UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

When Race Colors the Prairie:
White Residents' Responses to Immigrants of Color in Willmar, MN

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CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION

During the summer of 2006 when I researched and wrote this thesis, the issue of

immigration, illegal immigration in particular, came to a boil as the US Congress debated

immigration reform. For the past twenty years, immigration has come and gone as a

contentious issue both nationally and here in Minnesota as more immigrants arrive in the

state. Between 1990 and 2006 the number of foreign-born residents of the state increased

170 percent from 197, 465 to 343,106 people, representing 6.6 percent of the population

(Davies 2004, Pew 2008).   Recent titles of local reports give insight as to how

Minnesotans characterize and consider this demographic change.   Reports such as

"Faces of Change," "The Changing Face of Minnesota," and "Changing Faces, Changing

Communities" indicate that immigration of people of color is at the crux of the matter.

For a state imagined as populated by residents like those of Garrison Keillor's Lake

Wobegon, one might be surprised to learn that Minnesota is home to the country's largest

Somali immigrant population and the second largest Hmong immigrant population

(Mosedale 2004, Pfiefer 2006).   While this seems dramatic, when compared to past

immigration trends, there are relatively fewer foreign born residents in Minnesota now

than 100 years ago.   In 1910 29 percent of the population of the state was foreign born.

In 2006, that number was estimated at only 6.6 percent (Pew 2008).

Despite this relatively small percentage, the issue of immigration is at the

forefront of many communities statewide, both rural and urban. While a large majority

of all immigrants to the state reside in the Twin Cities metropolitan area, a fifth of

immigrants live in rural Minnesota (Ronningen 2004).   In recent years, rural Minnesota,

and especially its western counties has changed markedly, in step with trends across Great Plains agricultural states such as Iowa, Nebraska, and North Dakota. The economic transformations of rural counties of the Great Plains resulting from the mechanization and corporatization of farming and depopulation go hand in hand – a trend long recognized and accepted across disciplines by sociologists, demographers, economists, journalists and policy analysts (Cantrell 2005). The sequence of events and outcomes is also broadly accepted. Changes in agricultural technology have led to fewer farmers and larger farm sizes. Fewer people are needed to work the land, resulting in fewer employment opportunities for young people, who in turn migrate to larger towns to find work. What is left behind is a spiral of reduced demand for goods and services, resulting in diminished job opportunities and more out-migration. Because those who leave the communities tend to be young, communities are also faced with declining birthrates and a disproportionate elderly population (Cantrell 2005). This trend has been steady and long in shaping. At the beginning of the 20th century, nearly 40 percent of Americans lived on farms. By the close of the century, that percentage dropped to 1.06 percent (Anderlik 2006).

Within the trend of rural depopulation, there are pockets of rural population growth from immigration. Much of the latest trend of immigration to small, rural towns is driven by turkey and pork processing, both of which have expanded throughout the rural Upper Midwest (Fennelly and Leitner 2002, Amato 1996). Some of the newcomers to Minnesota who are thought of as immigrants are actually US citizens from California and Texas (Ronningen 2004). The majority of immigrants arriving from other countries that settle in rural Minnesota during the past two decades are legal and undocumented

immigrants from Mexico and Central America as well as refugees from East Africa and Southeast Asia.

Situated in the trend of rural depopulation, immigration to pockets of rural Minnesota communities merits further investigation. On the one hand, citizens, politicians and community groups in small towns across Minnesota bemoan the loss of vitality due to depopulation and "brain-drain" (or human capital flight). On the other hand, rural communities often respond to the population growth resulting from immigration with suspicion and prejudice, suggesting that immigrants are taking advantage of Minnesota's liberal welfare system and pushing whites out of jobs. This thesis seeks to understand the responses to and perceptions of immigrants by rural whites. I also wish to complicate commonly held assumptions that competition over resources is at the heart of anti-immigrant sentiment by examining the role of race and place in one local context (Rubin 1994). I selected the town of Willmar, Minnesota as a research site primarily because it is a small rural city experiencing population growth via immigration, situated in a rural western Minnesota county experiencing overall population decline.

I grew up in a small town similar in size to Willmar, in the same region of the state. Unlike Willmar, my hometown did not have a meat processing plant, but I witnessed the changes occurring in a neighboring town, Pelican Rapids. Pelican Rapids is home to a large Jennie-O turkey processing plant, similar in size to the plant in Willmar, although the population of Pelican Rapids is roughly one-third that of Willmar. As the immigrant population swelled in the mid-1990s, I began hearing disparaging remarks about immigrants and I observed the confusion, exasperation, and frustration of the long-time residents of Pelican Rapids, including my relatives. The changes in the

community were apparent. White students from the Pelican Rapids school district open-enrolled in neighboring district schools, complaining of the of immigrants ruining their schools. One of the most common complaints I remember was "the Mexicans were bad enough, but they're nothing compared to the Africans." A commonly accepted reason for the "influx" of immigrants and other newcomers was that the Twin Cities metropolitan counties had run out of welfare, and were told they could get benefits in rural communities, which didn't use up as much of their welfare funds. After leaving my hometown, I learned about the larger trends and forces surrounding my local experience – the growth of meat processing across the Great Plains, the changing scale of agriculture, and the increasing flow of people across borders.

After college I worked for a small rural development agency and a foundation that funded a variety of economic and community development projects in rural Minnesota. I worked with community leaders who complained about the loss of community vitality via depopulation, the aging of the remaining population, and the resulting loss of resources. The curiosity to understand how the challenges of immigration and depopulation intersect and are reconciled, led me to formulate this research project for my master's thesis in the Department of Geography at the University of Minnesota. I was fortunate to find an advisor within my department who shared and encouraged my interest in issues of immigration. My advisor, Dr. Helga Leitner completed a large research project on immigration to rural Minnesota in Faribault, Minnesota in 2001. In addition to the factors above, I chose Willmar as my site of investigation because of its demographic similarity to Faribault and the presence of Jennie-O Turkey Store plants in both communities. This allows for potential comparison of the two communities to examine

how similar demographic shifts are mediated by socio-spatial differences and similarities between the communities.

There are several broad issues I wished to address at the outset of this research. I wanted to understand if rural residents consider the issues of depopulation and immigration to be connected in their community. If rural residents both bemoan the trend of depopulation and simultaneously feel uneasy about the arrival of new immigrants, do residents see the issues in relation to one another? In other words, how do white residents reconcile these contradictory reactions to white population loss and non-white population growth in the form of immigration? From a geographic perspective, I wished to investigate the roles of race and place in shaping long-term residents' reactions to and perceptions of immigrants. What are the origins of their reactions and perceptions and how might they be spatially mediated? How is sense of place used to assert a set of identities that may be perceived as under threat from immigrants?

Through my research, I contribute to an understanding of these broad issues by focusing on several specific questions: What are the reactions of white residents toward the new immigrants? What are the white residents' perceptions of and experiences with new immigrants? How do these vary among white residents? Also, does the discomfort that long-time residents feel with immigrants stem from a challenge the immigrants pose to residents' sense of place and the identities derived from sense of place?

With these questions as a starting point, I examine how the nature of contacts between long-term residents and immigrants shapes the way in which respondents regard immigrants in their community, as well as how the language used by respondents demonstrates the role of race in how respondents consider immigrants in their

community. Finally, this study examines how rurality and notions of community shape the way white residents of Willmar respond to and perceive immigrants of color.

The next chapter "Background: Willmar's Well Trod Path" provides a historical background and overview of the community of Willmar, Minnesota, the site where I conducted the research presented in this paper. Chapter Three, "Literature Review: Whiteness, Race, Identity and Rurality," briefly summarizes and discusses the major academic writings that inform my study and create the theoretical framework used for analyzing the findings from Willmar. In Chapter Four, "Methodology: Using Focus Groups to Understand Perceptions" I discuss why I selected focus groups as a methodology, and how I constructed and recruited a sample. The next chapter, "Objections from the Institutional Review Board" is a narrative of my difficulties gaining approval to conduct this research. I also examine what these difficulties say about the limitations of the IRB process, especially when it comes to studying race. Chapters six and seven present the primary findings of the research in Willmar. Chapter six, "The Language of Race," examines language used within the focus groups to show how the perceptions of white residents of Willmar are shaped by racial "othering" of immigrants and newcomers. Chapter seven discusses how national discourses and community narratives shape the way white residents of Willmar relate to immigrants and understand their presence and place in the community. The final chapter addresses the future of Willmar and communities like it and how they might move from a model of "tolerance" to one of coexistence.

CHAPTER 2 – BACKGROUND: WILLMAR'S WELL-TROD PATH

This chapter provides basic background information on the location, industry, demographics, and history of Willmar since the time of white settlement. Willmar serves as the county seat of Kandiyohi County, which is located in the western corridor of Minnesota. In relation to larger urban centers, Willmar lies 95 miles west of the Twin Cities metropolitan area. The closest metropolitan statistical area, St. Cloud, is 60 miles away (Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development). The current population is 18,351 according to the 2000 Census (Census 2000). The population steadily gains 1000-2000 people each decade, drawing from the region, other parts of the state and nation, as well as from other countries. Because of its distance from larger cities, and its population size relative to its surroundings, the community of Willmar functions as a regional center for smaller towns and the surrounding rural areas. Willmar is the largest city in the county and draws people from surrounding towns and rural areas for work, medical care, shopping, and recreation. As the county seat, it is home to all county-level infrastructures, such as the courthouse, jail, and social services.

Figure 1.1 Map of Minnesota with Kandiyohi County highlighted.

Once an area inhabited by Lakota American Indians, European Americans settled Willmar and the surrounding areas in the 1850s via westward agricultural expansion and land allotments. The town of Willmar was established as a railroad town in the 1870s, with greater importance than other railroad towns because it was a division point for the Great Northern Railroad. The European immigrants who settled near Willmar were primarily German, Swedish and Norwegian. Like other rural Minnesota communities, Willmar still celebrates its Scandinavian heritage. In many ways, Willmar followed the familiar trajectory for rural communities following European settlement: an increase in farm sizes and a decrease in the number of farms and farmers. In recent years, agriculture near Willmar has increasingly consolidated into the hands of fewer farmers, who farm larger and larger areas of land as the scale of American agriculture continues to change (Amato 1999). When looking exclusively at white residents of Willmar, demographics mirror the larger trends in rural America of declining population, with

young people leaving rural areas for urban areas after high school. The white population left behind is an "aging population."

Willmar diverges from many other rural communities in its recent immigration trends. Willmar lies on the well-trod path of seasonal migrant workers who have come from California, Texas, and Mexico to work in the sugar beet fields in western Minnesota for over a century (Amato 1999). Over the course of the past 20 years, agricultural technology has mechanized the field work previously performed by migrant labor. At the same time migrant labor diminished, large-scale turkey and other meat processing industries grew tremendously in Minnesota (Fennelly and Leitner 2002). As the need for seasonal labor declined, the need for year-round labor in the meatpacking industry grew. In some cases, former migrant workers settled in Willmar year-round. Other immigrants, learning of the employment opportunities joined them.   The majority of new immigrants settling in rural Minnesota meatpacking communites such as Willmar during the past two decades are legal or undocumented immigrants from Mexico and Central America and refugees from East Africa and Southeast Asia (Amato 1996).

The meat packing industry plays a large role in the community. The Jennie-O turkey Store is the largest employer in Willmar, currently employing 1,500 people at the Willmar plant (Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development 2005). By comparison, the other major employers are Rice Memorial Hospital (912), Willmar Public Schools (900), Willmar Regional Treatment Center (530), Affiliated Medical Center (447), County of Kandiyohi (433), and Bethesda Homes nursing care facilities (350). The next largest manufacturing companies, Molenaar, Inc and West

Central Steel/Central MN Fabricating employ 160 and 150 people respectively, just a few less people than Willmar's Wal-Mart employs. (MN DEED 2006)

Jennie-O's founder, Earl B. Olson started his turkey production company in the 1940's and named it after his daughter, Jenny. Olson purchased his first turkey processing plant in 1949 in Willmar. Jennie-O eventually grew to be the sixth largest turkey producer in the nation (Jennieoturkeystore.com) before Hormel Foods bought it in 1986 and merged it with The Turkey Store in 2001. The Jennie-O Turkey Store is now the number one turkey producer in the nation. As a wholly owned subsidiary, Jennie-O maintains its headquarters and management in Willmar.

Although it is difficult to precisely know how many people in the community are immigrants. By examining census data for foreign-born population and race as well as data compiled by the school district on languages spoken at home by the children's families, we can derive a rough estimate of how many immigrants live in Willmar. That said, "immigrant" is not a precise term for the population I seek to describe. Many of the Latino "newcomers" are from Texas and other Western states. Many of the East Africans are refugees. Also, there are a number of African Americans in the community who have recently moved to Willmar that are included in the group I am discussing. I consider each of these groups as newcomers because for the most part, the longtime residents of the community homogenize these groups when talking about changes in the community. This is an imperfect categorization, but because my analysis centers on the perceptions and responses of white residents of Willmar, I take into account who the respondents in the study are talking about when they refer to "immigrants." Community officials indicate that Willmar may have grown by as much as 1000 people in the last five years,

largely due to immigrants. With these limitations in mind, we can establish a limited demographic profile of Willmar through a combination of census data and data from the Department of Education.

Race is a part of the United States Census each decade. In addition to the problematic nature of racial categorizations, race is a hierarchy we live with. (Winant 1994) The way the census defines these categories has changed from decade to decade. In the 2000 census respondents were no longer limited to selecting one race – for the first time they could self-report one or more races. While this thesis does not debate the strengths and weaknesses of racial categorization in census data, it is important to note the difficulty in accounting for the number of newcomers to Willmar within the matrix of race, ethnicity, and citizenship as well as the difficulty in comparing census race data over time. (US Dept of Commerce, 2000).

