

2009 Diaz McConnell, E. and F. Miraftab. "Sundown Town to 'Mexican Town': Newcomers, Old Timers, and Housing in Small Town America," *Rural Sociology* 74 (4): 605-629. The final, definitive version is available at <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/journal/10.1111/%28ISSN%291549-0831>

Sundown Town to "Little Mexico":

Old-timers and Newcomers in an American Small Town

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For more than a century, communities across the United States legally employed strategies to create and maintain racial divides. One particularly widespread and effective practice was that of "sundown towns," which signaled to African Americans and others that they were not welcome within the city limits after dark. Though nearly one thousand small towns, larger communities, and suburbs across the country may have engaged in these practices, until recently there has been little scholarship on the topic. Drawing from qualitative and quantitative sources, this paper presents a case study of a Midwestern rural community with a sundown history. Since 1990 large numbers of Mexican migrants have arrived there to work at the local meat-processing plant, earning the town the nickname "Little Mexico." The study identifies a substantial decline in Hispanic-White residential segregation in the community between 1990 and 2000. We consider possible explanations for the increased spatial integration of Latino and White residents, including local housing characteristics and the weak enforcement of pre-existing housing policies. We also describe the racialized history of this former sundown town and whether, paradoxically, its history of excluding non-whites may have played a role in the spatial configurations of Latinos and non-Hispanic Whites in 2000. Scholars investigating the contemporary processes of Latino population growth in "new" destinations, both in metropolitan and non-metropolitan areas, may want to explore the importance of socio-historical considerations, particularly localities' racialized historical contexts before the arrival of Mexican and other Latino immigrants.

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Forthcoming in *Rural Sociology*

Introduction

Bolstered by the U.S. Supreme Court’s 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision declaring that racial segregation was legal, for decades communities across America employed aggressive strategies to remain all-White.¹ Such practices included violence, overt and covert threats of violence, and local ordinances that excluded African Americans or sanctioned force to drive them out of town. Thus some communities practiced racial apartheid by becoming “sundown,” places that used harassment, intimidation, economic and social ostracism, and local ordinances to keep African Americans, Mexicans, and other groups from living there (Loewen 2005). For example, between 1890 and 1930, the Black populations of several hundred counties declined by at least fifty percent within ten years or less, perhaps entirely due to “racial cleansings” by local Whites that forced nearly all Blacks to flee the area (Jaspin 2007). As a result of these practices, perhaps a thousand U.S. localities—small towns, large metropolitan areas, and suburbs—were all-White by design between 1890 and 1930 (Loewen 2005).

The exclusionary practices implemented by sundown towns are part of the hidden history of America’s racism, a history hidden at least to Whites and therefore rarely documented in published work (Loewen 2005; Jaspin 2007). Yet careful documentation and consideration of these places and their practices could strengthen at least two areas of academic inquiry. The first is the geographic dispersion in the U.S. of Latinos, both U.S. - and foreign-born, in recent

decades. The dispersion is explored in a rapidly expanding literature (e.g., Stull, Broadway et al. 1995; Arreola 2004; Millard and Chapa 2004; Gozdziaik and Martin 2005; Kandel and Parrado 2005; Zúñiga and Hernández-León 2005; Lichter and Johnson 2006; Massey 2008). The second relevant area is the patterns of residential segregation in non-metropolitan areas now receiving attention (e.g., Kandel and Cromartie 2004; Lichter and Johnson 2006; Lichter, Parisi et al. 2007a; Wahl, Breckenridge et al. 2007; Lichter, Parisi et al. 2008); these studies document moderate to high levels of residential segregation of Hispanics and non-Hispanic Whites in smaller communities across the United States.

However, to our knowledge, no study has considered these phenomena simultaneously. Specifically, no examination of the movement of Latinos into new areas, whether metropolitan or non-metropolitan, has documented whether those communities may have sundown town histories nor explored whether such histories may be linked with their present racial and ethnic spatial reconfigurations.² We suggest that analyses of the contemporary residential patterns in communities now experiencing influxes of Latinos should consider the racialized historical context before the arrival of racially/ethnically diverse newcomers. Consequently this paper, drawn from an instrumental case study of one Midwestern small town, explores how its identity as a former sundown town may be one aspect, among many, associated with the spatial distribution of its new and rapidly growing Latino population. By design, sundown towns such as the one discussed here historically allowed few non-Whites to live within their limits. Between 1990 and 2006, however, in this traditionally homogenous community, which we call Riverbend, its Latino population has increased by 5,000 percent.

This study employs a multi-method approach that incorporates qualitative and quantitative data to undertake two objectives. The first is to document the racial context of the

community before Latinos began to arrive. Scholars (Winders 2005; Fitzgerald 2006) have noted that many studies of Latino migration do not explicitly address racial stratification. Yet, the complex history of Riverbend described here suggests the value of situating contemporary migration within a historical context marked by the centrality of race. To do so, the first step is to document a community's history as a sundown town, which as Loewen (2005) notes, is a challenge. Although there are useful sources of information about U.S. communities or counties with histories of racial/ethnic exclusion (Loewen 2005; Jaspin 2007), there is no exhaustive and detailed account of places with such histories. In the case of Riverbend, it required delving into such diverse material as oral histories about early 20th century life, archival newspaper articles, and historical census data.

The next objective was to determine the level of residential segregation in Riverbend in 2000 and to examine how it had changed since 1990. Census data at the census-block level were used to calculate a common indicator of residential segregation, the index of dissimilarity, at a fine-grained level of geographic detail. These measures were used in combination with other qualitative and quantitative material to explore a question that has received little attention in either the new destinations or the residential segregation literatures: might the racial context of a sundown town such as Riverbend be associated with the contemporary spatial distributions of the town's Latino, mostly Mexican, migrants and its White "old-timers"?

