

FROM THE MARGINS TO THE MAJORITY: COVERAGE OF IMMIGRANTS IN THE
GARDEN CITY (KAN.) TELEGRAM, 1980-2000

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ABSTRACT

At the heart of this study is the role a newspaper plays in the social construction of reality through its portrayal of Hispanic immigrants, assimilation and acculturation. IBP's construction of the world's largest meatpacking plant in Garden City, Kan., marked a watershed event in the beef industry's shift from union-dominated cities to rural areas in right-to-work states, a phenomenon that continues to gain momentum. This shift involves a heavy reliance on the secondary labor market of immigrant labor, much of it from Mexico. This thesis examines how portrayal of Hispanic immigrants changed in the *Garden City Telegram* newspaper. The study involves archive research, depth interviews with journalists and sources, and critical discourse analysis in historical context of *Telegram* articles surrounding watershed events in the history of Latino immigration. The most notable watershed topics are the *Telegram's* introduction of a Spanish-language weekly, the debate over how city and state should accommodate a growing Spanish-speaking population, the debate over English as the state's official language, the drive to improve English-as-a-second-language and bilingual education, and the passage of school bond issues necessitated by increasing enrollments. Whereas numerous studies cite the framing of Hispanics in the news primarily as criminals, illegal immigrants, and victims of crime, the *Telegram* consistently portrayed Garden City Hispanics as a population with legitimate concerns and prescriptions for resolving them. The *Telegram* added to an impoverished lexicon of media frames in other ways for Hispanics. The conclusion draws from the Garden City experience to offer lessons for editors encountering similar demographic change.