

## ABSTRACT

### Labor “Meats” Religion: Economic Restructuring in the Meatpacking Industry and Religious Adherence in the Midwest

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Labor market trends are often examined in light of their economic significance. However, little attention has been devoted to the relationship between economic trends and their potential impact on religion. Focusing on the consequences of economic restructuring, I argue that labor market variables have consequences for rates of religious adherence. Specifically, I examine an industry which well exemplifies the consequences of restructuring in the Midwestern United States, the meat processing industry. As a result of restructuring, many processors have relocated to rural communities in the Midwest, which lack a sufficient native labor supply to meet the employment needs of the packing plants, which have characteristically high rate of turnover. Consequently, packing plants have recruited and rely heavily on Hispanic immigrant labor to sustain operations. As Hispanic immigrants migrate to rural Midwestern counties, they bring their religion with them, over time increasing the share of Catholic adherents in their destination communities.

Labor "Meats" Religion: Economic Restructuring in the Meatpacking Industry and  
Religious Adherence in the Midwest

by

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A Thesis

Approved by the Department of Sociology

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## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction

Labor market trends are often examined in light of their economic impact, with social scientists devoting attention to the effects of business cycles on the social fabric of a community. However, little attention has been given to the relationship between economic trends and their potential impact on religious outcomes. In this paper, I argue that labor market variables have consequences for rates of religious adherence.

I focus on the particular impact of economic restructuring with respect to meatpacking in the Midwest, a region that has seen considerable growth in meat processing in recent years (Kandel and Parrado, 2005). As a result of restructuring, many processors have relocated to rural communities in the Midwest, which lack a sufficient native labor supply to meet the needs of the packing plants. Consequently, packing plants have recruited and rely heavily on immigrant labor.

As immigrants comprise a growing share of the meatpacking labor force, they likewise constitute a growing share of the population of the communities in which plants are located. This presence is not without influence on the communities they join. As numerous studies have documented, immigrants bring to their destination countries the religion of their homeland (Niebuhr 1929; Herberg 1955; Greeley 1972). Accordingly, increased representation of particular immigrant groups should correspond to an increase in the representation of the religion with which that group is associated. By documenting the effect that restructuring has had for the labor force composition of a particular

industry and region, I show that labor market trends have consequences for religious adherence.

### *Economic Restructuring and Meatpacking*

The early 1970s were witness to sweeping economic change in the United States. The *Pax Americana* era of economic prosperity that had followed World War II drew to a close as revived global market competition from war-torn countries began to have significant domestic impact (Bluestone and Harrison, 1982; Durand, Massey, and Zenteno, 1999). Economists Barry Bluestone and Bennett Harrison (1982, p. 6) have labeled the economic transformation occurring in the United States since the 1970s “deindustrialization.” By this they refer to “widespread, systematic disinvestment in the nation’s basic productive capacity” whereby financial resources were diverted from domestic production into mergers, acquisitions, and foreign investment.

The upsurge of corporate acquisitions and mergers that swept U.S. business in the post-war era represented a corporate strategy, first, for increased profitability, and later for protection of those profits from threat of economic crisis (Bluestone and Harrison, 1982, p. 166). Within the meatpacking industry, mergers and acquisitions were largely driven by the decreased demand for red meat, which had a dramatic impact on competition between firms (Ollinger, 2006; MacDonald et al., 2000). Due in part to increased awareness of health concerns associated with overconsumption of red meat and to increased poultry consumption, per capita beef consumption fell by almost thirty percent between 1976 and 1990 (Kandel, 2006; Ufkes-Daniels, 1994).<sup>1</sup> At the same

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<sup>1</sup>Ollinger et al. (2005) report a 15% decline in per capita red meat consumption between 1972 and 1992, coinciding with a 70% increase in per capita poultry consumption. The difference in Ollinger et al.’s

time, the industry was confronted with increases in feed grain prices and stagnating meat exports (Skaggs, 1986; Ufkes, 1995; Ollinger et al., 2005). Taken together, these decreased demands and increased prices for inputs put pressure on manufacturers to reduce costs.

