
About the New Iowans Program

The University of Northern Iowa's New Iowans Program (NIP) guides and prepares Iowa communities and businesses as they accommodate immigrant and refugee newcomers living and working in the state. NIP provides tailored consultation for community leadership, conducts research relating to issues facing newcomers and communities, develops innovative training programs for business and industry, and educates Iowans concerning the needs, challenges and opportunities of their new immigrant neighbors, co-workers and employees. All NIP programming incorporates a strong appreciation for the critical role newcomers play in ensuring the long-term social and economic vitality of Iowa's businesses and communities. Visit our Web site at www.bcs.uni.edu/idm/newiowans/.

Preface

This guidebook has been published by the University of Northern Iowa New Iowans Program in collaboration with Iowa Public Television. This book is a compilation of text and data from other New Iowans publications. These other publications include *Welcoming New Iowans: A Guide for Citizens and Communities* by Mark A. Grey, *Welcoming New Iowans: A Guide for Christians and Churches* by Anne C. Woodrick and Mark A. Grey (with Ecumenical Ministries of Iowa) and *Welcoming New Iowans: A Guide for Managers and Supervisors* by Mark A. Grey. These three books, *The New Iowans* book, and other products can be downloaded from the UNI New Iowans Web site, www.bcs.uni.edu/idm/newiowans. Additional information was taken from *A Health Provider's Pocket Guide to Working with Immigrant, Refugee and Minority Populations in Iowa* by Michele Yehieli and Mark A. Grey, published by the University of Northern Iowa Global Health Corps and New Iowans Program.

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Introduction

This handbook is an Iowa companion to the Public Broadcasting System (PBS) miniseries *The New Americans*. Immigrants have always played a critical role in the history of the United States and Iowa. Most Americans point proudly to their immigrant ancestors, where they came from and when they arrived in the United States.

The New American series shows us that immigrants continue to come from around the world to pursue their American dream. The same is true of recent immigrant newcomers in Iowa.

This book is a tool for communities, schools, churches, organizations and others to think about and discuss the issues raised in *The New Americans* series and the role of immigration in Iowa today. *The New Americans* series puts a very human face on the issue of immigration. It tells the stories of five immigrants and refugees from very different parts of the world: Nigeria, India, Dominican Republic, West Bank and Mexico. These people come to the United States for a variety of reasons, but they are all united by their desire to live their version of the American dream.

The purpose of this book is to bring the issues raised in *The New Americans* series home to Iowa. This book provides some basic information about immigrants in Iowa. How many immigrants live in Iowa? Where do they come from? Why do they come to Iowa? The book also shows why accommodating immigrants is so important for Iowa's future. There are many social, religious and economic reasons to welcome these newcomers. You will also find some ideas about how to welcome immigrants to your communities, churches, organizations and workplaces. Successful integration of immigrants and refugees in our workplaces and communities is essential to ensure Iowa's long-term economic and social health.

Some discussion topics are provided. Please use these exercises to spur discussion about immigration in your communities, organizations and schools. Suggestions for further reading are also provided.

At the end of the book, there is a glossary of immigration related terms as well as a list of Iowa-based services and agencies that can assist you with immigrant issues.

Who are the New Iowans?

Welcoming immigrant and refugee newcomers is an Iowa tradition. Iowa is a state of immigrants, and without immigration there would be no Iowa as we know it today. European immigrants settled in Iowa in the 1800s and early 1900s and created its communities, churches, mosques, synagogues, schools and social institutions. They were also the workers who made Iowa one of the world's most important agricultural and manufacturing economies.

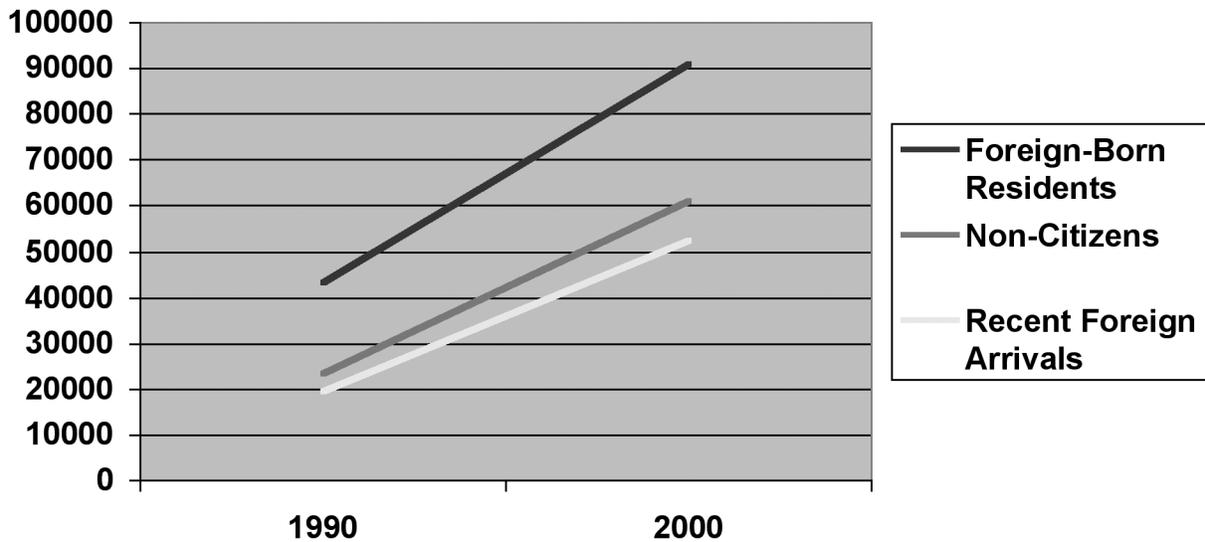
The first newcomers to Iowa were the Meskwaki. Later immigrant and refugee newcomers in Iowa often came from European countries like Denmark, Norway, Germany, Italy, Greece and Bohemia. There were also influxes of African Americans in the early and mid parts of the 20th century. But today, most immigrants and refugees come from other parts of the world, especially Asia, Africa, Latin America and the Balkans. In the 1970s and 1980s, for example, we welcomed Tai Dam and other Southeast Asian refugees. In the 1990s, the number of Latino newcomers in Iowa grew rapidly. Iowa has also experienced growth in its Bosnian, Sudanese and Somali refugee populations.

Immigrants Contribute to Iowa's Population Growth

Iowa's population grew between 1990 and 2000 by 5.4 percent to nearly 2.9 million. Importantly, about two-thirds of this growth was due to immigration, particularly by the arrival of Latino newcomers. In the 1990s, the Latino population grew by 153 percent to 83,000. Latinos are now the state's largest minority population, outnumbering African Americans by more than 20,000.

Iowa's Growing Foreign-Born Population

The majority of Iowans (96.9 percent in the 2000 Census) were born in the United States, and most (74.8 percent) were born in Iowa. However, the number of foreign-born residents more than doubled between 1990 and 2000. In 1990, there were 43,316 foreign-born people in Iowa or 1.6 percent of the state's total population. By 2000, there were 91,085 (3.1 percent) foreign-born residents. Only 19,273 Iowa residents entered the U.S. between 1980 and 1990, but 52,335 Iowa residents came to the U.S. over the next decade. In 1990, there were 23,324 non-citizens residing in Iowa. In 2000, there were 61,134 non-citizens. Between 1995 and 2000 alone, the Census Bureau estimates that more than 28,000 foreign-born people arrived in Iowa directly from their home nation.