In analyzing demographic trends Willmar, I chose 1980 as a pre-immigration baseline census for the latest waves of major immigration to Willmar. 1980 marks the first dramatic increase in the number of people who self-identify as Hispanic/Latino/Spanish origin in the census. See census figures for 1980, 1990, and 2000 in the following chart:

Figure 1.2 United States Census Race Data for Willmar.

	1980	1990	2000	Increase 1980-2000
Total Population	15,895	17,531	18,351	15%
White	15,656	16,117	16,171	3%
Hispanic	142*	1,205**	2,911**	1950%
African American/Black	0	62	165^/244^^	na

Data from the United States Census Bureau, 1980, 1990, 2000.
Definitions according to the census
*of Spanish origin
**Hispanic/Latino of any race
^ Black or African American
^^Black or African American, *race alone or in combination with one or more other*

races.

Nearly all the population growth in Willmar between 1990 and 2000 was in the number

of Latinos. Willmar is now home to the third largest Latino community in Minnesota

(Census 2000). In relation to statewide figures, the Latino population of the state is

estimated at 3 percent of the total population, whereas the Latinos comprise 16 percent of

the total for Willmar.

There are far fewer East Africans and Black Americans than Latinos who have

moved to Willmar in recent decades, and it is more difficult to ascertain how many East

Africans and African-Americans there are in Willmar. Census officials estimate that

Willmar is third largest Somali community in Minnesota. Because the growth in the East

African population has been quite recent, the 2000 census does not adequately represent

the number of Somali, Sudanese, Eritrean, or Ethiopian immigrants. Another limitation of

census data that makes a number difficult to obtain is that in self-identified racial data,

both African Americans and East Africans might choose "Black or African-American,"

and there is no way to know for example, that a Somalian refugee would self-report as

Black. An additional point of confusion arises in the 8.5 percent or 1,563 residents of

Willmar who chose "some other race" to identify themselves in the 2000 census.

Data from the Department of Education corresponds to the census data, but also illustrates another trend. The population of in the community is younger than the population of white residents (Ronningen 2004). While the census indicates 88 percent of the population overall in Willmar to be white, 2005 school data shows only 70 percent of enrolled students to be white. The dramatic increase in students of color between 2000 and 2005 indicates that there should also be growth in the numbers of people of color overall in the community.

Figure 1.3 Willmar Public School Race Statistics.

School Year	# Hispanic Students	# Black Students	# White Students	Total # Minority	Total of all students	% Minority
2004-05	1113	108	2980	1271	4251	30%
1999-00	808	64	3667	923	4590	20%
1994-95	697	35	4124	789	4913	16%
1989-90	379	14	4151	461	4612	10%

Source: Department of Education, State of Minnesota 2005. Category descriptors taken from source.

The percentage of school-aged children identified as Black or Hispanic is particularly striking when compared with school districts contiguous with the Willmar School districts. The average percentage of non-white school-aged children in all neighboring school districts is less than 1.5 percent (2005 All-American City Application).

Far more difficult than determining the numbers of immigrants, and refugees, and newcomers is estimating the percentage of undocumented immigrants (Ronningen 2004). The Department of Homeland Security estimates that among the 343,000 foreign-born residents of Minnesota, 60,000 are undocumented immigrants (2005). A more recent analysis estimates a slightly higher range of 60,000-80,000 undocumented immigrants and a slightly lower total of 334,000 foreign residents in 2007 (Fennelly & Huart 2009).

This estimate means the ratio of undocumented immigrants to "authorized" foreign residents across the state is roughly 18-24%. It is impossible to know what the ratio of undocumented immigrants to "authorized" foreign residents is for Willmar. None of the above statistics include the significant portion of Latinos in Minnesota who are native born citizens who maybe assumed to be foreign born residents or undocumented immigrants (League Women Voters 2002).

Regardless of what we do and do not know in terms of the profile of the community in raw numbers of "newcomers" in Willmar, it is the perceptions of whites that have more bearing on what happens in the community than the numbers alone. For example, as we will see later in this thesis, long-time community members feel a distinct threat, and this threat is rationalized as a response to the "influx" of immigrants, "most" of whom are illegal. Knowing the precise numbers is less important than exploring the origins of these sentiments. The sentiments and perceptions, rather than simply facts have real effects on the community and the interactions between long-time white residents and immigrants.

CHAPTER 3 - LITERATURE REVIEW:
WHITENESS, RACE, IDENTITY AND RURALITY

Several bodies of literature, including historical and contemporary whiteness studies, race and ethnicity, psychological identity formation, rural identity, and race and geography inform this thesis. From this literature I see an opportunity to contribute to scholarship that challenges whiteness as the norm, explores the the linkages of American-ness and race, race and rurality, and questions commonly held beliefs about the origins of anti-immigrant sentiment. In the following section, I outline the scholarship that most influenced my research and informs my theoretical framework.

Whiteness studies make visible the invisible privileges of being white – the benefits and social arrangements that seem to be neutral and normal, but are rather a function of racial privilege.   Whiteness studies emerged from historical inquiries of US immigration and race, namely through the work of David Roediger and Matthew Frye Jacobson. Roediger's, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the Working Class* takes its name from W.E.B. DuBois' concept of the public and psychological wages paid to whites. (Roediger 1991: 12, DuBois 1935: 700-701) The book extends DuBois' concept through a labor history approach, arguing that working class whites clung to and invested in whiteness because of the powerlessness of their class position. Roediger hypothesizes that it is difficult to form alliances across racial divides because of the investment working class whites have in protecting the benefits of exclusive whiteness. Roediger uses as evidence the case of Irish workers, who were not always considered to be white, to illustrate how whiteness is attained and maintained. Once whiteness was secured for the Irish, they invested in that white identity to maintain

distance and assert superiority over black workers. Roediger offers a lens through which to better understand the contingencies and complex nature of whiteness, especially in relation to class.

Like Roediger, Matthew Frye Jacobson explores the social construction of race through examining US immigration history. Jacobson highlights the mutability of race, especially whiteness. Groups once constructed as individual races – Hebrew, Teutonic, and Iberic for example 'became' white after a time in the United States. Jacobson disputes historians' assumptions that 'race' was used when 'ethnicity' was meant in the late 1800s and early 1900s.   Jacobson argues 'race' was indeed what was meant in this context. According to Jacobson, ignoring the meaning of how 'races' or racial identities of European immigrants became white serves to reinforce the naturalness of whiteness. Jacobson argues that whiteness is a fabrication, a social construction, and historically contingent. Rather than conceptualizing history of immigration as a process of assimilation and acceptance of immigrants into society, Jacobson encourages us to understand how successive groups of immigrants joined the dominant group (Jacobson 1999). What Jacobson's work does not address is how far whiteness can expand to envelop groups whose origins are not European. What does this say for the future generations – children and grandchildren of today's immigrants? Could the term "Hispanic" become irrelevant as a racial descriptor, just as Irish and Teutonic did? Fabrication or not, other scholars suggest that whiteness will never accommodate people of non-European origins (Rubin 1994).

Roediger and Jacobson's work informs the way we understand whites' perceptions of and reactions to immigrants today. An uncomplicated version of

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immigration history leads us to base comparisons with contemporary society on an erroneous assumption that race is static and of little importance to immigration history. Without understanding immigration history in the context of race, we misunderstand the significance of race in shaping the unevenness of assimilation historically. This misunderstanding creates a culture in which immigrants are expected by Americans to assimilate because assimilation seems like the natural path that their immigrant 'forefathers' took as individuals. A more nuanced model argues that it took generations for these groups to assimilate and to gain dominant culture acceptance of their American-ness and acceptance into whiteness. Today's immigrants do not assimilate in the way white Americans believe their forefathers to have assimilated. This alleged lack of assimilation is used as the basis for a judgment that posits immigrants as unable or unwilling to be a part of American society. This creates an impossible situation for contemporary immigrants of color by which they are expected to fully assimilate the way that immigrants of the late 1800s and early 1900s did; yet there is little recognition of historic assimilation occurring over generations or its dependence on different immigrant groups being recast as white. In this vein, Jacobson's work challenges the imaginary of America as the land of equal opportunity for all. Historically, groups of European immigrants could become "American" not through individual assimilation, but because of the assimilation of their racial group into whiteness over time (Jacobson 1999).

Contemporary whiteness studies investigate how whiteness shapes society today. George Lipsitz, in *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit from Identity Politics,* expands whiteness studies from the historical realm to contemporary American society (Lipsitz 1998). Whiteness, as defined by Lipsitz is the

systematic advantages for whites and the systematic disadvantages for non-whites, above and beyond prejudice, that produces white privilege. This privilege takes the shape of unearned rewards for whites and unfair legal, financial, housing, and healthcare barriers for those who are defined as non-white. This privilege is pervasive but invisible, and this invisibility, Lipsitz argues, is how the privilege maintains itself. From housing policies that allow whites to borrow and to build wealth over generations to education and immigration law, Lipsitz explores how whiteness invisibly underpins American society. Lipsitz writes, "Whiteness is everywhere in U.S. culture, but it is very hard to see… As the unmarked category against which difference is constructed, whitness never has to speak its name, never has to acknowledge its role as an organizing principle in social and cultural relations" (Lipsitz 1998: 1)Lipsitz's also illustrates that because of the privileges of whiteness, even the worst class ailments of white experience do not compare to that suffered by racialized minorities (Lipsitz 1998).

The field of whiteness studies and scholars such as Lipsitz are not without critics. Eric Arnesen asserts that whiteness studies historians in particular have not done a good enough job of presenting archival and empirical sources that present individual actors as agents (Arnesen 2001). Arnesen argues, it is only through understanding individual motivations and the everyday lived experiences of both whites and racialized Others that whiteness studies becomes more than a faddish intellectual exercise. Although whiteness studies allows us to see how whiteness thrives as the norm and the standard against which all else is measured, scholars must exercise care, as Arnesen suggests, to avoid rendering the framework of whiteness meaningless through abstract applications.

Using a similar framework as Lipsitz, John Hartigan approaches whiteness studies from a localized perspective, satisfying critics such as Arnesen. In *Racial Situations* Hartigan employs an ethnographic methodology to study race and class in three Detroit neighborhoods to better understand how whites in these neighborhoods make sense of race and white identity (Hartigan 1999). By using three demographically unique sites in Detroit, Hartigan explores how class position relates to daily interracial interaction, creating "racial situations." For example, Hartigan details a scenario in which poor whites that object to the opening of an "Afrocentric" school in their neighborhood are cast as racists in local news coverage. He uses this story to illustrate a situation in which one class or neighborhood disavows racism by placing racism onto another class or location. This creates a scenario in which there are "good whites" and "bad whites." Hartigan explains that this is possible because of the kinds of discourses available to different classes to make sense of race. Hartigan argues because poor whites are not as well-versed in politically correct ways of talking about difference, they do not voice their concerns in the "appropriate" language that middle class whites are more likely to employ. By investigating real life situations Hartigan argues on the one hand poor whites that have the most contact with black neighbors in his study have the most opportunities to build relationships and alliances. On the other hand these interactions also have the most potential for explosive, racially charged antipathy. Middle class whites in Hartigan's study had the least interaction and could therefore more comfortably take a race-neutral stance, criticizing the actions and statements of working class whites as racist (Hartigan 1999). This work underscores both the importance of local case studies and the necessity of studying racism as socially mediated by class.

Ruth Frankenberg's research further localizes whiteness studies to the individual level. Frankenberg argues that understanding the complexity and contradictions of white experience will help end racism. Her work examines whiteness through in-depth interviews with white women. The interviews reveal how on an individual level, whites view themselves as racially neutral. This neutrality structures the way they view and racialize others (Frankenberg 1993). Frankenberg provides a three part definition of whiteness as a structural advantage; a standpoint from which to view oneself, others, and society; and as a set of cultural practices (Frankenberg 1993). Frankenberg argues that her work makes possible "changing our places in the relations of racism" through understanding the complexity of these women's lives and how their situations and life histories influence their thinking on race. From Frankenberg's perspective, without understanding how whites as individuals make sense of race, we cannot possibly challenge racism, especially in a society so committed officially and legally to color-blindness and equality, yet so fearful of racial tension and rife with racial inequality.

Like Frankenberg, Pamela Perry argues "to more effectively dismantle white domination, we need to be aware of and ready to work with its different manifestations and internal contradictions" (Perry 2001, 86). Perry, using two cases studies of California high schools, demonstrates how in a predominantly white school, whiteness is *naturalized,* while in a multi-racial school, whiteness is *rationalized*. In other words, in a setting where whites are a numerical majority, their privilege is perceived as a natural outcome of majority status. In a setting where whites are not in the numerical majority, yet clearly maintain an advantage over others, dominance is rationalized or explained. Both cases ultimately demonstrate how white identities become "cultureless" and

normative through processes of naturalization and rationalization. This culturelessness

allows whites to defend white privilege either as a norm or as an outcome of rationalized

superiority. On a broader level, the naturalization of whiteness allows whites to claim

their rules, norms, and practices as normatively neutral and therefore not open to

challenge or change. Rationalization allows for whites to explain privilege as earned or

as a fair outcome of a sequence of events.

Yet, the whites are not so clearly defined as simply 'white.' Although the

institutions and norms of a town, such as the subject of this case study, are clearly

"white," white Americans often identify and celebrate themselves ethnically. While

whiteness studies provides a useful framework in which to analyze white reactions to and

perceptions of immigrants, an understanding of white ethnicity must also be employed to

understand the complexity of white identity. Whites can selectively choose their ethnic

identity and affiliation, or as Gans coined it, "symbolic ethnicity" (1979). More

importantly, and in opposition to non-white ethnicity, there is no longer a social cost

associated with white ethnic affiliation. Non-white ethnicities are racial ethnicities that

are ascribed and often carry "social and political consequences" (Waters 1990, 11).

