Number 23, October 2013

bread for the world INSTITUTE

briefing paper

A Tale of Two Cities (and a Town): Immigrants in the Rust Belt

by Andrew Wainer

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Abstract

In the midst of the debate over the largest potential immigration reform legislation in 50 years, some American communities struggling with decades of population loss and economic decline are being revitalized by newcomers. The role of immigrants in high-skilled fields is relatively well-known, but less acknowledged are the contributions that "blue collar" immigrants make to revitalizing depressed communities and economies, both as manual laborers and small business entrepreneurs.

In Rust Belt communities such as Baltimore, Detroit, and southeastern Iowa, immigration has slowed—and in some cases reversed—decades of population loss. It is revitalizing neighborhoods and commercial corridors. Immigrants—including lower-skilled immigrants—help generate jobs and economic growth for U.S.-born workers.

Immigrants are a disproportionate number of our country's entrepreneurs. This is particularly true in Rust Belt cities, where immigrants are more likely to be entrepreneurs than they are in more traditional immigrant gateways. But to make their full potential economic impact in the Rust Belt, unauthorized immigrants need a path to citizenship.

Key Points

- Immigration is slowing—and in some cases reversing—decades of population decline in American Rust Belt communities, from Baltimore to Detroit to rural Iowa.
- Immigrants are more likely than U.S.-born residents to be entrepreneurs. While they are 13 percent of the national population and 16 percent of the labor force, they are 18 percent of small business owners. Immigrants in Rust Belt cities are more likely to be entrepreneurs than those in other parts of the United States.
- Immigrants contribute disproportionately to the U.S. economic output—particularly to the Rust Belt's economic production.
- To maximize their economic contributions to Rust Belt cities, immigrants who are unauthorized need legalization and a path to citizenship.

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Introduction: Immigration and the Rise of Urban Industrial America

"*Central to the formation of modern North American society has been the growth of a vast urban industrial complex, extending from the Eastern Seaboard to the Great Lakes region, which began to develop in the 1870s and reached maturity in the 1920s.*"[1]

Following the Civil War, the economic force that developed in places such as Baltimore, Detroit, and the Midwestern breadbasket was fueled by immigrant laborers and entrepreneurs from places such as Ireland, Italy, and Russia. Between 1870 and 1920, about 25 million immigrants arrived in America, transforming backwoods trading outposts into urban-industrial dynamos.[2] By the mid-20th century, immigrant laborers and entrepreneurs contributed to making Detroit automobiles, Pittsburgh steel, and Iowa corn into global brands. But by the 1970s, much of America's Northeastern and Midwestern urban industrial base was eroding, and population decline followed. In 1950, Detroit was the fourth-largest city in the country with 1.8 million residents. By 2010, it had a population of 713,777— a population decline of 61 percent in 60 years.[3]

Cities with vibrant immigrant Irish, Jewish, and Italian neighborhoods began to empty as natives and immigrants alike moved to the suburbs or left the region completely: The Rust Belt was born. But even as "urban decay" entered the national lexicon, a new wave of immigrants trickled into the Rust Belt. What began during the 1980s grew in the 1990s and 2000s, as immigrants moved into cities that offered low-skill jobs, affordable housing, entrepreneurial opportunities, and sometimes even a welcoming attitude toward newcomers.

Mark Fenton/Bread for the World

Immigrants in the Rust Belt often work in the building trades. In this photo a worker installs a solar roof on a house.

Today, in the midst of a policy debate over the largest potential immigration reform in 50 years, cities still struggling in the post-industrial economy, particularly in the wake of the Great Recession, are looking to immigrants for economic revitalization. While immigration alone is not a sufficient tool for urban renewal, some of America's blighted cities see newcomers as a necessary part of their revival. There is a growing body of research on the contributions of immigrants to economic growth and job creation, including manufacturing jobs, for U.S.-born workers. Immigrants have also proven to be "pioneers" in neighborhood revitalization: as they resettle abandoned areas, they are followed by U.S.-born residents.[4]

Immigration as Urban Repopulation

"*For cities…outside the Sun Belt, population decline is the norm without immigration. Moreover, immigration explains all of the growth that does occur…The data say that…to stabilize [urban populations], immigrants are essential.*"[5]

The Ellis Island of the South

During the mid-19th century, Baltimore was a boomtown. In 1860, with 212,418 residents, it was the third-largest city in the United States after New York and Philadelphia. The city was building 2,000 houses a year to accommodate the population growth, which was spurred by new jobs in the shipbuilding, railroad, textile, and construction industries.[6] Fells Point in Baltimore, with an estimated 2 million immigrants entering between 1850 and 1910, was the second-largest port-of-entry in the country after Ellis Island.[7]

Moreover, as many as half of the millions of immigrants who landed in Baltimore stayed there, contributing to the region's economic development. The city's population was 25 percent foreign-born* by 1860, with many of the poor European immigrants working in the city's low-skilled labor sector. As one observer wrote, "Thousands of young German, Irish, and English men chose Baltimore because the prospects of employment in the region were good for those who had few skills and little capital."[8] Just as previous waves of immigrants struggled with poverty, today's immigrants are also disproportionately poor, in spite of high levels of workforce participation. About one-third of the city's foreign-born noncitizens live in poverty.[9]

* The terms "immigrant" and "foreign-born" are used interchangeably in this report.

Poverty is often even more prevalent for the children of immigrants—most of whom are U.S. citizens.[10]

Like Detroit, Baltimore's population peaked in 1950 at almost a million, and then entered a long decline. In the 2010 census, Baltimore had 620,961 residents—it had lost 35 percent of its population. Today, after decades of decline, Baltimore, along with Detroit and other Rust Best communities such as Dayton, Pittsburgh, and St. Louis, is courting immigrants to stabilize its population (see Table 1).

Civic leaders agree that repopulation is a central Baltimorean policy goal. "[Baltimore] is just block after block of boarded up houses," Maryland Hunger Solutions Program Advocate Anita Wahi says. "[The] biggest problem right now is just filling up the city." Father Robert Wojtek, of Sacred Heart of Jesus Church in Baltimore, said immigrants are the primary means of countering the city's depopulation. "If these folks weren't here...then who would be taking the brunt of the impact of not having a population?" he said. "Housing and buildings would be even emptier than they are. The ones that are going to populate [the city] are the immigrants."

