

Joan: Hello, and welcome to WorldCanvass from International Programs at the University of Iowa, I'm Joan Kjaer and we're coming to you from Merge in downtown Iowa City. This is part two of our program on the politics and impact of immigration. In this segment we're going to take a look at how media cover immigration issues, and we'll discuss public and local responses to the current immigration crackdown. So I'd like to introduce our guests. Just next to me is David Ryfe, director of the UI School of Journalism and Mass Communication, thanks for being here, David.

David Ryfe: Thanks.

Joan: Next to him is Jeff Cox, University of Iowa history professor and board member of the Hawkeye Chapter of the Iowa ACLU, thanks for being here, Jeff.

Joan: And at the far end we have Captain Bill Campbell from the Iowa City Police Department. Good to have you here, Bill.

Capt B Campbell: Thanks.

Joan: Thanks.

Joan: David, I'm hoping that we can get a little perspective on the broad debate about immigration by looking at ways in which the media tend to cover it. As the head of the School of Journalism and Mass Communication, I don't suppose that there's anybody better equipped than you to help us sort through what we're hearing and what we're seeing. How do you think immigration is being covered in today's media?

David Ryfe: Well there's actually quite a lot of academic research on that subject, of people going out and counting stories and following along and there's been a real transition in the last 20 to 30 years on how the media cover immigration. Before we start we should probably define our terms. We didn't have to do that in the past, but we do now. When I'm talking media, I'm talking really about professional journalism, I'm not talking about the cable shows, I'm not talking about online news sites, I'm really talking about people who are in the industry as professional journalists.

David Ryfe: In the 1970s to 1980s you would see a very common frame was a business frame for immigration. Immigration as a part of the local economy, and as an equivalent of that you'd see a lot of stories about labor and immigration. Partly because there was a broader labor movement, and unions were very important in public culture still, and therefore were ready and reliable sources for journalists.

David Ryfe: Today, we've seen almost a wholesale shift in the way in which media frame immigration. It tends to be one of two frames, and then a third is kind of creeping in. One frame is a public order frame, it's a very common way of

framing immigration issues today about public safety, people coming over the border illegally, what's happening to our communities with immigration, those sorts of issues.

David Ryfe: A countervailing frame, is a more humanitarian frame. Talking about individual immigration often or personalized and dramatized in these kinds of stories. Following them as they make their way into the United States and setting up themselves and their communities.

David Ryfe: There's one last little frame that's begging to make its way into the media coverage and that's more of a race and culture frame, where they talk about the different categories of people who are coming into the country and how they're changing the racial composition of the communities they go into. It's a minor frame compared to the other two, but as you can imagine these dominant frames tend to be driven partly by the news industry, certainly the commercialization of news in the last 20 to 30 years has meant that journalists look for stories they can dramatize, and conflict is easy to dramatize. And so, public order frames, humanitarian frames fit nicely into that need.

David Ryfe: But partly also what's happening in our political environment, professional journalism is bolted on to conventional politics and conventional politics moves, you're going to see the frames and news coverage move. So that's kind of generally an overview of how the frames have changed in the last 20 to 30 years.

Joan: Uh-huh (affirmative). Well I think that many people would say that we're sort of in an unconventional time in terms of politics just now and if we were to take that point of view, you did mention that you're not specifically referring to cable news and certainly not what happens on social media. But, there is so much news on a daily basis it seems these days. The news is kind of churning out, whether from the central, from the administration, or from anti-administration activists. What's the role of a responsible journalist to sort through all of this and try to give us a picture that's a seasoned, honest picture?

David Ryfe: Yeah, that's a question that professional journalists ask. Unfortunately for them, and perhaps for the larger public, journalists have really lost their ability to gate keep information in the public square. They once served as the primary conduits of information in public life and that's no longer true. They're one of a series of voices in public life and in a digital world there's lots of producers of information and consumers of information as well, so it's a more chaotic environment and journalists really, even if they could answer that question, their answer wouldn't necessarily be impressed upon the public anyway.

David Ryfe: We just live in a much more fragmented media landscape.

Joan: So what do we do when some call mainstream media 'enemies of the people?' How does one combat that?

David Ryfe: Well unfortunately, the way in which people process information psychologically is connecting to a new digital system that allows them to consume information based upon their predilections. Generally speaking, psychologically speaking, we prefer information that confirms our pre-existing views, we tend to gravitate to information that confirms those views. The digital space gives us an opportunity to limit ourselves to information that confirms their views, and there's a lot of public actors and political actors out there who are more than happy to produce information that looks like news, and feels like news, it's just simply not journalism, and are able to push that out to their particular audiences and it creates filter bubbles in the public square that are a part of the polarization and partisanship of the current political environment.

Joan: Yeah, Yeah.

Joan: Thanks for getting us started. Jeff, I'd like to go to you next.

Jeff Cox: Okay.

Joan: And talk to you with both of your hats on-- maybe the history professor hat and also someone who's part of the ACLU. You believe in the goals and values of the ACLU. To get back to the immigration topic directly, the ACLU has been right at the forefront of defending immigrant rights, trying to help people at the border that are in a lot of trouble right now, helping reunite children and so on and so forth. And I know that the ACLU has also been fighting cases here in Iowa. Give us all a little understanding of why this matters.

Jeff Cox: Right, well I don't speak for the ACLU, I'm just on the local board. I was just talking to Bill Campbell--our local chapter, for the first time ever, we met with the police chief of Iowa City, Jody Matherly, and had a very fruitful discussion. We were about, this was about racism rather than immigration, but he said something that I thought was very important in our meeting, he said. "There are things that police and prosecutors do that are lawful, but awful."

