

Undocumented Workers and Immigration Reform: Thematic vs. Episodic Coverage in a Rural Kansas Community Daily

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This qualitative historical case study examines how the Garden City Telegram, a small community daily newspaper, diverged from an episodic, conflict-driven frame for the debate over federal immigration reform in the 1980s and 1990s by promoting immigrants as potential citizens rather than outsiders. Qualitative content assessment of locally originated articles, opinion pieces, and wire stories in the Telegram found it promoted community dialogue by including Latino leaders in the conversation. It emphasized thematic coverage that explored the reasons for immigrants' presence and contributions to life in southwest Kansas.

A bellicose scenario has become familiar in American discourse about immigration reform. Advocates for English as the government's official language bellow that printing ballots and legal documents in Spanish kowtows to foreigners and wastes millions of tax dollars (U.S. English, 1983). Meanwhile, blue-collar nativists rage that "illegal aliens" take jobs away from Americans (Borjas, 1996). And conservative elites argue that accommodating foreign newcomers would undermine American culture (Buchanan, 2002). The scene is *not* Montgomery, Ala., where Gov. Robert Bentley enacted House Bill 56, which prohibited citizens from doing business with undocumented immigrants and required migrants and those who look like they might be migrants to prove their legal presence in the United States on demand. The year is *not* 2011, when that law took effect. The debate has nothing to do with the current mania for "securing our borders." Instead, this scenario occurred in the early 1990s. The place was Garden City, Kan.

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Latino immigration has been commonly associated with urban areas and the states along the U.S.-Mexico border (Chávez, 2009). Because of this geographical assumption, it might have been easy for scholars of community journalism and diversity to ignore this small meatpacking town in a remote corner of the High Plains. But if journalists in the rest of the country had paid more attention, they might have recognized that neither Alabama nor Arizona, whose S.B. 1070 provided a model for H.B. 56, has had a monopoly on debates between nativists and those who advocate for Latino immigrants' rights. They might have recognized the growing pains experienced by journalists caught in the demographic upheaval of immigration. Further, news media might have resisted the urge to frame the story in ways that promote conflict and threat perception and the incivility that has marked nativist responses to media discourse about immigration (Chavez, 2008). The *Garden City Telegram*, a newspaper with a daily circulation of 9,000 at its peak in the late 1990s (11,700 including its 2,700-circulation weekly Spanish-language supplement), struggled to make sense of the stream of Latino newcomers who came to town after IBP built the world's largest beef packing plant outside town. Once it recognized these were foreigners, the newspaper attempted to help the immigrants find a place in the community, earn U.S. citizenship, and learn to follow local laws while preserving their cultural identity. The purpose of this article is to examine one rural community newspaper's response to demographic change. Using the methods of the qualitative historical case study, this research shows that the *Telegram* served as a cultural mediator for Spanish-speaking newcomers and longtime residents by providing a locally generated alternative to the conflict frame prevalent in typical coverage of immigration. The paper's editors and reporters promoted understanding among disparate ethnic groups, provided a voice for immigrants, and cultivated readership among Spanish-speaking immigrants who needed information to orient themselves to their new home. This research is important because it reveals in the *Telegram* a model for similarly situated news organizations facing similar demographic changes today as Latino immigrants take up residence in rural communities that have long been mostly white and black.

Literature review: Hispanics as troublemakers and troubled people

Hispanics — this article uses the term interchangeably with “Latinos” in reference to people with heritage in the Spanish-speaking countries of Spain and Latin America — have been virtually invisible to mainstream news media unless they were portrayed as troublemakers and victims of crimes committed by other Hispanics. American journalism has neglected Hispanics with the exception of sensational coverage of violent outbursts, such as the Zoot Suit Riot of 1943 (Salwen & Soruco, 1997). At the macro level, that is, at the level of the narrative frame, 1970s news coverage of illegal immigration on the U.S.-Mexico border was biased by its reliance on Border Patrol spokespeople and other institutional sources who had an interest in portraying illegal immigration as a growing problem and portrayed immigration in a negative way (Fernández & Pedroza, 1981). That study found that news organizations relied mainly on non-Hispanic

reporters and that a reporters' Hispanic ethnicity had a positive correlation with their likelihood of getting their information from non-institutional sources such as illegal immigrants. Several late-twentieth-century studies found the news disproportionately represented Latino naturalized citizens and immigrants as criminals and as drains on government social services (Fernández & Pedroza, 1982; Greenberg, Heeter, Burgoon, Burgoon & Korzenny, 1983; Ramírez-Berg, 1997; Rodríguez, 1999). Patterns have included an emphasis on sensationalism, exaggerations of the extent of illegal immigration, harsh tones in reporting on the subject, and lack of critical inquiry into assertions that illegal immigration heavily burdens taxpayers (Center for Integration and Improvement of Journalism, 1994). Speakers and participants at the National Association of Hispanic Journalists conference in 1993 noted mainstream media cover Hispanics without a grasp of their historical context, resulting in superficial coverage, while business coverage has focused on strikes and portrayed peaceful labor actions as violent, further promoting the conflict frame (Gersh, 1993). News reports have represented Hispanics and African-Americans as lawbreakers and underrepresented as law enforcers relative to their representation in criminal and police populations (Dixon & Linz, 2000).