In effect, this decline meant that growth in sales volume could only occur from population growth or if one firm took market share from another (Ollinger et al., 2005; MacDonald, 2000).<sup>2</sup> Accordingly, consolidation became a popular competitive strategy. Facilitated by a spate of acquisitions and technological innovations, the meatpacking industry consolidated rapidly between 1980 and 2000 (MacDonald et al., 2000). In a fit of “competitive cannibalism,” leading firms relocated to the rural Midwest, where they built larger plants, and many independent packers disappeared (Ufkes, 1995). The number of meatpacking plants fell by 40% in the 1980s, while both the average plant size and output per worker nearly doubled (Ollinger et al., 2005).

Competitive pressure combined with advances in production, transportation, and retail to compel further changes in meatpacking. In addition to building high-volume plants in rural areas located near cattle supplies, industry leaders expanded their share of the US market for beef by further automating production (Ufkes-Daniels, 1994). Advances in mechanization resulted in further division of labor and the deskilling of tasks while allowing for increased productivity (Stanley, 1992). As part of this increased mechanization, high-speed processing lines substantially boosted productivity as

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(2006) and Ufkes’ (1995) estimates may reflect variation in measurement which either includes or excludes carcass weight.

<sup>2</sup>Development of the market for value-added meats has become another important strategy for growth. Demand for specialty “boutique meats,” which include organic meats and foods raised under socially- and/or environmentally-conscious conditions, and lean meats has grown tremendously over the last several decades. With a pound of lean meat worth over five times more than a pound of fat, producers are emphasizing the sale of smaller volumes of higher-value added meats (Ufkes, 1995).

evidenced by the increase in real output per employee between 1972 and 1992, which rose by an average of 78 percent (Ollinger et al., 2005).

The history of IBP, inc. (formerly Iowa Beef Processors; acquired by Tyson Foods in 2001) illustrates the effects of the confluence of technological advances and competition in the meatpacking industry. From its founding as Iowa Beef Packers in western Iowa in 1961, IBP stressed productivity and efficiency in its operations as its mission (Fink, 1998). Whereas major packers had traditionally located their hubs in urban centers such as Chicago and Omaha and in the railheads of the Midwest, IBP centered its operations in rural Denison, Iowa (Ufkes, 1995; Fink, 1998). This was part of a strategy through which IBP avoided unionized labor and its accompanying wage scales as well as the scrutiny of other major packing firms such as Swift & Co. (Fink, 1998). Rural location also had the advantage of allowing IBP to buy cattle directly from farms rather than urban stockyards, thus increasing profits by circumventing the intermediary between feeders and packers (Fink, 1998; Ufkes, 1995).

Though the company did not invent the technique, IBP is often credited with the popularization of boxed beef, the introduction of which would also have a significant effect on the meat processing industry (Fink, 1998; Kandel, 2006). Boxed beef, introduced in 1967, was an important innovation for the processor and consumer alike (Broadway and Stull, 2006). For the processor, these pre-cut portions of vacuum-packed meat represented a cost-efficient alternative to shipping sides of beef. Up to this time, the conventional method of shipment involved transport of chilled carcasses, a sunken cost since bone did not yield a significant profit return. Adopting the sale of boxed beef reduced transportation and energy costs by eliminating fat and bones from the shipment

(Ufkes, 1995). For the consumer, boxed beef appealed to the increasing demand for convenience in food preparation (Kandel, 2006). In the 1960s, as increasing numbers of women entered the labor force, the demand for pre-cut and further processed meat products rose. Processors responded by increasing the proportion of pre-cut meat produced such that this product became the dominant output by the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Boxed beef held an additional appeal for processors and grocers. Prior to the late 1960s, retail outlets retained high-wage union butchers to further process the half and quarter carcass portions of beef typically obtained from the stockyard. By converting to the sale of boxed beef, value-added processing shifted from the retail to the plant level, increasing profits for processors and decreasing costs for vendors (Ufkes, 1995; Broadway and Stull, 2006).

### *Impact on the Labor Force*

Structural changes in the meat-processing industry have been accompanied by changes in labor relations (MacDonald et al., 2000; Stanley, 1994). In particular, the geographic shift in plant location and the deskilling of the production process have significantly altered the labor force composition of slaughter plants. Among the most relevant consequences is the decline in unionized labor accompanied by the increase in immigrant labor (Kandel and Parrado, 2005).

In the face of increased competitive pressure driven by changing consumption patterns and technological development, desistance from unionized labor became a common cost-reduction tactic among processing firms. This practice was reflective of the larger strategy employed by capital in response to restructuring, in which domestic

firms attenuated their relationship with unionized labor through renegotiation or elimination of union contracts or through relocation to rural communities often located in right-to-work states (Bluestone and Harrison, 1982). In the 1970s, firms that maintained plants with unionized labor forced workers to accept wages comparable to those of workers at nonunion plants (Kandel and Parrado, 2005).