Joan: Hmm.

Jeff Cox: "They're lawful, but awful." And I was very pleased that he recognized that. We ... the ACLU has been at the forefront, as you mentioned, in defending the children separated from whoever brought them here, at the border.

Jeff Cox: The New York Times, I teach a course on the New York Times, history through the New York Times, and the New York Times is good on some things, just terrible in others, but if you saw the front page today there was a picture of a two year old girl on the front page who was in court in New York. She was sitting there and the immigration judge who dealt with something like 30 or 40 cases the same day, came in, sat down, looked at her, and said, "Oh, she's two years old." And the Homeland Security agent who was there wouldn't look at her. And I was thinking as I heard people talking about how comforting it would be for

her, to tell her, "Oh, you're under civil not criminal, I mean don't worry, there's 17 different agencies at work here." She's incarcerated and the ACLU has been at the front lines on the border in defending, it appears now, the 13,000 children who are being put in camps on the borders.

Jeff Cox: And I really feel obliged to respond to two things that Mary Hogan said. That is, "We're just enforcing the law." Reach for your billfold when you hear somebody say that. I mean the law is not fixed and settled. Immigrants have inferior rights to full citizens, but they don't have no rights. They have rights under the Constitution, they have statutory rights, they have rights under international law when it comes to asylum. And there is a very large amount of discretion in the people who enforce these laws.

Jeff Cox: This is the case of asylum seekers. The, it's true, as Mary Hogan said, that the people who cross the border were breaking the law by crossing the border with their children. That's true. But they're... in the past, they've often been treated under asylum seeker regulations rather than charged with criminal offenses.

Jeff Cox: That is a matter of discretion, and it is the same thing with the enforcement, whatever you want to call it, at Mount Pleasant, there're 11 million undocumented workers in the United States. To pick out 30 of them, somebody made a decision, that we're going to pick out this place in Mount Pleasant and arrest them, and of course this is political. It's to teach them a lesson. But, you know, this is not a lesson that's going to eliminate the 11 million undocumented workers. It's only going to terrorize them, and their children, and break up families.

Jeff Cox: There're large numbers of people who benefit from the fact that we have undocumented workers in this country. It's Iowa Ag. Most of these people have been invited here by employers, and are doing nothing more than being responsible people by trying to make themselves a living and take care of their families. There is no way 11 million people are going to be deported, so what we've got is a constant state of, a kind of racist aggression by the government against selected groups of people. That we never know exactly why they were picked out this way, or why they were picked out that way.

Jeff Cox: One of the biggest problems that we face in the ACLU is all Bill Clinton's fault. It's the '96 Immigration Act which made it legal to deport people for minor offenses. Barack Obama was known as the "Deporter in Chief" for good reason, because in his first term in office he deported three million undocumented workers. Three million. Almost each one of those represents a family that has been broken up, disrupted, orphans created, and so forth. He thought that if he showed that it was a hard line on immigration the Republicans would come around and cooperate with him. Well, that didn't work too well.

Jeff Cox: So, I think all we can do in the ACLU is fight a kind of hard line defense on individual cases and collective cases. We got the federal courts to declare the separation of children from asylum seekers, who had broken the law, against

the law. I mean it's not just immigrants that break the law, it's the government. In their enforcement of it.

Jeff Cox: And so the ACLU is fighting a kind of rear-guard action against a situation which is creating a kind of horror show for asylum seekers, for children, for undocumented workers in this country. And at some point we're simply going to have to do what Ronald Reagan honorably did, which was grant amnesty to the people who've been here, and who haven't broken any important laws. That's the only way we're going to end this situation. Otherwise it's just going to go on forever.

Joan: Well, Bill, let's go to you.

Capt B Campbell: You bet.

Joan: Yeah, okay.

Capt B Campbell: So, I'm going to bring a different spin to this. I'm going to start off by telling you a little bit of a story. You've probably all followed immigration issues, or you wouldn't be here tonight, and you've probably followed what's going on locally. So if you recall back in early 2017 there was a resolution that the council passed and during the resolution basically affirmed what it was that the city wanted to represent and so forth within its law enforcement in town. And it was entitled "Resolution reaffirming the public safety function of local law enforcement."

Capt B Campbell: So if you jump back a couple months before that, I was approached by the city manager, at the time I was the interim chief, and he asked me, "So tell me Bill, as we're putting this together what do you guys do, what's your interaction with ICE? What do you surrounding immigration? What kind of stuff are you involved in?" Now to date myself just a tad I've been with the department for 28 years, I've worked in just about every position that the department has and I started to kinda go back through and go, "Okay, let's see if I can't give a good answer to this question, so let me think of the experiences I have with ICE, with customs, with immigration," and I still to this day can't give you one. Because, frankly, local law enforcement, in this community, doesn't get involved with ICE really very much. I can't say that I've never talked with somebody with ICE, but I can't think of a time when someone from ICE has been called in by us to do something.

Capt B Campbell: So, my experience in this is very much one of the non-experience, to be honest with you about what I saw. So fast-forwarding to something ... And since then you've seen a number of policies, you've seen some laws passed by the state legislature that required certain things of local law enforcement, required certain things of local governments as far as things they couldn't do, couldn't limit what the police could do as far interacting with customs and with ICE.

Capt B Campbell: But ultimately I think it gets summed up very succinctly in one of our guidelines. And I'll just read right from it, "The primary function of the department," and speaking about our department here, "is to protect public safety for the benefit of all persons who reside in and visit the community. The enforcement of immigration law is the function of the federal government and currently resides with Immigration and Customs Enforcement, ICE, at the Homeland Security level."

