

The United States is a relatively young country, particularly in comparison to our European and Asian counterparts, and is populated primarily by immigrants and their descendants. We are all familiar with the “melting pot” analogy and description that is so much a part of the story of the formation of our country. My husband’s paternal grandfather immigrated to the United States from Wales at the age of 12, alone except for the rumor of family in the States and the hope of the opportunity America is known for. Today his son and grandson run a successful company which has provided a living for many families for over 45 years. What is the path that leads a person to leave everything he knows and seek a new country to call home and how does that coincide with a country’s willingness to receive and incorporate new citizens into the life of its population? This paper will briefly review the history of immigration policy in the United States, the different classifications of immigrants, how immigrants are currently handled by our government and the particular impact of one class of immigrants on the community of Fort Wayne. I’m intentionally beginning from the broad perspective of U.S. immigration policy because the history of U.S. immigration policy answered many of the questions in my mind as I pursued the answer to my specific topic of the impact of recent immigration on Fort Wayne.

The majority of research I did ties immigration policy to foreign policy for the United States. U.S. immigration policy seems to be viewed as both commentary on other countries’ current civic status, and as a deliberate message conveying the United States’ humanitarian identity. As our first President, George Washington, expressed, we are an “asylum for mankind”. That definition has helped shape our policy and self image as a country. We do, after all, have the statue of Lady Liberty welcoming newcomers to the United States in New York’s harbor,

“...Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed, to me:
I lift my lamp beside the golden door.” – from *The New Colossus* by Emma Lazarus

The poem is engraved at the base of the Statue of Liberty.

Our Constitution says nothing about the new government's intentions for immigrants and the federal government did not have a formal policy until 1875, nearly 100 years after the country's formation. From 1789 to 1875 the individual states controlled immigration policy. In 1875 the federal government prohibited the immigration of prostitutes, convicted felons and "coolies", a term used to describe Asians brought to the States against their will. I found a great collection of research in the Encyclopedia of the New American Nation, in particular an article by David M. Reimers where he noted that, "Through the years various ethnic groups attempted to pressure the federal government to take an active role in aiding their people in their homelands, either by admitting refugees or by condemning the oppression faced by their countrymen." The United States during this period of history did not officially respond to the pressures of its citizens, and practiced deliberate neutrality in the affairs of other countries, as documented in the Monroe Doctrine of 1823. President James Monroe declared that he expected European powers to refrain from ventures in the Western Hemisphere and in return the United States would stay out of European affairs. Immigrants were allowed to enter the United States and pursue citizenship but their numbers were not regulated, nor were their admittance an official commentary on the country they had left behind.

When President William McKinley was assassinated by an American-born anarchist in 1901, Congress passed the first law barring immigrants because of their political beliefs when it restricted anarchists from coming to the United States. A series of ever increasingly restrictive immigration policies were enacted by the U.S. Congress and included the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 which barred immigration from China, the "Gentleman's Agreement" of 1907, with the government of Japan, which regulated Japanese immigration, the Immigration Act of 1917, also known as the Asiatic Barred Zone Act, which barred immigrants from the Asia-Pacific Triangle, which included Japan, China, the Philippines, Laos, Siam, Cambodia, Singapore, Korea, Vietnam, Indonesia, Burma, India, Sri Lanka and

Malaysia. The Immigration Act of 1924, also known as the National Origins Quota Act, additionally limited the immigrants allowed from any country to 2% of the number of people from that country who were already living in the United States in 1890, according to that year's census. Basically, in the early 1900's we began as a country to become overtly bureaucratic in our immigration policies, and that has not changed.

