

Local responses to immigrants in the in the Midwestern United States

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Introduction

Historically, immigration to the United States has been an urban phenomenon. However, over the past decade there have been rapid and dramatic proportional changes in the racial and ethnic diversity of suburban cities and rural towns across the United States. By the year 2000, more immigrants in metropolitan areas lived in suburbs than in cities (Singer, 2004), and large numbers had moved into non-traditional gateway states, including Minnesota (Fennelly and Orfield, 2007). Some of the most dramatic percentage increases in immigration have occurred in rural, Midwestern communities, as the result of the expansion of meat and poultry processing plants. and in suburbs that have become the new centers of employment in low wage manufacturing and construction (Fennelly and Leitner, 2002; Kandel and Parrado, 2004) .

While Mexicans have long come to non-metro counties as seasonal agricultural workers, 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). By 2000, the state contained 41,592 foreign-born Mexicans (CLAC, 2003) and over 137,000 Spanish speakers.¹ In addition to Latinos, Minnesota has traditionally had the largest percentage of immigrants who are refugees of any state in the US; as a result there are a number of Southeast Asian, African, Russian and Bosnian residents who either came as refugees or were admitted to the country through family reunification sponsorship by family members who were accepted as refugees. Like Mexicans, these individuals have been attracted to emerging job centers or pushed to stressed suburban communities by segregated housing patterns.²

We have shown in earlier work that rural and suburban residents in the United States hold more negative views of immigrants than urban residents, and that this

difference in attitudes cannot be explained by lesser contact with the foreign-born (Fennelly and Federico, 2007). In that analysis the effects of rural and suburban residence on policy attitudes were mediated by attitudes toward multiculturalism and the perceived traits of immigrants, and especially by perceptions about the *costs* of immigration. In the present study we test a theoretical framework derived from work by Sanchez (1997), suggesting that sources of nativism stem from concern over:

1. *linguistic difference* (extreme antipathy toward non-English languages, and fear that they will undermine the American nation.
2. *multiculturalism*: the belief that an embrace of non-Anglo cultures and affirmative action accord entitlements to immigrant groups that undermine White Americans; or
3. *use of public resources*: a conviction that both authorized and unauthorized immigrants over-utilize welfare, education and health care services.

Our qualitative analysis is based upon written transcripts from focus groups held with male and female likely voters in two exurban communities (Greenberg et al, 2004), and from focus groups with working class and middle class residents and community leaders in a rural meat-packing town (Fennelly, 2005). By ‘exurban’ we mean counties that are adjacent to metropolitan areas (Singer, 2004). The exurban groups were convened as part of ‘The Minnesota Community Project’, a series of surveys and focus groups designed to elicit the opinions of likely voters on political, economic and social changes in the state.² In February of 2004 trained moderators conducted four separate focus groups (two female and two male) with White men and women between the ages of 30 and 60 in the exurban counties of Anoka, and Scott. Anoka County is located in east, central Minnesota, north of the twin cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul. In 2000 Anoka had 320,803 residents, 94% of whom were non-Hispanic Whites. Scott County is southwest of the Twin Cities, with 89,498 residents in 2000 (92% non-Hispanic Whites). It represents the fastest-growing are of the state, as metropolitan residents move to the outer suburbs. Participants in the Anoka and Scott County focus groups were between the ages of 45 and 60 years old, and of varying educational levels, although most were college-educated.

The rural focus groups were held in a town of 20,000 inhabitants that we call ‘Devereux’-a community of mostly White residents of European ancestry, with a large meat packing plant that has expanded over the past decade, attracting hundreds of Latino, Asian and African workers. The meat plant is one of the major employers in the town, but in the mid-1990’s most of the European-origin blue-collar workers left the plant after it was shut down and re-opened as a non-union shop. At the time of our interviews 96% of the employees on the plant disassembly line⁴ were immigrants. A vegetable canning factory is another employer that has attracted foreign-born workers. At the time of our research the population of the town included over 3,000 Latinos—predominantly from

Mexico, about 250 Somalis, a similar number of Nuer people from Southern Sudan, and over 400 Asians—principally Cambodians and Vietnamese.