Iowa's Foreign-Born Population 1990-2000

Where Do the New Iowans Come From?

There has been a dramatic shift in terms of the home regions of newcomers in Iowa. In the 1990 Census, 42.8 percent of foreign-born Iowans came from Asia, like Tai Dam and Vietnamese refugees, and only 13.9 percent came from Latin America. But in the 2000 Census, 36 percent of foreign-born Iowans were from Latin America. In Iowa's Hispanic/Latino population (which includes Hispanics born in Iowa and the United States) the largest group (61,154 or 74 percent) came from Mexico. Others came from Puerto Rico, Cuba, Guatemala, El Salvador, Panama and other Latin American nations.

According to the Iowa Bureau of Refugee Services, refugees settled in Iowa came from Sudan, Ivory Coast, Somalia and other African nations, Russia and other parts of the former Soviet Union, Vietnam, Cambodia and other parts of Southeast Asia, Iraq, Haiti, Cuba and Bosnia and other places in the Balkans. Between 1975 and 1999, nearly 22,000 refugees were settled in Iowa. Between 1997 and 2002 alone, 7,441 refugees were settled in Iowa with the most (5,383) coming from the former Yugoslavia. Several thousand more refugees came to the state as "secondary migrants" who were initially resettled in other states but then moved to Iowa.

What is the Difference between Immigrants and Refugees?

People often assume there is no distinction between immigrants and refugees, but the difference is important for economic, social and legal reasons. Refugees are forced to leave their home countries because of war, environmental disasters, political persecution and/or religious or ethnic intolerance. They come to the United States with a special immigration status that gives them automatic admission into the country and eases their reunification with family members. This status also provides them with a "green card" or work authorization permit. In addition, short-term financial assistance is funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services through private and state agencies like the Iowa Bureau of Refugee Services. Refugees are "invited" to live in the United States to start a new life.

Immigrants generally come to the U.S. for one of two reasons; they are joining family members who already live in this country, or they are “economic immigrants” seeking work and a better life for themselves and their families.

Immigrants and refugees have a good deal in common. For example, they come to Iowa seeking the things that established residents like about living here. For both immigrants and refugees, coming to the U.S. and Iowa presents similar challenges. For example, they experience new cultures and languages. They are often ethnic minorities who might face open racism or other forms of hostility, regardless of their immigration status.

Why Do Immigrants and Refugees Come to Iowa?

Immigrants and refugees live in Iowa for the same reasons established residents live here. Most are drawn by the availability of jobs. Many arrive to take jobs in meatpacking and other agricultural industries, but as time goes by, more newcomers work in other sectors of the economy, including construction, services, retail and hospitality. In many communities, their labor is in great demand.

Newcomers also appreciate Iowa’s low cost of living, affordable housing and safe communities. Just like established-resident Iowans, immigrants and refugees realize their children receive a fine education in our schools. For refugees and immigrants, living in Iowa provides an opportunity to start a new life for themselves and their children. Iowa provides an opportunity for thousands of newcomers to live their version of the American dream.

Why Do Immigrants and Refugee Leave Their Home Countries?

Just as important to understanding why immigrants come to Iowa is why they leave their home countries.

Global Migration

Economic and forced migration in the world has reached tremendous levels. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimates that there are currently more than 12 million refugees and seven million additional “persons of concern” who fall within the UNHCR mandate “to lead and coordinate international action for the world-wide protection of refugees and the resolution of refugee problems and to...safeguard the rights and well-being of refugees.” The International Organization for Migration (IOM) estimates that 175 million persons in the world (one in every 35 persons) is an international migrant. The IOM also estimates that the number of international migrants in the world has more than doubled in the last 35 years. Half of the world’s migrants move from less developed countries to economically developed nations such as the United States, Germany and Italy, while the remainder are less fortunate.

The world has become a global community. Advancements in communication bring “instant” information about the lives and activities of people throughout the world into our homes. In today’s world, decisions, policies and events that occur on all continents

affect the lives of Iowans. These processes connect Iowans to the lives of newcomers who have migrated to Iowa, and they help explain why people from Mexico, Somalia and Laos have settled in our communities.

Today's immigrants come from dozens of nations in Europe, Africa, Asia and Latin America, bringing a new collection of cultures, religions and languages even more diverse than those brought by Iowa's first European settlers. Further, modern day refugees and immigrants do not always intend to settle in a particular new territory. Many had to leave their own countries unwillingly, moving wherever they could to start a new life. Thus, many of our newcomers were already relocated once outside of Iowa, and then chose to move here to join family, accept jobs, or live in a different climate. Many of the ethnic Lao refugees in Storm Lake, for example, are "secondary migrants" who initially settled in Oklahoma and Minnesota before migrating to Iowa. The U.S. Census Bureau estimates that between 1995 and 2000 nearly 13,000 foreign-born people moved from other states to Iowa.

Although most Iowans tend to think about their ancestors in terms of their nationality, today's immigrants often come from countries with tremendous varieties of ethnicities, languages and religions, and they might have adopted the practices of additional cultures as they moved along the migrant path. National boundaries are less relevant today than the economic, political and family forces that drive global migrations. Many Latino newcomers come to Iowa from so-called gateway states like California, where immigrants initially land in the U.S. before moving on to other locations.

Economic Forces

The globalization of the world's economy affects every community in the world. Economic policies, such as international trade agreements and decisions made by multinational corporations touch our lives directly and indirectly. What might be a beneficial policy for some of us in the United States can cause significant difficulties for residents living in another county and vice versa. For example, the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) opened new markets in Mexico for Midwestern products at a reduced cost to the producers, but small farmers in Michoacán and other Mexican states cannot profitably compete with the cheaper United States agricultural products. It simply costs them more money to buy seed, which is frequently very poor quality, and harvest it, than they can get when they sell the crop. In addition, due to its huge debt crisis in the early 1980s, the Mexican government had already removed many agricultural subsidies before NAFTA. Consequently, by the mid-1990s many small-scale agriculturalists had to abandon farming.

On the other hand, Iowa companies like Ertl Toy in Dyersville, Fisher Controls in Marshalltown, and Hon Industries in Muscatine, have relocated production plants to countries outside of the United States in order to take advantage of cheap labor, fewer environmental controls and reduced taxation. When these companies relocated, however, the loss of jobs and tax revenues had a severe impact on the local economy.

Across the globe, agribusinesses dominate the farming industry just as large food chains and “super” stores supply our food, clothing and numerous other needs. The tremendous growth in the size and wealth of multinational corporations has led to an increasing disparity between the rich and the poor around the world, forcing many groups of people to move from their traditional homes to countries where a decent standard of living is possible.