With the advent of the World Wars, it seems that Congress and the President used the existing immigration policies to buffer the United States from the realities of fascism, communism and Nazi rule, which were wreaking havoc in the societies of Europe and northern Asia. During this time there were hundreds of thousands of potential immigrants to the United States, most of them seeking to flee the harsh regimes and persecution in their countries - but we would not officially acknowledge their plight. The U.S. was sending troops to fight in these wars but turning a blind eye to the civilian victims of war. We were also still recovering from the Great Depression so it could be said that the leaders of our nation did not wish to dilute the prospects of the 25% of our workforce that was still unemployed, by admitting competing workers. I have to confess that I am somewhat embarrassed by this phase of our immigration history in the United States. It does not sit well with my own sense of compassion and belief that part of what makes this country great is our diversity. It seems to me that when a government establishes restrictive policies it makes itself small minded even as its size swells to implement such policies.

After the end of World War II the tide turned both in official U.S. policy and in the implementation of that policy. The U.S. exercised its compassionate side to admit over 600,000 immigrants from Europe in the late 1940's and early 1950's. The League of Nations and then the United Nations were formed and the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Convention on Refugees in 1951, commonly known as part of the Geneva Convention. This officially designated a refugee as a person with "a well founded fear of being persecuted in his country of origin for reasons of race,

religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion.” The U.S. accepted this definition but it was not made a part of immigration law until the Refugee Act of 1980, nearly thirty years later. The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 abolished the national-origin quotas and the Asiatic Barred Zone Act and instead implemented a system of visas for admission to the U.S. By equalizing immigration policies, the act resulted in new immigration from non-European nations which began to change the ethnic make-up of the United States. Immigration numbers doubled between 1965 and 1970, and doubled again between 1970 and 1990.

Current immigration policy in the United States has four main tenets. It seeks to reunite families by admitting immigrants who already have family members in the United States. It admits workers with specific skills to fill positions deemed to be experiencing labor shortages. It provides refuge for people classified a refugee by the United Nations High Commissioner on Refugees, and it seeks to ensure diversity by providing admission from countries with historically low rates of immigration to the United States (CBO, 2006). Most of my information in this section is taken from a Congressional Budget Office paper on Immigration Policy in the United States. I am only going to cover legal paths of entry as illegal immigration was addressed fairly recently by Scott Glaze in his 2006 paper on Illegal Immigration.

There are two distinct paths for legal admission of individuals seeking residence in the U.S. The two paths are permanent admission or temporary. Individuals seeking permanent status are formally classified as immigrants and receive a permanent resident card, commonly known as a green card, and become known in the system as Legal Permanent Residents or LPR's. They are eligible to work in the United States and may apply for U.S. citizenship after the designated wait times. Temporary admission to the United States is granted for a wide variety of reasons; including tourism, diplomatic missions, study and temporary work. These individuals are not eligible for citizenship.

Of the individuals seeking legal permanent residency in the United States there are four categories, which are aligned with the four goals of U.S. immigration admission policy. The first category is family reunification, which includes admission of immediate relatives of U.S. citizens and family sponsored preference admissions. The second category is employment based preference for workers with certain skills. These skill sets include extraordinary ability in the arts, athletics, business, education or science as well as professionals with advanced degrees, workers in occupations experiencing shortages, religious workers and people willing to invest at least \$1 million in businesses located in the United States. The third category is the diversity program, which was established by the Immigration Act of 1990 to increase immigration from countries with historically low immigration levels. The final category of legal immigration is refugees and asylum-seekers. The goal of this category of immigration admissions is to provide a haven for refugees and asylum-seekers – people who are unable or unwilling to return to their home country because of persecution or a well founded fear of persecution. According to the Congressional Budget Office the difference between refugees and asylum-seekers is simply one of geographic location when application for admission to the U.S. is made. Refugees apply for admission to the United States from outside the country and asylum-seekers apply for admission from within the U.S. or at a U.S. port of entry. (CBO, 2006) There are a mind numbing array of rules and regulations tied to each of these paths of immigration. The Congressional Budget Office admitted that, “It is difficult to determine how many people might seek to enter the United States...various factors in addition to numerical ceilings affect these admissions.” Backlogs in the processing of applications for visas can slow admissions for a year and waiting periods vary by country and deter people who would otherwise seek lawful entry to the United States. (CBO, p. 4)The United States’ immigration policies as it relates to refugees is integrally tied to the United Nations Refugee Agency and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, known as the UNHCR. The UNHCR is governed by the United Nations

General Assembly and currently has a staff of over 6,600 in more than 110 countries helping approximately 34 million people (UNHCR).

