Mexican Immigration and Dalton, Georgia

Discussing immigration in the United States of America can be a controversial topic. Some may be in favor of immigrants, and others may oppose immigration in general; therefore, it is necessary to discuss how immigrants have affected Dalton, GA. Arthur D. Murphy stated in his scholarly book, *Latino Workers in the Contemporary South*, “One place where the impact of the new immigration is evident is Dalton, Georgia, a small manufacturing city that produces more than half of all the carpet in the United States. Faced with a tight labor market, Dalton’s carpet manufacturers have welcomed increasing numbers of Mexican immigrants with helping the industry survive” (Murphy 67). Dalton, also known as the Carpet Capitol of the World, has been given recognition dependent upon its’ manufacturing facilities – making a small city such as Dalton exist to others geographically. The Dalton community has come to be defined by the industry effects on Mexican immigrants seeking employment, the affect Mexican immigrants have had on Dalton, and the effects Mexican immigrants have had on citizens of Dalton.

To begin, as a young Hispanic myself, I recall moving to Dalton in the mid 1990’s with my parents seeking employment (my step dad was an immigrant). In an interview with my mother, she stated, “I was informed by my in-laws that the economy was booming and there were lots of job opportunities in Dalton. You could literally cross the road and get a job. When we first moved to Dalton, I was unsure of the rumors pertaining to employment. So, when we got off the exit entering Dalton, I saw a sign – the sign stated now hiring; I was not unpacked and
already seeking employment. By the very next day, I was employed and working” (Mata). This interview illustrates how Dalton affected many Mexican origin individuals or families seeking employment in this city. It is Dalton’s industry that attracts immigrants seeking manual labor. Not only has Dalton provided jobs to new comers, but the community has also given Mexican people the opportunity to establish work credibility for themselves for future opportunities. For example, Dalton has gained Hispanic businesses and economic contributions from the Mexican inhabitants. Some of the examples are as follows: Mexican restaurants, Mexican owned auto sales, the demand for bilingual employees, and the expansion of numerous industries by their labor contribution.

On the other hand, Mexican migrants have also affected Dalton. A few of the many ways include: a higher demand for bilingual educators, an expansion with churches, bilingual medical attention, filling in for positions many American citizens will not do, and boosting the cities’ economy. *Latino Workers in the Contemporary South* identifies how Dalton’s education became impacted by writing, “The study of Dalton is part of a larger service project in which scholars and staff of the Universidad de Monterrey in Mexico designed a series of programs to assist the public schools of Dalton and Whitfield County in their efforts to respond to the needs of Spanish-speaking students. In the 1998-99 school year, 41.5 percent of the student body in the public schools of Dalton was of Hispanic origin” (Murphy). Churches in Dalton were also affected in the need to house their increasing congregation, which required new facilities, and new denominational churches were being created to accommodate others. Hospitals also found the need to seek bilingual assistance to accommodate the accumulative number of Hispanic patients being received on a daily basis. Mexican immigrants were recognized for accepting less than minimum wage and physically demanding positions, which most Americans would not
consider accepting. Many of the wages earned by Hispanics also enhanced enriching Dalton’s economy with the funds being returned within the city.

Lastly, undocumented Mexican immigrants living in this country, including Dalton, has continued to be an ongoing argument in support or disagreement of their dwelling, and has impacted citizen’s views on immigrants. Numerous topics associated with immigrants may vary from employment opportunities being occupied by immigrants, free health care due to lack of documentation, cases of fraud/identity theft, and the inability to claim taxes by the American government. Various citizens may uphold the fact that there are many American jobs that have been taken by undocumented immigrants. Other citizens or immigrants may defend this argument by labeling them as unsolicited jobs. On the other hand, free health care has been an effect of immigrants residing in Dalton, and in other cities/towns. Hospitals, on most occasions, do not turn away a patient in need – causing unpaid health bills to be left. Undocumented migrants that have given birth to a child in this country – marks their child as an American citizen. This can be a controversial situation in regards to health care by giving the child legal rights as a United Stated citizen. Other serious matters have come from undocumented immigrants utilizing actual citizens’ legal documents (social security number and birth certificate), thus causing a citizen’s credit and identification to be damaged. In addition, taxes not being deducted are another negative affect from undocumented immigrants working and being paid in cash. In return, this affects the economy on a federal and state basis. These issues are worthy of concern and discussion, but Dalton would not be the thriving community it is today without its vibrant immigrant population.

In conclusion, immigration can involve a very biased dispute. It is easy to have an outsider’s point of view, and have a strong opinion towards immigrants. It is not until an
individual can place the self in another person’s shoes – so to speak – that he or she will truly comprehend the reasoning for immigrants sacrificing everything to have a life with new opportunities. John F. Kennedy, the 35th president of the United States, once stated,

The interaction of disparate cultures, the vehemence of the ideals that led the immigrants here, the opportunity offered by a new life, all gave America a flavor and a character that make it as unmistakable and as remarkable to people today as it was to Alexis de Tocqueville in the early part of the nineteenth century . . . .

Immigration policy should be generous; it should be fair; it should be flexible.

With such a policy we can turn to the world, and to our own past, with clean hands and a clear conscience. (Kennedy)

President Kennedy gave a simple, yet contentious, approach when speaking of immigrants. The United States of America is a country made up of immigrants for immigrants, and is a land of opportunity; therefore, this opportunity should be given to everyone whom makes an effort to better him or herself. “In the process, in familiar as well as surprising ways, the immigrants and their children are themselves being transformed into the newest Americans” (Rumbaut). America was founded as a new beginning for those escaping prosecution with hope for a better tomorrow. Should this country be less welcoming to those in search for a new beginning today than it was for the ancestors of the citizens that currently reside here? Every person living in the United States is an accumulation of different cultures and races. We are all unique. Our heritage is rich and beautifully woven. It is our experience in this country that unites us as citizens, and it is this very poignant experience that should be shared with newcomers.
Works Cited


Mata, Sonia. Face-to-Face Interview. 22 Oct. 2014
