

# **Shared History, Shared Hopes:**

A Photo Exhibit Documenting the Contributions,  
Struggles and Dreams of Idaho's Immigrant  
Communities



Organized by the Idaho Community Action Network and  
Featuring the Photography of Claudio Beagarie

September 2003

## Acknowledgements

The Idaho State Historical Museum provided invaluable support by generously offering to host the exhibit.

This photo exhibit would not have been possible without the invaluable contributions of: Keith Walklet of QuietWorks Photography, Leo Garcia of the United Food and Commercial Workers Local 368a, Steve Rainey of the English Language Center, Dr. Errol Jones of the History Department of Boise State University, Yasmin Aguilar of the Agency for New Americans, Elizabeth Cushman of the Idaho Office of Refugees, Les Bock and Marilyn Shuler of the Idaho Human Rights Education Center, and many others.

Leo Morales and Sam Blair of the Idaho Community Action Network ably organized the exhibit, with the support of Mimi Ho, Jill Reese, and Julie Chinitz of the Northwest Federation of Community Organizations.

## About Claudio Beagarie

Claudio Beagarie is a photojournalist with over 40 years experience in investigative reporting and social/cultural-style photography. In his home town of San Francisco, during the turbulent era of the early 1960s, Claudio learned the trade through personal contact with the civil rights and anti-war movements. Since his first contacts with San Francisco's Latino community, and with the United Farm Workers union in Delano, California in 1965, Claudio has focused his photo-journalistic efforts on the Mexican-American community. Claudio has also documented the lifestyle and culture of campesinos living in the Laguna district of Coahuila state, Mexico, where his wife's family lives.



Claudio's photos and articles have appeared in the San Francisco *Chronicle* (1965-66), *High Country Magazine*, (Council ID, 1977-81), *La Voz*, (Idaho Migrant Council, 1981 and 1992), and the *Idaho Statesman*, (1994). He has been cited as a source of information on Mexico by authors/reporters John Ross (Mexico City, 2000), Bill Wines (Boise State University 2001), Maribel Gutierrez (*El Sur de Acapulco*, 2001), and Tracy Eaton (*Dallas Morning News*, 1999). Claudio is currently volunteering his services to the following associations: the Idaho Hispanic Cultural Center, The Hispanic Folkloric Dancers of Idaho, and the Service Employees International Union. Claudio has a degree in Geology and has completed post-graduate course work in Mexico Studies at Boise State University in 2002.

# Introduction

Idaho is home to an estimated 64,000 immigrants. Immigrants come to Idaho from all over the world – from India, Mexico, Canada, Afghanistan, Russia, Japan, Germany, Bosnia, Peru, Iran, Cuba, Egypt, Guatemala, Russia, South Africa, Brazil, China, Poland, El Salvador, the United Kingdom, Spain, and many other countries.

Immigrants come to Idaho for the same reasons that brought the ancestors of Idaho's U.S.-born residents. Immigrants come to earn a living, to join family members, to flee persecution, and to build better lives – all very compelling reasons. Making the journey to Idaho and establishing a new life is often difficult and traumatic. In some cases, the trip is even life-threatening.

Even with these inestimable challenges, migration is integral to Idaho's history. The mining boom of the 1860s brought French Canadian, Welsh, Chinese, Mexican, German, Irish and other immigrants. By 1870, Chinese immigrants accounted for over a quarter of Idaho's population and formed the majority of Idaho's miners. Chinese, Japanese, and Mexican immigrants were instrumental in constructing Idaho's railroad infrastructure in the 1800s. And, in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century, Basques began creating their now well-established community in Idaho.

Despite the central role immigrants have played in Idaho's history, Idaho has not always welcomed immigrants. Chinese immigrants, for example, were vilified, assaulted, and murdered by the dozens in the late-1800s by their non-Chinese neighbors. During World War II, Idaho housed a concentration camp and a detention facility where Japanese immigrants and Japanese-Americans were incarcerated for no reason other than their ethnic background. Looking back, it seems blatantly unfair that immigrants were encouraged to come to the U.S., and Idaho, only to be relegated to second-class status, physically harmed, or criminalized.

Immigrants now living in Idaho are similar to those who came before them. In the 1800s, the industrial revolution displaced workers and spurred migration. Now, equally powerful economic forces cause workers to leave home and look for employment elsewhere. As companies move around the world and governments pursue globalization, workers are uprooted, finding demand for immigrant labor in Idaho's agriculture, manufacturing, service, and other industries.