The journey and process for an individual to go from being persecuted or threatened in their homeland to being resettled in the United States is a long one, as you might imagine. In order to be considered for refugee resettlement in the United States a person must first be identified as a refugee by the UNHCR. Refugees flee conditions in their home countries and find temporary asylum in refugee camps or communities in neighboring countries. There, the UNHCR interviews them to decide whether they should be granted refugee status and qualify for UNHCR protection. Once they are identified as a refugee the UNHCR seeks to find what it calls a “durable solution” for the refugee. The three primary options or “durable solutions” are voluntary repatriation to their home country, integration into the country of temporary asylum, or resettlement in a third country.

If a refugee decides that they wish to be resettled into a third country and chooses the United States, they must meet four criteria: they must meet the definition of a refugee contained in the Immigration and Nationality Act, they must be among those refugee groups determined by the President to be of special humanitarian concern to the U.S., must otherwise be admissible under U.S. law and generally must be outside their homelands, although there are exceptions to that rule. If they meet the criteria for eligibility to the U.S. resettlement program a refugee must then register and apply for resettlement to the UNHCR or a U.S. Embassy. They are then referred to one of ten joint voluntary agencies which are in part funded by the U.S. Department of State.

It’s interesting that at this point the process shifts to being run by non-profit, religious and quasi-governmental agencies. The ten agencies are the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, the Church World Service, the Ethiopian Community Development Council, the Episcopal Migration Ministries, the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, the International Rescue Community, the US Committee

for Refugees and Immigrants, Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services, World Relief Corporation, and the State of Iowa's Bureau of Refugee Services. As a side note, I have to confess that the State of Iowa as one of the ten agencies stuck out as an oddity to me. When I researched the history of Iowa's involvement I learned that it can be traced back to the fall of Saigon in 1975. A former U.S. government employee living in Laos observed the plight of the Tai Dam refugees and wrote to thirty United States Governors pleading for assistance. Iowa Governor Robert Ray responded by establishing a Task Force for Indochinese Resettlement within the State's Employment Office, which has evolved to become a full Bureau of Refugee resettlement with an emphasis of jobs over welfare.

Refugees are approved for admission to the United States through an interview with the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services as well as medical examination, security name check and the guarantee of sponsorship by one of the ten voluntary agencies. Once approved the refugees are entered into a program of cultural orientation while still overseas. The overseas cultural orientation covers eleven topics in fifteen hours. Those topics include pre-departure processing, the role of the resettlement agency, housing, employment, transportation, education, health, money management, rights and responsibilities of U.S. citizens, cultural adjustment, and travel. The cost of the refugee's travel to the United States is funded by the U.S. Department of State but it is done in the form of a loan, which is expected to be paid back over time, beginning eighteen months after arrival in the United States. Once they are approved, refugees are assigned to one of the ten voluntary agencies by the Refugee Data Center in New York. The ten agencies have over 200 affiliates throughout the United States. There are five of these affiliates in Indiana. Three are associated with the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. These are Catholic Charities of Fort Wayne-South Bend, Catholic Charities of Gary and Catholic Charities of Indianapolis. Church World Service and Episcopal Migration Ministries jointly operate Exodus Refugee and Immigration, Inc in Indianapolis and World Relief Corporation recently

opened an affiliate in Fort Wayne in 2009. As a side note, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops resettles 25 - 30 percent of all refugees entering the U.S.