Mexico Extremely low wages, poor working conditions and lack of economic opportunities in Mexico are all reasons Mexicans migrate to the United States, and the migration between Mexico and the United States is not new. The National Population Council reports that migration between Mexico and the United States is “a permanent, structural phenomenon...built on real factors, ranging from geography, economic inequality and integration, and the intense relationship between the two countries.”¹

Mexican immigration to the United States has occurred for several generations, but the permanent settling of Mexican immigrants in Iowa is a recent phenomenon. The expansion of meatpacking facilities all over Iowa since the late 1980s has attracted Mexican immigrant wage laborers. In 2000, 70 percent of the production workers at the Swift and Company plant in Marshalltown were Latinos. The low wages and poor working conditions by American worker standards are a blessing for sojourners who have left far worse conditions.

Although many immigrants who work in meatpacking facilities are poor, working class individuals, Mexican production workers at the IBP plant near Sioux City include a veterinarian, a lawyer and a university professor. These highly skilled individuals and many others like them cannot work in their own professions because they lack an expertise in English, they must acquire additional training or education in the United States, or in some cases they arrived without the proper immigration or refugee documentation.

Africa and Asia Globalization has similarly affected countries in Africa and Asia. There are many problems that are emerging from globalization in Africa and Asia:

- Increased poverty and food scarcity
- Reduced national revenues due to tax breaks and foreign investment incentives
- Increased problems of balance of payments and national debt to multi-lateral agencies like the World Bank
- Increased inequality between the rich and poor
- Increased environmental degradation
- Cultural displacement
- Capital flight

These economic forces have caused the displacement of people throughout Africa and Asia, bringing groups to the U.S. and to Iowa. Marshalltown’s Swift and Company plant, for example, employs Nuer refugees from the Sudan and Southeast Asians. Several hundred Sudanese now call Des Moines home.

Political Forces

Major ethnic conflicts, underlain by obscure economic, religious and political issues, explode on our television screens, and we are often confused about who are the “good” guys and “bad” guys. It is difficult for Iowans in our stable, settled country to understand why groups continually seem to fight each other. Regardless of the historical causes, ethnic conflicts often result in the displacement of one or more communities of people. In 2000, the United States resettled more than 72,000 refugees,² and within the last 10 years more than 10,000 refugees have made Iowa their new home. These include members of some of the largest refugee groups in the world; people from Sudan, Somalia and Sierra Leone in Africa, Bosnians and Vietnamese.

Further Reading

- *Crossing Over: A Mexican Family on the Migrant Trail*. Ruben Martinez, 2001, Picador Press.
- *Re-Creating America: The Ethics of U.S. Immigration and Refugee Policy in a Christian Perspective* Dana W. Wilbanks, 1996, Abingdon Press, Nashville.
- *The Maya of Morganton: Work and Community in the Nuevo New South* Leon Fink, 2003 The University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill.
- *Dead in their Tracks: Crossing America's Desert Borderlands* John Annerino, 2003, Four Walls Eight Windows.
- *The Middle of Nowhere: The World's Refugees Come to Our Town*. Mary Pipher, 2002, Harcourt, Inc.
- *Nuer Journeys, Nuer Lives: Sudanese Refugees in Minnesota*. Jon D. Holtzman, 2000, Allyn and Bacon.

An Introduction to Newcomers from Latin America, Africa, Southeast Asia and Bosnia

Latinos

Latino immigration has increased dramatically throughout the rural Midwest. Although they share the census designation of “Hispanic origin” and often Spanish as a native language, Latino immigrants differ in ethnic and cultural identity, class background and personal experiences. A personal identification with a particular state, or even a particular community, may be more important than is identification with a country or with the broad categories of “Hispanic” or “Latino.” In fact, outside of the United States there are really no Hispanics or Latinos. The terms are used only in the United States to designate a category of individuals who share a Spanish or Portuguese colonial history.

It is thus a mistake to think of Hispanics or Latinos as representing a homogenous group. Countries of origin include Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Puerto Rico, Peru, Argentina, Colombia, Brazil and Venezuela. Newcomers include manual workers and college educated professionals, urban residents and farmers, men, women and children and the very young and the elderly.

Mexico

Almost three-fourths of new Latino immigrants come from Mexico, and most of these come from a few states located in west central Mexico, which include Michoacán, Jalisco, Guanajuato, San Luis Potosí and Guerrero.³ The relationship between Latino immigrants and their hometowns in Mexico remains strong, especially among first generation newcomers. Direct phone communication, the availability of Spanish language media and the proximity of Mexico to the United States means that immigrants are often in daily contact with family, friends and neighbors back home. Annual trips back and forth across the border are not uncommon.

Social networks established between sending communities in Mexico and receiving communities in Iowa are an advantage to both Mexican newcomers and Anglo residents. Hometown networks assist the recent arrivals with housing, employment opportunities and community services. Such networks also provide a steady source of employees for many U.S. companies. Frequently social networks are established between a particular sending community in Mexico and a town in Iowa. For example, a large number of Latino residents in Storm Lake are from Santa Rita, Jalisco. In Marshalltown, more than 3,000 Latino newcomers are also residents of Villachuato, Michoacán.⁴ In Postville many are from El Barril, San Luis Potosi. In the Sioux City area, one of the primary sending communities is San Julian, Jalisco.

Latino newcomers in Iowa provide crucial financial assistance to their families, communities and churches back in Mexico. Nationally it is estimated that during the year 2000 Mexicans living in the United States sent more than 6.6 billion dollars, or 17 million per day, back to their families in Mexico.⁵ Monies are used for family life

expenses, community improvement projects (electricity, water, plaza and street renovation, church construction) and to support annual patron saint fiestas. Typically each village or community has one or more chapels or churches in which resides a statue of a Catholic saint, the Virgin, or Christ. In Villachuato, Michoacan, the patron saint is a statue of the crucified Christ, whom the Villachuatanos call *El Señor de la Salud*. The annual fiesta is held each year during *Semana Santa* (Holy Week). In 2001 more than \$40,000 was sent to Mexico by Villachuatanos living in Iowa and Nebraska to pay for the annual fiesta.

Central America

Some Latino newcomers are political refugees who fled from Guatemala, Nicaragua and El Salvador during the revolutionary conflicts that occurred in these countries from the late 1970s through the early 1990s. The largest group of refugees is from Guatemala, and many of them live in the greater Sioux City area. The majority are members of the same indigenous language and ethnic group, the Kanjobal Maya from the Western highlands of Guatemala.

Although political refugees qualify for legal immigration status, many Central American refugees fled their home without the help of official refugee organizations. Instead, individuals came alone, or perhaps with the private help of family members or U.S. churches. Asylum cases are often difficult to process and approve when the refugee enters the United States without proper authorization, and for some countries the legal status of political refugees has been hindered by U.S. intervention into Central American conflicts.

Southwestern United States

In some cases Iowa's Latino newcomers were born and raised in Texas or California, or lived in these states for many years before they moved to Iowa to find work and a more tranquil life. In contrast to places like Los Angeles, Iowa towns offer greater security and provide a healthier environment for families. Language barriers, the cold weather and a completely different socio-cultural milieu make adjustments difficult even for Latinos born in the United States.