This exploratory study considers a variety of structural explanations: the low cost of local housing, its features, and the weak enforcement of pre-existing housing policies. We also consider the sundown town history of the community. Specifically, we examine whether the past practices to keep out Blacks may help explain, among other factors, why this all-White town did not enforce institutional tools that would have likely increased the residential segregation of the

Latino population arriving after 1990. For example, the municipal codes often used to segregate groups by race/ethnicity and income (Berry 2001) were put on the books in Riverbend in the 1980's, but were not enforced or strengthened until recently. Factors noted in previous research may also be relevant, including earlier patterns of Hispanic-White residential segregation. These factors working together may help to account for the current spatial residential patterns of Riverbend and of other small communities undergoing similar rapid demographic change. Such issues may also be useful for understanding how residential segregation between Latinos and non-Hispanic Whites may have changed since 2000.

Background

The Geographic Dispersion of Latinos

Researchers, policymakers, and journalists have followed with great interest the recent demographic trends among Latinos in the United States, particularly the movement of Latinos to areas that historically have had few Hispanics. Indeed, in record time every region of the country has had large increases in Latino native and foreign-born populations (Guzmán and McConnell 2002; Suro and Singer 2002; Suro and Tafoya 2004). Hispanic population growth in non-metropolitan counties has been particularly strong (Saenz and Torres 2003; Kandel and Cromartie 2004; Lichter and Johnson 2006). Indeed, Latinos accounted for more than a quarter of the total non-metropolitan growth during the 1990s and for nearly 45 percent between 2000 and 2006 (Johnson and Lichter 2008).

Most scholarship about recent international migration and the dynamics of Latinos in the U.S. focuses on larger cities, but now more studies are examining the complex dynamics of

Latino population growth in smaller communities. Although population increases in small towns of a few hundred or more Latinos may appear inconsequential, such changes have presented challenges for both the long-term residents and the newcomers (Stull, Broadway et al. 1995; Arreola 2004; Millard and Chapa 2004; Gozdziaik and Martin 2005; Kandel and Parrado 2005; Zúñiga and Hernández-León 2005). Many communities, small as well as large, have struggled to address the needs of newly arrived Latinos for housing, health care, education, and at the same time to address the concerns of long-term residents about what they perceive as negative changes in their communities (Broadway 1995; Stull, Broadway et al. 1995; Millard and Chapa 2004; Fennelly 2005; Zúñiga and Hernández-León 2005).

Recent studies have offered important insights about the causes of the in-migration of Latinos, both native and foreign-born, to new areas in the Midwest and Southeast.³ As convincingly demonstrated by Stull, Broadway, and Griffith (1995), in recent decades food processing industries have implemented a cost-cutting “rural industrialization strategy” of relocating urban plants to rural areas or re-opening rural plants that had closed. Processors of meat and other foods who hope to increase profit margins look to the lower land prices in rural areas, the shorter distances to the “source” (be it cows or corn), the availability of non-union workers, and the tax incentives offered by rural communities (Zúñiga and Hernández-León 2005). Similar circumstances also attract textile and other industries to rural places (Hernández-León and Zúñiga 2000; Millard and Chapa 2004; Kandel and Parrado 2005).

Other factors, too, have drawn Mexican migrants and others to non-traditional destinations across the country, including the Midwest. Immigrant saturation of the labor market and small downward shifts in wages in some Southwestern locales may encourage migration elsewhere (Durand, Massey et al. 2000; Massey, Durand et al. 2002; Donato, Aguilera et al.

2005). In addition, the amnesty provisions of the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act allowed some formerly undocumented farm workers to seek employment in places that had previously had few Latinos and that were more affordable, furnished year-round employment, and were perceived as having a better quality of life (Millard and Chapa 2004; Fennelly 2005; Zúñiga and Hernández-León 2005).

Moreover, in the 1990s, cities such as Los Angeles began enforcing policies on occupational safety and minimum wages. As a result, low-wage employers left those cities and settled in new places, which then attracted immigrants (Light 2006). Simultaneously, the federal government's stiffer policies to thwart immigration from Mexico shifted Mexican migrants away from traditional crossing routes and to choose areas with less immigrant surveillance (Massey, Durand et al. 2002; Hernández-León and Zúñiga 2003; Orrenius 2004). The geographic dispersion of U.S. and foreign-born Latinos to new areas of the U.S., particularly non-metropolitan locales, likely stems from a combination of these factors.

Residential Segregation

Two theoretical explanations are usually offered for racial/ethnic residential segregation and its persistence in the United States. The spatial assimilation model suggests that differences in residential segregation are primarily due to individual-level differences in socioeconomic characteristics and advantages such as education and income across racial and ethnic groups (Charles 2006). As non-White minority groups improve their socioeconomic conditions, they are able to improve the quality of their housing and to reduce their segregation from Whites. Acculturation similarly brings such improvement, translating upward economic mobility into residential mobility (Rosenbaum and Friedman 2007). Spatial assimilation, however, seems to

apply more to Asians and Latinos who are lighter skinned or identify as White than it applies to African Americans and Latinos who are darker skinned or identify as Black (e.g., Logan and Alba 1993; Schill, Friedman et al. 1998; South, Crowder et al. 2005; Iceland and Nelson 2008).

Scholarship demonstrating differences among racial/ethnic groups after controlling for socioeconomic resources has generated another model: place stratification. This model points to the role of structural barriers in limiting the opportunities of African Americans and other non-White groups (Charles 2006; Rosenbaum and Friedman 2007). Institutional practices such as discrimination in mortgage lending and access to housing, and steering by real estate agents serve the interests of powerful whites and limit the upward mobility of African Americans and Latinos (Massey and Denton 1993; Oliver and Shapiro 1995; Conley 1999; Galster and Godfrey 2005). As Charles (2006) suggests, contemporary residential segregation “is best understood as emanating from structural forces tied to racial prejudice and discrimination that preserve the relative status advantages of Whites” (47).