The United States currently has an “admissions ceiling” of 80,000 people per year. The admissions ceiling allows 15,500 refugees from Africa, 17,000 from East Asia, 2,500 from Europe, 5,000 from Latin America and the Caribbean, 35,000 from Near East and South Asia and 5,000 from an unallocated reserve. In fiscal year 2008 we admitted 60,192 refugees and in 2009 74,652. To make those numbers local I can tell you that between 1991 and 2008 3,707 refugees were directly resettled into Allen County. Catholic Charities reports that 2,213 of those refugees are Burmese, 669 are from Bosnia, 294 from Vietnam, 146 from Africa, 130 from the former Soviet Union, 109 from Somalia, 91 from Iraq, 45 from Afghanistan, and 10 from Cuba. It is important to note that these direct or primary resettlement numbers only tell part of the story of the refugee population in our community. Once a refugee is officially resettled in the United States they are free to locate anywhere in the U.S. Fort Wayne has experienced a large secondary migration of Burmese refugees due to the attraction of the existing concentration of Burmese refugees and the reputation our community has of providing excellent resources to the refugees. The initial concentration of primary resettlement Burmese refugees to Fort Wayne can be attributed to the United States stated prioritization of family reunification for refugees. When a new refugee comes to the U.S., if they have existing family connections to immigrants, LPR's or citizens, they can request to be settled in the town of their family connections.

What has happened in Fort Wayne is a convergence of circumstances. Prior to 2003 in the U.S. relatively few of the total admitted refugees were Burmese, and in 2003 the total number of Burmese refugees resettled was only 203. Over the next three years the number of refugees from Myanmar grew to 1,612. Then in 2007, in response to the ongoing political crisis and the “Saffron Revolution”, which was a series of anti-government protests led by monks and so named for their saffron colored robes,

President Bush adjusted U.S. immigration policies to allow an increase in refugees from the Union of Myanmar. In fiscal year 2007 the total number of Burmese refugees resettled in the U.S. jumped to 13,896. In 2008 it was 18,139 and in 2009 it was 18,202. As a recap, in 2003 there were only 203 Burmese refugees resettled in the U.S. nationwide, four years later that number jumped to nearly 14,000 and continued to climb. In Fort Wayne there were a total of 2,282 refugees resettled over the sixteen year period of 1991 through 2006 and 768 of those were Burmese. The number of refugees resettled fluctuated between 44 to 261 per year, with an average of 143 new refugees officially resettled per year, and approximately 33% of those were Burmese. In 2007 the number of refugees resettled in Fort Wayne more than tripled to 632 and 613 of those were Burmese (96%). In 2008 there were 837 refugees resettled in Fort Wayne and 832 were Burmese (99%). Finally the wave crested and in 2009 the total number of refugees resettled in Fort Wayne dropped to 255, but still 235 of those were Burmese. The estimates are that Fort Wayne currently has an approximate population of 6,000 people of Burmese descent through both primary and secondary migration. I have seen anecdotal reference to Fort Wayne as having the largest concentration of Burmese population outside of Myanmar and the refugee camps but could not document that as fact. Fort Wayne has welcomed refugees of many descents through the years but the sheer volume and intensity of the recent Burmese resettlement makes their story the one with dominant impact for Fort Wayne today.

Burma, now officially known as the Union of Myanmar, is geographically the largest country in mainland Southeast Asia and the 40th largest in the world. It is nestled on the coastline of the Indian Ocean and Andaman Sea and bordered by India, China, Laos and Thailand. The culture is heavily influenced by the spiritual practice of Theravada Buddhism. In the early years of civilization the country was ruled by a series of small kingdoms. It was colonized by Britain and fell under British colonial rule from 1886 – 1948. For the fourteen short years from 1948 to 1962 the country had a multi-party parliamentary democratic system of government which made it one of the richest countries in Asia at