When whites equate their own voluntary ethnic affiliations to the ascribed identities of

racialized minorities, they fundamentally misunderstand the experiences of non-whites in

the United States. As Rubin writes, "In reclaiming their ethnic roots, whites can recount

with pride the tribulations and transcendence of their ancestors and insist that others take

their place in the line from which they have only recently come" (Rubin 1994, 415).

Waters' work is especially useful as an overlay to whiteness studies that helps us to

theorize white perceptions of immigrants of color demonstrating that when whites use

their own family's immigration narratives as a point of comparison and critique of immigrants they erroneously conflate their white ethnic experiences with those of racialized immigrants. Furthermore, such comparisons serve to maintain the us/them distinction.

An understanding of how whites perceive and respond to immigrants of color should also take into account psychological aspects of identity. Robert Wilton provides a framework for understanding the psychological processes in which difference and change within a spatial context challenge individual identities (Wilton 1998). Wilton argues, "when someone or something identified as different is out-of-place, it brings with it a challenge to an existing psycho-social order" (Wilton 1998, 183). In the context of immigration to previously racially homogeneous areas, Wilton's framework helps us understand the process through which whites come to view immigrants as people "out of place" and therefore disruptive to their own sense of place and identity. Although not substantiated across the board, Wilton also argues that individuals eventually get past this disruption stating, "that proximity *can* and does promote acceptance because it forces a reconceptualization of the self/social to incorporate a more nuanced understanding of difference" (Wilton 1998, 183). (My emphasis).

Dwyer and Jones add a spatial component to whiteness studies to explicate the "set of socio-spatial concepts that service whiteness" in order to "make considerations of racialization a fundamental aspect of geographical understanding" (Dwyer and Jones 2000). They discuss the processes of assigning space different characteristics, based on the social characteristics of its occupants. Furthermore, they suggest identities are contingent, multiple, and differentiated but also linked to one another. Bringing these

two ideas together, Dwyer and Jones argue for analyzing whiteness through a 'white socio-spatial epistemology.' Using this framework allows us to understand the complexity of identity as well as how white spaces, in the mind, become safe, predictable and orderly in opposition to non-white spaces, which are often labeled as ghettos. This work helps us understand how certain neighborhoods or places, (blocks, neighborhoods, or trailer parks for example) come to be understood as non-white spaces. Those non-white spaces, are coded dangerous, and thus the people in them carry that marker as well. In a similar vein, Bonnett points to a need for "a fuller appreciation of the multiple, spatially varied, inception of whiteness" as well as "an attention to, and understanding of, the diverse ways white identities are currently being developed and transformed" (Bonnett 1997, 197). Bonnett suggests an understanding of whiteness as the best way to explicitly debunk race as a natural categorization while illuminating the salience of racism.

Cultural geographers, such as David Delany, Richard Schein, and Ruth Gilmore argue that we live in a "wholly racialized world" and that geographers bring specific resources to theorize and better understand the spatialization of race and the racialization of space (Delany, 2002; Gilmore 2002, Schein 2002). Furthermore, geographers must better theorize space as an "enabling technology" through which race is produced and reproduced. (Delany, 2002). Cultural geographers, in line with other social sciences conceptualize race as socially constructed, and contribute an understanding of how race is both embodied and spatially mediated. Laura Liu has challenged geographers to integrate scholarship on race with scholarship on immigration. Liu argues the discipline holds a unique position from which to understand the linkages of immigration, race, and

space. She challenges geographers to go beyond analyzing immigration and race simply as matters of economic competition or the spatiality of ethnic succession at the urban scale (Liu, 2000). Kobayashi and Peake go farther, challenging geographers to "unnaturalize" the landscapes upon which racism and the racialization of immigrants are based by examining everyday life (Kobayashi and Peake 1994).

Several key geographic texts respond to Liu and Kobayashi and Peake. Anderson illustrates the spatiality of race through her study of Vancouver's Chinatown and it's residents and more importantly the racialization of immigrants and the neighborhoods in which they live and work. Anderson illustrates how othering processes that racialize immigrants lead to a normative reinforcement of white Canadians as 'true Canadians' and the naturalization of the white Canadian state. (Anderson 1991)

As scholars challenged race as a biological fact, racist claims became increasingly based on culture. Allen Pred's work illustrates how racism against racialized immigrants changed as the basis for racism shifted from biology to culture. Pred's *Even in Sweden* demonstrates how discrimination in housing, public assistance, and employment against immigrants of color and their descendents is justified by the perpetrators as rational. Pred shows how this discrimination is racism in action, rather than a rational response to the arrival of immigrants. Furthermore, the effects of residential segregation go far beyond spatial patterns. Pred emphasizes how these patterns of residential segregation engender further stigmatization of non-whites in Sweden and deepen structural racism in a country that is officially and legally egalitarian (Pred 2002). Pred also shows how the racism of an entire society can be placed onto one locality – a city or neighborhood. For example, if racially charged incidents or negative interactions occur in one specific place, the larger

society absolves itself of racism by locating it onto that specific place – a city, neighborhood, community or group of people.

Rural identity formation greatly influences and shapes responses rural whites have to and their perceptions of immigrants. Rural places are popularly conceived of as the repositories of American values, *a la* Garrison Keillor's Lake Wobegon. As more meat processing factories establish themselves across the rural landscape, and immigrants arrive to work in those factories, a small number of cultural geographers and rural sociologists have begun to turn their attention to how racialization and othering play out in rural areas of the United States. (Naples, Chavez, Nelson, Leitner) The examination of the relationship between race and space in a rural context is particularly important for this paper.

Through ethnography, Naples (1994) studies race and ethnicity alongside rural change in several sites in Iowa. The sites she chose were previously homogenously white rural communities that experienced several periods of Latino immigration starting in the 1990s. She highlights response of white residents as one of a sense of loss of community and a challenge to identity. White residents in her study make clear distinctions in their minds about who belongs in the community and who will always be considered to be outside of the community. Because of these distinctions immigrants frequently face great resistance when they make claims in different arenas, such as political representation and social services. The most significant way outsider status is constructed is through racialization of immigrants, which Naples describes as an ongoing, everyday process in rural communities that define the boundaries of belonging. This differentiation inevitably places anyone who does not appear to share the same racial or ethnic background "at the

margins of small town life" (Naples 2000, 44). Naples also discusses a paradox of

belonging, wherein immigrants are both criticized for not getting involved in the

community and unwelcome as members of community.

Like Naples, Sergio Chavez explores the ways in which small town residents

perceive and respond to immigrants, with findings similar to Naples (Chavez 2005).

Through a case study in rural northern California, Chavez finds that the primary objection

long-term residents raise regarding immigrants in their community charges that

immigrants do not participate in civic organizations and events. This leads long-term

residents to charge that immigrants do not actually want to be a part of the community.

Naples and Chavez describe a paradox of belonging wherein community belonging (or

full membership) is contingent on conditions that immigrants of color will not be able to

fulfill.

From a geographic perspective Lise Nelson explores the defense of normative

whiteness, in an analysis of white residents' resistance to the construction of subsidized

farmworker housing in Woodburn, Oregon in the early 1990s. Reactions to proposals to

create farmworker housing for Mexican immigrants reflected years of racial tension that

had been percolating. Through the public debate over housing, Nelson traces white's

perceived threat to the normalized community geography wherein immigrants of color

were invisible. The debate, Nelson argues, was an official forum for whites to make

public claims about who and what belongs in their community, and to underscore an

us/them distinction without overtly discussing race. Via racial coding, white residents

excluded the racialized Other and reinforced racial and cultural boundaries without the

mention of race, class, or legal status. (Nelson 2008) Nelson and Hiemstra explore the

ways in which the dynamics place and belonging for Latino immigrants in small town America are shaped by local context. By comparing the unique histories of Woodburn, Oregon and Leadville, Colorado, both of which are now approximately 50 percent Latino, Nelson and Hiemstra demonstrate the importance of understanding socio-spatial relations, in their unique local context, in analyzing the interaction of immigrants and the communities in which they live.

Leitner builds on this framework, by incorporating white residents' idealized notions of rural spaces as a part of the local context. In a study of a formerly predominantly white community, Leitner argues that white resident's responses to immigrants of color is an embodied experience that is structurally, socially, and spatially mediated. Immigrants of color and the spaces they occupy are racialized in ways that are shaped by individual whites' social positionality. Their responses also draw on national discourses on immigration, race, and racial stereotype as well as popular imaginaries of what rural life did and should look like. Leitner argues that racialization of immigrants and immigrant spaces reinforce the racial hierarchy that entitles whites to resources, firms up boundaries of Us and Them, and serves as the foundational criteria that determines who does and does not belong in the community. Leitner asserts that only by acknowledging and facing the role of race and racism, as well as recognizing the structures processes that fuel racism, will communities set the stage for true "coexistence" that goes beyond tolerance, assimilation, and multiculturalism models (Leitner 2010).

More study in this area is necessary to understand rural whites and their perceptions of immigrants of color, and how those perceptions may alter identity,

respective to sense of place and sense of community. Drawing from whiteness studies,

identify formation, white ethnicity, rural identity, and recent work in race and geography,

there is an opportunity to contribute to the body of geographic work that brings together a

socio-spatial perspective of race and community and accounts of how local context, rural

ideals, and national discourses on immigration and race, converge to reinforce racial

hierarchy draw boundaries of belonging. This paper endeavors to better understand white

responses to and perceptions of immigrants of color in one particular rural community,

with the objective of moving towards a model coexistence that more fully takes into

account the role of race and racism as well as the structures underlying racism.

CHAPTER 4 – USING FOCUS GROUPS TO UNDERSTAND PERCEPTIONS

Audrey Kobayashi, in reviewing scholarship on qualitative research interprets the meaning of Noblit and Engel's 'moral imperative' as the "moral obligation to recognize that subjects' lives are multifaceted, interconnected, contextually situated and deeply meaningful, in ways that cannot be conveyed easily by simple descriptions such as those achieved quantitatively" (Kobayashi 2001: 58). Kobayashi's interpretation of the moral imperative influences my choice of methodology. Qualitative research allows us to explore how the individual experience relates to both the community as a whole and the larger society, "and provides a deeper understanding of the meaning systems in which those experiences are embedded" (Kobayashi 2001: 58). In this vein, qualitative research enables me to challenge commonly held understandings and explanations of relations between white rural Americans and immigrants of color, in a way that quantitative research cannot. The following chapter gives a brief overview of the methodology employed in this research. I also discuss recruitment, sample, questionnaire development, and the logistics of data collection.

This research relies almost exclusively on focus groups as the data collection method. A focus group is defined as a one-time meeting between four to eight participants brought together by a researcher to discuss a specific topic (Bedford and Burgess 2001). The members of the focus group discussion spend approximately 90 to 120 minutes discussing a set of questions in a conversational, interactive format. This method was chosen because the researcher is able to hear the thoughts and opinions of a number of people as well as observe the group interaction of the participants. In

reflecting on the situations in which focus groups are appropriate, Bedford and Burgess write, "we regularly use focus groups as an efficient and interesting way of gaining insight into the ways in which people construct environmental and social issues; share their knowledge, experiences and prejudices; and argue their different points of view" (Bedford and Burgess, 2001. 121).   In addition, researchers are able to gain insight into respondents' perceptions and experiences across many dimensions - social, cultural, political, and economic – while positioning respondents as the expert and the researcher as the inquirer. Given the limited resources for my research project in terms of time and funding, focus groups also offered an efficient means of data collection. While I had considered in-depth individual interviews, the time constraints of my study made focus groups a better choice, as I was able to interact with 48 subjects in six separate focus groups in the time it would have taken me to conduct six individual interviews. Most importantly, I was able to observe the interaction of participants and gain insight into the ways in which consensus is built, and popular narratives are used and created.

Recruitment of subjects is of critical importance in qualitative research. Sample design and composition must be carefully constructed to reflect the research objectives and ensure homogeneity within each focus group and heterogeneity between groups. Recruitment can be challenging due to respondent reluctance, time constraints, expense, and regulations. The Institutional Review Board of the University of Minnesota bans the use of 'snowballing' in recruiting study subjects.   So, my stated recruitment technique was to place posters around the community of Willmar asking people to contact me if they are interested in participating in my study. Each poster listed the topic of my research, an invitation to participate for people who have lived or worked in Willmar for

more than 15 years, an offer of $20.00 cash for participation in a 90-minute focus group, and my contact information. I chose to recruit people who lived in the community for 15 years or more based on census information that reported 97 percent of the community as white in 1990. Although I am interested in the perspectives on community change by long-term residents, in this case long-term residency served as a proxy for recruiting white residents.

Very few of the participants were recruited through the 150 posters I hung in businesses across the community. In reality the subjects of this research project were recruited using my networks, which technically counts as snowballing. For the most part, I worked through contacts in schools, local service organizations, and churches to identify potential participants. I then sent a letter to each potential participant explaining my research and followed up with a phone call a few days later asking if he or she was interested in participating in a focus group. The letter included two consent forms and each participant was asked to review the consent form, sign one and send it back to me and keep the other for their records. During the follow up phone call if the potential subject was interested in participating, I asked if they had questions regarding the consent form and consent procedure and I also confirmed their occupational and educational background.

