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The Status of Refugees in Lincoln, Nebraska's - Low-Income Housing and Racial Segregation: A Contribution or Contrast to Neighborhood Solidarity?

David Baker and Kristy Feldhousen

The process of becoming a refugee is lengthy, complicated, and arduous. It involves timing, political, religious, and economic considerations – and luck. The United Nations High Commission for Refugee's (UNHCR) in combination with the Department of State (DOS) have established their own particular criteria for granting refugee status and placement policy. After granting refugee status, the UNHCR places the refugee into three optional resolutions: repatriation to the refugee's home country, local resettlement in the country of first asylum, and resettlement to a third country (US Dept of Health, 1995). In the post World War II era an influx of refugees have made their homes in the United States regularly averaging over 70,000 per year (US Dept of Health, 1995). The DOS has established a priority list ranging from one to five pending the level of crisis of the case. The DOS has designated particular "refugee" countries into particular priority groups. It can directly grant refugee status and place refugees in the US under resolution three, but most refugees are referred to the DOS through the UNHCR (Ibid.). Once the refugees have been classified into one of the priority list, the refugees are then distributed throughout the US according to local resource capacity, and particularities of the socioeconomic environment under replacement consideration.

Ideally, every refugee placement location in the US has a reasonable amount of refugees in regards to its potential to functionally integrate them. It should also have a staff capable of translating, communicating with, and assimilating the incoming ethnic groups. This requires a diverse, multi-cultural, and highly trained refugee placement infrastructure. Due to the difficulties of integrating these ethnic groups each refugee replacement location has developed its own distinctive cultural. The locational determinants of refugee placement in the US include the availability of translators, the existence of ethnically similar groups that are well established in the area, local attitudes on further refugee resettlement, and refugee concentration/comparative integrational levels (Ibid.).

Refugee status is a political decision as it is determined by the Immigration and

Naturalization Service's definition of refugees according to the Refugee Act of 1980. Besides meeting that criteria, refugees seeking admission to the US must have, "a special humanitarian concern to the US" (Ibid.). The DOS works with ten nationally certified refugee replacement organizations. Each organization places a bid for funding, which is relatively congruent with the number of refugees delegated to it. The organization then assigns the refugees guaranteed to it into one of its national chapters. For instance, the US Catholic Conference, (USCC) which is one of the ten refugee replacement organizations, has 100 Catholic Diocese nationally. Each location is assigned the appropriate number and type of refugees based on its capacity. Approximately \$400 million per year is appropriated from the Department of Labor to cover this cost (Ibid.).

From 1975 to 1987, most of the refugees have been Southeast Asian. In 1988, Eastern European (former USSR) and Slavic refugees accounted for the majority (Ibid.). California and Florida received well over half the refugees every year. Attempts to equitably distribute the refugees are placing many of them in Mid-Western settings.

There are two types of replacement strategies, but they each must go through the UNHCR's procedures, and be classified into one of the five US DOS refugee acceptance priorities. If refugees have friends and family in the US, then they go through the "family reunification" procedure. The family or friends of the refugee(s) work with the local replacement agency, and absorb the majority of responsibilities in the initial adjustment phases. Family reunification is the predominant strategy, as it requires less refugee placement infrastructure and spending from the organization. The family or friends can often request the admittance of particular refugees in a retro-active procedure, or the refugees can request to be placed among them personally. It is in this way that large communities and networks of relatively obscure and remote ethnic groups can form in small cities. A family reunification case is regulated and filed with the placement agency for four to twelve months. In the event that a refugee is deemed appropriate given the ethnic make up of the community, members of the relevant community are contacted by the local refugee replacement organization and asked if they would like to work with the case, making it a family/friend reunification case (Interview: Kay Wenzl).

The other type of resettlement scheme is "free case". Free case occurs when the refugee has no associates in the city s/he is being placed in. Only a few organizations settle free cases, since it requires a highly developed and competent staff. States like California cannot settle any more free cases as they have surpassed the ceiling allotment for refugees. A free case is evaluated and

filed with the placement agency for six to eighteen months. Free cases require housing arrangements and an initial subsistence grant in the form of food, food stamps, and a small cash allotment. All refugees, regardless of case type, go through a cultural adjustment/orientation session upon arrival. This program normally last ten days, three hours a day (Erickson, 1998).

Statement of Research Interest:

This study deals with the major ethnic groups of refugees in Lincoln, Nebraska, the spatial significance of their housing distribution, integration into Lincoln communities and subcultures, and racial/low income housing segregation in Lincoln. The USCC chapter of the Catholic Social Service (CSS) in Lincoln resettles approximately 500 refugees yearly (Figure 1). The numbers and types of refugees in Lincoln are a reflection of global political, social and economic trends. Vietnamese began massive migrations as refugees or as Ameri-Asian immigrants (most often as politically displaced peoples) in 1975. Bosnian refugees, victims of instability in the Balkans, have recently been given a significantly higher allotment for refugees status, and together with former USSR refugees represent a large portion of the refugees in Lincoln. Finally, Iraqi (Arabic and Kurdish) refugees form the third largest refugee community in Lincoln, totaling some 2,000 (Kay Wenzl, 1999). There has been much controversy over the claim that refugees in Lincoln are segregated into two low-income neighborhoods, and that they are not integrating into their respective neighborhoods. In this study, survey and mapping data of Lincoln's refugee population is compared to the literature on other refugee bearing cities and to Lincoln at large.

