

STRATEGIC DISCUSSIONS FOR **nebraska**



IMMIGRATION IN NEBRASKA



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*Front cover images from left to right:
Crete, Nebraska
Omaha, Nebraska
Lexington, Nebraska
Scottsbluff, Nebraska*

Dear Readers:

Strategic Discussions for Nebraska is a grant-funded research project located in the University of Nebraska–Lincoln College of Journalism and Mass Communications. The project began July 1, 2007, and performs studies on topics of national interest and how they affect Nebraska and the people who live here. Group discussions in selected communities encourage the public to be involved in improved statewide communication. Through these qualitative studies and discussions, we hope Nebraska can be a key player in raising national awareness and thus, affecting national policy on these topics.

We researched immigration for the project's initial study. We selected Scottsbluff, Lexington, Crete and Omaha and looked at the impact immigration has had on those communities. We selected these communities for specific reasons:

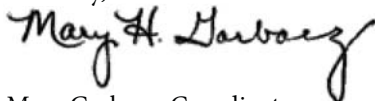
- Scottsbluff – because of its geographic and perceived cultural distance from the capital of the state, but also because its history with immigration goes back for nearly 150 years
- Lexington – because of the changes that community has experienced since the Tyson meatpacking plant located there in 1990
- Crete – because of the small size of the community, the changes it has experienced since the Farmland meatpacking plant located there in 1975, and also because of Doane College's long academic presence in the community
- Omaha – because of its size, history with diversity, federal designation as a primary resettlement site for refugees and also because of its geographic and perceived cultural distance from other parts of Nebraska

We spent hundreds of hours, traveled thousands of miles and conducted scores of interviews from many perspectives in each community. We studied the long history of immigration in Nebraska and used it as a comparison to today's issues.

The summary of our findings, selected stories and a list of additional readings are included in this magazine. This is only part of the information collected during this study. Please go to our website: www.unl.edu/sdn to read all the stories written from interviews across the state, as well as view photographs and video clips. As you read and view this information as a whole, consider whether you still believe immigration is a problem in Nebraska, and also consider possible solutions. We suggest you contact the officials on the community, county, state and national levels and share your thoughts and possible solutions with them. I welcome your comments on this study and your suggestions for future studies.

If you would like additional copies of this magazine, please contact me.

Sincerely,



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Summary of Qualitative Research Findings

After visiting with nearly 100 individuals and hosting several conversations statewide about immigration, the Strategic Discussions for Nebraska research team has learned some interesting information. A summary of this information follows here; overviews of Scottsbluff, Lexington, Crete and Omaha are included, along with a selection of the collected stories – they were selected because the information may help to understand the depth and breadth of the issue in Nebraska. Additional stories, video clips and still photographs may be found on our website: www.unl.edu/sdn.

Federal data indicate that, of today's immigrant worker population, 50 percent come to the U.S. from Mexico; 25 percent from Latin America; and 25 percent from Europe, Asia and Africa. Some are able to work in the U.S. legally; some are not. Public perception is based on superficial knowledge, SDN research shows, and the fear of the unknown or unfamiliar may have a great influence on the topic of immigration. The public can't tell the difference between a worker who is in the country legally and one who is not; they can't tell the difference between people from Mexico and people from Guatemala, for instance, even though there are major differences. In addition, the public may be disseminating and perpetuating myths through the newest technology and techniques available.

Media Influence

The immigration issue is far larger and more complex than most people can imagine, both in Nebraska and nationwide. There is a lack of education about the topic overall, and the media – local and national, broadcast and print – are at least partly responsible, as are the changing news consumption habits of people in the 21st century. People used to read newspapers and listen to the news regularly; today, headlines and the 10-second sound bite may form the depth of news knowledge, based on many interviews in this research project.

The Internet and the blogosphere have contributed to negative attitudes about immigration, as they quickly and widely disseminate myths and misconceptions, as well as vitriolic commentary. Todd Wiltgen, State Director for the office of Senator Chuck Hagel, spends a great deal of time dispelling these misconceptions when constituents write or call Senator Hagel's office. During a recent interview, Wiltgen displayed a large, three-ring binder full of factual reports collected so he could respond to a constituent's concerns about immigration issues. Most of the issues the constituent was worried about were myths, Wiltgen said. The research was provided by the Congressional Research Office and other federal research organizations.

Nebraska's Congressional Involvement

Nebraska's congressmen and senators are well-informed about the complexities of the immigration issue and are trying to find the most practical solutions, both for Nebraska and for the country as a whole. However, solutions that make sense in heavily-populated coastal states don't make sense for the sparsely-populated, agrarian Nebraska with its wildly different terrains and lifestyles. Nebraska's Congressional delegates receive a broad spectrum of feedback from their constituents about immigration – everything from “cut it off,” “keep it as it is,” “lower it,” “build a wall,” “don't build a wall,” “fix the system,” and more.

The Strategic Discussions for Nebraska team visited with Congressman Lee Terry, who represents the 2nd District; with

Charles Isom, Communications Director for Congressman Adrian Smith, who represents the 3rd District; and with Josh Moenning of Congressman Jeff Fortenberry's office – Fortenberry represents Nebraska's 1st Congressional District. The SDN team also visited with David DiMartino, then-Communications Director for Senator E. Benjamin Nelson, and with Todd Wiltgen, State Director for Senator Chuck Hagel. All are very much aware that the “one-size-fits-all” approach to immigration does not work for Nebraska, or for states similar to Nebraska.

Two of the major issues are fortifying the border with Mexico and identifying the people who are already in the United States and what they are doing here. Since September 11, 2001, much of the focus has been on terrorists possibly coming into the U.S. via the country's southern border. In addition to determining whether undocumented entrants into the U.S. have terrorist ties, federal authorities are looking at drug smugglers, traffickers in humans, gang activity and people who bring in and sell counterfeit goods.

Conversations about building a wall across the border between the U.S. and Mexico draw varied comments. One Lincoln employer asked “who will they get to build the wall?” knowing that immigrant labor is used for much of U.S. construction. Chuck Karpf of Scottsbluff is Discovery Program Director for the John N. Harms Advanced Technology Center of Nebraska, and commented recently, “If they're going to close the border with Mexico, they should close the Canadian border, too.”

Understanding Words, Culture

Conversations with sources throughout Nebraska indicate that people want a standard, respectful vocabulary to describe people, laws and situations. The terms “illegal” and “alien” are two of the terms to which many object. They suggest “undocumented worker” as a more objective term. A list of definitions is provided in this magazine; these are the main terms encountered during this study that require clarification and possibly change, based on feedback from many sources.

The cultural and economic divide is enormous between most Americans and the people who come here for a better life. “We are the shining city on the hill” to them, to quote Steve Frederick, editor of the Scottsbluff Star-Herald. Luis Peon-Casanova, lecturer in advertising in the UNL College of Journalism and Mass Communications, became a U.S. citizen on December 7, 2007. He noted recently that on the north-south highway through Mexico, he has often seen women and children selling snakes, falcons and rugs at the side of the road. That is the life they know; they were born into that lifestyle; their children are born into that lifestyle. They simply don't have the ability to imagine a lifestyle other than selling snakes, falcons and rugs at the roadside, Peon-Casanova said.

Federal Immigration Organizations

In March 2003, the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) replaced the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service, and its umbrella organization became the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). The U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), also established in March 2003 is the largest investigative and enforcement branch of the Department of Homeland Security.

However, the federal immigration system is nearly impossible to access; it changes its focus frequently; the ICE raids on companies that hire immigrant labor are short-sighted, assault

many Nebraskans' sense of human rights, break up families and negatively impact communities' economies, as discussed in a meeting of community leaders in Scottsbluff on May 14. Some sources go so far as to allege that these ICE raids are conducted solely for publicity. Even though many Nebraskans object to people working in the U.S. without legal documentation, they object far more strongly to the ICE raids that break up families. Even though a federal software system is available to employers to determine whether employees are legally able to work in the U.S., it is optional. SDN sources believe employers should abide by federal regulations regarding employing undocumented workers so employees aren't caught in such raids, with the inevitable repercussions that follow. Individuals' stories were frequent, detailing unanswered calls, years of waiting for documents and observed mistreatment of would-be applicants in federal immigration offices.

The largest U.S. immigration raid in history took place on May 12, 2008, at Agriprocessors, a Postville, Iowa kosher beef processing plant. Nearly 400 workers were arrested in that ICE raid. A spokesman for Rep. Tom Latham, R-Iowa, said Latham views the raid as a blow to families seeking a better life and for the community, which is suffering economically, according to an Associated Press story in the June 2, 2008 Lincoln Journal Star. The story went on to say that if that many workers were undocumented, the company must have known they were hiring undocumented workers. The SDN community discussion in Scottsbluff on May 14 brought out that if employers were required to hire only workers with legal documentation, it would prevent the kind of human crisis that was visited on the workers of Agriprocessors and their families.

Nebraska's Employment Future

Nebraska grows food not only for its own residents, but also for export. Its vast Sandhills region provides a suitable environment for raising cattle, and Nebraska ranks #2 in the United States in cattle production. A large work force is required to grow, transport, process and distribute or ship the product.

With Nebraska's death rate exceeding its birth rate, there is a current shortage of people available to do the work required by that #2 national ranking. And it will only get worse in the future, especially in rural areas of the state, according to Jerrod Haberman, Executive Director of the Panhandle Area Development District. The so-called baby boomer generation will likely retire in the next 10 years, he said, and combined with the fact that deaths are exceeding births, Nebraska's current critical shortage of workers will become even worse by 2018.

Rural Nebraska already has a difficult time finding health-care professionals, not to mention bilingual professionals to serve the population who doesn't speak English. Cal Hiner, administrator of the Tri-County Hospital in Lexington, struggles to fill positions there, and is always on the lookout for bilingual professionals. In addition, Lexington is working on the "grow your own" method of filling health care jobs, which encourages Lexington high school graduates to get the requisite training and return to the community to work.