Residential segregation of ethnic and racial groups is accepted as the norm in contemporary U.S. cities.⁴ For example, in Chicago, Los Angeles, and New York City, racial/ethnic segregation between African Americans and non-Hispanic Whites is high and has been so for decades (Massey and Denton 1993; Logan, Stults et al. 2004; Wilkes and Iceland 2004).⁵ Historically, Latinos have been less segregated from Whites than African Americans have been, but Hispanic-White segregation nationwide increased between 1980 and 2000 (Alba, Logan et al. 2000; Lewis Mumford Center 2002). Recent work focusing on residential segregation outside of the largest cities of the United States documents that the moderate to high levels of Hispanic-White residential segregation observed in metropolitan areas are present in

micropolitan and rural areas, as well (Kandel and Cromartie 2004; Lichter and Johnson 2006; Lichter, Parisi et al. 2007a; Wahl, Breckenridge et al. 2007).

Researchers have also begun to consider whether the geographic dispersion of international immigrants and Hispanics (both U.S. and foreign-born) to new destinations, including rural areas, points to their upward residential mobility symbolizing spatial assimilation or to geographic balkanization stemming from structural barriers and racially-based prejudice (Lichter and Johnson 2006; Lichter, Parisi et al. 2008). This work has provided new information about the high levels of residential segregation in non-metropolitan areas, particularly in rural places experiencing large increases of Latinos. For example, Hispanic-White segregation in both 1990 and 2000 was higher in nonmetro new Hispanic destinations than in nonmetro places with more established Hispanic populations, all rural areas, and all U.S. counties as a whole (Lichter and Johnson 2006; Lichter, Parisi et al. 2007a; Lichter, Parisi et al. 2008).

Moreover, recent work reveals that Hispanic-White residential segregation does not necessarily decline in new Hispanic destinations simply because large-scale Hispanic population increases are occurring. For instance, one study reports that nonmetropolitan counties with high growth rates of Latinos during the 1990s actually had higher Hispanic-White spatial isolation in 2000 than in 1990 (Kandel and Cromartie 2004). Another study examined residential segregation in new Hispanic destinations, including nonmetro places with the largest increases in the numbers of Latinos between 1990-2000 (Lichter, Parisi et al. 2008). These new Hispanic destinations had declining Hispanic-White segregation over the decade, which multivariate analyses suggest are related to their initially higher levels of Hispanic-White segregation in 1990. However, Hispanic population growth between 1990 and 2000 occurring in these places is not statistically associated with either changes in Hispanic-White segregation over the decade or

levels of segregation in 2000 (Lichter, Parisi et al. 2008).⁶ Taken together, this work documents that decreasing Hispanic-White spatial isolation is not the only possible outcome in new Hispanic destinations. When segregation does decrease between the two groups, it is related to initially higher levels of segregation in 1990 but not the influx of new Latinos arriving in the area.

Researchers acknowledge the need for more qualitative approaches, noting that when it comes to understanding how individual and institutional forces operate to create racial segregation, “We are near the limit of what can be accomplished through the analysis of publicly available census data...” (Logan, Alba et al. 2002: 320). Other scholars suggest that case study research in new Hispanic destinations may reveal additional explanations for high levels of Hispanic-White residential segregation (Lichter, Parisi et al. 2008). Therefore, this study’s in-depth and historically contextualized analysis of one small Midwestern community incorporates quantitative and as well as qualitative material in examining the spatial distributions of Latinos and Non-Hispanic Whites.

Data and Methods

For the paper’s two objectives as stated in the Introduction, we draw from diverse sources. Following Loewen’s (2005) call for triangulation of sources in documenting the sundown town history of the community, we carefully examined archival and contemporary newspaper articles from Riverbend and from nearby metropolitan areas, a circa 1880 book-length history of the county, oral histories of community members and nearby residents conducted in the 1970s and 1980s, and decennial census data about the county and Riverbend between 1810 and 2000. We used Census 2000 data to determine the number and characteristics of Latinos, their homeownership rates, and housing values in the community. From the 2000

census block-level data, we calculated the index of dissimilarity, a commonly used measure of the “evenness” of spatial distributions for two groups (Massey and Denton 1988).⁷ Calculations of the residential segregation of Latinos and non-Hispanic Whites at a finer level of detail such as census blocks are more appropriate for evaluating spatial isolation in smaller communities with few census tracts (Lichter, Parisi et al. 2007a: 568).

To document the structural features of the housing market, local housing policies, and the current housing context, we visited the census tracts having high proportions of Latinos in 2000 to record those landscapes, consulted Riverbend’s zoning laws and building permits, and toured the community with a city official. To learn about Latinos’ experiences with the local housing market, we examined the information on home purchases between 2004 and mid-2006 that a local real estate agent provided. In addition, using media accounts of Riverbend’s demographic changes, in 2006 and 2007 we identified individuals who could talk about the community’s history and recent demographic trends. They included two Mexican migrants working in education and a social service agency, and four clergy, two of whom are recent arrivals from Mexico. We also interviewed White locals: two prominent real estate agents, five bank employees, three managers of mobile home parks, and two housing officials.

The next section of the paper draws on these quantitative and qualitative sources to provide a historical and contemporary profile of the community. We have been careful to obscure the name, location, and identifying details about the community and to exclude the names of reporters and the newspapers and news services that published their articles. Midwestern towns have been featured in national news coverage about increases in their Latino populations and the subsequent immigration surveillance and enforcement; the current situation in Riverbend requires sensitivity because many newcomers lack legal authorization to live and

work in the United States. It is also necessary to protect the identities of persons who granted us interviews.

From Sundown Town to “Little Mexico”

Settled in the first quarter of the 19th century by Midwesterners from other areas, Riverbend has been a transportation hub since it was founded. Early in its history, its 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. Later, the community was on the railroad line and had a coal terminal, providing many opportunities for employment in the 19th and 20th centuries. Riverbend has had a strong history of keeping “outsiders” out, but has constructed “outsiders” differently in different eras. For example, the Riverbend newspaper in 1929 remarked, “While no violence has been attempted toward those of the class who happened into the city, it has always been quite evident that they [Germans] were not welcome.”