Literature Review

Moore (1982) concludes in his study of Indo-Chinese refugees in Utah that the dislocation-resettlement experience induces

a great deal of strain on refugee families. Differential rates of acculturation in family members leads to family conflict and distancing among the generations. He also finds that the resettlement experience results in isolation from several traditional institutional supports, especially religious traditions and rituals of worship (Moore 1982:11).

In his study of Soviet Jew and Vietnamese refugee communities, Gold (1992) finds informal and local self-help activities that reaffirm community ties.. These are based upon social networks, family, regional origins, education, and profession. The presence of these groups reveals high social solidarity within the communities. Gold also establishes three approaches to understanding the adaptation of refugees to the social environment:

First, I conditionally accept the thrust of the large body of recent research that states that collectivism is a major force in immigrant adaptation. Ethnic solidarity provides refugees with invaluable social, economic, and informational resources. Yet, while ethnic collectivism is a vital resource for these refugees, it remains most influential and effective at the local level. Broader community unification has yet to be achieved. Further, although beneficial, the various forms of immigrant collectivism that I observed lack the power and resources to solve many of the problems refugees find most pressing (Gold 1992:230).

Gold concludes that ethnic solidarity grows with time. He maintains that ethnic consciousness grows as refugees experience greater contact with the dominant culture. Refugees create their own institutions that are separate from those controlled by non-refugees.

Westermeyer (1989) points out the numerous psychological impacts of ethnic social structure on refugees. The characteristics of the host community, its relationship with the refugee community, and the similarities between the two all have a distinct effect on the adjustment of refugees. The presence of ethnically similar communities that are not refugee based is strong evidence for facilitation of neighborhood integration. In other cases, large ethnic communities can polarize the ethnic diversity and subsequent cultural adjustment of new refugees.

Other studies have dealt with the hazards of the resettlement process and its effects on neighborhood solidarity. Scudder and Colson (1982) note that the transitional stages may last up to two years, whereupon the community forms its most lasting impressions and range of social interactions based on a few occurrences with non-refugee locals. They speculate that the behavior has a function to "reconstitute their lives after a major insult to their physical, psychological, and sociocultural well-being" (274). They note that neighborhood integration is initially characterized by extroverted risk taking behaviors, "the stage of potential development requires initiative on the part of the relocatees, every effort should be made to help them help themselves to get back on their feet" (276).

The majority of literature on refugee integration points to the functional significance of language skills in building intra-community bonds. Beiser (1989) mentions that often language skills can act as marginalizational determinants (60). This often contributes to a cycle of alienation, discrimination, and patronization. Language plays a key role in integration, perhaps the most important one. Language skills can contribute to personal happiness and extroversion, facilitate cultural diffusion, and enhance educational and vocational opportunities.

Hypotheses and Study Procedures:

The three hypotheses of this study are as follows:

1. Refugees in Lincoln are concentrated into low-median house value neighborhoods.
2. These neighborhoods are statistically defined as being preponderantly non-white.
3. Refugees in these neighborhoods do not share a sense of neighborhood consciousness with non-refugees.

Original research was conducted to test all of the hypotheses. Three types of comparative methodologies were implemented. This research included:

1. Comparative GIS – Census track maps of Lincoln specifically testing the hypotheses (this is the primary data component).
2. Attitude and behavior surveys of refugees in Lincoln including SPSS analyses.
3. Qualitative interviews with “knowledgeable local experts” regarding their opinions on these hypothesis.

All three of these comparative endeavors will be discussed and analyzed in the following methodological order: statement of research typology – including definition and conceptualization of variables, explanation of the data collection, explanation of how it was collected and with whose help, the actual data information, (charts, maps, graphs, quotes) summarizations of the strengths and weaknesses of the data, and finally, the implications of the data – supporting or rejecting the hypotheses.

Research Review:

I. GIS/Census Tract Comparative Maps:

The most transparent method of empirically measuring neighborhood trends is topography. The first two hypotheses

were tested using the Geographic Information System (GIS) Arcview mapping software. Census tract information from the 1990 census of Lancaster County, Lincoln City was placed on a GIS track map of Lincoln. However, refugee location and concentration is not recorded on census track information. Maps of Lincoln with Refugee data were contributed by Dr. John Gaber, Community and Regional Planning, University of Nebraska at Lincoln, based on original research from students.

The maps are largely self-explanatory. The two variables, low-median house value, and racial composition of the tracks are separated into five categories. Low-median house value includes all residential home values averaged per track, with each track being in one of the five respective categories. The maps are divided along track lines, but only the five categorical lines are shown on the map so that often one continuous color set includes multiple tracks. Racial composition is measured as the actual number of non-white inhabitants per track. Each dot on the refugee map (map 1) represents one refugee household on that map (Appendix map 1, 2, 3, and 4).

The weaknesses of these data are few. Census tract information is quite credible, as is the work of the Department of Community and Regional Planning. There are some problems with overgeneralizing from these maps. First, only the number of non-white inhabitants per track was available (for logistical reasons). Therefore, areas where there is a higher number of non-white inhabitants could be due to higher populations as opposed to racial segregation (however this is unlikely). Median house value also included the rural areas surrounding the Lincoln community, somewhat distorting the residential – median home value picture as well. The strength of this type of analysis is its simplicity.