The increasing technical nature of employment has also changed the employment landscape, and small communities are finding ways to train people to fill these jobs, according to Dr. John Harms, current State Senator from District 48 (Scottsbluff) and retired President of Western Nebraska Community College. The John N. Harms Advanced Technology Center is part of WNCC, and was built to serve the technology training needs of western Nebraska.

The workers from other countries are reliable and loyal and cause few problems, according to employers SDN interviewed; they often have specialized skills learned in their own countries that are valuable in American construction projects.

Meatpacking/Processing Jobs

In many cases, beef processing facilities are located close to the source of production; the small towns can't provide enough workers, so immigrant labor fills the positions.

Nebraska's smaller communities are actively recruiting people for available jobs. They're recruiting from Nebraska and from other parts of the U.S., but they're also recruiting from other countries. Without this work force, the state's economy would suffer. Pundits have suggested the immigrant work force is taking jobs Americans won't take, while others disagree.

Todd Wiltgen, State Director in Senator Chuck Hagel's office, said "how much would you want to be paid to work in a meatpacking plant?" He said people are reluctant to answer, and may tell him that "other" people would be happy to take those jobs. Eric Brown, General Manager of KRVN Radio in Lexington, was one of the community leaders who led recruitment efforts to fill a large, empty manufacturing facility in Lexington. When Tyson moved into the structure and set up operations, the need for nearly 2,000 workers was more than the community of 10,000 could provide, so workers from other countries moved in to work in the plant. Some Lexington residents "did try it out," Brown said, but very few remain employed there. It is hard work, and Brown does believe that these workers are filling jobs Americans aren't willing to take.

Angelo Fili, Executive Vice President of Greater Omaha Packing Company in Omaha, hires many Latino workers and uses the federal verification software to be sure the company's employees are working in the U.S. legally. The company has built an addition to the plant specifically to provide for the sorts of formal and informal educational needs of the employees – language classes, citizenship classes, classes to help them understand American banking and culture – whatever they would like to learn, "we'll find a teacher." The classes are offered free of charge, Fili said. The employees are valuable to the company, he said, and the company wanted to give back to them. An unexpected result was that the program also grew company loyalty.

Language

Historically, immigrants to Nebraska took a long time to learn English. In some cases, it took generations. However, some Americans today have little patience with immigrants' process of language-learning.

According to Todd Chessmore, Superintendent of the Lexington Public Schools, educational research shows it takes seven years to learn English well. Parents of immigrant children are less likely to learn English as quickly as their children. But, Chessmore said, Americans' wish that immigrants be fluent in English quickly is complicated. "What does it mean to be fluent?" Does it mean reading a menu? Speaking, writing and reading perfectly? Or some combination of those? Chessmore uses the term "biliterate" instead of "bilingual," because "biliterate" means speaking, reading and writing in two languages, while "bilingual" may mean only speaking in two languages. Chessmore is pleased with the language process of Lexington's students. The majority of the students are Latino, he said, and it is increasingly clear that those students will have the advantage in the job market in the future; they are already earning scholarships and winning awards for educational excellence. He is now making sure the white students learn Spanish well so they have the same opportunities as their Latino classmates.

Kyle McGowan, Superintendent of Schools in Crete, says the Crete schools start Spanish-language education in kindergarten. Crete's location just 20 miles from Lincoln increases the chances of finding bilingual teachers and other personnel. Dr. Gary Reynolds, Superintendent of Schools in Scottsbluff, would like to start Spanish-language education in kindergarten too, but finding Spanish teachers is a challenge in Nebraska's Panhandle.

Racism? Education? Or Poverty?

Alex Moreno, Chief of Police in Scottsbluff, is of Mexican descent. He believes there is an element of racism today, but believes it is more likely to be a gap in education or income between whites and Latinos or between whites and any other ethnicity. Moreno said he sees a difference in the way professionals – like doctors and lawyers – are treated in comparison with agricultural workers who have less education and have lower incomes.

However, each Nebraska community is different in its ethnic makeup and in its ethnic history. Scottsbluff's ethnic mix has been part of the community's history for nearly 150 years, while the mix in Lexington has been only 18 years. Crete has worked with a variety of ethnicities since Farmland started operations there in 1975. Omaha was settled by a wide mix of ethnicities in the 1850s, so the city has always known differences.

Law Enforcement, Public Safety

Local law enforcement agencies are not only charged with enforcing laws, but also with protecting and serving the residents of a community. Moreno said that local law enforcement agencies are being asked to participate in ICE raids nationwide, and he sees that involvement as a conflict in the “protect and serve” mission of law enforcement. The human rights aspect of immigration is ignored in these cases, he said; communities take it seriously when such raids break up families and mistreat people.

Moreno said one of the most difficult issues arises when a non-English-speaking person is accused, by a person who does speak English, of a crime he or she did not commit. Another is when a non-English speaking person is a victim of a crime (such as rape or domestic assault) perpetrated by an English-speaking person. That is when it is vital for a community to have bilingual law enforcement officers and other personnel who can translate for victims, in addition to those who have committed crimes. Moreno, who is bilingual, said he is frequently contacted to break down communication barriers to establish either innocence or guilt. America's judicial system assumes innocence until guilt is proven.

Eric Brown of Lexington believes anything can happen in any community, but points out that demographics indicate most crime in any segment of society is perpetrated by young men, regardless of their ethnicity. The immigrant workers are largely young men, so it would stand to reason that communities with a large population of young men would have more crime. Brown believes the crime in Lexington is relatively rare and minor in nature.

Children—the Common Denominator of Nebraska's Future

“The common denominator of the whole immigration issue should be children,” according to Lyn Wallin Ziegenbein, Executive Director of the Peter Kiewit Foundation in Omaha. The children being educated through Nebraska's schools are the

future of the state, and the efforts to keep them in Nebraska will determine the work force of the future.

Chuck Karpf of Scottsbluff said he believes Nebraska needs to develop a system of incentives so young people will stay in the state. His ideas range from giving people lower property taxes for a period of years, to paying for their educations should they agree to work in the state for several years.

Dr. John Harms, in his role as state senator in Nebraska's Unicameral, is spearheading long-range planning for Nebraska beginning in the 2009 legislative session. His focus on rural Nebraska will address many issues such as educating Nebraska's children for the future needs of the state and possibly developing programs to recruit and retain workers – not only Nebraska's own children, but also people from other countries and other parts of the United States.

The Role of Religion

A church family has long been a way for newcomers to integrate into a community. Today, Lutheran Family Services and Catholic Social Services are two of the main religious organizations that help refugees integrate into new communities. The focus is on helping people to integrate quickly into America, but at the same time serving the various physical, emotional and spiritual needs of the newcomers, as well as the underserved of each community.

Lutheran Family Services nationwide is one of the largest organizations working with the needs of refugees who fled the political violence of Sudan and have resettled in the United States.

Most of today's immigrant population comes from predominantly Catholic countries, so the Catholic Church has significant involvement in serving the needs of both refugees and immigrants. Jim Cunningham, Executive Director of the Nebraska Catholic Conference, said the Catholic Church looks at immigration issues from a moral, human rights standpoint, as it has for centuries. The Church has developed and accepted five principles on migration:

- Persons have the right to find opportunities in their homeland.
- Persons have the right to migrate to support themselves and their families.
- Sovereign nations have the right to control their borders (though more powerful economic nations have a stronger obligation to accommodate migration flows).
- Refugees and asylum seekers should be afforded protection (by the global community).
- The human dignity and human rights of undocumented migrants should be respected.

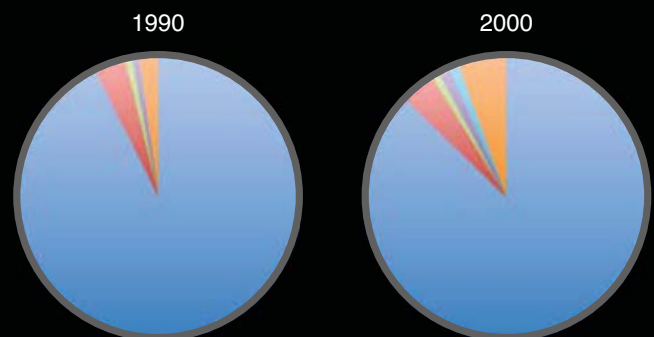
The Catholic Church in Nebraska is also in the process of developing a joint statement on immigration from the bishop in each of Nebraska's three dioceses, Cunningham said. ●

For more information visit www.unl.edu/sdn/immigration

Nebraska Demographics

Race	1990	2000
White (Caucasian)	1,461,733	1,494,494
Hispanic (of all origins)	35,093	94,425
African American	56,424	67,537
American Indian	11,989	13,460
Asian or Pacific Islander	12,270	22,324
Other	876	19,023

* Sources: 1990 Census and 2000 Census



Definitions Relevant to Immigration Discussion

Acculturation (acculturate)—to cause (a society) to change; the process of adopting the cultural traits or social patterns of another group (dictionary.com).

Alien—a resident born in or belonging to another country who has not acquired citizenship by naturalization; a foreigner; a person who has been estranged or excluded; noncitizen; a creature from outer space (extraterrestrial) (dictionary.com). *The consensus of those interviewed is that “alien” should be stricken from immigration discussions and “undocumented worker” or “noncitizen” be substituted.*

Americanize—to make or become American in character; assimilate to the customs and institutions of the U.S. (dictionary.com)

Assimilate—to bring into conformity with the customs, attitudes, etc., of a group, nation, or the like; adapt or adjust: to assimilate the new immigrants (dictionary.com). *Some of those interviewed object to this word, as there are many definitions of what constitutes assimilation; preference is given to either “Americanize” or “acculturate” because of the forced or coercive nuance of “assimilate.”*

Asylee—a person who seeks asylum in the U.S., is in the U.S. and is unable or unwilling to return to his or her home country for fear of persecution based on race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion. Asylees are in the U.S. legally (personal interview with Christine Kutschkau, State Refugee Program Coordinator with State of Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services).