At the micro level of analysis — the level of linguistic choices involving phrasing and preferred terminology — news media have depicted Hispanics as foreign to America; used dehumanizing nouns such as “aliens” and “illegals” to characterize undocumented immigrants; and included Hispanics only in the context of crime, entertainment and civil rights (Center for Integration and Improvement of Journalism, 1994). *Los Angeles Times* articles about the debate over the anti-immigrant Proposition 187 found that metaphors reflected anti-immigrant sentiment (Santa Ana, 1999). The following metaphors were used in Proposition 187 discourse: immigrants as animals, as debased people, as weeds, and as commodities.

Research on the news media's role in the portrayal of immigration in rural areas beyond the Borderlands states of California, Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas is sparse. Most scholars have focused on the zone along the U.S.-Mexico border and cities where Mexican immigrants have tended to settle since the 1900s. More recent research has delved into media representation of Latinos in communities where their presence is relatively new. Lauterer (2006) examined how seven North Carolina newspapers accommodated Hispanic immigrant populations. The independent English/Spanish bilingual newspaper *Idaho Unido* subverted the dominant media paradigm in rural Idaho (Beachboard, 2007). Vargas' content and textual analysis (2000) found news reports in the Raleigh, N.C., *News & Observer* newspaper gendered Latino news as feminine and reproduced a stereotype of Latinos as underclass peons. Paulin (2004) found in a broader study of five Southern mainstream newspapers that most did not portray immigration negatively, attempted to portray Latinos positively, and promoted social understanding. Still, Latinos were portrayed as victims who lacked control over their circumstances. A mixed-methods study (Stewart, Pitts & Osbourne, 2011) of the *Virginian Pilot* found that the newspaper attached negative

stereotypes to Latino illegal immigrants and stigmatized them as members of an out-group.

Framing theory has played a prominent role in studies of media-constructed difference among ethnic groups. Framing involves selecting aspects of perceived reality and making them more salient in a way that promotes a particular definition of a problem, interpretation of cause, evaluation of morality or recommendation for treatment of whatever the text describes (Entman, 1991). Micro-level indicators of framing include the selection of sources and details (Entman, 1991; Fernández & Pedroza, 1981). Macro-level indicators include organization, storytelling, and narrative emphasis (Iyengar, 1993; Domke, McCoy & Torres, 1999; Kellstedt, 2003). Frames are persistent (Reese, 2001), but can shift, change and be replaced (Hertog & McLeod, 2001). Framing's focus on the connection between changes in social conditions and the construction of reality make it an appropriate theory to apply in the present study.

Background and methods: Historical case study with textual assessment

This historical case study examines the *Telegram's* negotiation of the tension between American demand for undocumented Latino immigrant labor and nativists' urge to push immigrants back to countries of origin during debate over and implementation of immigration reforms from 1986 through the mid-1990s. Construction and meatpacking jobs in the Midwest and Southeast have given those regions the fastest-growing Hispanic immigrant populations in the United States (Durand, Massey & Charvet, 2000). By focusing on coverage in a community beyond the Borderlands, this study addresses a neglected area of research. The following research question guided a qualitative textual analysis of 47 locally originated articles, editorials, columns, and wire service stories in the *Telegram*:

RQ: How did framing of Latino immigration change during federal immigration reform in the 1980s-90s?

This project, which also employed interviews with four *Telegram* journalists and two community service providers, sprang from a larger cultural historical case study that used guided in-depth interviews with journalists and community leaders, archive research, and qualitative textual analysis of 461 articles, editorials, columns, and letters to the editor, to examine how the *Garden City (Kan.) Telegram* covered public debate surrounding changes in public policy and culture concerning Latino immigration in southwest Kansas.

Historical case studies aim to understand a situation from multiple perspectives. Sources may include published communication artifacts, such as books, periodicals, and government documents; and private communication artifacts, such as company reports and personal correspondence. The method of "content assessment" has been used by media historians who are interested in the cultural context of journalistic products and practices (Kitch, 1997; Marzolf, 1978). This method relies on "reading, sifting, weighing, comparing and

analyzing the evidence in order to tell the story” (Marzolf, 1978, p. 16). This approach has three prongs: assessment of content for the ways media convey values, attitudes, and social norms and embrace or exclude groups; examination of the backgrounds and social systems of the producers of media content; and the significance of journalism’s presentation of information, values, and opinions. Sources in the present study include *Telegram* articles, interviews with newspaper staff and community stakeholders, and documents concerning the Garden City’s changing population. Content assessment is appropriate because this study set out to examine the way media content changed as demographics shifted.

Findings: Thematic vs. episodic coverage in the *Telegram*

The present study found the *Telegram* promoted community dialogue by making Latino leaders part of the conversation and emphasized thematic coverage of public debate that explored the reasons for the presence of undocumented immigrants in southwest Kansas. The Associated Press and Harris News Service, on which the *Telegram* depended for statewide, national and international news, emphasized episodic coverage that relied on the news value of conflict. This was not wholly unexpected since conflict, not understanding, is prominent in the criteria detailed in Tuchman’s pioneering 1973 study of news work routines. Conflict is also prominent among indicators of news value values in two of the most commonly used college reporting textbooks (Mencher, 2011; Brooks, Kennedy, Moen & Ranly, 2008). Nonetheless, understanding was a vital element in the *Telegram*’s local articles.