The fourth GIS map, a compilation of the first three, shows the areas where the variables intersect and where they are

superimposed. This GIS map summarizes a number of factors. Alone, it is almost conclusively a final statement on refugee locational distributions in Lincoln. Refugees in Lincoln are segregated into low-income housing and predominately non-white neighborhoods. The data on this map show two distinct neighborhoods, both of which clearly support the first two hypotheses. These neighborhoods are just North of O street, on 27th, the "Malone" area, and around the Capital, between 14th and 20th streets, and A to M streets. These maps reflect the preponderant racial/class divisions that are ubiquitous in American society. They demonstrate an ethnic concentration that is similar to the ethnic communities described in previous literature. This study concludes that these communities do indeed exist in Lincoln, Nebraska in two separate "ethnic enclaves". These "ethnic enclaves" have several distinct subculture divisions and differential group identities, as the other two comparative studies demonstrate.

II. Attitude and Behavioral Surveys of Refugees in Lincoln:

A survey was generated and designed to measure group (neighborhood) consciousness of refugees. Neighborhood consciousness is defined as the desire to befriend ones' neighbors, and the feeling of belonging to a neighborhood. The survey measured particular attitudes and behaviors about neighborhood integration-consciousness. This was done by assessing to what degree the respondent agreed with five statements, (Survey 1, Appendix) how many of a particular type of outings he or she participated in per week, and the number non-refugee people in the neighborhood the person was familiar with. The definition is inherently comparative, as there is no set idea of what a "normal" level of neighborhood consciousness is. Consequently, refugees and non-refugees were both surveyed.

Due to time constraints, availability, and language barriers, only ten refugees (all of whom are students at UNL) were surveyed. Because of the high concentration of refugees found in the GIS mapping data in the selected neighborhoods, (over 90% of all refugees in Lincoln live in one of these two neighborhoods) it is assumed that the refugees, although not randomly selected, do represent beliefs about neighborhood consciousness among those communities. It is also important to note that the survey establishes relevancy in light of the concentration of refugees found in the GIS comparative maps. Ten non-refugees living in the same selected regions were also asked to participate. Statistical analyses were then performed on the data collected.

This type of research design is somewhat problematic as it is difficult to base generalizations upon it. The sample is not random, and therefore may not be representative of that neighborhood. Secondly, the sample populations, refugee and non-refugee small. All of the respondents were students under the age of 26, and do not represent the older age. However, all of the surveyees live in the selected area. This is the only attempt to measure actual refugee beliefs and attitudes. Despite these methodological problems, the surveys do have a great deal of usefulness after their limitations have been defined.

Of the ten items on the survey, statistically significant results were found on three questions. Despite the limited research design, there is a 95% chance that attitudes/beliefs of refugees and non-refugees are different concerning neighborhood consciousness in these areas. The results show that refugees are less happy than non-refugees living in these neighborhoods, non-refugees attend functions outside of the home much more often than refugees, and refugees would like to live in the neighborhood longer than would non-refugees (Graphs 1, 2, & 3). The data show support for the third hypothesis: refugees in these neighborhoods

do not share a sense of neighborhood consciousness with non-refugees. Furthermore, the data suggests, that refugees form their own communities and establish their own social networks in the community they reside. Overall, scores for neighborhood integration and consciousness are seemingly low for both samples. Both sample populations averaged below a 1, the lowest score possible, on feeling welcome in the neighborhood. They also had a low tendency to visit others in the neighborhood.

III. Qualitative Interviews of "knowledgeable experts" Opinions.

In addition to refugee surveys, interviews were conducted with professionals, concerning the placement and cultural adjustment of refugees. These interviews were valuable in regards to the third hypothesis. Interviews were conducted with neighborhood leaders in the Malone and Lincoln High area. These interviews concerned the general attitudes held in the neighborhood on integration and consciousness, particularly in regards to "encroaching" refugees. Peggy Newquist (Cultural Orientation Director of Catholic Social Services), Curt Kruger, (Refugee Department Case Management Coordinator at Catholic Social Services), and Dr. Joseph Stimpfl, (Assistant Professor of Anthropology and International Studies), were interviewed and asked the following questions:

1. Is there a certain area where most refugees are concentrated in the city?
2. What kind of area is it in terms of housing conditions, ethnic populations, crime rates, etc.?
3. Do you believe that the refugees become easily integrated into these neighborhoods? If not, why?
4. What are some of the problems refugees might have with others in the neighborhood?

In regards to question one, all informants maintained that refugees were concentrated in the Malone community and the area surrounding Lincoln High School. Areas surrounding Everett and Elliott schools were also described as having high populations of refugees. Peggy Newquist described specifically where each refugee group was concentrated, stating that the Bosnian refugees reside near Lincoln High School and Randolph Street, forming a "Bosnian village". Several Bosnian families also live in the "Russian Bottoms" near 8th and X Streets. Ms. Newquist stated that the Vietnamese refugee population was more scattered throughout Lincoln while Iraqis were concentrated from 9th to 27th Street and from A to O Street. Many Russians were said to reside near Lincoln Air Park in West Lincoln.

All informants described refugee resettlement areas as low-income housing areas. Curt Kruger maintained that refugee homes must meet the minimum housing standards as established by the replacement organizations and the Department of Housing and Urban Development, (HUD) Dr. Joseph Stimpfl related that the poorest housing in the city was near Everett school, where many refugees are located. Areas of refugee resettlement are also described as having a great deal of ethnic diversity, as well as having the most occurrences of petty crime in the city.

Peggy Newquist described differences in living conditions between the refugee ethnic groups. Vietnamese people generally live "communally", often with more than one family in a dwelling. This practice often exceeds the city codes for numbers of people living in one house. While Vietnamese and Russians usually live in houses, Bosnians and Iraqi Kurds tend to live in apartments.

