

## GREATER MILWAUKEE ETHNICITY

Study conducted by Urban Anthropology Inc. between 2000 and 2011

Jill Florence Lackey, PhD

Principal Investigator

And 67 other anthropologists

A book, covering the more scholarly dimensions of this study, is in development.

### I. Introduction

#### A. Characteristics of study conducted by Urban Anthropology Inc.

1. Qualitative interviews with 425 ethnic leaders/representatives
2. Typical interviewee had a mixed ethnic background but reported participating in a relatively high number of activities of at least one of his/her ethnic groups
3. Data included over 6,000 pages of interview transcripts
4. Observation at over 30 ethnic events
5. Duration of study: 12 years

#### B. Groups studied/number of interviews in each group

Generally speaking, the number of interviewees in each group corresponded to the relative size of the ethnic group in the greater Milwaukee area. However, the American Indians were oversampled in order to capture the internal diversity of nations within the group.

<u>Ethnic group or category</u>	<u>Number</u>
African Americans	42
Germans	35
Mexicans	32
Poles	30
Other Slavs (Czech, Romanian, Slovakian, Kashubian, Hungarian, Slovenian, Serbian)	32
Irish	30
Italians	29
American Indians	29

“Other” Europeans (Dutch, French, Belgian, Swiss, Luxembourgish, Spanish)	22
Russians	19
United Kingdom area (England, Scotland, Scots Irish, Wales)	16
Scandinavians (Norwegian, Swedish, Danish)	15
Hmong	14
Muslims (Arab, Northern African, Palestinian, African American Muslim)	13
“Other” Asians (Indian, Thai, Japanese, Chinese, Taiwanese, Filipino)	12
Indigenous Africans	12
Caribbeans (Puerto Rican, Dominican, Haitian, Jamaican)	12
Jews	11
Central and South Americans	9
Greeks	8

### C. Anthropologists participating in this study

The following is the list of anthropologists, anthropology interns, and other scholars that participated in interviewing or observing ethnic representatives and groups, or participated in collecting data from archival sources. The total is 67.

A-C: George Anachev, Ericka Bailey, Jill Barganz, Ole Bassen, Erin Bilyeu, Laurel Bieschke, Abena Ivory Black, Crystal Blair, Jaime Bodden, Sarah Bradley, Ed Bremberger, Annette Centenno, Stacey Cushenberry,

D-F: Michelle Dekutowski, Katy Dineen, Kathrin Fiedler (Schmid), Alejandra Estrin, Laura Finley, Bix Firer

G-J: Erinn Brittney Gedemer, Carolyn Hall, Amy Hilgendorf, Scott Hamann, Meghan Houlehen, Whitney Johnson, Tony Johnson, Lynn Johnston,

K-N: Jessica Kegel, Nkosi Knight, Beth Krueger, Joe Kubisiak, Jill Florence Lackey, Ayn Lee, Martha Leuthner, Erin Malcolm, Jeremy Mattson, Cloe McCabe, Aimee McGinty, Jamie Merkel, Denise Meyer, Rebecca Mueller, Sarah Munson, Brenda Nemetz,

O-R: Kim Osborn, Danielle Paswaters, Rick Petrie, Brooke Phelps, Troy Potter, Sara Rich, Anna Reidy, Paul Rivas, Mary Roffers

S-Z: Jason Scott, Lisa Spencer, Lily Shapiro, Amy Svinicki, Tracey Tessman, Mike Theis, Jeff Thomas, Alexandra Trumbull, Chanel Updyke, Jenna Valoe, Lauren Christine Walls, Ashley Widowski, Kelly Willis, Amanda Ybarra, Natalie Ann Zitnak

## II. Preface: Why should we care about ethnicity?

### A. Identity needs

1. Identity is one of the basic human needs. Behavioral scientists often use the Max-Neef classification to measure basic human needs, and one of these needs is identity. People need to situate themselves in time and space.
2. Studies demonstrate that people—especially youth—who have strong knowledge of their own ethnic group are more likely to be tolerant of other ethnic groups (than people with little knowledge of their own ethnic group) (Eibl-Eibesfeldt, 2004; Hirschfeld, 1996).