As recommended by Bedford and Burgess, I recruited at least eight participants for each group, hoping that no fewer than five and no more than eight participants showed up. The focus groups, conducted in late August through September, with the exception of a final group in mid-December, were organized by a rough approximation of class determined by occupational and educational background. To foster productive

conversation, I tried to ensure homogeneity within the groups and heterogeneity between the groups as well as an equal number of male and female participants in each group. By using a categorization based on educational and occupational background, I was able to construct groups that were more likely to have common language and experiences, as recommended by Bedford and Burgess. The criteria for these class divisions are crudely defined at best. I made a judgment of which group the participant belonged in after a phone conversation, during which I asked about their occupation and highest level of education attained. People's lives do not fall neatly into categories, and thus it was difficult at times to determine in which group I should place each person. Occupation, education, and income were later confirmed in an intake questionnaire prior to the beginning of each focus group. For example, a couple both employed as teachers indicated an annual household income of 50-59,000. A second couple, neither of which has a four-year college degree, one of whom works in a blue-collar trade, the other works as a secretary indicated a household income of over 70,000. The issue of class was not clear-cut.

In the end I recruited 43 participants and divided them into six groups. There was one "working-class" group, three "middle-class" groups, one group of professionals, and one group comprised of community leaders, most of whom could be considered upper-middle class. A complicating factor in organizing the focus groups was the difficulty of recruiting respondents with "working class" occupations and educations. I found it very difficult to recruit people in typically blue-collar jobs compared to people in "white-collar" professions. This recruiting difficulty means that the working class is significantly underrepresented in this study. The respondents recruited over-represent an

higher level of education and better of financial standing. This is a problematic issue for this study, as it lessens the ability to interrogate the role of class and the differences in respondents' daily contacts with immigrants as a function of their class positionality.

There are several reasons that explain the difficulty in recruiting working class respondents. First of all, the people most willing to participate in a study like this are those who have a stake in the matter, such as local government officials, community leaders, social services providers, and teachers. These people are easy to identify and recruit because they have higher visibility in the community. They are also more inclined to agree to participate in the study because their participation "counts" towards their work. For example, a city official could view their participation in a study on immigration as a part of their job.

Secondly, I used my professional connections in the community as a starting point for recruiting. Those connections are people who are community leaders. One of my informants belonged to the Presbyterian Church and recommended a number of people from his congregation when I asked him to identify "everyday folks." This church happened to have attempted to "reach out" to immigrants as a congregation in the past, and perhaps this also influenced their decisions to participate in this study. These connections all began and ended in the upper-middle or middle class. Reaching working class people through my middle class connections proved difficult to impossible.

Thirdly, working class people have less flexibility with their time. If they work in a factory, participating in a focus group cannot be considered a part of their workday the way it would for the people mentioned above. Also, schedules for wage-earners are more strict and regulated than that of salaried professionals, especially for wage-earners doing

shift work. Of the factory workers I attempted to recruit, many simply didn't have time to come to the focus groups. Several shared childcare responsibilities with partners working an opposite shift and thus could not participate.

I finally recruited a number of working class participants through the aid of long-time Latina resident who had connections across all segments of the Willmar community. Even then, I had only one factory employee and one big-box retail worker in addition to a home childcare provider; three manual trades people, and one nursing assistant.

I suspect that the most underrepresented group, aside from wage earners, are people who have strong negative perspectives on immigration. As one woman who worked at the turkey plant and declined my invitation to participate told me during a phone interview, "you don't want to hear what I have to say." On the one hand, she knew that what she has to say would offend others and is not politically correct. On the other, her experience and perceptions are not any less valid than those whose had more "appropriate" opinions to share. I would assume there were many other people who have strong negative perspectives on immigration who would be less likely than those who consider themselves to have neutral or positive perspectives to participate in a research study led by a University researcher.   These perspectives certainly matter, for they influence the daily lives of immigrants and long-time residents of the community alike. In this respect, the chosen methodology and recruiting difficulties may have led to under-representation of negative perceptions of immigrants and immigration.

Although the groups reflect a rough approximation of class, there are no neat comparisons and contrasts to be seen between the groups in terms of income and education. I did the best I could to fit the willing participants into groups based on a brief

conversation with them about their lives. With a more time and financial resources, I could have composed groups that better reflected a local class structure. Even if I had the time and resources, I'm not certain that carefully crafted groups would have benefited the study. For the sake of this study, what is more important is that people, generally, in the groups could relate to one another because of educational background or occupational experiences in order to have an honest, open conversation.

I have included below demographic information for the 42 out of 43 respondents who filled out an intake questionnaire. Participants were asked to specify their gender, age, birthplace, when they moved to Willmar (if born outside of Willmar), religion, occupation, annual household income, marital status, number of children, and number of those children living in Willmar. In the study, there were 20 males and 22 females. Thirty-five were married, four were divorced, and three were single. The median age of the participants was 54; older than the median age of the community, which was 38 for whites. The official median age includes 15-24 year olds, so 54 is not overly far from the median age for adults.

The average length of time in the community was 33 years, which included the 11 people who had lived in Willmar their entire lives. Twenty people came from other towns around the state of Minnesota, and the other 11 grew up out of state. In terms of highest educational attainment, six participants had graduate degrees, 22 held college degrees, nine had some college, three had high school diplomas, and one did not have a high school diploma.

There was very little religious diversity in the group. Ninety percent identified themselves as Christian, with 76 percent of those being Protestant and 14 percent

Catholic. Of the total participants 43 percent were Lutheran. Of the Lutherans, one

identified as Buddhist-Lutheran. Two people did not answer the question. Two others

selected "none" for religious affiliation.

Figure 4.1: Details about focus group participants.

Gender	Male	Female
	48%	52%

Age	18-30	30-40	41-50	51-60	61-70	70+
# of participants	2	6	4	14	7	8

Marital Status	Married	Never Married	Divorced
	83%	7%	10%

Education Level	No Degree	High School Diploma	Some College	College Degree	Graduate Degree
	2%	8%	22%	53%	15%

Each of the six focus groups took place in a public place, such as the boardroom

of the YMCA and the community education center. Upon arrival, each participant filled

out an intake questionnaire and turned in their consent form if he or she had not mailed it

to me previously. Helga Leitner served as the facilitator for the first two focus groups and

I facilitated the following four. In groups that Dr. Leitner moderated, I took notes. In

groups I moderated, Dr. Leitner or a fellow graduate student, or I took notes.

The focus groups began with a brief introduction by the facilitator and note taker

followed by introductions around the table. The sessions lasted 90-120 minutes and were

recorded using a digital voice recorder and a microphone. At the conclusion of the focus

group, each participant was given an envelope with $20 cash in it as a "thank-you." I

composed full transcripts of the focus groups and gave each of the participants a pseudonym. The transcripts were then coded and analyzed to develop and connect themes. Three themes comprise the body of this thesis. Of all the possible themes to develop, I chose the three that best begin to answer my stated research questions and relate to the theoretical framework previously laid out in chapter three.

The flow of the focus groups was to start out talking very broadly about the community and then narrow to discuss immigration in more detail. The set of questions asked in each focus group centered on four major topics: changes in Willmar during the past ten to fifteen years, perceptions of new immigrants and new immigrant groups, contacts and experiences with immigrants, and the future in the community in terms of identity and relations between new immigrants and long-time residents.

The first part of our conversation centered on changes in life and work in town over the past ten to fifteen years and their opinions on the reasons for these changes. We also discussed whether life and economic opportunities were improving or worsening overall. In each group, immigration came up unprompted as both a major change and as having an impact on life and economic opportunities, positively and negatively. I then asked about perceptions of new immigrants and asked the participants to share their understandings of where the groups of immigrants are from, why they are here, and what the differences between the groups are. I also asked the participants to identify major differences between the new immigrants and the long-term residents in their values and behavior. We also discussed commonalities respondents feel they have with new immigrants and the benefits and concerns of having new immigrants in the community.

We then shifted from discussing perception to talking about actual encounters. We

asked the participants to talk about both positive and negative personal contacts and experiences they have had with new immigrants, emphasizing the respondents' own personal experiences rather than hearsay or general opinion. The respondents were also asked to render an opinion on how they would categorize relations in the community overall between long-term residents and new immigrants.

In closing we asked respondents to comment on what both immigrants and long-term residents need to do to get along better. We also discussed Willmar's 2005 receipt of the All-American City award by the National Association of American Cities, and what it did, and did not have to do with immigration. Each group concluded with an opportunity for participants to reflect on the most important topic discussed and asks if there are important issues that were not discussed.

CHAPTER 5 – ADMINISTRATIVE BARRIERS TO STUDYING RACE

In addition to the above description of methodology, recruitment, and study design, I have included a description of the difficulties my advisor and I encountered with obtaining Institutional Review Board approval for my project. I include this section because it illustrates the difficulty and challenge of qualitatively researching race in the academy. It illuminates several important barriers that speak to larger societal and academic issues as well.

In accordance with university policy I applied to the Institutional Review Board Human Subjects Review for approval of my research. The application was made on May 20, 2005. I assumed my research project would pass without any problems both because my methodology is based in large part on my advisor's IRB approved research, and because my project posed minimal risks to participants. My project also met the requirements for expedited review, as defined on the IRB website.

IRB applicants may apply for expedited review when research activities: "present no more than minimal risk to human subjects, and involve only procedures listed in one or more of the following nine categories" (IRB Website). Minimal risk is defined by the IRB as "the probability and magnitude of harm or discomfort anticipated in the research are not greater in and of themselves than those ordinarily encountered in daily life or during the performance of routine physical or psychological examinations or tests" (IRB website). Also, focus group methodology falls directly into item seven (of the nine categories mentioned above) on the list of research activities qualified for expedited review, which reads "research on individual or group characteristics or behavior

(including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies" (IRB website).

The expedited review categories do not apply "where identification of the subjects and/or their responses would reasonably place them at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, insurability, reputation, or be stigmatizing, unless reasonable and appropriate protections will be implemented so that risks related to invasion of privacy and breach of confidentiality are no greater than minimal" (IRB). While researchers cannot *guarantee* confidentiality for any focus group participants, focus groups are included in the list of activities approved for expedited review. In addition, I explicitly outlined in my application to the IRB how the associated risks are minimized by asking participants to agree to maintain confidentiality outside of the focus group. Finally, we knew from the outcome of Leitner and Fennelly's previous research, that participation posed minimal risk to individual subjects.

Having met all the requirements for expedited review, I was surprised to find out that my project triggered a full review by the student social science IRB committee. My first indication that something was wrong came on June 4, 2005 when I visited the small liberal arts satellite campus of the University of Minnesota where I completed my undergraduate degree. A psychology professor, who is an acquaintance of mine, heard that I was on campus for a conference and asked to speak with me. Because of our relationship, Dr. Anderson (pseudonym), who sat on the Student Social IRB committee,

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gave me a "heads up" that my research project application was to be deferred by the IRB. He wanted to take the opportunity to explain why to me in person.

During our conversation he conveyed to me the following: that the use of focus groups as a methodology by a graduate student triggered a full committee review by the IRB rather than the expedited review process to which I had applied. Nowhere in the IRB guidelines does it state that focus groups moderated by graduate students should fall under a full committee review. The committee concluded that the risks of using focus groups (especially with a graduate student as facilitator) as a methodology on a topic as "controversial" as mine posed risks to individual participants that outweighed the benefits. The committee was not confident in my ability to manage the group given the alleged high potential for conflict due to the nature of the topic. The committee also found that the privacy and confidentiality of the participants could not be guaranteed. Finally, the selection of "whites only" raised red flags for the committee. The committee felt I did not make a sufficient case for exclusion of people of color and immigrants in the community. He made very clear to me that the committee found my research topic to be very valuable, timely and important. He encouraged me to resubmit my application and eliminate the focus groups and conduct individual interviews instead. If I were to apply again using focus groups, I would need to make a stronger case for the focus groups by explaining why they will yield better information than interviews, and also to make stronger links between Leitner and Fennelly's methodology and my own.

In this conversation, Dr. Anderson focused on why focus group conducted by graduate students were problematic. But, later correspondence with the IRB states that the committee's hesitation centers on perceived racial exclusion and direction that I be

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more "inclusive" in my sample, even though the point of the study is to understand white

perceptions and responses. Dr. Anderson actually encouraged me to recruit "long-time

residents" rather than "white long-time residents" to obviate the need to use racial

descriptors at all. Reading between the lines, the IRB's message to me was: racial

exclusion is OK, if you don't acknowledge race. I felt that I could exclude non-whites

from the study because my inquiry centered on understanding white perceptions.

From my own and my advisor's perspective, there is actually no justification for

"inclusivity" in this case. This study examines the origins and nature of perceptions of

and responses to immigrants of color. Including immigrants in the study would only

serve to tokenize immigrants or satisfy some kind of misguided political correctness. It is

not as though this was a proposed pharmacological study of heart medication that only

includes middle-aged white men in its sample study. In her discussion of the value and

the challenges of conducting qualitative research, Audrey Kobayashi suggests IRB

guidelines function more to protect the institution than to protect research subjects,

stating, "Sadly and ironically, harm clauses in ethical guidelines are as much (or perhaps

more) concerned to protect the interests of the research institution against legal suits as

they are to protect the subject from emotional ill effects" (Kobayashi 60). Kobayashi's

point struck a chord later when an IRB committee member admonished me that my

research could be misunderstood and misappropriated by those who wish to portray rural

whites as racists and that this would reflect poorly on the university. Is this a valid reason

not to do research with human subjects - that one's findings *might* be misinterpreted and

misused and thus the university *might* come under attack for approving the inquiry in the

first place?

