

2009 Quad Cities Leadership Academy
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What Kind Of Immigrants Are Needed In The Quad Cities?

The question our group was asked to answer is what kind of immigrants does the Quad Cities need? This question was not easy for our group to answer, and I suppose we all felt that the simple answer is that we need all kinds. The Quad Cities need immigrants of all skill levels; natural born and foreign born; professional and semi skilled. We need teachers, artists, community activists and laborers. We need immigrants who are willing to contribute their cultural experiences and blend them with the fabric of our own.

The Quad Cities has a rich history of people from near by states and far away lands settling this territory. Immigrant labor dredged, bridged and tamed a mighty river for commerce and turned the soil that helped feed this nation in good times and bad. John Deere, an immigrant who fled Vermont during a period of economic stagnation, brought his skills and innovation to this area and began one of the most prosperous farm tools manufacturing companies this region and the nation has known.

Past immigrants to this area includes persons of German, Belgium, Irish, French, Greek, Armenian, English, Welsh and Swedish descent. In recent years, we have seen a large influx of Hispanic and African immigrants who, like many before them, have brought their families and are busy building their lives here beside our own. You can find them contributing their talents in our offices, factories and farms, learning or teaching in our schools, and building virtual bridges between groups where barriers have once stood and divided a community.

For the purposes of our presentation, our group focused attention on five areas where immigration might strengthen the Quad Cities, those are: Academic, Medical, Finance, Industry, and the Arts.

Academic

There are two theories that discuss the disadvantages of Latinos in educational attainment and they are the Cultural Discontinuity Theory and the Cultural-Ecology Theory. Cultural Discontinuity Theory: These theorists believe “that immigrant youth are disadvantaged due to language, culture,

and social interactional conflicts between home and school.” This speaks of the conflict between children speaking English in school and then coming home to their Latino culture and the Spanish language.

Cultural-Ecology Theory: These theorists believe “that immigrant educational attainment is affected by a complex interaction of multiple factors that include motivation to immigrate, perceptions of opportunity, and labor market pay off for attainment.” In other words if these people do not feel that going to school and learning English is going to help them in the long run why would they waste time in school when they could be out making money and helping their family?

The benefits of Latino educators include language proficiency and visible role models for young persons learning a new language and culture. Insider knowledge of issues affecting the migrant population and effective policy advocates for their rights. It also brings diversity awareness for majority students who might not otherwise have the opportunity to experience a different culture.

Medical

Perhaps the biggest reason given to support the need for immigrants taking up residency and practicing medicine is the cultural aspect. Within any culture, peoples’ values, behavior and beliefs can vary enormously. Differences may occur due to length of time in the host nation, socio-economic background, level of education, rural or urban residence, dietary preferences, identification with cultural and religious background, and different life experiences - including the often daunting and confusing experience of migration.

Having a physician that speaks your language and understands your culture will go a long way in supporting the newly arrived immigrant and will assist with the transition to the larger community.

Finance

Why should financial institutions target the Hispanic population? For one, the Latino market is the fastest growing consumer market in the United States, with a purchasing power of \$700 billion that is expected to grow to \$1 trillion by 2010. Financial institutions need to help migrants overcome the barriers that held them back when accessing loans or establishing credit. They need to develop products, procedures, and strategies that work for immigrants and provide the ability to document identity, income, and creditworthiness in a way that is acceptable to the rules and procedures of the U.S. banking system. There are knowledge barriers to overcome and educational services to

implement. The goal for financial institutions toward immigrants should be same as to any natural citizen; to allow for home ownership, funds for new business start up or educational loans that ensure the newly arrived feel pride in their accomplishments and help to build this community.

Industry

The Quad Cities is an attractive area for industrial companies. Despite the recent economic conditions that forced many manufacturing firms to reduce the size of their workforce or close their doors completely, the Quad Cities remains an ideal location for industry to operate. Two of the Quad Cities larger manufacturing firms were contacted regarding the size and composition of their Hispanic workforce, and provided some insight as to where they were employed in their companies.

The first employs approximately 1,000 Hispanic/Latino workers at different levels. The majority work as assemblers and warehousemen while approximately 6% are employed as middle management with less than 1% employed as upper management.

The second employs approximately 400 Hispanic/Latino workers at different levels. The majority work on the factory floor in skilled and semi-skilled positions with a smaller percentage working in low to middle management.

Industry leaders recognize the contributions of immigrant workers and are doing more to accommodate, recruit and retain Latino workers. For instance, many have begun to implement cultural awareness programs designed to foster an understanding the Hispanic/Latino work ethic thus creating an environment of respect, mutual cooperation and courtesy. They are also encouraging Hispanic/Latino workers to seek management level positions within their firms.

The Arts

The contributions of Hispanics to the development and success of America are woven into almost every segment of the nation's history. To envision America untouched by Latinos is to imagine a country without much of its folklore and many of its achievements. For instance, La Banda is a group of 10 – 20 members playing woodwind, brass, and percussion instruments. Its roots come from the overlapping of Mexican music and German Polka. When Austrian leaders were in Mexico, they would bring in musicians from Europe to entertain them; the Mexican people would hear the melodies and try to recreate them to please the Austrians. With thought provoking lyrics by famed writers, the music tells stories of heroes, battles, families, and love.

The Mariachi is Mexico's most famous and beloved style of music. The men who perform this music adorn themselves like Mexican cowboys known as charro's and can usually play more than one instrument while they sing and dance. The traditional dance technique associated with many mariachi songs is the zapateado, which has its origin in Spain. The performers drive the heels of their boots swiftly into the dance-floor, often in time with the rhythms which complement that of the musical instruments.

Whether German, Irish, Mexican or African, the Quad Cities needs to bring in new citizens to fill jobs, teach a new generation young people, finance the American Dream, treat the ill and provide artistic diversity that makes this region such a wonderful place to live, work and play. According to the Pew Society, "about six-in-ten Americans say they like the idea of living in politically, racially, religiously or economically mixed communities." We would like to believe the Quad Cities is reflective of that same sentiment.