Immigrants also come to Idaho as refugees, individuals who are escaping persecution. War in Southeast Asia, the Balkans, and the Near East/Central Asia have forced many people to leave homes in these countries and seek refuge in Idaho. Refugees, like other immigrants, contribute greatly to Idaho's cultural diversity and economy.

Yet, like in earlier years, Idaho's immigrants do not always receive fair treatment. Federal and state laws deny many immigrants the protections available to those born in the U.S. Inequitable laws create barriers to living wage employment, food, health care, education, physical security, and other basics of life. Immigrants are also still vulnerable to harassment and physical attack.

All human beings deserve respect for their dignity and human rights. Idaho's immigrants will continue contributing and giving to Idaho – and also striving for the promise of justice and equity to be fulfilled.

# Idaho's Immigrants

## Many Faces and Many Contributions

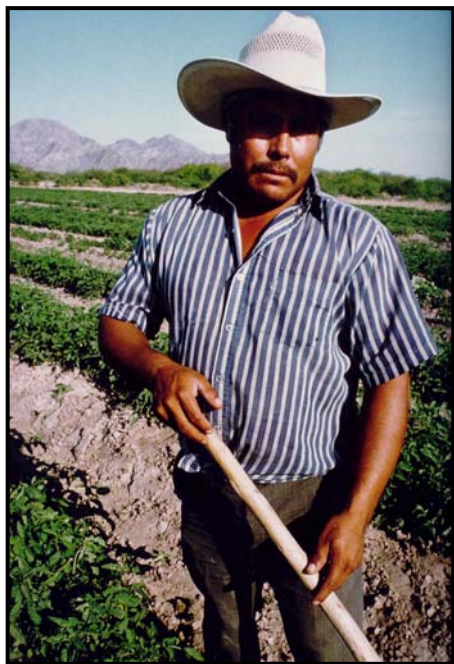
### Building Idaho's present

Chinese workers were among the first immigrants to Idaho, drawn by the 1860s gold boom. By 1870, about sixty percent of Idaho miners were Chinese, but they also worked as cooks, packers, launderers, and in other jobs.

The work performed by these and other immigrants is not just a part of Idaho's history – it is also part of Idaho's present, as it helped launch major industries in Idaho, including the railroad, agriculture, and mining.



Courtesy of the Idaho State Historical Society.



Courtesy of Claudio Beagarie.

those from Mexico. And Idaho's meatpacking industry has also come to depend on the contributions of immigrant laborers, who put food on the table for Idaho, the United States, and the world.

### Feeding Idaho, the country, and the world

Idaho's agriculture industry has long reaped the rewards of immigrant labor. In the early 1900s, the U.S. government subsidized the development of Idaho's agriculture industry by facilitating irrigation projects and railroad construction.

For the labor needed for these projects, growers and industrialists turned to immigrants. Japanese immigrants became the backbone of Idaho's sugar beet industry, and labor recruiters actively sought Mexicans living in Mexico and other U.S. states for farm jobs.

Idaho agriculture continues to prosper from the work of immigrants, particularly



Courtesy of Claudio Beagarie.





Yasmin Aguilar and Nabeela Masud are both refugees from Afghanistan. Yasmin currently works at the Agency for New Americans, where she assists refugees with transitioning to life in Idaho. Nabeela, who is now working for a Boise laundry business, is one of Yasmin's clients. Courtesy of Claudio Beagarie.

## Finding refuge in Idaho

Refugees are people who must leave their home countries where they face persecution motivated by their race or nationality, political or religious belief, or membership in a disfavored group. Many are fleeing death, torture, arbitrary arrest and detention, and even genocide and "ethnic cleansing."

For many years, Idaho has received refugees. Between 1983 and 2000, over 7,000 people found

refuge in Idaho, coming from such diverse places as Tibet, Bosnia, Afghanistan, Congo, Cambodia, Ukraine, Iraq, Vietnam, Thailand, Sudan, Iran, Somalia, and many others.

Refugees often come to Idaho as survivors of war, ethnic cleansing, and other forms of brutality. From the mid-1970s to the late 1980s, nearly 2,000 Southeast Asian immigrants – Cold War refugees created by years of conflict and displacement – made their way to Idaho. More recently, people fleeing the atrocities in Bosnia, Kosovo, Afghanistan and elsewhere have established communities here. But refugees do not bear just histories of trauma – they also bring great resourcefulness, hope, and determination.

