

# The Lewiston Somalis: Current and Future Workforce Development Challenges

Phil Nadeau

Deputy City Administrator, Lewiston, Maine

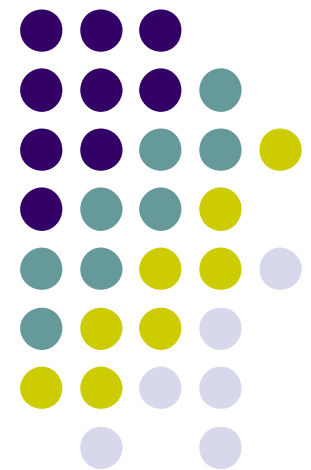
September 4, 2008

and

Center for Workforce Research and Information,  
Maine Department of Labor

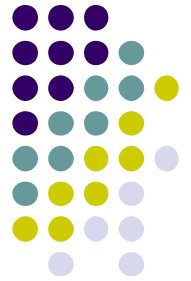
And

Maine State Planning Office



# **The Ali-Liston Fight**

## **May 25, 1965**

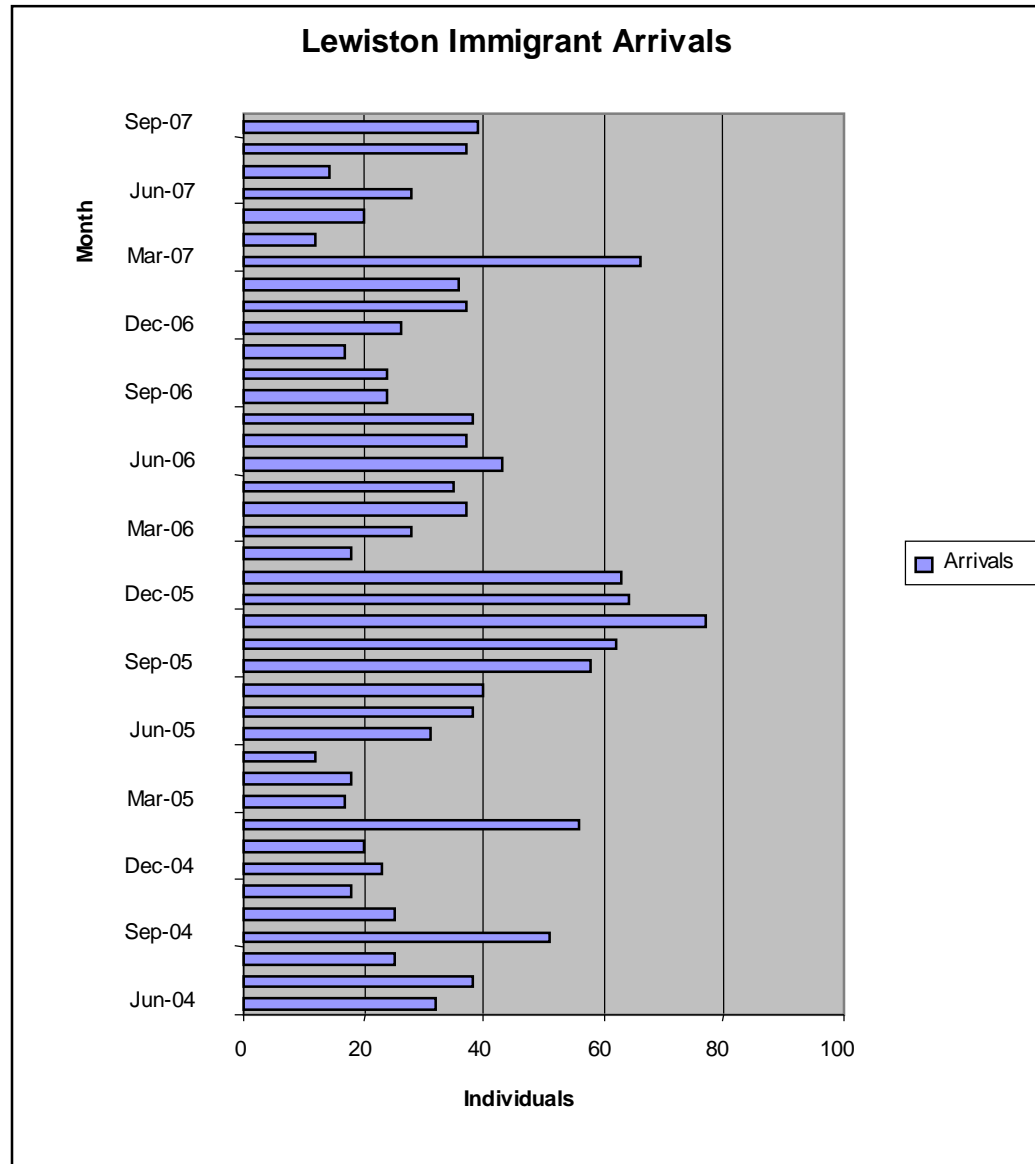


**Until recently, the only  
Lewiston story of any real  
national/international interest**

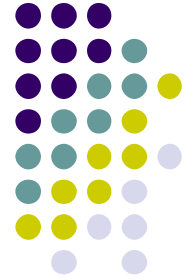




Lewiston's recent experience with the relocation of nearly 3,500 Somali refugee secondary migrants began in February 2001 and has since generated significant national and international news coverage



# Lewiston's Population Decline May be a Thing of the Past in 2010



## Population Trends

<u>Census</u>	<u>Population</u>
2000.....	35,690
1990.....	39,757
1980.....	40,481
1970.....	41,776
1960.....	40,804

---

Source: State Planning Office web address: <http://www.state.me.us/spo/economics/economics/mcd/p60-2000.pdf>

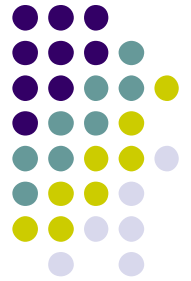
*An Analysis of the*  
**Employment Patterns**  
**of Somali Immigrants**  
*to Lewiston from*  
*2001 through 2006*

A Publication of:  
Center for Workforce  
Research and Information  
Maine Department of Labor  
Maine State Planning Office