the time. There was a military coup in 1962 which ended the prosperous times and some say turned the country back to a dark age from which it still has not returned. In 1974 a single party system of government called the Burma Socialist Program Party, a military junta and dictatorship, was implemented and was the sole political party until 1988. During this time Burma became one of the world's most impoverished countries. There were a series of protests against military rule which culminated in the 8-8-88 nationwide uprising. The uprising created an opening for an opposing military coup d'état and a new party rule. The country held free elections in 1990, but when the current ruling party lost 392 of the 489 available seats it annulled the election results and continued military rule. In 2007 the International Labor Organization announced at the International Criminal Court that it would be seeking "to prosecute members of the ruling military junta for crimes against humanity" (Spiegel Online) over the continued forced labor of its citizens by the military. There have also been rumors of ethnic cleansing practices through the years. It is estimated that there are over 2 million Burmese refugees. Other nations have conflicting views on how to best deal with the Union of Myanmar. Calls for sanctions by the United States, France, Canada and the United Kingdom are opposed by neighboring countries who believe that sanctions would not help to solve the issues. In May of 2008 a cyclone hit the Irrawaddy region of Myanmar with an estimated death toll of over 200,000. There is no peace in the Union of Myanmar and little hope of it in the future.

Before 2007 the refugees immigrating to the United States and resettling in places like Fort Wayne were in many ways the cultural elite. They were smart enough or well connected enough to enter themselves into the official United Nations refugee system and escape both the horrors of persecution in Burma and the confinement of the refugee camps. These refugees were generally well educated and recognized as professionals in their own country. Because they came to the United States in smaller numbers they have more easily assimilated into the U.S. culture. That is not the case for the influx of refugees that began in 2007 when President Bush singled out the Myanmar military regime as

one of the most brutal in the world. Most of the more recent refugees have come to the United States after existing in the refugee camps. The first refugees from Burma set up the camps along the Thailand – Burma border in 1984. Many have lived in the camps for more than twenty years. They have spent most of their adult lives in the camps, leaving them unprepared for life on their own. Life in a refugee camp is utterly unlike life in the United States in many ways and, in fact, most Burmese refugees are fearful of new life in the USA. (USA Today, 1.22.2009) When they are granted passage to the United States they must first take part in classes on how to provide for their own basic nutrition, how to change a diaper, and how to use the bathroom in a western toilet. It is illegal to travel outside of the refugee camp without a day pass and impossible to find work within the camp. In the United States refugees are expected to find a job and begin working within 90 days of arriving.

The long term citizens of the camps lack social skills from camp living, suffer from a variety of health issues from the unsanitary conditions and are far less educated than the earlier refugees. It is estimated that 30% are illiterate in their own language (Center for Applied Linguistics), which makes literacy in English as a second language an even greater challenge. The comparison I heard from our local agencies that work with the refugees, is that in the '90's the refugees were professionals who easily assimilated into our community and arrived in manageable numbers so we were well prepared to assist them. The large influx of refugees that began in 2007 stressed the systems we had in place to help refugees both because a much larger number of refugees arrived and because these refugees were much more dependent upon assistance from their experience of living in the camps where housing, food rations and basic medical care were provided. Their arrival also coincided with the recession that is still gripping our nation, which makes finding employment and independence that much more difficult.

Debbie Schmidt has been the Executive Director of Catholic Charities in Fort Wayne since 1990. She has been at the heart of the storm that our recent influx of refugees has caused. She described the

impact on systems community wide who were caught by surprise with this influx of refugees. The U.S. Department of State has an operational guide for agencies which outlines their responsibilities to refugees in the resettlement process. They are to provide Housing, Furnishings, Food, Pocket Money, Clothing, Transportation, Intake and Orientation, and Referral Services. The agencies do receive some federal funding for this, \$450 to be dedicated to rent or direct amenities for the refugee and \$450 per refugee to the agency. In return the agency has 30 days from arrival to get the refugees to the health department, put their kids in school, provide housing and clothing and help the refugee find an initial job. Under the State Department's Office of Refugee Resettlement, individual refugees are eligible to receive up to eight months of refugee cash assistance and refugee medical assistance. Families may also be eligible for TANF and Medicaid services. To the refugee, however, these services are a maze of paperwork and office visits. They don't have any experience with the type of vast government aid infrastructure that exists in the United States. The health department and school systems are the two government service providers that were first impacted by the flood of refugees.