Capt B Campbell: So, I bring an interesting message to you on this and it's one that really says by and large we don't get asked by ICE to do much. I can't say it never happens. If I were to come up here and tell you that you'd go like "Really? You've never really talked to customs about anything?" That's not true, but we don't get really asked to do anything. So when it came down to the resolution and what we'll use for resources that kind of thing to be involved in immigration enforcement, it was pretty simple. This policy, this resolution, those things don't change what we do very much.

Capt B Campbell: Now, just one caveat to it, and I know you have some follow-up questions to this. So the question comes up then "What about, what if ICE were to call and ask for your help?" Certainly, we, and I'll go back to something Mary said, and that is we don't, we're not the people who are going to make policy, the police are not going to make policy, they're not going to make the law, we are required, by law, to uphold the law. So, if I get called by someone from the FBI or the IRS, or from ICE, and they're going to request us, we're going to filter that through the same way we'd filter any other request. To determine what the need was, and how it fits inside this mission. Again, this mission to protect public safety and so forth. Having said that, we can play a lot of "What ifs" if we choose to, but it's really not a question we get asked, it's not something we get asked.

Joan: Wow, wow. To take this to sort of another level related to community safety.

Capt B Campbell: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Joan: Certainly there are some people living in our community that have concerns about their status, who have concerns about a family member who may not be legally in the country. I understand that you and the chief and others in the department meet periodically with people who have those concerns. Can you share some of the concerns and some of the assurances you could give.

Capt B Campbell: Yeah, and I think that that's probably one of the most unfortunate things that comes out of this. And it's something that on a personal level as a police officer, but also just someone who's interacted with people that are from other communities who may or may not have status to be in the country, we see an anxiety. "Should I come forward to report a crime?" "Should I come forward to be a witness?" I think there's times where we have lots of good witnesses to crimes and were violent crimes and they don't come forward 'cause they're concerned about what's going to happen with that information.

Capt B Campbell: You know the reassurance that we bring is that we're not tasked, again we go back to this primary mission, we're not tasked to be doing immigration enforcement. Having said that, and this is the one that's challenging I think for us, if ... Obviously the police department can't control what happens with information when someone ... I mean let's play out a situation. You have a court case, someone is a witness in court, obviously that information becomes a public thing and then where does that go to? Where does that information go? And there's a lot of anxiety about that. I can tell you that it's not our go-to to run and take information from a criminal case and provide it to immigration officials. That's not what we're going to do with information. There's some pretty specific information within our guidelines that prevents that. That's not what we're doing with that information.

Capt B Campbell: But that's a tough one. Because ultimately if I show up and I'm wearing a police uniform what is my job there. Why am I there? If I'm involved in a criminal investigation and there ends up being a crime that gets investigated, what if that crime involves something with immigration and then I'm around and with it, certainly easier to just stay away from the police, than to engage them if there's that risk. I think that we try to send that message, as the chief would say, it's really about how we send that message every day. It's not about how we interact on whether we pass this resolution or not, it's what are the police really doing when they're out there talking to us. How are they treating us? What kind of confidence can I have with them?

Capt B Campbell: So we really try to instill that with the officers, you know what it's important, it's that people trust you, it's important ... I mean that's about solving crime. I think the chief, and I should have the stat in front of me, but I think the chief has said since this resolution's passed, I think that violent crime in Iowa City dropped by 11 percent. Does that have anything to do with the council? I'm sure it does. Or I'd say it has everything to do with the council.

Capt B Campbell: I think ultimately the goal is to have a community that trusts its police, and recognizes at least for that group of people that's not what our job is, that's not what our mission is, that's not why we're here.

Joan: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Yeah, thank you for explaining that. Clearly those kinds of city resolutions vary, right? You could be in a very different city, maybe in a different part of the country with a much ... with a police force that was much more anxious to engage with enforcement of immigration violations. And so then on a national level, I guess this is where the ACLU is again, and other organizations that are concerned with the rights of immigrants and so on, get involved.

Jeff Cox: I'll just say one thing. The person to ask this question to is Lonny Pulkrabek, I think not you, but most of the ACLU cases on so-called sanctuary cities, which don't really exist, they're just some who've passed certain kinds of resolutions and others. Is whether ICE requests to the jail, to hold people longer than the

time that they are legally obliged to hold them. Beyond the time they're legally obliged to hold them before charging them.

Capt B Campbell:

And I think Lonnie's-

Jeff Cox:

And that's been a flashpoint, I mean some cities have done this, others have refused, others have been threatened with having their federal aid cut off. Oakland I think. Do you know anything about that?

Capt B Campbell:

I do believe that the Sheriff came out with a public statement that said he would not-

Jeff Cox:

He wouldn't do it.

Capt B Campbell:

Yeah.

Joan:

Mm-hmm (affirmative). Would not hold people-

Capt B Campbell:

And was fairly critical of, yeah.

Joan:

Yeah, yeah, huh.

Capt B Campbell:

Although I don't believe the board of supervisors passed a resolution. I believe that the sheriff made a statement, and I think that's also, you can find that online pretty easily.

Jeff Cox:

Well he's in charge of the jail.

Capt B Campbell:

Yeah, yeah.

Capt B Campbell:

And I think that he also commented, and that again, is not something that he ... He doesn't get requests from ICE very often. It doesn't come up very often.

Joan:

Huh. Yeah. So David, when you hear about these kinds of things does it trigger any thoughts in terms of what you've seen in reporting?