The rural focus group participants in the present analysis were White, U.S.-born residents who had lived in the community for at least ten years—long enough to have observed the demographic changes that are the subject of the study. They were also representative of older residents who comprise an increasingly large fraction of rural communities as younger White adults leave to seek employment in the cities. Rural participants were assigned to one of three groups: community leaders (CL), middle class residents (MC), and working class residents (WC) on the basis of their employment and status in the community. Members of the community leader group were recruited through a list of town leaders provided by the head of the local Chamber of Commerce; middle class group members were recruited through community organizations, such as the Chamber of Commerce, the PTA, and the Rotary Club; Working Class participants were referred by a local resident who had run job retraining programs for former meat plant employees and by former employees themselves.

The unit of analysis for transcript examination in both studies was a comment by a participant, ranging from a couple of words to several sentences. We coded all immigrant-related comments based on whether they displayed positive, negative, or mixed³ sentiments toward immigration,⁴ and also coded the topics discussed by the participants.

State-wide Attitudes Toward Immigrants

Before analyzing conversations from selected focus group participants in exurban and rural communities we put them into context by examining the results of a state-wide survey of 673 state-wide residents, and a separate survey of 251 exurban residents conducted in 2004 as part of the Minnesota Community Project—the source of our exurban focus group data (see Table 1). The original purpose of the Minnesota Community Study was to examine voter opinions and perceptions of increasing conservatism in the state; however, the researchers added specific questions on immigration after hearing repeated negative comments about immigrants in the focus groups.

In the survey residents were asked if they agreed with the statement that “immigrants are hurting our quality of life in Minnesota because they are putting big demands on our public schools and are draining resources from the whole community”. Rural and exurban respondents were most likely to agree with the statement (51% and 52% respectively), reflecting what Sanchez described as *concern over the use of public resources*. In contrast, 36% of urban respondents and 44% of those in suburban communities agreed with the statement.

**Table 1: State-wide Sample (n=673) and Exurban Sample (n=251)
 Agreement that “Immigrants are hurting our quality of life in Minnesota
 because they are putting big demands on our public schools and are draining
 resources from the whole community”**

	Urban	Suburban	Rural	Total	Exurban Survey
Strongly/Somewhat Agree	35.9%	43.5%	51.0%	44.3%	52.1%
Strongly/Somewhat Disagree	64.1%	56.5%	49.0%	55.7%	47.9%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Focus Group Results - Positive Comments

Although a majority of comments about immigrants were negative in both the rural and exurban focus groups, this was not exclusively the case. About a fifth of the exurban focus group members’ comments were coded as positive statements⁵ (see Table 2), most frequently expressions of empathy, such as the ones made by two women in Anoka County focus groups:

Somalians, well virtually anybody that comes here, they have to be gutsy. Things had to be pretty awful to leave everything you have to have a lot of courage to go someplace new.

Table 2: Minnesota Community Study Exurban Focus Groups: Number and Percentage of Negative, Positive, and Mixed Comments about Immigrants

Comment Type	Number	Percentage
Negative comments	45	57.7%
Language	14	
Benefits	11	
Costs	10	
Assimilation	9	
Property/Education	6	
Comparison to earlier waves	6	
Level of immigration	6	
Crime	2	
Fear of minority power	1	
Positive comments	17	21.8%
Sympathetic	6	
Hard-working ethics	5	
Joys of diversity	4	
Family values	1	
Mixed positive and negative comments	<u>16</u>	<u>20.5%</u>
Total Immigrant-related comments	78	100.0%

I feel that they are struggling because I can't imagine having to save up enough money to get here and if they have a different language, I think they just have a huge struggle.