### B. Collectivism needs

1. The United States is labeled the most individualistic nation by most researchers. Participation in ethnic groups restores some of the needed balance between individualism and collectivism.
2. Societies that are more collectively oriented have been shown to have lower crime rates (e.g., Triandis, 1995; Hirschfeld, 1996).

## III. Background: History of ethnic attitudes in the United States

American elites have used metaphors and catch-phrases for addressing ethnicity in the United States.

### A. 1776-1945

1. Metaphor: the British pasty
2. Ethnic differences were known but highly ignored. Differences were thought to disappear when consolidated under the “stiff upper crust” of our British colonial heritage.

### B. 1946-1970

1. Metaphor: the melting pot
2. Ethnic differences were acknowledged but were believed to lose their specific “flavors” when combined with the overpowering British stock in the pot.

### C. 1970s-1990s

1. A recognition that the melting pot never happened
2. Scholars that had been writing about the melting pot and ethnic assimilation began to agree that ethnicity was not “melting away,” but was sometimes taking on different forms
3. Scholars began to use the word “pluralism” to reflect American diversity.

### D. 1990s to present

1. Metaphor: The salad bowl
2. Ethnic differences remained as unique “flavors” in the American whole.

#### E. Special ethnic considerations

*1. African Americans and American Indians.* Nearly every ethnic group has special circumstances where not all the findings will apply to them. But these two groups have a few more special circumstances.

*2. Differences between them and other ethnic groups.* Most are familiar with African and Native American conditions in the history of this country: their devastating conditions of slavery, loss of land, deprivation of rights, and loss of numbers due to European domination. But there is also something else: They were not “immigrants” in the sense that most of the other groups were. How would this make them different? Members of the immigrant groups likely had special traits that influenced their decisions to leave their homelands

- a. Some immigrants were more enterprising and were looking for more opportunities to establish themselves economically or later to get better educations
- b. Others suffered from persecution and hardships at home and had the courage to start over in America.

Either way, the immigrants were probably people who were a little different from others back home. They might have had a little more courage or a little more greed or ambition. They might have been pronounced individualists, or risk takers. Thus we should not expect African and Native Americans to behave like these immigrant groups.

*3. Yet despite these obvious differences* both African Americans and American Indians in the Milwaukee area share far more patterns with other groups than one would expect.

#### IV. Findings from the Milwaukee study

##### A. Strategies Milwaukeeans use to maintain their ethnic boundaries

Ethnic groups in this study use a range of strategies to maintain their solidarity. Not all use every strategy, but all use more than one. Those using the most strategies are most likely to thrive.

1. Language and language preservation
  - a. Retaining the language

*Example quotes:*

**Hmong 142:** “We speak it at home. If you teach a kid English first and Hmong second they will get a huge accent and you can’t understand them. If you teach them Hmong first, then English, then it works out.”

**Other Slavic—Slovenia 157:** “At these functions, we still have members that speak our Slovenian language. We enjoy playing “Bolina” at Triglav Park, and before each picnic, we celebrate Mass in our Slovenian language.”

**Mexican 151:** “We have new people coming in that help us keep up the language, but even if they didn’t, we still try and speak Spanish in the home.”

**French 131:** “If there is any engagement of policy [around French culture] it should be to try to save the French language in schools.

b. Relearning the language

*Example quotes:*

**Jewish 124.** “Hebrew is stressed. You rarely see any Jewish family where some member doesn’t have some rudimentary instruction in Hebrew. “

**Other Asian—Taiwan 111:** “They [parents] make sure that their kids are very up to date and educated in Chinese language and culture. “

**German 121:** “Well, for me, right now, I’m really in a romantic phase...I really like the German language. So, I put a lot of time and energy trying to sharpen my German language skills. That’s personal. German was not spoken in my home. My family came over so long ago, that not even my grandfather spoke German.”

2. Ties to past homelands

a. Visiting the homelands

*Example quotes:*

**Native 182:** “It’s important for many Indian people, as well as myself, to keep the ties to the rez. People might work here in Milwaukee and maintain a household, yet go home to the rez in summers.”