Annanda K. Rector  
Economist, Maine State Planning Office



# Characteristics of the Study Population

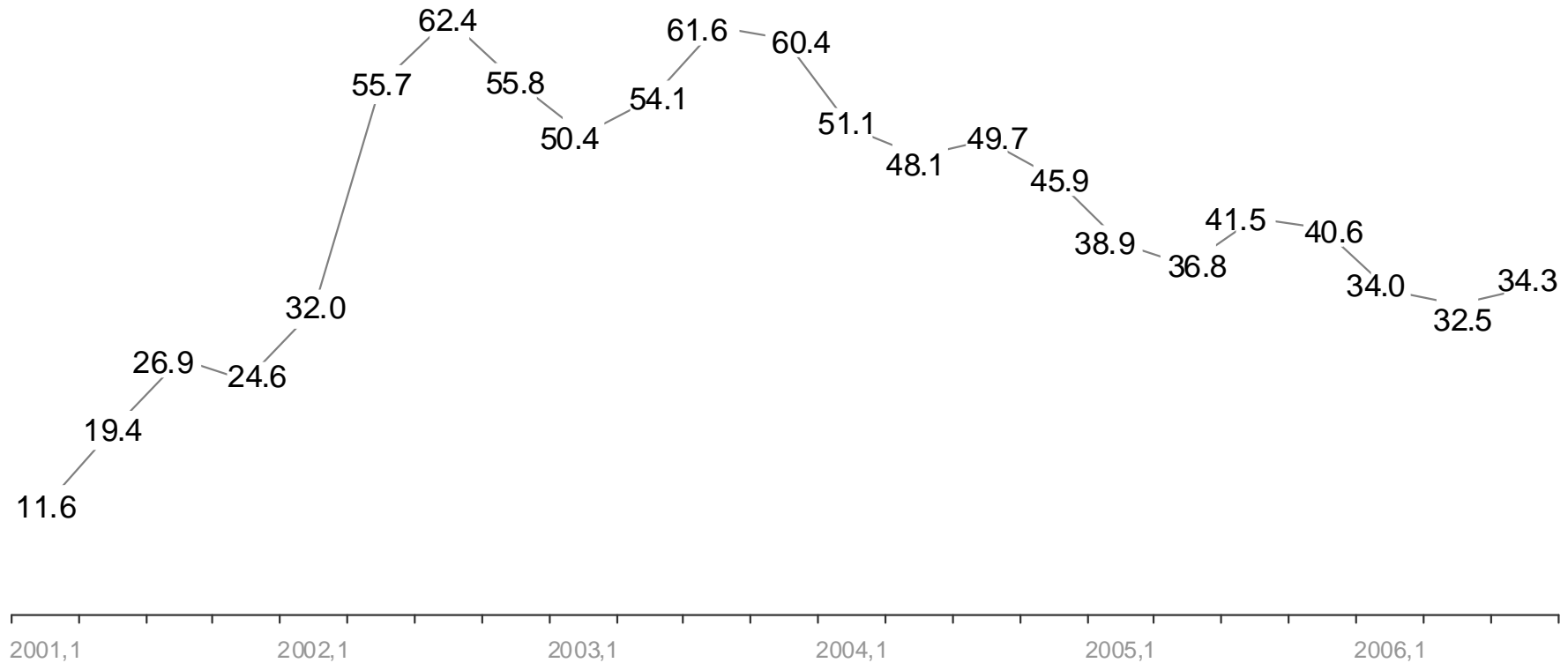


- 2,461 immigrants identified in GA records (enrolled prior to January 2007)
- 1,963 immigrants from Somalia
- 498 immigrants from other countries
  - Ethiopia, Puerto Rico, Sudan, among others
- Most immigrants appeared to be members of young families
- Immigrants from Somalia were slightly younger, on average, than those from other countries

Figure B



## Percentages of Eligible Somali Immigrants with At Least One Year of Wages by Quarter



Seasonal trend: higher employment in spring/summer, lower employment in fall/winter

Long-term trend: sharply increasing employment through 2002, gradual decline starting in 2003



# CareerCenter Training and Services



- Between 2001 and 2006, only 120 Somali immigrants (6%) received WIA services from the CareerCenters
- Reasons for low participation are unknown, but language barrier may contribute
- 84 of the Somali immigrants receiving services (70%) participated in training of some sort



# Educational Attainment

- Very little was known about the educational attainment of immigrants
- 85% of all immigrants in the study, and 88% of immigrants from Somalia, had unknown educational attainment
- Better information on educational attainment, literacy, and language would help in development of training and employment strategies

# The Most Notable Concerns Around Refugee Employment Opportunities In Lewiston



- The absence of a large pool of job opportunities for low-skilled, low-literate/LEP job seekers
- The absence of a single industry with a history of hiring LEP job seekers
- Insufficient workforce development funding at the federal or state level

# Lewiston's Refugee Language Profile



- Illiteracy rates in Somalia are estimated to be as high as 75% (Putnam & Noor, 1993) within the general Somali population – problematic for adults requiring ESL and job training
- New arrival profile – most are secondary migrants (95%) and most have been in country two years or less when they arrive – problematic as most refugee funding is focused on the first year and very little is invested into ESL workforce development