Other positive themes in the exurban group comments referred to the strong work ethics of immigrants and the benefits of diversity, implicitly rejecting the concerns over *multiculturalism* or *use of public resources* as defined by Sanchez.

Among the three rural focus groups the percentage of positive statements ranged from 36% of the comments about immigrants made in the Community Leader (CL) group to 31% and 29% of the comments in the Middle Class (MC) and Working Class (WC) groups respectively (see Table 3). Only in the CL group did positive statements exceed negative ones. That group included a former mayor, a bank president and the owners of a number of small businesses. Not surprisingly, their views on immigration reflected their roles as entrepreneurs concerned with the economic vitality of the community and their perspective that diversity was a healthy ‘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:

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. (Female, CL Group)

Table 3: Evaluative Comments About Immigrants in the Devereux Rural Focus Groups, 2001

Group	Positive Comments		Negative Comments		Mixed Comments		Total Comments	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Cmty Leaders	22	(35.5)	19	(30.6)	21	(33.9)	62	(100.0)
Middle Class	58	(31.2)	70	(37.6)	58	(31.2)	186	(100.0)
Working Class	75	(28.5)	113	(43.0)	75	(28.5)	263	(100.0)

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. (Male, CL Group)

In each of the rural groups special praise was reserved for Asians, who, in the words of a Working Class woman “have become almost part of the European [community].” In Sanchez’ terms, Asians are not seen to pose a multicultural threat; and number of focus group respondents reinforced the perception of Asians as ‘model minorities’, as noted by the following participant:

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. In fact, 'bout the time when my kids graduated Devereux, it was two boys and both of 'em went on to West Point, and they were from Vietnam or Cambodia (Male, MC Group).

There was little recognition in any of the communities of the diversity that exists among and within the various immigrant groups. Although foreign-born residents in Minnesota include citizens, permanent residents, and unauthorized workers of vastly different backgrounds, few participants in the focus groups appeared to understand this diversity or to the selection process that attracts particular groups to the U.S. An exception is the following observation about Mexicans:

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 (Male, MC Group).

Finally, several focus group participants who made positive comments about immigrants seemed to derive their empathy from personal experiences with family members who entered the US as immigrants, as in this comment from a Devereux resident:

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. ... it seems like it was more of an immigrant country in those days. I went through all of the stuff we've talked about here, tonight. (Male, MC Group)

Focus Group Results—Negative Comments

As mentioned earlier, attitudes toward immigrants in each of the exurban groups and among the MC and WC rural focus group participants were predominantly negative, or a mixture of positive and negative statements. Many of the comments did not fit neatly into one of Sanchez' three categories. In the Devereux Middle Class focus group the introductory question on changes that participants had observed over the last five to ten years immediately elicited examples of generalized threats elicited by the very presence of immigrants. This is similar to what some researchers have described as the “power threat” perceived by Whites in reaction to increasing concentrations of Black residents in the US or in Europe (see, discussion in McLauren, 2003 and in Oliver and Mendelberg 2000). Fear of the increasing numbers of immigrants, and nostalgia for a more homogeneous town population combined to foster negative attitudes among the middle class residents in our rural groups.

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. (Female, MC group)

Some of the rural residents alternated positive statements about the changes in town with acknowledgement of fear. A woman who had taught English to immigrants in Devereux initially commented that the town had become “more exciting” now that there were new Hispanic and African businesses, but then 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 (Female, MC Group).

Rates of serious crimes in Devereux had 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:

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 (Male, MC Group).

Linguistic Difference

Both historically and in contemporary times, concern over perceived linguistic threats have been an important expression of xenophobia. Adoption of English is seen by many Americans to be not only as an essential skill, but also a measure of assimilation (Fennelly and Palasz, 2003). One of the prominent themes in both the exurban and rural focus groups was the symbolic importance of language as a means of defining membership in the community and acceptance of American mores. The implication is that immigrants voluntarily chose whether or not to speak English, and that this choice indicates a willingness or unwillingness to be integrated into U.S. society. The following comment in Devereux was typical.