Garden City’s history of Hispanic immigration is so long and complex that the journalists of the *Telegram* had difficulty recognizing the change taking place around them in the early 1980s. In 1986, The *Telegram* was just beginning to grasp the extent of a demographic shift triggered in 1980, when IBP Inc. built the world’s largest packinghouse in Garden City (Broadway, 2000). From 1980 to 1990, the southwest Kansas town’s population rose to 24,318 from 18,246, a gain of 33 percent, and with the population increase came increased demand for police and firefighting services (Donelson, 1997). By 2000, 43.9 percent of Garden City’s 28,451 people were Hispanic, a startlingly high proportion given that Hispanics constitute just 7 percent of the population statewide (Census, 2011). Most of the growth came from Spanish-speaking immigrants drawn by low-skill jobs at the packing plants, where as much as 80 percent of the work force was Hispanic (Leiker, 2002).

For the most part, the *Telegram* showed little awareness of immigration issues relating to Hispanics through the late 1980s. It took wire service reports about pending immigration reform in Congress and Hispanic community leaders’ agitation about police harassment of Mexican-Americans and Latino immigrants for the paper to realize the nature of the demographic change in their midst. The *Telegram*’s small reporting staff devoted itself to covering the local community. Because the newspaper’s reporters failed to acknowledge the presence of recent immigrants in and around Garden City, the *Telegram* relied heavily on AP articles for immigration news through 1989. This is not to say that Hispanics were left out

of the newspaper; rather, the *Telegram* did not recognize that the newcomers were any different from the town's assimilated Hispanic population. Mexican-Americans had been part of the community since migrant workers came to southwest Kansas as sugar beet and wheat farmworkers and Santa Fe Railroad maintenance workers around the turn of the twentieth century (Oppenheimer, 2003).

In the late 1980s, both the Kansas government and the journalists at the *Telegram* became increasingly aware that native-born Mexican-Americans were not the only kind of Hispanics in the state. Nominal and structural changes in Kansas' bureaucracy provide evidence of this. In 1986, the Senate Committee on Governmental Organization endorsed a bill changing the name of the Kansas Advisory Committee on Mexican-American Affairs to the Kansas Advisory Committee on Hispanic affairs (Associated Press, March 16, 1986, p. 7). As of 1986, 21 percent of Kansas' nearly 62,000 Hispanics were of Cuban, Central American, Puerto Rican or other descent, and the state changed the name of the committee to acknowledge a growing percentage of the state's Hispanics were of non-Mexican lineage.

The *Telegram* relied on Harris News Service, owned by the paper's parent company Harris Enterprises, for reports on the beginnings of immigration reform in 1983. Harris reported U.S. Rep. Dan Glickman of Kansas voted with the majority when the House Judiciary Committee approved a bill to overhaul immigration regulations in an effort at "curbing the flow of illegal aliens into this country by creating a system of civil and criminal penalties against employees who knowingly hire such aliens" (Harris News Service, 1983, p. 1). The legislation stalled for three years but ultimately became the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 (Newton, 2008). Congressional debate and talks leading to passage of the IRCA nearly went unnoticed by the *Telegram* until the bill reached a conference committee to reconcile the House and Senate versions of immigration reform, when it became front-page news (Associated Press, October 10, 1986, p. 1).

Covering the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986

If there were any doubts whether there were foreign-born Hispanics in Garden City, they were erased in the late 1980s, but the *Telegram* was slow in picking up on radical changes to immigration laws that were in the works in Congress. Buried on page 8 on June 26, 1986, the paper carried an Associated Press article that reported the House Judiciary Committee approved a measure designed to reduce the flow of illegal immigrants —AP wrote "illegal aliens" — and improve conditions for those already in the United States (Associated Press, June 26, 1986, p. 8). Assuming the editors were aware of illegal immigrants in the community, the article would have had two main audiences: Residents with acquaintances or relatives who were illegal immigrants, or employers with workers who were in the country illegally. Then the story disappeared for three and a half months when, out of nowhere, news of possible immigration legislation popped up on the front page. The lead front-page headline blared, "Immigration bill revived" (Associated Press, October 10, 1986, p. 1). The bill was referred to as "the

immigration bill” or “immigration reform legislation” throughout the legislative process. Not until the following spring did articles in the *Telegram* refer to the Immigration Reform and Control Act by its proper name (May 1, 1987, p. 2). The banner headline October 15 announced, “Immigration bill nears compromise” (October 15, 1986, p. 1). The lead emphasized the reason for the flow of immigrants:

After years of failure, Congress is within a whisker of approving a bill designed to shut down the stream of illegal aliens crossing the border *for new job opportunities* in the United States [emphasis added]. Compromise legislation was approved Tuesday by House-Senate conferees, who took a cue from successful tax bill writers earlier in the session: They locked out the lobbyists and negotiated in secret (p. 1).

The phrase “for new job opportunities” fits a macro-level narrative frame of illegal immigrants as participants in the American dream — that is, people seeking opportunity they could not find in their home countries. The article detailed the bill’s provisions: “an amnesty program for long-term illegal aliens and a system of fines against employers who knowingly hire undocumented workers. The amnesty would apply to those who came to this country before 1982.”