David Ryfe:

Well, you know there's lots of different consequences of the disruption of journalism, but certainly one of the most significant is the demise of local news and local newspapers. Any of you who get the Iowa Press Citizen, you can see that on a daily basis. It's just not the paper that it once was. And most local newspapers are not that anymore. Strangely enough what that's meant is that most local people consume mostly national news. And so strangely enough it used to be said that all politics was local, and now all local politics is national. Because local people are reading local actions through the national discourse.

David Ryfe:

And it's the demise of the local news is part of the increase of partisanship and polarization. It's easier to come together to figure out how to fix the specific



issue we all together share here. But when there's no conversation about that in the local news and what we have is on cable news, it makes for strange local discourse. It becomes refracted through the national conversation. And that's part of the acceleration of partisanship and polarization today.

Joan: Yeah, yeah. Any concluding thoughts and of you want to give?

Jeff Cox: No, I just want to second that. The decline of the Press Citizen. I mean there's some, the Gazette has actually gotten better, it really has. I mean Vanessa Miller does a great job at covering the university. But you know if you want to read a really good newspaper, I recommend the Tipton Conservative, it's a weekly, published in the county seat of Cedar County. They'll print any letter anybody sends them on any topic, and so you have the weekly cranks in there, but you have a real debate going on. It's a better newspaper, a weekly, than the Press Citizen now, it's just such a shame. Such a shame.

Joan: And do you feel that the community is pretty solidly behind the kinds of approaches you've taken here in the police department?

Jeff Cox: I'm sorry what-

Joan: Oh, I'm sorry I was talking to Bill.

Capt B Campbell: Definitely, and as Jeff has said, Chief Matherly's done a fantastic job of really ramping up those aspects of things. I think we're out there more than we were, and I think that we have a supportive council surrounding those things too. I do believe that and I think that, again, we can always do things better and there's always, I mean, I jokingly say that police officers are often times like the playground monitor, except adults don't like to be told that they're not supposed to run.

Joan: Yeah.

Capt B Campbell: And that's a tough role. There'll always be criticism and review of what we do, and we expect that. But I think we continually do things better.

Joan: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jeff Cox: Not everything is getting worse.

Joan: Yeah.

Capt B Campbell: That's right, that's right.

Joan: That's a good way to end the segment, I think. So thank you David Ryfe and Jeff Cox and Bill Campbell for being here. Really appreciate it so much.

David Ryfe:

Thank you.

Jeff Cox:

Thank you very much.

Joan: Hello. I'm Joan Kjaer and I want to welcome you to WorldCanvass from International Programs at the University of Iowa. This is part three on our program on the politics and impact of immigration. And our guests in this segment are Mazahir Salih and Jesus Chuy Renteria. Thank you both for being here.

Joan: Real pleasure to have a chance to talk to you. You know, we've had a lot of heavy conversation and important conversation, but now we're going to talk to two people who live in Iowa who have made their lives here and you both come from different places in terms of family heritage.

Joan: I want to start with you Mazahir. You were born in Sudan, in Africa, and now you're here. You are a worker at the Center for Worker Justice and you were recently elected to the Iowa City City Council, brava. So tell us, you came from Sudan to America and probably under very trying circumstances.

Mazahir Salih: Yeah. I guess the first thing that I want to say is that no one will leave a place that they are feel comfortable. I came to America because I really couldn't stay in Sudan because I wasn't feel comfortable, I just forced myself and I came here.

Mazahir Salih: When I came first, I came to Virginia and I came looking for better life. But to tell you that first, in the beginning I thought when I got to America it would be easy life, I will collect the money maybe from the street, and you know try to do that, I have a lot of really, really, you know stories about America and how the life is easy over there and people got paid in dollar and dollar for us is really something big.

Mazahir Salih: Anyway, when I came new, I just try, said, "Okay, I'm going to have my life become better in few days." But the reality wasn't like that, I think better life is not something laying there for the taking, better life is really something you have to fight for it. You have to build it yourself, and that is what happened to me. I came to America, I have a lot of barriers, I was thinking, "This will be the best life ever." But in the beginning was hard. Language barriers, culture barriers, even weather barriers. I came from a hundred degrees every day, and coming to America, which is cold and the snow, never saw the snow before, and all these kinds of things really it is not easy to come from your country like where you have your people, and your language, you feel comfortable. Even now speaking to you, if I speak that on my language I would say it beautifully. You know? But yeah, still I struggle in the language and everything sometime. But just to show you that this is not an easy thing when I arrive here, it was really difficult for me to find job, to resettle, to understand the language, to do a lot of things. It was totally, you know, difficult.

Joan: Did you come here to meet someone from your family? Or did you come requesting asylum?

Mazahir Salih: No, actually I came because you know in Sudan my dad pass away when I was third grade, we are four sisters and two brothers. We have, our life was really, really hard growing up. We suffered too much since my mom, she doesn't have enough education. And I was just thinking about something, I need to improve our life. I always liked to improve things when they are not going in the right direction, since I was little. That's why the first was I was trying to help my mother and she always say, "Education is solution. I don't have enough education that's why I'm not finding a good job." And she encouraged us to educate, you know like really study hard so we can graduate. I did graduate from civil engineering, from my country, and I thought as soon as I get my certificate I will find good job and build a better life for my family in Sudan.

Mazahir Salih: But that wasn't the reality because you know the government was corrupted. If you don't know somebody in some organization or companies you cannot even find job. I just hold my certificate looking for job, couldn't find anything, that's why I just decide to get out of the country. I start hearing about the immigration lotteries and I applied many times without luck, and finally I went to Egypt and I get a visa to come to the United State and I came here really looking for that better life. Which I'm still fighting for it.

Joan: So you're married now and you have children.