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 (Male, MC Group).

This quote illustrates the ways in which notions of individual accountability inherent in the 'Protestant Belief System' (Katz et al., 1986) underlie stereotypes about out-groups. As another rural resident described it, immigrants who speak in their native languages are '*creating their own isolation*'—in other words, are responsible for their own disadvantaged status.

After several comments about the need for immigrants to learn English, the Devereux moderator asked, "So is it all about just learning English? What else, besides?". One participant replied:

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

In the mind of this speaker assimilation is a uni-directional process of adaptation *by* immigrants *into* US society. Another man in the same group emphasized the need for this assimilation to be rapid and complete:

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 (Male, MC Group).

Although mainstream Americans are fond of seeing themselves as a nation of immigrants, the vision of a single nation/single culture model persists. This single culture model, which is fundamentally assimilationist, contrasts with a multicultural model of nation/community, in which cultural identities are anchored in both the immigrants' respective cultural background and in the contemporary national culture of which they

are a part (Jackson and Penrose 1993). These alternative visions of nation/community lead to very different kinds of immigrant – host society relations. In particular, the immigration of culturally very different populations challenges the identities of the indigenous population leading to tensions, xenophobia and racism. Host society reactions, such as xenophobia, in turn, affect immigrant identities and their relations to members of the host society (Nagel 1994). There is no doubt that, in the minds of both rural and exurban residents, rapid, unidirectional assimilation is the goal for immigrants, and is unquestioningly defined as being in immigrants’ best interests.

Multiculturalism

Concepts of ‘linguistic difference’ overlap with Sanchez’ second category of ‘multiculturalism’, or the belief that immigrants receive undeserved entitlements that undermine White people’s rights⁶, as exemplified in the following comment by an exurban woman in Scott County:

I agree with diversity too, but I think no matter where you are coming from, you should speak the language here; you should make adjustments to what is here. I think it is great. You know keep the things from your own nationality, I think that is great but if you live here, you should learn how to speak English and not have everything adjusted to fit you.

A woman from Anoka County makes an even more explicit statement about unwarranted privilege:

*Well, it appears and I don't know, I mean when you watch the news and everything, I know a lot of times it can be slanted, the people from other countries will come in and they want everyone to learn their ways rather than coming here and saying; okay, now I am in America, I am going to become an American.
(Anoka County woman).*

Examples of mixed statements in the exurban groups frequently included disclaimers of nativism as statements that prefaced prejudiced remarks.

I think diversity is really good, but if they are coming just because our welfare is good and then, if they are coming just for the programs they get, I don't think that is right. (Woman, Scott County)

Some of the strongest statements about multiculturalism or, what is commonly called ‘reverse discrimination’ came from members of the Devereux Working Class group.

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 (Male, WC group).

Exurban men in Scott and Anoka Counties make similar, angry arguments that the 'benefits' accorded to immigrants come at the expense of citizens.

And then go back to the immigration stuff, you know I felt terrible, I need to ask myself why they all have health insurance and cars and going to school for all these budgets and stuff and no one can take care of my mom. She can't get insurance, and it pisses me off. (Male, Scott County)

My wife works in the health care industry...and they're just spending . . . They're giving these immigrants. . . health care. I mean my father-in-law, he's worked here his whole life, and he's gotta pay for it . He broke his back, and he had to pay for his own medical. And there's these people that just move over here and ...they come in and they've got these Somalis and they say they're depressed, well then they get five more years of Welfare. Four-and-a-half years they come in, they make an appointment, they go on depressed. And then they get more Welfare. (Male, Anoka County)

Implicit in Sanchez' categories of multiculturalism and use of public resources are fears of loss of power and White privilege by the majority population—fears that are couched in complaints about public benefits or immigrants in the labor force. In fact, in a number of instances focus group participants openly voiced fear over losing majority status. The first statement below is from an exurban focus group; the second set of comments is from women in the Working Class Group in Devereux.