Baltimore City Hall has long been aware of the potential of immigration to repopulate the city—or at least to slow its decline—and has taken steps to welcome newcomers. In 2008 Gov. Martin O'Malley established the Maryland Council for New Americans to "review and recommend new policies and practices to expedite immigrant integration into the economic and civic life of the state."[11] Building on O'Malley's efforts, in December 2011 Baltimore Mayor Stephanie Rawlings-Blake set a city goal: attracting 10,000 new families over the next decade.[12] "She [Rawlings-Blake] needs bodies," said Betty Symington, executive director of the Baltimore Episcopal Refugee and Immigrant Coalition. "And immigration is a very important way to turn that around."

In March 2012 Rawlings-Blake issued an executive order barring city agencies from using municipal funds to apprehend unauthorized** residents and ordered city agencies to provide all services allowable under federal law to residents regardless of their immigration status.[13] In an interview with National Public Radio in August 2012, Rawlings-Blake said, "We are open for business, particularly in the area of Latino immigrants. We've actively recruited Latino immigrants to Baltimore, and when they come here, they're thriving. Many have opened businesses, employed individuals... I think it's a win-win."[14]

Table 1 Population of Baltimore, MD 1950-2012

Year	population	percent change in population
1950	949,708	10.5%
1960	939,024	–1.1%
1970	905,759	–3.5%
1980	786,775	–13.1%
1990	736,014	–6.5%
2000	651,154	–11.5%
2010	620,961	–4.6%
Est. 2012	621,342	0.1%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Table 2 Baltimore Metropolitan Area Immigrant Population, 2000-2010

	2000	2010
# Immigrant	146,128	251,260
% Immigrant	5.7	9.3
# change in immigrant population 2000-2010	105,132	
% change in immigrant population 2000-2010	72%	

Source: Immigrants in 2010 Metropolitan America: A Decade of Change. Brookings Institution, October 2011. http://www.refugeehighway.net/downloads/regionnamerica/2010-Brookings-Report-Decade-of-Change-USA.pdf

Baltimore's Latino population is still small—in 2010, the city had about 26,000 Latinos, about 4 percent of the population.[15] But this is a 137 percent increase from 2000; moreover, the steep increase occurred even though the city lost more than 4 percent of its overall population in this same decade.[16] Furthermore, according to U.S. Census Bureau reports, immigration may be the primary cause of an incipient reverse in Baltimore's population loss. After 60 years of population loss, the Census Bureau reported that there were 621,342 people in Baltimore in July 2012, up slightly from a year earlier. The population gain was attributed to "increased [immigration] at the same time as the number of people leaving the city went down."[17] While the numbers are small, the impact of immigration on Baltimore is clear to both analysts and residents. A 2010 report by the Baltimore Metropolitan Council found that foreign immigration will continue to be the major source of population growth in the Baltimore region," adding, "Integrating these populations into the social and economic fabric of the region will require a concerted and sustained effort"[18] (see Table 2).

The 2000 Census was a wake-up call, alerting residents to the potential benefits of immigration for Baltimore and new immigrants to the potential benefits of coming to Baltimore. Between 1990 and 2000, the city lost 85,000 residents—11.5

**Undocumented and unauthorized are used interchangeable in this report to refer to immigrants in the United States who are not in the country legally.

Figure 1 Highlandtown and Fells Point Neighborhoods, Baltimore, MD

percent of its population. Partly in reaction to this decline, one of the city's worst ever, in 2002 the Baltimore-based Abell Foundation identified the importance of immigrants to stemming population decline, calling them "essential."[19] But Census data and social science are not the only evidence of the impact of immigration on the city. Residents see it all the time. "[Baltimore neighborhood Fells Point] was very blighted...you would really not feel comfortable or safe walking down the street," said Luis Borunda, founder of the Baltimore Hispanic Chamber of Commerce. "Slowly, Hispanic owned-businesses started opening up and really changed the landscape. It's...attracted other [non-Latino] businesses."

Latin American immigrants have focused on the Fell's Point and Highlandtown sectors of Baltimore that were home to immigrants from Eastern Europe, Greece, and Italy a century ago. The impact of the new wave of immigrants is palpable. "The apartments around here are all full...Places are being repopulated," said Lisa O'Reilly of St. Anthony's Catholic Church. Jose Rivas, vice president of the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, also noted the change in the two neighborhoods. "I remember when I first came here [in 2000]... the Eastern Avenue corridor...was dead at that point, all the businesses were shutting down. Now it's a vibrant community (see Figure 1)."

Unplanned Success

Why are immigrants moving to Baltimore and how can the city attract more newcomers? Most observers say that the real attractions for immigrants in Baltimore are economic; they run deeper than a municipal public relations campaign. Specifically, immigrants go to Baltimore for manual labor jobs and a low cost of living; many also have family connections.[20]

The 2002 report by the Abell Foundation mentioned above found that most cities that reversed population decline through immigration had not planned for this success. "There are no strategic plans or prospective programs to draw upon," the report stated. "In the absence of examples of planned activities that attracted immigrants...Baltimore must base its plans on those inherent characteristics that appear to have made these cities different."[21] Another report on immigrants in Baltimore stated that the impact of a pro-immigration city government campaign was questionable: "It is...less certain how much this official, top-down pro-immigration stance translates into the actual lives of Baltimore's foreign-born."[22]

Baltimore residents who work with immigrants agree that manual labor jobs and affordable housing make the difference. "Immigrants tend to look for opportunity, a lot of them are entrepreneurs," said Patricia Hatch, a program manager at the Maryland Office for Refugees and Asylees. "The ones that are coming in as [manual] workers are the ones looking for affordable housing." Jose Ortiz, who is originally from Puerto Rico and who built his own construction company in the city, said that immigrants were attracted by the combination of blue-collar jobs and low-cost housing. "Rent was cheap and the work was there, that's really the bottom line," he said. "That's why I grew so rapidly, [Baltimore started] developing everywhere...sports were coming in...the stadiums...the Inner Harbor...that's how I got my break."

Jose Rivas also traces the immigrant influx to a growth in construction work in the city that began about a decade ago. "During the early 2000s...there was construction that was picking up a lot in the area," Rivas said. "There were buildings, roads. Most of labor was Latino. Also the cost of living is very low. Housing is very inexpensive."

Baltimore's public outreach to immigrants may not be the decisive factor in attracting them, but it can only enhance the city's natural attractions for immigrants. Some Rust Belt communities experiencing more severe poverty and population loss, however, are trying to attract newcomers without government outreach.