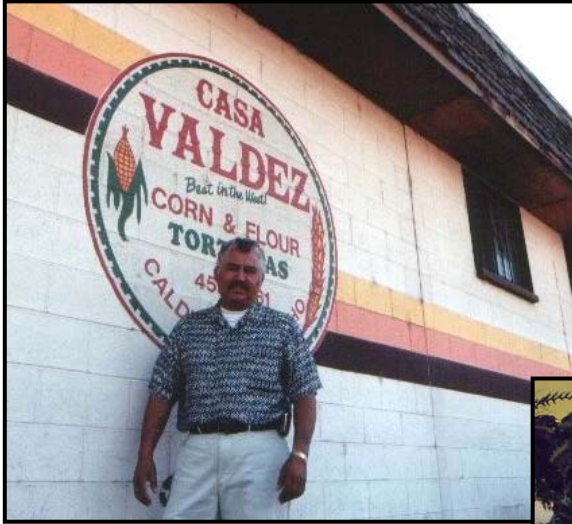
Idaho benefits from the great richness that refugees offer. And, as with immigrants in general, Idaho employers – and their clients and customers – benefit greatly from the labor of refugees, who are now found working in nursing homes, restaurants, hotels, retail stores, food processing plants, dry cleaners, hospitals, and for many other businesses.



Idaho has recently become home to a number of Bantu refugees from Somalia. They are pictured taking a break from beginning English classes at the English Language Center in Boise. Courtesy of Claudio Beagarie.

## Keeping Communities Alive

Immigrants play an important role in revitalizing communities that would decline or disappear without them. Across the country, rural communities are particularly threatened. In many Idaho towns, small, independently-owned businesses depend on their immigrant customers in order to survive.



José Valdéz is founder and owner of Casa Valdez, a Caldwell tortilla company. Courtesy of Claudio Beagarie.

The creation of businesses by immigrants is also important for keeping Idaho communities alive. Such businesses spur economic development, contribute to communities' tax base, and create new employment opportunities.



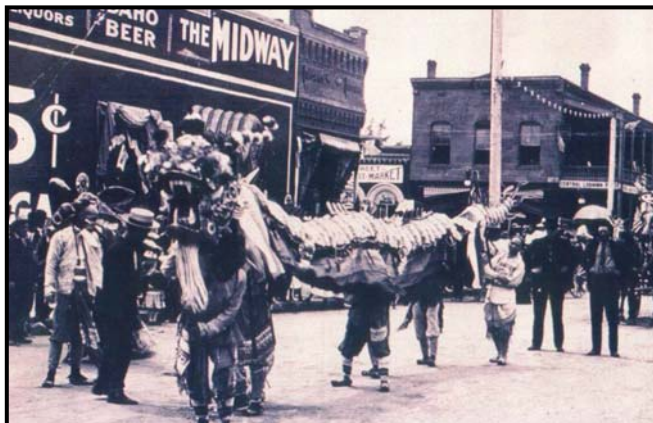
Sohail and Farah Ishaq are owners of the Taj Mahal restaurant in Boise. Courtesy of Claudio Beagarie.

## Immigrant offerings to Idaho's culture

Cultural diversity has long been a reality in Idaho, and Idaho is growing even more diverse. The cultural contributions that immigrants bring to Idaho can not be measured in terms of dollars and cents – they are invaluable to Idaho's past and future.



Courtesy of Claudio Beagarie.



Performance of the Chinese Lion Dance. Courtesy of the Idaho State Historical Society.



# Dignity and Human Rights for Immigrants

## A Promise Unfulfilled

### The immigration system: broken and unequal

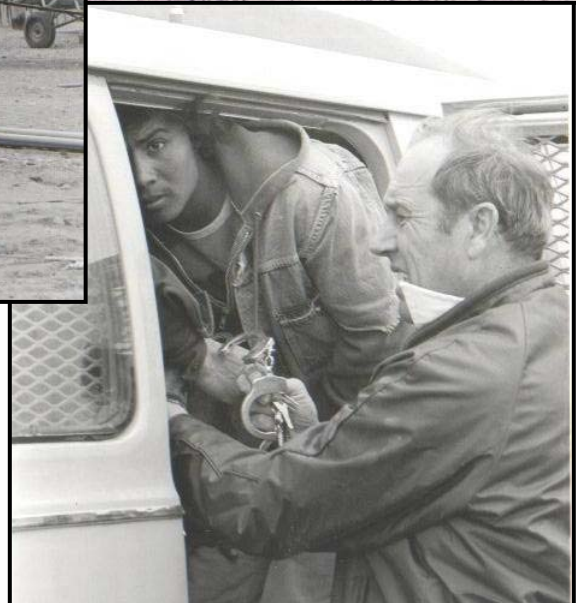
Like all human beings, Idaho's immigrants deserve respect for their dignity and human rights, regardless of their immigration status. This has yet to become a reality. Though immigrants bring prosperity to Idaho, they are often denied the opportunity to share in that prosperity.