In the early 20th century, when more blacks were living in the Midwest, the community employed outright racist practices to maintain the “character,” then often understood as the whiteness, of the town. A common practice of sundown towns was to post signs at the town’s entrance that informed African Americans that they were not welcome within the city limits after dark; the existence of such signs has been confirmed in more than 180 communities (Loewen 2005: 104). Sundown signs were posted in Riverbend that implied that African Americans could stay the night or reside in the community. For example, a Black man who had lived in a neighboring town recalled a posted sign warning, “Read and run, Mr. Nigger”; he could not get a hotel room for the evenings when he worked in Riverbend during the late 1920’s and 1930’s.⁸ A White male Riverbender recalled a sign that said, “Don’t let the sun set on you in this man’s

town.”⁹ Still another local, a white woman born in 1898 and a life-long Riverbend resident, noted:

[Riverbend] didn’t allow colored folks in. . . . 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

Elsewhere in the same county, in adjacent counties, and across the Midwest were other sundown towns (Loewen 2005). Early in the 20th century, urban areas with large non-White populations such as East St. Louis enacted violent exclusionary policies towards African Americans. An egregious example is the 1908 “race riot”¹¹ in Springfield, Illinois, the state capital and the birthplace of Abraham Lincoln (Senechal 1990). Several Black men were lynched (Loewen 2005), and perhaps two-thirds of Springfield’s African Americans fled the city to escape further violence (Senechal 1990).

The history of racial exclusion in Riverbend and other Midwestern communities may help illuminate the experiences of racial and ethnic change now occurring in the region. For example, Riverbend’s sundown history documents that the current influx of racially and ethnically diverse migrants into Riverbend is *not* the community’s first experiences with immigration or race. Moreover, the lack of diversity in Riverbend before the recent arrival of Latino migrants is not a coincidence: the town’s practices were likely to have ensured such homogeneity. Indeed, historical census data show that fewer than fifteen African Americans resided in Riverbend from the decade of the town’s inception through 1980.¹² More recent census data for Riverbend show fewer than thirty non-Hispanic Blacks in 1990 and 2000, or less than one percent of the population.¹³ This is not an uncommon result: most places with histories

of driving out or keeping out non-Whites remained nearly 100 percent White in the year 2000 (Loewen 2005; Jaspin 2007). In Riverbend, however, the pattern has changed dramatically in recent years.

Riverbend Today

Although the community has remained at about the same size for the last thirty years, its racial/ethnic composition has undergone an important shift: the non-Hispanic White population has decreased since 1990, according to census figures, at the same time that the Hispanic population has increased considerably (Census Bureau).¹⁴ Table 1 shows the racial/ethnic composition of Riverbend in 1990, 2000, and 2006. In 1990, fewer than 40 Latinos lived in Riverbend; by 2006, more than 2,000 Latinos were estimated to live there (Census Bureau 2006).¹⁵ Interviews with locals and media coverage confirm that about thirty percent of the community's population is Latino (interviews 2006, city newspaper, January 6, 2003).

Table 1 About Here

Census data indicate that of Latinos residing in the community in 2000, more than half had been living in a foreign country, primarily Mexico, five years earlier (Census Bureau). Of those Latinos in Riverbend who were living in the U.S. in 1995, approximately 33 percent were living in another state (Census Bureau). Thus, Riverbend's Latino population includes a mix of immigrants recently arrived in the U.S. and individuals who had previously lived elsewhere in the country, a finding consistent with previous scholarship about Latinos in other new destinations (Mohl 2003; Saenz and Torres 2003; Durand and Massey 2004).

Until the mid-to-late 1980s, Riverbend had several factories; now a meat-processing plant is the primary source of employment, along with the local hospital and school district. The plant reflects its corporation's "rural industrialization strategy" (Stull, Broadway et al. 1995). After years of rising labor costs, the plant had closed in the 1980s. The plant re-opened several years later with half as many workers and a significantly lower starting wage (news service, November 9, 2003). The corporation began to recruit from outside the area, particularly in border towns of the Southwest, bringing in both Mexican migrants and Mexican Americans (interviews 2006; news service, November 9, 2003). Consequently, although at first the local factory workers had been predominantly White locals, by 2006 about 46 percent were non-native English speakers (city newspaper, March 14, 2007). Of those, approximately 80 percent were of Latin American origin, according to the state's Department of Commerce 2006 profile of Riverbend.¹⁶

The way in which the presence of Latinos in Riverbend recently expanded is consistent with the literature about "new" Hispanic destinations. Employment in poultry and other food-processing industries is a well-known draw for immigrants from Latin America and Asia (e.g., Stull, Broadway et al. 1995; Griffith 2005; Kandel and Parrado 2005). In Riverbend, by all accounts, the majority of adult Latinos work at the factory. Many are undocumented Mexican immigrants, some of whom purchase fraudulent identification and work papers (city newspaper, May 20, 2001; city newspaper, March 8, 1991; interviews 2006).

The size of the Latino population in Riverbend has led to the community being nicknamed "Little Mexico" and "Mexican town" (news service, November 9, 2003, interviews). Locals recognize that the primary employer, the meat-processing plant, has influenced the racial/ethnic composition of the area. The reaction of the White residents to the process of change is not unified. Many believe that Riverbend has changed for the worse since the arrival of

Latinos in the area, for example citing a perceived rise in crime and drug use. Their response is consistent with studies documenting the distress of long-time residents about racial/ethnic change in small towns (Salamon 2003; Millard and Chapa 2004; Gozdziaik and Martin 2005; Zúñiga and Hernández-León 2005). However, other long-time residents appreciate the arrival of the mostly Mexican immigrant population because of the new business and “younger blood” they have brought to the community and the visible improvements they have made to the local housing stock (interviews 2006). Such inconsistent reactions to immigrant newcomers are in line with other qualitative studies showing that communities with rapidly increasing Mexican immigrant populations are sites of both conflict and accommodation (Hernández-León and Zúñiga 2005).

