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Sundown Town to “Mexican Town”: Old-timers and Newcomers in Small Town America

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Abstract

For more than a century, communities across the United States legally employed strategies to create and maintain racial divides in America. One particularly widespread and effective practice was that of “sundown towns,” places that signaled to African Americans and others that they were not welcome within the city limits after dark. Though nearly one thousand small towns, large metropolitan areas, and suburbs across the country may have been sundown towns, until recently, there has been little scholarship on the topic. This paper presents a case study of a small homogeneous Midwestern community to consider the connection between past exclusionary policies and responses to rapid demographic change occurring within its boundaries. Analyses of diverse sources document that this community was a sundown town that effectively excluded African Americans for nearly 150 years. Yet, within 15 years, Latinos now account for thirty percent of the town’s population. Interestingly, both quantitative and qualitative data suggest that Latinos are residentially integrated within the community. We argue that consideration of the town’s sundown town history is essential for understanding this outcome. Indeed, partially because of past exclusionary policies, this all-White town was not prepared for the influx of Latino newcomers, mostly recently arrived migrants from Mexico. Consequently, local housing characteristics and regulations of land use and zoning account for the residential integration of White long-term residents and Latino newcomers noted in 2000. Yet, recent developments suggest that this community may become more residentially segregated in the future, as local officials have begun to enforce and strengthen local codes in a place that has been unofficially named “Mexican Town” by neighboring communities. The results of this preliminary study are informative for understanding the connection between racialized histories and contemporary responses to racial and ethnic population change in the United States.

**Sundown Town to “Mexican Town”:
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INTRODUCTION

For more than a century, White communities across America employed strategies to remain all-White, including violent acts, overt and covert threats of violence, forcibly driving African Americans out of town, and local ordinances. One particularly widespread and effective approach to maintain racial divides in America were the practices of “sundown towns,” places that purposely signaled to African Americans and others that they were not welcome within the city limits after dark (Loewen 2005). Perhaps one thousand small towns, large metropolitan areas, and suburbs across the United States were sundown towns. For example, in Illinois, at least 145 towns with populations larger than 1,000 people were “sundown towns (Loewen 2005). Indeed, one town in Illinois, Anna, is nicknamed for its sundown town policy of “Ain’t No N----- Allowed” (p. 199).

Sundown towns are part of the “hidden” history of white racism in America (Loewen 2005).¹ Furthermore, and partly because of its invisibility to Whites and subsequent lack of mention in written histories (Loewen 2005), there is very little research on the topic. Yet, a careful consideration of sundown town policies across the country would strengthen many different areas of academic inquiry. One particularly important example is the growth of the Latino population in rural and small town America. In record time, every region of the country has experienced large Latino population growth (native and foreign born) (Frey 2002; Suro and Singer 2002; Saenz and Torres 2003; Suro and Tafoya 2004), with particularly strong increases in non-metropolitan counties (Lichter and Johnson 2006). A relatively small, but growing, body of research concentrates on the causes and consequences of Latino migration to non-traditional receiving areas in the country (Stull, Broadway et al. 1995; Gouveia and Stull 1997; Durand, Massey et al. 2000;

Grey 2000; Hernández –León and Zúñiga 2000; Grey and Woodrick 2002; Fink 2003; Salamon 2003; Arreola 2004; Fennelly 2005; Gozdziaik and Martin 2005; Kandel and Parrado 2005; Zúñiga and Hernández –León 2005; McConnell Forthcoming, 2008).

Yet, to our knowledge, no study of Latino migration, either in metropolitan or non-metropolitan areas, has considered the connection between the racialized history of a community and contemporary racial and ethnic change. This paper draws from an instrumental case study of one Midwestern small town to examine how the racial context as a former sundown community continues to influence the circumstances of a new and rapidly growing Latino population. The traditionally homogenous Midwestern town of 6,000 people, which we call Riverbend, has experienced an astounding 3,700 percent growth in the local Latino population in 15 years.² In 1990, Latinos comprised 1 percent of Riverbend's population; by 2000 they were 18 percent, and by 2005, they accounted for fully 30 percent of the community. The study incorporates qualitative and quantitative data about Riverbend, including: (a) semi-structured interviews in 2006 and 2007 with Mexican immigrants, White local officials and business persons, members of church and faith-based organizations, and community service providers, (b) archival newspaper research, c) publicly available oral histories about early 20th life in Riverbend and the state; and (d) 1990-2005 Census Bureau data for Riverbend and the county.

This paper focuses on two primary issues. First, the paper documents the racial context of the community, county, and state *before* the arrival of Latino newcomers.³ We provide evidence regarding the sundown town history of the community and the centrality of race to Riverbend's history and development. Second, the paper explores how the racial context of Riverbend is associated with current spatial distributions of Latino migrants and "old-timers" in the community. Interestingly, both quantitative and qualitative data suggest that Latinos *are* residentially integrated in the community. For instance, Census 2000 data shows that Latinos live in all areas of town.

These patterns are related. The sundown town history of the community provides an essential backdrop for the contemporary interracial/interethnic residential integration between Mexican migrants and long-time Non-Hispanic White residents. Indeed, we argue that partially *because* of past exclusionary policies and years of successfully keeping out Blacks, this all-White town was not prepared for the influx of Latino newcomers. Municipal codes that often serve to segregate groups by race/ethnicity and income (Berry 2001) were not strictly enforced in Riverbend. Low-cost housing and other structural features of the housing supply also allowed Mexican migrants to rent or buy mobile homes or site-built homes in every neighborhood. Consequently, Latinos are spatially dispersed throughout the community. Yet, recent developments in the community suggest that the Latino-White residential integration present in Riverbend in 2000 may be fleeting. In the last five years, Riverbend officials have begun to enforce regulations that will likely increase the residential segregation and separation between the old-timers and newcomers to this small town.

The organization of the paper is as follows. First, the article provides the background to the study: a summary of previous scholarship about Latino change in rural communities and a description of the data and methods. The next section of the paper delves into the racial history of the community, racial and ethnic composition of contemporary Riverbend, and the responses to Latino newcomers within the community. Third, the paper supplies evidence of contemporary residential integration between Latinos and Non-Hispanic Whites and offers explanations for this surprising outcome. We conclude our analysis of the connection between past policies and the town's current residential integration of newcomers with indications of increased segregation in Riverbend's future.

BACKGROUND

Though most scholarship about international migration and Latinos in the U.S. focuses on the dynamics of large cities, the complex dynamics of recent socio-economic change in small communities is a contentious process that requires careful scrutiny. Latinos, both native and foreign-born, have increased dramatically in many non-metropolitan areas, accounting for a quarter of the non-metro growth through the 1990's and preventing population losses in 100 counties (Kandel and Cromartie 2004). Small towns across America are experiencing similar or even higher growth rates, categorized as *high-growth Hispanic counties*, counties with at least 1,000 Latinos and 150 percent growth between 1990 and 2000 (Kandel and Cromartie 2004). Such counties, and others with high increases but not meeting these criteria, are dispersed throughout the Midwest and South.