When asked if refugees become integrated into their neighborhoods, all informants replied that they were not. Peggy Newquist attributes this lack of

integration to a language barrier and cultural differences. She believed that Bosnians are becoming integrated faster than those from other groups because they are culturally more similar to American culture, while Kurdish communities have the hardest time as their culture is vastly different. This finding is similar to what the literature has suggested.

Another factor adding to the difficulty of integration into the neighborhoods is American feelings toward refugees. Ms. Newquist related that hate comments are common. There is a hostile feeling among many Americans towards refugees that can be heard in comments such as "Don't we have enough?" and "Aren't they taking American jobs"? Many refugees experience this hostility first-hand, through comments directed at them like "raghead". These factors create hostility and make adjustment difficult for refugees.

Dr. Joseph Stimpfl and Curt Kruger maintained that the refugee integration into "ethnically segregated" neighborhoods was simple because their own social network was already established in the form of friends and relatives from their own country. Many times, refugees are resettled with family members and therefore have a social base upon entering a neighborhood. However, the scattering of refugee groups across the city prevents a network from forming. It is important to note that the neighborhood integration expressed by Dr. Stimpfl and Mr. Kruger represents intra-ethnic group interaction, and not inter-ethnic group interaction, which would be a "truer" measure of neighborhood integration. The findings here also suggest that the creation of predominant ethnic neighborhoods drowns out ethnic toleration and multicultural interaction as the existence of an "ethnic kinship network" allows for social interactions to remain in a closed network.

Dr. Joseph Stimpfl believes refugees are not integrated in their areas by their own

choice. To go outside their social network breaks down their own support structure. Family, friends, and religion provide structure for these refugees. Integration into another structure would cause a deterioration of this base.

Other problems seen by informants include xenophobia, misinformation about the environment, and a mistrust of government officials. Peggy Newquist related that refugees are uneasy about living in Lincoln and are concerned about crime. She also expressed that the cultural orientation given refugees only lasts ten days and that there is no focus on neighborhood solidarity.

Refugees are being placed into communities that are currently dealing with racial tensions, the center of this area being the Malone community. Fieldwork was conducted in this area in May to June of 1998 by Kristy Feldhousen through the University of Nebraska Ethnographic Field School. This work provides a background for the current research subject. The Malone community is historically an African-American neighborhood, formed when redlining practices prevented African-Americans from settling elsewhere in the city. According to interviews with residents of the Malone neighborhood, the area was one of close-knit relations in the past. Recently, white middle-class people have begun moving into the neighborhood. The housing values in the community have increased dramatically and is now pushing out the lower income African-American families. The newcomers' goals differ greatly from those of the historically resident population in the Malone community, and opposing neighborhood groups have formed as a result. They see the neighborhood as divided by both race and interest.

Introducing refugees into the neighborhood has the potential to increase community tensions. In interviews with residents of the Malone neighborhood,

tension between African-Americans and whites is evident, and many residents are apprehensive about newcomers from outside the United States. People interviewed watched newcomers closely and, more significantly, worried about the new housing being constructed that would serve to house more low-income families like refugees. To construct this new housing, older houses in the neighborhood have been torn down. Change like this continues to take place in this neighborhood as population increases.

It is clear that most refugees are placed in the poorest areas of Lincoln, areas of high ethnic diversity and low-income housing. Most refugees have family sponsors and relatives living in Lincoln by the time they are placed in neighborhoods. In this way, refugees have an established social network that allows for immediate integration. Involuntary social isolation of refugees may be merely a construct of outsiders, as many refugees may prefer to stay within their own social networks. Integration into mainstream society could break down these networks. However, it is also possible that refugees find it difficult to become integrated into their environment because of cultural differences and hostile feelings from surrounding Americans.

The Malone community is one neighborhood into which many refugees are being placed. Many of the characteristics of this community may be similar to other communities into which refugees are settling. The Malone community is one that has a history of being subjected to city planning and construction, causing tension within the community. It is also accommodating an influx of refugee populations, which adds to the tension in the community.

Impacts of refugee populations on social environments can only be estimated with the current data. However, through interviews with refugee resettlement authorities and residents of a neighborhood with a high refugee population, it is clear that tensions exist due to race and opposing interests. An influx of refugees may increase tensions in these neighborhoods. Yet, it is apparent that refugees remain in the own social bases and do not socially integrate into their surrounding American communities.

Further Discussion and Conclusion:

Several methods were used to test the hypotheses. GIS Arcview maps have provided strong evidence of housing segregation at multiple levels. Lincoln, like other heterogeneous American cities, is highly fractionalized along race, class, and ethnic boundaries. This study shows that in Lincoln, significant variation among these variables has been concentrated into two distinct neighborhoods; the Malone area, and around Lincoln High. Refugees and non-refugees in these neighborhoods are not integrating with each other. Rather, they are maintaining their own socio-cultural identities; which do not allow intra-community networking. This is most obviously manifested in language barriers, which continue to crystallize ethnic community isolation in these neighborhoods. Further research should include a more extensive and representative survey sample, evaluations of English as a Second Language programs, and a study of informal English speaking skill acquisition. Studies should also be continued on the social and physical environmental effects of refugee resettlement on these neighborhoods.