Mazahir Salih: Yeah, I met my husband you know after five years in Virginia. I met my husband who is asylee, he's from Sudan but he came and he came and seek asylee and he got his asylum. And we met and I just thought he's a good guy, still good guy, and we got married and we have five children in Virginia. In Virginia I started working after 15 days, I work in McDonald's because you know even though I have civil engineering degree, but it is new country for me, I have to start all over. That's why I started by working in McDonald's. And they pay me \$5.25, that's important, I have to add because this was 1997. The minimum wage was \$5.25, and now the minimum wage is \$7.25, that's not good. But you know I ... Just that was the minimum wage, I was working hard sending money back home, I built a beautiful house for my family back home and I start sending money also for my brother and sister so they can go to school and start improving our life over there.

Mazahir Salih: I was working two jobs, in two McDonald's, I just have one from 7:00 to 3:00 and the other one is from 4:00 to close. I have just to change my shirt, very quick, get bathroom because one of them was franchised, one of them original McDonald's, they have different shirt, and just go to the other one. I remember I still, like really long time on my feet even sometime I get blister when I go home, it really was tough for me because I had to pay my rent in Virginia, I have to send the rent for my family back home, and all the money, they depend fully on my salary here in the United States and that what I been doing, but after I done everything for my family, after that I met my husband in Virginia and I really had tough time in Virginia resettling things as new country for me as I told you, but after I resettle I start learning everything quickly and I become advocate for the new people who come, I was start advocate for them, tried to

make them resettle, try to help and navigate through the system when I hear I become very famous in Virginia by helping newcomer.

Mazahir Salih: My cell phone was a public phone, not private phone, everybody will give it to anyone. So they can call me at nighttime, no problem, I will pick up the phone because I think that it is important to help the new people navigate. You will come like really lost, scared, especially if you have children. When I came, I came by myself, but when you have children it will be really difficult for you. I will take my whole family, try to register their kids to school, apply for certain benefit, figuring out the place they can stay and rent, and try to help them find a job. Also, I can enroll them in English as a second language classes and try to help them navigate. I was doing this for long time in Virginia, just advocating for the immigrants actually because at that time I don't have any interaction with American people outside my workplace. I just find them there, talk to them while I'm work, I don't have any other interaction or friend, or anything.

Mazahir Salih: Until I been doing this for long time, I met my husband, I have five children, which is one girl four boys, I have all of them in Virginia and finally I decide I need to work professionally, where I can earn more money and spend less time in work, like eight hours a day, enough. And have more time to stay with my children. And also the rent was very expensive in Virginia. And I have five children we live in two bedroom apartment, we paying \$1750 and this was really ridiculous. I work hard, my husband work hard so we can navigate and try to make ends meet.

Mazahir Salih: But I decide to come and study, and I was Googling some kind of community college where I would find a place to find less rent, at the same time to study. And I just come across Iowa, Kirkwood Community College, and looking what I'm going to study there. And I find something called EEG, which is electroneural diagnostic technology, you measure the brainwave EEG if you heard about it. For the people who have epilepsy or head trauma or those kind of things. And I said, "Oh, I love that." Even though I'm engineering, I was supposed to deal with cement and aggregate and all these kinds of things, but you know this is what make me deal with the brain and I always think if I focus on something, I will do it. That's why I said, "Oh, I'm going to do that." And I just decided to come to Iowa to Kirkwood Community College to study EEG and I promised all my friends in Virginia, because they was really sad that I'm leaving Virginia, I said, "Two year I will be back, two year only, to finish that associate degree in Kirkwood Community College and come back." And here I am, I never went there but do you want me to tell the story in Iowa?

Joan: Yeah sure, and then we'll go to Chuy and we'll hear his story too.

Mazahir Salih: Sure. You know when I came to Iowa really ... I'm done so maybe he go first or like-

Joan: No it's okay.

Mazahir Salih: Anyway it's good to ask.

Mazahir Salih: When I came to Iowa. As I told you, in Virginia I was very passionate about helping people and advocate for them but I was limited in my help to the immigrant people because I thought they are the people that needed help. And maybe the Americans can help me navigate so I can help the other people to navigate. But during that time when my daughter start going to the Head Start, this is the first time I start going and engaging with school. And I been going there just to volunteer because they told me there is a volunteer opportunity for parents to come. And I been going there, they start seeing me coming a lot and they said, "What about to join the Head Start Policy Council?" I said, "Why not? But i don't know what that is." "You're going to tell me about it"? And I just join it and I understand what it is and I find ou,t "Oh! As a parent, we can have input in how the money of the Head Start could be spent." Oh that, isn't that good? Like we have voice and as an immigrant I'm going to have that voice and I can not imagine it. And I always ask, "Are you sure we can say no and we can say yes, not the administration?" and they say, "Yeah, we're helping the board to do everything".

Mazahir Salih: One of the people who was in the policy council, she said, "Hey, Mazahir, do you wanna learn more about this? There is something called Parent Leadership Institute of Alexandria, Virginia. Why don't you join those people? This institute will educate people, they trying to make the parent leader of the community and they will teach you about the system, how the government work, from city level, state, county, everything."

Mazahir Salih: And I have no idea there's something called the mayor, I have no idea there's something called city council or even board supervisor because that's my, really the last thing on my agenda when I came to this country, even I did not put it on the agenda, I don't want to know how those kind of things, I have many other important issues I was focusing on.

Mazahir Salih: Anyway, I joined the Parent Leadership Institute of Alexandria, I become really familiar with the laws and how everything start working. They took us to the capital of Virginia, Richmond. And we saw people are passing bills and I didn't understand it at that time really very well, but I was like seeing what's going on at least start having idea and I become leader. During that program you have to graduate with a project. You have to focus on one project that you can improve the community or just solve a problem or issues in the community.

