

# **LAW ENFORCEMENT AND THE HISPANIC POPULATIONS**

## **AT ADAMS COUNTY**

*By Teku Teku*

### INTRODUCTION

The Adams county, found in the state of Pennsylvania , has a land area of about 520 sq miles and a population of about 81,232 people. People of Hispanic origin number about 1216, representing 1.6 percent of the total population.

According to the Uniform Crime report of 1995, published by Pennsylvania state police Bureau of Research and Development, the undermentioned are the factors that generate crime in Pennsylvania in general and Adams County in particular.

B Population density and degree of Urbanization of Locality and its surrounding area.

B Variations in composition of the population, particularly youth concentration.

B Modes of transportation and highway systems.

B Economic conditions including median income, destitution and job availability.

B Cultural conditions such as educational, recreational and religious characteristics.

B Family conditions with respect to divorce and family cohesiveness.

B Climate.

B Effective strength of law enforcement agencies.

B Attitudes of citizenry towards crime.

B Crime reporting practices of citizenry.

Uniformity in reporting under the Pennsylvania system is based upon the proper classifications of offences by the police. In view of the need of compatibility with the Federal system, the categories of offense classification employed in this program remain the same as those employed on the national level. Offenses are classified into two parts in the state of Pennsylvania. The Adams county being under the legal jurisdiction of Pennsylvania abides to the State laws. This implies that any person living at the Adams county, be him a local resident or Hispanic has to obey the State laws.

Any individual who commits one or more of the offenses inside the area of jurisdiction of Pennsylvania is held responsible. Thus all Hispanics resident at the Adams have the

responsibility of obeying the state laws .Otherwise, they face same consequences like other residents. Thus if a migrant worker at an orchard in the Adams County gets involved in a murder case ,the Pennsylvania law, relating to crime will be applied to him.

Another report published by The Pennsylvania Crime Since the word Afamily@connotes not only nuclear parent- child family, but an extended family of several generations, including cousins. Such relationships are a source of emotional and financial support. It is not surprising ,therefore ,that extended kinship is the major organizing principle of Hispanic crime networks.

BHispanic drug groups exploit indigenous populations of Hispanics in some localities of the commonwealth.

### PURPOSE OF STUDY.

There is a common saying at the Adams county that the Hispanic populations especially the migrant farm workers are the main perpetrators of crime at the Adams county. The local residents blame them of violence, stealing ,drug abuse, disturbing tranquility by playing loud music ,acting under influence of alcohol and drugs .In fact ,the Hispanics are blamed of all vice. On the other hand, the Hispanics also blame the local residents of racial discriminations and perpetrators of hate crime. The purpose of this paper is to investigate if all these allegations and counter-allegations are true or false. The study will also attempt at making a comparative study of crime wave between the local residents of Adams County and the Hispanic populations especially migrant farm workers. Finally, this paper will also attempt at solving the problem of stereotypes. Harper Lee (1980) in *To kill a Mocking Bird* wrote that Ayou never really understand a person, until you consider things from his point of view@. The migrant workers come from societies with completely different cultural backgrounds. Their cultures surely influence their behaviors. It is possible that the residents may misjudge their behaviors and tag them as criminals.

HYPOTHESIS. The general hypothesis of this paper is that the Hispanic populations at Adams County are responsible for most of the crimes at the Adams County , such as rape, violence, drug abuse and trafficking, Driving under influence and many other offenses.

### LITERATURE REVIEW OF SIMILAR STUDIES

Though subsequent studies were conducted out of the Adams County, the essence is to show how Hispanics are viewed as main generators of crime in American communities.

1) *Daily Herald*, Arlington Heights, Sept 26, 1996: AHispanics want to escape image cast by crime shadow@. In this article leaders of Elgin=s Hispanic community in Northern Dakota say, the group is being attacked by one media outlet with negative reports that stereotype and turn the Hispanic people who now account for 26 % of Elgin=s population into escape goats for any and all problems in town. Hispanics in Elgin are always blamed by local residents for theft, violence ,arrogance etc. The Hispanics see the Police as being bias and supportive of local residents.