I talked to Mindy Waldron who is the Department Administrator for the Allen County Board of Health. She described the pre-2007 refugee services her office provided as a brief screening of relatively healthy individuals. They would receive two months notice prior to the refugee arriving and would see less than 200 a year. Beginning in September of 2007, when U.S. policy changed, Fort Wayne received over 600 Burmese refugees in three months. This Burmese population was also tending to arrive with more health issues. Because they had lived in the jungle or in camps they had no dental care, many had pre-existing conditions such as diabetes and other chronic health conditions. The real concern and impact is the high percentage of the refugees who had latent, or dormant, tuberculosis and/or hepatitis B. Over the past three years there has been a major shift in resources and budget in our local health department to accommodate the demands of our new residents. If a new patient arrives free of all disease it costs the county \$12.41 per person to screen them. If they are diagnosed with latent TB that

number jumps to \$276.61. If they are diagnosed with active TB it is a minimum of \$2,019.16 per person to treat them. Part of the protocol for treating a patient with active TB is daily observed therapy. In other words, the health department must physically observe each patient every single day to ensure that they take their medications. In 2008 that meant 6,344 visits to individual patients. They saw 25 – 30 active TB patients a day and those patients were required to participate in daily therapy for nine to twelve months. The Health Department must also track down every person the infected individual has come in contact with to test them. Latent TB infection is as big a concern as active TB status because statistically there is a 50% chance that someone with latent TB will become actively infected. The biggest impact in to the Health Department has been a forced shift in focus from big picture community care to refugee care. Dr. Deb McMahan, the Health Commissioner, used to have an administrative position and now spends 70% of her time in direct patient treatment. And that doesn't include the time she donates to Matthew 25 as they struggle to keep up with the increased demand for their services. The Health Department's budget for refugee care has grown to 3.5 times its former size and now is over a quarter of a million dollars annually. They have received some state and local grants but the majority of the funding has come from cuts to other programs. In 2009 the County approved the creation of a new clinic site for the Health Department, a decision that in large part was made to accommodate the growing demands of an active TB clinic.

Both Fort Wayne Community Schools and East Allen County Schools have seen an impact to their programming as they have attempted to assimilate immigrants into their schools. Emily Keirns from Fort Wayne Community Schools told me that there has been a more gradual impact on their school system in terms of the recent wave of refugees. Fort Wayne Community Schools has been accommodating immigrants and language translation issues for over 20 years. Currently there are 79 languages and dialects in the Fort Wayne school system and they have 20 schools with English Language Learner (ELL) programs. Fort Wayne developed magnet schools for their English language learners. This

program offers the opportunity for the most language challenged students to work in an environment designed to accommodate them. They have 2,296 kids in their ELL programs and 3,984 students that they identify as part of the language minority population. 15% of their language minority population is Burmese. Fort Wayne Community Schools has 82 full time staff members dedicated to their ELL program and an additional 50 interpreters available on a contract basis. East Allen County Schools now has an Elementary school that is LESS diverse – Southwick. Because a large apartment complex has been rented to a primarily Burmese refugee population, 60% of that school is Burmese.