**Muslim—Palestine 112:** “They [37 grandchildren] have all been back to Palestine. “

**Jewish 124:** “You rarely see an Orthodox family that has not been there.”

---

**African American 126:** “I know some blacks that have gone to Africa. But it’s hard. You don’t really know where you came from. You visit here—was this my ancestor’s home? Was this my ancestors’ tribe? You come away with more questions than answers. I know people that have come back mad. They say, ‘Other people go to their home countries and search for their roots. We have nothing to search for.’”

b. Supporting the homelands

*Example quotes:*

**Mexican 193:** “Oh, we all sent money back to our relatives in Mexico when we first arrived. Some still send money twenty, thirty years later.”

**Italian 132:** “When they had the earthquake in Italy, right away we were sending emails out and raising money for that. I think we try to keep a connection with Italy itself. “

3. Shared religious practices

In nearly three-quarters of the groups studied, most ethnic members shared the same religion. This contributed to ethnic solidarity in private and in public.

a. Keeping a shared identity in private

*Example quotes:*

**Greek 172:** “In their homes they have special areas with shelves where they have their family altar with icons, like of Jesus, the Virgin Mary, and patron saints of members of the family. They light it with lights and keep their holy water from the church on special occasions. They keep it there. This is another place for the family to pray. It is a family based worship.”

**Muslim—Palestine 152:** “Even those who don’t pray five times per day as required, we all mostly fast during the holy month of Ramadan.”

b. Keeping a shared community in public

*Example quotes:*

**Other Asian—India 121:** “There’s a temple in Waukesha. There are loads of Indians staying there and Pewaukee. We used to go mostly weekends, every weekend, for no reason. ‘Let’s just go, and if they need help we will go help, if they need volunteers. If they are doing some functions there we can just go and help make their function better.’ So not just religious necessarily; maybe social.  
“

**Polish 151:** “There’s a heavy religious element to the community. Life centers on the parish.”

**Mexican 133:** “Our church is our community. It’s our social life.”

#### 4. Food

##### a. Reminder of ethnic origins

*Example quote:*

**German 182:** “Every so often we get the craving for German food and find our way to one of the German restaurants around town. I’m not sure why it’s so satisfying. It’s more than a craving for a food that you like. The entire taste brings you back, back to a time of Sundays at grandmother’s house. Or maybe it’s just the need to connect to something larger than yourself.”

##### b. Reason to get together with fellow ethnics

*Example quotes:*

**Native 160:** “We see a lot of feasting coming back now in the city. There used to be intimate feasts but now we do a lot bigger ones and the community can come out. We put our differences aside to do this.”

**African Congo Congolese 101:** “Certain days a month and every Sunday, we go to Church and eat together; [we eat] Congo food at a potluck.”

#### 5. Art forms

##### a. Ethnic visual arts

*Example quotes:*

**Scandinavian--Norway 106:** “Well mine would be rosemaling. . . In Norway there are different types of rosemaling according to the different districts in Norway. So there’s many different styles, but I would say five popular ones.”

**Polish 151:** “We had a special art form we brought from Poland, called Wycinanki. It was done by cutting out colored paper and layering the cutouts into forms. It’s still taught to the new generations.”

**Mexican 162:** “Our mural tradition has been passed on, even in the U.S.”

##### b. Ethnic music

*Example quotes:*

**African American 190:** “Jazz and blues . . . With Europeans it’s different—succinctly—they will play the same song twice exactly the same. This won’t be the case with African Americans; It’s how we see the world.”