Elgin's police sergeant John Denofrio said the truth of the matter is that more violent crimes in town this year have been committed by Hispanic gangs than any other gangs. In this report the Hispanic leadership at Elgin blamed reports published by newspapers and the Elgin police as racially inclined. AWe need to have a better understanding of each other and value diversity instead of pointing fingers@, said the leader of the Hispanics. In the opinion of Hispanic leadership it is getting worse. The community continues to poke blame and say that image problems and violence are issues of the Hispanics. But the leadership argues that gangs and violence are not unique to the Hispanic community.

2) *The Washington Post*, Washington D.C., Sept 22, 1998: Ruben Casteneda, ALaurel( a community in Mississippi) vows to reach out to Latinos. Police effort comes after fatal beating@. In this article the chief of Laurel's police department said that he is concerned that some crimes against Hispanic immigrants there go unreported, and that he will increase and improve his agency's efforts to reach out to the city's fast growing Latino community.

AWhen Hispanics commit crimes they are reported to the police. But when a crime is committed against a Hispanic is not reported to the police,@said one Hispanic. The immigrants cited several factors for not reporting the crimes, fear that their immigration status or the status of relatives will be investigated, distrust of the justice system and fear of retaliation from the people who robbed or assaulted them.

3) Uniform crime report, Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Annual report 1995. Compiled by Pennsylvania State Police, Bureau of Research and Development. This book gives a summary of crimes committed in the state and outlines them according to the various racial groups. Statistics concerning Hispanics can also be found in the book.

METHODOLOGY. This study is mainly descriptive. To get the necessary information we met the following categories of people: the police, local residents, migrant workers (Mexicans and Haitians), growers and workers at the State Health Center. Two methods were used to get information. The first method was interviews and the second was simple dialogue in a question and answer form. We had an interview with the police chief Bowers of York Springs, PA on October 8, 1998. On November 17, 1998 another interview was conducted with Sergeant Lauer of the state police in his office at Gettysburg, PA.

Through regular encounters with migrant workers either at the Center for Human Services, State Health Center, Mission of Mercy Mobile Clinic at Gettysburg College, camps, GED and ESL classes, Mexican shops and restaurants, discussions were held and much information was got. A visit to the Hardware shop at York Springs brought us in contact with B. H, a local resident who gave us much information on crimes at the Adams County.

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## MAJOR FINDINGS

The major findings were grouped into four categories in order to best describe what the various people think about crime at Adams County.

### A) Local residents.

According to the few local residents talked to at Adams County, the Hispanics especially migrant workers are responsible for about 90 % of the crime committed at Adams County. Local residents blame migrant workers for the following offenses: assault on local residents, rape, drug use and trafficking, playing very high music, many people living in one apartment, violence, robbery, high consumption of alcohol.

The local residents hold that the arrival of the Hispanics at Adams County there was a lot of peace and tranquility. But the arrival of the migrant workers resulted in a rise in crime. Local residents have the habits of contacting the police to arrest migrants just at the sound of loud music. They even exaggerate the Hispanic offenses in front of the police. They perpetrate harassment and even induce the return of some migrant workers.

B.H ,who has lived in Yorksprings for long, runs a Hardware Store. He sees Hispanics to be thieves. He is always suspicious of them and would not like them to enter his Store. He feels that the Police is too lenient on Hispanics and would not act when a case concerning Hispanics is reported to them.

### B) Migrant workers (Hispanic).

The migrant workers accepted the existence of crimes at Adams County. But they refused to accept that their arrival at Adams County increased the crime rate. According to the migrant workers, they are usually involved in the same crimes and offenses committed by local residents. Unfortunately, their own offenses are usually exaggerated. The migrants also blame local residents of assault and violence on them and constant inducement of police harassment. They accepted the existence of drugs at Adams County but refused being the users or traffickers. They also blamed some local residents for use of drugs. According to Haitians, drugs are traded by Jamaicans and not Hispanics. Migrants also accuse local residents of racial discrimination. They refuse to recognize the cultural differences existing between them. They also see the police as protectors of the local residents.

