

Steve Pinto, "Hispanic Relation to Crime in Adams County."

In the small town of York Springs, Pennsylvania the face of the community is changing. Instead of last names like Smith and Jones, more and more of the residents now have last names that some people can barely pronounce or spell. What was once a small, almost entirely white community, has become a port for the growth of the Hispanic community in Adams County. But as the wave of immigration keeps growing, the appearance of Hispanics in this small town has kept many local residents and law enforcement officials on alert.

Across the USA there are many communities like York Springs. As Mexico and various countries in Latin America continue to experience economic crisis, more and more people continue to migrate to America looking for work and money to send to their families back at home. Jobs in agriculture, factory work and blue-collar work provide sources of income for migrants willing to put in long hours of hard work for minimum or less than minimum wage. Despite low wages, migrants can make just enough to live comfortably, and often find a place they can call home. In York Springs, nearly 200 Hispanics from Mexico, Puerto Rico, and a variety of other countries have tried to make the small community second home. According to the town's Borough Council reports ten years ago there was a little more a dozen Hispanics living or staying in town, and now the Hispanic community comprises nearly a quarter of the population, which is roughly 800.

When I began to look into the relationship between the majority white population, the Hispanic community and law enforcement, I noticed that each side in the relationship was plagued with stereotypes that their clouded their view of one another. My purpose was to find, or at least try to find, what the majority of York Springs thought of Hispanics and crime. Was the stereotype of Hispanics as rowdy and prone to criminal activity only found in the larger urban areas where crime has been historically more prevalent, or was York Springs an example of a populous misinformed by the media and dominated by prejudice? I briefly tried to find other studies that were similar to mine and I found that there were a number of studies on the relationship between law enforcement and the community in large urban centers like New York City and Los Angeles, but research into small communities like the one I was about to study was limited. And as I sat back and began to look at the task ahead, it started to become clear that getting the information you needed in small towns like York Springs can be difficult. For the sake of argument, I must use a stereotype that is associated with small communities, which is that people in small towns are usually not fond of outsiders moving in or of outsiders snooping around trying to meddle in their business or the way their town is run. Of course, this idea is probably more

fact than stereotype, but it accounts for the uneasiness and resentment that many in the York springs community have for the Hispanic community.

My methodology for this project was two-fold. First, I wanted to focus on the aspects of law and the relationship with the Hispanic community by making contact and interviewing people that played a direct role in this relationship. This would be my main source for information. then I wanted to somehow tie in my findings about York Springs to events that have been happening across the nation. The first part of this was easy, but the second was a little more difficult since York Springs has not had to deal with some of the issues that larger communities face every day. At least not yet.

For years, York Springs was a place where generations of families would live and raise their children. It was very uncommon to see children who had grown up in this town to leave, but if they did for various reasons such as military services, education or a job, they would always come back to their roots. These are the words of Bud Miller who, at age 84 has seen all of the changes in York Springs first hand. As a longtime member of the York Springs historical society Bud recalls that the people of York Springs have always been wary of newcomers, and at times inhospitable or even cold. AA lot of people in this town just want it peaceful and quiet. They don't want to worry about big city problems...like Gettysburg..or Harrisburg does.

Bud admitted that York Springs is at a crossroads, and it would be from decisions made now within the community that would affect generations of residents for years to come. Whether the residents of York Springs would accept the Hispanic community and attempt some understanding between the two cultures, or if the would continue to look the other way as more Hispanics moved in, could make or break a town that was at one point a place people wanted to live. And although he particularly doesn't like the Hispanic community all that much, Bud realizes that two cultures can live with each other only if there is an effort from both sides.

When I interviewed the York Springs Police Chief, George C. Bowers, he expressed a lot of the same ideas. Chief Bowers believes that problems in the community exist because of misunderstandings and the fact that few members in the community have tried to bring whites and Hispanics together. he recalls all the times that he has gone to the Borough Council of York Springs and asked them, almost begging them to start some cultural assimilation programs for both communities. Programs that would allow whites to understand where Hispanics are coming from and what they are looking for, and that would let Hispanics know what is expected of them

as residents of York Springs and America. Instead of trying to bring everyone together, Bowers says that the Borough Council has turned the other cheek claiming that the situation is not critical. But Chief Bowers knows differently. On the streets of York Springs the white community of York Springs is slowly getting more and more frustrated and bitter with the arrival of the Hispanic community. Nearly everyday, him and his officers are contacted by white citizens of the community who have one or more complaints against the Hispanics in town. According to Chief Bowers, the calls can range from complaints about Hispanics playing music too loud, or just hanging out on the street talking, which immediately produces a lot of suspicion and fear in the local residents. An example, Chief Bowers used was that one night he received a call from an elderly woman, who said she was afraid to walk down the street because there was a bunch of Hispanics on the sidewalk socializing and she was afraid that he would assault her and steal all her money. Since the arrival of Hispanics, Bowers has noticed that the community has become edgy and discouraging. No longer does he see people excited about York Springs, and everyone is looking to jump on the first chance to leave town.