Biliterate—a person who is able to read and write in two languages (dictionary.com).

Bilingual—a person who is able to speak in two languages with the facility of a native speaker (dictionary.com).

Documented Worker—a worker from a country other than the United States who has completed the appropriate and official paperwork and has been approved by the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services to work legally in the U.S.

Fluent—ability to speak and/or read a language with ease (dictionary.com). *There is significant difference of opinion among sources interviewed about the definition of “fluent” in the context of immigration – does it mean a person can speak AND read, speak OR read, and at what level?*

Hispanic—from the Latin word for Spain, Hispanic has the broader reference, potentially encompassing all Spanish-speaking peoples in both hemispheres and emphasizing the common denominator of language among communities that sometimes have little else in common. Only Hispanic can be used in referring to Spain and its history and culture; a native of Spain residing in the U.S. is a Hispanic. Hispanic is a label that borders on the offensive and lacks the authenticity and cultural resonance of Latino (dictionary.com).

Integration—an act or instance of integrating a racial, religious, or ethnic group (dictionary.com).

Immigrant—a person who voluntarily leaves his or her country of nationality to work, study or live in another country. Legal immigrants may be eligible for certain public assistance benefits (personal interview with Christine Kutschkau, State Refugee Program Coordinator with State of Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services).

Latino—in Spanish means “Latin” but which, as an English word, is probably a shortening of the Spanish word *latinoamericano*—Latino refers more exclusively to persons or communities of Latin American origin, such as Mexico, Central America and South America. One cannot substitute Latino for Hispanic without garbling the meaning. When referring to residents of the U.S., most of whom are of Latin American origin, one can theoretically use either Hispanic or Latino. Latino is a term of ethnic pride and can also be changed to the feminine form (Latina) when referring to women (dictionary.com).

Mexican—a native or inhabitant of Mexico, or a person of Mexican descent (dictionary.com).

Mexican-American—a citizen or resident of the U.S. of Mexican birth or descent (dictionary.com).

Nativism—the policy of protecting the interests of native inhabitants against those of immigrants (dictionary.com).

Refugee—a person who is outside his or her country of nationality and is unable or unwilling to return to that country because of a well-founded fear of persecution based on race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion (personal interview with Christine Kutschkau, State Refugee Program Coordinator with State of Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services).

Secondary Migrant—a refugee who has lived in the U.S. legally for three years or less and has moved to another state (personal interview with Christine Kutschkau, State Refugee Program Coordinator with State of Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services).

Undocumented Worker—a worker who has not completed appropriate and official paperwork to work legally in the United States and has not received the approval by the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services to work in the United States. This group also includes persons who have overstayed their legal visas and have no current documentation.

U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS)—formerly the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), the USCIS is a government agency within the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. The USCIS is responsible for the administration of immigration and naturalization functions and for establishing immigration services policies and priorities (www.uscis.gov).

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (USICE, called ICE as an acronym)—the ICE organization is the largest investigative branch of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. This organization combines the enforcement branches of the former U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service and the former U.S. Customs Service. The purpose of ICE is to enforce U.S. immigration and customs laws and to protect the United States against terrorist attacks. ICE targets illegal immigrants; the people, money and materials that support terrorism; and other criminal activities. The focus of ICE includes: gang activities; employers who hire illegal workers; fraudulent immigration document and benefit applications; organizations that smuggle and traffic in humans; organizations responsible for smuggling and distributing counterfeit products (www.ice.gov).

Xenophobia—an unreasonable fear or hatred of foreigners or strangers or of that which is foreign or strange (dictionary.com).

Re-Inventing the Wheel: Nebraska's Immigration History

Immigration issues in Nebraska seem to have come to light only recently, and sometimes with a startling vehemence. But Nebraska has a 150-year history of immigration, and also a history of difficulty in accepting differences between ethnic groups.

"We have a long history of immigration in Nebraska; every one of us came from somewhere else. Even the American Indians migrated here from somewhere else," said Dr. John Wunder, Professor of History at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. And during the years since then, there have been issues of acceptance.

What about people today who are vocally anti-immigrant? "I would say they are selfish and ignorant of the past," Wunder said softly. "Americans have collective amnesia."

Even at that, Wunder said, America has been more welcoming than other countries. Historically, there have been serious immigration issues in other countries; issues still exist today that are dealt with by violent means.

Nebraska's history paints a picture of immigrants from many European countries who were looking for a better life, knowing it would take hard work and sacrifice. They encountered people from other countries seeking the same thing, but differences in ethnicity, religion, language and culture made it hard to communicate, hard to work together. There were tensions, and sometimes trouble.

But they were building Nebraska, and they persevered.

Nebraska's Early Immigration

One must have a working knowledge of Nebraska's history and growth to understand immigration issues in the state today. "In the 1920s alone, more than 500,000 people moved to Nebraska," Wunder said. Taking into account the

population of the state at that time, it was a significant influx of newcomers. By comparison, the population of Nebraska in 1860 was about 30,000; the population in 1920 was around 1,296,000; and the population in 2007, according to U.S. Census, was about 1,775,000.

Nebraska's roots began to grow, in part, because of the settlement of adjacent states. Kansas, for instance, attracted Pietists, who were believers in religious and ethical purity, as well as purity in customs and traditions. Those individuals who preferred more independence from such constraints moved north to Nebraska. Perhaps it is not surprising, then, that Nebraska is still known for its independent thinkers, manifested by America's only one-house legislature, the Unicameral. A bill establishing the Unicameral system was passed by a vote of Nebraskans in 1934 and the first session began in 1937. This system of government in Nebraska still exists today.

The first federal immigration law was enacted in 1882, but its life was only 10 years, Wunder said. It was revised in 1892, then again in 1902. "It was created because there was distinct anti-Chinese sentiment on the west coast, as so many people came here to work from China. The Chinese were not interested in assimilation; there were also racial overtones. At the same time, Japanese, Filipino and South Asians were also coming in," he said. In 1920, the first all-purpose federal immigration legislation was enacted – the same year that women were given the right to vote. "Assimilation," Wunder said, "is really defined as forced cultural

change; it requires coercion." Acculturation, on the other hand, allows a person to choose the characteristics he or she wishes to adopt. Picking and choosing these characteristics is positive in society, Wunder said, because allowing choice is the basis for a more successful society long-term. Various other terms have been used historically and recently, including "integration" and "Americanization." Each term means something different, especially if one is to consider the decade in which it was used.

Nebraskans of the 1850s and 1860s came to the state by steamboat via the Missouri River or by covered wagon from the east. There were push factors and pull factors that influenced the desire to migrate to the United States, and specifically to Nebraska, Wunder said. Push factors pushed people out of their home countries, while pull factors attracted them here. Economic factors pushed them out of their own countries, including the fact that farmland was traditionally passed down to the eldest son, leaving other sons without land to farm and thus no way of making a living. Farmland was cheap in Nebraska, Wunder said, so that was a "pull factor," pulling many people to Nebraska from many European countries at that time. The railroads in Nebraska heavily influenced where people settled, as the railroads carried these people to a town depot, which was the hub in communities served by the railroad.

If a certain area of the state needed railroad workers, recruiters for the railroad would meet ships in New York and bring the immigrants to Nebraska



Dr. John Wunder

on the train. Immigrants usually arrived in groups of the same ethnicity, so a whole Swedish community, for instance, might settle in a certain area. Germans made up the largest percentage of immigrants, Wunder said, and were “the most harassed people during World War I.” Local anti-German sentiment was so strong about that time in Nebraska, Wunder said, that German immigrants were prohibited from speaking their language on the phone or in schools; town names were changed (New Berlin, for example, became Garland), and the Ku Klux Klan became active as an anti-immigrant, anti-Catholic, anti-German, anti-black and anti-college-educated organization. More than 50 newspapers were once published in German; today there are none.

Post-WWI Change

A letter written in 1919 to a Mr. Richard Hurd by President Theodore Roosevelt discusses Americanization and what adaptive traits should be expected of immigrants to America. World War I had ended in 1918, and anti-German sentiment was at a high point. His comments detailed some of his expectations of men regarding language, loyalty and assimilation. The date of the letter and the term “man” in its context is historically significant, as women did not have the right to vote until 1920, and blacks were not assured that privilege until 1965; though blacks were given the right to vote after the Civil War, some states found ways to prevent them from voting.

In fact, that whole post-WWI time period, Wunder said, was a time of change. “Things were not pleasant in America. The economy fluctuated; there was massive urbanization and industrialization; World War I displaced a lot of people because they were either working for the war effort or working in the war, and people had to go to different places,” he said. “Africans – post-Civil War – had moved north to the cities. America was surrounded by change, and it was mysterious. The automobile allowed people to get around. Radio brought great culture changes; people listened to music, started dancing, drinking and smoking,” he added.

Gender also became an issue. “There

was a gender change in families, which resulted in stress in society. Women had joined the work force during World War I, and they wanted to continue working,” Wunder explained. Women had been pushing for the right to vote, and men were concerned. The suffrage and Prohibition issues were closely linked, Wunder said. German and Czech immigrants opposed Prohibition because drinking was part of their culture. Northern Europeans thought Prohibition was a good idea. “It was thought that if women were given the right to vote, they would vote in favor of Prohibition,” he said. “Nebraska was one of the later states to approve women’s suffrage.”

Change was happening so fast it was

event paled in comparison to a race riot in Tulsa, Oklahoma around that time. “In Tulsa,” Wunder said, “mobs destroyed – killed – the entire black community.”