The Africans

Most Americans think of Africa as one big country inhabited by a homogeneous population of "Africans." In fact, Africa is the world's second largest continent and has 49 countries. These countries range in size from the largest, Sudan, which is four times the size of Texas, to the smallest, The Gambia, which is one-fourth the size of Iowa. Far from being a homogeneous population, Africans speak more than 1,000 different languages and identify with an even larger number of distinct ethnic groups. The largest number of African refugees in Iowa came from Sudan. Other smaller populations have arrived from Rwanda, Ethiopia, Sierra Leone, Nigeria, Congo, Chad, Togo, Ivory Coast and Liberia. The refugee status of most of Iowa's African newcomers is important. As we pointed out in the beginning of the handbook, refugees differ from immigrants because they are no longer able to live in their home countries. This is certainly the case in Africa, which has the world's largest refugee problem. Indeed,

Africa only has about one-fifth of the world's population, but it has more than one-half of the world's refugees.

There are a number of reasons Africa has so many refugees and many of them come to the United States and Iowa. As an example, let's look at the situation in the Sudan. This huge country—like the majority of African nations—was not created by the Africans who lived there, but rather by Europeans. The area was a single British colony from 1889-1955, but its million square miles incorporated many different languages, ethnic groups and religions. In Sudan today there are more than 100 languages spoken.

Throughout much of colonial history in Africa, Europeans used “divide and rule” methods of government. That is, they encouraged conflict among indigenous groups in order to discourage their cooperation against European rule. The primary point of conflict encouraged by Europeans in the Sudan was between Muslim groups in the northern half of the country and non-Muslims (including Christians) in the south. Unfortunately, the conflict between these two populations did not end when the British pulled out and Sudan achieved its independence in 1955. On the contrary, it got worse. The result was a civil war that continues to rage today. Sudanese refugees in Iowa and the United States are fleeing this decades-old conflict. The United States receives refugees from both the north and south regions of Sudan, but most Sudanese refugees in Iowa are Nuer people from southern Sudan and most of them are Christians.

Like all refugees, African refugees were torn from their homes and can no longer live there. Returning home may be a long-term goal, but it is not always realistic. They come to Iowa to start over again and try and create new lives for themselves and their children.

Coming to a new and strange place like Iowa presents a number of challenges for African refugees. We often hear their complaints about the cold winters, but there are more serious matters to contend with. First, there is the challenge of being black in predominately white communities and workplaces. Second, as with most immigrants and refugees, there are language barriers. Although many Sudanese refugees speak English, most do not, and learning English takes a great deal of time and effort. Third, there are often significant cultural barriers for African refugees, an important one being religion.

There is no single African religion. Religion and systems of thought in Africa are as diverse as African languages and ethnicities. Coptic Christians in Egypt believe that Christianity was brought to Egypt by St. Mark the gospel-writer and Coptic monasteries were established as early as the fourth century A.D.; Christianity reached Ethiopia in the fourth century A.D. and Christian monasteries were established there in the fifth century. Christian churches in Egypt and Ethiopia thrived several hundred years ago. Christianity was brought to parts of sub-Saharan Africa by missionaries as early as 250 years ago and was even more widely spread under European colonialism.

Islam was brought to Northern Africa in the seventh century and today millions of Africans who live in the northern third of the continent are Muslims. However, it is too

simple to say that all Africans are either Christians or Muslims. Indeed, traditional religions remain popular in many areas.

Southeast Asian Refugees

Iowa has a proud history of welcoming Southeast Asian refugees. In 1975, Iowa was the first state to welcome thousands of refugees from Southeast Asia, and since the 1970s, thousands have come here. Most Americans remember the so-called “boat people” of Vietnam; 600,000 of them risked their lives on the open sea to escape the communist regime in Vietnam. Many used un-seaworthy craft, including oil drums strung together with rope. An estimated 45 percent of the boat people died at sea. In 1975, Iowa was the only state to open its arms to thousands of Tai Dam (or Black Tai) and other Lao, Khmer (Cambodian) and Hmong refugees who fled the aftermath of the Vietnam War to settle in the United States.

Hundreds of Iowa families, churches and communities sponsored families. They located across the state in communities large and small, and Iowa became the first and only state to have a government agency to work on refugee issues. This agency went through several organizational and name changes, but it eventually became the Bureau of Refugee services (BRS). For more than 25 years, the Bureau of Refugee Services has settled thousands of refugees in Iowa from around the world.

Southeast Asians practice a variety of indigenous and Western religions. In Vietnam, for example, traditional religion involved a mixture of animism, Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism. Christianity was first brought to Vietnam by Catholic monks in the 16th century and gained even wider followings after France made Vietnam a colony in 1887. French Catholic missionaries developed the Roman-style alphabet for the Vietnamese language used today.

Today about 10 percent of Vietnamese are Catholics. In many U.S. communities with substantial Vietnamese populations, large Catholic Vietnamese churches have been built. Protestant missionaries reached Southeast Asia later than the Catholics. The Christian and Missionary Alliance did not even start in Vietnam until 1911, and the majority of Vietnamese Protestants in the United States trace their church history to the *Tin Lanb* or “gospel” church established then.⁶

Just as European, Latino and African Christians have done, Asian Christians have interpreted Christian principles in the context of their own culture, and have incorporated important ethnic customs in Christian ceremonies.

For many Asians, honoring ancestors is an important part of religious life. In its simplest form, people who practice ancestor honoring acknowledge the benefits and opportunities they received from their parents and grandparents, and they thank them in private ceremonies. Involving the ancestors in funerals, weddings and other significant rites of passage is also common. In this sense, ancestor honoring acknowledges the belief that ancestors retain an interest in the family’s affairs.

People believe that the ancestors actually have the ability to impact events in their lives and bring blessings or curses, which can seem like ancestor “worship” to many Western Christians. In the case of honoring or worshiping ancestors, it is common for Southeast Asian refugees to maintain small family shrines in their homes. These usually include photos of ancestors and a place to burn incense. Prayers are often offered at these shrines.

Buddhism is also quite common in Southeast Asian cultures. Buddhists worship in temples with monks and nuns, although they can worship privately as well. This religion has been brought to the United States and Iowa, and there is a Buddhist Temple in Des Moines. Buddhism as a religion is based on the life and teaching of the Buddha, who lived in India between about 560 and 480 B.C., but its teachings also reflect some of the basic philosophies of Asian culture. In Buddhism, there are Four Noble Truths about life.

- Humans and all other living beings are caught in a cycle of suffering in which their actions (karma) entrap them. Thus, Buddhists believe in reincarnation.
- Suffering is caused by desire.
- The third Noble Truth is that the cycle of suffering can be broken. Buddhists call this end of suffering “Nirvana.”
- The way to Nirvana is the Eight-fold Path, which combines ethical and discipline practices, concentration and meditation with faith, and the ultimate transformation to enlightenment. Many of these practices parallel the Judeo-Christian Ten Commandments.