The complications that amnesty might pose — chief among them was fake documentation — were noted in a local sidebar, the first *Telegram* staff reporting on the topic since immigration reform reappeared in 1986 (Zubeck, 1986, p. 1). The sidebar reported an estimated 5,000 to 8,000 undocumented immigrants were in southwest Kansas, with 35,000 in the state. Although Garden City had an INS field office, its officers referred questions to an INS deputy district director. The director said that during the previous year, the INS concentrated on identifying and deporting illegal immigrants who were criminals or who were holding jobs that could be held by U.S. citizens or foreigners who were in the country legally. Only 1,750 had been taken into custody in Kansas and Missouri, the two states administered by the regional office in Kansas City, Mo., combined. That such a small number were deported suggests the rest were not entirely unwelcome. Story framing can be defined as much by what is left out as by what is included. In this case, the only sources represented federal agencies, whereas the reporter could have sought comment from local immigrant or minority advocacy groups such as United Methodist Mexican American Ministries, the G.I. Forum, or the Southeast Asian Mutual Assistance Society, all of which were active in the Garden City area. Instead, the *Telegram* let a bureaucracy story remain a bureaucracy story rather than humanizing it with the voices of immigrants or their advocates. The paper also ignored businesses that might have been affected by the new rules for employing immigrants.

Although the *Telegram* carried a story on House approval (Associated Press, October 16, 1986, p. 1) and how the bill awaited final approval in the Senate with the endorsement of President Ronald Reagan (Associated Press,

October 17, 1986, p. 1), the newspaper ran nothing about Reagan signing the bill into law. Instead, the story went dormant until just before the IRCA was to be implemented. Members of the community, however, did not keep quiet about it. A letter to the editor from Roman Catholic Bishop Stanley Schlarman of the Diocese of Dodge City (Dec. 20, 1986) during Christmas week read:

Over the past few years, thousands have left their homelands for political, religious and economic reasons and have migrated to our area of Southwest Kansas in search of a better life. These newly arriving immigrants, representing many nationalities, whose religious and cultural backgrounds are very different, form an impressive mosaic of people. They help form our one nation under God. They bring special gifts that enrich our communities and our lives, and should be seen as blessings from God. ... Let us take to our heart the words of the Divine Immigrant, "I was a stranger and you welcomed me." (Matthew 25:35) (p. 4).

Letters on controversies have the potential to trigger a series of letters in response. Yet this one did not. Between the bishop's letter and implementation of immigration reform in May, the topic came up four more times. *Telegram* columnist Dolores Hope (March 4, 1987) wrote:

Garden City now embraces a diverse population. While many who have roots here are still around, many others have moved in ... some of them, perhaps, to live here for a long time and others very briefly. The experiences of the newcomers must vary greatly, depending on both their circumstances and their personalities. Some may prefer anonymity while others seek inclusion in the life of the community. You may not know them personally, but maybe that won't matter if you need help ... or if they do (p. 4).

In an interview conducted for this study, Hope seemed unaware of how much she had written about Latinos and immigration and did not perceive her own writing as unusually empathetic or sensitive about them when asked about her connection to those topics. Her treatment of these subjects may be explained by her family's membership in the Roman Catholic Church. Hope's columns reflected church teachings on social justice, including the ideas that it should not be illegal to cross a border to escape poverty and that all human life is sacred (H. Hope, 1988; Blume, 1996). The Catholic and United Methodist churches took the most active role in helping immigrants relocate in southwest Kansas. The *Telegram* also pointed amnesty-seekers to the Catholic Agency for Migration and Refugee Service in Elkhart, southwest of Garden City and just north of the Oklahoma state line (Garden City Telegram, March 11, 1987, p. 3). The *Telegram* also publicized a public meeting about the new immigration law where an immigration lawyer was available to explain the law. Employers were encouraged to attend, and information was to be provided in both English and Spanish (Garden City Telegram, April 1, 1987, p. 3).

Not all in Garden City were so welcoming. A letter to the editor (Todd, 1987) complained that illegal immigrants were keeping the writer from getting work:

I have lived here for two years and have 100 job applications out to which no one has had the courtesy to answer. But I keep seeing their help wanted ads in The Telegram. IBP, The Hilton, K-Bobs Steakhouse, Val Agri and the list goes on. The joke about it all is that they claim to be Equal Opportunity Employers. The only way I have been able to survive in Garden City is that a man and his wife asked me to take care of their rentals, and in return my family and I get our rent and utilities. But a man can't support a family this way. I want to take care of my family and have pride in doing so. Why won't anyone give me a chance? If more personnel managers were in my place they might understand how I feel. People that are citizens of the United States are not being given a chance because employers would rather hire non-citizens with no experience just because they will work for a cheaper rate or because they feel sorry for them. Well it's time that you take a look at our community and feel sorry for the citizens of the U.S. We need work too! (p. 4)

“Both sides of the story” vs. “all sides of the story”

While the *Telegram* showed its awareness of immigration issues, federal officials responsible for putting the law into effect acted as if implementation took them by surprise in the spring of 1987. So did employers. A wire story (Associated Press, May 1, 1987) explained:

Even before historic immigration reforms take effect next week, critics are saying the government has botched the law so badly that extensions may be necessary to accommodate a flood of illegal aliens applying for amnesty. The Immigration and Naturalization Service's final rules governing the immigration were published today in the Federal Register, just two business days before the opening of the amnesty program and a month before the start of employer sanctions. (p. 2)

U.S. Rep. Charles Schumer, one of the bill's principal writers, suggested the deadline for amnesty applications should be extended because of disarray at INS offices (Associated Press, May 1, 1987a, p. 2). A wire sidebar warned that employers were unprepared, noting, “Many employers, ranging from farmers to restaurateurs, are not ready for the new immigration law a little more than a month before it bars the hiring of illegal aliens, business and worker representatives say” (Associated Press, May 1, 1987b, p. 2). The sidebar cited the concerns of business and labor leaders such as Frederick Krebs of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, who lamented, “You've got a lot of employers out there

who, despite all the publicity, don't know. Others are aware and want to do something, but they're not sure what they want to do." The sidebar quoted leaders with the International Ladies' Garment Workers Union and the National Council of La Raza who bemoaned employers' pre-emptive efforts to fire or lay off workers suspected of being in the country illegally.