Today

Fast-forward to Nebraska today.

New technologies have revolutionized Nebraska agriculture; the complex equipment requires skilled workers. Fewer farmers are needed to farm more land. “We have great pride in our homestead past, when people were allowed 160 acres of land to farm. Today, it is more likely to be 1,600 acres,” Wunder said. The immigrants are now working on the end product in the meatpacking business instead of the beginning of the product – the planting. Many immigrants are unskilled laborers, and farming now requires skilled laborers.

In cities, the clear evidence of change comes from looking at school data. The composition of the state has changed; five years ago, data from the Lincoln Public Schools’ English Language Learner program student body was chiefly Iraqi, followed by students from Kosovo, then from Bosnia. In Lexington, much of the community is Hispanic, but there now are a significant number of workers from Ethiopia, Sudan, Somalia and Liberia.

Wunder said it doesn’t appear that much attention is paid to matching immigrants to culture, making it more difficult to acculturate new immigrants. “We are notoriously insular; we don’t place emphasis on other languages; we are world-deficient.”

Many young people have left small communities; you’ll find people 50-plus years of age – white – and then large groups of young Hispanics. “You not only have the ethnic difference, but you also have the generational difference, the cultural difference and the religious difference,” Wunder said.

How does it manifest itself? “The older folks don’t think through things like school bond issues to fund education for immigrant students, but education is the way to make this work,” he said. “Anti-tax increase equals anti-immigrant.” ●

For more information visit www.unl.edu/sdn/immigration

“Assimilation is really defined as forced cultural change; it requires coercion.”

- Dr. John Wunder
Professor of History at the
University of Nebraska-Lincoln

difficult for people to absorb. In fact, Americans elected two presidents – Warren Harding, then Herbert Hoover – who were not interested in great change. “People wanted someone who did not want change,” Wunder said. “Americans were feeling very insecure.”

That insecurity, he said, led to a race riot in Omaha in 1919. “One man was killed – lynched, actually. Henry Fonda, who was born in Omaha, and his father were in Omaha at the time, and Henry later wrote that it was the most frightening thing he had ever witnessed,” Wunder explained. As bad as it was, the Omaha

Covering the New Nebraska: Serving Diverse Audiences through the Media

Nebraska's influx of workers from other countries has brought profound changes to some communities in the state. Those changes have brought new challenges to many Nebraska media outlets who wish to provide coverage of all aspects of a community.

Daily and weekly newspapers are challenged to provide a smorgasbord of information to all kinds of readers in the paper's subscription area, including international, national and local news, business news, agricultural news, feature stories, human interest stories, editorials and classified advertising. Even though the desire is strong to bridge the gap between ethnicities in a community, the people-power may not be available.

A January 17, 2008 videotaped conversation dubbed *Covering the New Nebraska* was moderated by Kathleen Rutledge, former editor of the Lincoln Journal Star. Panelists were Kent Warneke, editor of the Norfolk Daily News; Josh Wolfe, editor of The Crete News; and Dr. John Wunder, Professor of History at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, who brought the historical perspective to the conversation. Contributing by mail were Steve Frederick, editor of the Scottsbluff Star-Herald and Lindsey Tederman, editor of the Lexington Clipper-Herald.

"The old population is graying; the new population is immigrants," Rutledge noted, but time and staffing constraints make it difficult to cover everything in small, diverse communities.

"No matter how good your intentions are it's hard to meet the needs of everyone...Hispanics, people of faith, farm families, single mothers, grandparents and such unless you find ways to include their voices in your newspaper," Frederick said from his office in Scottsbluff. And a good place to start is hiring people at the newspaper that reflects the community's diversity. Scottsbluff's history includes migrant farm workers who were first Germans from Russia, then Hispanics, more than 100 years ago. They worked in the potato and sugar beet industries. The community was settled by these groups, as well as others who worked for the railroad. "I encounter intense polarization and closed-mindedness, especially in politics. Some people are resolutely unreachable with facts. Where this becomes most damaging is in an issue such as immigration, where many people equate immigrants with Hispanics (or even more specifically, Mexicans) and don't differentiate between legal and illegal immigrants,"



Frederick said. "The only way to bridge those gaps is to respect and reveal nuance, expose nonsense, highlight good role models and spend less time getting pulled into political squabbles and more time emphasizing our common humanity," he added.

And the obvious answer to bridging the coverage gap, Tederman said, is to cover more stories exploring other ethnicities, different ages and various interests. Lexington has experienced great changes since IBP took over a large, vacant building in Lexington and remodeled it as a state-of-the-art beef processing facility. Now Tyson Fresh Meats, the facility attracted enough workers from many countries to change the face of

“Hispanics in Norfolk are surprised that we want to know about them...but we have gotten over treating minorities as a novelty. We just incorporate this coverage as part of our regular coverage.”

- Kent Warneke
Editor of the Norfolk Daily News

Editor Commentary on Today's Media

I believe part of the reason newspapers are struggling is that we have allowed special interests to take control of the conversation and define us as something we're not; specifically, the baloney about "liberal media." Newspapers have a responsibility to be smart. That sounds egotistical, perhaps, but we are supposedly more engaged, do more research, observe more intently, have greater institutional memory. There's nothing wrong with putting all that hard work into what we do. The worst newspapers, I believe, are those that pander to their readership – all conservative columnists because their audience is conservative, no stories about Hispanics because the community is quietly racist, no stories about the dynamics of farm subsidies or conjunctive water use because the community is hostile to "anti-farm" coverage. We should be biased toward the truth, wherever that takes us. That means respecting people's intelligence and aiming high. It means being courageous. A newspaper that refuses to be intimidated will command respect. There aren't many of them left.

- Steve Frederick, Editor, Scottsbluff Star-Herald



that small community. Most of the workers are Hispanic, but there are now also workers from Somalia and Sudan, with other ethnicities arriving frequently. "The Lexington Clipper-Herald owns an adjoining building, which we rent to a Muslim place of prayer. I'm hoping to do a feature on the Muslim religion and way of life," she explained as an example of a story that might help bridge the gap.

The Clipper-Herald offers a free monthly Spanish newspaper called "Que Pasa," which summarizes the month's top news stories. "This shows tangible success," she said. "We've also added the Spanish translation to our website—one click of a button, and the entire page is translated to Spanish," even though she's found it's difficult to serve all dialects of the language. Tederman also measures success of the paper's efforts by the coffee shop discussions the day after publication, as well as direct compliments and website hits.

Small weekly papers are challenged by the changing face of their communities, in addition to their staffing shortages. "The Crete News has been around since 1871," Wolfe said. "We used to have a whole page of Czech news that correspondents would provide to us, but frankly, those people have died, and we haven't had great success getting the Hispanics to be involved," he said. He hopes a leader of the Hispanic community will come forward and act as a liaison, helping to bring Crete together, even including notices of common events such as weddings and births. Farmland opened its doors in Crete in 1975 as a pork processing facility, and has attracted workers from many countries, as well as workers who are longtime Nebraskans. Although the workers are mostly Hispanic, nearly two dozen languages and dialects are represented in the work force.

Norfolk's Warneke moved to Norfolk in 1987, shortly after a meatpacking plant went in and the Hispanic population nearly doubled, along with the mix of cultures and ethnicities. "We have a 20-member newsroom staff, and we share the

same concerns you have in Crete," he said. "Hispanics in Norfolk are surprised that we want to know about them...but we have gotten over treating minorities as a novelty. We just incorporate this coverage as part of our regular coverage." A bank robbery in Norfolk in 2002, in which four Hispanic men entered U.S. Bank and killed four employees and one customer, had the potential to polarize Norfolk. But one of the Hispanic churches held a healing service and invited everyone in the town, Warneke said. "The Hispanics were as hurt as the Caucasians. It turned the tide. That one gesture turned the tide."

After the bank tragedy, Warneke said he went out and solicited letters to the editor from the Hispanic community. "I had never done that before, but I wanted their voices to be heard," he said. Finding a good spokesperson is valuable, he said.

Finding commonalities is at the heart of it all, Rutledge suggested. An editor of an Asian newspaper came to visit her some time ago, and suggested that the Journal Star run a story on how different ethnicities make chicken soup; nearly everyone makes it, but with interesting differences. Finding those common experiences and keeping up personal relationships in the community are important, she said, especially when you're working with an emotional topic like immigration.

Wunder, the historian, said one can't overestimate the importance of developing those connections and improving them over the long term. "These immigrants may be of one or two religious groups. These are connections, as are schools. Churches and schools have the most direct line to the people," he said. "There are natural suspicions and you have to prove yourself. In journalism there's an immediacy to everything, and this can't be immediate."

Success in bridging the gap in coverage would look a lot like a bulletin board, Frederick said. "Lots of letters, lots of press releases, lots of photos, stories from all strata of the community, dependence on more than "official" sources and a place for reader-generated stories."

The benefits of these efforts will show up in the communities. Engaging people in the community like Spanish teachers to involve their students in diversity projects would be helpful, Wunder said. And in the end, he added, "I think it's crucial that we want our communities to be peaceful places where people have a good life." ●

For more information visit www.unl.edu/sdn/immigration

Immigrants, Refugees Not the Same

Myths and stereotypes related to immigrants and refugees are common, and Christine Kutschkau is eager to communicate the facts.

Kutschkau, State Refugee Program Coordinator with the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services, has found that the media tends to lump everyone with limited English proficiency into the same category, leading people to believe they're all the same. But there are profound differences.

By federal definition, an immigrant voluntarily leaves his or her country of nationality to work, study or live in another country. Legal immigrants may be eligible for certain public assistance benefits; however, they are not eligible to receive benefits or services from the Refugee Resettlement Program.