The non-metropolitan Midwest experienced particularly rapid Latino population growth in recent years, approximately 113 percent between 1990 and 2000 (Goudy 2002), outpacing rates in Midwestern urban areas (Saenz and Torres 2003). Increases in small towns of dozens or a few hundred Latinos may appear inconsequential, but have profoundly affected all aspects of social life for both the long-term residents and immigrant newcomers in many domains, including housing, employment, health care, and education (Stull, Broadway et al. 1995; Fink 2003; Salamon 2003; Millard and Chapa 2004; Gozdziaik and Martin 2005; Zúñiga and Hernández –León 2005). What has occurred in these communities offers valuable information about the growing racial and ethnic heterogeneity in the United States, the discontents of rapid population change, and variations in the process of immigrant adaptation and mobility.

The majority of Latin American immigrants in the U.S. overall and in rural areas tend to be from Mexico (Schmidley and Robinson 2003; Millard and Chapa 2004; Zúñiga and Hernández –

León 2005), though others come from Guatemala and El Salvador (Fink 2003; Mohl 2003; Moran-Taylor and Menjivar 2005). Within the Mexican immigrant population in non-metropolitan areas, some come directly from their home country and others engaged in “secondary migration”—that is, moving from another part of the U.S. (Hernández –León and Zúñiga 2003; Salamon 2003; Lichter and Johnson 2006). Some Mexican immigrants have been in the US for many years, with U.S. born children, legal status, and fluent English; while others have been in the U.S. for only a few months and plan to eventually bring their Mexican-born children to the United States.

Qualitative studies focused on the causes and consequences of Latino population growth, both native and foreign-born, in non-metropolitan areas have led to important insights about why Latino populations are increasing so rapidly in these areas. One particular explanation focuses on small towns dominated by manufacturing. As convincingly argued in Stull, Broadway, and Griffith (1995), food processing industries in recent decades have implemented a “rural industrialization strategy,” of relocating urban plants to rural areas or re-opening rural plants that shut closed. Corporations engage in this cost-cutting strategy to deal with declining profit margins. The lower prices of land in rural areas, shorter distances to the “source” (whether it be cows or corn), availability of non-union workers, and tax incentives offered by small communities have encouraged the return or the entry of manufacturing plants that engage in meat or poultry processing (Hernández –León and Zúñiga 2000; Fennelly and Leitner 2003; Millard and Chapa 2004; Grey and Woodrick 2005); textiles (Zúñiga and Hernández –León 2005), and other industries.

The industrialization strategy has led to turnarounds in the communities, though manufacturing work is more physically dangerous, dirty, and far less lucrative than in previous decades (Millard and Chapa 2004; Kandel and Parrado 2005). Consequently, employment opportunities in large plants have been a primary force in driving the growth of immigrants from

Latin America and elsewhere to non-traditional rural areas (Stull, Broadway et al. 1995; Gouveia and Stull 1997; Gouveia and Stull 1997; Fennelly and Leitner 2003; Kandel and Cromartie 2004; Kandel and Parrado 2005; Zúñiga and Hernández –León 2005). This scholarship has led to a general consensus about the process of population change in small communities, a description that receives support in the unfolding of Latino migration to Riverbend.

Additional factors have encouraged Latinos, especially Mexican migrants, to choose non-traditional destinations outside of the Southwest. For instance, the immigrant saturation of the labor market, job displacement, and small downward effects on wages in some Southwestern locales encourage migration elsewhere (Latapí, Martin et al. 1997; Durand, Massey et al. 2000; Massey and Malone 2002; Donato, Aguilera et al. 2005). Recent immigration enforcement efforts by the federal government have led Mexican immigrants away from traditional crossing routes to newer, more dangerous paths, to remain in the country rather than participate in circular migration, and to move to areas with lower immigrant surveillance (Massey, Durand et al. 2002; Hernández –León and Zúñiga 2003; Orrenius 2004). Further, the amnesty provisions of the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act allowed many formerly undocumented farm workers to seek out employment opportunities in places that previously had few Latinos (Zúñiga and Hernández –León 2005). For migrants deciding where to settle, affordability and year-round employment in rural areas are an attraction. Still other reasons include the perception of a higher quality of life, greater safety for raising kids and other non-tangibles (Millard and Chapa 2004; Fennelly 2005; Zúñiga and Hernández –León 2005).

DATA AND METHODS

The study draws from diverse sources. Using media accounts of Riverbend's demographic changes, in 2006 and 2007 we identified and interviewed individuals who could speak with us about the community's history, recent changes, and challenges; including Mexican migrants, immigrant activists, and long-time locals with extensive contact with them via social service agencies, church leaders or as local business owners.⁴ In addition, we interviewed Non-Hispanic White community members working for the city and others employed in banking, real estate, and managing mobile home parks.⁵ A total of fifteen persons were interviewed. Newspaper articles quoting White Riverbend residents supplemented the perspectives of long-term residents that we interviewed.

An in-depth examination of the racial history of the community required that we incorporate archival and contemporary newspaper articles from Riverbend and nearby metropolitan areas, published histories of the county, and oral histories of community members collected by state universities in the 1970s and 1980s. County and city-level Census Bureau data provides quantitative information about the number and spatial distribution of Latinos, homeownership rates, and housing values in the community between 1990 and 2005. To address the structural features of the housing market, we took photographs and noted physical aspects of the community, and visited census tracts showing high proportions of Latinos in 2000 to record the landscape of those areas. Finally, we consulted zoning laws and building permits, went on a community tour with a city official, and drew from interviews with banking personnel, real estate agents, and city staff to examine past and present housing policies in Riverbend.

FROM SUNDOWN TOWN TO “LITTLE MEXICO”

Though Riverbend is several hours from larger towns and metropolitan areas, the town has been a transportation hub since it was founded. Early in Riverbend’s history, the town’s proximity to a river made it an attractive location, as the river was used to transport goods and passengers by steamship to other Midwestern locales. The community was on the railroad line and had a coal terminal providing many opportunities for employment in the 19th and 20th centuries.