Hispanic-White Residential Segregation in Riverbend

In the case of Riverbend, Census Bureau maps show that two census tracts and a portion of a third census tract, comprising seven block groups and totaling approximately 390 census blocks, lie within the town’s boundaries. Latinos, who comprised approximately 18 percent of Riverbend’s residents in 2000, appear to be dispersed fairly equally across most of the seven block groups; indeed, Latinos comprised between 13.2 and 26.8 percent of six block groups. A seventh block group in the southern part of Riverbend had the lowest proportion of Latinos, 7.3 percent. All our interviews with knowledgeable locals –staff of the local housing authority, real estate agents, bank personnel, and Mexican migrants themselves –indicated that Latinos live throughout the community.

Formal calculations of the index of Hispanic-White dissimilarity for Riverbend, using block-level data, are illuminating.¹⁷ Our calculations indicate that Riverbend was moderately segregated in 2000, with an index of dissimilarity of 57.6.¹⁸ In other words, more than half of

rural Latinos would have to move to be evenly distributed with non-Hispanic Whites across all census blocks. Riverbend's index of dissimilarity is consistent with research about "new rural boomtowns"--nonmetropolitan communities with the fastest-growing Hispanic populations over the decade (Parisi and Lichter 2007; Lichter, Parisi et al. 2008). On average, nonmetro places with the largest Hispanic increases since 1990 had a mean Hispanic-White index of dissimilarity in 2000 of 63.4 (Lichter, Parisi et al. 2008). Segregation in 2000 of the top twenty "rural boomtowns" ranges from 41.2 to 76.7; and 70 percent of these places had indexes of dissimilarity over 60 (Parisi and Lichter 2007). Therefore, Riverbend's Hispanic-White segregation in 2000, at 57.6, is consistent with other rural Hispanic boomtowns.

As is true for non-metropolitan places and counties nationwide (Lichter, Parisi et al. 2007a; Lichter, Parisi et al. 2008), there is less residential segregation in Riverbend in 2000 than in 1990. What is notable; however, is that Hispanic-White segregation in Riverbend declined by more than 32 points, down from 90.1 for the community in 1990 (Parisi 2008).¹⁹ This decrease is much larger than the mean decline, 14 points, noted for new rural Hispanic boomtowns with population dynamics that parallel Riverbend: very few Latinos in 1990 and Hispanic growth rates of nearly 3,500 percent over the decade (Lichter, Parisi et al. 2008). Quantitative analyses, described earlier, suggest that the high level of Hispanic-White residential segregation in Riverbend in 1990 is likely related to the community's segregation patterns in 2000; the large increase of Latinos over the decade is not (Lichter, Parisi et al. 2008).

Lichter and colleagues (2008) also conclude that residential separation in new Latino destinations cannot be reduced to place-to-place differences alone, "discrimination in housing markets or residential preferences" also may be influential (17). We turn now to a qualitative investigation of structural factors specific to Riverbend, including the cost and features of the

local housing market and the previously weak enforcement of the town's few pre-existing housing policies. Although such factors have rarely been considered in the place stratification model or in empirical studies of residential segregation, they may also contribute to Riverbend's decline in Hispanic-White isolation since 1990.

Housing Market and Local Policies

Several features of Riverbend's housing are suggestive about the spatial distributions of White "old-timers" and Latino newcomers and changes in residential segregation once more Latinos entered the community. For example, housing is fairly affordable throughout the community. Site-built houses in Riverbend tend to be seventy years old or older, with 2-3 bedrooms and approximately 1,000 square feet plus basements, and to be valued at \$30,000 to \$60,000. In 2000, the median value of homes owned by Latinos was approximately \$50,000; those owned by non-Hispanic Whites were valued at \$43,000 (Census Bureau). Latino and Non-Latino renters paid approximately \$410 a month in 2000, less than the state or national average rent (Census Bureau). Persons employed at the local factory are able to afford the rent or mortgage payments on local housing. For example, a 2007 *Fact Sheet* from the local plant estimates that the starting wage of production workers is \$11.65/hour. The monthly payment on a 30-year fixed mortgage with a \$50,000 loan amount, an interest rate of 7 percent, and local real estate taxes (1.5 percent of appraised value) would comprise about 21 percent of the pre-tax income of a full-time employee at the plant earning \$12 per hour. That is a modest housing cost burden; in 2001, nearly 24 percent of homeowners and 40 percent of renters in the United States were allocating more than 30 percent of their income to housing (Joint Center for Housing Studies 2007).

Some of the first Latino newcomers were motivated to buy homes soon after arriving because Riverbend's rental market then was relatively tight (interview 2007). By 2000, about 20 percent of Latinos in Riverbend were homeowners (Census Bureau); they appear to have made even greater inroads on homeownership since then. Real estate agents say that they do considerable business with Latinos (interviews 2006). One prominent real estate agent enrolled in Spanish classes to improve her interactions with her increasingly Spanish-speaking clientele. Among her real estate transactions, persons with Spanish surnames were sellers or buyers in 28 percent of the houses that she sold in 2004, in 25 percent in 2005 and in 33 percent during the first six months of 2006.²⁰ The assistance of Riverbend's prominent real estate agents may have eased the transition to homeownership for many local Latinos and enabled them to purchase homes throughout the community. The resulting Latino homeownership in diverse neighborhoods may be another reason for the decline in Hispanic-White residential segregation in the community between 1990 and 2000.

A lack of pre-existing and enforced land use and zoning ordinances to regulate residence may be another factor in the present spatial distributions of Latinos and Whites in Riverbend. Racially-based zoning was determined to be unconstitutional in 1917 (Berry 2001). Since that time, however, municipal zoning ordinances have maintained or reflect desired social hierarchies that serve racial/ethnic segregation without employing racially explicit language (Silver 1997; Sandercock and Kligler 1998a; Sandercock and Kligler 1998b; Meyer 2000; Berry 2001; Pader 2002). Likewise, though occupancy standards that limit bedroom occupancy to two people or less may be considered neutral, they inscribe "ethnicity and family relations on the land" (Pader 2002) by enforcing culturally-based definitions of overcrowding that often conflict with the number of members in immigrant households (Miraftab 2000).