I received an official notification from the IRB on June 7th, 2005. The email explained that the IRB deferred approval of my application for several reasons. The primary reason identified was the use of focus groups having "the potential to cause extensive social harm" (IRB email #1). Furthermore, the committee added, "as designed, this proposal presents serious social risk, including further stigmatization of immigrants in Willmar (and beyond), and promoting the idea that Willmar residents are xenophobic" (IRB email #1). The email went on to suggest that the focus groups could become volatile due to the controversial nature of the subject and that semi-structured interviews would be better. The committee also found the application did not "provide clear, scientific justification for the method proposed in the application and that they don't agree with exclusion of foreign-born residents. Finally, the committee suggested the use of length of residence in recruiting subjects, rather than recruiting white residents. (IRB email #1)

Both Dr. Leitner and I found this email upsetting for several reasons. On June 21, 2005 we responded to the committee in writing with several concerns and questions. At this time, I also submitted a revised application to the IRB, which changed the recruiting terminology from white residents to long-time residents, but did not change the focus group methodology. Our letter explained that we were taken aback by the committee's rationale explaining why this study constitutes an inordinate risk to research participants. In response to the committee's suggestion that this study might promote the idea that Willmar residents are "xenophobic," we replied that this statement constituted at best a non-substantiated, unscientific conjecture. At worst it was a negative stereotyping by the committee of the residents of Willmar, which we found to be unethical. Our letter also

suggested that in contrast to the committee, we do not, and indeed could not, presume to know *a priori* what the subjects' responses would be. Rather, the purpose of the study is to explore the diversity and origins of responses of long-term residents, positive as well as negative.

Furthermore, it was not clear to us how the committee came to the conclusion that "the use of focus groups might further the stigmatization of immigrants in Willmar and beyond." The committee provided no explanation on how they reached this conclusion. Indeed, the focus groups conducted by Drs. Leitner and Fennelly in another town in rural Minnesota, suggests otherwise. This research has shown that rather than leading to further stigmatization, focus group discussions allow participants to reflect on their opinions and exchange information on diverse experiences. We did not respond to Dr. Anderson's original assertion in conversation that the committee believed that a graduate student could not manage focus group methodology on a topic such as race, because this point was excluded from the official IRB letter.

Given these problematic and unsubstantiated conjectures by the committee, we felt that it was inappropriate to request that we defend the choice of methodology. However, in the spirit of open scientific dialogue, we provided the committee with rationale for choosing focus groups over intensive interviews. Our response stated that after careful consideration of the advantages and disadvantages of a variety of different methods of data collection, we chose focus groups over intensive interviews, because focus groups - with minimal interference from the moderator - allow for open conversation among participants to voice opinions, narrate experiences, and make sense of these opinions and experiences in relation to those of others through social interaction

(Pratt 2002). Furthermore, focus groups provide opportunities to observe how opinions

and beliefs circulate, get enhanced and contradicted in social interaction. Based on Dr.

Leitner's previous research, the relational nature of focus group conversations is

particularly valuable in identifying contradictions and inconsistencies in representations

of immigrants. Past focus group discussions have included participants re-evaluating and

reflecting on their experiences – based on another respondent's challenge – something

that is not usually possible in an individual interview context.   Our letter to the

committee also reiterated that the proposed research would replicate a study completed

by the applicant's advisor, which used the same methodology and a similar discussion

guide. Lastly, our letter inquired why this study, which qualified for expedited review,

was sent to full committee review.

After submitting my application to the IRB for a second time, my advisor and I

had several email and phone exchanges with the chair of the IRB committee as well as

IRB staff assigned to our application. In one exchange, the chair accused us of being

"largely unresponsive, if not hostile." (IRB email #3) This led to a phone conversation

with Dr. Burch (pseudonym), the chair of the IRB committee, and myself following both

our letter and my revised application to the IRB. During this phone conversation Dr.

Burch told me that the focus groups were not the primary problem. Rather, the issue was

my use of race in recruiting. Contrary to what the official notification stated, Dr. Burch

said the committee's major problem with my research was that I wanted to interview

whites about *white identity*. Dr. Burch insisted that this was a prejudiced, racist exclusion

of African and Hispanic immigrants. He urged me to be more inclusive with my sample

and suggested that I write the committee a separate letter stating that I would add on an

additional focus group of immigrants in order to be "more inclusive." I countered that I

found this "tacking on" of an additional focus group far more problematic than leaving

them out altogether. To conduct one focus group of immigrants and six of white

residents and pretend that one mixed group of Somali refugees and Latino immigrants

could somehow represent immigrants as a whole in Willmar lacks rigor, goes against the

standards of focus group methodology and tokenizes and patronizes immigrants. I also

emphasized to Dr. Burch that the whole point of focusing in-depth on white residents is

to be respectful of the complexity and diversity of their opinions. Expanding my study to

include focus groups of immigrants would sacrifice that depth in the name of "inclusive"

breadth.

In our phone conversation, Dr. Burch also expressed that it could be damaging to

the community to reveal the xenophobia of its residents. He also mentioned that he felt

that my work could be exploited by others and misused and it is the IRB's responsibility

to protect against this. Next, he suggested I conduct a mail survey, rather than focus

groups. This to me was the biggest indication that the problem was not my research, but

the committee's lack of understanding of qualitative social science research within an

IRB model designed primarily for quantitative medical research.

Despite these misunderstandings, we came to an agreement that in order

"represent" the immigrant communities, I would conduct individual interviews with

Latino community leaders and representatives from different organizations dealing with

immigrant issues in addition to my original focus groups.

The committee responded to my application stating that the committee:

was disappointed by both the content and tone of your letter dated June 21,
2005; they remain convinced that your original proposal involving exclusion

by race violates both the law and fundamental ethical principles, and in this case poses an unacceptable risk-benefit ratio. While the committee remains concerned about your understanding of the IRB system and your recognition of the risks posed by this study, it appreciates your ultimate responsiveness to its concerns and viewed your proposal (via email dated July 9, 2005) to mitigate risks of social harm by conducting interviews with 10-12 immigrants and/or immigrant-advocates favorably. They urge caution when conducting the focus groups and encourage you to be prepared to deal with unanticipated problems, such as emergent group hostility toward the excluded. (IRB email #4)

The committee asked that I provide a detailed protocol for inclusion of the immigrant interviews, including all recruitment, consent materials and an outline of interview questions. I was also asked to revise the "Procedures" section of the consent form to state that researchers cannot promise privacy, as focus group formats are not conducive to this. The committee suggested that I revise the benefits paragraph of the "Risks and Benefits" section to state that there are no direct benefits to participating in this study. Finally, the email stated that "the committee does not require but nevertheless urges you to revise question 12 or delete it from the list of questions: 'In general, how do white Americans and immigrants get along in Willmar.' This question appears to be leading and as written, raises the risk of social harm. At minimum, the committee requests that you change 'White Americans" to "Long-term Willmar residents' as per your revised recruitment protocol" (IRB Email). Perhaps the committee felt that not acknowledging race would eliminate the potential for racism in my groups.

The story of my IRB application is interesting because it exposes institutional barriers to conducting research on race. If we avoid researching race because of a fear of conflict or worse, if we pretend race is no longer relevant or worth studying, we allow racism and racial inequality to stand invisibly intact.

There are wider implications relating to my specific problems with the IRB. A number of questions arise about how to address the mismatch between IRB processes designed to regulate medical research and the nature of social science inquiry, how to make one approval process work for the wide range of methodologies and inquiries with human subjects. Also, we must consider the implications of a single model for all research across medical, biological, psychological, and the social sciences. Finally, who is going to challenge review boards in specific institutions when those who care enough to do so are those who need their research approved by the IRB? This issue of human subjects review boards in the social sciences goes far beyond how to adapt a model designed for medical research to social science. As Kobayashi reflects, "this issue in itself is an ethical one. The outcome would have been much better had those guidelines been less concerned with protecting university interests, and more concerned to develop in the researcher a sense of caring and commitment" (Kobayashi 60). Certainly this is indicative of three much larger issues meriting further exploration: the adoption of institutional review board models originally designed to review proposed medical research to social science, the fear and lack of willingness to critically examine race relations in the United States, and finally how the decline in public funding for research institutions dictates the need for increased image consciousness on the part of universities.

CHAPTER 6 – THE LANGUAGE OF RACE

If you were to ask citizens of Willmar if there is racial conflict in Willmar, they would probably say no. Race is uncomfortable to talk about, it may feel politically incorrect to discuss, and we live in an officially "colorblind" nation. By investigating and analyzing the language people use to communicate about race, without directly talking about race, we can better understand the underlying dynamics of how whites perceive immigrants of color and construct their identities and sense of place in relation to immigrants. Throughout the focus groups Dr. Leitner and I conducted in Willmar, respondents alluded to race and talked about race primarily without using racial descriptors or speaking about racial difference. Although they may not say it outright, immigration in Willmar is about race. Topics related to race and racial language run throughout each focus group and participants subtly racialize immigrants. Racialization occurs throughout the transcripts as us/them othering as well as the comparison of immigrants to racialized American minorities. The thread of race in the story of Willmar is apparent via racial coding and othering, but also in the way respondents use common racial themes to talk about their community. For example, respondents deploy the model minority myth, speaking about immigrants through the lens of athletics and adoption of children of color. Similar to Hartigan's *Racial Situations* (1999), that respondents were talking about race in Willmar becomes apparent as respondents divest themselves of racism by placing it on groups of other whites commonly thought of as more racist than others.

Respondents in the focus groups clearly were at a loss on how to appropriately refer to the newcomers in their community. Some of this may have to do with discomfort in using racial descriptors, and some of it may have to do with the general uncertainty over how to refer to the newcomers in their community. Because there are Mexican immigrants from Mexico, Latin Americans from Latin America, US born Latinos from Minnesota and the southwest, and Somali refugees in the community, a singular label is insufficient. The term Hispanic is sometimes used, as is Latino. Neither of these terms account for the growing population of East African immigrants, primarily refugees from Somalia. I too struggle to use the best terminology. At times I follow Joe Amato's lead in using 'newcomers,' but other times 'immigrant' seems more fitting. The most common response from focus group participants is to simply say 'us' and 'them.' These terms both homogenize and draw a line between long-time residents and newcomers, or those who belong (us) and those who do not belong (them). At other times, immigrants and people of color as a group are referred to as 'diversity,' 'minorities,' 'nationalities,' 'people of diversity,' and 'diverse people.' For example, in the following passage, Roger, a 60 year-old operations manager, is speaking about immigration to Willmar, but does not refer to immigrants, rather uses a vague reference to community change as being about diversity.

> Roger: "There's been a big change in our community as far as diversity… which is fine… but ah, there's been a lot of problems that have come long with that diversity."

In the following statement, Marcy, a 53 year-old elementary school teacher, is speaking about change in the community, and Marcy uses the term "minority" to describe immigrants. In this statement, the use of "minority" as a descriptor of all non-white

residents places immigrants and American people of color together, showing the speaker's association of immigrants with racialized minorities.

> Marcy: "I heard one of the statistics of the kindergarten in Willmar this year are 50 percent minority."

At other times in the focus groups, a lack of descriptors reinforces an us/them distinction. Numerous times throughout each of the focus groups respondents spoke of experiences with immigrants to Willmar, but carefully resisted using any terminology, perhaps because they don't feel comfortable using any terminology, for fear that it may be inappropriate. For example, the following statements from separate conversations refer to newcomers without using any descriptors at all.

> Kristi: "I actually have a neighbor that is… her husband moved from Texas, so, they're not, you know, from Mexico…"

> Marcy: "I used to teach with some, like the interpreters and things."

Kristi, a teacher in her mid-30s, and Marcy were responding questions about their personal contacts, experiences, and interactions with immigrants in the community. They may not have used more specific words to describe whom they were referring to because they were confused about what to call the immigrants they've come into contact with. They may have also been hesitant for fear of using a wrong or an inappropriate word. Either way, the unspoken "them," is reinforced in opposition to "us." Similarly, Gary, a 54 year-old welding supply sales representative, makes a statement that creates a division between Hispanics and "us." His use of the words 'nobody else' presumably only refers to whites. Latinos here are set apart from whites, not only as "they," but also because Gary's "nobody else" only refers to whites.

Gary: "Parking on the street – It's the biggest pet peeve I've got. I've never seen it before in Willmar until the Hispanics came to town and its like they've got to pull up on the curb and put one wheel up on the grass. Why, why? I wouldn't do it and nobody else does it. Why do they do it?"

These statements are fairly innocuous, but the language or lack of naming reinforces us/them othering, wherein whites are the normative "us" and the racialized Other is the deviation from the norm. In the next statement, Bill, a retired bookkeeper, uses vague terminology to imply that he is talking about Latinos in his community. His use of a common racial stereotype eliminates the need for him to be more specific about whom he is referring. Furthermore, he gives legitimacy to this racial stereotype by invoking a credible source.

Bill: If I saw somebody doing something I would be hesitant to correct somebody misbehaving on the street or something. Law enforcement people will tell you that 90 percent of them have got knives. So, the fear factor is real, I think.

Bill uses vague language to refer to the Other while using a racial stereotype to clearly communicate to the receiver about which group of people he is speaking. In each of the comments above, an us/them distinction is reinforced between the speaker and immigrants. The way these distinctions are constructed, through the use of vague descriptors or no descriptors, at times paired with racial stereotype, allow for conversations about race without using overtly racial language.

The us/them distinctions are racially constructed, evidenced by respondents' comparisons of immigrants in their community to racialized American minority groups. For most of the respondents, it seemed natural to place African immigrants into American categorizations of race, thus racializing newcomers.

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Marcy: "There's so many more people around. Somalians, I don't know if all the black people we see in Willmar are Somalians, but I think a good share of them are."

In another conversation centering on Somali immigrants, the speaker interjects a comment about an African-American. Presumably, to George, a retired clothing store manager, Somalis fall into the same, or similar racial categorizations as African-Americans.

George: "I've got a black son-in-law and I tell ya, you couldn't ask for a finer person in the world."