The history of Riverbend provides a strong argument for the need to situate contemporary migration within a historical context that recognizes the centrality of race (Winders 2005; Fitzgerald 2006). Why? Because the current influx of racially and ethnically diverse migrants is not the first time that the town has confronted issues of immigration or race. Riverbend has a long history of immigration from Western Europe. For instance, a history of the county published in 1882 provides biographical sketches of prominent men in Riverbend, including immigrants from Switzerland, Germany and other countries who owned large plots of land, became directors of local financial institutions, established lumber mills, and the like.⁶

On the other hand, it appears that early European immigrants were neither welcomed nor completely incorporated in the community. Indeed, the Riverbend newspaper reported in 1929 that the community “has never felt kindly toward the 'cullid Gemmen' and while no violence has been attempted toward those of the class who happened into the city, it has always been quite evident that they were not welcome.” Oral histories also suggest negative attitudes towards immigrants. For example, a White woman who moved to Riverbend in 1919 at age 30 recalls disliking the immigrants in the community, “I never wanted into (Riverbend) because I said, ‘It’s just full of dominating Dutch. And I hated the Dutch.’”⁷

Race has been a “problem” for Riverbend, as for so many other communities, both urban and rural, who have struggled to maintain the “character,” often understood to be the *whiteness*, of their way of life. Diverse evidence indicates that Riverbend was indeed a sundown town. Oral histories collected from persons born around 1900 indicate that signs were posted in Riverbend stating, as one white man recalled, “don’t let the sun set on you in this man’s town.”⁸ A Black man who lived in a neighboring town reported that he could not get a hotel room for the evenings that he worked in Riverbend during the late 1920’s and 1930’s. A posted sign warned him, “Read and run, Mr. N-----.”⁹ Still another local, a white woman born in 1898 referred to the racial climate during her high school years:

They didn’t allow colored folks in (Riverbend)...Just recently, the last few years they (African Americans) were allowed to come here. (At that time, African Americans) could come here like if they worked on a bus or something...but they wouldn’t let them stay overnight...(Riverbend) just didn’t allow colored folks here.¹⁰

Though by all accounts African Americans were not allowed to reside in the community, there was interracial contact between higher-status White residents and lower-status Black waiters and porters working at the local train station and Black women employed as domestics and nannies.

The frequency of sundown towns across America and the lack of historical treatment of the topic highlights the invisibility of racism in U.S. history (Loewen 2005). Also invisible are the true reasons for many racist practices and policies. For instance, the catalyst for sundown town policies in many communities were what were perceived to be rising crime waves instigated by Blacks and the alleged rapes of White women by Black men (Loewen 2005). This theme appears in the oral history project plumbed for material for the current study. For instance, a White woman born in 1898 and a life-long resident of Riverside explains that Blacks weren’t allowed because:

(Riverbend) used to be the county seat and a couple of Negroes stole the papers and took them to (another town) because they wanted (that town) to be the county seat. And I don't know for sure but I kind of believe that those two Negroes were hung down here in the park. The city park. I think I've heard Mother and Dad tell about it.¹¹

This explanation connects exclusionary practices against African Americans with their own actions, which blames the victims rather than the institutionalized discrimination occurring in multiple sites in the state and across the country. The same woman notes, "At that time coloreds and whites were sort of segregated. They didn't mix like they do now." This statement reveals the invisibility of racism to some Whites; Blacks and Whites don't "mix" voluntarily rather than because of institutional discrimination that insured their separation and unequal treatment.

Other towns in the same county, adjacent counties, and communities across the Midwest also were "sundown" (Loewen 2005), and provide a larger context for the actions and perspectives in Riverbend. During this period, large cities across the Midwest with large non-White populations, including East St. Louis, enacted violent exclusionary policies towards African Americans. Particularly egregious examples include the "race riot" in Springfield, Illinois in 1908, the capitol of Illinois and the birthplace of Abraham Lincoln.¹² Following an accusation that a Black man had raped a white woman, several Black men were lynched, including a Black barber (Loewen 2005), a Black man married to a White woman, and others.¹³ Individuals alive during that period recall roaming mobs of angry White men carrying weapons, the destruction of many African American-owned businesses and homes, and the influx of armed militia convened by the governor to calm the situation.

Some Whites tried to protect African Americans, such as one woman's memory of her father's actions to protect employees of his transfer company during the Springfield race riot:

When the riot started--Papa had several colored men that were his truck drivers--he got them and told them to go and get their families and sneak them over there to that place, and he would lock them up in there and keep it perfectly quiet. They did and saved their lives...¹⁴

Others reported similar efforts during the race riot, but as Loewen (1996) notes, anti-racist activities by Whites are also invisible in U.S. History.¹⁵ Though noteworthy, the actions of a few White individuals on behalf of local African Americans could not overcome the brutal physical, economic, and psychological damage inflicted on African American families during that period.

The migration of Latinos to the Midwest is not a new phenomenon, although the rapid rate of increase is new. Mexican migrants and Mexican Americans first arrived in the Midwest before World War I in agricultural jobs, as well as employment in industrial and manufacturing firms such as Ford Motor Company, Inland Steel, other factories in Indiana, Michigan, and Ohio; and constructing railroads to St. Louis and Chicago (Valdes 1991; Vargas 1993; García 1996; Valdes 2000; McConnell 2004). Indeed, throughout the 20th century, despite discrimination and racialization, Mexican Americans and Mexican immigrants and Puerto Ricans created meaningful and rich lives in the region.

Many studies of Latino migration do not explicitly address racial stratification (Winders 2005). However, as this brief history of Riverbend and other Midwestern sites show, the racialized history of the community, county, and region provide an essential backdrop for understanding how newcomers of a different ethnic and racial background are treated within the community—then and now. Indeed, in light of the history of Riverbend and other places in the Midwest, it is not surprising that the town was nearly all White before the increasing arrival of Latinos in recent decades: past practices in the community ensured that result. Indeed, according to one newspaper article published in 2003, “In 1858, the people of (Riverbend) had gathered in the town square to hear...a speech opposing slavery. But a century later, they had hung a noose in that same park, warning blacks to stay away.” (news service, November 9, 2003). The very small numbers of African Americans in the community and county undoubtedly stem from Riverbend’s exclusionary

practices, some of which occurred less than thirty years ago.¹⁶ Such policies and practices reveal how racial discrimination is institutionalized in ways intended to have differential impacts on minority groups (Pincus 1996). Clearly, long-standing practices in Riverbend were intended to exclude persons considered to be “undesirable,” and are crucial to understanding the contemporary context of Latino migration today.

Riverbend Today

Though the size of Riverbend has remained about the same in the last thirty years, the racial/ethnic composition of the area has changed dramatically. According to census figures, the Non-Hispanic White population has decreased since 1990, at the same time as the number of Latinos exploded (U.S. Census Bureau).¹⁷ In 1990, less than 50 Latinos lived in Riverbend according to census figures; however county-level estimates indicate that nearly 2,000 Latinos lived in Riverbend in 2005 (Census Bureau 2006).¹⁸ The 3,700 percent growth in Riverbend’s Latino population far out-paced state-level change.¹⁹ Moreover, recently published newspaper articles and our own interviews suggest that the numbers of Latinos in Riverbend may be far larger than official tallies. Census data indicates that of Latinos residing in the community in 2000, more than half were living in a foreign country, primarily Mexico, five years earlier. The most common Mexican states sending migrants to Riverbend are Michoacán and Guanajuato. Of those Latino immigrants in Riverbend who were living in the U.S. in 1995, approximately 33 percent were living in another state (U.S. Census Bureau). Thus, Riverbend includes a mix of both immigrants recently arriving in the U.S. and those who moved to town from some other U.S. area.