A comparison of Associated Press and *Telegram* coverage yielded a notable contrast. The Associated Press portrayed stories with a frame of conflict, a natural byproduct of the journalistic admonition to "always tell *both* sides of the story." This approach can preclude moderate viewpoints from being represented. With this approach, reporting becomes a game of opposites without middle ground in which a reporter quotes one Democrat for every Republican or one labor source for every employer source. The *Telegram*, in contrast, framed its coverage in terms of stakeholders, not opponents, thus providing a continuum of points of view rather than opposites (Neufeld, May 5, 1987, p. 1). The sources were Mike Heston of the Immigration and Naturalization Service's amnesty office in Garden City; Jim Bennett, an INS enforcement agent in Garden City; Luisa Galeano, manager of Harvest America, a social service nonprofit that aided rural migrant and seasonal farmworkers and poor Hispanics; and the Rev. Penney Schwab, director of United Methodist Mexican American Ministries, which provided health care and translation services for poor Hispanics. The accent was not on showing conflict, but on telling about the procedures and potential difficulties in applying for amnesty. Adding to this pragmatic approach was a sidebar telling amnesty applicants and employers about their rights and responsibilities under the new law, including a list of things one must do to apply. At the end of the article was a paragraph in shaky Spanish that told Latino immigrants whom to call for help with applying for citizenship: INS, St. Mary's Roman Catholic Church, and the United Methodist Care Center.

The *Telegram's* terminology was also significantly different from AP's. The lead of the *Telegram's* first local story on the new amnesty avoided the label "illegal aliens" in favor of a more descriptive phrase: "Thousands of *people* [emphasis added]— perhaps millions — who have lived and worked illegally in the United States now have the chance to live legally and openly" (Neufeld, May 5, 1987, p. 1). The offensive term "illegal aliens," however, did not entirely disappear from the *Telegram* until the early 1990s after the arrival of reporter Sarah Kessinger, who became the first editor of *La Semana*. An example typical of her approach appeared in a September 1991 report that under a new federal law, annual immigration would be increased by 100,000 a year. The terms she used were "local immigrants," "people," "immigrants," "residents who had been in the United States since before 1982," "foreigners" and "personnel from a Canadian or Mexican branch" (Kessinger, Sept. 28, 1991, p. A1).

The first wave of applicants was a mere trickle. The *Telegram* devoted a quarter of the front page May 6 to a photo of one INS staffer sitting alone at a table next to rows of empty chairs in the Garden City immigration legalization office, another photo of two INS officials examining an immigration legalization form, and a story on the first day of the amnesty. Again, the lead avoided using "illegal aliens" as its subject. Rather, it read, "Sixteen people showed up Tuesday

on the first day of business at Garden City's immigration legalization office, but an official expects activity to pick up as people gain confidence in the amnesty process" (Garden City Telegram, May 6, 1987, p. 1). An AP article told a similar story nationwide at legalization offices in Connecticut, New Jersey, Boston and Los Angeles, but unlike all of the AP's previous articles, its lead used "illegal immigrants" instead of "illegal aliens" (Associated Press, May 6, 1987, p. 1).

A month later, and with 11 months remaining, a *Telegram* reporter wrote that applications were still slow, with a misleading headline that read, "Chances are running out for amnesty" (Neufeld, June 11, 1987, p. 1). The headline took its cue from INS district director Ron Sanders, who said, "We can't overemphasize that the clock's running and time's running out on the program." The article provided some reasons for the lack of applicants, including office hours of 8 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Such hours would be difficult for working people to fit into their schedules, given that many worked at the IBP meatpacking plant, where strict work rules made it tough to get time off for any reason (Stull, 2003). One reason there were few applicants, the *Telegram* found, was that although the Garden City office had a phone, INS officials set it up with an unlisted number to "protect confidentiality." The *Telegram* listed the toll-free number to give amnesty-seekers a chance to apply (Neufeld, June 11, 1987, p. 1). Schwab, of United Methodist Mexican American Ministries of Garden City, wasn't puzzled by the initial lack of applicants and argued that the number was unlisted because the INS did not want to be inundated with phone calls. Interviewed for the present study in 2007, Schwab said:

We were processing paperwork during the amnesty, and Immigration set up this office. They had an unlisted phone number — they wouldn't run it in the phone book, and they never had anybody come to the office and they had to close the office because of it.

Regardless of the reasons, the article noted the most pragmatic and common reason in favor of the amnesty — immigrant labor was needed, regardless of nativist opposition:

Recent news reports have said cherry, strawberry and other perishable crops are rotting in California and Oregon because there aren't enough immigrant workers — legal or illegal — to pick them (Neufeld, June 11, 1987, p. 1).