Bosnian Refugees

Immigrants from the former Yugoslavia, particularly Bosnia, now reside in Iowa. They came in the 1990s as war refugees, and were granted legal permission by the United States government to resettle throughout the country. Many of the Bosnians here in Iowa are actually “secondary migrants,” as they first resettled in other areas like Utica, New York, before eventually moving to Iowa. The 2000 U.S. Census showed that Iowa’s Bosnian population was 5,695, with a total 6,575 Iowans being of Yugoslavian ancestry. The common assumption, as with all immigrant and refugee groups, is that the 2000 Census underreported the Bosnian population. In Black Hawk County alone, informal projections estimate the Bosnian population to be more than 4,000. Most are drawn to the state by jobs in the meatpacking and agricultural processing industries, and by Iowa’s peaceful, rural family-oriented lifestyle.

Bosnians, unlike many other immigrants to Iowa, are generally classified legally as true refugees. This means that they were forced to flee their homeland due to ethnic conflict, and did not come voluntarily to the United States like economic migrants. The road that led most Bosnians refugees—indeed for *all* refugees—to Iowa was very difficult. Many were deeply traumatized by ethnic cleansing, war injuries, torture, rape and other human rights abuses that forced them out of Bosnia. Many stayed in Germany or other European countries before moving to the United States. Many would prefer to be back in Bosnia if the political situation was different, and they generally resent people who think they came to America just to seek jobs.

Bosnia is quite well developed and cosmopolitan. Bosnians resent established residents who speak down to them and imply that the Bosnians came from a “backward” country. Bosnia was one of the six republics that made up the former Yugoslavia, and was the most ethnically diverse. Most of the Bosnians in Iowa speak Bošnjak, which is similar to Serbo-Croatian.

Most Bosnians are very well educated and highly literate. Not all will know English, though, upon arrival in the United States, and will still prefer educational programs in their native language. Many Bosnians were professionals back in their home country. In fact, most were doctors, nurses, teachers and business leaders. Many would like to resume their professions in the United States, particularly as medical providers, and should be utilized in refugee programs. Many Bosnians that worked in skilled trades or who held professional licenses find themselves working in positions well beneath their skills level. Differing professional guidelines, lost/destroyed certifications and language barriers hinder many refugees’ ability to transition into similar positions in Iowa.

Most Bosnians in Iowa are Muslim. Although they are Muslim, most are fairly secular in their practices. Most Bosnians do not eat pork, celebrate Christmas or attend churches. However, it should not be assumed, for instance, that Bosnian women wear veils and long dresses.

Bosnians place a great deal of value on extended family ties. Many have now been successful in bringing additional family members to the United States, like grandparents. Grown children are usually excellent caretakers of their elderly parents, and do not like to put them into nursing homes. Likewise, young children will usually give great respect to their elders. Public health and social services programming should target the entire family unit, rather than just the individual. This is certainly the case for all immigrants and refugees.

What is Life in Iowa Like for Immigrants and Refugees?

Newcomers in Iowa today have many faces. They are Sudanese cattle herders, indigenous Maya from Guatemala and Vietnamese. Many of the new immigrants are people of color. Their languages, food and appearances are very different from most resident Iowans who descended from Northern European German, Scandinavian and English families.

Despite a shared “immigrant history,” few residents empathize with the immigration experience of recent Latin American, African and Southeast Asian newcomers. Third and fourth generation immigrants who did not experience the migration themselves tend to minimize the difficulties that are associated with settlement in a foreign environment. Comments like, “Well, my grandparents learned English” and “Earlier immigrants did their best to assimilate.” disguise the difficulties faced by German, Norwegian and Irish immigrants when they first settled in Iowa. In 1887, for example, the American Protection Association was founded in Clinton to argue for laws prohibiting Catholics from being elected to public office. Germans and Irish were targeted groups whose “drinking habits” stood in contrast to the ideals of the temperance movement supported by other established immigrant groups. The use of languages other than English was banned in Iowa in 1918, a law that enraged Iowans who still spoke and worshipped in German, Danish, Norwegian and other European languages.⁷

Just as our own ancestors did, Iowa’s new immigrants and refugees face many challenges.

Cultural Differences Nothing is familiar. All too often, newcomers arrive with few personal possessions, little ability to speak English, and a set of cultural beliefs, attitudes and behaviors that are very different from those of their new community. Unfortunately, instead of trying to identify similarities shared with immigrants or refugees, established residents tend to focus on the differences. Behaviors or physical appearances that are contrary to expectations make people feel uncomfortable. Deeply engrained cultural expectations determine what is considered “common sense” social rules and “proper” behavior, and both newcomers and established residents surprise each other by the ways they interact and behave. Unfortunately, differences tend to be viewed as negative, either because we do not understand what we observe or because we misunderstand the intentions and assumptions of others.

Language Differences For newcomers who have no or very few English skills, living in an English-speaking community can be daunting. Simple things that established residents take for granted, like enrolling children in school or getting a driver’s license, can be intimidating and difficult. Often, adults in the family must spend long hours at work, leaving little time to learn English, which can take several years to master. As a result, they must rely on others to interpret for them. Because their children are the only family members who can enroll in school, some parents are forced to rely on them to translate, a situation that puts children in a relative position of power that many cultures find inappropriate.

Professional Differences The work of immigrants and refugees is very different from the small farming and family industries that sustained European immigrants a hundred years ago. Newcomers to Iowa typically work in low paying, entry-level jobs in the service or meat packing industries. Individuals work long hours, sometimes working two jobs simultaneously. Parents will work opposite shifts so that one parent can always be home for childcare responsibilities. Time spent commuting back and forth to work and the actual hours worked means that immigrants and refugees rarely have extra leisure time to spend studying English or volunteering in community activities.

Hostility to Differences For virtually all immigrants, interaction with established residents is difficult. Language differences make communication difficult, and cultural differences go beyond foods and family life. Newcomers and established residents have different worldviews that are not always compatible, and minority newcomers often feel that established residents consider their culture inferior. Resident Iowans do not understand the newcomers' cultural traditions, and the lack of understanding creates fear and prejudice. At times there is open racism and hostility towards newcomers.

What about Undocumented Immigrants?

Unlike refugees who are, in a sense, invited to come to the United States to start new lives, immigrants ask to enter this country for one of two reasons; they are joining family members who already live in the U.S. or they are seeking work. The latter kind of immigrants are often referred to as “economic immigrants” and their status in communities is often complicated by their social and legal situation.

Whereas refugees often enjoy support from government and private agencies and their travel to the U.S. is paid for, the majority of immigrants have no such formal support systems. Economic immigrants are often socially isolated, separated from family and friends for long periods until they can find work and establish a home in this country. They might lack contacts in this country to explain U.S. laws, social customs and neighborhood expectations. Often they are simply poor. Having spent all their money to get here and lacking language skills or professional certifications, they must work long, hard hours simply to survive.

The immigrant’s status is further complicated by the legal complexities of U.S. immigration law. The only set of U.S. regulations thicker than immigration law is the federal tax code, and the complicated rules reflect the great variety of immigrants who wish to enter the U.S. Under federal immigration law, all foreign-born people enter the United States with some kind of immigration status that either allows them to freely enter the country or that makes their presence here illegal, but the variety of immigration visas is tremendous.