Other firms took a different route, with IBP leading the way. The company broke with the master wage contract that established industry-wide wages,<sup>3</sup> benefits, and working conditions in meat processing, thereby setting the pace for the future of the industry wage structure (Broadway, 2000; Broadway and Stull, 2006; Ufkes, 1995). In order to remain competitive, other firms followed suit by employing similar tactics including union-busting, plant closure, and rural relocation (Ufkes, 1995; Lamphere, Grenier, and Stepick., 1994).

Rural relocation offered several advantages including increased proximity to feedlots, which reduced transportation costs; inexpensive land for high-volume plants; and financial incentives from rural communities eager to enhance their economic livelihood (Stanley, 1992). But perhaps more importantly, plants relocating to rural communities could avoid the culture of unionization that had developed over the course of industrialization in urban areas (Bluestone and Harrison, 1982). In the early 1960s, high-volume packing plants began to open in rural Iowa, Kansas, and Nebraska to avoid unionized labor (Lamphere et al., 1994). Lacking a strong labor union presence, firms

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<sup>3</sup>As Broadway (2000, p. 38) explains, IBP “used the development of the disassembly line to lower its labour costs by avoiding the terms of the industry-wide master contract, arguing that less skill was required than in older plants.”

could take advantage of rural wage scales, which were significantly below those in urban areas.

Declining unionization coincided with changes in the workforce composition of packing plants. In contrast to the middle class lifestyle once guaranteed by work in the meat packing industry, production workers in 1992 were earning about one third less than the wages they had twenty years earlier (Ufkess, 1995; Ollinger et al., 2005).<sup>4</sup> In conjunction with adoption of rural wage scales, this wage decrease was also a consequence of the increased mechanization of the production process, which required less technical skill on the part of the worker. IBP's aforementioned refusal to pay a "master rate" to its production workers is illustrative. In 1969, as unionized workers in Dakota City, Nebraska fought for competitive wage, IBP maintained an unsympathetic posture. According to the company, the union was trying to force IBP "to pay skilled labor rates for a new system of meat processing, under which the company says the job is done more efficiently by less skilled workers (King, 1969)." Thus, the human capital required for labor force participation in the industry was reduced from decades prior.

### *Immigrant Labor*

Together, geographic relocation and deskilling of production have been conducive to an increase in the immigrant labor force in the Midwest. Meatpacking, which requires little training or English language proficiency, represents an attractive option to immigrants who enter the US for economic reasons (Dalla and Baugher, 2001). A report by the Economic Research Service indicates that immigrants comprise a large growing

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<sup>4</sup>Broadway and Stull (2006, p. 57) describe the change in this way: "In 1960 industry wages were 15 percent above the average manufacturing wage; by 2002 they were 25 percent below the average manufacturing wage."

share of the labor force at slaughter plants, with Southeast Asia, Mexico, and Central America constituting the major sending countries (MacDonald et al., 2000). Plants today rely heavily on immigrant labor (MacDonald et al., 2000). While this has historically been the case, the immediate post-war labor force was overwhelmingly white and native-born. The number of immigrant and refugee workers, native-born migrant workers, and the proportion of women workers have all increased since that time (Stanley, 1992). In relocation to rural communities, processing plants face a limited supply of native labor. Many large beef plants, which require in surplus of 1,000 employees in their operations, have located to towns with 20,000 or fewer residents making it difficult to satisfy plant employment needs using the local labor force alone (Stanley, 1992). In addition, jobs in meat processing are among the highest in rates of injury and therefore exhibit extremely high turnover. In their first year of operations, some plants reach turnover rates over 200 percent among line workers (Broadway, 2000). As a result, processing plants require a more extensive pool of laborers than simply the number necessary to fill the immediate workforce.

To ensure the availability of labor, plants have recruited immigrants and migrant workers both domestically and abroad. Some of the largest companies employ labor recruiters, who entice potential workers with commercials extolling the benefits—particularly monetary—of employment in the industry (Hedges and Hawkins, 1996). IBP, for one, has used Spanish-language radio ads in McAllen and Eagle Pass, Texas to reach prospective employees (Hedges and Hawkins, 1996). In addition, some processors use current employees to draw in additional workers, offering bonuses of \$150-200 for

recruiting employees who stay beyond a probationary period (Stanley, 1992; Broadway and Stull, 2006).