The natural shift while speaking of Somali immigrants to comments about African – Americans both homogenizes Somali immigrants and African-Americans as Black while singling out an individual within this group. George's comment suggests that there are also "good" people among the Other who defy stereotype but this sentiment doesn't displace stereotypes or expand to the larger group from which he singles out his son-in-law. In the three comments below, Roy, Roger, and Beth use racially coded language when talking about change in their community. Roy is a retired railroad worker with a high school education, Roger is a 60 year-old operations manager and Beth is an administrator at the local hospital. Their use of racial coding makes it clear they perceive immigrants racially; using terminology that typically cast racialized Americans in a negative light.

Roy: "Well, five or ten years ago you never heard of 'Minn-ah-soooodah' (said with an exaggerated 'Scandinavian' accent) having a *drive-by* shooting."

Roger: "I've watched the inner city, I call it the inner city here, areas deteriorate big-time"

Beth: "They came here and that's when our gang problem was about the worst that it had been."

Drive-by shootings, inner city, and gang are all racial codes used above to talk about the changes whites have observed in their community. The use of these codes suggests the respondents consider these changes as having to do with race.

Racialization is also apparent in how respondents spoke of immigrants in relationship to athletics, this time in a positive light. Each group noted the emergence of soccer in the community with a bit of wonder. In sports that have been played in Willmar for a long time, the success of immigrant children marks a quick route to acceptance in the community. To the respondents, this is a way for immigrants to make a positive contribution. As one community leader stated, "There are also some of the minority kids that have really proven themselves athletically, you know they are some of them are very good athletes which is very acceptable to the community."

Although the comments are positive about the role of immigrants in the commuity, the way the respondents discuss these young people's success both racializes and essentializes them. Somalis in particular fall into the stereotype of blacks as more athletically adept than whites. Members of the community show great pride in several Somali runners. Athletics offers a way for people to come together, but racial undertones prevail in Roger's comment below about Somali cross-country athletes and George and Gail's exchange.

Roger: "Two of them are all-state – they live right next to me. And they are Somalians. We sat at their house and had a nice conversation. Their names are Mohammed and whatever."

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The conversation shifted from talking about children of immigrants participating in athletics to other people of color in the community, again demonstrating the connection in participants' minds between immigrants and racialized American minorities.

> George: "You go to the football games and you get this Hansen kid who is going to be a terrific all-stater. I'm sure half-black."
> Gail: "Hansen, he doesn't sound like a minority."

The exchange between George, a retired clothing store manager and Gail, a restaurant worker, shows the connection in their minds of immigrants to racialized American minorities and the stereotype not only of African-Americans and athletics, but this exchange also points to who belongs and doesn't belong in the community. Hansen, to Gail, is a name that doesn't sound like it belongs to an African-American child. Hansen, in her experience, is a Willmar name, a Scandanavian name, a white name.

Other points of comparison between immigrants and racialized American minorities show how immigrants are thought of as a racialized Other. When asked questions about immigrants, there were several times when participants responded with stories about interracial adoption, again suggesting how race and immigration are intertwined. These situations show how people of color and immigrants are thought of as the same… that is, different from whites. Respondents' racial coding and comparisons of racialized others shows that immigration and race are tightly connected in the minds of long-time residents of the receiving community in the contemporary era. This othering serves to maintain an us/them boundary, reinforcing a white "us" as the norm and a racialized "them" being anything outside of that norm.

At times, respondents acknowledged racism against immigrants, but primarily

through their own divestment of racism and, at times, its placement on other whites.

Whether it is people who are older, more rural, or less educated, the respondents pointed

to other whites as racists, absolving themselves of racism, while still maintaining an

us/them distinction between immigrants and whites.

In two separate focus groups, participants made jokes about people from a very

small community just a few miles from Willmar. In a way, the respondents set up a racist

fictional character who is an exaggerated stereotypic picture of the average rural

community elder: Scandinavian heritage, Lutheran, and politically conservative. He is so

backward that he "hasn't left the county in 60 years." Bill, a retired bookkeeper, in the

following passage talks of the value of interacting with immigrants while shifting the

theoretical tensions between immigrants and whites from whites like him to whites like

the racist steroetype.

> Bill: "As individuals we have grown just from being exposed to people
> from other cultures. You talk about people from somewhere like Sunburg
> [a small neighboring village], you've got people who haven't been out of
> the county in 60 years. What chance would they have to meet a Hispanic
> or Somalian, but I think even they grow as they come to accept people."

Later Bill returns to this point, stating that most people accepted the immigrants from the

beginning, with the exception of the Lutheran-Norwegian steroetype he described

previously.

> Bill: "I think when the Somalians and Hispanics started coming to town, I
> think people were willing to accept that, pretty readily. And, the
> conservative Lutheran-Norwegian had a real eye-opening when some of
> these people moved to town.

In this passage, it wasn't he who is responsible for racism or the distance between whites

and immigrants – it is someone else who is the culprit. In addition to the community

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steroetype of the conservative Norwegian-Lutheran, racism is also placed onto the elderly in general, who as the respondents see it, are more set in their ways. Bill's comments also suggest that there is the eventual possibility of broad acceptance of immigrants in the community, even among the pockets of people who are stereotypically unlikely to accept them. In the next exchange, Greg a 50 year-old carpenter and Helen, a 53 year-old in-home daycare provider, identify why they think older white residents in general are less accepting of immigrants:

> Greg: "I think, from what I see, a lot of long-term residents here are over 60 and they don't have anything in common, so they don't not get along or get along.
> Helen: "They don't deal with it…"
> Greg: "If they have to walk around in a different aisle, they'll do it. I think because for so many years, German Norwegians were the people that lived around here. You know, Scandinavians, whatever, Europeans. And now that they're set in their ways, somebody with different language and different color and different disposition on life is to them a stranger in their country. So they don't deal with it."
> Helen: "It's unacceptable to them."

Greg and Helen develop justification for why older people are less welcoming – they are too set in their ways. It becomes about the circumstance of them being elderly rather than elderly people of which they speak being racist. Respondents attribute racism to those who, unlike the elderly, have frequent interaction with immigrants in the community. Dean, an artist in his mid-50s, refers to less well-educated whites as those who are likely to take issue with immigrants.

> Dean: " I used to go to those COPS [a community policing organization] meetings they have. And there are some very vicious things out there about Mexicans. I would guess some of the less well-educated whites are generally to blame… but they are also the ones who have to live next door to the drug houses and whatnot."

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In the previous passage, "vicious" comments about Mexicans are attributed to another group of less educated whites while the speaker maintains a stereotype of Mexicans as being the responsible for drug houses. Dean also acknowledges the role of spatial proximity and real encounters in shaping less-educated whites' perceptions of immigrants.

Respondents acknowledge racism against immigrants in their community, and the disparities between white residents and immigrants are apparent. It is much easier to think of how these disparities are due the racism and prejudice of certain groups of whites than to consider structural or institutional racism. Placing racism onto a white Other also allows respondents to express stereotypes and frustrations without owning them personally.

Racialization and othering is also evident in the deployment of the model minority myth. The myth holds that Asians own their own businesses, strive to be educated, pull themselves out of poverty, are good at math, and don't commit crime (Wu 2003). Retellings of this myth may be intended to be complimentary of Asians, but they are also meant to chastise other people of color, as if to say, "see – they can do it, why can't you? What's wrong with you?" This myth also obscures the experiences of other Asian immigrant groups, such as Hmong and Cambodians who are more likely to live in poverty and are less likely to thrive in American society than other Asians. In the following exchange focus group participants invoke the model minority myth as they discuss how to improve community relations between immigrant groups and long-time residents.

> Moderator: "What do immigrants need to do in order to get along and become members of the community?"

> Chris: "Education."
> Roger: "They need to educate themselves."
> Moderator: "About what?"
> Roger: "You see Asian people coming to the US, the Koreans, the Vietnamese, and then you see the Pakistan and Indian coming and in no time they are owning businesses, hotels, fast food."
> Roy: "Top of the Class."

Asians are compared to other immigrants in Willmar in a positive light in the passage above as well as in the passage below where the group is discussing Latino performance in education. Kurt, a retired vocational school instructor, makes the following observation, comparing Latino school performance to that of Vietnamese immigrants, reinforcing a common stereotype of Asians as smart, hard-working students.

> Kurt: "I think our school district was pretty 'white,' I'll use that term, until about the 70's when we had an influx of Vietnamese. A lot of families were being adopted by churches and different groups and these families all came into town and ah, there were a lot of professional people, people that back in Vietnam had lots of education, probably had professional jobs. Not all of them, but the kids who came to our school couldn't always speak the language, but very, very talented, very hard working and I think what happened then, a few years later, we started to get some of the first, and I'll use the word Hispanic because they were probably some of the first ones. You saw a little bit of …the cultures were different. They weren't, what I'll call it, how I'll say this, but the difference in kids was very obvious. I think sometimes the Hispanic kids were willing to say, I'm sorry, but I don't get this and they would just quit. Whereas the Vietnamese had a different mindset. They just worked right through it."

In a separate conversation, Mark, a local bank manager, points to the difference in work ethic between Chinese immigrants and Latino immigrants, alluding to family structure and hard work as the cause of two Chinese families' relative success in Willmar.

> Mark: "See, those people (referring to Chinese immigrants) value, they have strong family values and ties. One generation helps the next generation. We have two Chinese families who own a restaurant and they have done extremely well. Their work ethic is much much greater than… the Hispanics."

Use of the model minority myth suggests that immigration in Willmar is about race and racial hierarchy. By comparing a handful of examples of successful Asian immigrants to the entire population of Latino and African immigrants, white residents validate stereotypes and racial hierarchy. In a sense, the model minority myth and system of racial hierarchy allow white residents to point the finger at the Other as the source of community conflict. They are indirectly suggesting that because a handful Asian Americans are able to succeed, adapt, and contribute, the issue with Latinos and Africans has something to do with their race, rather than the community or long time residents of the community. These comparisons illuminate the established racial hierarchy, and justify preferential treatment for those at the top of the hierarchy.

Racialization of immigrants took shape in ways both subtle and obvious in the conversations I had with white residents of Willmar. The othering language of "us" and "them" shows the established racial boundaries in the minds of whites. Associations of immigrants to racialized American minorities via terms like "drive-bys" and designations of neighborhoods in which Latinos and Somalis live as "inner city" as well as the easy shifts in conversations from topics immigrants to topics such blacks in athletics show that immigration is indeed about race in Willmar. This is evident as well in how respondents divest themselves of racism and speak about immigrants in ways that reveal immigrants' position on the racial hierarchy.

CHAPTER 7 - MAKING SENSE OF IMMIGRATION

On one of my trips to Willmar I was invited to attend *Kaffefest*, a celebration of Swedish Heritage in Willmar. In a place where many residents celebrate and maintain a Lake Wobegon-like community identity, how does the settlement of immigrants of color affect sense of place. How do white residents of Willmar make sense of it all? How do they understand and explain the situation of their community? In turn, how do they conceive their own identities in relation to the immigrants? How do they relate their life experiences to what they perceive the life experiences of immigrants to be? The previous chapter discussed the ways in which rural whites perceive immigrants in their community racially and as a racialized Other. This chapter explores how focus group participants described change in their community as well as how they deploy national discourses and community narratives to explain immigration and its effects on their community.

As discussed in the introduction, communities across the upper Midwest have undergone a period of significant demographic change. In simplistic terms, the mechanization of farming results in increased efficiency, requiring fewer people to produce more food per acre on farms with larger acreage. The resulting rural depopulation forces other changes such as "brain drain" of professionals who used to serve the rural population and the loss of young people who leave their rural communities following high school to pursue opportunities not available in the areas in which they were raised. The aging population left behind needs more services and is less productive in economic terms. These factors work together to erode the vitality of rural areas.

Outsourcing of manufacturing jobs means there are few smokestacks for rural communities to chase when trying to create job opportunities. One of the large industries left in rural Western Minnesota is meat processing. Similar to agriculture, meat processing has scaled-up to increase efficiency as well. For the handful of communities in Minnesota with pork and turkey processing plants, low-paying job opportunities at the plants attract "unskilled workers" to the community. In the case of Willmar, which is home to the largest turkey processing company in the world, The Jennie-O Turkey Store, US Latinos from Texas, Latinos from Mexico and Central America, and Somali refugees have come to work.

The resulting population growth in Willmar stands out relative to other towns in the region. The community is growing due to immigration, whereas neighboring rural communities have lost population. Population gains from immigration translate to more allocations from the government in terms of local government aid, per pupil education funding, social services, transportation funding, etc. Focus group respondents were not unaware of the benefit of having more bodies in the community, and the role of immigration in stabilizing population growth. Steve, an elected county official reflects on the population:

> Steve: "Our community wouldn't be growing without them. Because if you look between 1990-2000 the Caucasian population of Willmar has gone down."

More specifically, population increases bring stability to school enrollment, which means stability for what is often the centerpiece of small towns, the school system. A municipal government leader explains,

> Doug: "The minority kids have contributed greatly to the whole school system. They backfill, number-wise, the declining Caucasian population

as the Caucasian numbers decrease, the minorities increase, which is keeping the system quite stable."

White residents concede the utilitarian value of the population stability immigrants bring to Willmar, and the previous chapter illustrate that whites perceive immigrants racially, but there are many other aspects to how they think and feel about the newcomers. The arrival of immigrants of color to the community coincides with other changes in small town life. The most significant change many respondents describe is the loss of "small town feel." While small town feel is an intangible concept, respondents point to the decline of the core downtown district and the increased development on the outer edges of town of big box retailers as one sign of the loss. Indirectly, immigrants are also associated with the loss of small town feel, as discussed in the previous chapter as respondents discuss drive-by shootings, the inner city, and ghettoes in conjunction with conversations about immigrant related change.