The scenario represented an interesting turnabout in the framing of immigration. Whereas "illegal alien as troublemaker" or "illegal alien as drag on society" have been the most common frames for immigrants in the news, it was the INS that got labeled as a burden in the *Telegram*. The headline on *Telegram* Managing Editor Fred Brooks' June 16, 1987, editorial read, "INS red tape." It noted:

Red tape is killing the federal government's illegal alien amnesty program. Much of the red tape is needless. Most of it is wasteful. All of it is frustrating. ... Frustrating are the bureaucratic explanations and the excuses for problems. That's to be expected with any new government program, but the illegal alien amnesty program has been particularly blessed with a good number of bureaucratic gremlins. There's still time for the INS to salvage things, if it's willing to cut the red tape (Brooks, June 16, 1987, p. 4).

Two years later, after the INS closed the Garden City enforcement office, *Telegram* editor and publisher Jim Bloom wrote:

Closing the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service's Garden City office is a foolish decision. But foolish decisions are the norm from the knucklehead higher-ups in the INS. ... It is difficult to believe the INS, by retreating to Wichita, will do a better job of enforcing immigration laws on the frontlines in southwestern Kansas (Bloom, November 29, 1989, p. 4).

The *Telegram* also blamed companies that hire illegal immigrants. A June 26, 1987, article noted the paperwork employers were required to check to verify workers' identity and work eligibility (Neufeld, June 26, 1987, p. 1). In news articles through that date, it was frequently workers who were labeled "illegal," not their scofflaw employers. That was not the case in that day's house editorial, which called the required I-9 employment eligibility form "the backbone of the Immigration Control and Reform Act of 1986" (Brooks, June 26, 1987, p. 4). The editorial at long last provided acknowledgment of the companies that hire illegal workers as lawbreakers, comparing them to speed-limit scofflaws:

There will, of course, be a few "speed traps" set by the INS every so often. Fines will be stiff, from \$100 to \$1,000 for each ineligible employee. That threat should catch the attention of most employers. We hope it does, because the only way for the U.S. to regain control of its borders is to eliminate the economic incentive for companies to hire, and thus implicitly recruit, illegal aliens. (p. 4).

The frame of "scofflaw employers" resurfaced in an editorial that Bloom wrote in response to a *New York Times* report headlined "Vast fraud by migrants found in amnesty plan." Bloom wrote:

Alas, in the face of considerable lobbying by fruit and vegetable growers in Texas and California, Congress created a loophole. The growers wanted to protect their cheap labor force. So instead of having to prove nearly five years of continuous residence, most

agricultural worker applicants had to show only that they had done 90 days of farm work between May 1, 1985, and May 1, 1986. ... Now the Immigration and Naturalization Service has identified 398,000 possible fraud cases among the farm program applications. ... To sum up, the amnesty program and the stiffer immigration laws outlined in the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 are as open today as they were when the act was passed.” (Nov. 22, 1989, p. 4)

Not all of the *Telegram's* attention to immigration matters went to undocumented workers. The newspaper also celebrated members of the community who successfully completed the path to U.S. citizenship. “New citizens: Doctor and Mrs. Arroyo make it official,” read the headline on December 10, 1987. Zefarino and Violeta Arroyo, immigrants from the Philippines who came to Garden City in 1968, became legal residents in 1972 and were sworn in as naturalized citizens with about 140 others from western Kansas, mostly Vietnamese, Cambodians and Laotians (Post, Dec. 10, 1987, p. 2). “We’ve been paying our fair share [of taxes],” Violeta Arroyo noted, reinforcing the story’s immigrant-as-exemplar frame.

The amnesty program then went unmentioned in the *Telegram* until April 1988, when only a week remained for people to apply. The front-page article reminded prospective applicants which documents were necessary and informed readers that the INS would accept incomplete applications and file supporting documents later (Neufeld, April 27, 1988, p. 1). The article also noted the INS closed the Garden City legalization office because it wasn’t processing many applications, although social service agencies continued to assist with them. A total of 2,200 people applied during the general amnesty period in Kansas City, 1,975 in Wichita, 967 in Garden City and 490 in St. Louis (Harris News Service, May 5, 1988, p. 3). In southwest Kansas, about 500 applied under the special agriculture worker amnesty at the United Methodist Mexican American Ministries office in Garden City and the Harvest America office in Leoti (Neufeld, Dec. 2, 1988, p. 1). In national wire coverage, an Associated Press story quoted INS spokesman Greg Leo on the eve of the May 5, 1988, general amnesty deadline: “At this time, it appears we will break 2 million” for the combined programs (Associated Press, May 5, 1988, p. 9). The AP story used the term “illegal immigrants” in the lead, although “illegal aliens” and “aliens” appeared further down in the story, an indicator that the wire service was making strides toward more inclusive language but was inconsistent.

Immigration reform in the 1990s

As the *Telegram* became more aware of Hispanic immigrants in Garden City, its use of stories about immigration legislation from the wire services increased. An October 1990 *Telegram* article reported that the U.S. House was prepared to approve a measure designed to reunite families kept apart by previous immigration law and end 25-year-old barriers against would-be immigrants from northern European nations and others that had sent immigrants to the United

States (Associated Press, Oct. 3, 1990, p. 1). The measure also was intended to increase the number of “highly skilled and otherwise needed foreign workers who would be allowed into the U.S.”

