

EXPLORING IMMIGRATION

MODULE 2 – Do We Need Limits on Immigration Numbers

SPEAKER It's a beautiful day to become a citizen. 00:00:54

NARRATOR Despite the fact that the nation's population has increased by 125 million people since the immigration law was changed in 1965, many influential Americans believe that more is better. 00:01:30

But a clear majority of Americans believe that the *golden door* to citizenship has become an open door, and that the country is unable to absorb successfully more than a million new immigrants every year. 00:01:42

Holland, Michigan, far from any national border is a good example of what is happening throughout the country. 00:01:58

Town Crier Hear ye. Gather round. Gather round. The Mayor and his council is about to have an official council meeting. 00:02:12

1st MAN We are gathered here to inspect the downtown 8th Street surface. Mayor, these streets are filthy. We need to ask the citizens to come out to clean them. I would move that we do that. 00:02:32

NARRATOR Although significant social changes caused by large numbers of immigrants have affected the city and surrounding communities, Holland continues to honor its Dutch heritage annually in a wildly popular Tulip Time Festival that attracts many thousands of visitors from far and wide. 00:02:50

2nd MAN You still see a lot of Dutch of course. In fact, this festival has Dutch as highlight, but if you – don't forget, last week we celebrated Cinco de Mayo and they were very much involved in – with us, so to speak. And if you look around you'll see various Mexican people, you'll see

Cuban people, you see people from Korea, and they're all part of it.
00:03:15

I think when I arrived here I was too, shall I say – everything was changed, everything was unusual. Coming from the Netherlands – and English was hard, we still went to Dutch services on Sunday. But at that time already, the churches like this one, and other churches in town, they had one service; a Dutch service in the afternoon for all the people that had a hard time with the English language. 00:03:38

And I think for us that lasted maybe about a year, and then we didn't feel the need any more to go to the Dutch service, because it was all these old folkish. 00:03:47

3rd MAN It was a very small town; I thought quite provincial. You know I grew up in the Hague, which is a very cosmopolitan city as you well know, and so to come here where on Sunday there was absolutely nothing going on except church twice you know; it was not all that pleasant for me. I did not really feel at home, especially when they had Tulip Time. 00:04:12

You know Tulip Time they do that in May, and they'll have everybody dressed up in a Dutch costume and they did the Compo dancing and the whole bit. You know I came to Holland, Michigan assuming that people would be Dutch and of course they were like 100 years ago.
00:04:28

1st FEMALE I just like all of our visitors that come to Holland. Not only am I an alumni Dutch dancer, I'm a step-on guide for our coaches that come here. And I'm just very proud of our community and I like to share our history with our visitors from out of town. 00:04:44

I think Holland has kept its tradition and built a diverse community. The Dutch people are welcoming people, and we welcome all kinds of diverse faiths, diverse races, we have more than just our Tulip Festival to celebrate our Dutch heritage. Last week we had Cinco de

Mayo, which is put on for our Latin-Americans United for Progress Group. The Hispanic culture is the largest minority in the city and they celebrate it. 00:05:12

We have a Kwanza Festival at Christmas time, so we – we might just celebrate everything here. 00:05:19

4th MAN And we're talking the – really the early '60's when I became aware of my surroundings and spent a little bit of time living outside the city just north of here. But it was largely a very white bread kind of community and – and really didn't notice the change that much until I went to junior high school here, which would have been in the – in the late '60's; and then graduated from high school in '72. 00:05:44

And at that time we started seeing a – a fairly large influx of Hispanic citizens, mostly from Mexico and – and Texas and – and you know that area; and had quite a number in my graduating class. A small number, but it was – it was obviously growing. 00:06:01

And didn't – didn't notice a huge change after that until probably almost 20 years later. And then in the '90's it did seem to go through another boom; plus, we had a - a real influx during that same time of Southeast Asian immigrants from many different countries. 00:06:19

So it's a – it's a very eclectic community these days, and I think it really reflects what's going on in the entire United States. 00:06:26

NARRATOR More than two decades ago, Holland began to confront the realities of local issues linked to immigration because of the area's significant agricultural economy in local fields and factories. 00:06:40

2nd FEMALE We come from Texas, and we come in March; first week of March. We work in the fields, digging, weeding with the hoes and some things about the nurseries. 00:06:59

5TH MAN As a migrant, you know, worker, I actually work in the fields for almost – for nine months. After that we go back to Texas. We just dig plants, put them in a pot, and then they storage them in houses with plastic on top and ready for next year to get ship to stores and all that stuff. 00:07:21

We come back up here, make some money sometimes, you know. If you know how to save money, you'll be able to save money; because sometimes you can't find work up there. And over here, I mean we come over here and the work is here; you know five days, six days a week. 00:07:38

You get good pay sometimes and it's kind of fun so. About 12 to 14,000 to, you know, for those nine months. If you put them all together, you know your wife and mine, it'll probably come out to 17 or 18,000 for the whole year. 00:08:00