Mazahir Salih: At that time I find out the Head Start bus for the kids has been cut due to budget. And I find out a lot of parents which is having kids say, "I don't see them anymore coming." When I ask, they told me they drop because they don't have a means of transportation to take their kids to the Head Start. But I said, let me ask my mentor if that's a good thing to solve. He said, "Yeah, that will be it."

Mazahir Salih: Anyway he start helping me how to do a campaign around this, and he told me, he gave me the tools and the first thing I did is a survey to see how many kids

has been dropped. And I find 11 kids has been dropped because of that. And I took all this and start proposing something, who can solve the problem. We brought ... They told me I have to go and meet the mayor, and ask the city to solve the problem. And I went there for the first time to see the mayor, and the mayor invited for me all the school, the superintendent and the transportation directors, everyone. And he said, "Here's Mazahir. She looking for a solution and you are here from the city, tell me how you can help this." And he told me, "And by the way if we cannot find help, what you going to do?" I told him, "I'm going to go to the media and make it public issues." And he said, "No, don't do that now, let us solve the problem."

Mazahir Salih: And we did. We really accomplished, we had the bus pact, running, and this is the first time I can say I become really engaged as American citizen and even make change. I was very happy I did that change. And I still have that passionate and when I came to Iowa I met with the people who's really passionate about social justice.

Mazahir Salih: One day just by accident I was at Coralville Public Library with my youngest one because he doesn't have school, and we was hanging at the library while I see people coming in and all of them they went downstairs and I said, "Oh, is there some people that look like me, they wearing a scarf, and they going down, and let me go and see what is going on downstairs." And one day I ask somebody, "Is this public?" He said, "Yes, it is public." And I went there found a lot people from different background, and guess what that was the first meeting for the Center for Worker Justice.

Mazahir Salih: It was called Immigrant Voice Project at that time and they're having their first meeting. And I just, they talking a lot about a good things, they talking about all the issues that I love. I like it. And I said, oh those my people. Just God send me to the library so I can join this. And I just start like talking to them, I put my name for the next meeting, and that's how I engaged with the Center for Worker Justice. Later I become a founder. Immigrant Voice Project is the founder of the Center for Worker Justice. So I become one of the founder of the Center for Worker Justice. If you don't know we did a lot of good stuff in this community. Most stuff you know, but I like to brag about it. You know all the time wherever I go we raise the minimum wage to \$10.10 as you know in Johnson County. Where you know the Des Moines people came and they said you cannot, they took the right of the county from that, but you know I said, "We don't care about Des Moines people." They are not the Johnson County residents, they don't know anything, that's why we start going to the business door to door and ask them to keep paying the minimum wage of Johnson County, which is \$10.10, because they still operating. No one went out of business, that's why we been telling them that. That's one of the victory we have we recover almost now today \$70,000 of wage theft. Wage theft, as Robin mentioned early, just employer doesn't want to pay people who done the work for them. And you know I just in fact recovered two wage theft last week. One of them is \$600 and the other is \$400, almost \$1000 just last week. This is happening in this community, we are really improved the relationship between

minority and local enforcement here. As you said, Captain Campbell was talking about the relations between minority, how they help, we are the one who are calling Captain Campbell and all the local informants to come and talk to the immigrants. So they can feel safe in this community.

Joan: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Mazahir Salih: I guess those all the thing that we really done and after that I just decide also by knowing ... I guess I can stop here and you can ask me later.

Joan: Yeah, no that's good-

Mazahir Salih: Sorry, you know my story is not only a half an hour, I think maybe three hours.

Joan: I understand, well-

Mazahir Salih: Give him just a little bit and maybe you can ask-

Joan: Okay okay okay.

Joan: So Chuy, such a pleasure to have you here too.

J Chuy Renteria: Thank you Joan.

Joan: So your family came here, your mother independently came from Mexico, your father came from Mexico. Met in Muscatine, got married, and tell us what happened since then.

J Chuy Renteria: Yeah, so I think it's important and first of all thank you everybody for sticking around and thank you, Joan, for inviting Mazahir and I. Something before I get into it, this is just be being a little sassy. It's really interesting to see the kind of dichotomy get placed in kind of the talking heads and everybody kind of leans into that. And then when it comes to, and I know it's late, too, but when it comes to actually having us talk and kind of like get into the complexities of who we are as people, I think people sort of, kinda lose interest, which I think is really interesting to point out. And Mazahir, when you speak, you speak like I speak, we're both storytellers. And you kind of get into the nuance of communication. We don't talk in acronyms. And I think that's really important to think about when we're actually conversating and having these stories.

J Chuy Renteria: So before I get into more with that, so my parents are both from border towns in Mexico. They didn't know each other and they both moved and came to Iowa, immigrated to Iowa, and ended up going to a meat processing plant in Muscatine and got married in Muscatine and then, it was Louis Rich at the time, in West Liberty, Iowa, which is about 20 minutes away, and I was born here in Iowa City and grew up in West Liberty. And another thing to kind of note, too, is I kind of have imposter syndrome right now. I feel like, "What am I talking



about?" But for me it's almost ... It's really important for me to, and I think, Joan, you recognize this, I don't have the answers. And I think it's important to have people on platform like this who don't have the answers. Instead, I'm burdened with the questions. And right now I just have to make those questions manifest for you, and for you, Joan.