Riverbend had several factories until mid to late 1980s, but at the current time, a food-processing plant is the primary source of local manufacturing employment. This plant is part of the corporation’s “rural industrialization strategy” (Stull, Broadway et al. 1995). After years of

declining profits and rising labor costs, the plant closed in the 1986. The plant was sold to another food processing corporation and re-opened a year later with half as many workers and much lower starting wage than previously (news service, November 9, 2003). Employee turnover was very high due to wages, the difficulty of the work, and employee injury. The corporation began to recruit from outside of the area, particularly border towns in the Southwestern U.S. (news service, November 9, 2003). Many persons previously working in the Southwestern agricultural industry came to town to work at the plant, as it provides full-time, year-round employment work that offers higher starting wages and more job security than farm work. The plant actively recruited outside of the community to bring in more workers, namely Mexican immigrants and Mexican Americans (news service, November 9, 2003).

Initially the local factory was predominantly White, but by 2007, about 46 percent of the factory employees are non-native English speakers (city newspaper, March 14, 2007). By all accounts, the majority of adult Latinos living in Riverbend work at the local factory—the plant provides job applications in Spanish and English, and according to the company website, currently pays more than \$12 per hour for positions at the plant. Nearly 2,500 employees work at the factory, with nearly 1,000 non-White employees, and approximately 80% of those from Latin America (State Department of Commerce community profile, 2006).²⁰ A large proportion of the manufacturing plant's Latino workers are undocumented Mexican immigrants, some who purchase fraudulent identification and work papers (city newspaper, May 20, 2001; city newspaper, March 8, 1991). The plant sub-contracts cleaning services to sanitation companies. Third-shift employment at one local sanitation company pays nearly \$8.00 an hour and purchases classifieds advertisements in English and Spanish. A large proportion of the sanitation company's approximately 120 workers are Latino, mostly Mexican migrants, which bumps up the size of the Latino workforce associated

with the plant (city newspaper, April 4, 2007). Contract work of this type typically employs Mexican immigrants, particularly those lacking legal status (Donato, Stainback et al. 2005).

Impacts of these demographic shifts were felt immediately in Riverbend, and confirm the consequences of rapid immigrant growth in small-town America found in past research, especially in schools, churches, and social service agencies. Local institutions and businesses began to adjust accordingly. The school system experienced an influx of Spanish speaking students. By 2003, fully one-third of the students in the school district were Latino (news service, Nov. 12, 2003). The school district hired Spanish-speaking staff to serve as liaisons between the school and immigrant families (city newspaper, March 31, 2002). Indeed, as in other communities (Zúñiga and Hernández –León 2005), many persons interviewed recognize the impact of newcomers on the growth of businesses in the community, both those targeted to immigrants specifically and others. A local Spanish-language newspaper is published every week, including articles translated into Spanish from the main local paper, special-interest articles and photos. Real estate agencies, banks, butcher shops and other businesses in Riverbend and nearby towns place ads in the Riverbend Spanish-language paper.

Latino immigrants have established businesses, including bars, Mexican restaurants, and grocery stores that draw both Latinos and non-Latinos (city newspaper May 20, 2001, interviews and site visit 2006). These entrepreneurial Latinos appear to be secondary migrants who previously lived in other U.S. areas where they gained experience and social capital before arriving in the community. Such varied experience in the U.S. likely allowed them to become economically successful fairly quickly (Hernández –León and Zúñiga 2003). Indeed, one Mexican-owned restaurant closed down partly because there was so much competition from new Mexican restaurants in Riverbend. Mexican immigrants arriving in Riverbend provide opportunities, not just

problems: including preventing population loss in the area, rejuvenating the local churches, purchasing cars and homes, and increasing the demand for rental housing (city newspaper, March 31, 2002). Both Mexican immigrants and White locals recognize these realities.

Reactions to Community Change

Riverbend's exclusionary past certainly provides additional insight into current reactions to Latino migration. Consider comments made by the local mayor in 2003 in reference to the increase of Latinos:

(Riverbend) had been an all-white, redneck community for 160 years...For a community like that to have a different ethnic group come in, well, it's hard to adjust...(Until 1990) there were no Hispanics here. *I'd like to think I had a lot to do with that.* (news service, Nov. 9, 2003). If a genie would jump out of a bottle and ask me if I'd like to have it the same way as 15 years ago, damn right I would. But that's not reality." (news service, Nov. 12, 2003). (italics added).

The mayor's attempt to take credit for keeping Riverbend "all-White" is rendered particularly meaningful in light of the decades-long struggle to keep African Americans out of the community, the county, and other sites in the Midwest. The lack of diversity before that time appears to be a source of pride for this politician, as he has maintained the historical integrity and character of the town. Indeed, a communal pride in "redneck" Whiteness would certainly be threatened by the influx of Latinos. The term "redneck" refers to a specific class-based form of Whiteness that serve as a source of pride for working class Whites, and is superior to other low-class forms of whiteness, such as "white trash" (Hartigan 1997).

Riverbend's failure to keep out non-Whites is noted by members of nearby communities who may also be invested in this racial project. Indeed, White townspeople are bothered by persons from nearby towns referring to the Riverbend as "Little Mexico" and "Mexican town" (news

service, November 9, 2003, interviews). Consequently, taunts of “We Want Tacos” at high school sporting events by neighboring community members (news service, Nov. 12, 2003) may take on special meaning; perhaps shaming the community for not doing more to keep out non-Whites.

Though the mayor and other community members are dismayed by the growth of Latinos in the community, they recognize that the prominent employer, the food processing plant, is responsible for shaping and influencing the racial/ethnic composition of the area. Before leaving his post for a few years, the out-going mayor warned the incoming one: "I told him, 'If you don't stay after (the corporation owning the factory), you are going to have a lot of Hispanics and a lot of Asians come in here and take those jobs.' "That's exactly what happened," he said (news service, November 9, 2003). A corporate representative says of the Riverbend plant states, “We’ve done very little recruiting outside the (Riverbend) area over the years. People have come to us, by and large” (news service, May 5, 2006). Factory workers, including Mexican migrants, tell a different story.

The mayor is concerned because the plant recruits:

Hispanics, blacks, and the downtrodden to work in their plants—those who don’t have the computer skills or the basics for today’s work environment...They seem to prey on that type of people. They (the factory) take advantage of the disadvantaged. (news service, Nov. 9, 2003).

Thus, the mayor frames the problem with the community change as due to individual-level characteristics of the newly arrived residents: people who are downtrodden and lack basic skills.

Other locals refrain from describing their dislike about the arrival of Mexican immigrants in racial or ethnic terms. One common strategy is to focus on the criminality of illegal immigrants. For instance, a factory worker, speaking of a recent immigration raid in Riverbend says:

(T)he local Hispanic population fits in fine most places, works hard and is generally neat and clean. The issue...is not whether immigrants are worthy of living in (Riverbend), but that everyone should have to obey the same laws (city newspaper, April 6, 2007).