Many foreign-born workers entered initially as replacement labor during wage disputes between packers and unions (Stanley, 1992). An observer of the 1969 Dakota City strike between the Amalgamated Meat Cutters and Butcher Workmen and Iowa Beef noted that the processor sought immigrant labor early on (King, 1969). Even before the onset of the strike, IBP had begun to recruit workers from among the Mexican-American population of the Southwest. As the strike ensued, the company housed a number of the immigrant laborers in the plant's administration building while they awaited the completion of 50 new houses which IBP was building for them.

Beyond providing a steady supply of labor, employment of immigrants keeps industry wages down, particularly when such workers are undocumented. Though precise figures are difficult to obtain for employment data on illegal aliens, evidence suggests that a substantial share of the foreign-born workforce in the meat-processing industry is unauthorized (Hedges and Hawkins, 1996; Grey and Woodrick, 2002). In Iowa and Nebraska, for example, an estimated 25 percent of workers at meatpacking plants in the late 1990s were illegal aliens (US General Accounting Office, 1998).

In recruiting laborers for work in processing plants, packers have targeted some of the most mobile segments of the population: new immigrants and young adult single males (Broadway, 2000). Workers are recruited both domestically and abroad, from immigrant communities and those with high unemployment within the US in areas such as California and Texas (Dalla, Ellis, and Cramer, 2005). But Hispanic and Asian immigrants, particularly refugees from the Southeast, dominate the labor forces of

Midwest meatpacking plants (Broadway, 2000; MacDonald et al., 2000; Dalla et al., 2005).

### *Implications for Religious Adherence*

Numerous social scientists have documented the tendency for immigrants to bring the religion of their homeland to their destination communities (see, for example, Niebuhr, 1929; Herberg, 1955; Greeley, 1972). When a large enough number of immigrants from a community with a predominant faith tradition come to inhabit a receiving community, it follows that this religious tradition will assume an increasing presence in the religious landscape of that community.

While immigrant labor recruited for and attracted to packing plant employment is not limited to Hispanic immigrants, this immigrant group constitutes a substantial share of the meatpacking labor force and is predominantly Catholic. Evidence from the New Immigrant Survey Pilot (NIS-P) shows that Mexico is the top provider of Catholics to the United States (Jasso et al., 2002).<sup>5</sup> Similarly, the NIS-P shows that 77.8 percent of all Mexican immigrants are Catholic. A more recent estimate, which attempts to determine the proportion of Catholic Hispanics more generally, estimates that roughly 70 percent of all Hispanics, or slightly above, are Catholic (Perl, Greeley, and Gray, 2006). In conjunction with the high volume of Hispanic immigrants employed in meatpacking, these estimates suggest that meatpacking communities should witness an increase in the proportion of Catholic adherents coinciding with the increase in Hispanic laborers.

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<sup>5</sup>The New Immigrant Survey Pilot is a national random sample of new immigrants who had recently received a green card as of October 1996. The study was implemented to inform the execution and design of the New Immigrant Survey 2003 and was funded by the National Institute on Child Health and Human Development, the National Science Foundation, and the Immigration and Naturalization Service.

More formally, I offer the following two propositions and hypothesis in summarization of my argument.

Proposition 1: The meatpacking industry, which has largely relocated to the rural Midwest, has attracted a substantial number of Hispanic immigrant laborers.

Proposition 2: The Hispanic immigrants that come to fill these positions in the labor market are predominantly Catholic.

Hypothesis: Accordingly, restructuring in the meatpacking industry will increase the proportion of Catholic adherents in the religious landscape by attracting Hispanic immigrant labor.

However, it is not simply that Hispanic packing plant laborers alone constitute a large enough contingent to substantially alter the religious landscape. Rather, their initial presence, driven by a demand in the meatpacking industry, leads to the establishment of communities which facilitate and perpetuate successive waves of immigration in which friends and relatives join the initial immigrant in the packing community. In other words, change begun through the labor market is sustained through social networks.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Data and Methods

In order to test the above hypothesis, I utilize a case study approach. In doing so, I borrow from the new urban sociology, which underscores the importance of place and circumstance in the study of regional processes (Smith, 1995). While several counties throughout the Midwest have been subject to social change as a result of packing house relocation and immigrant labor recruitment, such changes have not occurred uniformly across all Midwestern counties. Rather, each of these counties has followed a different timeline. So too, the particular history of each county provides a unique context which may facilitate or hinder the proposed relationship between the composition of the packing plant labor force and the religious composition of the county. Because of these two considerations, using a case study methodology was deemed most appropriate for the present study question.