Chief Bowers explains that one of his biggest challenges has been making the community understand that everything the Hispanic community has been accused of doing the other side has done. Never in his twenty-three years in York Springs, has an Hispanic person been guilty of a serious crime, such as murder or rape. A few years ago, the parents of a teenage girl accused a young Hispanic male of statutory rape, but after further investigation, the girl admitted that she had been dating this guy for some time, and she had willingly gone to his apartment and engaged in sexual conduct. According to Bowers this has been the only instance of a serious charge brought against a Hispanic, but is careful not to rule out that accusations like this may happen again. He also adds that there have been no case of a Hispanic committing assault or purse snatching, which seems to be the major fear of female residents in town, as they are calling police every time they see a group of men on the street, afraid that something may happen. And although, Chief Bowers understands the fears of many people in the community, he believes that it is the misunderstanding between two cultures that has led to this fear and anxiety.

He points out that some people in York Springs will repeatedly call in complaining about loud music coming from Hispanic residences or that a group of Hispanics are standing on the sidewalk looking for trouble. But Bowers believes that if people understood the way of living and the social structure of countries like Mexico, and other nations migrants come from, they would understand that hanging out on the corner is normal and they don't want to hurt anyone.

And not only is it frustrating for the officers to waste their time on petty calls like this, but it can affect the relationship of Hispanics and the police, which has required a long time to build trust. Bowers admits that if he had a better knowledge of Mexican culture, he could explain or at least understand why the Hispanic community fears the police and why they don't ask for help when they need it. When Chief Bowers first arrived in York Springs, he says that all the migrant workers lived in camps on the orchards of the growers and were separated from and left alone by the community. Very little calls would come from the camps requesting police help, and more often than not when the police were actually dispatched to a scene of a fight or any other crime, everyone had fled, and no one was willing to come forward as a witness. Fear of deportation or retribution by the guilty would leave many cases unsolved. As migrants have begun to become more active and permanent members of the community, and have moved into apartment complexes all over Adams county and especially

in York Springs, members of those communities believe that they have brought with them new waves of crime.

Yet from what Chief Bowers and his officers tell me, crimes that are committed involving Hispanics are almost always internal and usually not reported to the police. By internal they meant that an argument or fight would break out in the Hispanic community, among themselves or a group of friends. As one of Chief Bowers' officers put it though, "this becomes really frustrating sometimes because when we get to the scene of a fight, someone may be hurt or property may be damaged and there are no eyewitnesses and no 'bad guys,' so there is nothing we can do. But the rest of the community may get wind of this and think oh my god, those Hispanics, they are getting out of control and they will probably come after us soon." Chief Bowers added that the community fails to realize just how quiet the Hispanic community is and how much they stay to themselves and try to stay out of trouble. Usually, it is the whites in this community that try and start something with the Hispanic community, either by physical or verbal badgering. Bowers recalls an incident where there was a group of Hispanics on one side of the street and a group of whites on the other, and the whites began shouting obscenities and threatening the Hispanics that had just been standing around talking. AWhen we got there both sides were yelling and cursing at each other and it could have gotten really out of hand

One of the other officers that was on duty that night remembers arriving at the and thinking Aoh my god, it has finally reached the boiling point. The officer who wishes to remain anonymous because he has been harassed by locals residents, says that it was almost unavoidable that something like this was going to happen. ASome of the white residents had become so

frustrated, and they had had a little too much to drink, and they wanted to get ride of 'the problem' and the knew the police wouldn't help so they decided to become vigilante's. it was a crazy night. I asked him what kind of harassment he had been getting, and he was a little reserved but admitted that some members of the community were extremely bitter and had begun to satirize the police and other members of the community who were taking a stand for the Hispanic community.