The Silicon Valley of the Early 1900s

Like Baltimore, Detroit was founded in the early 1700s. In the early 1800s, it received waves of immigrants from Germany, Scandinavia, and Poland. Industrialization and immigration accelerated after the Civil War. By 1870 almost half of Detroit's population of 79,577 was foreign-born.[23] By the late 19th century, before the growth of the automobile industry, the city developed a manufacturing industry based on building stoves, machines, and other goods. But it was automobiles that transformed Detroit from a second-tier city in the 1800s to the center of America's most important industry by 1950. The immigrant influx to Michigan during

the late 18th and early 19th centuries helped make Detroit a global brand. According to researchers, "There is a direct correlation between the rise of manufacturing in Michigan and the increases in foreign immigration...into Michigan in general and into Detroit in particular."[24] The role of the Ford Motor Company in the city's industrial growth, and its immigrant population growth, is legendary. Henry Ford scoured the globe to attract workers for his factories, and they included artisans from the British Isles and laborers from Mexico and the Arab world.[25]

Table 3 Population of Detroit, MI 1950-2012

Year	population	percent change in population
1950	1,849,568	13.9%
1960	1,670,144	-9.7%
1970	1,511,482	-9.5%
1980	1,203,339	-20.4%
1990	1,027,974	-14.6%
2000	951,270	-7.5%
2010	713,777	-25%
Est. 2012	701,475	-1.7%

Source: Author's calculations of data from the U.S. Census Bureau and Data Driven Detroit, http://datadrivendetroit.org/

By 1950, Detroit was the fourth-largest city in the country with 1.8 million residents. But as mentioned earlier, the 1950s would prove to be the city's population peak. With the loss of manufacturing jobs, the city was transformed from an industrial powerhouse to an emblem of urban decline. By 2010 Detroit's population was 713,777, the lowest since 1910. A 2011 New York Times article quoted a local official as stating, "It's a major city in free-fall...Detroit's tax base is eroding, its citizens are fleeing and its school system is in the hands of a financial manager." [26] Detroit has the highest poverty rates of the nation's 50 largest cities, with nearly half of all children living in poverty[27] (see Tables 3 and 4).

Today, as in Baltimore, a coalition of foundations, community organizations, and business leaders are seeking to attract immigrants to the Motor City. But unlike Baltimore, in Detroit local government is not playing a central role. Observers say it's too overwhelmed with other problems to make welcoming immigrants a priority. In July 2013 Detroit became the largest city in U.S. history to declare bankruptcy.[28] Because of the challenges facing local government, most of the work of integrating immigrants is being done by the nonprofit and business sectors. "In this town it's about dollars, and the availability of dollars," said Hector Hernandez, executive director of Southwest Solutions, a community service agency in Detroit that works with immigrants. "The city is tackling a myriad of problems, monumental problems. I don't think [immigration] is high on the radar yet...fundamentally the city doesn't have the resources to help us on any kind of scale."

Table 4 Detroit Metropolitan Area Immigrant Population, 2000-2010

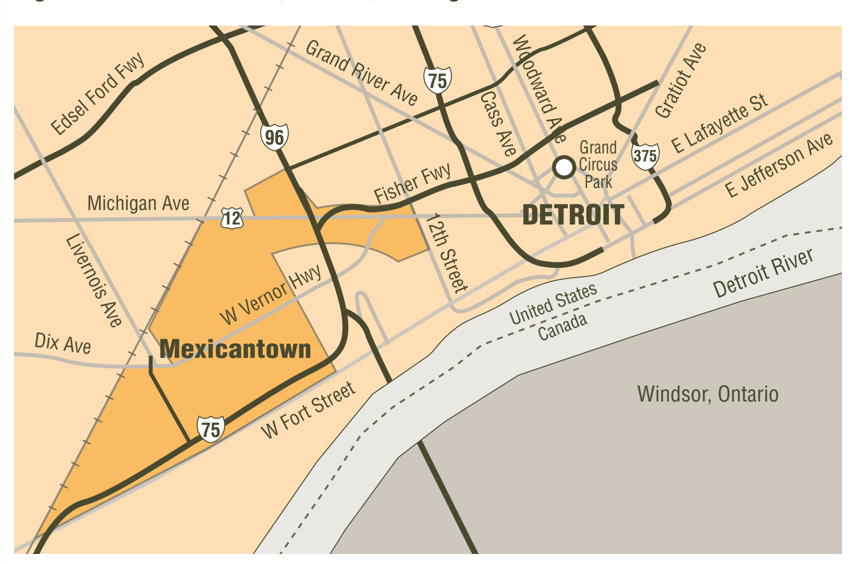
	2000	2010
# Immigrant	337,059	367,371
% Immigrant	7.6	8.6
# change in immigrant population 2000-2010	30,312	
% change in immigrant population 2000-2010	9%	

Source: Immigrants in 2010 Metropolitan America: A Decade of Change. Brookings Institution, October 2011. http://www.refugeehighway.net/downloads/regionnamerica/2010-Brookings-Report-Decade-of-Change-USA.pdf

But even without government support, immigration and the growth of immigrant neighborhoods was one of the few bright spots in Detroit's 2010 Census. Between 2000 and 2010, the city lost 237,000 residents—25 percent of the total population in just 10 years. But the city's southwest neighborhoods, an area known as "Mexicantown" and populated heavily by Latin American immigrants, actually increased in population. While the city lost 41,000 whites and 185,393 blacks in this decade, it gained 1,512 Latinos[29] (see Figure 2).

"[Southwest Detroit] is the only low-income neighborhood that is growing," said Steve Tobocman, director of Global Detroit, an organization promoting Detroit as a destination

Figure 2 Mexicantown, Detroit, Michigan



for immigrants. While Detroit City Hall does not have a robust program to welcome immigrants, the positive impact of immigration on the city is not lost on local officials. In 2012 Detroit Mayor Dave Bing called Mexicantown "one of the bright spots in our city."[30] Hector Hernandez said that the vibrancy of southwest Detroit is also reflected in the abundance of fresh food markets in the midst of a city described as a food desert. "In southwest Detroit you have no less than five really large grocery stores that cater to the ethnic community," Hernandez said.

Experts working with the local immigrant community said that immigrants also come to southwest Detroit with the skills needed to build it up. "A lot of the neighborhood is being built house-by-house, block-by-block by immigrants, many of whom are undocumented, many of whom have construction skills by trade," said Ryan Bates, director of the Alliance for Immigrant Rights. "They are buying houses that are abandoned, that are dilapidated and rebuilding them." This is in line with national studies showing that immigrants stabilize communities in decline. Often, native-born Americans move into these areas after they are "pioneered" by newcomers. One study by the Americas Society/Council of the Americas and the Partnership for a New American Economy found that "for every 1,000 immigrants settling in a county, 250 U.S.-born individuals follow, likely drawn by the increased economic opportunities created by immigrants."[31] The report also found that nationwide, immigrants created $3.7 trillion in housing wealth.