Conversely, a refugee is outside his or her country of nationality who is unable or unwilling to return to that country because of a well-founded fear of persecution based on race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion. Each October, the President of the United States issues a determination on the number of refugee admissions within a federal fiscal year. The admission of up to 80,000 refugees to the United States during the 2008 fiscal year is justified by humanitarian concerns or is otherwise in the national interest.

Other populations eligible for provision of services offered by the Refugee Resettlement Program include asylees, Amerasians, Cuban/Haitian entrants, secondary migrants, victims of severe forms of trafficking, and any lawful permanent resident who once held one of the other referenced statuses in the past.

Kutschkau works solely with refugees and their resettlement, not with immigrants. "By federal mandate, the Refugee Resettlement Program focuses on self-sufficiency as quickly as possible after arrival to the United States," she said.

There are three communities in Nebraska where refugees are actually placed – Hastings, Lincoln and Omaha. Even with limited human and financial resources, service providers in these communities are well-equipped to provide eligible populations with culturally and linguistically-appropriate assistance.

She notes that eligible populations often come to the United States having

suffered torture and trauma based on the sometimes-horrific situations they have fled in their home countries. Refugee resettlement agencies, in partnership with the State Refugee Resettlement Program, consult with a variety of community entities to determine the viability of resettling particular refugee groups. Discussion of issues related to the impact on business, schools, law enforcement, housing, health and language access is paramount in planning for new arrivals. Faith congregations and family sponsors, Kutschkau said, are sought to assist in the ongoing assimilation of newly-arrived refugees.

Refugees who moved to smaller communities may be secondary migrants. "Refugees make the decision to go to the secondary site," she said. Many refugees come from agrarian areas in their home countries, mostly with smaller populations, so metropolitan areas feel too big to them. "And our government can't mandate that they stay in the primary placement site," she said. For example, the Somali and Sudanese refugees who now live in Lexington were primarily resettled to Minnesota and Texas, and they came to Nebraska on their own.

"The grapevine is powerful," Kutschkau said, and when Immigration and Customs Enforcement raids occur in a work site, the grapevine quickly communicates that there are available jobs in a community. After one of these raids, Kutschkau says communities can expect a large wave of new workers – sometimes with languages and cultures new to the community.

The Refugee Resettlement Program in Nebraska is funded exclusively with federal dollars. Based on the funding source, allocations are divided among service providers.

Kutschkau said there are two cultural orientations that take place for refugees. The first takes place in the refugee camp or U.S. Embassy. The purpose of overseas cultural orientation is to help refugees develop realistic expectations about life in the United States. Overseas cultural orientation enables refugees to begin processing, in a safe and familiar environment, what can be an overwhelming



amount of new information. Overseas cultural orientation addresses 11 essential topics related to processing, travel and resettlement: pre-departure processing, role of the resettlement agency, housing, employment, transportation, education, health, money management, rights and responsibilities, cultural adjustment and travel.

The second cultural orientation takes place post-arrival in the community where the refugees are resettled. "That's the domestic cultural orientation. It teaches basic survival, but also teaches housing and personal safety," she said. "But most of that information is not retained," she added, because it's a lot of new information to absorb under less-than-ideal circumstances. There is support for the first 90 days after arrival, she said.

Kutschkau recognizes that refugees need more than 90 days to acculturate, learn the language and adjust to their new environment, so her office works with faith-based communities and families to continue the acculturation process. Her office also serves the refugee community through providing health and safety information printed in many languages and distributed to sites where refugees are likely to receive it. But it's not possible to print the information in every language, considering how many languages are spoken. For example, language data from the Lincoln Public Schools, Kutschkau said, indicates that there are 2,000 non-native English speakers in the student population. Of those, 56 different countries are represented, with 46 languages spoken. ●

An Employer's View

“I have a hard time imagining where we would get our work force if we didn't have the Hispanic community. If they ship them all back, there will be a big void—at least in our state,” said a Nebraska employer who asked to remain anonymous.*

His company employs several hundred workers, both skilled and unskilled, and says Hispanic workers comprise 80 percent of his new hires. “I think they are a very viable part of our community, and if we just eliminated them, and sent the Hispanics back to wherever their roots might be, this community would suffer.”

This employer's long experience in business and with the Hispanic work force gives perspective to the immigration issue. Nebraska is different from some states due to its small population, so there are fewer people to form the needed work force. There is competition for workers in his business, even with the influx of workers from other countries. He tries to keep the workers he has, while recruiting new people.

“The Hispanics are our best workers; the most loyal. They'll be there on time, do the hardest jobs with no complaints, and they appreciate everything you do for them,” he said. And they are long-term employees—many have been with his company for two or three generations. “They are more reliable; they're always there; they follow directions; they don't cause trouble; they don't get into trouble. I don't see these terrorist things that people are talking about, and our people aren't into drugs like people are saying they are,” he said.

This employer is concerned that some actions by the media may be negatively impacting public opinion concerning workers from other countries, creating a general disapproval of immigration nationwide and perhaps even encouraging the formation of new laws to regulate immigration or exclude immigrants.

“These talk shows quote things, and if you repeat them enough times, people accept them as facts. I hear that these workers are causing a drain on the health care system, but my guys never get sick. They don't want to miss a day; they're here to earn money. A lot of them send money back home, but they are still generating money for the economy,” he said.

And what happens when new laws exclude immigrants? “Oklahoma has passed some laws that are tougher on the Hispanic community, and I understand that (after the law was passed) pickup after pickup was full of employees leaving the state, and now there are billboards up, people trying to hire workers,” he said. People will try to steal employees from other companies, he said, offering workers more money to work for the other company. “Where does it stop?” he said. “We are petrified.”

Homeland Security has given employers the option of using a software program called E-Verify to determine legal status of employees. The employee provides his or her name and social security number, and if they are in the system and the name and number match, the employee is a legal worker and may be hired. “But it doesn't always work,” this employer said. In the case of Hispanics, a person often keeps his or her mother's name, and maybe mother's maiden name, too. “They might have three or four names. Now, that can be a problem if you mix them up and don't remember what's on the card...so it doesn't match,” he said. “We may try three or four times, and if we can't get it right,

then we give them appropriate time to straighten it out and if they can't, then we have to release them.”

He has heard stories about the difficulties encountered by people trying to go to the immigration office in Lincoln. “For someone to go through the process of trying to get their paperwork straightened out—they make it so difficult, they frustrate people so they don't do it. The government isn't user-friendly,” he said.

Raids on job sites are also troubling, he said. “We had 12 employees on a job site, and ICE workers questioned them. It scared them to death. Think about it...do you have all your paperwork with you at all times, when you're out there working hard? How much identification do you have with you right now if someone asked you to prove you are legal?”

This employer described his recent trip to California, during which he happened to hear a radio show about the immigration situation, and that it is a big burden. “But on the other hand, I don't know what they'd do out there if they didn't have anyone to pick their lettuce, their strawberries, pick their grapes...they wouldn't be able to harvest their crops without some of the migrant workers,” this employer said.

It would be interesting to challenge some of the statistics quoted in the media, he said, and see whether they have any validity to them. For example, whether a specific ethnicity really is a large portion of the country's or the state's concerns with criminal activity, or whether it's the influx of a large number of young people. The 18-34 age group, say some law enforcement personnel, statistically has more criminal activity than younger or older groups. Other statistics would be interesting to investigate, he said, such as whether these workers are really a drain on other areas of the country.

It's more than the issue of whether they're a burden on the U.S. economy. “I don't think they are,” he said. My family's history is the same kind of thing...came from (another country)... didn't understand English, worked hard. They didn't have to live in the shadows, though, and that's a difference,” he noted.

Living in the shadows makes some people wary of those they don't understand. Language, this employer said, is part of the problem. Some don't like to hear people speaking Spanish. “Why Spanish would bother people is beyond me,” he said. “I don't understand that; it's just prejudice.” People are going to have to understand, he said, that when you come from another country, you are going to flock to other people who came from that country, just like people did historically. “They talk the language they know, then they pick up a little English as they go. For the first generation, their English skills aren't very good, but by the second generation it's usually very good,” he said.

“The Hispanic community is not an ignorant community,” he said. “They came here because they needed to try to improve their standard of living from wherever they came from. A lot of them came over here illegally a long time ago, and they've settled in, they've raised families, they've had 2nd and 3rd generation people here. These are great citizens of our country,” he said. “There is no reason to fear that they are going to be terrorists, or gangsters or anything like that. I think if they are given a chance and allowed to stay, we'll look back on this era and say ‘hey, what were we worried about?’”

And if a wall is built on the Mexico-United States border, he said, has any thought been given to who will build the wall? ●

* The identity of this employer is known to the coordinator of this project and to a member of the SDN advisory board. Both can vouch for his veracity.

For more information visit www.unl.edu/sdn/immigration

Independence, Self-Reliance Key to Scottsbluff's Staying Power

You won't find a lot of towns in Nebraska's Panhandle, and the towns you will find are sparsely-populated, even by Nebraska standards. But the people who call the Panhandle home are the independent sort – the kind who rely on themselves and each other to grow their communities and improve the quality of life for all people.

The Scottsbluff area was settled by Germans from Russia who came to work the potato and sugar beet fields in the middle of the 19th century. The community still bears the tidy, manicured look that was their trademark. After the area was settled and the Germans from Russia began to take other jobs in the area, migrant Hispanic farm workers worked the crops beginning in the early 1900s, following the planting and harvest in many areas of the Midwest. Many stayed, choosing to make the community their home. North of the Panhandle, in South Dakota, is the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation, the second-largest reservation in the United States and the tribal home of the Oglala Lakota Sioux. The diversity of ethnicities and cultures have characterized the Panhandle and specifically, the Scottsbluff area since the community was settled.

Smaller communities continually face the challenges of attracting doctors, nurses, attorneys, dentists and other professionals to their communities. The best way to attract them, say some, is to use the "grow your own" model, which encourages the community's young people to return after they complete their educations. They know the communities and they may be happier and thus, stay longer than would recruits from elsewhere.