I think that ties in with jobs as far as . . . I worked at [an electronics manufacturing company], and I'll give a big example, I worked with a Somalian, a Bosnian and someone from Africa. They're all doing the job. But where's our people? You know, I felt like a minority...that kind of makes me worry a little. (Anoka County man).

* * * *

Woman 1: 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. .

Woman 2: *I think that is, was one of the concerns that was brought up about how many more people are gonna be here before we – (Female, WC Group)*

Woman 3: *Get overpopulated. (Female, WC Group)*

Woman 2: *- like I said, yeah, feel like the minority. (Female, WC Group)*

In another segment of the same focus group the Devereux women quoted above extend their concerns over becoming ‘like the minority’ to explicit fears of losing political power. The fear of loss of power among White focus group participants was made quite explicit in this exchange among members of the rural Working Class focus group in Devereux:

Moderator: *Can you imagine the different groups we're talking about becoming full-fledged members of the community? (Female, WC Group)*

Woman 2: *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...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 (Female, WC Group).*

Woman 4: *It would be almost scary, yeah, I guess, that scary feeling they may change it (Female, WC Group).*

Woman 2: *Well, I mean, maybe if enough of 'em all get here they could all vote them in... (Female, WC Group)*

Woman 4: *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. (Female, WC Group)*

Use of Public Resources

Concerns over ‘multiculturalism’ and worries about the costs of immigration, or “use of public resources” were indistinguishable in the exurban and rural Minnesota focus groups. There was a strong sense that immigrant were getting entitlements at the expense of the well-being of native-born Americans.

However, many of the comments in both the rural and exurban focus groups are also indicative 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 by 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). This view is exemplified by the following comment from a man in an exurban focus group:

We are letting a lot more minorities from other countries into this country; the Asian groups are getting large. The (inaudible) groups are getting very large and it seems when they come over here they are getting all the tax breaks. They get all this help. They get this, they get that, they get this, they get that and those of us who have fought for this country, who have paid our taxes, who raise our children and who live in this country and in this state are the ones that are paying for all those people to get all those breaks and our children and our lifestyles are not increasing, they are staying stagnant. Some are still staying at poverty level because these people who are coming into Minnesota from other countries are getting what us as Minnesotans or American citizens ought to be having. (Anoka County man)

This and other angry statements about immigrants are reminiscent of items on psychological scales measuring Right Wing Authoritarianism (Altemeyer, 1996), a measure of submission to formal authority and aggressiveness toward out-groups that has been shown to be highly correlated with racial prejudice (Levy, 1999). One of the items in Altemeyer's scale, for example is "Some of the worst people in our country nowadays are those who do not respect our flag, our leaders and the normal way things are supposed to be done". Contrast this with the following comment by a Scott County man:

I think they've got to tighten up the borders a little bit better. I mean after 9/11 this is a whole different world we're living in and I think that immigration has been free and most of our forefathers have all come over from some point or another to get here, but I think that there's a difference between if you're coming over here with the intent to live the American dream its one thing, but if you're coming over here to hang your country's flag in your front yard and if you're coming over here trying to make me change or I've got stand up or apologize for who I am because you don't speak my language or I don't understand your religion, and we've got to have all these laws and rules and regulations for you so that you can live here. I think that's crap. I think this is America. If you want to live here you abide by the rules and regulations that we have.

In the Devereux Middle Class rural group one woman voiced frustration over what she perceived as unnecessary language programs for the children of immigrants.

One thing too that has my kids rather upset is the language barrier and also they're not learning English fast enough here, so we're having to have the translators or having to put up the Spanish or Somalian signs, and if we moved to their country, we don't feel that that would happen for us ((Female, MC Group).