Courtesy of Idaho State Historical Society.



Courtesy of Idaho Statesman, BSU Library.



Courtesy of Idaho Statesman, BSU Library.

Immigration is stimulated by economic forces and policies that immigrants do not control – and from which they may not even benefit. Historically immigrants were sought after and recruited by employers, and Idaho businesses still rely on immigrant workers – as do the customers and clients of these businesses. And the economy of the United States as a whole increasingly depends on immigrants. Yet the immigration system established by the U.S. federal government is out of touch with this reality.

U.S. immigration policy denies the means to acquiring official status and citizenship to millions of immigrants who are leading lives much like those of their native-born neighbors – working, raising families, participating in community activities, paying taxes. Without official status, many immigrants have no real security for the future. They will never be able to access the benefits to which they have contributed, and they remain vulnerable to violations of the most basic of rights. This system creates inequalities that harm all who live in Idaho, whether immigrants or Idaho-born.



## Divided families

Making a better life for one's children is one of the principal reasons that people immigrate to Idaho. Yet the U.S. immigration system makes it very difficult for families to remain unified. Processing backlogs, visa limits, and onerous requirements and restrictions often keep families separated. For example, currently the spouse of a lawful permanent resident can expect to wait about five or seven years for his or her immigrant visa to become available, with additional time for processing. The waiting period for other relatives can be even longer.

## Bitter harvest

Industry in Idaho and the U.S. as a whole has long benefited from immigrant labor. Yet the U.S. immigration system prevents immigrants from getting a fair return on their contributions.

Idaho's early harvesters of sugar beets, potatoes, and peas suffered many inequalities and indignities. Yet mistreatment and exploitation of immigrant workers is not just a thing of the distant past. Unfortunately, far too often it continues to this day.



Mexican migrant housing at Driggs, ID labor camp, August 1931. Courtesy Mexican Foreign Relations Archive.



Mexican migrant pea-picker and children at Driggs, ID labor camp, August 1931. Courtesy Mexican Foreign Relations Archive.

U.S. immigration policy denies legal status to many workers and, either outright or effectively, locks them out of the workplace laws that are meant to protect all workers. As a result, many immigrants have little recourse if they are denied a

living wage or even the minimum wage, are offered only substandard housing, or are even kept in involuntary servitude.





Minidoka Relocation Center. Courtesy of the Idaho State Historical Society.

## The assault on civil liberties

Recently, immigrants have been stripped of many rights traditionally considered “inalienable” in the United States. These include the rights to be free of indefinite detention, to have a fair judicial process, to not be held secretly, and many others.

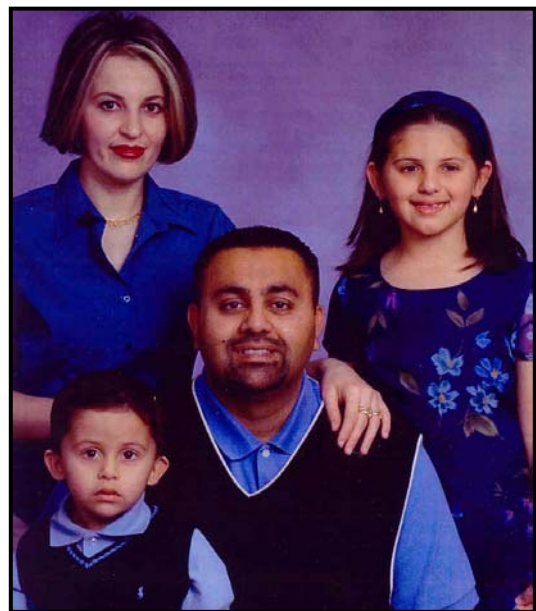
Yet this is not the first time that immigrants in the U.S. – or Idaho – have been stripped of their civil rights and civil liberties. For example, in the 1880s, the U.S. Congress prohibited further immigration of almost all people from China. This decision grew out of a climate of fear and hate toward Chinese immigrants. And, unfortunately, the Idaho legislature joined in removing rights from Chinese immigrants, barring them from owning mining lands and restricting them from engaging in mining activities.