In some years, people from one country are allowed into the United States and the next year they are not. Also, Congress sets quotas for the number of people from some countries that are allowed to enter the U.S. on an annual basis. The application process for all immigration services, from visitors’ visas to becoming a naturalized citizen, can be daunting and take years. Navigating the bureaucracy associated with the Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services (BCIS) (formerly the Immigration and Naturalization Service - INS) can be intimidating and exhausting. When immigrants come to Iowa to take jobs, they can have a variety of work-eligible immigration statuses. For example, immigrants who take highly skilled jobs, for which there is great demand and few American applicants, may have an H1B or H2B visa. Long-term immigrants who are eligible to work in the U.S. are issued Resident Alien cards or “Green Cards.”

Of course, not all people who seek jobs in the United States are eligible to do so. There are thousands of immigrants working in Iowa who do not have an official BCIS document. These “undocumented” workers sometimes obtain forged immigration and other documents to be eligible to work, giving false names, addresses or social security numbers. Employers who hire these immigrants are legally required only to make reasonably sure that the documents workers provide are genuine, but for the undocumented workers, their legal status overshadows every aspect of their lives here.

Many undocumented workers and their family members have paid exorbitant border crossing fees and risked their personal safety for an opportunity to work for a decent living in Iowa.⁸ Once in the United States, they live in continual fear that they or a family member will be arrested and deported back to their country of origin. In order to be able to work, undocumented workers will purchase false documents, typically at a very high cost. They run a greater risk of job exploitation: women are particularly vulnerable to sexual harassment while on the job. In addition, undocumented workers are often unfairly depicted as criminals.

Although some immigrants are living in Iowa as undocumented residents, many are in the process of applying for legal resident status. It can take the BCIS up to 10 years to process a family unification petition, which is filed by an immigrant who has his/her green card, or the authorization to work in the United States. The petitioner requests that members of his/her immediate family (parents, spouse, children, siblings) also be granted legal status to reside in the United States.

The ethical questions of illegal entry and forgery are not taken lightly by Iowans, but neither are they taken lightly by immigrants. These individuals have taken a grave risk to obtain work in the United States, chancing arrest and deportation in order to find a job. Most come from poverty-stricken parts of the world where the long-term prospects for an income and quality life are poor. Migration, with or without immigration documents, is their only way to improve the quality of their lives. For the God-fearing breadwinner in Mexico, or the single mother in war-torn Central American, the choices are not always easy, but these families have chosen to do what they must to provide for themselves and their families.

Welcoming Immigrant and Refugee Newcomers

The Need for New Iowans

There are a number of practical reasons why Iowa needs immigrants and refugees. Across the state, immigrants and refugees are filling jobs that might otherwise go unfilled. As we look to the future, more immigrants and refugees will be needed to make up for a pending shortage of resident workers. There are five general trends that signal the future shortage of available workers:

- **Iowa's population is aging.** In 2000 17.8 percent of Iowans were age 60 or older. In 2020, one in every five Iowans will be age 65 or older.
- **Iowa's workforce is aging.** In Marshalltown, for example, people age 60 or older make up 28.8 percent of the town's working-age population. At some Iowa employers, 40 percent of salaried and 50 percent of hourly employees will be eligible to retire by 2005. In one typical community, Fort Dodge, the median age of all employed persons in 2001 was 42. Among highly skilled workers, the median age was even higher at 46. One-third of Fort Dodge schoolteachers are eligible to retire by 2005. Thirty percent of those in professional, paraprofessional and technical positions in the Fort Dodge area are eligible to retire by 2010.
- **Birth rates have declined sharply.** Live births in Iowa have dropped from 14.2 per 1,000 in 1990 to 13.1 per 1,000 in 2000. This drop was particularly sharp in rural areas. Only 14 Iowa counties met or exceeded the 2000 state average birthrate and only four of these counties were rural. Rural live birthrates as low as 6.9 per 1,000 were recorded in 2000. More recent data show that Iowa's birth rates continue to fall. In 2002, the live-birth rate for Iowa was down to 12.9 per 1,000. Between July 2001 and July 2002, 50 of Iowa's 99 counties experienced negative population growth. That is, half of Iowa's counties experienced more deaths than births.⁹
- **More people leave Iowa than move in.** The U.S. Census Bureau estimates that between 1995 and 2000, 33,000 more people left Iowa to live in another state than moved to Iowa from another state.
- **Nearly half of Iowa's Regent's universities graduates leave the state.** In 2000, almost 60 percent of University of Iowa graduates took jobs out of state. In the same year, 46.9 percent of Iowa State University and 30.4 percent of University of Northern Iowa graduates left the state.

Newcomers as Workers

Availability of labor is one of the most important factors when companies consider expanding or building new businesses in Iowa. Companies need to identify and tap into new sources of labor to expand current operations or build new facilities. The Professional Developers of Iowa have noted that the availability of labor "is among the top three important location factors for businesses considering expansions or relocations." Given the demographic trends, hiring immigrants and refugees is a matter of survival for a growing list of Iowa companies, but our research in Iowa companies that employ immigrants and refugees found other reasons as well.¹⁰

Productivity

Our research among Iowa companies shows that newcomers are reliable, productive, motivated, positive and loyal employees. Some companies had statistics showing that immigrants had lower rates of absenteeism. One company gave merit points for attendance, and Latino workers consistently held most of the of the top 10 attendance records.

Managers noted that newcomers were hardworking, task-oriented and dedicated. One company's statistics showed that most Vietnamese and Latino workers were more than 100 percent efficient in their jobs. Indeed, 60 percent of the plant's workers who were at or over 100 percent efficiency were immigrants or refugees even though they made up only 25 percent of the workforce.

Attitude

Newcomers were also recognized for their motivation. Many were commended for their strong work ethic, eagerness to do jobs and ability to work at top speed. As one supervisor said, "The immigrant community in our organization has a distinct desire to say, 'I am going to work hard and my kids will have a better life.' They are driven. They want more overtime."

Many newcomers were praised for their positive attitude and for enjoying their jobs. One manager said of immigrants and refugees, they "come in, show up every day. They are kind, courteous, and loyal—[I am] happy that I gave them the opportunity. This is a win-win situation that made my job easier. At a time when I had a problem getting workers, they came and were darn happy to be here."

Religious Reasons to Welcome New Iowans

Mandates to welcome newcomers are found in the Christian, Jewish and Islamic traditions.

The Bible provides a number of passages that remind Christians of their responsibility to welcome strangers.¹¹

- “When an alien resides with you in your land, you shall not oppress the alien. The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land Egypt” (Leviticus 19:33-34).
- A similar call is found in Jeremiah’s Temple Address, in which he said, “if you practice strict justice toward one another, if you do not oppress the resident alien, the orphan and the widow...I will establish your home in this place” (Jeremiah 7:5-7).
- Paul wrote to the Hebrews, “Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it” (Hebrews 13:2).

Similarly, the Jewish holy book, the Torah, makes several references to the Jew’s responsibility to welcome newcomers. Here are some examples:¹²

- “So Moses told the Israelis: ‘You will not lie to, or abuse, or give pressure to any foreigner in your land, because you too were once foreigners in Egypt’” (Exodus 22).
- “You should not take advantage of any foreigner that lives in your land. You should understand the souls of foreigners, because you were once foreigners in Egypt” (Exodus 23).