A local newspapers' informal survey of residents in early 2007 indicated that it wasn't the legal status of newcomers that was problematic for old-timers, but the migrants' perceived resistance to assimilating:

Not one person said the immigrants should be turned away at the border or returned to their native countries. The consensus was that if someone is relocating to another culture, they should learn the language and expect to follow the laws of the land. (city newspaper, April 11, 2007).²¹

Other local residents believe that “Riverbend has bent over backwards” (interview 2006) for the new arrivals. Consequently, what motivates dislike about Mexican immigrants is resentment: “A lot of people feel that the immigrants are protected by our own laws more than we are” (news service, Nov. 11, 2003). Framing the “illegal immigration problem” as one that reflects concerns about the poor quality of immigrants, the rule of law, failures to assimilate/integrate, and taking advantage of the community's goodwill rather than concerns explicitly based on race and ethnicity mirrors the national rhetoric about contemporary immigration. Furthermore, concerns expressed in such terms may partially shield persons espousing such views from being labeled as racists.

Qualitative studies have explored the ways in which small-town community members show newcomers “their place”—through individual acts of discrimination in work or social arenas, communicating racial prejudice and their distaste about immigrants and Mexicans specifically, or via other means (Millard and Chapa 2004; Zúñiga and Hernández –León 2005). What also makes the situation difficult for White community residents in Riverbend is that the small size of the town means that it is hard to avoid Latinos. This is best seen in the public school district--with only a few

elementary schools and a combined middle and high school, nearly all youth attend the same schools. Further, Census 2000 data, interviews and newspaper articles reveal that Latino newcomers in Riverbend are distributed throughout the community, rather than highly concentrated in one or two small areas. Therefore, White community members cannot isolate themselves from Latinos. Some White locals in Riverbend who feel that it “gotten too crowded with Mexicans” say that they plan to move away (news service, Nov. 12, 2003).²² Moving away to avoid non-Whites is a well-established response in the United States (Lichter and Johnson 2006).

Though relatively rare, there is overtly racist activity occurring in Riverbend since Latino migrants began to arrive, including the recent destruction of a home in a nearby community that was to be rented to a Mexican family from Riverbend (city newspaper, May 12, 2000). A Southern Poverty Law Center report in 2005 suggests that a Ku Klux Klan brotherhood group is active in Riverbend. The website for the local KKK organization indicates a rented mailbox at the Riverbend post office. The KKK last marched in the community in 1996, mounting a burning cross on the site where a Mexican man shot and killed a White man. The location where the shooting occurred, a business owned by a Latino migrant, was burned down by arsonists. By all accounts, relations were very tense for a period after that event.

Of course, not everyone in Riverbend is hostile towards the Latino newcomers.²³ For instance, the church leaders of various faiths have openly expressed their support for the immigrants, who have rejuvenated their congregations with younger blood. City officials, trailer park managers, and real estate agents all noted that the migrants pay their bills on time and take care of the homes that they purchase. A local official relates, “Their choice of paint might be a little different than what we’re used to, but them keep them (their houses) up.”(interview 2007). According to the current mayor, “We had problems in the beginning, but it just gets better with

time” (city newspaper, January 6, 2003). Referring to the slow process of change, a Mexican immigrant who predominantly socializes with other Mexicans in town says, “We have celebrations [like Cinco de Mayo] at school and invite Anglo people. Little by little, more people come and become acquainted” (interview 2006).

Clearly, the negative responses on the part of some Riverbend residents is consistent with past studies documenting the distress of long-term residents about the changes in small towns (Salamon 2003; Millard and Chapa 2004; Gozdziaik and Martin 2005; Zúñiga and Hernández –León 2005). However, unlike past scholarship, we explore how the community’s history as a “sundown town” is directly linked with contemporary receptions to newcomers. Indeed, we argue that the racialized history of Riverbend provides a framework for interpreting contemporary reactions and events as much more powerful than a few racist individuals operating alone on their racial prejudices. The early policies that “discouraged” Blacks from settling in Riverbend in earlier decades, we argue, explains not only why there was so little diversity in Riverbend before Latinos arrived and how White locals view recent changes in the community; but also helps us understand, perhaps ironically, how this racist past has influenced the town’s current integrated residential patterns across the lines of ethnicity. It is this last point to which we now turn.

RESIDENTIAL INTEGRATION AND HOUSING IN RIVERBEND

Distinct physical segregation of diverse social groups has been a feature of the U.S. for decades. For example, racial/ethnic segregation between African Americans and Non-Hispanic Whites in large metropolitan areas such as Chicago, Los Angeles, and New York City is very high (Lewis Mumford Center 2001).²⁴ Census data suggests that residential segregation between Non-Hispanic Whites and African Americans in metropolitan areas decreased between 1980 and 2000. However, for other racial/ethnic groups such as Latinos, who are less segregated than African

Americans but growing rapidly, they are *not* less segregated in the United States than in 1980 (Lewis Mumford Center 2001).²⁵ In fact, one study of Hispanic-White residential segregation of census tracts in non-metropolitan places finds that there was more separation between the two groups in 2000 than in 1990 (Kandel and Cromartie 2004). Even more striking, the highest 1990-2000 increases in residential segregation exists for high-growth Hispanic counties, such as the county where Riverbend is located.

Yet, by all accounts, Latinos and Non-Hispanic Whites are not highly residentially segregated in Riverbend. Indeed, all persons that we interviewed, both Latino and non-Latino, reported that Latinos were spatially dispersed throughout the community. Our own visits to the community suggest that Latinos live everywhere in Riverbend. Quantitative data from Census 2000 data confirms our qualitative findings of significant residential integration for Riverbend between Latinos and Non-Hispanic Whites. Census Bureau maps show that two census tracts with three block groups each cover most of Riverbend. Approximately 85 percent of Riverbend's Latinos live in the six census block groups, a lower level of geography than census tracts.²⁶ A non-specialist examining the data for these six block groups would quickly realize that Latinos, who comprise approximately 18 percent of Riverbend in 2000, are dispersed relatively equally across the block groups. Indeed, Latinos comprise from 7 percent to 27 percent of each block group's population.

Formal calculations of residential segregation measures for Riverbend also confirm fairly low residential segregation. Two results are particularly notable. First, following the traditional cut-off points for one residential segregation measure, Latinos in 2000 could be classified as "moderately" segregated from Non-Hispanic Whites in census tracts for the county where Riverbend is located (Michigan 2007). Riverbend's county overall is more segregated than that of other High-growth Hispanic counties in the United States, but is less segregated compared to other

non-metropolitan counties lacking historical or fast-growing Latino populations (Kandel and Cromartie 2004).²⁷ Second, the two census tracts covering most of Riverbend show even lower levels of residential segregation than the county.²⁸ In fact, according to these measures, the residential segregation between Latinos and Non-Hispanic Whites could be considered low.