Immigration legislation received no further mention until the *Telegram* covered Proposition 187, a California ballot that would deny illegal immigrants access to health care, public education and other social services, on its op-ed page in October 1994. *Telegram* editors deemed interest in 187 to be high enough that they included a brief on the front page about 70,000 protesters marching on Los Angeles City Hall to protest the proposition (Associated Press, Oct. 17, 1994, p. 1). The lead on an in-depth explanation of it took a narrative approach:

SAN DIEGO (AP) — Mary Sanchez is fed up with illegal immigrants soliciting work from street corners in her suburb, then getting paid under the table and paying no income taxes. On Nov. 8 she will vote for Proposition 187, one of the most incendiary ballot measures to hit California since the English-only initiative passed in 1986 (Associated Press, Oct. 26, 1994, p. 8).

The article noted that Sanchez was “not Hispanic but is married to a man of Mexican descent.” When the proposition passed on Election Day with 59 percent of the vote, the *Telegram* carried an AP story that framed the story as anti-crime, not anti-minority. The *Telegram* localized few national stories, but immigration was an exception. Given the transnational nature of Garden City’s Latino immigrants and their habit of maintaining social networks over vast distances, the California vote was played much like a local issue. A local sidebar by *Telegram* reporter Itzel Stewart quoted Garden Citians who opposed the measure. Her sources said that children should not be deprived of an education and that it is cruel to deny medical and educational services (Stewart, Nov. 10, 1994, p. 1). One source pointed out that contrary to Sanchez’s assertion, income tax is deducted from undocumented workers’ paychecks and that illegal immigrants pay sales tax every time they make a purchase, like everybody else. A federal judge blocked enforcement of 187 because it was unconstitutional (Associated Press, Nov. 17, 1994, p. 5). Stewart, a naturalized citizen born in Panama, was the only Hispanic on the *Telegram* staff. Her byline appeared as “Itzel Rodriguez” after she remarried in the late 1990s.

Given that story selection and placement are among the elements of framing, the decision to give front-page, above-the-fold play to Mexican President Carlos Salinas de Gortari’s November 1994 invitation for Mexicans in the United States to come home indicates that editors perceived it as important and highly interesting to their readers. The article carries the frame of “immigrant as hard worker,” and its position suggests the editors believed it was important to promote this frame:

Salinas said Mexicans go to the United States in search of jobs — not the public services that California would deny to illegal immigrants under the state’s newly passed Proposition 187 (Associated Press, Nov. 14, 1994, p. 1).

The article's selection contested the nativist frame of "immigrant as parasite" promoted a few days before by *Telegram* reader Rob Andrews, whose letter to the editor blamed immigration for crowding in Garden City's public schools and contended Kansas should follow other states' lead and discourage immigrants from coming for "freebies":

An elementary school teacher told me a story about six girls in her third grade class talking about impending births in their families. Becoming curious, she asked how many of them were expecting another baby in their families soon. Five out of six. I asked her how many were Hispanic? "Oh — all of them." ... California and Texas have both passed initiatives restricting the freebies provided by the state and community to illegal aliens. The fate of these laws is still in question, but with the recent election reflecting a strong shift to the right in American thinking, proposition such as 187 are raising a lot of eyebrows. If you were an illegal alien in California or Texas, what would you be thinking? Colorado? Kansas? Garden City? ... If we had enacted something like Proposition 187 four years ago, we might not need new schools now" (Andrews, Nov. 11, 1994, p. 4).

Bloom, who remained *Telegram* editor and publisher until 1997, didn't miss the opportunity to respond by selecting a syndicated editorial cartoon labeled "California: The Nation's Trendsetter." The Golden State is depicted on a map of the Western United States with a huge "Yes on 187" yard sign sticking out of the San Joaquin Valley and a voice balloon stating, "I say we blame our problems on poor kids" (Pett, Nov. 21, 1994, p. 4). Latino community leader Norma DeLaO (1994, p. 4) wrote in a letter to the editor the next day, "We should be addressing this problem with education instead of trying to find someone to blame." Her response evoked the "immigrant seeking opportunity" frame:

The United States is seen as a land of opportunity. People come here for a better life. We are so lucky to live in a democratic society where life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness are so much valued. The immigrants who come here are fleeing persecution, poverty or war. ... We should be proud of the way Garden City has embraced immigrants. The community has grown both in size and in cultural diversity that has gained nationwide recognition. Our immigrants have worked hard and have made their home here. We have many businesses that are owned by Third World immigrants. I am proud to be a member of this group (DeLaO, 1994, p. 4).

Bloom selected an editorial (*Statesman-Journal*, 1994) from a paper in Salem, Ore., to run in place of the house editorial that asked, "Are Americans so callous that we would take from the lowest economic rung of our population just

to give the rest of us a few more pennies?” Congress turned out to be “that callous” in 1996, when it passed the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act, creating harsher penalties for illegal immigration, restricting welfare benefits to recent immigrants, and making the deportation process easier for U.S. administrators. The *Telegram* detailed the impact: “Gloomy notices will be arriving in hundreds of thousands of mailboxes in the next few weeks: The government is cutting off disability benefits for up to half a million elderly and disabled legal immigrants (Associated Press, Feb. 15, 1997, p. A7). The story quoted advocate Muriel Heiberger of the Massachusetts Immigration and Refugee Advocacy Coalition in Boston, who said, “People are going to be in absolutely desperate straits. This is the money they have to pay rent, to buy prescription medication to buy the basics for survival.” Other advocates pointed to hardship cases that included Cuban and Vietnamese refugees with no family to care for them. U.S. Rep. Clay Shaw, representing the Republicans who created the legislation, was quoted as saying, “It shows how the immigrants are really coming here and using the U.S. as a retirement program.” The story employed a sympathetic frame that juxtaposed pitifully helpless people against heartless bureaucrats. Examples likely to evoke sympathy got three times the space of the explanation of why the bill was deemed necessary.