In both large cities and smaller rural communities with ethnically and racially diverse populations, zoning and land use regulation as well as annexation have been the spatial means of separating disadvantaged, often Black or other minority, populations from Non-Hispanic Whites (Johnson, Parnell et al. 2004; Lichter, Parisi et al. 2007b). For example, in Orange County, California, local government ordinances and planning regulations operate as effective anti-immigrant “border check points” at the neighborhood level, keeping immigrants out (Harwood 2005: 368). In metropolitan and non-metropolitan areas, zoning ordinances that designate separate areas for mobile homes, which are usually occupied by lower-income residents, concentrate the poorer, often minority households in trailer parks on the edge of town. For instance, Mexican migrants in one Louisiana community reside in employer-provided trailers on the fringes of the community, which ensures their spatial isolation (Donato, Stainback et al. 2005). Ordinances about zoning and land use are crafted as racially neutral, but are not neutral in their consequences.

Like many other small towns, Riverbend has no designated planning agency. Riverbend’s “planning” decisions are made by professionals not necessarily trained as planners, and by economically and politically powerful local figures such as Chamber of Commerce leaders and elected officials (Miraftab and McConnell 2008). As is often the case in homogenous small towns, for many years Riverbend had no formal regulatory means that would spatially segregate racial and ethnic groups. In 1980, a zoning ordinance was established in Riverbend that differentiated districts for single-family, site-built homes and mobile homes; however, locals note that its enforcement has been lax for many years.²¹

Riverbend’s mild regulatory climate has had important implications for the types of land use that emerged in the 1990s throughout the community. For example, mobile homes, which

constitute one of the more affordable housing options for Latino newcomers in town, comprised 15 percent of Riverbend's housing units by the year 2000. The proportion of mobile homes among Riverbend's housing is not unique; rather, it is on par with national figures showing that mobile homes account for about 18 percent of housing in non-metropolitan areas (Nitschke 2004). What is notable in Riverbend, however, is that unlike other areas with large numbers of Mexican migrants (Donato, Stainback et al. 2005), mobile homes are located not only in a handful of mobile home parks, but throughout the community.²² The lack of enforcement of the 1980 regulation about the placement of mobile homes in specific residential districts has led to the present situation: trailer homes located next door to larger site-built Victorian homes on the same street in neighborhoods throughout the community. Both types of housing units are mostly single-family, plus a few small, multi-unit structures.

In 2003, local authorities revised and began to enforce Riverbend's brief zoning and land use document of 1980. Two specific complaints appear to have precipitated this change: that the proliferating mobile homes are substandard and that there is rampant overcrowding in single-family homes. For example, many residents as well as local officials disapprove of overcrowded households in Riverbend. In one instance 17 people were said to be residing in a single-family house (interviews 2006). Many locals supported adding regulations about occupancy to local ordinances. Some interviewees voiced concern for occupants' safety and fear of fire hazard in supporting the occupancy regulations, while others felt that smaller families were paying an unfair proportion of the cost of water as compared to the cost paid by the extended or ad-hoc families in single houses (interviews 2006, 2007). (Residents pay a flat per-site water rate.)

To address the first issue, the new policy required that on land where residents wanted to replace a mobile home, it be replaced within 60 days by one manufactured in the previous five

years. Zoning amendments also created a mobile home district, so that no more mobile homes could be placed in areas with single-family, site-built homes; after 2003 they were relegated to trailer parks or other areas zoned specifically for mobile homes (interview 2007). To address the issue of overcrowded housing, the local housing ordinance now includes occupancy standards limiting a housing unit to a single family. The small size of Riverbend makes it easier for officials to enforce regulations and identify code violators. On a tour with a local official in 2006, he quickly pointed out houses, apartments or mobile homes where perhaps dozens of individuals lived—in all cases, Mexican immigrant families. Suspected violators are required to show birth certificates and other information to prove that they belong to only one family. Occupancy codes are particularly burdensome for the Latino migrants in Riverbend; the shortage of rental housing and the presence of single immigrant men foster overcrowded housing.

The 2003 revision and stricter enforcement of zoning regulations for mobile homes and occupancy standards—whether justified in terms of “substandard trailers,” the unfairness of service payments carrying “free riders,” or the imperiled safety of inhabitants in overcrowded units — may or may not be a response to the town’s in-migration. Mexican migrants argue that the zoning ordinances were motivated by a phenomenon that was relatively benign, immigrants placing mobile homes on vacant lots (city newspaper, March 31, 2002). The City Council said that they were responding to complaints that the number of mobile homes “was out of control” (city newspaper, April 4, 2002). Although local officials have not explicitly stated that the new occupancy standards were in response to the influx of Latinos, examples of problems that these officials shared with us all involve Mexican immigrant households. Whatever the motivation for the changes in 2003, stricter zoning and occupancy standards augment the housing challenges faced by lower-income households, particularly Mexican newcomers.

It is notable that the revision and enforcement of institutionalized responses through such planning tools as zoning and land use ordinances did not happen in Riverbend until more than a decade after Latino migrants began to arrive. Riverbend's delayed enforcement of spatial mechanisms for social stratification may have several explanations. For example, there was no state-level mandate regarding local ordinances or experienced planning professionals on hand in Riverbend to shape and enforce the 1980 ordinance. Another possible factor is Riverbend's history as a sundown town. In cities with urban space already stratified on the bases of class, race and ethnicity, newcomers commonly fall into "their place." Likewise, in some rural areas, annexation and other practices have effectively separated racial/ethnic groups (e.g., Johnson, Parnell et al. 2004; Lichter, Parisi et al. 2007b). Therefore, among other reasons, it is possible that the lack of racial/ethnic diversity for most of Riverbend's history may have contributed to authorities' fairly slow action vis-à-vis policies that in other places might have increased the spatial segregation of Latinos and non-Latinos.