Local Housing Market

Given the history of policies to exclude African Americans from Riverbend, one might expect there to be high levels of residential segregation between Latinos and Whites. A brief description of local housing options is illuminating. Riverbend has a mix of older and newer housing units in the community. The majority of housing is single-family housing with a handful of small multi-family housing structures. The largest multi-unit complex was built in 2005 with approximately 40 units, primarily set aside for low-income households. Site-built houses tend to be seventy years or older, with 2-3 bedrooms, approximately 1,000 square feet plus basements, and selling for between \$30,000 and \$60,000.²⁹ Census Bureau data indicates that both Latinos and Non-Latinos who rent pay approximately \$410 a month, which is lower than the state or national average, but can be unaffordable for families relying on one earner working at the food processing plant.

By 2000, only about 20 percent of Latinos in Riverbend were homeowners. However, since that time, Latinos appear to have made great inroads to homeownership. The story of Maria, interviewed in 2006, is a particularly telling example. Maria, a Mexican woman in her thirties, moved to Riverbend eleven years ago. Her husband was recruited to work in the local food processing plant by a mobile recruiting team, consisting of a representative of the factory and a nurse. Though her husband did not have legal permission to live and work in the United States, he passed the company's medical exam and was provided a \$400 advance and a bus ticket from Texas

to Riverbend.³⁰ After a few weeks of sleeping in his car, he used his first paycheck to move into an apartment recommended by the factory's Human Resources and Relations personnel.³¹ He soon sent for his wife and their child.

At first they lived in a rental home that was “full of cockroaches, really ugly” says Maria. When Maria first arrived, there were only few Spanish speaking people in Riverbend. She recalls “there were perhaps 50 to 70 Latinos in town.” Local churches played a significant role in their settlement in Riverbend. Church staff and volunteers provided translation services in meeting with doctors and public service agencies, made home visits, and helped them get groceries, mattresses, linens, clothing, and other basics.³² Even though money often was very tight, Maria and her husband would stand in line at the local post office on paydays to send about \$50 to their parents in Mexico.

Eventually, they purchased a very inexpensive mobile home. “We were so happy. We painted it, put new carpet in. We just loved our mobile home.” Five years later, they had a second child and needed a larger home. They saved enough money to purchase a run-down house abandoned by the previous owners, who left the community in the late 1980s. The home was cheap enough that they were able to renovate it suit their family's needs. Maria says:

I fixed it up myself. When my husband went to work and the kids went to school, I got busy with tearing down walls, taking off carpet, fixing up the plumbing system and all sorts of things...I got help also. Here people help each other to fix their homes. We ask friends . . . We pay \$15 an hour. It is not free but it is cheaper. And we pay cash.

Now, their current home is “a bigger house with a large yard,” she says with satisfaction. Based on their experiences with low-quality rental housing in Riverbend, Maria and her husband decided to become landlords. Today, they rent their mobile unit to a Mexican family.

After 11 years in Riverbend, Maria and her family are financially stable and well-established in the community; they own two homes and a car. Maria's husband improved his English and was able to demonstrate his interpersonal abilities. Eventually, he earned a supervisory position within the plant that was less physically demanding. For this reason, he has been able to continue at the plant, while many of his co-workers who continued to work on the factory line eventually have to leave the plant due to physical ailments.³³ Though initially Maria experienced the isolation of living in a small town thousands of miles away from Mexico, it did not last long. When the plant was hiring, Maria says "we told our relatives and friends in Mexico and in California about the jobs and many of them joined." They now have nearly fifty relatives in town. Nearly every Sunday, relatives come to her house to grill meals, listen to music, and play soccer in the yard.

For Maria, the main advantage of Riverbend is that it "is where you can reach your dream of homeownership," partly because housing prices are so reasonably priced in the community. Census data for Riverbend in 2000 indicates that the median housing value of Latino-owned homes is approximately \$50,000.³⁴ Such home values make homeownership relatively affordable in the community: a 30 year fixed mortgage with a \$50,000 loan amount and an interest rate of 7 percent results in a monthly mortgage payment of approximately \$335. Real estate taxes are approximately 1.5% of the appraised value of the home, adding another \$63 per month to monthly cost of ownership. Other than the down payment, the cost of the mortgage and tax would comprise about 20 percent of the pre-tax income of individuals working full-time at the local factory at \$12 per hour.

Real estate agents report that, they recently have begun to do a lot of business with Latinos. Agents are well-aware of the potential represented by Mexican migrants. Indeed, one particularly prominent real estate agent enrolled in Spanish classes to better serve his rising Spanish speaking

clientele. Records of his real estate transactions show that persons with Spanish-surnames represented 28 percent of the homes that he sold in 2004, 25 percent in 2005, and 33 percent for the first half of 2006. Satisfied Latino homebuyers refer him to other potential homebuyers. He also confirms that several Mexican migrant clients have purchased very inexpensive homes, renovated them with the help of friends, and sold or rented to other Latinos.

Latino migrants in Riverbend employ various strategies to purchase homes, such as pooling funds and putting the home in the name of one individual, often a legal citizen. According to real estate agents, one particularly dangerous method is to purchase a home using a social security number and identity that belongs to someone else, often an unknown person (interview 2006, city newspaper April 12, 2007). This strategy is problematic because the person making the down-payment and regular mortgage payments does not actually own the home. Latino newcomers' interest in homeownership coincides with the loosening of lending criteria to attract Latino homeownership occurring nationally (Gallagher 2005; Grow 2005), which may have encouraged local lenders to work with potential Mexican homeowners to secure mortgages. Indeed, though few local banks have Spanish-speaking loan officers, Latino customers often bring persons to interpret for them. Then, banking personnel indicate that they work on a "case-by-case" basis with Mexican applicants lacking social security numbers and other materials.

We believe that features of the local housing market, especially the lack of large apartment complexes and the relatively low-cost of purchasing homes, have contributed to the residential integration observed for Riverbend. Further, interviews with local real estate professionals confirm that Mexican migrants looking to buy homes do not state preferences for any particular geographic area. Instead, they are interested in buying an inexpensive home that they can improve over time.

Zoning and Land Use Policies

In most communities, the mix of different types of housing, the location of mobile home parks, and the presence of multi-unit buildings has led to distinct housing outcomes. For instance, most zoning ordinances in communities direct the placement of site-built homes and mobile homes into different areas, with mobile homes generally confined to trailer home parks. Mobile homes are less valuable than single detached family homes or other types of housing (Bennefield 2003). Persons who cannot afford to rent or buy units in apartment buildings or single family site-built homes rely on mobile homes to meet their housing needs.