The Quar’an, the holy book of Islam, also mandates kindness to newcomers:¹³

- “O’You believe, enter in peaceful relations with all” (Baqara 2:208).
- “God does not forbid you of being courteous and kind with those who have not fought your religion, nor expelled you out of your homes. Indeed Allah (God) loves those who are kind, and fair” (Mumtahina 60:8).

Further Reading

- *Welcoming New Iowans: A Guide for Citizens and Communities*, 2001, UNI New Iowans Program.
- *Welcoming New Iowans: A Guide for Christians and Churches*, 2002, UNI New Iowans Program and Ecumenical Ministries of Iowa.
- *Welcoming New Iowans: A Guide for Managers and Supervisors*, 2002, UNI New Iowans Program.
- *A Health Provider’s Pocket Guide to Working with Immigrant, Refugee and Minority Populations in Iowa*, 2003, UNI Global Health Corps and UNI New Iowans Program.

Making Multiethnic Communities Work

Based on our experience and research in communities, workplaces and organizations throughout Iowa, we have three general recommendations for everyone who wants to encourage positive and long-term integration of immigrant and refugee newcomers.

Be Patient with Each Other

Remember that moving to a new country with a new language and culture is an extremely stressful and difficult thing for immigrants and refugees. So many of the everyday things established residents take for granted—like enrolling children in school or getting a driver’s license—present daunting challenges to newcomers. Getting and keeping a job is, of course, a matter of survival for newcomers. Life in the United States might not feel “normal” for several years—if ever—and the same might be said of the workplace. Immigrant and refugee workers require more time and patience, but citizens and community leaders in our research clearly indicated that newcomers are worth all of the extra time and effort.

It is also essential to be patient with established residents. The presence of immigrants and refugees will present a number of challenges to them, particularly if the newcomers do not speak English well. Much of this will be new to them as well. No one can force people to change, and people might become resentful when leaders attempt to force them to do so. Both established residents and newcomers need to be involved in the “buy in,” committed to making their new multiethnic community work.

Never Make People Apologize for Who They Are

One of the most humiliating things people can go through, regardless of culture or language, is to be forced to apologize for being who they are, to be made to feel inferior because of language, religion, ethnicity or immigration status. It is critical to guard against placing either newcomers or established residents in a position in which they feel obligated to apologize for their identity, cultural perspectives, language or background. This is not only disrespectful treatment; it will lead to discord in the community.

Focus on the Long Term

Activities to integrate immigrants and refugees should be based on a long-term vision of the social and economic health of the community, not one based solely on a desire to “diversify” the community. Diversity yields a number of benefits and opportunities to communities. However, recruiting newcomers for the sake of diversity is like putting the proverbial cart before the horse. All community leaders and citizens should be informed that integrating immigrants and refugees is part of a long-term vision for the economic vitality of the community.

Glossary

Alien: “Alien” is the legal term that describes a person who is not a U.S. citizen.

Asylum Seeker: A person who entered the U.S. either legally or illegally who applies to the Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services (BCIS) for permanent residency due to persecution or serious danger in his/her country of origin.

Asylee: A person who is granted asylum is an asylee.

Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services (BCIS) (formerly the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS)): An agency of the U.S. Department of Justice, the BCIS is responsible for enforcing laws regulating admission of foreign-born persons (“aliens”) to the U.S. and administering immigration benefits, including the naturalization of qualified applicants for U.S. citizenship.

Citizen: A person born or naturalized in the U.S. is a U.S. citizen. Almost all persons born in the U.S. acquire citizenship automatically and cannot lose it involuntarily. Foreign nationals may become naturalized citizens by lawfully residing in the U.S. for a number of years and satisfying other legal requirements. U.S. citizens—by birth or naturalization—may work and travel freely throughout the country, may travel to and from the U.S. without restrictions and have all rights and privileges in the U.S. Constitution.

Culture: The set of values, assumptions and expectations passed from generation to generation that governs the most basic and essential concepts of human life. Culture includes norms that govern how people behave in a community with respect to dressing, eating, living and working, as well as how they think about such things as family, health or religion.

Economic Migrant: A person who voluntarily leaves his/her country of origin for economic reasons.

Ethnicity: Ethnicity is related to culture, but it is a more precise term that has to do with our sense of identity as individuals and members of groups. Ethnicity is flexible, often changing for different situations and through life. Ethnicity does not rely on race, the physical characteristics of people. The danger in relying on race to categorize people is that it contributes to stereotypes. There is always a great deal of ethnic diversity among people who otherwise share physical characteristics.

“Green Card”: This is the informal name for the card issued by the Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services (BCIS) as proof of registry as a legal permanent resident of the U.S. It is officially INS Form I-551 and its official name is Alien Registration Receipt Card. The card’s common name reflects the fact that at one time its color was green.

Immigrant: An immigrant is a person who voluntarily leaves his/her country of origin to reside in the U.S. “Immigrant” is also the legal term for a foreign national who is lawfully permitted to permanently reside in the U.S., usually with a green card.

Non-Immigrant: A foreign national person given permission to enter the U.S. for a specific purpose and for a limited period of time, such as a tourist, visitor or student.

Race: Describes physical differences among people in terms of skin color, hair or facial features. Most social scientists do not even believe that significant physical differences exist among humans, and biological characteristics are unrelated to ethnicity.

Refugee: A person who has involuntarily fled his/her country of origin and who cannot return due to a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of his/her ethnicity, faith, nationality, political opinion, or association with a particular group. Refugee status is an immigration status determined by the U.S. government prior to the refugee’s entry into the U.S.

Undocumented or Unauthorized Alien: Sometimes referred to as an “illegal alien.” An unauthorized alien is a person who is in the U.S. without being legally recognized as a refugee, immigrant, legal non-immigrant or asylum-seeker. This includes persons who have entered the U.S. illegally and “out of status” aliens who were allowed into the United States for a fixed period of time (as students, tourists, etc.) but who have remained in the U.S. after their visas or work authorizations expire.

Group or Individual Studies and Discussion Topics

The following are questions that can be used by individuals, neighborhoods, organizations, schools and others to discuss important issues surrounding immigration in Iowa.

Topic 1: Recalling Our Immigration Experience

For many of us, recalling our own immigrant past will help us empathize with the lives and situations of more recent newcomers. With the exception of Native Americans, the United States is a nation of immigrants and Iowa is certainly a state of immigrants. Life in Iowa as we know it today would not exist without our rich history of immigration. Here are some questions and issues to discuss as we think about the plight of today's immigrant and refugee newcomers in Iowa.

- 1. Did some of your ancestors come to the United States from another country? What do you know about their first few years of life in this country? What languages did they speak? What religions did they practice? What language did they use for worship? What helped them become members of their new society?*
- 2. One hundred years ago, there were great waves of immigrants from Europe. Were any of your ancestors among them? What encouraged or forced them to come here? How did they feel they were accepted? What is your reaction to your ancestors' immigrant groups? Do you have different reactions to the other immigrant groups that came around the turn of the last century?*
- 3. Most immigrants and refugees today come from Asia, Africa and Latin America. Do you react differently to any of these groups than you do to European immigrants? What impact have these groups had on our society, state and communities?*
- 4. Discuss the differences between the old European immigrants and the new immigrants from Asia, Latin America and Africa. What do you believe are the most important differences? What do you believe are the similarities? How will the new immigrants impact U.S. society?*
- 5. What is the difference between immigrants and refugees? Are there differences in terms of how they are treated in the U.S. and Iowa? Do you have different feelings for these two groups?*
- 6. What are the greatest challenges associated with the arrival of newcomers in your community? What are the opportunities associated with their arrival?*

Topic 2: Who is an American?