J Chuy Renteria: Something that my dad talked about--he's from Ojinaga, which is in the Mexican state of Chihuahua, which is the northern border state. He said that when he was growing up there were posters and fliers all throughout Ojinaga for jobs in Iowa and what the language said to him was, "Come to Iowa and work, we won't check papers." And he said if you don't think that's happening to this day, then you're fooling yourself. And I think there's tons of questions that happen when you start to think about that. And some, I'm just going to pose them as rhetorical questions, it's like how many people know about West Liberty? How many people know here that West Liberty was the first majority Hispanic town in Iowa? And another rhetorical question is how many undocumented people do you know, personally? And something that I say is, "If you know somebody here in Iowa, who looks like me, who has brown skin, who's Mexican or Central American you're about two degrees removed from somebody who knows an undocumented person."

J Chuy Renteria: And whether or not we're talking semantics and whether or not we're talking about breaking the law. We're talking about families, we're talking about all these complicated questions that arise when the sort of political burden gets placed on us. So, my parents had three kids. My brother, I have an older brother who's ten years older, older sister, five years older than me, and myself. And we grew up, and I think an interesting thing that happened is growing up in Iowa and I wrote a story about this, which, Joan, you read-

Joan: Yeah, it's fantastic-

J Chuy Renteria: And we kinda talked about it. It's a story about work and I kinda talk about all the different experiences I've had with my identity and work here in Iowa. And I started off with saying let me tell you about my relationship with work, 'cause if you're Mexican in America you have a relationship with work and it's complicated. When people look at me when I'm working, they see the accent I have, or they see the accent I don't have. They see how tan and dark I get when I'm working in the summer in roofing. That was really interesting, one of the first guests who talked about, when he talked about the immigration checks was your complexion. And I think that's really, one of the biggest most complicated things that happen when you talk to people of color, marginalized people, or people... immigrants here, you're talking about complexion and how when we worked in the summer people would treat us differently when we saw how dark we got. I had, and, Mazahir, I went to Kirkwood as well, so that's funny. I went to Kirkwood and I had my Kirkwood ID, and I had a Kirkwood ID where I was like 19, and it was the end of the summer, 'cause it was in the fall, so I have this picture of me on this Kirkwood ID where I'm tanned and I had a buzz cut and I kept it for a long time 'cause I would show it to people and my ID now, picture

me with an ID right now. So I show them that one and then I show them the Kirkwood and people would have a visceral reaction. And I couldn't tell you how many times people said, "You look like you went to prison."

J Chuy Renteria: I think right there it shows you how much of a complicated kind of ... like you have this idea of how dark you are, your complexion and it vibrates when you're a person of color and you're in this kind of paradigm.

Joan: Yeah.

J Chuy Renteria: Yeah.

Joan: Well, Chuy has written an amazing book and he shared one of the chapters with me as we were, earlier on, planning this program and it was about this story of work and some of the people who were related to you who were involved in summer roofing and so on and so forth. And you just talked about how whatever you were doing with your own personal life, maybe at that point you were taking courses in the junior college, I don't know, but people would drive by in the neighborhood where you were putting a roof on a house and you said....

J Chuy Renteria: So, it goes like this. When we're on the roof of a house ... And here's the thing, to give you guys a lot of context 'cause I think it's like Mazahir and I, we have lots of context we need to lay out. For me growing up in Iowa, I know about, I can understand about 80% of Spanish, I say I have this 80%, 20%, formula I tell people. I can understand about 80% of what my parents or what people are saying, I can speak about 20% proficiency, whatever that means. Basically, if you were to say, "Are you fluent in Spanish?" I would say, "No." And I think it gets really ... and the thing with my family is, and it happens with a lot of family of immigrants, in our family you can actually go like, "Oh, yeah, my nephew speaks Spanish; his brother, it kinda didn't hit his ear and he doesn't speak Spanish; his sister is the most Mexican out of all of us so she for sure speaks Spanish." And that's something we ask of ourselves, "How Mexican are you really?"

J Chuy Renteria: And in the story I talk about how I ended up roofing with my brother for a summer because my brother is an amazing roofer, and I'm not, but I needed some money for the summer. And so it was my brother and we kind of amassed this team of misfits. So it was my cousins, and my brother, and some other people and we ended up getting some undocumented workers working with us, too. You work construction, you work roofing, you know it's unregulated and that can happen, and it was all this, so I was working with this guy who was undocumented who couldn't speak any Spanish at all and here's me who looks like I could be his son, who can't speak any Spanish and we communicate through my brother who can speak, and my dad and everything over there, all this kind of culturally-textured, nuanced kind of, really, ecosystem that's like funky, right? And anybody driving by, and this might be just my own personal bias, but to anybody driving by, we're Mexicans on a roof.

J Chuy Renteria: And so that's a rhetorical question I have for people, like when you're driving by and you see a group of Mexicans, what do you feel? How do you think? What do you think when you're seeing them working? Can you see the nuance in there?

J Chuy Renteria: A thing that happened just today that's kind of interesting is my name, Chuy. C-H-U-Y, pronounced Chu, but we say Chuy. And so many people got to me from here in Iowa City and there like, "That's such a crazy name, is it Star Wars?" That's the one thing I hate, is it Star Wars? Chewbacca? They're like "Wow, that's such a unique name." Jesus, Jesus, Chuy is one of the most common names in the world. In West Liberty I know about six Chuys. There's a student at the University of Iowa who, his TA was accidentally sending me emails all semester, this semester, because his name is Jesus Chuy, I won't say his last name, but I think in her head she's like, "There's no way at all that there's another Chuy." I was like, no he's one of like seven other Chuys in West Liberty. So that's another ... so I mean for that, the question right there is like, "What are our perceptions of what's normal or not?" What's our perceptions of what's, you know we're talking about ethnocentrism and we're talking about how do we perceive others if we are ignorant to these cultures.