While the decline of the downtown is unrelated to the arrival of immigrants, the future of downtown Willmar is dependent on immigrants. Because many of the traditional downtown stores have gone out of business, real estate values have declined, making way for inexpensive commercial and apartment rentals downtown. This is one area where immigrants are gaining a foothold in Willmar. Because of the decline of traditional downtown commerce, immigrants can afford to open new businesses downtown. There are several Mexican restaurants, a few Mexican and African themed variety stores, and a Mexican bakery. In Willmar, downtown, a symbol of white rural America is increasingly an immigrant space.

Figure 1. Rosita's Barbacoa Restaurant, The newest Mexican restaurant in Downtown Willmar.

Figure 2. Variety store serving Mexican and Somali immigrants in downtown Willmar.

Figure 3. Mexican gift store, downtown Willmar.

Figure 4. Mexican general store, downtown Willmar.

For some respondents Willmar's downtown was interconnected with their conception of small town and now the downtown has become a place of danger because of the immigrant presence. Roy, retired railroad worker, discusses both the loss and the fear in the following passage.

Roy: "I used to go downtown and used to have coffee. People downtown, you go downtown and you don't know anybody. Well, you don't go downtown, you don't go downtown after dark. You have probably four or five businesses downtown and professional people. Whatever you had is not there anymore and I think that's sad because I really liked Willmar downtown."

The implication is that the downtown is lost because of the immigrant presence. The downtown area, as an immigrant space, has been re-coded as a place of danger and loss. The sense of loss is placed onto and blamed on the immigrant. The presence of people of color presents a challenge to rural whites' notion of what it means to live in a small town. As previously discussed, respondents use the lens of urban crime, which they associate with racialized American minorities to describe and understand their changing community. To them, the presence of immigrants of color working, living, and shopping downtown challenges their sense of Willmar as a small, rural town. Rural identity is predicated on whiteness as the American norm (Kobayashi and Peake 2000). When that norm is visibly challenged by immigrants of color, the rural identity and sense of place is also challenged, as Jason, a 33 year-old shop manager at an industrial plant, discusses below.

Jason: "I think 15 years ago you could categorize Willmar as a small town rural community in Minnesota. Today, I don't think you could say that because of the diversity."

To him, the presence of the racialized Other changes a fundamental aspect of his community, which is built on the entanglement of rurality and whiteness. Jason's comments also illustrate a tacit belief that homogeneity is foundational to rurality. The Other makes it the opposite of small town, more like a city where "diversity" is the norm. Residents strive to explain how and why their community changed and continues to

change, in order to reconcile this challenge to their sense of place. There is no clear-cut common understanding about the origin and nature of change in their community, which make national and community narratives helpful to explain their situation and validate their opinions about community change.

When asked to discuss the effects of immigration on the community, respondents across the focus groups draw on national discourses and community narratives in conjunction with local anecdotes to explain their ideas and opinions about their communities. Anecdotes feature strongly in respondents' comments because many lack direct personal contacts and interaction with immigrants. Without those contacts, they rely on either brief encounters or hearsay to answer specific questions about immigration. Respondents combined these anecdotes with larger community narratives about Willmar's situation and national discourses about immigration, sometimes as a way to support or inform their opinions, beliefs and perceptions.

At the time of the research, summer of 2006, negative national discourses on immigration were not hard to come by. The objections to immigrants and immigration posed via these discourses contend that immigrants live here illegally; drain national, state, and local resources; bankrupt states; steal jobs from Americans; take advantage of the welfare system; pose a threat to national security; and are given unfair advantages. Other national discourses plant the fear that our country will lose its identity because whites will become a minority (Huntington 2004). The fiery rhetoric of Colorado Congressman Tom Tancredo's book asserted that immigrants were parasites, feeding off the American host while refusing to assimilate, thereby chiseling away at American identity (Tancredo 2006). Tancredo was characterized as an extremist, but a more

mainstream momentum was building, which led to the movement to build a 700-mile wall along the US-Mexico border and to a crackdown on undocumented workers and their employers. The conversations in Willmar reflect the anti-immigrant tenor and content of these national debates.

Within the focus groups, as we discussed community change, there were many comments about immigrants taking advantage of "the system" in a number of ways. Roy's comments express concern over taxes through his assertion that immigrants have come to the community to take advantage of its generous social welfare benefits.

> Roy: "It's another thing that's hard – I don't know, the county or the state… It's hard on our taxes. Because most of them don't have insurance. Housing, food, a lot of them come here just for that reason."

Invoking the pain of higher taxes both softens and justifies this complaint in the context of the conversation. In a separate group, Stephen, a college student home in Willmar for the summer, speaks to a common complaint of immigrant entitlement as well as implying immigrants' intent to exploit the system.

> Stephen: I think there is a sense of entitlement. The American Dream – doing it all for yourself, instead of saying, when I have my sixth kid I can get medical insurance. They know they can get benefits if they do a certain thing."

Stephen's comment hints at a more fundamental claim – that immigrant behavior is un-American, as well as reiterates a stereotype of Latinos having many children. In addition to taking advantage of the system, immigrants are considered by some of the respondents to be taking resources away from white citizens who they see as more deserving of those resources. In the following exchange, respondents discuss community resources and unfair advantages that

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immigrants in their community have over long-time residents. The conversation,

among working class whites Theresa, Jason, and Nancy, who have the most

contact and direct economic competition with immigrants of color shows

ambivalent attitudes towards immigrants – both empathy and resentment.

Theresa works on the shop floor at the Jennie-O plant. Jason, 33, is a shop

manager at an industrial plant. Nancy, 48, works in customer service at a big-box

discount retailer.

> Theresa: I just would never see myself packing up all my possessions and
> my husband and kids and moving to some god-known place that, you
> know, and I couldn't speak the language. That takes a lot of courage.
> They must be very desperate to get out of where they are at to do
> something like that.
>
> Jason: Our county has always had deep pockets for that.
>
> Theresa: Yeah, but just the idea of doing that, that takes a lot of courage
> and a lot of faith.
>
> Nancy: But do a lot of them, once they get up here, do they use the
> country welfare to too much of an extent and they don't want to have to do
> Jennie-O work or Wal-Mart work because it is not a good job and they
> depend on other people of this community to support them… I mean, the
> taxes… I think that's where you see some of the bitterness from the people
> who've been around here a long time because some of the white people
> who are here that could use… maybe could have gotten the WIC program
> (Women, Infants, Children – a federal food and nutrition assistance
> program) program or shoulda gotten the WIC program and didn't because
> the immigrants used it all up.

On the one hand, Theresa asks the group to consider the challenges immigrants face as

they move to a new country and the sending country conditions that bring them here. On

the other hand, Jason and Nancy respond with the burden they feel immigrants place on

community resources. Nancy asserts that immigrants might not actually work, but look

for social services to take care of them, thereby using resources that rightfully belong to

people who have been in the community longer. Nancy, a low-wage worker at a large

retail discount store, may be witnessing first hand the shrinking of the social safety net.

Access to welfare resources has been limited through welfare reform, and Nancy might

attribute those shifts to the coincidental arrival of immigrants in her community. In a

focus group of middle class whites, similar sentiments about immigrants burdening "the

system" (public assistance) arose as respondents discussed the effects of immigration on

their community. The sentiments of Roger, a operations manager, and Greg, a carpenter,

were based more on observation than on the personal experiences of the discussion

among wage earners above.

> Roger: "How much of that can we handle in a town this size? We have
> Jennie-O, and they can only hire so many people. So these people keep
> coming in. What are they going to do? They are going to walk the
> streets."

> Greg: "I think one of the biggest adverse deals about this whole thing is
> that community money is… I would say 60 percent shoveled towards
> immigrants so the people that maybe have three kids and the husband ran
> off and they are still under the age of five and she's 21-23 years old find it
> harder to get into programs and stuff because there are so many of them.
> And food stamps. The medical. They use up a huge amount of county
> and state and federal funding."

Again, we see that respondents not only view immigrants as a strain on resources, but

that immigrants are not the rightful recipients of government aid or "community money"

as Greg refers to it. Claims in this arena are made via exaggeration, such as the 60

percent of community money going to immigrants and the story of the rightful recipient

of welfare as a young, presumably white, abandoned mother. The underlying sentiment

is that immigrants take resources away from those who really deserve them. The people

who deserve the benefits are those who "belong" in the community, those who count as

"us," not "them" as discussed in the previous chapter. In the narrative below, Helen speaks of a family that she works with through her in-home daycare.

> Helen: "I know of one instance a few years ago. I was taking care of a special needs, a slow learner. They had a summer program but it was full though because all the minorities had it full and there was not room for him. Because it was full. I said at that time your child is a minority in our own community. Whereas that child should have gotten help but because he could SPEAK ENGLISH (speaker's emphasis) he could not be into those programs."

Helen's outrage about the situation is based on an underlying belief that the child is more worthy of resources than "minorities" because he is an English-speaking community member. Furthermore, Helen's story also presents the fear that because of situations like this, where immigrants are consuming resources meant for whites, that whites are treated as though they have minority, rather than majority status. To other respondents, taking advantage of the system isn't just about appropriation of community resources; it is also about cheating the system in hiring. In this example, Bill, a retired bookkeeper, points out that immigrants take advantage of the hiring system at Jennie-O, because immigration control is flawed.

> Bill: The ones I hear the most about are… one of the supervisors at Jennie-O has a someone working for him and it's the third time that person has worked at Jennie-O going under a different name. You can come here and work for seven years and run to California, get a different ID and they're good for another seven years. That's a problem with the system, folks. I don't think it's their fault. They're taking advantage of the system.

Healthcare in particular is a national tension point in the immigration debate and locally in Willmar. Across the country, healthcare costs are rising at the same time the social safety net is eroding. Immigrants, as representatives of change, are assigned blame

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for declining resources and inability to meet rising costs. Here Steve, a 68 year-old elected county official, tells a common anecdote that replays the national immigration discourse about the effect of immigration on healthcare.

> Steve: "I think in California and Arizona and New Mexico, it's bankrupting cities… their healthcare systems."

By contrast, Beth, who works in healthcare administration in Willmar, voices a more nuanced concern over immigrants and healthcare.

> Beth: "I'm not sure we have the infrastructure to support them. You can look at just delivering healthcare and we need interpreters more and more and it's an added on need with out reimbursement and so you need to add these things on with diminishing returns."

At the community level, people observe and experience the effects of sharply rising healthcare costs at the same time that immigration rates are rising. Again, we see the idea that immigrants are placing strain on public resources of which they are not the rightful recipients. The group accepts this notion without discussing other reasons why healthcare costs are rising.

A broader national discourse surrounding immigration is the fear of losing a singular American identity. (Huntington 2004) In Willmar, engagement with this discourse is both about American identity and community identity as well as majority/minority status. Conversations about community change and community identity in Willmar show the interconnectedness of Americanness and whiteness. Later, when asked what the most important topic discussed in the focus group was, the group had an exchange that shows how easily Americanness and whiteness are connected.

> Moderator: What is the most important thing we discussed today?

> Steve: "It's a good reminder that we talk about things like this."

Beth: "Just to think, what does it mean to be an American?"

George: "Or a Caucasian."

Marcy: "Or a soon to be minority."

George: "It's getting closer all the time."

Beyond simply being "outnumbered" by immigrants, for whites to be less than fifty percent of the population, threatens white dominance and privilege and threatens sense of self and sense of place and community. Respondents, like Marcy, express a sense of loss and unexpected consequences when speaking about what has changed in her community.

Marcy: "A friend of our brother came and he lives in Arizona… this was about 15 years ago. As he came through Willmar he made the observation, 'you will not know your town in 15 years.' And we thought, 'what? We've got a few Hispanics…' But, I think he is right. The whole town has changed. I don't know if the downtown people or Jennie-O realized how all of this was going to change Willmar."

Marcy's comments reveal a changing sense of place, as well as the notion that local institutions hold responsibility for the changes. Marcy identifies "downtown people" (local government officials) and Jennie-O as agents of community change, perhaps as gatekeepers or institutions that allowed or encouraged immigration.

The national discourses echoed above about immigrants taking advantage of the system, negatively impacting healthcare, and challenging American identity are further localized through Willmar-specific community narratives about immigration. By retelling these discourses through a local lens or narrative, the national discourses are further reinforced.

In other instances, community narratives are shared that are less closely tied to the "storyline" of national discourses, but draw on the fundamental sentiments through a local lens. An example of community narrative drawing on the underlying sentiment of

national discourses on immigration can be seen in the "origin myths" of immigrants in Willmar. There is no official common story about how so many immigrants came to live in Willmar, but there are several versions of the story, and each version illuminates the ways in which white residents make sense of the arrival of immigrants. One prominent community narrative centers on how immigrants arrived in Willmar. The narrative has several variants, but all of them tell of Jennie-O's recruiting strategy in Texas, whereby Texan Latinos are told of all the welfare benefits available in Willmar, and how Willmar offers a "free-ride" for immigrants. Another version tells of the State of Texas putting Latino criminals on a bus bound for Willmar to get them out of their state (Green 1994). Certainly, Jennie-O does recruit Latino workers in Texas, but these stories conform to the sentiments of a larger negative discourse about the nature of immigrants and immigration, namely that immigrants take advantage of the liberal welfare system, and that they are "undesirables." Also problematic are the half-truths that emerge from pairing fact with stereotype. Respondents use the authority of family, friends and acquaintances to substantiate community narratives and lend truth to stereotypes of immigrants. Generally speaking, the fact that Jennie-O recruits Latinos in Texas is paired with the stereotype that immigrants are criminals and unfairly take resources away from Americans, as we see in the following comments from Gail, a restaurant worker; Mark, a local bank manger; and Dale, a college instructor.

> Gail: "What we were told is that Jennie-O advertised in East Chicago for employees and a lot of these people came here to work and a lot of them were gang members and they were on the run from the law and they thought, let's go, there's jobs, so they took off and they came here an that was when our gang problem was about the worst it had been."