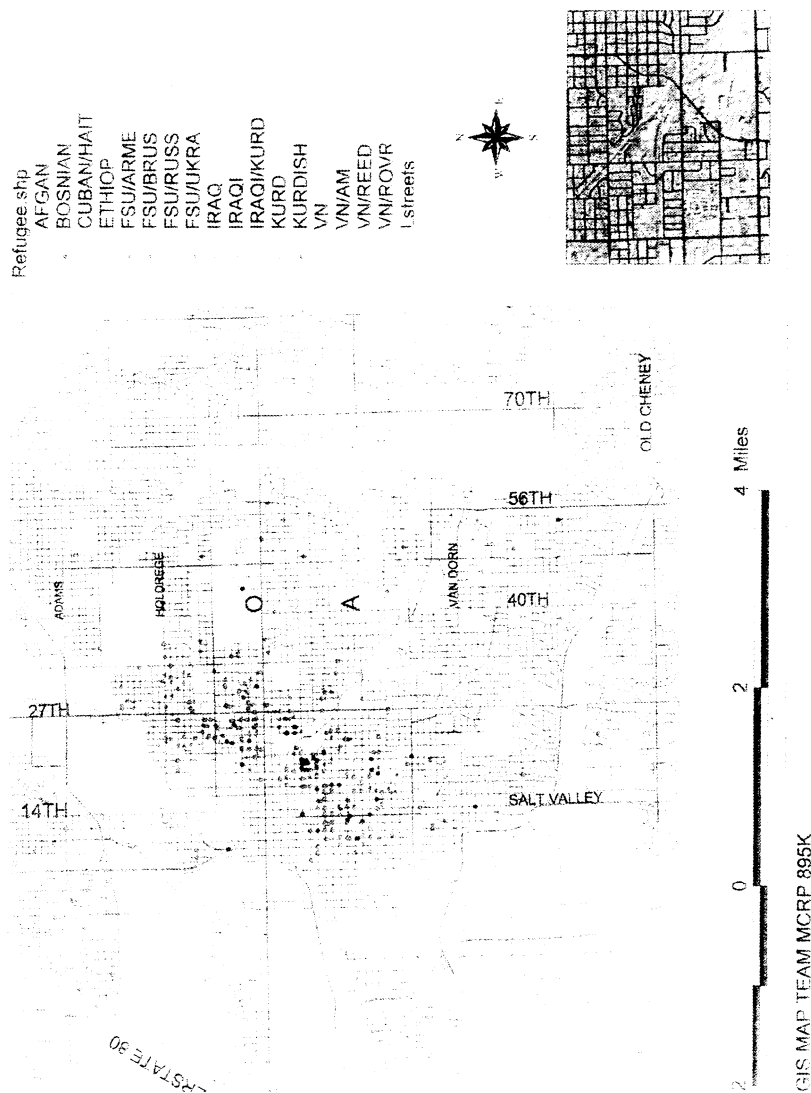
Appendix:

Survey 1

1. I feel welcome in this neighborhood.	1	-	10
2. I know my neighbors on a first name basis.	1	-	10
3. I am happy living in this neighborhood.	1	-	10
4. I would like to meet others in this neighborhood.	1	-	10
5. I believe this neighborhood is safe and clean.	1	-	10
6. I would like to live here for 10 more years.	1	-	10
7. How many people do you know in this neighborhood?_____			
8. How many times do you visit someone in your neighborhood each week?_____			
9. How many times do you attend a social function in your neighborhood each week?_____			
10. How many people do you know in your neighborhood?_____			

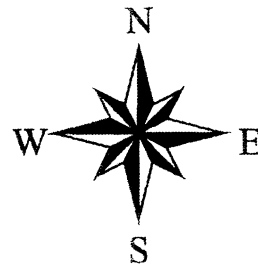
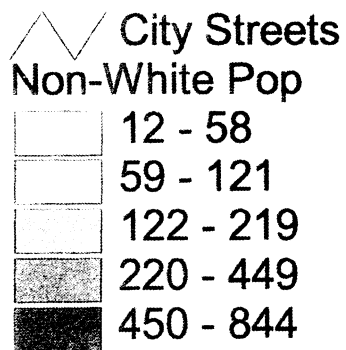
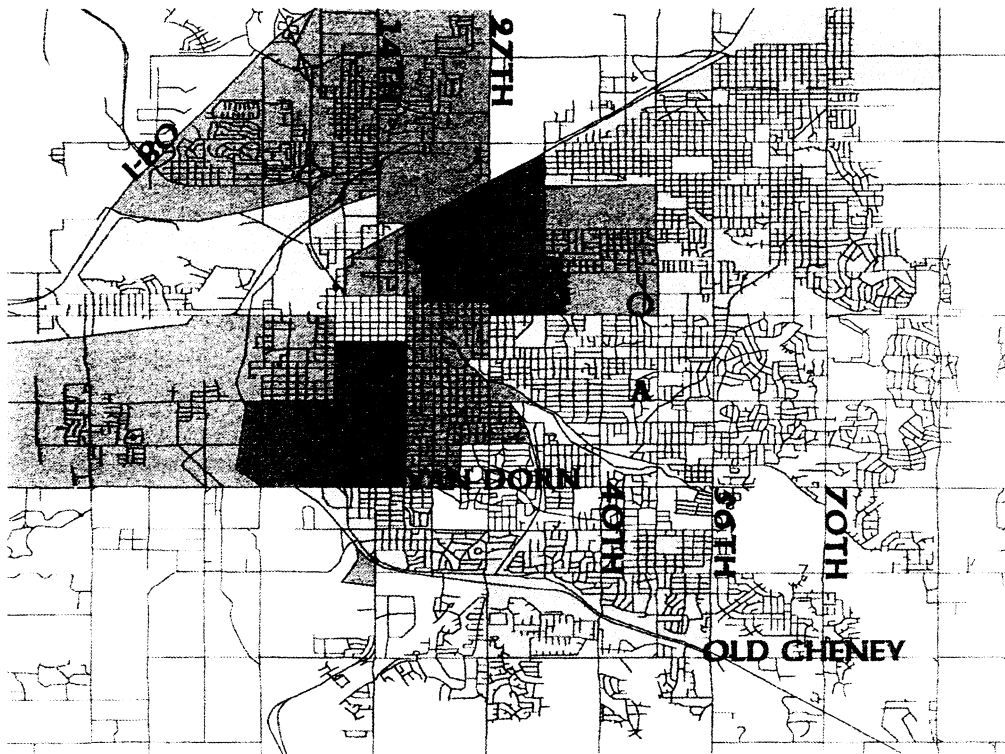
Map 1