During World War II, Idaho housed the Minidoka Relocation Center, a camp where Japanese-Americans (most of whom were U.S. citizens) were incarcerated due only to their ethnicity. Again, this policy was motivated by fear. The U.S. now looks back on such decisions with shame and regret. Fifty years from now, how will this nation view its most recent decisions to strip immigrants of the most basic freedoms and liberties?

## Overcoming fear and maintaining a proud heritage

Fear of – and attacks on – immigrants has increased in recent years. Yet the Mehmood family is proud of their heritage and their background. Adina Catovic and Furqan Mehmood met in Boise a decade ago, and are now proud parents to Nimra (eight-years old) and Emin (three-years old).

Furqan immigrated from Pakistan in 1988 to study in Idaho, founded Boise State University’s Muslim Students Association, and leads prayers in Boise’s Muslim community. Adina came to Boise in the fall of 1993 as a refugee, fleeing the ethnic cleansing in Bosnia-Herzegovina that took the lives of her father, brother, three uncles, and nine cousins. Only she, her mother, and younger brother survived the genocide.



Courtesy of the Mehmood family.

Furqan now works as a realtor. Receiving his license immediately after September 11, 2001, and fearing discrimination, he took the nickname “Frank” on his official license. But when he answered the phone “Hello, this is Frank,” his daughter asked, “Daddy, who’s ‘Frank’?” Furqan then decided to reclaim his given name.

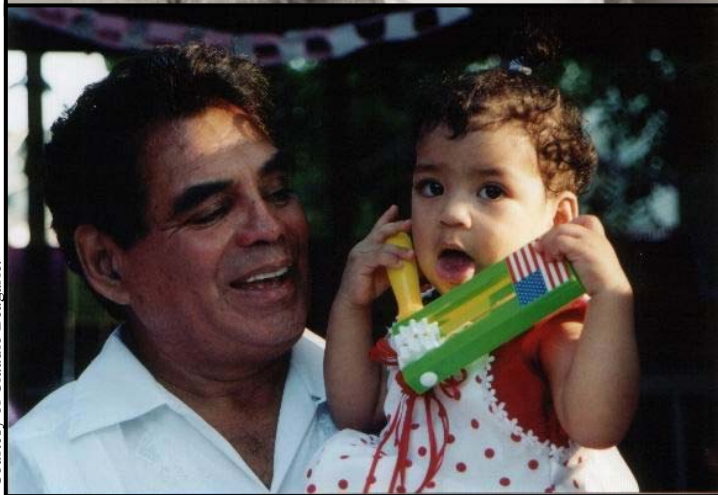
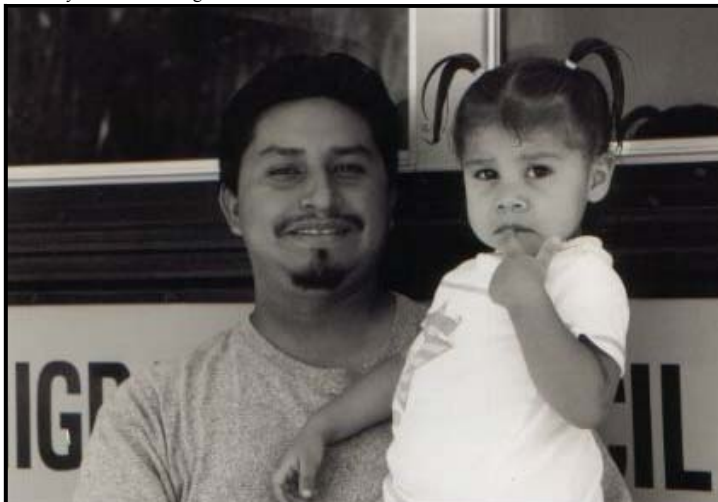
# Idaho's Immigrant Youth