6th MAN I did four years in elementary school in Mexico and then I moved to Holland back, and I did one year of elementary and then I went to middle school. And I went back to Mexico and then I came back a month ago and I started to go to school. 00:08:29

Now I like West Ottawa because there's a lot of people that I can speak with; there's a lot of Hispanic people. Also there's a lot of kind people here, like – well I want to finish my high school, get my high school diploma and then go to college because I want to be someone in the United States like a nurse, a doctor or something. 00:08:58

3rd FEMALE What was the immigrant experience, what was the migrant experience here in 1985? And I was not familiar with the migrant experience in 1985 because the migrant farms are geographically isolated. Even though they are in the area where I live, they are a half mile this way or a half mile that way. You don't know that they exist, unless you know that they exist. 00:09:22

So in terms of my awareness of the immigrant population, it was very very limited at that time; because you just don't see folks. The intolerance that I perceived in the area had to do with people of color in general. 00:09:40

They're – a lot of it was unintentional bias, it was simply not knowing how to think outside of your own cultural perception because there is such limited exposure. There were people of color who would share that you know it was just not a comfortable community. 00:10:00

We had a large Hispanic population, both of migrant agricultural workers that were settling into the community, as well as people that were coming from other communities and Mexico to settle in this community because the supports began to be in place. 00:10:16

7TH MAN Before I escaped from Vietnam I – I had my sister here. I – we had contact with her here in the United States already, so I know – I know exactly that I may be able to come to the United States to reunite with my sister. 00:10:37

Most of my time in the United States is to live in Holland here. I have to say the mild racism feeling is still existing at that time. For example, sometime people feel pressures to call us like the geeks or whatever; but that's just the – just real small group of people to compare with large group of people in United States. 00:11:11

In – in Holland here they all understand and help us out. 00:11:19

8th MAN When I started really becoming aware that some people had serious issues with – with the way the city was changing, was really in the early '80's when I was elected to the City Council for the first time. And I would get the most – some of the most spiteful older citizens who were just up in arms about you know this family or that family and what they were doing to their home; and started feeling a little bit of it coming at me from that way. 00:11:45

And I would listen to them and – and try to be nice, although I remember quite often hanging up the phone after warning a few of them that you know I wouldn't be listening to their language; I just wouldn't sit and listen to them talk about people that way with the words they were using and you know epithets and just things that I didn't agree with. 00:12:06

And – so that – I guess it was kind of emblazoned really in my mind at that point that this is a transition we're going through and it's – it's – it's really something different that happening to our community. 00:12:16

NARRATOR The building of a Mexican friendship foundation in a downtown waterfront park in 1999 was a personal triumph of Alfredo Gonzales, the son of immigrants and now a Dean at Holland's prestigious Hope College. 00:12:31

4TH FEMALE Thank you for welcoming us to – to your beautiful city, and thank you for having in this beautiful park, our fountain. Thank you. 00:12:44

9TH MAN My family is perhaps not unlike a lot of the early Mexican families that came to this community, first in the late 1940's and then in the 1950's, and then – with – really in greater numbers in the early 1960's. 00:13:01

My father, you know born in Texas in the – 1896 and his father before – before him also in Texas before Texas was a – a member of the – of a union as we now know it. So from that side of the family, you know my father's side of the family, you know Texans, you know for many generations. 00:13:22

On the other hand, my mother came from northern Mexico. She was born there; she has a lot of family there. And in a way our family represents you know the – both the old and the new. You know people who came from Mexico, they met here and they established a

new generation of Mexican or Mexican-Americans as we are called.
00:13:43

Racial relations in our community are vastly different today than they were say 20 years ago when I first started working at Hope College, and even before when I was working for the City of Holland. It was remarkable I think to find another you know person that looked like me working in some type of professional job; it was in fact a rarity to find someone like me. 00:14:09

It was probably more difficult for me as – as – as trying to you know to fit into a community that was some – as some would say in – difficult to break in to; because you know *'if you're not Dutch'*, the saying used to be *'you're not much.'* 00:14:24

It's not always been easy. If you look at a Chamber of Commerce booklet in the early 1970's you would find that there's not a single photograph of the Latino presence in our community. But I recalled with some people plotting to boycott Tulip Time if there were not some changes made in that booklet. 00:14:48

And in fact I have in my home some of those changes that were made, because some of us worked to take the photographs, put them in the book, and then distribute the book. There is – there is some changes that have taken place here. 00:15:01

NARRATOR Immigrant success stories like that of Holland's Alfredo Gonzales is what many American business and industry leaders celebrate, while advocating at the federal government allow an ever increasing number of immigrants to enter the country legally each year.
00:15:16

CHILDREN SINGING 'THIS LAND IS YOUR LAND' 00:15:55

END