Zoning ordinances often lead to the concentrations of poorer, often minority, households in particular areas, such as trailer parks on the edge of town. Such regulations are linked with the concentration of Mexican immigrants to distinct residential spaces in small towns, such as employer-provided housing on the fringes of the community (Donato, Stainback et al. 2005). Scholars argue that municipal zoning ordinances were and are implicitly tools of racial/ethnic segregation (Burns 1994; Silver 1997; Pader 2002). Though racially-based codes are illegal and unconstitutional since 1917 (Berry 2001), housing codes that appear to be racially neutral such as the occupancy standard of no more than two people per bedroom inscribe “ethnicity and family relations on the land” (Pader 1993; Pader 2002; Ahrentzen 2003).³⁵

Like other communities, Riverbend had pre-existing planning and zoning regulatory mechanisms. A zoning ordinance was established in 1980 that differentiated districts with single family homes and those for mobile home units. However, locals note that the enforcement has been lax for many years. Consequently, over time mobile homes were placed in residential neighborhoods next door to site-built homes, leading to a very unique and striking blend of housing

types on the same street. City officials and real estate agents indicate that mobile homes, about 15 percent of the housing units in Riverbend, are distributed throughout the community.

Some Latino newcomers reside in mobile homes in these mixed residential streets adjacent to bigger and smaller stick-built houses.³⁶ Other Latinos live in the mobile home parks in and around Riverbend. For example, one such park within the city's boundaries has approximately 20 mobile homes. The trailer park owner's records indicate that families with Latino surnames resided in about 40 percent of the units; these families are mostly newer residents with small children. Another trailer park, about 3 miles outside of the city limits, has less than 10 mobile homes that were manufactured in the 1970's and 1980's. The manager/owner of the park indicates that all of the units are owned by Latinos that came to town within the last seven years. Of course, with estimates of at least 2,000 Latinos in Riverbend by 2005, their housing needs far surpass the availability of mobile homes in trailer parks or those interspersed throughout the town. Yet, because of local housing characteristics, Latinos are fairly residentially integrated throughout Riverbend.

What is Next for Riverbend?

The sundown town signs in Riverbend have been gone for decades and recent Latino newcomers and long-term Non-Latino residents are residentially integrated, at least as of the year 2000. This is an interesting outcome: a place that warned African Americans to stay away using racist symbols several decades ago is now nearly one-third Latino, with Latino newcomers residing "all over town" (interview, 2006). We argue that explicitly because of such policies, the structural features of the local housing market were not a priori exclusionary before Latinos migrants arrived.

However, recent activities in the town since 2000 suggest that the community is responding to this shift. Indeed, local officials amended residential zoning ordinances and stepped up

enforcement of those regulations. An ordinance passed in 2003 required that land where a mobile home is currently located be replaced within 60 days by another mobile home that is no older than five years old. This means that older mobile homes are phased out with newer units, increasing the costs of mobile home ownership in that area; and consequently, encouraging lower-income households to find other alternatives. Further, zoning amendments created a mobile home district so that no additional mobile homes may be located in the areas zoned for single-family site-built homes, they must be placed on lots in trailer home parks or other areas zoned for mobile homes (City Clerk interview 2007). The site initially proposed for the placement of more mobile homes, near active railroad tracks, was controversial; no action has been taken on the proposal (city newspaper, March 31, 2002).

Though such enactments to control and limit mobile home parks have taken place within the last five years, and the Latino population in Riverbend has skyrocketed within the last 15 years, the (White) city officials, real estate agents, and trailer park managers do not explicitly connect the two trends. Rather, local officials explain the renewed enforcement because of “substandard trailers” that began appearing in Riverbend (city newspaper, June 29, 1997). Some Mexican migrants disagree, believing that the zoning ordinances were enforced because immigrants began moving into mobile homes and placing them on vacant lots (city newspaper, March 31, 2002).

Community leaders are also trying to control other aspects of the community. For example, areas currently zoned as single-family residential districts, which is most of the town, allow for only one family, an immediate family, to reside in a unit. No extended family members are allowed to live in the residence. The small size of the Riverbend coupled with the local official’s experience in the community insures that the housing supervisor is acutely aware about violations of occupancy ordinances. On a tour with the supervisor, she was able to quickly point out housing where perhaps

dozens of individuals were residing. Such units have been cited for violating the zoning limiting housing units to a single family. Violators are required to show birth certificates and other information to prove that only one family is residing in a unit.

Occupancy codes are particularly problematic for Mexican migrants in Riverbend; the local housing shortage, the relatively low pay of jobs, and the presence of single Mexican men make it much more likely that they will reside in what are considered to be overcrowded housing conditions. In Mexico and other parts of the world, there is a shared tradition of multi-generational households with the preference for sharing bedrooms; decades of U.S. housing standards have claimed that such practices are unhealthy and disadvantageous (Pader 2002). Local occupancy standards are legal. Yet, just as such regulations were used vis-à-vis immigrant tenements in early 20th century New York City, they can be a useful tool against “whoever are the current unwanted...the not-yet-white populations” (Pader 2002, p. 313) such as Mexican migrants in a formerly sundown town.

CONCLUSION

This paper explores how the racial context of a small Midwestern community, especially its history as a sundown town, is connected to the rapid demographic change occurring within its boundaries. Our “thick description” of Riverbend points to ways in which the town is typical of other small manufacturing towns across the country who have experienced dramatic increases in Latinos. Yet, we also uncover a “hidden” history to this previously all-White community, as it effectively excluded African Americans for nearly 150 years.

Our examination of a diverse materials indicate that this context is essential for understanding the current racial and ethnic dynamics, the responses to newcomers, and residential integration in Riverbend. Indeed, we argue that the deep rooted practices inherent in the local

sundown town policy mediate how old-timers respond to new racial and ethnic diversity. Further, the historically constituted lack of preparedness for exclusion through zoning and land use regulation operated in conjunction with the contemporary housing financial market and its housing financial institutions to result in fairly low residential segregation between Whites and Latinos. Since that time; however, Riverbend officials have begun to enforce and strengthen local codes that may help them regain “control” of a place that has been unofficially named “Mexican Town” by neighboring communities. This is a process that may change residential segregation within Riverbend in the future.

Sundown town policies are not thought about often, but when they are, the practices are perceived to have been rare, random, and archaic. However, as Loewen (2005) convincingly argues, perhaps thousands of communities across the United States engaged in such exclusionary policies, and directly influenced the settlement patterns of African Americans. This paper only scratches the surface of how racial discrimination has been institutionalized in this community and other small towns across the Midwest, but we offer it as an example of how the conclusions drawn about interracial dynamics of population change in both metropolitan and non-metropolitan areas would be strengthened by an explicit consideration of the racialized historical context. Additional qualitative and quantitative research in diverse settings would be very useful to moving forward our theoretical and empirical development about processes of demographic change in the United States.

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¹Discriminatory practices also were directed against American Indians, Japanese, the Chinese, Jews and many others.

²For confidentiality reasons, we obscure the name, location, and detailed information about this community, the respondents, and authors and location of newspaper articles.

³ Following Moran-Taylor and Menjíar (2005), we refer to Latinos in Riverbend, predominantly from Mexico, as newcomers, migrants, and the like to emphasize the fluidity and back and forth movements of Mexican migration to the United States. Like other Mexican immigrants, those residing in Riverbend engage in transnational practices. Though financial resources, products, and the migrants themselves cross national borders between Mexico and Riverbend, this paper focuses on their activities on the U.S. side of the border.