**Caribbean-Puerto Rican 174:** “I play with various groups throughout the city, particularly my own, a Latin jazz group, and a *bomba* and *plena* group, which is strictly Afro-Puerto Rican music. And a little salsa, meringue, funk, whatever. “

c. Ethnic theater

*Example quote:*

**German 101:** “We take plays and actually kind of translate them now into the American language, a little bit, if that’s possible. And present them, mostly a comedy type thing because of the variety shows that are being put on here in Milwaukee, they have to be visual, they have to be funny, they have to be whatever. Nobody sits through a Ludwig Toma play anymore, it’s just all too serious, you know. “

d. Ethnic textiles

*Example quotes:*

**Hmong 115:** “My wife does this, sews traditional clothing. I don’t do anything. Wife tries to pass on to kids. Only time we wear traditional clothes is on New Year. “

**African American 191:** “Textile clubs were always big in the African American community. We brought them up from the South. Today there still are a lot of quilting clubs that connect people to the old times.”

e. Ethnic dance

*Example quotes:*

**Native 144:** “Dancing is one way we pass on our traditions to our children. ”

**Italian 130:** “I have been in the Italian dance group of Milwaukee, Tradizione Vivente, which stands for living tradition which means we are passing on traditions from our ancestors through us to our children, so the living tradition.”

f. Ethnic stories, folklore, and literature

*Example quotes:*

**Native 144:** “Dancing is one way we pass on our traditions to our children. ”



**Italian 130:** “I have been in the Italian dance group of Milwaukee, Tradizione Vivente, which stands for living tradition which means we are passing on traditions from our ancestors through us to our children, so the living tradition.”

## 6. Political activity

### a. Political and public jobs

*Example quote:*

**Irish 125:** “Elections were so important to us. Even as young children we worked on campaigns. So many of our own people were running for office.”

### b. Advocating for homeland and immigration policies

*Example quotes:*

**Mexican 184:** “We always have the same trouble. Immigration is the most important reason keeping us together. We have people living in this country with no documents and no rights- and yet have all the responsibilities, paying taxes, and making this country rich. “

**African Kenya Mbere 101:** “At the same time we follow the American politics-- especially the controversial issue about immigration reform. That is something that we are talking about. Of course we express our own political opinions about what is going on in American politics. “

## 7. Perception of group’s highest values

When asked about the highest value within the ethnic group, some groups had high levels of internal agreement (where at least 30% stated the same value)

### a. Work ethic

Groups in agreement: *Ibos (Nigerians), Mexicans, Germans*

### b. Faith/religion

Groups in agreement: *Poles, Filipinos, Puerto Ricans*

### c. Family focus

Groups in agreement: *Irish, Greek, Italian, Mexican*

### d. Independence/self-determination

Groups in agreement: *African American, Russian*

e. Community-mindedness

Groups in agreement: *Scottish, Slovenian*

f. Progress with each generation

Groups in agreement: *Scottish, Slovenian*

g. Respect for the past: *American Indians, Hmong*

## 8. Ethnic secular organizations and clubs

Interviewees identified over 350 ethnic organizations in the greater Milwaukee area. These organizations fulfilled a number of functions for their members. Below are the functions listed and the ethnic groups that have organizations or clubs with these functions.

a. Ethnic advocacy and anti-discrimination organizations

*African American, American Indian, Arab, Central American, Chinese, French, Greek, Hmong, Irish, Italian, Jewish, Mexican, Norwegian, Palestinian, Puerto Rican, Scottish, Slovenian, Taiwanese*

b. Economic organizations (jobs, professions, mutual aid, business)

*African American, American Indian, Central American, Filipino, Greek, Hmong, Irish, Italian, Jewish, Mexican, Norwegian, Polish, Puerto Rican, South American, Slovenian*

c. Political interest organizations

*African, African American, American Indian, Arab, Chinese, Irish, Italian, French, German, Greek, Hmong, Jewish, Mexican, Palestinian, Polish, Puerto Rican, Slovenian*

d. Social organizations (family/clan)

*African American, American Indian, Arab, Black Muslim, Hmong, Irish, Italian, Jewish, Mexican, Palestinian, Puerto Rican, Slovenian*

e. Gender-specific organizations

*African American, American Indian, Danish, German, Greek, Hmong, Irish, Italian, Jewish, Mexican, Polish, Puerto Rican, Slovenian*

f. Assisting new settlers organizations

*African, African American, American Indian, Central American, Chinese, Filipino, Hmong, Italian, Jewish, Mexican, Polish, Puerto Rican, Russian, Slovenian, South American, Taiwanese*

g. Leisure time activities organizations (dinners, picnics, dances, powwows)

