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Promoting Immigrant and Human Rights at the Local Level: A Case Study of the Welcome Dayton Initiative (abstract)

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The Social Practice of Human Rights: Charting the Frontiers of Research and Advocacy

2015 Conference of the University of Dayton Human Rights Center

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Research Panel: Migrants and Minorities

Presenter: Jamie Longazel and Theo Majka, University of Dayton

Title: A Tale of Two Cities: Divergent strategies in reaction to increases in immigrants and their implication for immigrant human rights

Abstract: Hazelton, Pennsylvania and Dayton, Ohio represent contrasting examples of community reactions to increases in immigrants. Both cities have experienced de-manufacturing in recent decades. In reaction to an influx of Latinos, Hazelton enacted the 2006 Illegal Immigration Relief Act (IIRA) which placed severe restrictions on the rights of undocumented. In contrast, the Dayton City Commission passed the Welcome Dayton: Immigrant-Friendly City initiative in 2011 with the goal of facilitating the integration of immigrant residents.

Hazelton's developers used tax incentives to establish warehouses, distribution centers, and a meatpacking plant, resulting in a significant demographic change.

However, in adopting a neoliberal approach, the developers failed to provide support for emerging Latina/o-owned small businesses. The results have implications for economic justice and the protection of the rights of immigrant laborers. Also, Hazelton illustrates the limitations of legal challenges to restrictive legislation. Although the law was challenged and subsequently ruled unconstitutional, a local White-Latina/o organization attempting to 'build a bridge' between recent immigrants and local residents/institutions has been constrained from raising issues like race and immigrant rights. Consequently, the dominant narrative goes unchallenged and core factors — racial and economic inequality — remain in place.

In contrast, the Welcome Dayton initiative was resulted from ongoing efforts by numerous local organizations, including those of immigrants and refugees themselves, to assist recent immigrants and protect their rights. When the City's Human Relations Council initiated community conversations on immigrant issues, there were many participants with experience to guide the writing of a comprehensive report with extensive recommendations for institutional change. Once begun, Welcome Dayton's initiatives have partnered with local organizations. Whether intentional or not, Dayton and cities with similar initiatives are acting in accord with the U.N.'s 1990 International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families, especially the articles specifying equal access to educational, vocational and social services and equality of living and working conditions and employment contracts.

These two cases reflect the contrast between citizen rights, which often stress individual rights and sometimes pit groups against each other, and human rights based on principles of social justice and the well-being of the human person.

Keywords: Immigrant rights, integration, restrictive legislation, local initiatives, International Convention on the Rights of Migrant Workers

Short biographies:

Jamie Longazel is an Assistant Professor of Sociology at the University of Dayton. He received his PhD from the University of Delaware in 2011. Prior to arriving at the University of Dayton, he was a Doctoral Fellow at the American Bar Foundation in Chicago, IL. His research comes out of the law & society tradition and focuses specifically on immigration law and politics, crime and inequality, and race relations. His recent publications have focused on sub-national immigration politics – in particular, Hazleton, Pennsylvania’s passage of the Illegal Immigration Relief Act (IIRA). He is the co-author with Benjamin Fleury-Steiner of *The Pains of Mass Imprisonment* (New York: Routledge, 2013) and the author of "Moral Panic as Racial Degradation Ceremony: Racial Stratification and the Local-Level Backlash against Latino/a Immigrants" (*Punishment & Society*, 2013), among others. Email: jlongazel1@udayton.edu

Theo Majka is a Professor of Sociology at the University of Dayton. He received his PhD from the University of California, Santa Barbara, in 1978. Among his publications are *Farm Workers, Agribusiness and the State* with Linda Majka (Temple University Press, 1982) and "Institutional Obstacles to Incorporation: Latino Immigrant Experiences in a Mid-Size Rustbelt City", also with Linda Majka, in *Latinos in the Midwest*, edited by Rubén Martínez (Michigan State Press, 2011). He has taught in the University of Dayton’s Human Rights Studies Program since its inception. Email: tmajka1@udayton.edu