Even with the admitted “burden” on the school systems it is clear that school administrators and teachers love their immigrant kids. Fort Wayne Community Schools’ Waynedale is an elementary school hit by the influx of Burmese refugees due to the placement of refugees in an apartment complex in their district. They celebrate the international roots of their students and incorporate that diversity into their curriculum. Northcrest Elementary hosts an annual International Celebration and language classes for parents in the evenings. East Allen County Schools hosts newcomer programs and cultural exchange days and have what they call a system wide awareness of refugees that filters all the way to their cafeterias, which now offer foods catering to Muslim students. I asked the teachers and administrators what they had observed about the assimilation of our immigrants and refugees. They responded that how well a group integrated into society depended upon three factors: 1) the age of the immigrants, as the younger generations were much more likely to assimilate quickly, 2) how many immigrants of the same culture there were, a strength in numbers observation that indicated a tendency to stick closer to previous cultural norms when the immigrants were clustered together, and 3) the length of time that they had been living in their new country, the longer an immigrant lives in the U.S. the more likely they are to assimilate into the culture.

The Justice system in Allen County has been impacted by the immigration and refugee populations as well. The biggest impact has been the need for translators in public safety and justice processes. The Allen County Sheriff's department has commissioned a full time officer to focus on translation with the Burmese population, in addition to a stable of translators shared with the courts system to accommodate the wide variety of languages spoken by those interacting with the system. In law enforcement there is ongoing discussion of how to deal with the three "B" gangs – Bosnians, Bantus (Somalia) and Burmese. The trouble between these groups transcends anything that has happened on U.S. soil, but we need to deal with it as we help them acclimate to their new home. Jerry Noble, the Administrator for the Superior Courts in Allen County tallied the fiscal impact to the courts as being about \$75,000 on an annual basis for court interpreters. The officials within the justice system that I interviewed did not express any great re-adjustment to accommodate the immigrants and refugees; perhaps because the Justice System by its nature is designed to deal with those outside the cultural norms and expectations of our society.

The recent surge in refugees to Fort Wayne has not gone unnoticed by the social service organizations and foundations of our community. We have a Community Resource Center for Refugees on South Calhoun Street, and in December of 2008 a Burmese Advocacy Center was established at that location. Eleven different agencies have focused on helping the Burmese refugees as they attempt to assimilate and thrive in their new home country. Meg Distler, the executive director of The St. Joe Community Health Foundation, described an organic growth of this assembly of agencies. Each agency existed before 2007 and responded to the growing need for assistance from individual passion. Most of the agencies have a branch or extension of what they already do with an office in the Advocacy Center. Advantage Health Systems provides bilingual Advocacy Coordinators to assist Burmese refugees in accessing health care. African Immigrants Social and Economic Development Agency helps with civic education, naturalization and driver's lessons. Allen County Lead & Healthy Homes helped identify a

major source of lead poisoning to the Burmese when it identified a home remedy common in the Burmese culture as being lead and arsenic based. Their discovery has alerted officials around the world and filtered back to affect distribution of these home remedies in Thailand and Myanmar. The Burmese Muslim Community of Indiana helps refugees apply for utility and rent assistance. Crime Victim Care of Allen County provides court accompaniment and justice advocacy. St. Joe Community Health Foundation operates a clothing and household goods bank, as well as serving as a fiscal agent at the inception of the center. The State of Indiana operates a Family and Social Services office in the center for enrollment assistance for refugees to Medicaid, food stamps and other programs. Neighborhood Christian Legal Clinic offers free legal representation and preventative law education. Super Shot, Inc provides free vaccines with Burmese translators. The Burmese Advocacy Center organization provides employment training and self-sufficiency classes. Most notable of the organizations housed under this roof is The Reclamation Project, an organization originally conceived to restore the Rialto Theater on South Calhoun Street. They found themselves geographically in the middle of the burgeoning transformation of Calhoun Street to refugee central. This organization responded by forming what they call a "Circle of Friends" program, which is completely unrelated to their core mission other than by neighborhood proximity. Circle of Friends pairs American and refugee families to assist with life, assimilation and acculturation issues. It creates friends where before there were strangers. To my mind, that is an example of Fort Wayne at its finest.