Prejudicial statements are rationalized as concerns over impacts on school budgets, school achievement of White students, property values, and use of welfare as illustrated in the following quotes from exurban and rural participants:

They have to learn English, and they can't be mainstreamed into the schools with our kids and slow our kids down. (Male, Anoka County)

Well, the thing that I am aware of and that concerns me is the education. I have three kids and two of the have already graduated, but throughout the years I see them taking more and more money away from our school systems. The federal government mandates that you need so many programs for English as a second language and they promised that they would fund part of it but they haven't given any of the schools, not just our school, but any of the schools anywhere any money, and so then it comes from the majority of the classroom stuff and I have a real hard time with that. They have to fund raise themselves. (Male, Anoka County)

My opinion is the rentals, the houses, the real estate will go down. 'Cuz they - cars all over and junk, they don't take care of the yards and stuff. That's what I think is - three, four cars in a yard, stuff like that. (Rural Male, MC Group). 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 (Rural Male, MC Group).

Conclusions

In our test of the usefulness of Sanchez' theoretical framework we found that the "anti-foreign sentiments" that underlie contemporary nativism did not always fit neatly into discrete categories of fears concerning language, multiculturalism and cost. Instead, the comments of both exurban and rural residents in our study reflected a blurring of the lines of these groupings and seemed to represent rationalizations of pre-existing prejudices. We expected and confirmed that perceptions of economic threat (Sanchez' category of concern over the use of public resources) would be particularly acute among working class

residents who had worked in similar low-status jobs. This finding conforms with studies by other researchers demonstrating that people of low socioeconomic status are most susceptible to the perception of out-groups as a competitive threat (Oliver and Mendelberg, 2000; Public Agenda, 2000) and that socio-economic and language barriers serve to reinforce existing status differences. What is less easily explained is the fact that educated residents in relatively wealthy exurban communities were equally likely as the Working Class rural focus group participants to express fears over the ‘costs’ of immigration in both the survey and focus groups. From the nature of the focus group responses we conclude that complaints about slow assimilation, unfair benefits and the costs of immigration are a screen for deeper nativistic attitudes, and a justification for discrimination (Stephan and Stephan, 2000). This is the nature of contemporary attitudes toward race; as Nevins (2003) has argued, it is not the nature of racism that has changed in the US since the 1950s, but rather the underlying arguments that are presented. Instead of a discourse that emphasizes biological inferiority, contemporary racism—and we would argue nativism-- present arguments that particular groups have proven unable (or unwilling) to realize their capacity because of their ‘inferior culture and/or because they have not learned or do not practice what it takes to be ‘successful’. This version of the Protestant Work Ethic is clearly prevalent among many of the participants in the exurban and rural focus groups in the present study.

It is ironic that White exurban and rural residents feel threatened by immigrants in communities where privilege and power so clearly reside in the hands of the native-born. As Lamphere et al. (1994) have noted, interactions between European-origin natives 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, and in most of these relationships it is European-origin residents who wield the authority.

Latinos comprise the largest group of immigrants in Minnesota, and the power differentials discussed above are, of course, exacerbated by the undocumented status of many Hispanic workers. However, fear and uncertainty regarding rights and expectations are faced by all immigrants, regardless of legal status. In some situations employment exploitation and language segregation may even form part of an unspoken strategy on the part of employers. We suspect that Naples’ (2003) is right that some rural Midwestern employers purposely recruit Asian and Latino workers with little facility with English as a means of increasing the fragmentation of the workforce and diminishing the potential for workers to organize.

Immigrants have made gains in select urban and suburban settings, but it is native-born Whites who wield the power in exurban and rural communities. Although immigrants are at the bottom of the social hierarchy in these settings, this inequality is invisible to many White native-born residents. Their misperceptions stem from ignorance about both the day-to-day struggles of the foreign-born, and the length of time