As in Baltimore, manual labor jobs and an abundance of affordable housing are the main attractions for immigrants to Detroit. Bates said that these socioeconomic characteristics have been drawing in immigrants despite the lack of a specific immigration strategy from the city. "We tried to engage [local government] on immigrant integration and welcoming but the city's in such crisis that it's been hard to get it on the radar," he said. Although Detroit City Hall isn't actively welcoming immigrants, Michigan has a perhaps unexpected immigration champion: Republican Governor Rick Snyder. In May 2013, Snyder tweeted, "If you made a short list of what made America great, immigration would be on it." Snyder is working with a bipartisan group of political and business leaders to promote immigration reform as a way to spur economic growth in Michigan.[32] "People think they're taking jobs," Snyder said of immigrants, "but the reality is that they create jobs."[33]

Snyder's stance on immigration reflects a national consensus that high-skilled immigrants are a net economic benefit to the economy. The more difficult task for those seeking to create a welcoming environment for immigrants in the Rust Belt is illustrating the benefits of attracting lower-skill immigrants, many of whom enter the United States impoverished and without authorization. This can prove to be especially difficult among U.S.-born Rust Belt residents struggling in depressed economies. "Lower-skill immigration helps address our aging workforce and population loss," said Susan Reed, attorney for the Michigan Immigrant Rights Center. "That's a real opportunity to say that immigrants are uniquely positioned to move us into the future. But that's a hard sell to someone whose kids had to leave the state [to find jobs]." Nevertheless, Reed said she thinks Detroit doesn't have alternatives to immigration when it comes to repopulation and economic development. "A lot of young Michiganders have left and they are not coming back," she said. "If we are going to have any kind of economic development, we don't have population growth happening any other way than immigration."

Immigration and Urban Economic Revitalization

"In the 25 largest metropolitan areas, immigration and economic growth go hand in hand. That's easily understandable: Economic growth and labor force growth are closely connected, and immigrants are likely to move to areas where there are jobs…Between 1990 and 2006, the metropolitan areas with the fastest economic growth were also the areas with the greatest increase in immigrant share of the labor force… The challenge is to make sure that immigrants and U.S.-born workers struggling in low-wage jobs share in the benefits of economic growth."[34]

Immigrants' impact on the U.S. economy is complex—there's a kaleidoscope of costs and benefits—but any objective reading of the research reveals that immigration brings a net gain to the national economy. In the Rust Belt as elsewhere, the key dispute is over to what extent immigrants displace existing workers. Or do they complement the workers already there? Most research indicates that immigrants contribute more than their share to economic productivity. According to a 2009 study by the Fiscal Policy Institute (FPI), "In the United States, immigrants make up 12.5 percent of the population and they are responsible for 14 percent of economic output."

The FPI report measures immigrant economic impact using a tool, the Immigrant Economic Contribution Ratio (IECR), that quantifies the relationship between population size and economic output. FPI finds that immigrants make particularly large contributions in the 25 largest metro areas, most of all in Rust Belt cities. Both Baltimore and Detroit have immigrant economic contribution IECR ratios far above average. The only cities with higher IECR ratios were other Rust Belt metros, including St. Louis, Cleveland, and Cincinnati (see Table 5).[35]

Regional studies also find that economic growth in the Rust Belt is driven in part by a blue-collar immigrant labor

Table 5 Immigrant Economic Contribution Ratio by Metro Area

Metropolitan Statistical Areas	Foreign-born Share of Population	Foreign-born Share of Economic Output	Immigrant Economic Contribution Ratio
New York	28%	28%	1.00
Los Angeles	35%	34%	1.00
Chicago	18%	18%	1.02
Dallas	18%	16%	0.91
Philadelphia	9%	10%	1.11
Houston	21%	21%	0.99
Miami	37%	38%	1.03
Washington	20%	20%	0.98
Atlanta	13%	13%	1.03
Detroit	9%	11%	1.30
Boston	16%	16%	0.99
San Francisco	30%	29%	0.98
Phoenix	17%	15%	0.89
Riverside	22%	25%	1.15
Seattle	15%	16%	1.02
Minneapolis	9%	8%	0.88
San Diego	23%	23%	0.98
St. Louis	4%	5%	1.22
Tampa	12%	13%	1.08
Baltimore	8%	9%	1.24
Denver	13%	10%	0.82
Pittsburgh	3%	4%	1.47
Portland	12%	12%	0.98
Cincinnati	3%	5%	1.39
Cleveland	6%	7%	1.26
Total for 25 Metro Areas	**20%**	**20%**	**1.02**
Total for U.S.	**12%**	**14%**	**1.12**

Source: Immigrants and the Economy: Contribution of Immigrant Workers to the Country's 25 Largest Metropolitan Areas. *Fiscal Policy Institute*, December 2009.

force. A 2012 report on the impact of immigrants on Maryland found that, "Over the past decade Maryland's growth in construction, travel, retail, transportation, farming and fishing sectors was greatly supported through immigration. Without the influx of foreign-born workers, expansion in these labor-intensive industries would have been choked off, increasing prices and discouraging growth across the economy."[36] In Detroit, analysts agree that even immigrants without a great deal of formal education drive economic growth. Matt Bihun, who worked with the Southwest Detroit Business Association, said, "Immigration...is the most important generator of economic development in the city right now. Harnessing their energies and motivations and facilitating that is the most important economic development tool we have." Bihun said that the working-class immigrant neighborhoods of southwest Detroit are "the only area [outside downtown]...that has a thriving main commercial artery."