## Our Hope, Our Future

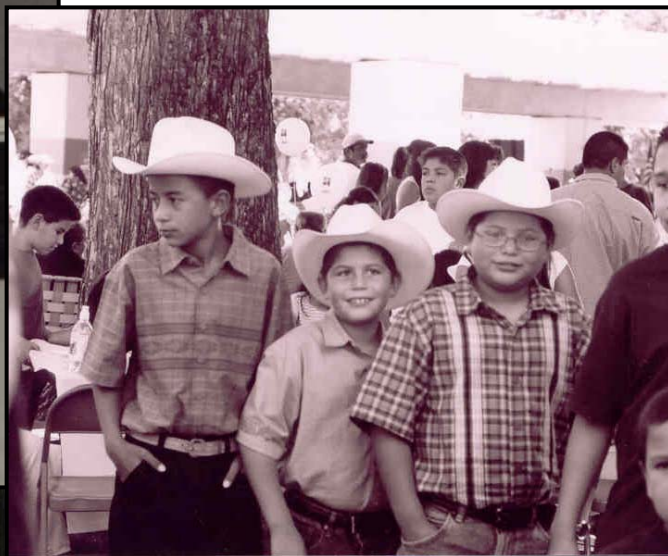
### Aspirations and challenges

Immigrant children and the U.S.-born children of immigrants bear their own dreams and the dreams of their parents. Yet young immigrants also face tremendous challenges. They are often affected by the same discrimination, lack of living-wage employment, and immigration-system barriers that their parents face.

Courtesy of Claudio Beagarie.



Courtesy of Claudio Beagarie.



Children at the 2003 Farm Worker Appreciation Day. Courtesy of Claudio Beagarie.

### Idaho's prosperity depends on immigrant youth

In the coming years, Idaho and the United States in general will come to rely more and more on immigrant youth and the children of immigrants. As the U.S. population ages, each working person will support a growing population of retired people. Already

the nation's Social Security system is accruing a net benefit from current levels of immigration to the U.S. With the baby boomers reaching the end of their working lives, immigrant youth will be key to securing the retirement that all seniors should be able to count on.

And, despite many challenges, immigrant youth will also go on to revitalize Idaho communities – creating new businesses, raising families, building their communities, and carrying on the traditions taught by their parents.



## Immigrant youth: realizing dreams, deferring dreams

Idaho's colleges and universities are educating many young immigrants and children of immigrants. The Boise State University's Cultural Center is a place where students of diverse backgrounds can come together. And BSU features such student organizations as the Filipino-American Organization, the Organización de Estudiantes Latino-Americanos, the Scottish-American Society, and the Vietnamese Student Association, as well as the Black Student Alliance, Hui-O-Aloha, and the Intertribal Native Council.



Courtesy of Claudio Beagarie.

Yet many young immigrants are denied the opportunity to pursue this education.

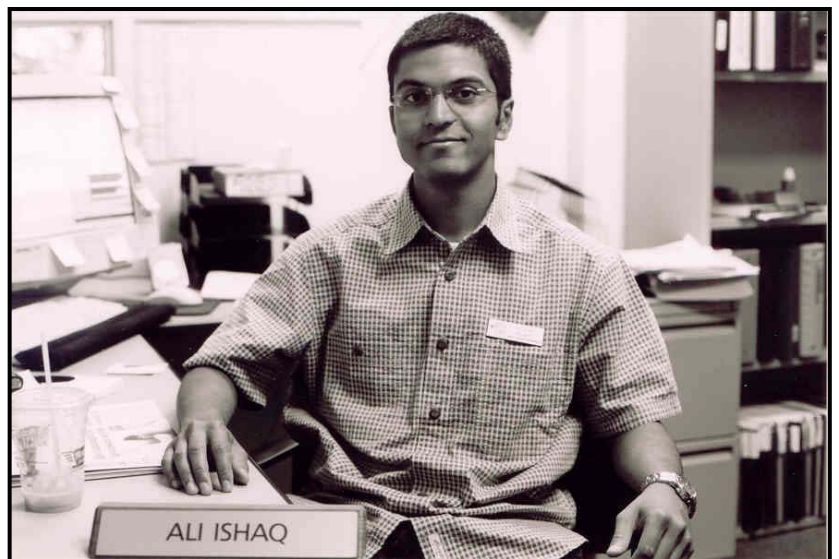
Every year, thousands of children come to the United States with their families. They grow up in the U.S. and, like their neighbors and friends in school, think of this country as their home. Yet, as they approach adulthood, many youth are confronted with a cruel fact: because they lack legal status, the doors to education and quality employment are shut to them.



Courtesy of Claudio Beagarie.

Unable to take access in-state tuition rates or take out federal student loans, undocumented youth have no choice but to forego education beyond high school. And, lacking both employment authorization and access to education, they are often pushed into low-wage, no-benefit jobs.

Idaho is home to many young people who have a great deal to offer their communities and their state. Too many of them are forced to defer their dreams, for years or forever.