J Chuy Renteria: And the other thing I asked before, but like who knows West Liberty, who knows about this majority Hispanic town that's only 20 miles away. That if you drive down their downtown it looks like little Mexico. My tia has a restaurant there and it's amazing, so you guys should go. I'll do one plug.

Joan: Yeah. Well and just one more thing... it really struck me so hard when you recounted another incident that happened. You work in a professional role at Hancher Auditorium, it's a wonderful position, you're involved in community engagement, reaching out to schools and so on...a really responsible, wonderful, exciting job, and your parents came to Iowa City at one point and wanted to see you in the new Hancher Auditorium, but-

J Chuy Renteria: So here's how it goes.

J Chuy Renteria: So, through this roofing thing that happened with my brother, it ended up, and I talk about it in the story, it ended up being this entire saga of the summer of us, kind of the ramifications of what I consider systemic racism. And it fell apart, and I ended up going to Kirkwood and getting my associates degree and then I went to the University of Iowa for dance, so I did my undergrad in dance, and then right when I graduated I got a knee injury and I always say I had really big plans and an impending knee injury that dashed said plans. And I ended up working at a day center for individuals with special needs for about 10 years. And from there I saw an opening for Hancher, for community engagement.

J Chuy Renteria: So basically what we did at the day center was try to creative ways to get these individuals out into the community in real ways. So it translated really, really well to Hancher. That is all to say that I've kinda been, you know had lots of different hats in the community and was really, really excited and it felt like a huge step up to be working at Hancher. 'Cause the kind of elephant in the room,

dirty secret with day centers is like it's so hard, and there's not a lot of money and everybody has to come to a point where there like, have to make a decision, if they're going to sacrifice for this or if you have to take a left, and so I jumped at the opportunity for Hancher, and one of the first weeks I got the job, when I got in was when it opened, the new building.

J Chuy Renteria: And so my parents were going to come see, and as I said our communication is like they speak in Spanish, I talk in English, and I talk in Spanish which is pretty much English with a few Spanglish like "Perros and Comos" in there. So we were trying to conversate and we're talking on the phone and Hancher wasn't on their GPS because Hancher wasn't around, the new building wasn't there so they ended up in this kind of random other university building and all of the sudden I'm on the way there and I hear, I'm talking to my mom on the phone, she like [Spanish Donde Estas 01:38:36], and I'm like "Where are you?" And I hear this other voice get on and it's the receptionist for this other building and she says, "Hey, I think I'm here with your parents." And I'm like, "Oh, yeah, yeah, I'm on my way." She's like, "I'm here with your parents, I think, and we're trying to figure out where you work, are you in the back dock? Are you the custodial? Do you work with the kitchen staff?"

Joan: Hmm.

J Chuy Renteria: Yeah, right.

Mazahir Salih: Assumptions.

J Chuy Renteria: Yeah, and I think it's like this culmination of this story, which is like ... and I mean, my mom, if you know my mom she laughed so hard, when we were like in private. 'Cause she lets it roll off her back. And she's used to it and she's strong. And for me, I'm really sensitive, and I internalize it, but it's like a microaggression, right? But I think it's really important, especially, I wanted this story to culminate and have this really packaged thing, for what I call the "gut punch." The gut punch of that microaggression, because it really, really kinda showcases for the optics of it. You can be working and you can be sustaining in this ecosystem of all these nuances and then, but no. Where do you work? Are you a janitor? And, the whole story too, there's nothing wrong with that, I worked custodial, I worked roofing, and there's nothing, I think I ended, I'm trying to remember the story to now, I end it with, "Work isn't just saying that these jobs, there's no honor in it, but it's saying that those aren't the only jobs that define us." Which I think is a really, really hard thing for some people to swallow.

Joan: Yeah. Boy. Well I think we could probably go for another three hours.

J Chuy Renteria: Yeah.

Joan: But I'm afraid we probably have to respect the time of the audience, too. And, gosh, I can't thank you both so much for coming here. Really, it's just wonderful. Both just wonderful people in the first place, but I would be really interested to have people in the audience just raise your hand if your parent or grandparent was an immigrant to the country.

Joan: Yeah.

Mazahir Salih: That's a lot.

Joan: So, you know. Yeah.

Mazahir Salih: Yeah, I just want to add the assumption that people made by just the way that you look, or the accent that you have or the way that you dress, I'm going to just say quick things, you know Joanne's Fabric, they moved, and on their grand opening they invite the city council to come and do this. And you know that all the customer will come, because if you are the first 100 on the line or first 50 on the line you get discount, and people race there for the morning, and they told me exactly what time I should be there as a part of the city council. And I went there, just same, a scarf, you know, not changing anything. And I went there, and I just walking confidence going inside the store and you know the people who are in the store they stop me. And she said, "Oh, you know, just go to the line, we did not open yet."

Joan: Oh, oh.

Mazahir Salih: And before that I saw from far away, I just saw the city manager going and I saw Susan Mims going inside, and she just opened for them. Because I was in the parking lot trying to hurry up and get there, as soon as I get to the door she didn't even bother to ask me who I am, she just said, "Go there, the customers on that line, you have to stay outside until we open. We haven't opened yet." And [inaudible 01:42:13] go by, I think you guys invited me. She said, "Who you are?" I said, "I'm one of the city council." She said, "Oh, yeah, you can come." And you know just like I don't look like city council, maybe that's why.

Joan: Well, you do now! You look like our city council. So thank you so much. Chuy Renteria and Mazahir Salih.