Many of the towns in the Panhandle are using the "grow your own" model, but also proactively recruit people to come to their communities, and make efforts to retain the people who live there. Maintaining population is a success; growth is cause for celebration.

Scottsbluff has held its population at about 15,000 for several years. Its next-door-neighbor community -- Gering -- holds at about 8,000. Alliance, an hour's drive from Scottsbluff, weighs in at a population of 9,600, and Sidney, also an hour from



Scottsbluff and headquarters of Cabela's, stays steady at about 6,000.

The culture is different in Nebraska's Panhandle than that in the eastern part of Nebraska. Scottsbluff is only 100 miles from Cheyenne and 200 miles from Denver, but is 400 miles from Lincoln. When Scottsbluff residents turn on the television news, they're watching news from Colorado or Wyoming, not from Nebraska. They may identify more with those states than with Nebraska in some ways. They're accustomed to handling issues themselves rather than turning to outside sources for help. If voters turn down a bond issue for a needed project, residents may raise money privately and make it happen anyway.

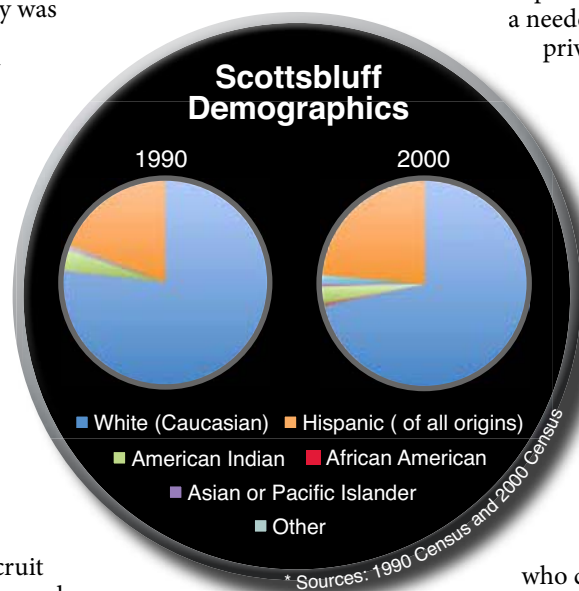
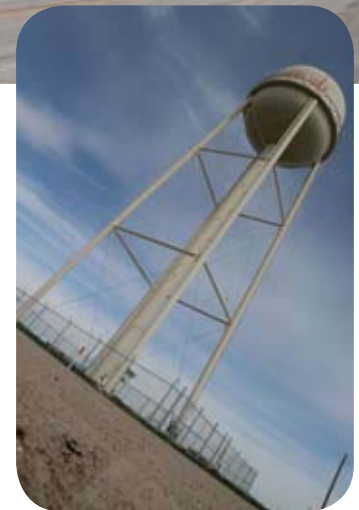
Talk to the locals, and there may be a hint of curiosity about people from the eastern part of Nebraska who make the day's drive to the area.

The residents feel a bit like they've been forgotten since they're so far away, according to one local leader.

There's also a hint of protectionism – tell outsiders what you want them to know, or tell them just a little, but don't give them the whole story.

Concern for education, planning, rural America

Occasionally, though, there's someone who comes forward and tells that whole story. Dr. John Harms, for example, retired as President of Western Nebraska Regional College in Scottsbluff so he could run for the District 48 seat in Nebraska's Legislature, representing Scotts Bluff County. Harms completed his first term in the Unicameral in April 2008, and is championing a move toward long-range state planning and education of the state's residents. "We have no idea how we can make anything





happen, and it's even worse in the communities," he said in a recent interview. Harms is deeply concerned about the dropout rate in western Nebraska schools... something not everyone will talk about. Employment of the future depends on education, he said, as jobs are becoming increasingly technical and require specific skills. There is less and less need for unskilled labor as years go by, he said, and he fears a large population of people sitting idle in communities who have not been proactive in efforts to educate their residents.

"Immigration has made us what we are"

Hod Kosman, Chairman, President and CEO of Platte Valley National Bank in Scottsbluff, is another person who talks. "The GED class is the largest high school class in Nebraska," he said, and it's sometimes a struggle to cross cultural barriers so the diverse population can be persuaded that education is the way to self-sufficiency. In one culture, education is far less important than are other things; in another culture, moving around frequently is a barrier to keeping kids in school; in yet another culture, it's not acceptable to be educated – it's something only white people do.

Despite the challenges, "immigration has made us what we are (in Scottsbluff)," Kosman said. "We've been assimilating immigrants since 1920 and it has added to our community, but it has put tremendous pressures on us, too." For instance, false documentation can leave a banker holding the bag if an undocumented worker is deported and defaults on a loan, he explained.

Overall, he said, there is lots of cultural mixing in the Scottsbluff area and many businesses are owned by ethnic minorities.

That increases by generation, he said. "Most immigrants who come here want to do well," he said, but the Native American population is a different story in many cases.

The Native American population frustrates businessmen like Kosman, he said. There is a lack of leadership and understanding, he said, and he thinks the reservation system is part of that issue. Keeping Native kids in school is a challenge, he said, because the tribe is culturally nomadic and people move frequently.

"We're all in this together"

Scottsbluff and other neighboring communities are not wealthy; in fact, the annual family income is well below the state average, according to Rick Kuckkahn, Scottsbluff City Manager. The common thread running through the community is religion, he said, and church support groups are important in many community roles, including acculturation of people and businesses. "This area is founded on religion, and it's deeply rooted in everything we do," he said. "When there's a decision to be made, we all ask ourselves 'is this morally the right thing to do?'"

Randy Meininger, Scottsbluff mayor, noted there are more than 200 churches in the region; most are neighborhood-based and cater to the needs in a region or a neighborhood. In fact, Meininger said, he'd like to see the churches take a bigger role in reducing Medicaid.

Kuckkahn said living in Scottsbluff comes down to one thing: "we're all in this together." ●

For more information visit www.unl.edu/sdn/immigration

LEXINGTON

Overview



High Quality of Life for Everyone

In the late 1980s, Lexington was still a small farming community in the fertile Platte Valley. Lexington farmers were still planting and harvesting the same land their ancestors farmed 100 years ago; neat homes lined the streets of the town; business and industry were thriving.

Then a large manufacturing business left town, leaving vacant its manufacturing facility so large that 12 football fields could fit inside. It also took with it many jobs; homes went up for sale; people moved away.

“We needed a company to fill that building,” said Eric Brown, General Manager of KRVN Radio and a leader in the Lexington community. A group of about seven Lexington leaders devoted much of their time for about a year and a half to recruit businesses to move to Lexington and occupy that facility.

When the team of Lexington leaders looked for businesses to occupy the facility, they seriously considered the impact each option would have on social services, law enforcement, health care – every part of the community. “We wanted to know what impact it would have on Main Street,” Brown said.

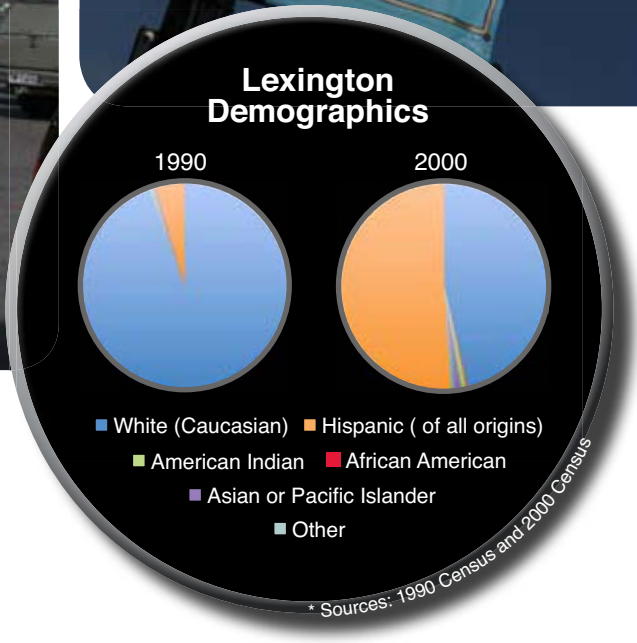
That’s when representatives of Iowa Beef Processors (IBP) decided that, with some remodeling, the facility would work for them. After many months of remodeling, the beef processing facility began operations in Lexington in 1990. Many Lexington

residents started working in the facility, Brown said, but few still work there. Instead, immigrant workers flocked to fill the jobs at IBP (now Tyson).

In the years since then, Lexington has changed. Farmers still farm the land of their ancestors; neat homes still line the streets. But there are businesses in town that are owned by Latinos; the Lexington Public Schools are about 75 percent non-white. Although most are Latino, there are a few students from Africa; most are from Sudan and Somalia, with a few from Ethiopia.

“We have the same minority percentage as Los Angeles,” Brown said. “When people say Lexington has changed forever, well, nothing stays the same. What you try to do is make it an attractive place to live. We’ve recruited good teachers; we have a good hospital; we’ve raised a ton of money for a new library; prior to that we built an aquatic park. We just remodeled the middle school auditorium. So you do things for humanities and quality of life,” he said.

TOWN



Totally Positive

Dennis Burnside, Assistant City Manager in Crete, believes it takes a generation or two for existing residents of a community to accept new residents, but his office is not sitting by waiting for that to happen; it's moving forward, assuring that representatives from every part of Lexington are "at the table."

"We're trying to establish a 12-member Multicultural Commission," Burnside said, on which most of the ethnicities in town are represented. A number of Latinos have volunteered to serve, he said, and Burnside's office is trying to also get the community's Africans involved.

"Most of the people who are moving the community forward think this (immigration) is a good thing and try to be welcoming," he said. The economy is doing well; new businesses are opening; students are in school.