that it took their European ancestors to become fully integrated into 20th century America. As described by Alba and Nee (2003), most European groups maintained strong ethnic ties and loyalties for generations, and it was “only in the third and in some cases the fourth generations that the powerful undercurrent of assimilation came unmistakably to the surface.” Furthermore, although census data on the language proficiency of earlier and more recent waves of immigrants are not comparable (Stevens, 1999), there is good reason to suspect that the same *determinants* of proficiency operated for both historical and contemporary immigrants—principally, age at entry to the US, time in the country, and years of completed schooling (Fennelly and Palasz, 2003). Most natives are also unaware of the inherent contradictions in commonly held prejudicial beliefs. On the one hand immigrants are stereotyped as a ‘burden’ on society — individuals who do not subscribe to the prevailing work ethic, who receive welfare and ‘undeserved’ state benefits and who make insufficient efforts to become ‘assimilated’; on the other hand their very presence, their economic successes and even the elusive possibility of civic and political engagement on the part of foreign-born residents are seen as threats.

The employment of arguments about slow acquisition of English is an example of an additional paradox—an inability to recognize the fiscal advantages of immigration and rejection of the very remedial programs that would reduce barriers to assimilation. Close to half of immigrants in Minnesota (42%) speak English well or very well—a percentage that is slightly higher than the US average (Fennelly and Palasz, 2003). Furthermore, the gain in individual school funds from enrollment-based state funding formulas greatly outweighs the costs of hiring teachers of English Language Learning (ELL) for some children of immigrants. Nevertheless, while participants in the exurban and rural focus groups couched many of their complaints about immigrants in terms of concern over lack of mastery of English, they were equally vociferous in their objections to the costs of ELL classes. Furthermore, with the exception of some of the ‘community leaders’ in Devereux, no other focus group participants acknowledged the important contributions of immigrants to the tax bases of their communities.

We suspect, however, that complaints about linguistic difference, multiculturalism and the use of public resources are ultimately about power, and that demands that immigrants give up their former customs and languages are thinly veiled exhortations for one-way assimilation, or what Rumbaut has called the ‘implicit deficit model’—the notion that the goal for all immigrants is to learn to become American. In their extreme form these attitudes are part of broader ‘ethnoculturalism’, the belief that the only authentic Americans are White, English-speaking Protestants of northern European ancestry (Schildkraut, 2003: p474).

In conclusion, although our data do not conform precisely with his three categories of determinants of nativism, we agree with Sanchez that “cultural beliefs in innate difference have worked together with structural forces of inequality to frame (and hide)

discussions of White privilege.” (Sanchez, 1997: p1024) What is most dangerous about this modern form of racism is that it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. Stereotypes about misuse of public resources and the perceived unwillingness of immigrants to ‘assimilate’ are utilized to garner support for public policies that further reduce opportunities for job and language training and eliminate safety nets and protections for immigrants who are exploited or fall ill. The result is the proliferation and sanctioning of negative stereotypes and the hardening of barriers to the integration of an important and growing segment of the population.

NOTES

¹ Categories of Spanish speakers and Latinos, of course, include both native- and foreign-born individuals, although the distinction may not be apparent to many White Euro-Americans. Mexicans constitute the largest share of foreign-born residents in both the nation (27.6%)²⁶ and Minnesota (16%)⁴.

² Greenberg, S., A. Greenberg, and J. Hooktkin. “The Rise of Exurbia: The Changing Shape of Minnesota.” Hubert H. Humphrey Institute for Public Affairs: Minnesota Community Project, December 14, 2004.

<http://www.greenbergresearch.com/index.php?ID=1264>

³ We classified immigrant-related comments that were objective (no value judgment) or referred to participants’ unfamiliarity with immigrants as part of the “other” category.

⁴ Comments could be classified in multiple categories.

⁵ This distribution of positive and negative responses was similar for the man and woman focus groups (not shown)⁵.

⁶ We use the racial category ‘Whites’ here because the native-born residents in our study rarely distinguish among immigrants. In their discourse US-born residents are ‘White’ and immigrants are ‘minorities’, regardless of national origin. The opposite assumption is also true; ‘White’ immigrants, such as Central and Western Europeans are never singled out as the ‘Other.’

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