The Hispanics claim that even the mass media exaggerates their crimes and always tries to paint them *black*. Asked to explain why they don't report the local residents to the police, most Hispanics described it as Aneedless@, given the fact that the police protect the local residents. Some of them who are undocumented are afraid to betray themselves.

C) The police.( Interviews with Police chief Bowers of Yorksprings and Sgt. Lauer of the State Police)

Information gathered from the police indicated that Hispanics do not commit offenses that are significantly different from the common offenses committed by local residents of Adams County. However, certain Hispanics were found guilty of the following offenses:

B Driving under influence of alcohol or drugs and violating traffic rules. When caught violating traffic rules most Hispanics refuse to speak English. They accept to speak English only under threats.

B Use of fake or counterfeit documents like Green Cards, Driving licenses, Visas, and other documents demanded by the INS.

B The use of false names in various documents. An individual may have many names.

B The use of multiple post box numbers and addresses.

B Driving uninsured, unregistered cars.

B Hispanics always changed identification when caught in a crime.

B They are usually involved in hit-and-run accidents.

B Ownership of vehicles changes without changing the name of the owner and not changing the names on the documents. They are involved in drug activities which eventually lead to crime.

B Hispanics take assumed names. Always involved in cases of assault and other violent acts.

Nonetheless, the police have the following comments to make about Hispanics:

B Despite the fact that Hispanics are involved in crime, the crime rate is not alarming. This is because they commit similar offenses to those committed by local residents. Even local residents drive under influence too, disrespect traffic rules. Some of them are also involved in assault and violence too. The police confined the fact that some local residents exaggerate offenses committed by Hispanics and always contact the police for minor negligible problems. The police officers accepted that to an extent the possibility of racial discrimination can not be ruled out. They said that because the Hispanics are of a different color and race their own crimes always stand out.

B According to the police chief at York Springs, the Hispanics are culturally different from local residents. The fact that many of them live in a single apartment is just part of their culture, not a crime. He added that the main problem is that Awhen people don=t know each other, they hate, and when they don=t understand each other, they hate.@

B Again information from the state police showed that things have evolved positively in the last five years at Adams County. More and more migrants come forward to report crimes committed against them. This was not done many years ago. Many Hispanics too try to regularize their stay by going in for authentic documents.

D) Growers/ Health workers.

According to one grower talked to, migrant workers are not as bad as the local residents claim. It is true that some of them don't have documentation (passports, visas, Green Cards) but they are not thieves, rapists. Just like the migrants, the local residents also drive under influence. The growers always have a set of rules and regulations which they hand to the migrant workers at the beginning of the season. The regulations hold that any worker who commit a crime out of the camp will not be covered by the grower. These regulations make them more careful. The grower also explained that because of the long hours the farmers spend at the orchards they have little time for leisure. But the grower accepted that once in a while the workers consume alcohol, get drunk, fight and assault one another, but the situation has changed positively in the last five years.

This assertion was also supported by the Health Center workers. The Health worker explained that many years ago (about ten years) the migrant workers used to come to the Health Center with injuries sustained after violence resulting from alcohol consumption. So the Health Center sent out a law stipulating that nobody will be treated of injuries incurred after violence resulting from alcohol. Consequently, in the last five years such incidents have become rare.

## ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION

Putting together the various bits and pieces of information given by the police, who are the main law enforcement officers, following conclusion could be drawn;

BThe Hispanics could not be said to be responsible for the bulk of crime at Adams county.

BContrary to the popular view held by the local residents, Hispanics commit just the every day offenses that are committed by the local residents too.

BIt is true that crimes committed by Hispanics are exaggerated by local residents. But it is not true that the police protect the local residents, because in most cases the police apply the law without fear favor.

BIf the INS could ease the procedure of acquiring immigration documents, the Hispanics may be spared of the temptation of fake and counterfeit documentation. It is the problem of survival that that pushes most of them to buying fake documents. This people come to the USA to work money ,that would help them and their families , since the economic situation of their various countries is not encouraging.

#### LIMITATIONS

The problem of language was the main impediment in this research. My inability to communicate in Spanish hindered my possibility of getting more information . Some Hispanics were afraid to reveal interesting information, because of their uncertainty of the aftermath.

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