The Lexington Public Schools are led by Superintendent of Schools Todd Chessmore, who believes that all students should

graduate knowing two languages, regardless of their ethnicity.

"My pie-in-the-sky dream," he said, "is that every student be biliterate – able to read and write in two languages – before high school graduation." The system has been teaching English to Latino students for many years, but is now placing more emphasis on teaching Spanish to students for whom English is their first language. The benefits will be great as these young people enter the job market. Preference will be given to those who are biliterate, regardless of ethnicity.

Chessmore has a good bit of experience in leading school districts with non-white populations; he spent nine years with Indian Reservation schools, which, he said, is "probably the most difficult system in the state of Nebraska." His focus is on dealing with the whole child, "helping students be happy with the skin they're in and their lot in life, have aspirations to move on and help other people," he said.

But, he said, "we are offended by harsh discussion that goes on concerning immigration. And sometimes we forget that we are affecting kids when this is the only country they know, but say they aren't welcome here. And I take pretty strong offense that we can be so uncaring and harsh on anyone's children."

Chessmore sees only potential when he looks at kids and schools, and focuses on what constitutes success. The graduation rate is good; students are winning awards and scholarships; they're going on to college; they're getting jobs. "We're now hiring back some of our Latino students that are now graduates of the University of Nebraska-Kearney to our program, so there are a lot of really good things going on in Lexington."

Lexington is a positive community, an accepting community, an ever-changing community, according to Lindsey Tederman, editor of the Lexington Clipper-Herald. "People are people, and they may have an accent, they may be a different color, but I think we're all trying to do the same thing – work, raise a family, live together cohesively."

Tederman credits the strong core group of lifelong Lexington residents who have come forward to model for the entire community in accepting the immigrant population. They have also worked hard at keeping the community thriving.

Even so, there have been legitimate news stories from Lexington that haven't been positive for the community, and the outside opinions of Lexington based on these stories concern Tederman. When the stories are picked up by other papers, she said, "they can't resist inserting a phrase about the high immigrant population of Lexington, which may or may not be relevant to the story."

Tederman said communication issues are the biggest roadblock to acculturating the diverse community. She said the Latino population has a culture similar to the Caucasian population, but the new arrivals from Africa have dissimilar cultures. There is uncertainty about who is responsible for helping them acculturate, she said; there are no funds or groups designated for that purpose, and that makes it a bit complicated for the community.

"If I were to give advice to another small community about to get a meatpacking plant or other large business, it would be to assemble a core group of people who have been in the community for a long time, and get them on the same page," Tederman said.

"I'd also tell them that it's not going to ruin their city; it's actually going to improve their economy, it's going to grow. Take the things that are positive and work with those, and be proactive instead of reactive." ●

For more information visit www.unl.edu/sdn/immigration

Crete—A City of Contrasts

Crete is a community of about 6,500 people, located in Saline County about 20 miles southwest of Lincoln. Founded by Germans from Russia, it later became home to an influx of Czech immigrants, who influenced the community with their culture, foods and religion.

Crete has been home to Doane College since 1872; Doane is a private liberal arts and sciences college known nationally for high-quality education. Crete is home to a progressive public school system known for excellence in academics and sports.

It's also home to Farmland Foods, which has changed the landscape of Crete since it opened its doors for business in 1975. Farmland processes pork products, and this Farmland facility is both a slaughtering and manufacturing plant. The plant employs about 1,800 workers and many travel long distances to work there, according to Tom Crisman, Mayor of Crete and a longtime Farmland employee. In the last 20 years, the Farmland plant has attracted immigrant workers from many countries – chiefly Mexico and countries in Central America. But, Crisman said, the plant has employed large numbers of Asian workers in the past, and currently employs smaller numbers of workers from other countries. Seventeen languages and dialects are now spoken in the plant, he added.

Crete Today

Latino-owned restaurants and other businesses dot Crete's downtown district, which is a change from the past. Many longtime Crete residents remember the locally-famous Czech restaurant that closed its doors a few years ago and miss its ethnic foods, but evidence of change is everywhere. A new fire station gleams downtown. Infrastructure is being improved; new middle school was built nearly four years ago; there's a new hospital.

Crete Public Schools is a few blocks down the street, changing to meet the needs of its ever-changing student population, and teaching Spanish to students as early as kindergarten in addition to its thriving English Language Learners (ELL) program. Kyle McGowan, Superintendent of Schools in Crete, is one of many Nebraska superintendents who believe students who know two languages well will have an advantage in the job market, and that a language is easier to learn for children than it is for adults.

The Crete News, located on a downtown corner, continues to churn out a weekly newspaper, as it has since 1872. Doane College stands on a hill in a park-like setting, old buildings aside new, continuing to recruit students from all over the country to this small



community.

Jonathan Brand, President of Doane College since 2005, hopes to expand associations between the college and the rest of the Crete community; the college already hosts many educational and social activities in Crete. Many years ago, more than 80 percent of Doane's faculty and staff lived in Crete; today only half live there. Part of that is because Lincoln has grown in that direction, and the conveniences of a larger city are attractive to some people. However, Brand would like to increase the number of faculty and staff who live in Crete, and has introduced an incentive program to persuade more Doane employees to live there.

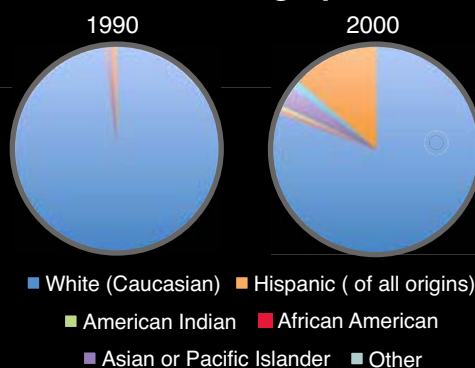
Community Division – Real or Perceived?

Crete's mix of ethnicities, combined with the presence of both a nationally-ranked college and a meat processing facility, creates a dichotomy in this community; it is all the more apparent because of the community's small population.

Statewide, Strategic Discussions for Nebraska researchers found a variety of opinions regarding the reasons for divides in communities, real or perceived. While some voices indicate it is a race issue, others – including Latino leaders – say it isn't so much an issue of race as it is a divide between people who are educated and people who are not; people who work in manufacturing facilities as opposed to people who work as professors, doctors or lawyers; people who are poor compared to people who are not.

Still, there are people in every community – including Crete – who say the workers should leave, and that the school system shouldn't spend tax dollars teaching Spanish in the public schools. The majority, however-

Crete Demographics



* Sources: 1990 Census and 2000 Census

CRETE

Overview



er, say the Crete economy would crash if those workers left, and that teaching Spanish to native English-speakers and English to native Spanish-speakers can have only positive results.

Learning and Communication

McGowan believes the process of acculturation begins in the schools, as children learn languages and cultures of their classmates. McGowan is implementing programs to be sure the Crete schools continue to move in a positive direction. One example is the schools' diversity plan, designed to help more kids succeed, he said. It also helps students understand the culture of Crete.

Nearly four years ago, the schools hired a bilingual counselor. "Our premise is that the system works, but you have to be able to access it. Osmosis doesn't work," McGowan said. That counselor also serves in outreach and advocacy roles.

Constant communication is one of the keys to engaging the various ethnicities, he indicated, and knowing how everyone is comfortable communicating is important. It's not enough to use normal forms of communication with varied ethnicities. For example, if McGowan wants to hire a bilingual employee, he advertises on the Internet.

One of the ways Crete schools are communicating with the Latino population is through a Hispanic Parents Night. "We needed to work on our informal communication network," he said. "Good schools have good, multiple ways to communicate."

"The world has changed," McGowan said, and Crete schools are changing with it.

Bridging the Gap – The Crete News

Josh Wolfe, editor of *The Crete News*, believes any problems with negativity are few; he occasionally gets letters to the editor and publishes them, but says they are written by very few people. Wolfe is actively involved in bridging the gap of coverage between Crete's ethnic groups, hoping to increase communication and understanding. However, his newspaper has a small staff and can't cover all the events going on in the community. He wants to cover all the news and social events in Crete – not only in the white community, but in the Latino community, as well. The Latino community seems to be surprised that he

wants to include them in the *Crete News*, Wolfe said. He hopes to re-introduce an old custom, in which volunteers covered social events in the community and wrote columns or stories for the newspaper. If he can make that happen, he will be able to include all segments of Crete's population as well as manage his staffing shortage.

Managing Fear

Some of the employees at Farmland are undocumented, according to Father Julius Tvrdy, pastor of Sacred Heart Catholic Church. The church and St. James Catholic School are very near the downtown district. Fifty percent of the students in St. James School are English Language Learners (ELL), Father Tvrdy said. Most of those are Latino, but there are also some Vietnamese students. He said that his goal is for all the kids in St. James School to learn to read and write Spanish – to be biliterate.

He first told SDN researchers of the fear among the undocumented workers at Farmland. They fear being found out, fear deportation, fear for their families if that were to happen, he said. That fear makes people live quiet lives and makes them shy away from community activities. Latinos are usually devout Catholics, and Father Tvrdy, who speaks Spanish fluently, works closely with the Latino Catholics in addition to the Caucasian segment of the population. He continues to try various activities and methods to decrease their fear and increase their involvement in the church. He is reaching out to people who are here legally, encouraging them to serve on committees and become involved in other activities in hopes that others will follow that lead.

The undocumented workers and their families don't like to hide in the shadows, Father Tvrdy said. They would prefer to be here legally. "Our Hispanics are industrial migrant workers," he explained, and it's a "long, impossible process to become a legal resident. Unless there's a green card, there's no way of moving forward, no way they can improve themselves."

