

Immigration: An Economic, Social and Cultural Perspective

Between 1990 and 2010, Latinos grew from under one to nearly three percent of the population of Mississippi. These new residents have been integrated into local economies throughout the state as workers, consumers, and entrepreneurs. They are changing both themselves and the face of the communities in which they live in ways that range from near invisibility to complete integration. Dr. Bridget Hayden conducted research over the summer with immigrant and native Mississippi residents in communities throughout the state to reveal how national, regional, and local ideas and cultural traditions intersect with the individual initiative of local leaders to create very different conditions that affect how immigrants are integrated into local communities.

One major finding of her research is that immigrants and non-immigrants most often live parallel lives with very little communication between communities. Unless they work together, they are largely oblivious to the skills, experiences, and knowledge of the other group, which impedes the recognition of immigrants as a resource, which may hinder local development opportunities. A second finding suggests that in addition to being influenced by global, national and state political and economic forces, local residents interpret the presence of immigrants through the lens of Mississippi regional cultures and histories. For example, Mississippians of the Coast and the Delta referenced their regions' different racial histories in speaking of the integration of immigrants. Finally, her research highlights the importance of local leadership in shaping relationships between immigrants and non-immigrants. Local police, politicians, business leaders, and church members and leaders from both communities are playing a decisive role in shaping local variation between towns even within regions. For example, the minister of one church may seek to add a Spanish language service, while a church in another town may have bilingual services, and a third may have no service for Spanish-speakers at all.

Dr. Bridget Hayden, associate professor of Anthropology, and Dr. Michael Wittmann, associate professor of Marketing, were selected to become the 2012 Trent Lott National Center Fellows at The University of Southern Mississippi. In order to achieve its potential of serving as the University's primary community economic development and business engagement entity, the [Trent Lott National Center for Excellence in Economic Development and Entrepreneurship](#) created the Fellows Program for faculty and staff throughout the university to have formal affiliations with the Center.

This new affiliation creates a mechanism for the expansion of a robust body of knowledge for the practice of community economic development, entrepreneurship and business engagement.



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