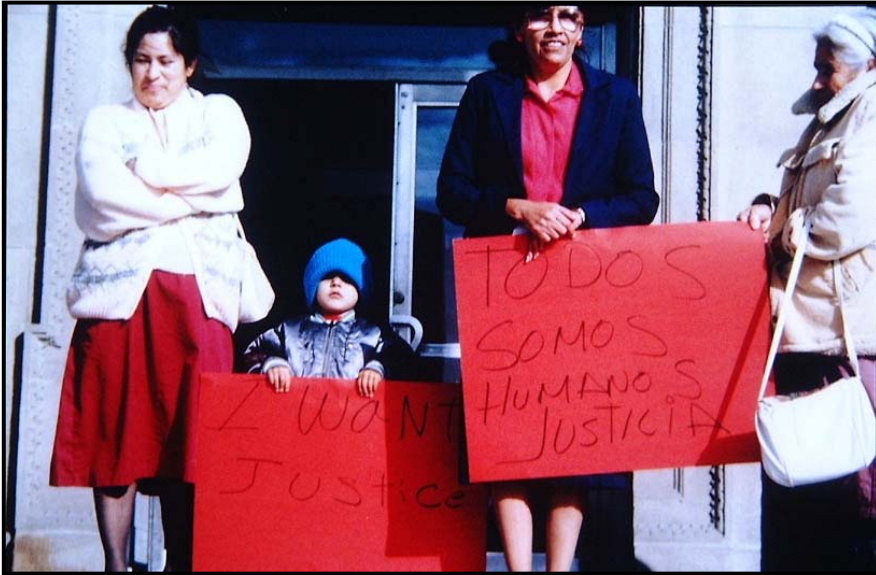


In 2003, Ali Ishaq was elected President of Associated Students of Boise State University, BSU's student government.  
Courtesy of Claudio Beagarie.



# Immigrant Voices for Justice

## Building a Future of Fairness



Courtesy of Idaho Statesman, BSU Library.

### Immigrants will not be silent

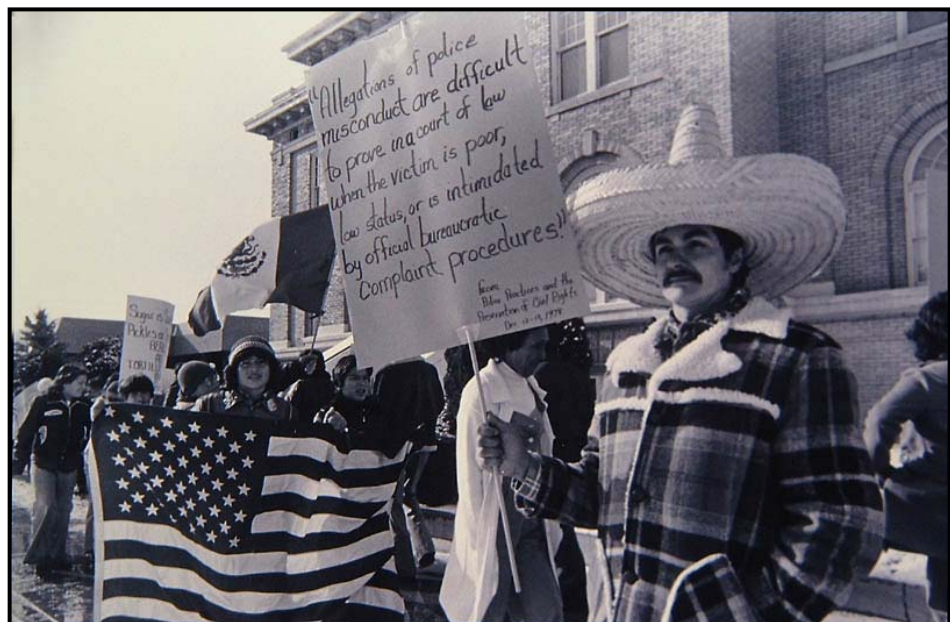
When citizenship is placed out of reach of immigrants, so are many of the rights and protections that accrue to citizens. Yet many courageous immigrants do not let this “second class” status stop them from defending their rights or the rights of others.

The Constitution of the United States places great importance on people’s right

to hold and convey political beliefs. This right is protected by the First Amendment of the Bill of Rights, which is central to democracy in the U.S.

Whether or not a person is a citizen, or even has official immigration status, he or she is a human being whose right to express an opinion or a belief should be respected. Across Idaho, immigrants are speaking with friends, family, and neighbors about important issues, engaging elected officials, and publicly raising their voices to call for justice and fairness.

This civic participation is one of the most important contributions a person can make to his or her community and to the country as a whole.



Courtesy of Idaho Statesman, BSU Library.