People who live in the United States usually call themselves “Americans.” This is a kind of shorthand for being U.S. citizens. But many people in the western hemisphere also consider themselves Americans because they live in North or South America. People in the U.S. also tend to use the terms “world” to describe their country. We call our professional baseball championship the World Series, although only U.S. teams play. We expect other people (including immigrants) to learn English, but most U.S. citizens cannot speak a second language.

- 1. Have you ever been in a situation where you were a minority because of your language, nationality or ethnicity? Can you describe this situation and how it felt?*
- 2. Many people believe that their nationality, culture or language is superior to others. Upon what do they base their assumptions? Can you name some ways that people tend to see important issues like justice only in terms of their own nation, culture or language?*

Topic 3: Getting to Know Your Neighbor

As we have seen, many religions call followers to reach out to their neighbors. For instance, in the Christian tradition there is Paul’s letter to the Romans, in which he outlines the Christian’s many responsibilities. Among these, he notes the responsibility to “owe no one anything, except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law...love your neighbor as yourself” (Romans 13:8-9). Similar responsibilities are found in the Jewish and Islamic traditions.

- 1. Relate an encounter you have had with someone who is different from you. What made that person(s) different from you? Culture? Language? Nationality? Ethnicity? What did you say or do? How did that encounter make you feel? If you could have that encounter again today, what would you do differently?*
- 2. When you think about the future of your community, business, synagogue, mosque, and church, what role might newcomers play? What will remain the same in, say, 10 years? What will be different? How much of this change will be difficult for you personally? How do you think your church and community will respond to these changes?*
- 3. As you think about the challenges and opportunities associated with immigrants and refugees in your community, how will the call to “love your neighbor” come into play? Will it make people more tolerant? Will it make people try harder to understand the lives and circumstances of immigrant newcomers?*

Topic 4: Welcoming Strangers

Many Iowans feel a moral and religious mandate to welcome immigrants, refugees and other strangers. Of course, everyone may interpret these mandates in different ways. Some might see this as a mandate, a guiding principle to direct one's day-to-day life. Others see it as a recommendation. It's a good idea to help the poor and strangers, when we have time or an opportunity arises. For some people, translating any religious call to welcome the stranger into daily life might seem overwhelming. Many take the approach that they will do what they can when they can. Our lives are already so busy with family obligations, work, school activities, and so forth that there is little time to seek out the needy, much less do anything for them.

- 1. Some Iowans make distinctions between the “deserving” and “undeserving” poor. That is, there are some poor people who deserve our help because they are trying to make their lives better. What about immigrants and refugees? Do we also divide newcomers in terms of those who deserve and don't deserve our help? What criteria do we use to make these distinctions: language, ethnicity, national origin or immigration status? Are strangers without proper immigration documentation any more or less deserving than those with documentation?*
- 2. Do people in your community make decisions about whether immigrants and refugees fit the religious mandate to welcome the stranger? What kinds of things do people in your community say about immigrants and refugees? Do people consider immigrants and refugees the kind of “strangers” we read about in our religious texts?*
- 3. Many organizations in Iowa have outreach programs to immigrants and refugees. These include food pantries, clothing banks, providing English lessons, etc. Has your organization considered such an approach? Are there other needs among the immigrants and refugees in your communities that could be met by your organization? Even without organized outreach efforts like food pantries, how can you or your community welcome newcomers?*
- 4. How will you welcome newcomers to your community? What accommodations will you make? What changes will this require of your community, both in attitudes and practice?*

Iowa Immigration and Refugee Resources and Services

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Sioux City
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303 N. Main Ave
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Des Moines Public Schools
Park Avenue School Welcome Center
3141 SW 9th Street
Des Moines, IA 50315
Phone: 515-246-8170

Hispanic Information Center
1413 Broadway
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Phone: 712-263-8022
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La Casa Latina
715 Douglas Street
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www.state.ia.us/government/dhr/

Iowa Division of Latino Affairs
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www.state.ia.us/government/dhr/la/

Iowa Bureau of Refugee Services
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Des Moines, IA 50314-2330
Phone: 1-800-326-2780
www.dhs.state.ia.us/Homepages/dhs/refugee/

Iowa Civil Rights Commission
211 East Maple Street
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www.state.ia.us/government/crc/index.html

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Refugee Cooperative Ministry
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Phone: 515-277-4476
Fax: 515-271-7454
www.lssia.org/

Iowa Coalition against Domestic Violence
Sonia Parras
2603 Bell Ave, Suite 100
Des Moines, IA 50310
Phone: 515-244-8028
Fax: 515-244-7417

Notes and References

- 1 National Population Council Report, 2001
- 2 United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Web site:
<http://www.unhcr.ch/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/home?page=PUBL&id=3b8e2aa14>
- 3 “Barriers to Employment” Central Iowa Latino Laborforce Survey, Iowa Workforce Development, March 2001
- 4 Mark A. Grey and Anne C. Woodrick (2002). Unofficial Sister Cities: Meatpacking Labor Migration between Villachuato, Mexico and Marshalltown, Iowa. *Human Organization* 61(4), pages 364-376.
- 5 *The Chicago Tribune*, 13 November 2001
- 6 Minh Chau Mgod Vo and Kari Ann Vo (1995) *Harvest Waiting: Reaching Out to the Vietnamese*. Concordia Publishing House.
- 7 Peter L. Peterson (1974). Language and Loyalty: Governor Harding and the Iowa’s Danish-Americans During World War I. *Annals of Iowa* (42): 406-407. Governor Harding’s Proclamation resulted from his deep distrust of German residents during World War I. See Leola Allen (1974). Anti-German Sentiment in Iowa During World War I. *Annals of Iowa* (42):418-429; Nancy Derr (1979). The Babel Proclamation. *Palimpsest* (60):114.
- 8 One consequence for undocumented Mexican immigrants after September 11, 2001, was that the cost for crossing the U.S.-Mexican border almost tripled in price, and risk to personal well-being increased.
- 9 U.S Census; Iowa Department of Public Health.
- 10 For more information on hiring and integrating immigrants and refugees into the workplace, see the handbook *Welcoming New Iowans: A Guide for Managers and Supervisors* by Mark A. Grey. Available as a download at www.bcs.uni.edu/idm/newiowans.
- 11 For more information on how Christians can welcome newcomers, see the handbook *Welcoming New Iowans: A Guide for Christians and Churches* by Anne C. Woodrick and Mark A. Grey (published with Ecumenical Ministries of Iowa). Available as a download at www.bcs.uni.edu/idm/newiowans.
- 12 Thanks to Hagai Yehieli for providing passages from the Torah.
- 13 Thanks to Mohammed Fahmy for providing passages from the Quar’an.