As a response to the growth of the Hispanic community, Chief Bowers and his officers decided to take Spanish classes in order to communicate and break down the language and cultural barriers. And although it was a valiant attempt, Chief Bowers admits that it didn't work because the language they learned in those classes was a dialect that most of the Hispanic community didn't know and so the effort to bring the two communities together failed once again. Years back, religious organizations had come into town asked the borough council to use certain facilities for migrant education, and human services, but were turned down, and since then only the Lutheran church has been successful in operating programs for the Hispanic community

After sitting down with Chief Bowers and a few of the officers on his force, it was clear that the York Springs police was disappointed and frustrated with the Borough Council. They had made several attempts to inform the council on what needed to be done in the community as far as bringing people together and interaction, but the council failed to heed the warning that something needed to be done or else.

Along with other members of the Mosaic program and one of our professors, we interviewed Pat Golden who has been the York Springs Borough secretary and treasurer for almost eleven years and owned home in York Springs for nearly eighteen years until she recently bought a home outside of town. We were interested in Pat Golden because she had been involved with the town's governing body for many years and had seen the town's transformation first hand, as both a public official and an average resident. She also caught our attention because her son-in-law is Mexican.

About a week before meeting Pat Golden I had talked with her son-in-law Benjamin. Benjamin has been in the United States for nearly fourteen years, and has spent the last eleven years living and working in York Springs. As a supervisor for Pennsylvania Quality Eggs, has hired many Mexicans and has played the role of a father figure and leader in the Hispanic community. During my interview with Benjamin, when I asked him about racism in York Springs, he implied that the racism was a result of the behavior of many in the Mexican community. After hearing this I was sort of shock to hear it

coming from someone in the Hispanic community, but I realized that it could provide a foundation from which I could build my research. When it was finally my turn to ask Pat Golden some questions, I decided to use what Benjamin had said and see how she react and what information I could get from her. And she never hesitated in her response.

AI believe what he said (Benjamin) to a point Like I said because they go out here in front of their neighbors and they urinate on telephone poles...*because* they know it irritates their neighbor. or they go out there, and I mean I'll never forget the day the guy was, and I know this on tape, squatted down and pooped right in front of me. In broad daylight, at a dumpster. Not twenty-five feet from a back door of an apartment building that had a public sewer. You know when I called the cop and he got there the guy had a red bandana. When the cop got there they all had red bandanas. And I could not tell him which one it was...they do that kind of thing...they know. Or they know there's a no open container law, no open alcoholic beverages on public streets, so they pour their beer into a coke can and they stand on the street and every time a cop goes by they go 'hey...' And the cop knows there's booze in there, but what's he gonna do..he can't stop and, you know, harass them. But...like I said they just do these little things...but it doesn't affect crime...I mean the white people are just as bad. I had one situation where the Hispanics didn't clean up their yard, so the white neighbor took the rake and picked up all of his leaves and through it across the fence into the rest of they yard...Now if someone did that to me, even if my yard was dirty I wouldn't want someone else dirt to be there too.

When Benjamin started dating Pat Golden's daughter Stephanie, he was eighteen and she was twelve years old, which above all things drove her nuts. The problem was not because he was Hispanic. My main problem was that my daughter was twelve years old. My next major problem was I was married to a man who was very prejudice. You were either white or he did not even talk to you. He didn't refer to you as human. It didn't matter, so he did everything he could to stop them. And I had come to the realization a couple years later that there was nothing I was going to do about this. I can leave me house at three o'clock in the morning in my bunny slipper and fuzzy robe and walk down the street and yank her out of his apartment. But the more I did it, the more she was going to do it. My ex-husband chased him down the street with a gun calling him everything but a whatever, a human. There was another time he threatened to throw him down two flights of stairs, well that's because he was hiding in my daughter's bedroom behind the door. And when he asked my daughter if anybody was up there she said no, and my ex-husband knew there was and he gave Benjamin about three second to get the hell down the street. Benjamin had a real obstacle with that. I asked pat if she ever was bothered by the town's

opinion of her daughter running around with a Mexican, and she replied AI really didn't care. I'm that type of person that if my kids are happy with what they're doing or they at least show some semblance maturity I'm not going to do anything. I'm sure the community had problems with it. there was my daughter, at twelve years old and I could have killed her for what she was doing. Yet, I see these little girls now that are thirteen, fourteen, and they're with a different Hispanic every week. And I know one little girl here who was pregnant at twelve, fourteen, and fifteen, she had three abortions by three different Hispanics. Her mother does not care, so under those situation what do you do. The more you tell her, she can't do this, the more she's going to do it.