But on the state or national level, Father Tvrdy said, "I don't hear anybody addressing any part of this complicated issue." ●

For more information visit www.unl.edu/sdn/immigration

OMAHA

Overview



Omaha – a Sprawling Tapestry of Diversity on the Plains

Diversity is nothing new to Omaha; it's as common as the hard work of the immigrants who founded the city in 1854. Omaha has grown to be a center of banking, insurance and meat processing over the years based on that hard-working beginning. However, ethnic and race relations in the city have been difficult throughout the city's history, and Omaha continues to deal with various issues today.

Omaha, like all of Nebraska, was settled by immigrants. What makes Omaha different than some communities is that, over the years, it was settled by an exceptionally diverse mix of people. This was especially unusual because of Omaha's location in the center of the United States; it was easier to stay in cities closer to the coasts than to continue to travel inland. People of various religions and ethnicities, from Africa, Mexico and southern, northern and eastern Europe were included in the first 100 years of immigration; Asian, Latino and African immigrants and refugees have arrived in the last 50 years. Native Americans immigrated to Nebraska from other locations, as well.

Ethnic hostilities took place in the 1890s between the city's Catholics and the American Protective Association; a violent anti-Greek riot in 1909 dispersed Omaha's Greek population throughout the Midwest; and the lynching of an African-American by the name of Willie Brown in 1919 was another signpost of the depth of racism in Omaha at that time.

Confrontations occurred throughout history, including several notable events in the 1960s. North Omaha today struggles with poverty and violence, as well as the crisis of an achievement gap in black males, according to Trina Creighton, lecturer in the College of Journalism and Mass Communications at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Creighton, a former crime reporter in Omaha, is conducting a research study and is producing both a manuscript and a documentary on that achievement

gap. She hopes that awareness will curb what Creighton calls "the loss of a generation of young, black men."

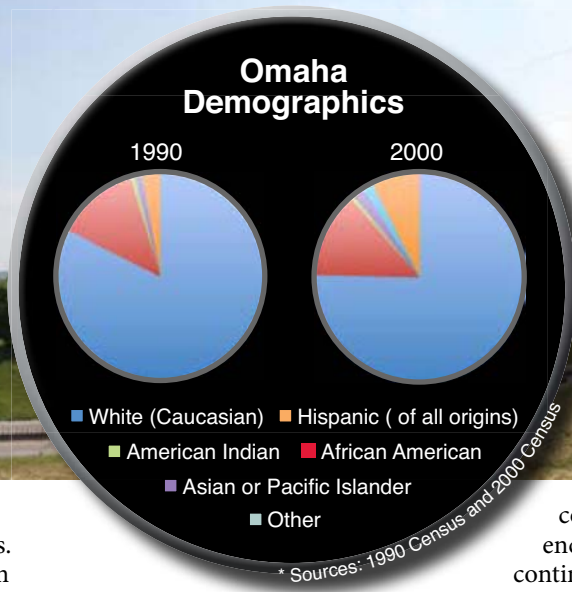
Immigration in Omaha Today

According to Frank Partsch, retired editorial editor for the Omaha World-Herald, any discussion of immigration issues in Omaha is complex. "We are not talking about one group, or even a dozen groups," he said. Immigrants in Omaha can be professionals from Africa and Asia, political refugees from Bosnia, people in search of a better life, legally or illegally, from a host of Latin American countries. Immigrants are Jews from Russia, Muslims from the Balkans, tribe members from remote areas of South America, political refugees from Somalia and students from China, he explained.

At one time, Partsch said, the Omaha Public Schools identified more than two dozen linguistic groups among its student body – students whose first language was something other than English.

"With this vast diversity of the immigrant population comes a vast diversity of problems and issues," Partsch said. Even among groups that might appear outwardly similar there are differences; Cubans and Salvadorans, for example, have vastly different histories and reasons for leaving their native land. Other differences separate Mexicans from Guatemalans.

In addition to being a city that continues to attract immigrants from many countries, Omaha is one of Nebraska's three



federal refugee resettlement locations; the other two are Lincoln and Hastings. These three cities welcome people from many different countries, all in different stages of acculturation, language learning and job seeking. Refugees come to the U.S. under this country's legal protection from persecution; many have endured great physical and emotional suffering prior to coming to the U.S. Several organizations help refugees to resettle in the United States; help immigrants when necessary; and help poor people meet their needs.

A'Jamal Byndon, Senior Director for Advocacy for Catholic Charities in Omaha, has spent 25 years with Catholic Charities, helping the disenfranchised population of Omaha.

"My job is to try to help low-income people – people who are at the bottom. I also try to bring people together from different sectors in Omaha and try to change structures," he said. "I try to get people who traditionally do not deal with the 'have-nots' to do more of that. The whole issue of being committed to a community, a state...I try to bring the world together," he said.

Byndon believes historical demographics indicate there is a caste system in this country. "I try to change structures so people are no longer locked into poverty and into their caste," he explained. He described himself as a "social justice person" who believes all people need to be more inclusive of others, not only in the areas of race and gender, but also of ideology. His mother was a social justice activist, he said, and her role modeling helped lead him to his chosen career.

Byndon spent two years in the Peace Corps after he graduated from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. He met his wife there, and when he returned to the United States he decided to work with the poor. His experience in Africa was life-changing, he said, and formed the basis for his personal mission in dealing with the poor. "I cannot begin to describe to Nebraskans how sometimes strangers who had very little treated me as if I was one of their relatives," he said. He said he always remembers to treat the disenfranchised people of Omaha in the same way he was treated in Africa – as a valued guest.

Additionally, Byndon said it is critical that the voices are "at the table." In committee and board meetings and other interactions, he said, "we have to make sure the very people we are talking about are there – both sides of the continuum. We often balance our scale to folks who are like us, rather than not like us."

Byndon is aware of the many situations from which refugees and immigrants flee. "When you think in terms of people who

come from a tortured past and experience, we should not be the ones who continue with that torture for them, either physically or psychologically," he said.

The Bible says to treat others as you would want them to treat you -- "if we keep that in mind as we deal with people, how can we disrespect or denigrate them?"

Population and Perspective

Omaha's population alone is approaching 500,000, but its metropolitan area surpasses 800,000 and growing. The total population of Nebraska is about 1.8 million, according to the 2000 U.S. Census estimate for 2006, which is the most recent estimate. The eastern part of Nebraska is by far the most densely populated part of the state; the Sandhills and Panhandle regions are the most sparsely populated. The distance from Omaha to Scottsbluff, for example, is 474 miles, while the distance from Omaha to Chicago is 468 miles.

Even though Scottsbluff and Omaha are in the same state, the culture, terrain, population and economy are in stark contrast to one another. Omaha is home to several Fortune 500 companies and is a center of banking, insurance and medicine. Its access to transportation, entertainment, health care and cultural activities rivals much larger cities. It can be easy to forget that Omaha lies within a largely-agricultural state – one that is #2 in cattle production in the whole country; one that helps to feed the world's hunger for food and fuel; one that competes with other communities and other states for health care providers in rural areas; one that struggles to maintain population in its rural communities. Driving is the chief means of traveling to Scottsbluff from Omaha; there is no commercial air service between the two communities. Some stakeholders in Scottsbluff say they have learned to rely on themselves and on one another in the smaller communities; they need each other. If a community wants to keep a grocery store, for instance, the community needs to shop there. In a larger city, if one store goes out of business, there's always another.

The rural residents of Nebraska are accustomed to driving to Lincoln and Omaha, though many of their trips to larger cities are to Denver and Cheyenne, which are hours closer. Their urban counterparts are much less likely to drive to the western part of the state. According to Steve Frederick, editor of the Scottsbluff Star-Herald, "the road does go both ways." ●

For more information visit www.unl.edu/sdn/immigration

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The Hispanic challenge

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 Journal: *Perspectives*

“Measuring Immigrant Assimilation in the United States”

Author: Jacob Vigdor, Professor, Duke University
 for The Manhattan Institute’s Center for Civic Innovation
First Annual Index of Immigrant Assimilation

“Mexican Americans and the American Dream”

Author: Richard Alba
 Issue: Jun. 2006
 Journal: *PS: Political Science & Politics*

“Mexican Immigrant Political and Economic Incorporation”

Author: Frank D. Bean, Susan K. Brown and Rubén G. Rumbaut
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“Changes in Asian and Hispanic Population in the Cities of the Great Plains, 1990-2000” Evelyn Ravuri 75 Great Plains Research. SPRING 2003 VOL. 13/NO. 1

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“New Immigrants in the Great Plains: Strengths and Challenges” John DeFrain, Rochelle Dalla, Douglas A. Abbott, and Julie Johnson 163 Great Plains Research. FALL 2004 VOL. 14/NO. 2

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Organizations Working on Immigration in Nebraska

Nebraska Appleseed
Mexican American Commission
Lincoln Action Program
The Catholic Church

Other Initiatives

The Rural Initiative
Dialogue Across Nebraska
Community Builders
START
Friendship Force
New American Task Force
Justice for Our Neighbors

Beautiful Nebraska

Written by Jim Fras and Guy Miller

Beautiful Nebraska, peaceful prairieland,
Laced with many rivers, and the hills of sand;
Dark green valleys cradled in the earth,
Rain and sunshine bring abundant birth.

Beautiful Nebraska, as you look around,
You will find a rainbow reaching to the ground;
All these wonders by the Master's hand;
Beautiful Nebraska land.

We are so proud of this state where we live,
There is no place that has so much to give.

Beautiful Nebraska, as you look around,
You will find a rainbow reaching to the ground;
All these wonders by the Master's hand,
Beautiful Nebraska land.

Jim Fras was a refugee from Russia who moved to Lincoln in 1952. In 1960, Fras and Guy Miller wrote the words to Beautiful Nebraska. Fras set the words to music. On June 21, 1967, the Nebraska Legislature approved legislation adopting Beautiful Nebraska as the official state song.

STRATEGIC DISCUSSIONS FOR **nebraska**

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