In Baltimore, data indicate that immigrant neighborhoods in the southeastern part of the city have higher rates of employment and more neighborhood businesses per resident than non-immigrant neighborhoods.[37] Southwest Detroit is more densely populated and has higher rates of employment than the city as a whole.[38] Southwest Detroit is also more entrepreneurial. It has more businesses than downtown Detroit, and 10 percent of all households report self-employment income—about double the rate of the city as a whole.[39]

Immigrant Entrepreneurs

"*The entrepreneurial success of immigrants is well known. For example, business ownership is higher among the foreign-born than the native-born in many developed countries including the United States...Businesses owned by some immigrant groups are also very successful, with higher incomes and employment than native-owned businesses.*"[40]

Immigrant entrepreneurship is an American tradition. Andrew Carnegie escaped poverty as a child in Scotland, came to the United States in 1848, and became a captain of industry and a leading philanthropist. Today's immigrant technology entrepreneurs also lead some of the nation's most successful companies. Foreign-born residents are more inclined than natives to start and own businesses. Few entrepreneurs reach the heights of Carnegie, of course, but immigrants' propensity for entrepreneurship at all levels generates economic activity, including employment, in their communities. Nationally, immigrant-owned small businesses employ 4.7 million people and generate $776 billion in income. While immigrants are 13 percent of the national population and 16 percent of the labor force, they comprise 18 percent of small business owners.[41]

In Rust Belt cities such as Baltimore and Detroit, immigrants are even more likely to be business owners than they are in other metro areas. While 8 percent of Detroit's people are foreign-born, they are 17 percent of all business owners. In Baltimore, foreign-born people are 9 percent of the population but 21 percent of entrepreneurs (see Table 6). In fact, Baltimore and Detroit have the highest ratio of foreign-born entrepreneurs to natives of all major U.S. metro areas; in both cities, immigrants are about twice as likely as natives to own a business. This is also true of Rust Belt cities such as St. Louis and Pittsburgh. All have higher ratios of foreign-born business ownership than traditional immigrant

Table 6 Immigrant Business Ownership is Closely Linked to Immigrant Labor Force

2010 ACS

	Foreign-born Share of Population	Foreign-born Share of Labor Force	Foreign-born Share of Business Owners
New York	29%	36%	36%
Los Angeles	34%	43%	44%
Chicago	18%	22%	27%
Dallas	18%	23%	25%
Houston	22%	29%	31%
Philadelphia	9%	12%	14%
Washington	22%	28%	33%
Miami	39%	47%	45%
Atlanta	14%	18%	21%
Boston	16%	20%	15%
San Francisco	30%	36%	35%
Detroit	8%	10%	17%
Riverside	22%	30%	31%
Phoenix	14%	18%	18%
Seattle	17%	20%	19%
Minneapolis	10%	12%	11%
San Diego	24%	29%	32%
St. Louis	5%	5%	8%
Tampa	13%	16%	17%
Baltimore	9%	12%	21%
Denver	12%	14%	16%
Pittsburgh	3%	3%	4%
Portland	12%	15%	13%
San Antonio	12%	16%	25%
Sacramento	17%	21%	18%
25 MSAs Total	**21%**	**26%**	**28%**
US Total	**13%**	**16%**	**18%**

Source: Immigrants Small Business Owners: A Significant and Growing Part of the Economy, A Report from the Fiscal Policy Institute's Immigration Research Initiative, June, 2012.

Table 7 Ratio of Foreign-born to U.S.-born Business Owners by Metro Area

2010 ACS

	Business Owners as a Share of U.S-born Labor Force	Business Owners as a Share of Foreign-born Labor Force	Ratio of Foreign-born to U.S.-born Share
Baltimore	3.0%	6.1%	2.1
Detroit	2.7%	5.1%	1.9
San Antonio	2.1%	3.6%	1.7
St. Louis	3.1%	4.7%	1.5
Chicago	3.3%	4.4%	1.3
Washington	3.0%	3.8%	1.3
Atlanta	3.8%	4.6%	1.2
Philadelphia	2.9%	3.5%	1.2
Pittsburgh	2.5%	3.0%	1.2
San Diego	3.1%	3.5%	1.1
Dallas	2.5%	2.9%	1.1
Denver	4.2%	4.7%	1.1
Houston	2.4%	2.7%	1.1
Tampa	4.4%	4.8%	1.1
Los Angeles	3.5%	3.7%	1.1
Riverside	2.2%	2.3%	1.1
Phoenix	3.3%	3.3%	1.0
New York	3.7%	3.7%	1.0
Seattle	3.8%	3.7%	1.0
San Francisco	2.9%	2.7%	0.9
Minneapolis	3.5%	3.3%	0.9
Miami	6.4%	5.8%	0.9
Sacramento	2.4%	1.9%	0.8
Portland	3.7%	3.0%	0.8
Boston	3.0%	2.3%	0.8
25 Metro Areas	**3.3%**	**3.7%**	**1.1**
United States	**3.1%**	**3.5%**	**1.1**

Source: Immigrants Small Business Owners: A Significant and Growing Part of the Economy, A Report from the Fiscal Policy Institute's Immigration Research Initiative, June, 2012.

gateway cities such as Los Angeles, New York, and Miami (see Table 7).[42]

A walk through Highlandtown in Baltimore and Mexicantown in Detroit reveals the concentration of business enterprises, particularly food markets and restaurants. "I don't think it's any coincidence that southwest Detroit is one of the only areas that is growing and has the most independently-owned businesses," said Enrique Razo, who works with the Detroit community development organization SER Metro. "When you drive through a lot of the other areas [of the city] there are lot of abandoned houses and abandoned buildings. A lot of immigrants see these buildings as an opportunity...It's a different dynamic over here in the southwest area...There's a lot of revival going on."

Business experts said that Mexicantown in southwest Detroit is an ideal location for small entrepreneurs. "The physical environment lends itself to offering a place where businesses can thrive," said Matt Bihun. "There's greater density in southwest Detroit, there are more young people, there are generally homes with more children, there are fewer vacancies." Bihun said that immigrant entrepreneurship creates a "virtuous circle" of competition. "It's a race upwards. One person does a façade improvement for instance...then all the five other restaurants do the façade improvements,

because they are competing with each other," Bihun said. "I tend to see that in southwest Detroit more than I see that in other parts of [the city]."

Marcos immigrated from Mexico looking for economic opportunity and started his own construction company in Detroit.

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Marcos, a 31-year-old man from Mexico, is an example of how immigrant entrepreneurship affects Detroit. Marcos learned the construction trade from his father in Mexico, but when his father injured his back at work, Marcos felt pressure to support the family—a difficult task in his rural Mexican town. Marcos first entered the United States hidden in a car in 1998 and settled in Texas for several years. He came to Detroit in the early 2000s on the recommendation of a cousin who said he could earn more money. After working as a mason for several years, Marcos decided to use his savings to apply what he learned in Mexico and the United States in his own construction company. Today his home construction and demolition business has seven employees. After living in Mexicantown for some time, Marcos moved his family to the suburbs, where he used his business income to buy a home. He sees Detroit as a land of opportunity. "There's a lot of [construction] work here," he said. "They need more people. Last night we had to work until 8 p.m. because we had another project to do today."