*African, African American, American Indian, Central American, Chinese, Filipino, Hmong, Italian, Jewish, Mexican, Polish, Puerto Rican, Russian, Slovenian, South American, Taiwanese*

h. Sports and gymnastics organizations

*African American, American Indian, German, Greek, Italian, Mexican, Norwegian, Polish, Serbian, Puerto Rican, Scottish*

g. Education and enrichment organizations

*African, African American, American Indian Chinese, French, German, Greek, Hmong, Irish, Italian, Jewish, Mexican, Norwegian, Polish, Russian, Scottish, Slovenian, Swedish*

h. Arts (including culinary) organizations

*African, African American, American Indian, Central American, French, German, Greek, Hmong, Irish, Italian, Jewish, Mexican, Norwegian, Polish, Puerto Rican, Russian, Slovenian, South American, Swedish*

g. Health and wellness organizations

*African American, American Indian, German, Mexican*

h. Parades and street processions organizations

*African American, American Indian, German, Mexican*

g. Annual festivals' organizations

*African, African American, American Indian, Arab, French, German, Greek, Hmong, Irish, Italian, Jewish, Mexican, Polish*

h. Genealogy organizations

*Irish, Jewish, Kashubian, Scots Irish*

i. Local ethnic newspapers

*African American, Hmong, Jewish, Italian, Mexican-Puerto Rican*

9. Groups using the most organizing strategies:

*Irish, Slovenians, Italians, Greeks, Hmong, Mexicans, most American Indians*

## B. Comparing older ethnic groups to newer ones

1940 is the cutoff date used in this study. Groups arriving in their largest numbers before 1940 are considered to be the older ones and groups arriving after 1940 are the newer ones. Newer ones include: *Cubans, Slovenians, Hmong, some other Asians, Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, African Americans, Africans, Russians, Serbs, Palestinians, Burmese, Bosnians*

### 1. Older ethnic groups and work

#### a. On the first generation immigrants

*Example quotes:*

**German 113:** “My grandfather was always so proud of the fact that by the time that he came to America to the time he retired, he never missed a day of work. There was never a day he didn’t work. That was typical in the German community: nobody wanted to miss a day of work. “

**Other Slavics Kashubes 134:** “Their main occupation was fishing—They’d get up at 3 or 4 am, be out on lake and not come back until early afternoon. Then they’d work at the dock for three or four hours, cleaning and drying fish and the nets.”

#### b. On the later generations of the older generation groups

*Example quotes:*

**Polish 166:** “Did the next generations work as hard as the immigrants? I would not say so. They didn’t have as much to prove and the struggle wasn’t as hard. No language to learn, no new rules. Most of us had never experienced much hardship.”

**German 169:** “Germans always took pride in our work ethic. It was a work ethic for its own sake, not just so we’d climb up in some job. This is not what it once was. Germans have become a lot like other Americans and the work ethic is diminished. “

### 1. Newer ethnic groups and work

#### a. On the first generation immigrants

*Example quotes:*

**Muslim—Palestine 112:** “When my father came he was a tradesperson. Of course we didn’t know much English, so he worked in sanitation in a bakery. As soon as he could afford it, he bought properties and rented them. Then he bought a corner store. But he didn’t want us to do that. It was a lot of hard

work. . . But as an immigrant mentality, you do what you can, you get educated, and then you do better. You always want to do better than the generation before. . . We struggle with that, because sometimes as people from different countries, we have to prove our abilities.”

**African Congo Congolese 102:** “We learn English, find a job, and try to continue our education. It is important to become more educated and support our families. As soon as we get to America we work.”

b. On the later generations of the newer generation groups

*Example quotes:*

**Other Asian—China 171:** “But with the next generation, I think there’s hardly any pressure on them to do anything.. . Children were not encouraged to follow their parents’ footsteps in those days. They just wanted us to have a better life, get our education, and improve.”

**Russian 150:** “Do the young people today struggle like their parents did? No. I guess they just don’t have much to prove. They know they have the support.”

Conclusion: This study suggests that both the early arriving and the later arriving ethnic groups maintained a strong work ethic in its earliest generations, but that the work ethic weakened in succeeding generations.