⁴There appear to be some Latin American migrants from countries other than Mexico; however, they are a tiny fraction of the total Latino migrant population in Riverbend.

⁵This approach was judged to be most appropriate, as it was not possible to identify all immigrants residing in the community, given their recency of arrival, irregular living arrangements, hours of employment, and legal status. Unfortunately, it was difficult to find immigrants who had previously worked for the plant but who found other local opportunities, respondents suggested that immigrant workers who had to leave the plant because of injury or health problems often left the area. Neither researcher was born in Mexico, but are either first or second generation immigrants in the United States. Both conducted interviews in Spanish or English. A graduate assistant working on the project, a white male, conducted in-person and phone interviews with some of the White locals in our sample.

⁶ Of course, this published history has other biases, perhaps excluding prominent women and less successful immigrant men.

⁷ Memoir audiotaped in 1978 and transcribed by staff from a state university.

⁸ Memoir audiotaped in 1972 and transcribed by state university staff.

⁹ Memoir audiotaped in 1975 and transcribed by state university staff.

¹⁰ Memoir audiotaped in 1987 and transcribed by state university staff.

¹¹ Memoir audiotaped in 1987 and transcribed by state university staff.

¹²The labeling of these activities as “race riots” are inaccurate, by all accounts, they were roaming groups of white males looking for African Americans. Those versed in Mexican American history will see similarities with the mislabeling of the Zoot Suit Riots in Los Angeles in 1942.

¹³ Memoirs audiotaped in 1973 and 1990, transcribed by state university staff.

¹⁴ Memoir audiotaped in 1973-1974 and transcribed by staff from a state university.

¹⁵ Memoir audiotaped in 1973 and transcribed by staff from a state university.

¹⁶Though not the focus of this study, these exclusionary policies also help explain the disparate settlement patterns of African Americans and recently arrived African immigrants noted by Lichter and Johnson (2006).

¹⁷We do not have empirical evidence to speculate on the connection between Non-Hispanic White decreases and Latino increases, though it is possible that a “tipping point” has been reached as noted in Lichter and Johnson (2006).

¹⁸The most recent “official” data available about a small town such as Riverbend is from Census 2000. Data sources such as the 2005 American Community Survey collected by the U.S. Census Bureau do not calculate population estimates for areas with populations smaller than 65,000. To arrive at the 2005 figure for the community, we assumed that the approximately the same proportion of Latinos in the county lived in Riverbend as in 1990 (90 percent), and extrapolated from the 2005 county-level estimates.

¹⁹The state had a larger Latino population base in 2000, therefore the percent change is not as high as in Riverbend, a place with a relatively small Latino population base.

²⁰The other 20% of non-White workers at the plant are African immigrants, with a few others from Asian countries. This paper focuses on Mexican migrants, the overwhelming majority of non-White individuals in Riverbend.

²¹ Very infrequently, Latinos in Riverbend are able to respond to this argument. Recently, one Latina migrant offered the following explanation: We don’t feel that we are hurting anyone by being here, because we work, because we don’t steal anything...I understand that being here without papers is an offence, but we try to do the best we can. We pay our taxes, and we try to obey the law as best we can. (city newspaper, April 6, 2007).

²² Data for the county in which Riverbend is located indicates that there has more out-migration between 2000 and 2006 than in-migration from international destinations (U.S Census Bureau components of change estimates), but this could be due to the movement of Whites and Latinos to areas with more diverse employment, young adults coming of age and choosing urban areas such as Chicago, as well as moves specifically to avoid Latinos.

²³ We concur with Hernández –León and Zúñiga (2005) about the importance of identifying “accommodation” not just “conflict, competition, and tension” (p. 254).

²⁴ A common measure of residential segregation, the Dissimilarity Index, shows the extent to which two groups are evenly spread among census tracts. The value indicates the proportion of the either group that would need to move to another subarea to be even with the other group. A high value on the 0-100 scale, approximately 60 or high is considered to be very high segregation, 40-50 is moderate segregation, and below 30 is considered to be fairly low (Lewis Mumford Center 2001).

²⁵ Cities such as Los Angeles show that both Hispanics and Blacks are very residentially segregated from Non-Hispanic Whites, with a Dissimilarity Index from Whites of 63 for Hispanics and 68 for African Americans. In the largest Midwestern city, Chicago, the dissimilarity index for Latinos is 62 and 81 for Blacks (Lewis Mumford Center 2001).

²⁶ Census maps show that a two census tracts considered here cover 1.1 mile and 2.8 miles. A third census tract is excluded from consideration because though it accounts for 15 percent of Riverbend’s Latinos, it has far lower-population density and covers 65 miles of the community and surround areas.

²⁷ According to the Racial Residential Segregation Measurement Project, the Dissimilarity Index for Whites and Latinos in Riverbend’s county is about 43 at the census tract level and 51 at the Block group level. It is typical for indices to be higher at lower levels of aggregation, such as the block group versus the census tract. Kandel and Cromartie (2004) report that in 2000, the dissimilarity index for high-growth Hispanic counties is approximately 26.

²⁸ Author calculations of the index of dissimilarity for Riverbend as a place compared to the overall county-level dissimilarity index shows a dissimilarity index of 25.6 and an index of 20.5 for the six block groups within the 2 census tracts.

²⁹ There are only a few Riverbend homes valued at over \$100,000, all of which are owned by non-Hispanic white residents. The local housing market is suffering, as are other parts of the country. A review of a local real estate agent’s website in March 2007 showed that 43 percent of homes under \$40,000 are reduced; 55 percent of homes originally priced \$40,000-\$70,000 are reduced, and 33 percent of homes over \$70,000.

³⁰ Documents were not required to be shown to the factory until several weeks into employment. Federal immigration policies, such as the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act, require employers to request and view documents indicating legal status and identification, not verify the validity of the documents.

³¹ Local real estate agents indicated that the factory offers advances on a case-by-case basis after employees have started work at the plant, perhaps paying a month’s rent directly to the landlord and some funds for food, these funds are withdrawn from several paychecks.

³² The qualitative sources noted earlier in the paper note the role of local churches and other organizations in meeting the needs of newcomers.

³³ Indeed, between 2000 and mid-2006, nearly 600 claims were made against the corporation for repetitive stress injuries occurring at the Riverbend plant, and the plant paid out \$6 million on those claims (city newspaper, June 29, 2006). Those who leave the factory tend to move away from the area in search of work that is not as strenuous or dangerous.

³⁴ Median housing values for non-Hispanic White households in Riverbend are slightly lower, about \$43,000 in 2000.

³⁵ Other scholars are more skeptical (e.g., Berry 2001).

³⁶ Local building permit records show that the first permits, required to do any kind of building including home additions, were first issued to Latinos in 1997. All building permits issued to Latinos concerned the construction of mobile homes, valued at approximately \$7,000 apiece. Some permits were used to replace older units with newer mobile homes in residential neighborhoods; Latinos account for 30 percent of such building permits issued after 2002.