Enlarged View of Distribution of Refugee Population by Ethnicity

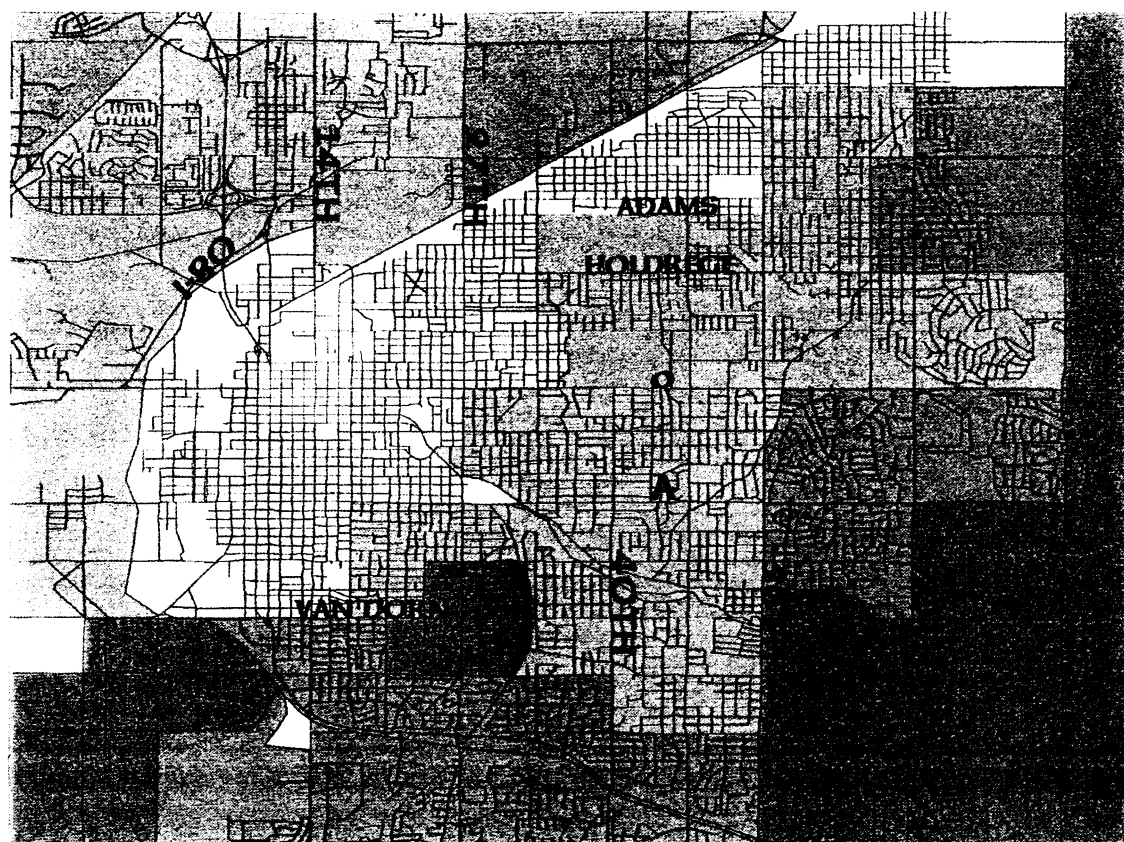


Map 2

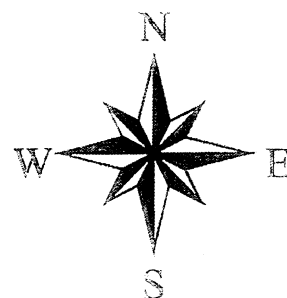
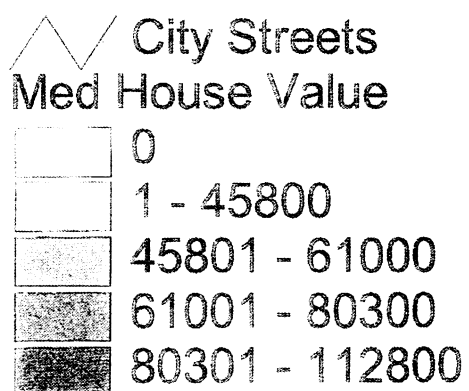
Lincoln Non-White Population