Fort Wayne has also managed to attract national attention to the plight of refugees arriving in the middle of a recession and that impact on communities trying to assist them. Debbie Schmidt told me about a visit last November from Eric Schwartz, Assistant Secretary in the U.S. Department of States' Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration. Schwartz visited Fort Wayne, Chicago and Minneapolis-St. Paul because he had heard that communities were struggling to keep up with the influx of refugees. As a result of that visit the State Department announced in January 2010 that it is doubling the federal

funding given to refugees from \$900 to \$1,800 per refugee. Congressman Mark Souder and his staff strongly advocated for a reduction in the flow of immigrants to Fort Wayne and for increases in federal grants for organizations working with the refugee population. I wouldn't be telling the full story if I skipped over the presence of a national blog entitled *Refugee Resettlement Watch* that is based in Hagerstown, Maryland. Fort Wayne and its Burmese population are referenced in eleven posts. This is not a shiny, happy place on the Internet but rather a collection of posts which feeds on the new millennium version of anti-immigration frenzy. It's the same old story of opposition to the United States allowing or encouraging immigration from places in the world where people are struggling. Although not as well documented, I'm certain that the tone and pitch of these arguments must be reminiscent to that which was present in the late 1800's and early 1900's when our federal government barred all Asians from immigrating to the United States. I would remind the authors that most of our citizens come from families that sought refuge in the United States at some point in history, and that they should count their blessings that they live in a country which protects their right to be hypocritical.

Immigration of new populations is considered an asset to communities when contemplating their future vitality. Fellow Questor John Stafford covered this topic in his paper "What Successful Cities Have To Say To Fort Wayne" in March 2006. John very graciously reminded me of his topic and pointed me in the direction of several resources that support this theory. A 2006 Brookings Institution Study titled *The Vital Center*, documents the fact that between 1995 and 2000 Fort Wayne had a net domestic migration of- 11.3% which was compensated for by immigration from abroad incoming totals of 11%. If we didn't have immigration we would be shrinking. 11.3 % is a significant percentage of population to lose. The study is focused on the Great Lakes Region and notes that, "...major metros of the region are becoming truly world cities in the sense of hosting diverse multi-national populations and in serving as entryways for immigration." (Austin, p.33) In 2007 The Brookings Institution released a report titled *Restoring Prosperity, The State Role in Revitalizing America's Older Industrial Cities*. In this report author

Jennifer Vey stated that “While the integration of foreign immigrants is certainly not without challenges, over the long term these newcomers can bring about substantial benefits. Recent research has shown, for example, that over the past decade, immigrants nationwide have started a greater share of new businesses than native-born residents, and have had an enormous effect on job growth and neighborhood revitalization in urban areas.” (Vey, p.39) Richard Longworth states it more baldly in his book, *Caught in the Middle, America’s Heartland in the Age of Globalism*, when he says “...if the Midwest has a future – it depends on immigrants.” (Longworth, p. 103) I am personally not quite that fatalistic about our future, but I do believe that the impact of recent and not so recent immigration to Fort Wayne will long term be positive. I’m thinking of the students in our schools who learn side by side with kids from all over the world and what an advantage that will be for them when called upon to succeed in a global economy. I’m also thinking that the business connections and work ethic of our new residents has great potential for creating a cultural retail and dining center. A “Burma Town” in Fort Wayne, perhaps? South Calhoun Street is on its way to that destiny.

I want to thank all of the individuals who have assisted me as I gathered research for this paper. This second paper of mine for Quest Club required an entirely different process of research and I very much appreciate the patience and openness of those I interviewed. I had to turn into a temporary journalist and that transition did not come easily. I thoroughly enjoyed the opportunity to talk to people from across the community about the work they do, transcribing my notes and audio tapes from those interviews was not nearly as much fun. All through this process I was reminded of what makes Fort Wayne such a great community. We care about each other and we welcome newcomers very easily. I’m proud to call Fort Wayne home and delighted that we as a community get to share our home with people from all over the world who need a welcoming place to call their own.