Recent scholarship described earlier points to important differences in residential segregation in urban areas relative to nonmetropolitan places and between rural locations with and without large Latino population increases. An in-depth comparison of residential segregation for new immigrants in multiple sites is beyond the scope of this paper. It is important, however, to highlight the significance of community size in how such patterns unfold and are experienced. For example, Hispanic-White residential segregation in Riverbend in 2000, though far lower than in 1990, is at the high end of the moderate category of residential segregation. Yet, in a small town like Riverbend, with only a few elementary schools and a combined middle and high school, nearly all local youth attend the same schools. Nor are there many choices of educational, recreational and commercial outlets. Should there be White Riverbend residents who wish to

isolate themselves from Latinos, the small size of the community simply makes that difficult unless they move out of the area— an option not easily available to White, blue-collar workers tied to the meat-processing plant. Similarly, Latinos who live in neighborhoods with mostly other co-ethnics are still coming into regular contact with Whites at the local post office, shops, and parks. Future research should explore how racial/ethnic residential segregation is qualitatively experienced in small communities relative to larger metropolitan areas.

The decline in Hispanic-White residential segregation during the 1990s, trends in Latino homeownership in Riverbend, and the growing number of Latinos with longer-term residence in town suggest that there may be less segregation in the community at present than there was in 2000.²³ However, that suggestion does not rule out a shift to more spatial isolation of Latinos from non-Hispanic Whites in Riverbend's future. Nor does it present a reductionist or deterministic assertion about this complex, historically constructed and locally situated phenomenon. Rather, we suggest that lower levels of residential segregation in the future are one of several possible outcomes, and it may be linked with the racialized history of Riverbend. Longitudinal studies undertaken in multiple communities, both with and without histories of racial exclusion, might be able to uncover many aspects of the changing social and spatial dynamics of communities like Riverbend that this study has only begun to unearth.

Conclusion

With the sundown town signs in Riverbend gone for decades, residential segregation between recent Latino newcomers and long-term, non-Latino residents declined between 1990 and 2000, and may have further decreased since 2000. What an interesting outcome: a place that warned African Americans to stay away several decades ago is now nearly one-third Latino, with Latino newcomers residing “all over” (interview, 2006), not simply in mobile home parks on the

edge of town. The findings of this study are twofold: it uncovers new evidence of the sundown history of a previously all-White community that had effectively excluded African Americans since it was established. Moreover, it explores how, among other factors, the racialized history of this small Midwestern town may be connected with the town's contemporary socio-spatial dynamics vis-à-vis a new population: Latinos who have arrived since 1990.

Like other case studies of new destinations for Latinos, mostly Mexican immigrants, we provide an in-depth description of the processes of change occurring in the community and situate the phenomenon within a larger theoretical and empirical framework. This multi-method study offers hints that past racially exclusionary practices may complement our understandings about contemporary racial/ethnic change in new destinations. Specifically, we suggest that Riverbend's sundown history may be relevant to the current spatial distributions of Latinos and non-Latinos. For example, previous racist practices and the resulting lack of racial/ethnic diversity in the community may help us understand the structural features of Riverbend's housing market before and during a period of large-scale racial/ethnic change. Indeed, by employing a historicized perspective, we can provide a more comprehensive explanation of the pattern observed: a 1990-2000 decline in Hispanic-White residential segregation that is more than twice the average drop in segregation of rural "new immigrant destinations" experiencing a large influx of Latinos (Lichter, Parisi et al. 2008). Clearly, however, a broad range of factors could be involved in this change, including Riverbend's high level of Hispanic-White residential segregation in 1990.

Irrespective of the reasons, decreasing Hispanic-White isolation over the decade may indicate that Latinos arriving during the 1990s could choose residences based on their individual preferences, in line with the spatial assimilation theory of residential segregation. Subsequently,

however, Riverbend officials began to strengthen and enforce local codes. Thus new structural barriers may now constrain the residential choices of Latino newcomers, which would be consistent with the place stratification perspective that limitations affect where less-advantaged residents may settle. Such changes in local policies may influence future Hispanic-White residential integration in Riverbend even as more Latinos arrive.

The situation in Riverbend cannot provide causal evidence of a relationship between a sundown town history and contemporary segregation. More scholarship is necessary in order to make causal claims or to achieve generalizable results about the preliminary evidence provided by this case study. For example, research is needed to compare patterns of residential segregation in communities, both with and without sundown town histories, which are experiencing new racial and ethnic diversity. This work will be challenging. Verifying that a community is a former sundown town or engaged in other racially exclusionary practices requires tracking down a broad range of sources, such as oral histories, archival newspaper articles, historical census data and other materials. Further, finding places with sundown histories that also have experienced large-scale contemporary growth of Latinos or other racial/ethnic minorities is time-consuming; many such places remain nearly all-White at the present time (Loewen 2005; Jaspin 2007).

Despite these challenges, investigating the connections between racialized historical context and contemporary events is a promising direction for qualitative and quantitative research. For example, scholars could examine whether places with and without histories of racial exclusion might differ in outcomes other than residential segregation. Researchers could also investigate the differences *between* former sundown towns, such as places with mixed employment bases, varying population sizes, and diverse rates of Latino and other population

growth. Studies that address these questions would advance the documentation of the hidden sundown history of communities across the country and provide more insight about their relevance for a broad range of contemporary patterns.

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¹ Extensive scholarship documents the existence of legal rulings and precedence supporting racial segregation in the United States and of federal practices, such as by the Federal Housing Authority, that implemented and maintained residential segregation in the nation (e.g., Conley 1999; Massey and Denton 1993; Oliver and Shapiro 1995).

² Throughout this paper, references to Whites are those who are not Latino/Hispanic. Following Moran-Taylor and Menjívar (2005), we refer to Riverbend's Latinos or Hispanics, predominantly persons from Mexico, as newcomers, migrants, and the like to emphasize their fluidity, back-and-forth movements, and transnational practices. Though financial resources, products, and the migrants themselves cross national borders, this paper focuses on the U.S. side of the border.