Map 3 Lincoln Median Housing

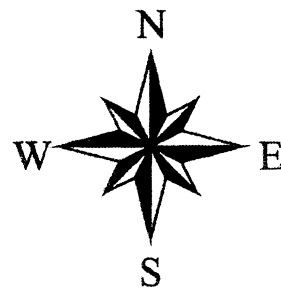
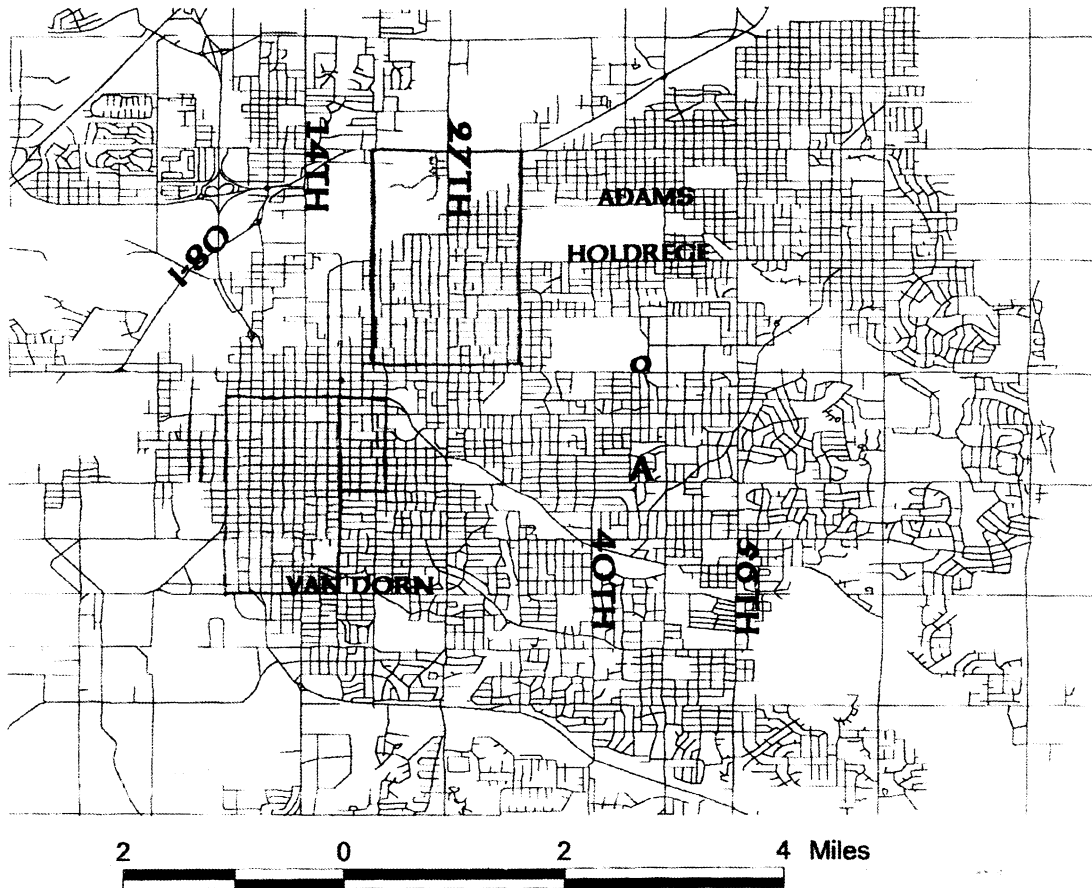


2 0 2 4 Miles



Map 4

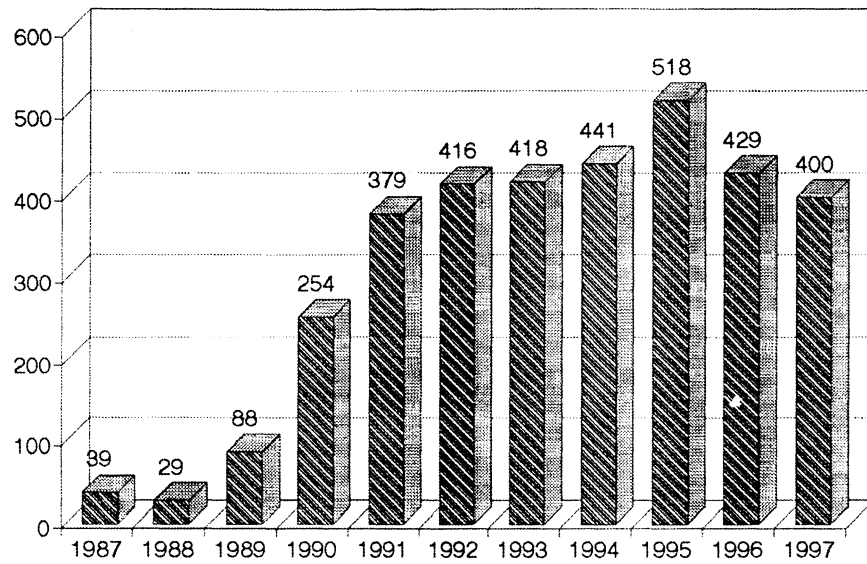
Selected Neighborhoods: Malone and Lincoln High Area