Conclusion: Talking *to*, not just *about*, immigrants and proposing community solutions

A Chinese proverb states, “To know the road ahead, ask those coming back.” The *Telegram*’s reporters and editors have seen the road ahead when it comes to Hispanic immigration into the nation’s interior. Community journalists, particularly in rural areas of the Midwest and Southeast that are seeing the most rapid growth in Latino immigrant population, would do well to heed the example of the *Garden City Telegram* and learn from its experience. By 2050, Hispanics are projected to be 24.4 percent of the American population, up from 12.6 percent in 2000 (Census, 2006). If reporters, editors and executives want a taste of what is coming their way, they need to look at how Garden City and its newspaper evolved in their coverage and inclusion of Hispanics. They also must acknowledge what scholar Arlene Dávila argued in 2008: Contrary to nativist portrayals of Latino immigrants as social liabilities, a growing consensus argues these newcomers contribute to the economies of the communities that receive them, they are moving up, and they are in some ways more “American” in their values than the native-born (Dávila, 2008). News media must embrace this change if they hope to remain socially relevant, but they also must pay attention to Hispanics to remain economically viable. Wilson, Gutiérrez & Chao (2003) elaborate on this point:

More than population growth and technological advances, however, it is the economic mechanisms of support that control the development of media in the United States. Corporate advertisers largely support print and broadcast media. When advertising is increased for a particular segment of the population, the media that

reach and influence that segment gain increased advertising dollars. These dollars also make it more economically profitable for managers of existing media to consider changes to formats and content to try to attract that segment and the advertising dollars that will follow (Wilson et. al, 2003, p. 297).

Community journalists should feel compelled to fulfill two needs that are quite different from the concerns of large market news organizations. The first is immigrants' need for information to help them acculturate to the United States, a role that Latino-oriented publications have long fulfilled in places with long histories as immigration gateways (Rodríguez, 1999). The second is publishers' need to profit. Immigrants are an engine of small-business creation and population growth in rural areas, which have suffered declining populations for decades (Farmer & Moon, 2011). These entrepreneurial immigrants have begun to create cultural, sports, and business ventures that serve receiving communities' native and immigrant populations alike (Hernández-León and Zúñiga, 2002). Latino immigrants represent a potential new market for community publishers to sell advertising and build circulations through the introduction of bilingual and immigrant-oriented niche advertisements, features, sections, and publications.

Asked in an interview for this project what lessons the *Telegram* held for newspapers in markets experiencing an influx of immigrants, Bloom said, "Be aware that change is occurring in the community, and know that attitude means a lot. You can say, 'This place is changing, and that's bad,' or you can make the most of things and try to make it a better place."

The stance of the *Telegram* seems clear after a review of its editorials: While the paper assumed illegal entry into the United States was not praiseworthy, it saw that the local, state and national economies needed it. This pragmatism reflected the business realities of the Garden City region. Although the newspaper respected the traditional firewall between the opinion pages and the news pages as demanded by the journalistic orthodoxy of objectivity, its approaches to covering immigration were subtly tilted in favor of immigrants. Its shift to more inclusive language and away from dehumanizing terms such as "illegal alien" provides evidence of this at the micro level of word usage. But at the macro level of narrative, pragmatism was evidenced by *Telegram* articles' inclusion of the defense of immigrants. Pragmatism was evidenced by journalists' source selection, which included stakeholders such as social service providers and the immigrants themselves and thus provided points of view beyond those of INS bureaucrats and law enforcement officials.

Further, when the 1986 immigration reforms were implemented, the *Telegram* sought to reveal problems in INS bureaucracy and offer solutions. And last, by including information on how an illegal immigrant could apply for amnesty, the *Telegram* did not speak about immigrants in the third person, but directly to them. These aspects of reporting and editorializing might not reflect just sympathy so much as pragmatism: There was hard, low-paying work to do, and there were not enough people in southwest Kansas to do it, so what was the matter with bringing in help from south of the border? All of these factors

combined in a strain of journalism that sought to be inclusive of foreign newcomers. In doing so, the *Telegram* provided a model for how community news organizations in similar situations can promote a positive context of reception for immigrants.

This is significant because, as a study of immigration discourse in the *Virginian Pilot* newspaper revealed, media discourse can shape the perception of real and imagined intergroup threats, leading to negative in-group perceptions and behaviors that discriminate against members of the marginalized Latino immigrant out-group (Stewart et. al, 2011). Stewart et. al explained such behavior with Tajfel & Turner's social identity theory (1986). Social identity theory proposes that members of a dominant in-group, such as whites in a majority-white community, maintain their power and gain competitive advantage over members of marginalized out-groups, such as immigrants, by promoting and maintaining a positive image of the in-group while doing the same with negative images of out-groups. The result can be spiraling social and economic inequality and the assignment of out-group members to status as members of a permanent inferior class. In contrast to the Virginia study's demonstration of the consequences of the symbolic construction of Latino newcomers as illegal immigrants, the present case study provides an example of an alternative construction of Latino immigrant newcomers as potential citizens and contributors to society rather than threats to the communities receiving them. The present study points to a key difference between community journalism and metro journalism. In the journalism of smaller communities in which people share an identity of place, the urge to accept may be stronger than the urge to divide. By this logic, community and in-group membership are the same.

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