Like West Vernor Highway in Mexicantown, Baltimore has its own immigrant small-business corridors. "You see these little Mom and Pop shops everywhere, and some of them are going to be gone the next year, that's the nature of small business," said Elizabeth Alex of the community organization Casa de Maryland. "But a fair number of them grow and hire workers and fill up commercial corridors. Just having sheer numbers of small businesses can help, especially if they are concentrated in a small area." Betty Symington, executive director of Episcopal Refugee and Immigrant Coalition, said that Baltimore's immigrant businesses tend to be small and are often started out of necessity. "This is how immigrants survive," Symington said. "You can't survive on $9 an hour as a cafeteria worker so a lot of them start business on the side."

Highlandtown in Baltimore and Mexicantown in Detroit are not Rodeo Drive or Fifth Avenue. Most of the businesses are small, as just mentioned, and these commercial corridors experience some of the same urban decay as their broader urban environments, including abandoned storefronts and crumbling buildings. In spite of their tangible impact on the Rust Belt, the potential of immigrant entrepreneurs is constrained by a number of barriers.

Barriers to Immigrant Entrepreneurship

One of the primary challenges is immigrants' limited experience with and trust of the formal financial sector. "[They come] from rural areas where they never had contact with a bank," said Catalina Rodriquez, Baltimore's Hispanic Liaison. "Or back home they might have had a bad experience with a bank. To get the community to trust bank institutions is a problem. There really isn't this mentality of credit or credit cards, it's more of a cash community." This lack of experience with the financial sector, combined for some with the uncertainty created by living in the United States without authorization, leads immigrants to operate outside formal financial channels. "Our community has a lot of wealth, and has a lot of assets, it's just in people's file cabinet or in their bedroom," said Casa de Maryland's Elizabeth Alex. "It's just not being used as well as it could be."

The lack of familiarity with financial institutions extends to a lack of knowledge of how to grow a business beyond the micro level. "For both documented and undocumented immigrants, just having a good business plan to ask for money is the hardest part," said Jose Rivas, vice president of the Baltimore Hispanic Chamber of Commerce. "They don't know anything about leases, they don't have a business plan to go get a loan. They use all of their savings to get a loan from hard money lenders. This is the only option people know so that's where they go."

The unauthorized status of some immigrants reinforces their avoidance of formal financial tools for both personal finances and entrepreneurship. Experts said that the threat of deportation, which is on the increase, means that immigrants want their money close at hand—under the proverbial mattress rather than in the bank. "People might think, 'If I get deported, how would I get my savings,'" said Catalina Rodriquez, Baltimore's Hispanic Liaison. The education, language, and structural barriers facing immigrant entrepreneurs who need a business loan mean that many experts see community development financial institutions as a key component to nurturing immigrant entrepreneurship. "They

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Mexicantown in southwest Detroit boasts a variety of food markets and restaurants, distinguishing it from other parts of the city where residents do not have easy access to food.

need micro-lending for purchasing storefronts, for getting set-up," said Betty Symington, executive director of the Baltimore Episcopal Refugee and Immigrant Coalition.

These barriers to immigrant entrepreneurship have been noted nationally as well as in Baltimore, Detroit, and other Rust Belt cities. Noting that immigrant businesses tend to have lower sales than native businesses, a report by the Small Business Administration states, "Limited access to financial capital may restrict immigrant business success... Insuring sufficient access to financial capital is important for the continued contribution of immigrant-owned businesses to economic growth, job creation, innovation and exports." That report concludes, "Barriers to entry and expansion faced by immigrant small businesses may be costly to U.S. productivity, especially because immigrants represent an increasing share of the population and have a proclivity toward entrepreneurship."[43]

There are several initiatives in both Baltimore and Detroit that seek to increase the economic impact of immigrant business enterprises. In Baltimore the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce has been discussing workshops for immigrants on starting a business, business planning, business loans, and tax accounting. In Detroit, Southwest Housing Solutions and Global Detroit have launched the ProsperUS Detroit entrepreneur training and microlending program. In addition to providing loans, the program includes a 12-session class for aspiring entrepreneurs on how to start and maintain a business. "These are loans that these individuals couldn't go to any bank to apply for...they aren't ready," said Hector Hernandez of Southwest Housing Solutions. "We go into this knowing that this is going to be a little more risky than typical, because they are start-ups, because they are an immigrant population. Our intention is that eventually they will be able to secure a commercial loan from one of the big guys here in the city...We want to help them build a track record for that."

Rolling Out or Pulling Up the Welcome Mat?

The efforts of business and civil society in Rust Belt cities to attract newcomers are sometimes at cross purposes with the federal immigration enforcement system, which targets the immigrant families, workers, and entrepreneurs who support local economies. In Detroit in recent years, intense immigration enforcement and increased deportations are slowing the urban revitalization in the southwest part of the city that occurred during the early- and mid-2000s. "As immigration enforcement has gotten stricter, a lot of those families are leaving and neighborhoods that have been thriving and growing are now being abandoned again," said Ryan Bates, attorney for the Alliance for Immigrant Rights. "Detroit is a border town. There is Border Patrol all over the neighborhoods...stopping people in the neighborhood, questioning people about their immigration status."

City and state representatives have asked Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) not to focus on targeting and deporting families, but the enforcement atmosphere—combined with other factors—has contributed to an exodus of immigrants. "Immigrants are leaving the city because...they don't feel welcomed anymore," Detroit business owner Lydia Gutierrez said. "What are they going to come here for?" Statistics from ICE support the assertion by many in Detroit that it faces a disproportionate amount of deportations. Although Baltimore and Detroit contain roughly the same population, according to ICE statistics, Detroit had 1,000 percent more removals in 2010 than Baltimore. The Detroit ICE field office counted 8,054 removals of immigrants while Baltimore had only 859. For that year Detroit had more removals than New York City and Philadelphia, which have much larger overall and immigrant populations.[44] There is no more important challenge for unauthorized immigrants than their legal status. As Congress considers immigration reform, the stories of Norma and Jazmin illustrate the difference between the policies of increased enforcement or legalization.

Norma immigrated to the United States from Mexico illegally in 1994. "I saw that there wasn't opportunity for me or [for my husband] so we came looking for the American Dream," she said. Norma came directly from her Mexican village to Detroit where she had siblings. She started working at a meat packing plant within months of arriving. She spent 15 years there, eventually becoming a manager. She had three children and bought a house with her husband. She achieved her dream until she was caught up in the rising tide of workplace immigration enforcement.