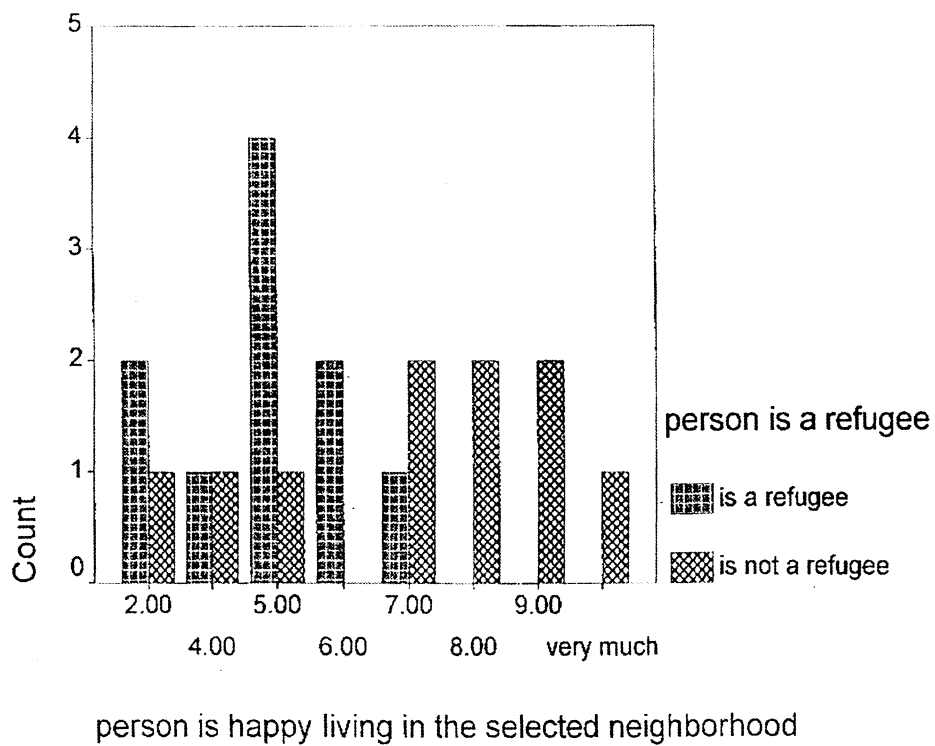
City Streets

Figure 1

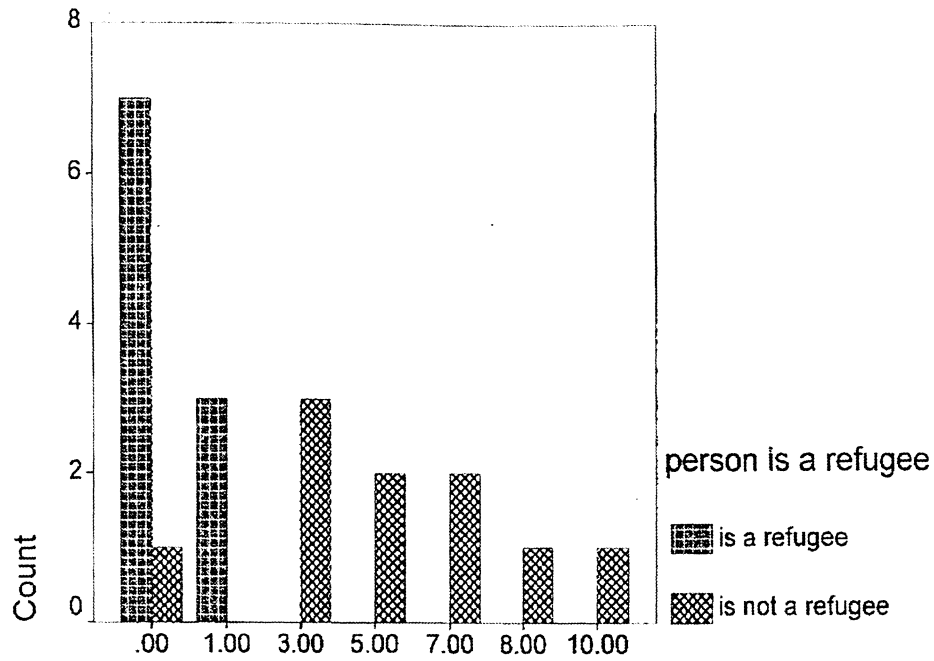
Catholic Social Services Refugee Arrivals, 1987-97



Graph 1

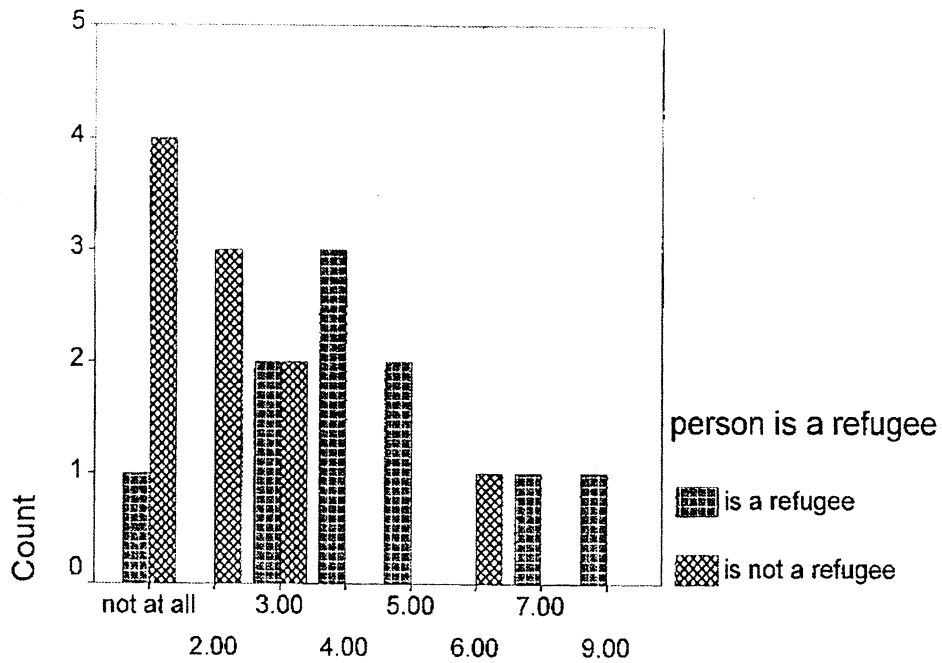


Graph 2



number of times per week attends function outside of home

Graph 3



person would like to live in the neighborhood for 10 more year

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