### C. Ways that those interviewed compared themselves to other groups

1. Nearly three-quarters of the time they found similarities

*Example quotes:*

**Native 121:** “African Americans say that it takes a whole whole village to raise a child; this is integral in Indian communities.”

**African American 105:** “We were sort of like the Jews in that they couldn’t own land too and found jobs in the cities. “

**Hmong 152:** “Some have similar customs, like the Hispanic role of women, marriage traditions, and so on. Somalis are like us and Africans generally.”

**Polish 111:** “The Mexicans would move into our neighborhoods in all of the cities. We were both Catholic, kept grandma in the home, took our kids to dances, and played polkas.”

2. When they found differences, they expressed them more as complementary differences than as undesirable differences

*Example quotes:*

**Italian 124:** “So when I was a kid growing up, Henry Maier was the mayor, the Germans ran the city, all the judges were Irish, all the cops were Irish. We didn’t have those types of roles. We were more supportive, more background.”

**Mexican 184:** “African Americans, for instance, know the language, so they have the voice to speak back where there is a lack of justice. We don’t like to complain, which is one of our worst tendencies.”

**Native 154:** “There’s a difference in the city—kids were raised on the rez to not draw attention to themselves. Teachers see this as inattentiveness. We learn differently . . . This makes us different from other cultures like Jewish and African American and perhaps Greeks and Italians.”

#### D. Threats to ethnicity in the greater Milwaukee area

##### 1. Public policy

###### a. Involuntary movements of people

Example: Urban Renewal and freeway building cost Milwaukee:

- *Bronzeville and the entire black business district*
- *Little Puerto Rico*
- *Irish Tory Hill*
- *Little Italy*

###### b. Failures of MPS contributed to the break-up of some ethnic neighborhoods

*Example quotes:*

**Polish 178:** “We stayed in the old neighborhood much longer than most of the Poles. We liked it there. But when my kids had kids and the Milwaukee school district got so bad, well, they had to move to the suburbs to get into a better district. “

**Jewish 101:** “There was a flight from the community by middle class Jewish people [because] the Milwaukee Public Schools were starting to slip. Up until that time, Washington High School had been one of the premier schools in the city. “

**French 126.** “I personally love Milwaukee, but really regret that my children had to go to MPS. This was before you had the emersion and the Choice schools. “

**Spaniard 195:** “MPS in general is an issue with every group.”

## 2. “Americanization”

### a. Fixation on economic opportunities and mobility

*Example quotes:*

**English 103:** “All over the country you are seeing people leaving their ethnic communities to pursue some idea of the American Dream. Wherever the young ones perceive some opportunity—that’s where they end up. Often they regret the move, when they see what they’ve lost.”

**Other Asian—China 171:** “I think nowadays with the jobs- -families realize that the children have to go elsewhere for jobs and work, and that has assisted the thinking that they don’t all have to be there together, physically. But a lot of families do come back after a while too.”

### b. Changes in child-rearing norms mean children no longer follow parents’ practices

*Example quotes:*

**African American 171:** “The so-called American ways were forced upon us. Our culture was stripped from us. But even some of us older folks who try to recapture some of our African heritage and pass that on to our kids have problems. The kids today have their own youth culture. It’s not just in black families. It’s everywhere. “

**Russian 140:** “For example my grandson, when I try to cook Russian food, ‘No, no, no, don't do me Russian food. I am American, I want to be American.’ They like pizza, they like hot dogs, and it's driving me crazy, but he doesn't want to be involved in Russian culture.”

**Hmong 141:** “The respect for our elders that we once had is not as much today. We have to work very hard to keep our kids from trying to be like the other kids and respecting our traditions.”

## E. Study conclusions

1. Ethnicity is still strong in the greater Milwaukee area (with over 350 ethnic organizations)
2. First generation immigrant populations from any era offer a unique set of contributions to our city and our nation (more to come here)

3. Findings suggest that people practicing their own ethnicities have positive opinions of other people's ethnicities
4. But to survive in Milwaukee, ethnic groups will have to organize for more favorable public policies and institutions, and find more creative ways to pass on their practices to their children