In early 2013 Norma lost her job at the meat packing company she held for 15 years after ICE conducted a workplace audit, forcing unauthorized workers to leave. The threat of losing your job or deportation has historically been a risk for

unauthorized immigrants, but Norma—like other immigrants in Detroit— said the surge in enforcement has created a state of fear in the city in recent years. "Before you heard about someone you didn't know who got asked for their papers," she said. "Now it's your husband, it's your brother, it's your neighbor...You hear people talking about it everywhere." As a working mother, Norma isn't accustomed to being at home, so she's spending her time at a community service agency trying to improve her English while her husband continues to work. Going back to Mexico isn't an option. "If it's bad here, it's worse there," she said. Without immigration reform, her ability to support her family and contribute to the Detroit economy are uncertain. "I came here as a newlywed just to give my kids a better life," she said. "We just want to keep working, we're not here to hurt anyone."

Jazmin was brought to the United States during the early 1990s when she was 2 years old. Her parents came from the state of Guanajuato in Mexico. "It was so tough [in Mexico]," she said. "There's no jobs. It's not a very good economic situation." She started working in a southwest Detroit bakery when she was 15 years old while going to school. When she was 17, her father became sick and died. As the oldest of four children Jazmin was expected to work to support her mother. In spite of being an honors student she quit high school and started working full time. Jazmin worked and babysat her younger brothers while her mother worked in a factory. It got harder when her mother was forced to leave her factory job due to her status as an unauthorized immigrant. Jazmin also said that workplace raids and deportations have impacted the Mexicantown bakery where she worked. "We had more customers before, but since the [immigration] laws have been getting tougher and tougher there's less customers, less money," she said. "If there's less money for the owners there's less money for employees."

Finally, in 2012, Jazmin found relief. In June 2012 President Obama signed a memo allowing for temporary legalization for certain unauthorized young immigrants who came to the United States as children—the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program. Jazmin was accepted into the program and it transformed her life. "I live without fear," she said. "Before I would drive to the corner store and you would be afraid to be stopped for no reason. That's scary," she said. Now Jazmin is getting a driver's license so she and her family can be more mobile. She's also applying for a social security number so she can seek better-paying jobs and go to college.

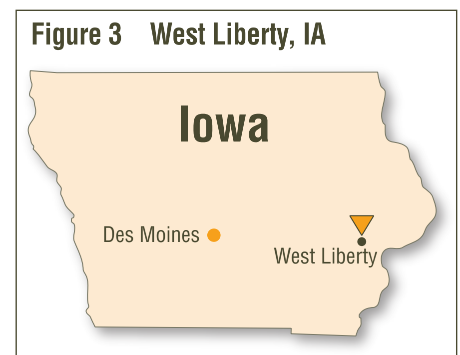
While Detroit's program of attracting immigrants is hampered by heightened immigration enforcement due to its status as a border city, this is not as problematic for Baltimore which is not close to an international border. In some cases experts say that as other localities increase immigration enforcement, newcomers have been driven to Baltimore. Jose Rivas of the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce said that the city has received immigrants who have left places like Prince Williams County, Virginia, which enacted harsh local immigration laws beginning in 2007.[45] "In Prince Williams they made some laws similar to Arizona and Alabama," he said. "A lot of those folks decided to move to Baltimore... They felt like the government was a little friendlier." Elizabeth Alex from Casa de Maryland agreed that some immigrants arrived in Baltimore after trying other parts of the country and finding them inhospitable. "A number of folks moved here not from Mexico directly but from other parts of the U.S., particularly Virginia and some of these states that have had immigration policies that made it harder for them to get work," she said. While immigrants face challenges in Baltimore, Alex said that they were largely left alone by police, due in part to the regulations enacted by city hall, discussed earlier. "Cops have better things to do than target immigrants," she said.

Home on the Range?

Few people could immediately spot similarities between rural Iowa and Rust Belt cities such as Detroit and Baltimore, but they do have one key characteristic in common: all are experiencing steep population declines. In 1910, almost half of Iowa's population was rural, but by 2010, only 27 percent of residents lived in rural areas. Rural Iowa has lost population in every decade since 1920. In fact, there are fewer people in rural Iowa today than there were a century ago.[46]

The town of West Liberty (population 3,742) is an exception to the depopulation that so much of Middle America is experiencing (see Figures 3). The difference, here as in other "exceptions" that remain vital in the face of falling populations all around them, is the presence of immigrants from Latin America. Between 2000 and 2010, Iowa's Latino population grew by nearly 84 percent, while the non-Hispanic population increased by less than 2 percent. As other southeastern Iowa towns withered during this decade, West Liberty's population grew 12 percent. It became the first town in the state with a Hispanic majority (52 percent). See Table 8. In addition to slowing the decay of small-town Iowa, Latino immigrants support the state's agribusiness economy.[47]

Figure 3 West Liberty, IA



While immigrants in Detroit face a climate of fear, West Liberty has for decades been integrating immigrants into its

Table 8 Iowa Demographic Change 2000-2010

	2000	2010	# Change	% Change	2010 % of total Iowa population
Total Iowa population	2,926,324	3,046,355	120,031	4%	100%
Iowa Hispanic population	82,473	151,544	69,071	84%	5%
Iowa foreign-born population*	91,085	133,547	42,462	47%	4%
Iowa white population	2,781,561	2,748,640	32,921	1%	91%

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, The Hispanic Population 2010, May 2011; Census Viewer Population of Iowa: Census 2010 and 2000 Interactive Map, Demographics, Statistics, Quick Facts; MPI Data Hub, Iowa Social & Demographic Characteristics.

*Data for foreign-born from 2000 and 2011.

economic life. "In the last 20-30 years we would have had a population decline if we hadn't had immigrants come in to take jobs in the food manufacturing business," said Steve Hanson, superintendent of West Liberty Community School District. "They provide a source of labor that wouldn't have been there." Although political integration lags behind economic integration, it is increasing. In February 2012 Jose Zacarias, who emigrated from Mexico to Iowa in 1984, became the first Latino on the West Liberty City Council.