Three years into her daughters relationship with Benjamin, Pat brought him to the house and talked with him. She knew that after three years there was nothing she could do or say to change anything, so she told Benjamin the way it was going to work. A I sat him down and said look...you're gonna have to do these things. If you want to see my daughter, you will get legal insurance on you're car, you will get a driver's license, you will have registration on your vehicle, you will pay you damn taxes. And if you're going to see my daughter you going to act like an American and this is the way its going to be...and he did. But I told him that he would not be permitted in this house until you do what you have to do.

After years of working on his English, Benjamin lost his Mexican citizen status and became an American citizen, and oat believes that he is experiencing some problems within the Mexican community because some people are saying he sold out and that he's not Mexican anymore. But Benjamin has made a name for himself in the white and Hispanic communities. He joined the fire company in Hildesburg and according to Pat and a couple of the volunteer firefighters, they think the world of Benjamin. according to one of the volunteers AWe were leery at first, because of him being Mexican. But when he joined us, he worked so hard and was so friendly with everyone that he fit right in. And it helps us having someone who is Mexican and speaks Spanish that can help us when we have an emergency were some one is hurt and they don't know English. he has done a great job for us.

In the Mexican community Benjamin has been the person to call when you're in trouble and need money to pay a fine. Pat explains that on more than one occasion he has even left work to go bail one of his cousins or friends out of jail. AI have a real problem with that when I have two grandchildren, and they come first. Benjamin is very family oriented but if his cousin gets in trouble and needs \$800 or \$900, Benjamin will be there. And it irritates the living daylights out of me. I don't care if you want to get

your cousin out of trouble, but if my granddaughter or grandson needs something, you better never say 'I don't have the money.' One problem Pat has is that her and Benjamin are very close. She knows that he doesn't have any family in the area except for a few 'no good cousins' as she put it, so she has been there for him on a number of occasions including marriage problems. Of course, this puts her in a tight spot. Because on the one hand she wanted to be there for Benjamin, but she was obligated to be there for her daughter.

I turned Pat's attention to what she thought was the community opinion of the Hispanic community. She said the problem lies in the older white community that just wants to live in a quiet and peaceful town. They don't want any trouble, and many of them have become afraid of the Mexicans. Some are so scared they won't even leave their house just to talk a short walk. And although we have had some problems with a few Mexicans, as a whole they cause about as much trouble as the local teenage, high school kids. I remember one year when the fire company was having their annual carnival, and a group of teenagers, who were the children of some prominent residents went to the carnival looking to fight some Hispanics. They walked over to this one Mexican guy and they pushed him down and started punching and kicking him trying to start a brawl. Well, the Mexican gentleman did fight back and then the cops came and rounded up the white teenagers and they were off to jail.

The only thing that Pat can remember in recent years that has caused that type of large confrontation between the white and Hispanic communities, was the use of the soccer field behind the old elementary school. Years ago, Benjamin and about ten or eleven other Hispanics petitioned the Borough Council for access to the soccer field. The local Hispanics came to us and said 'can we use the ball field.' Okay fine you can use it, but we're not responsible if anything happens and you have to clean up after yourselves. Ten, fifteen, twenty guys...they were great about. Then teams from Gettysburg, and Chambersburg, and Harrisburg, and Carlisle were invited down to play, and then you were talking about five, six, seven hundred Mexicans at the soccer field on a Sunday morning. They started to break in the school and use the bathrooms which were not hooked up, so you can imagine what those toilets looked like after a couple months with no running water. They would go up in the trees at the fire company, which is their Christmas trees, they would throw their beer bottles in there, their dirty baby diapers. They would go to the bathroom there...and then they would leave. And they'd leave this group of local guys to clean up. And it was two guys Benjamin and Martin, and they would come in here with garbage bags and they after spending hours cleaning the mess. But there was nothing

they could do. And no one knew who had opened their mouth and invited all those people here.

After only one year, the Borough counsel finally said enough and closed the field again by putting up railroad ties, and forming a wall of telephones blocking the entrance. A year later Benjamin and the same group of guys asked for another chance to make the idea work, but again things got out of hand and the town closed the field for good. 'Every night at six you would see the guys in the soccer shoes, heading towards the field to play, and they would play till dark and leave, no problems. But that was just 15 or 20 guys, but when as the numbers grew larger and larger, that's things got out of hand and we had to say no to the ball field. that meant saying no to the little league, the fire company, anyone who wanted to use the field. Cause you can't say no to one group and yes to another, that's prejudice and then you would be looking for trouble and maybe at a Civil Rights lawsuit.