³ Some of these areas are not new Latino destinations. For example, Mexican migrants worked in agriculture, railroads, or heavy manufacturing in much of the Midwest in earlier decades (e.g. Vargas 1993). See Vásquez and colleagues (2008) for a recent review of scholarship about changes in the geographic distributions of U.S. Latinos.

⁴ See Charles (2006) for a thorough review of related empirical and theoretical scholarship.

⁵ In the largest Midwestern city, Chicago, the dissimilarity index for Latinos is 62 and for Blacks is 81 (Lewis Mumford Center 2001).

⁶ Another study focuses on nonmetro places that were ten percent or more Hispanic in 1990, areas that represent more established Hispanic locations (Lichter et al 2007a). The analyses of 1990-2000 change in Hispanic-White segregation also show that rural areas with higher segregation in 1990 had declining segregation over the decade. However, in these established

Hispanic rural areas, places with more Hispanic than White population growth during the 1990s had significantly higher segregation in 2000 than in 1990.

⁷ The Dissimilarity Index ranges from 0 to 100 and indicates the proportion of either group that would have to move to another subarea to be evenly distributed with the other group.

⁸ Oral history audio taped in 1975 and transcribed by state university staff.

⁹ Oral history audio taped in 1972 and transcribed by state university staff.

¹⁰ Oral history audio taped in 1987 and transcribed by state university staff.

¹¹ It is inaccurate to define these activities as “race riots.” By all accounts, roaming groups of White males went looking for African Americans to assault. Those versed in Mexican American/Chicano history will see similarities with the similar mislabeling of the Zoot Suit Riots in Los Angeles in 1942.

¹² Historical census data accessed from a Historical Census Browser on the University of Virginia website, <http://fisher.lib.virginia.edu/collections/stats/histcensus/>.

¹³ Though the community and the county in which Riverbend is located are primarily non-Hispanic White, members of other racial/ethnic groups reside in adjacent counties, perhaps because of Riverbend’s sundown history.

¹⁴ It is not clear whether the recent decline of Riverbend’s non-Hispanic White population is due to avoidance behavior consistent with “White Flight.” During the 1990s, the speed of the production line at the local meat-processing plant increased and wages declined sharply. Whites who experienced workplace injuries or could not survive on the lower starting wages would have few employment options in town and might have left the area. Moreover, Riverbend’s shrinking White population might also be due to trends noted in non-metropolitan areas across the country, such as the migration of young adults to cities and an aging White population yielding fewer

births than deaths (Jones et al. 2007). Census data indicate that the Non-Hispanic White populations of all five counties adjacent to Riverbend's county also decreased between 1990 and 2006; none of these counties had a significant influx of Latinos.

¹⁵ The most recent quantitative data available about the town of Riverbend are from Census 2000. To arrive at the 2006 figures of Latinos, non-Hispanic Whites, and non-Hispanics of other races, we assumed that approximately the same proportion of the county's population of each group live in Riverbend as in 2000 (88.9 percent, 37.3 percent and 44.0 percent respectively), and applied those figures to 2006 American Community Survey county-level estimates.

¹⁶ The other 20 percent of non-White workers at the plant are African immigrants, with a few others from Asian countries.

¹⁷ An index of dissimilarity of 60 or higher is considered to be high segregation, 40-60 is moderate segregation, and below 40 is low (Lichter et al. 2007a).

¹⁸ Our measure of the index of dissimilarity for this community is slightly lower than the index of 59.4 calculated for the community by Lichter and colleagues (2007a) and shared with us in 2008. The difference is likely to be their use of a GIS-based approach to aggregate block-level data to the place, compared with our inclusion of all census blocks within seven block groups that fall within Riverbend's boundaries.

¹⁹ Residential segregation in Riverbend is lower than that for the county as a whole, which had a dissimilarity index of 92.4 in 1990 and 76.6 in 2000 (University of Michigan 2007).

²⁰ Latino migrants in Riverbend employ various strategies to purchase homes, including pooling funds and buying the home in the name of one individual, often a U.S. citizen; using the social security number and identity of someone else (interview 2006, city newspaper April 12, 2007).

Through the period of study, local banking personnel appeared willing to work on a “case-by-case” basis to help Latino applicants qualify for mortgages (interviews 2006).

²¹ We have been unable to determine the reason for the 1980 zoning ordinance. Riverbend officials and prominent local real estate agents are unaware of why the ordinance was established. Members of the state’s chapter of the American Planning Association note that there was not a state-level mandate to establish zoning ordinances. Small towns across the state might have adopted ordinances because nearby jurisdictions did so, a developer might have wanted assurances regarding neighboring properties before building an apartment building, a local resident might have requested an ordinance based on activities of his or her neighbors, or other reasons.

²² Being a predominantly working-class town, Riverbend has mobile homes occupied by a racially and ethnically mixed population. For example, in one mobile home park within the city’s boundaries, about 40 percent of the approximately 20 mobile homes have residents with Latino surnames.

²³ Beginning in 2010, data based on five-year averages for small communities will be available from the Census Bureau and will be useful for calculating segregation measures more frequently than every ten years.

Table 1. Racial/Ethnic Composition of Riverbend, 1990-2006

| | 1990 | | 2000 | | 2006 | |
|----------------------------------|--------|---------|--------|---------|--------|---------|
| | Number | Percent | Number | Percent | Number | Percent |
| Non-Hispanic White | 5,221 | 99.1 | 4,650 | 80.7 | 4,165 | 66.0 |
| Latino | 31 | 0.6 | 1,032 | 17.9 | 2,036 | 32.2 |
| Non-Hispanics of all other races | 18 | 0.3 | 84 | 1.4 | 115 | 1.8 |
| Total Population | 5,270 | 100.0 | 5,766 | 100.0 | 6,316 | 100.0 |

Source: 1990 and 2000 figures come from Summary File 1 of the 1990 and 2000 censuses. 2006 figures for Riverbend are extrapolated from county-level estimates provided in the 2006 American Community Survey.