West Liberty is home to West Liberty Foods, which employs 850 people and is only one of several food processing companies in the area that rely on immigrant labor. "They [immigrants] saved the town," said Father Greg Steckel of St. Joseph Catholic Church. "Since the 1960s [meat processing has] been the lifeblood of the community." Steckel said the immigrant influx in West Liberty provides a contrast to other towns in his diocese. "Other towns...in the southeast corner of Iowa are dying, there's no other word for it," he said. "You have more flight from the farms. Farms have become mega-farms to survive and with agribusiness you have fewer people on the land. Many of our towns can't support a parish... Some communities are vibrant...but lots of the smaller, tiny communities are going by the wayside."

Due to immigration, West Liberty is surviving. "There's a theater, grocery store, restaurants...It's an actual downtown area," Steckel said. "For a town this size, we would long have become a bedroom community [without immigration]." As in Baltimore and Detroit, immigrants not only provide a needed labor force but are also an entrepreneurial class that supports small businesses. "[Immigration has] kept a lot of storefronts and businesses open that probably otherwise would have closed," said West Liberty mayor Chad Thomas. "Part of that is when you have new people coming in, whatever skills they may have had from whatever country they were coming from do not necessarily equate with getting a job right off the bat, I think there is a sort of entrepreneurs by necessity."

Even though some of the new arrivals are unauthorized, the general atmosphere of fear that pervades some other immigrant communities is not noticeable in West Liberty. One of the best examples of the community's integration of immigrants in West Liberty is the school district, which has a growing enrollment and boasts a Spanish/English dual language program. This facet of West Liberty's cultural integration also has an economic impact, according to Superintendent Steve Hanson. "If we were a district that didn't have industry supported by immigrants we would most likely have declining enrollment which means we would have less and less money and be able to employ fewer and fewer teachers and other school employees," Hanson said. "The school in rural Iowa is [one of] the largest...employers and if you have fewer students you have fewer jobs."

The integration of immigrants isn't perfect. And while West Liberty has largely succeeded in integrating immigrants to the benefit of the local economy, not all residents are happy with its transformation into a minority-majority town. "There's two West Liberty's," Father Greg Steckel said. "One that no longer exists except in people's imagination... There's still the pretense that...the non-Spanish speaking could have made it on their own [even if the immigrants hadn't arrived]." And in spite of the economic opportunity and welcoming atmosphere, unauthorized immigrants in West Liberty face the same primary obstacle as any other person who is in the United States without documentation. "We are in the country where if you want to get ahead you can, but to get ahead you need a legal document," said Francisco Martinez, who works at West Liberty Foods. "Even if you have talent, gifts, wisdom, you still can't do it without the right documents."

Andrew Wainer/Bread for the World

Jose Zacarias came to the United States from Mexico during the 1980s looking for work. In 2012 he became the first Latino elected to the West Liberty City Council.

Recommendations

Legalization and a Path to Citizenship

There's no more important policy change for immigrants in Rust Belt communities—as well as those throughout the United States—than the establishment of a path to legal status and citizenship. Without this, immigrant integration efforts and other programs will have limited impact. To make a full contribution to the revitalization of the Rust Belt, immigrants need legalization and a path to citizenship. The economic benefits that legalization would bring both to immigrants and to the U.S. economy as a whole are well documented.[48] Recent research also suggests that in addition to the benefits of gaining legal status, immigrants receive an additional economic benefit from citizenship.[49]

Immigrant Workforce Training

Legalization and a path to citizenship are necessary but not sufficient policy changes to help immigrants realize their economic potential. Immigrants will benefit from a combination of English instruction, adult education, and job training. There are many resources currently available to help states create workforce training programs.[50] At the city level, these programs are in the pilot stages. New York City's Immigrant Bridge Program connects immigrants to jobs, with the goal of reducing poverty and enhancing the city's economy.[51] But it is focused on highly-skilled workers, while many immigrants arrive in the United States without formal education and marketable skills. These lower-skilled but economically important workers also need programs.

Financial Education and Asset Building

Financial education and asset building were identified as particular challenges to helping immigrant entrepreneurs in Rust Belt cities. As with other difficulties facing immigrants, there has been significant research at the state level on barriers to the financial integration of immigrants.[52] But cities need to develop more specific plans as well as programs to reach out to immigrants. Such plans and programs have gotten a start in Baltimore, Detroit, and other localities, but they are generally in the very early stages.[53] Organizations such as Appleseed operate financial access programs for immigrants that may serve as effective models for cities trying to support immigrant entrepreneurs.

City-Level Data on Immigrants in the Rust Belt

There is a lack of city-level research and data on the Rust Belt's foreign-born population. While useful state-level analyses of the impact of immigration are not difficult to find, more research and data on immigrants at the municipal level—particularly outside traditional arrival or gateway cities—would help researchers and local leaders better understand the role of immigrants in their cities.

Research Methodology and Data

The primary data for this report was gathered in the course of three case site studies of immigrant communities in the Rust Belt. The host communities were chosen based both on the city or town's status as part of a region that has been losing population over decades, and on whether efforts to reach out to and integrate immigrants are being made by local government or a nongovernmental organization. All three sites host growing immigrant communities, and together, they offer geographic and economic diversity. In each site, we conducted interviews with government officials working with the local immigrant community, nongovernmental leaders, members of other organizations working with immigrants, and immigrants themselves. Relevant leaders in the business and faith communities were also interviewed.

The goal of the interviews was to gather information on the economic contributions of immigrants in the case study sites. A total of 78 interviews were conducted. Interviews were conducted by phone or in person, in Spanish or English depending on a respondent's preference. All interviews took place between September 2012 and August 2013. The interview protocol was semi-structured; it consisted of open-ended questions designed to encourage respondents to talk extemporaneously about various topics. We used a variety of secondary quantitative data—from the U.S. Census Bureau and other sources, as cited in the body of the report—to frame the qualitative data gathered through the case study research. The quantitative data helped ensure that the case study site information was grounded in a broader context of the economic impact of immigrants, whether in other Rust Belt communities or nationwide.

The information gathered in interviews was transcribed and coded thematically based on major themes (as identified through assessing the interview content as a whole). We found consistency in themes across the three sites, which gives us confidence that the issues we discuss are both relevant to improving the potential of immigrants to revitalize local economies, and matters that require policy attention. Many quotes from the interviews, often intertwined with the author's interpretations, are incorporated into the narrative of the report. The validity of information from the interviews was ensured by obtaining and comparing information from a number of respondents playing a variety of roles. For example, at one site, interview subjects included a mayor, city council member, community leader, business person, immigrant worker, and immigrant entrepreneur. Discrepancies in responses were noted and examined. We sought feedback from several internal and external reviewers prior to publication.

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