In Gail's version of how immigrants came to live in Willmar, Jennie-O plays a prominent role in recruiting, as does the sending community. In this case, East Chicago, as a sending community evokes an urban, criminal connotation for the speaker and listeners. Immigrants, in this telling are coded as undesirables, as criminals, as the source of new gang activity in Willmar. On the other hand, Mark's version of the story alludes to the agricultural history of the area, and the role of Latinos as migrant agricultural laborers.

> Mark: Diversity became a big part of the community and it started with the sugar beet growing in Renville county, a county seat as we're told, the auto industry went in the tank in Texas in the '80s so some of those folks and their uncles and aunts who had been working there heard of the medical benefits and the welfare assistance that was available here. Some of the folks came and decided to stay and the community wasn't quite ready."

Again, respondents point to the draw of government assistance as a lure for immigrants coming to the area, as we see in Dale's comments below.

> Dale: "some of the ones after the migrants [migrant workers] were shipped out from Texas. Texas would put them on a bus, give them a one way ticket to Willmar and give them so much money to get them out of there. Minnesota was known as a very good welfare state and they shipped them up here big-time. They were proud to get rid of them."

In Dale's telling of the story, as in Gail's, Willmar is the recipient, not just of immigrants, but also of undesirables. Casting immigrants as criminals and undesirables serves several purposes – justifying why they don't belong in Willmar and why they shouldn't have access to resources.

Somalis and Bosnians comprise a much smaller proportion of the immigrant population in Willmar, and there are few established narratives about how they came to live in Willmar. In the exchange below between Jason, a 33

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year-old shop manager and the moderator, Jason asserts his belief about the arrival of Somalis and Bosnians in Willmar.

> Jason: "I'm saying that they all came here on a free ride"
>
> Moderator: "How does that work? What do you mean by free ride?"
>
> Jason: "When we went over there and got in the dispute with Bosnia and Somalia. Our government elected to take a certain amount of people who didn't want to participate in the action over there or they were for whatever reason set aside and then they were given open reign to the US. And then they plotted…planted them strategically in communities throughout the US and Willmar happened to be one of them. That's just my understanding. I'm not an expert, but that's what I know."

Jason expresses both certainty and defensiveness about his claims that refugees from Bosnia and Somalia have infiltrated the US and are treated with special care. The implication, to the respondent, is that Somalis and Bosnians are given special privileges or unfair advantages. Jason's understanding of how Somalis and Bosnians came to live in this country justifies the position that immigrants have unfair access to resources that don't belong to them, that immigrants are here as "free-riders."

In reality, there are Latinos who come from Texas, Mexico, and Central America. There are Latino families who have settled in the Willmar area after working as migrant laborers in the area for many seasons and generations. There are also Somali refugees who have made Willmar their home. Respondents' explanations of how immigrants arrived in Willmar may point to confusion in the community about the where, how, and why of immigrant presence. "Origin myths" evolve from a need to make sense of the presence of immigrants, but more importantly, they justify an already existing position on immigrants.

In addition to origin myths, other popular community narratives serve to help people make sense of the presence of immigrants while justifying stereotypes, prejudices, positions and beliefs about immigrants. Once commonly cited narrative that was brought up in discussions about immigrant/receiving community tensions was Elm Lane. Elm Lane was a trailer park on the outskirts of town and a number of immigrants lived there as it was one of the few sources of affordable housing in the community. Under an absentee landlord, conditions in Elm Lane deteriorated. Crime flourished and eventually a police substation was built outside the park (Green 1994). The municipality eventually, through judicial order, revoked the landlord's rights to rent out the property, and Elm Lane was razed.   Public debate often occurred in the local newspaper where "cultural differences" were cited as the source of trailer parks' problems. According to a Willmar police officer, in a West Central Tribune article about Elm Lane, problems were less about material conditions, and more about culture.

> "...culture and poverty play a bigger role in the violence than overcrowding...the problem starts when they are out barbecuing and drinking. It's not the over -crowding. There are a lot of guns out here. They like to flex their muscle and they shoot, and they shoot into the air" (Prusak 1993).

Official accounts such as this create and maintain stereotypes while also creating racial associations with a place, racially encoding the trailer park. They are also the material used in construction of local narratives that explain what is going on in the community.

An example of how these official accounts are deployed in other common narratives is that of the "bad seeds." Immigrants are associated with bad seeds,

especially those living in places like Elm Lane. The following speakers each

articulate this notion of "bad seeds" as an explanation for problems in the

community. For example, in separate focus groups, Dale, a college instructor and

Dean, a local artist, identify the bad seeds as sub-segment of immigrants in the

community with interesting, albeit completely inaccurate explanations.

> Dale: "The Elm Lane brand of Hispanic was a brand in itself. Some of
> those people are the people Castro kicked out of the asylums."

> Dean: We had some real problem neighbors who were Marielitos that
> Carter let in and they came to the north side and they were major
> problems. Cubans. They're gone now.

Other respondents reference early groups of trouble-making "bad seed"

immigrants without identifying their origins. The consensus among respondents

like Doug, a municipal government official and Mark, a bank manager, is that

immigrant and host community relations were rocky at first due to the criminal

nature of the first groups of immigrants, but that the criminal element has been

driven out, and relations are today more harmonious.

> Doug: We had a lot of bad people here that the police department had to
> really work at identifying, arresting, and getting rid of. I think our
> community today is a lot more stable and safer after that first wave in the
> late 90s. There was a lot of criminal element that came in at first…."

> Mark: We had a couple gangs and that seems to be all behind us, and a lot
> of the riffraff are out of our community. There has been a complete turn-
> around and that element is gone. The people of diversity who are here
> dress better and have smaller families.

The "bad seeds" narrative allows respondents to personify and identify the source of

tension between immigrants and the receiving community. The story of the "bad seeds"

centers on what was wrong with the immigrants, rather than questioning anything about

the host community. Through this kind of narrative, respondents are able to understand why things have improved. In white residents' minds, it is the departure of the bad seeds that made things better, not improved housing stock, more translation services, or greater widespread acceptance of immigrants.

There are numerous tensions and challenges in communities where new immigrants of color and long-time white residents come into contact with one another. The residents of Willmar I spoke with make sense of it all by putting together the pieces of their own feelings of what it means to live in a rural community, community narratives, and national discourse in line with the events they see and experience in their own lives. For example, the community narrative of bad seeds holds that a group or gang of immigrant criminals lived in Willmar at the time when immigrants first settled in Willmar in large numbers, the police drove them from the community and now relations are better. It is hard to separate how much of this story draws on the racial stereotype of Latinos as criminals who belong to gangs, how much of it has to do with improving availability of affordable housing or better inter-community relations, and how much of it has to do with a police crackdown on criminals. The first groups of immigrants to Willmar were not likely to have been Marielitos or people recruited from "East Chicago" by Jennie-O, but in the absence of fact-based community history, residents of Willmar are left to piece together their own stories, which are shaded by racial stereotype and national discourses such as how immigrants take advantage of the system, threaten American identity, and drain resources.

CHAPTER 8 - CONCLUSION: MOVING BEYOND TOLERANCE

The previous chapters discuss the ways in which rural whites' perceptions of
immigrants of color have to do with race. Racialization of immigrants took shape in ways
both subtle and obvious in the conversations I had with white residents of Willmar. The
accompanying othering lanuguage illuminates the established boundaries in the minds of
whites between the "us" and the racialized immigrant "them." Associations of
immigrants with racialized American minorities, the positioning of immigrants in the
racial hierarchy, and the divestiture of racism also demonstrate that whites in Willmar
perceive community change and immigration through the lens of race. I have also
examined the ways in which rural whites reconcile their sense of place with the presence
of immigrants and resulting community change by drawing on national discourses and
community narratives. To conclude this thesis, I will discuss the future of Willmar and
communities like it.

The academy and community development agencies each offer
perspectives on what might and what ought to happen in communities like
Willmar based on broader experiences and bodies of literature. I argue that it is
critical to first examine the perspectives of Willmar residents about their
community's future, as they are the actors and agents who will create and inhabit
this future. This project is limited in scope to understanding white residents, so
this analysis does not include the perspective of immigrants in how they view the
future of Willmar. In each group, the participants were asked to look to the future
and discuss ways they could improve relations between immigrants and white

residents of the community. They were also asked to discuss ways immigrants could improve relations. When asked these questions, participants offered two primary veins of thought about their own roles.

The first set of proposals, heard most often from white collar, more educated respondents centered on allowing for the passage of time as a way the community will eventually come together. The common proxy in discussing time was through the topic of how long it takes to English language acquisition, suggesting that improved relations is contingent on assimilation.

Barbara, a college professor, like many other well-educated respondents, recognized that her immigrant ancestors did not immediately learn English. Within the broader context of the passage of time as a way to improve relations, Barbara alludes to the length of time it took for her immigrant ancestors to learn English.

> Barbara: But I look at how long it took our immigrant fore-mothers and fathers… I had German grandparents and Swedish grandparents and they were limited in English.

Roger and Mary, both employed in blue-collar industries, comment here specifically on language, implying that immigrants of yesteryear assimilated more quickly than immigrants of today.

> Roger: If you come from Norway or Sweden, it's things like, you learn the United States way. Here it seems like the other… Hispanic way goes on, they don't have to accept our way, we have to accept their way.   They come in here and they can, I mean, they all speak Spanish all the time. I'm assuming 50-60-80 years ago, Norwegians learned to speak English quick and learned to live here."

> Mary: "All the immigrants who came here 100 years ago, they all learned the English language and they adapted to the United Sates and the ones who come now want to keep their own heritage."

The first proposal of the passage of time as a way to improve relations between white long-time residents and immigrants illustrates the expectations around assimilation. This expectation is mediated by class position. The second set of proposals for improving relations between the long-time white residents and immigrants involves getting past individual racism and prejudice. George's comment below may seem naïve, but his comment reflects the commonly held belief among participants that the personal prejudice of individuals (particularly the prejudice of less well educated or elderly whites) is the primary factor that stands between immigrants of color and long-time white residents.

> George: "If we had a golf member at the club who was Hispanic or Somalian out at the golf club, I'd play golf with him."

Like George, Katherine, a 38 year-old homemaker, and Dale, a retired college instructor point to the belief that individual action will alleviate the strain in the community.

> Katherine: "And what we ourselves can do… and not leaving it up to somebody else either. Not leaving the city to do it or some other agency, but that we can do ourselves. Because we are a part of this community and what can we do to make it better.

> Dale: "If you're not part of the solution, you are part of the problem.

When it comes to what immigrants can do to foster better relations with white residents and improve the future of the community, focus group participants constructed a set of conditions of belonging that immigrants must meet in order to truly be a part of the community. These conditions by and large involve immigrant assimilation to the

white norm, wherein immigrants should "act like us" not only by conforming to white American language as discussed above, but also through assimilation of white values, behaviors, and norms. Katherine, a 38 year-old homemaker and Kristi, a teacher in her mid-30s, invoke the American Dream as a value to assimilate to, and they articulate the belief that with hard work, immigrants can achieve the American dream.

> Katherine: the American dream is alive and well if you go in and you
> work hard, you know, you can still work your way up.

> Kristi: Opportunity, I mean, there's opportunity if you are willing to find
> it you can, I mean, there's just opportunities available

In the participants' minds, this kind of opportunity is what America is all about, and their belief in it lays the responsibility for success or failure squarely in the lap of immigrants, absolving the dominant white culture of responsibility. Offering the American Dream as a solution also obscures the role of race and unequal power relations.

One the one hand, immigrants are expected by participants to "act like us" to improve relations between immigrants and long-time white residents. On the other hand there is doubt about the possibility of assimilation because of the perceived difference in fundamental values between immigrants and those of white Americans. Here Jason identifies what he sees as the source of the divide between immigrants and white residents in Willmar.

> Jason   They don't respect life the same. They don't have the same values
> when it comes to life. Look at the news. Talk to the guys that come back
> from any of those countries. Whether or not the people here believe what
> the people from that country believe, I really can't say, but they don't
> value human life the same way we do. There's no way you would see
> anybody from Willmar dragging a dead body down the street and you go
> back to their home communities and they've done it.

Jason's comments are not representative of all the focus group participants, but his sentiment that there are differences in basic human values that will never bridged, underscores the barriers to achieving assimilation or tolerance, no less coexistence. Although the onus appears to be on immigrants to meet assimilationist conditions in order to belong, the boundaries of "us and them" are fixed and defended by racialization and are thus not easily transgressed. As Leitner argues, these conditions of belonging are also set through the racialization of immigrants, establishing immigrants as out of place (Leitner, forthcoming).

In a sense, both the proposals of what white residents see as their role in fostering a better future for Willmar, as well as their expectations or conditions of belonging bring us to "dead ends." The passage time and overcoming individual prejudice lead us to a model of racialized tolerance, "that extends the logic of white class power and privilege; a class power that enables white middle and upper classes to distance themselves from both working class immigrants of color and the white working class" (Leitner, forthcoming). On the other hand, what community members identify as the role of the immigrant in creating a better future for the community, sets out assimilationist conditions of belonging, which may be impossible to meet.

So, how to avoid a dead end? First of all, local initiatives need to move beyond models of tolerance to recognize the roles of race, racial hierarchy, racial privilege and racial discrimination and their effects on immigrants within the community. Secondly, initiatives must look beyond local to examine the broader context of national discourses and how they are brought to bear on the community in order to fully understand the local community dynamic. Thirdly, in examining the role of broader discourses in how local community narratives are shaped, it may be possible to construct new narratives: new

origin stories that set the stage for the dismantling of the boundaries set by racialized

othering, create appreciation for and knowledge of the Other, and identify a shared future.

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