- 95% of all Somali public school students are enrolled in ESL programming – 80% speak a language other than English at home

# Lewiston Adult Education ESOL Data



## ESOL Demographics

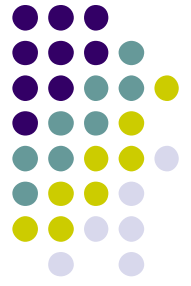
Academic Year	Number of ESOL Students Enrolled	Gender		Age					Employed on Entrance		Became Citizens	Native Language						Entering Educational Functioning Level					
		Male	Female	16-18	19-24	25-44	45-59	60+	Yes	No		Yes	Arabic	French	Spanish	Somali	Chinese	Other	EOL 1	EOL 2	EOL 3	EOL 4	EOL 5
2002-2003	275	106	169	8	43	166	43	15	31	244	0	0	12	32	186	21	24	46	109	78	33	9	0
2003-2004	246	86	160	9	38	162	39	8	35	211	1	2	3	8	217	12	4	26	110	65	35	9	1
2004-2005	328	108	220	18	72	177	40	21	62	266	6	2	9	18	266	9	24	62	97	93	58	18	0
2005-2006	364	139	225	12	88	202	44	18	51	313	7	6	4	12	331	9	8	128	105	78	44	9	0
2006-2007	374	148	226	7	69	213	66	19	68	306	9	4	2	8	343	14	3	151	99	69	42	10	3
2007-2008 ytd 3/12/08	262	102	160	0	55	144	51	11	24	238	11	7	4	9	221	14	7	121	84	31	21	3	2
Demographics retained only for students with 12 hours or greater attendance hours.																							

# The Refugee Low Literate Adult Dilemma



- research says it takes 5 to 7 years for most people **literate in another language** to move through the 5 levels of language proficiency and be able to study content in English...
- **the greater the level of illiteracy** in one's primary language, the longer it takes
- **the older the individual, the longer it takes**
- the inability to achieve even a certain level of casual speaking ability in another language **increases the difficulty in securing employment**

# Areas of Future Study & Funding/Programming Needs



- Educational attainment, language, and literacy skills
- Industry sectors in which immigrants are employment
- Workforce needs of firms in the area
- Workforce Investment Act – a federal commitment to develop a national workforce development strategy with an emphasis on ESL vocational training → directly related to national labor force expansion being fueled by foreign born population