## Fighting for a minimum wage

The minimum wage law is a basic workplace guarantee that protects workers from receiving extremely substandard wages. Yet until 2002, Idaho farmworkers – a great many of whom are immigrants – were denied even this most basic protection.

This policy was reversed thanks to the efforts of farmworkers and their supporters, who organized a campaign to pass farmworker minimum wage legislation. The legislation was signed into law in 2001 and went into effect in 2002.



A young member of the Idaho Community Action Network carries a sign calling for “Salario Mínimo para Todos” (Minimum Wage for All). Courtesy of ICAN.

## Full human rights – not indentured servitude

Guestworkers are seasonal workers who are granted temporary legal status to carry out work for a U.S. employer. While guestworkers have legal status, this status is linked to their work for a specific employer – essentially leaving them in a vulnerable state of indentured servitude.



Courtesy of ICAN.

In recent years, a number of Senators and Congresspeople have proposed legislation that would remove even more rights from guestworkers. Many have also proposed to essentially transform undocumented workers into guestworkers – individuals whose labor is valued but whose full humanity is not.

In 2002, members of the Idaho Community Action Network and Pineros y Campesinos Unidos del Noroeste, Oregon’s

farmworker union, rallied against such proposals and met with Idaho Senator Larry Craig to express the importance of providing immigrant workers with rights on the job and a real avenue to permanent residence status and citizenship.





Courtesy ICAN.

## **“United we dream”**

In September 2003, Melissa López (the daughter of immigrants) traveled to Washington, D.C. to join immigrant youth and their supporters in the “United We Dream” campaign. This campaign is calling for legislation that will remove the barriers that prevent many young immigrants from gaining legal status and pursuing higher education.

In Idaho, young people who are like Melissa in every way but their immigration status are speaking up about their experiences, the challenges they face, and the importance of legislation that will help them reach their dreams.

## **Your vote is your voice**

“Su voto es su voz.” Even with the many obstacles that immigrants face to civic participation, the power of the ballot is not out of reach for those immigrants who are able to become citizens – nor is it out of reach for U.S.-born children of immigrants.

Through the Latino Vote project, Latino community leaders such as María González Mabbutt encourage Latino Idahoans to register to vote and go to the polls on election day.

Immigrants continue to face obstacles to living wage work, to the basic necessities of food and health care, to equal access to education and employment, and to basic freedoms and liberties. But through diverse forms of civic participation – voting, engaging elected officials, participation in community groups – Idaho’s immigrant communities are building a fair and just future for all Idahoans.



Courtesy of ICAN.



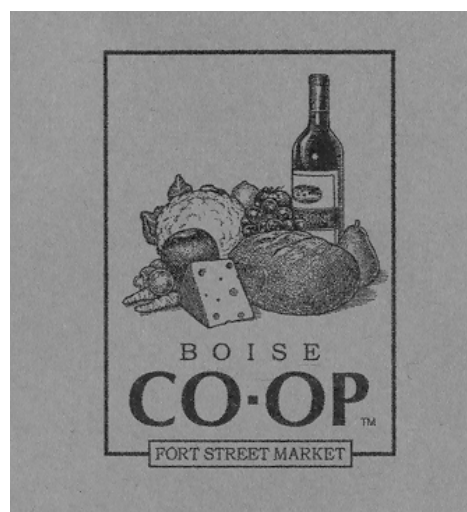
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***Friends of ICAN –***

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## **About the Organizations that Have Prepared this Program:**

**The Idaho Community Action Network (ICAN)** serves as a powerful, consolidated voice for Idaho's poor, with chapters and membership clusters in 12 Idaho communities, including the state's three largest cities and numerous rural towns. Through ICAN, low-income Idaho families have a voice in the decisions that impact their lives. In addition to its direct action work, ICAN runs a statewide, volunteer-driven food program that helps low-income families supplement their monthly budgets. ICAN's community organizing model integrates the provision of food with training, leadership development, and action on issues to win concrete changes in people's lives and advance social, racial and economic justice for all Idahoans.

**The Northwest Federation of Community Organizations (NWFCO)** is a regional federation of four statewide community-based social and economic justice organizations located in the state of Idaho, Montana, Oregon and Washington: Idaho Community Action Network (ICAN), Montana People's Action/Indian People's Action (MPA/IPA), Oregon Action (OA), and Washington Citizen's Action (WCA). Collectively, these organizations engage in community organizing and coalition-building in 14 rural and major metropolitan areas, including the Northwest's largest cities (Seattle and Portland) and the largest cities in Montana and Idaho.

*For more information, contact:*

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