I have always heard that sports help bring people together, and in York Springs it was beginning to work. Not only did soccer allow Hispanics to enjoy themselves, it also kept them away from the bars and out of trouble. The community also began to notice how the soccer field had opened up a world of opportunities for the kids in York Springs that really didn't have much to do. One man recalls seeing some of the younger white folk on the field, learning how to play soccer, alongside the Mexicans, and there seemed to be no problems. But as the soccer field idea turned into a nightmare, the stories about how the Hispanic community acted and what they had done to the place created a whirlwind of rumors accusation and stereotyping. Benjamin recalls that after the soccer field incident 'Aa lot of people in the community became more vocal about wanting the Hispanic community gone and all these people began to think that oh these Hispanics are so dirty and violent And it wasn't true. Because of a few people, the entire Hispanic community was labeled.' He added that besides urinating and dumping garbage around the field, people who had driven their cars there would drive across the field and tear up the grass and dirt, leaving huge tire marks. It was one problem after another

Public opinion in York Springs is mixed. On the one hand you have a few whites that are embracing the towns transition with open arms. They welcome the change and see nothing wrong with the Hispanic community. However, the majority of the population appears to be extremely misinformed and has a lot of stereotypes of what Hispanics are like and what they have done to their small town. Colleen and Teku, two other students in the American Mosaic Semester went to the hardware store in York Springs, and they found so much bitterness. According to Colleen's notes, the owner of the hardware store felt that the only reason Mexicans and the migrants

came here was to get on welfare, because the day they arrive they go straight to the Gettysburg welfare office. He mentioned that no Mexicans own any land or house, they merely rent apartments in town which are run by absentee landlords which is why many of the apartments are run-down and over-crowded. Bill and his friend felt that before the Mexicans came into the town there were no problems. Now there are rapes, assaults and drug problems. And the police do nothing to punish the Hispanics merely because they don't want to be accused of being racist or bigoted. If asked whether many Hispanics come into the store, Bill said oh yes, to steal. The Mexican store was brought up in conversation, and even though he knows the owner very well, Bill believes that the store doesn't make much money yet they have expensive products, so he thinks the store is running a drug chain.

Chief Bowers and Sgt. Lauer of the Pennsylvania State Police, Gettysburg barracks believe that the largest problem in York Springs and in surrounding areas is ignorance. Although members of the Hispanic community have been guilty of various crimes or been part of illegal activity, it is usually among themselves so whites don't have anything to fear. The Hispanics are not targeting whites as potential victims, it's just the white community is so clouded in stereotypes and prejudice that they can't see past minor flaws and see the good of the Hispanic community and how much the area's economy needs them,' one of Chief Bowers officers noted.

Of course, one cannot say that everyone in the town has been upset about the new Hispanic community, but even the ones that claim they are open-minded and fair people, seem to have issues. One day when I was talking to Benjamin he said something that struck me really hard and made a lot of sense, and was very simply put. He first began talking about his marriage and he talked about his marriage to a white woman, and he said that in order for a biracial marriage to work he said that you have to know that if one person eats rice and the other eats sandwiches, you can't just eat rice, or just eat sandwiches, you have to eat a little bit of both. In terms of community with two different cultures, Benjamin said that you have to learn how to give and take a little from both sides. That when you come to this country as a Mexican or Hispanics, there are certain lifestyles and rules you have to follow and there won't be any trouble. He said that when you come to America people watch to see if you follow the same rules. It would be like going down to Mexico being an American and just doing what ever you want. And although people in your own country may do the same thing already, as a immigrant and sort of a guest you are required to follow certain rules. Benjamin was very adamant about his feelings that many Hispanics had given the white community of York springs a reason to be bitter or maybe even wish the Hispanics would just leave. I remember him saying that often he will tell Mexicans that many of the stereotypes about them are false, but

far too many negative images have been thrown out to the public by certain actions that people will take more notice of the bad aspects rather than the good.

And after all the interviews and all of the casual conversations I've had with people, the problem in York Springs breaks down to one thing. People don't understand new cultures when they first encounter it and often create stereotypes to provide some kind of meaning to what they don't understand. It's all about ignorance, which is usually the case when you examine prejudice. And the sad fact is that until residents in York Springs realize that the barriers they've put between each other, and the stereotypes they've created are weak, and try to save their community, the town will continue to fall apart like so many others have.