#### *County Selection*

Researchers have identified several Midwestern locations in which the meat processing industry has attracted a sizeable immigrant labor force (Broadway, 1990; Grey and Woodrick, 2002; Fink, 1998; Wood, 1988; Gouveia and Stull, 1997; Dalla et al., 2005). Using this body of literature, I selected four counties through which to further investigate my hypothesis based on the availability of information on the development

and evolution of the meat processing industry in that particular place.<sup>1</sup> Because local context, including the racial and ethnic heritage as well as the history of the meatpacking industry in a given area, are important factors in facilitating or inhibiting the hypothesized change, the availability of in-depth ethnographic data was a primary criterion for county selection.

The ethnic composition of the immigrant labor force attracted to a particular community was an additional consideration. Recruitment of immigrant labor has not been limited to the Hispanic population but has also targeted Asian immigrants, who likewise constitute a significant share of the meatpacking labor force in the Midwest (Dalla et al., 2005). For this reason, the counties selected for study are those which have witnessed an increase in the Hispanic/Latino population as a result of recruiting by packing houses due to rural relocation.<sup>2</sup> Finally, in order to ensure that the proposed change in the religious landscape has not been localized to a particular Midwestern state, counties were also chosen so as to represent multiple states. The counties included in the study are Dallas County, Iowa (Fink, 1998), Marshall County, Iowa (Grey and Woodrick, 2002), Finney County, Kansas (Stull, Broadway, and Erickson, 2002), and Madison County, Nebraska (Dalla et al., 2005).

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<sup>1</sup>Research on the effects of the meatpacking industry for a given community has generally been conducted at the city or town level rather than the county level of analysis. However, the present study is necessarily limited to county-level analysis due to the availability of data on religious adherence.

<sup>2</sup>The present study argues for a relationship between economic restructuring and an increase in the Catholic population as a result of Hispanic immigration. However, a corresponding argument could be made for an increase in particular Asian immigrant faiths resulting from Asian immigration. While I have limited the scope of this study to the Catholic share of the religious landscape, the proposed relationship between economic restructuring and the religious landscape more broadly is assumed to extend to other religious traditions as well.

### *Demographic Profiles*

Demographic information for each county was obtained from the U.S. Census Bureau and USA Counties™, which provides county-level census data from past censuses. The US Census provides county-level data including total population, Hispanic/Latino population, White non-Hispanic/Latino population, income, education, median age, poverty status, and rurality for the year 2000. USA Counties™, a compilation of data from various sources at the county level of geography, includes census data for these variables for the years 1980 and 1990.<sup>3</sup>

Demographic data for the Hispanic and White, non-Hispanic populations is further broken down by sex. Each population is disaggregated to reflect the specific number of males and females and the county sex ratio, calculated as the number of males per one hundred females. Past research indicates that Mexican immigration, which accounts for a substantial portion of overall Hispanic immigration to the United States, is dominated by males of labor-force age (Durand et al., 2001). Accordingly, counties which have witnessed an increase in Hispanic immigration due to the meat processing industry should be characterized by a greater ratio of Hispanic males to females.

### *Hispanic Population*

Because the format of the question probing Hispanic descent has been modified at each census, its use for gauging change in this population over time merits further attention. The 1970 decennial census was the first to collect data on the Hispanic population in the United States by asking a sample of the population to report their

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<sup>3</sup>For more information on USA Counties™ data, see <http://censtats.census.gov/>.

1970		
Is this person's origin or descent— ( <i>Fill one inside</i> )		
o Mexican	o Central or South American	
o Puerto Rican	o Other Spanish	
o Cuban	o No, none of these	
1980		
Is this person of Spanish/Hispanic origin or descent? <i>Fill one circle.</i>		
No (not Spanish/Hispanic)		
Yes, Mexican, Mexican Amer., Chicano		
Yes, Puerto Rican		
Yes, Cuban		
Yes, other Spanish/Hispanic		
1990		
Is this person of Spanish/Hispanic origin? Fill ONE circle for each person.		
o No (not Spanish/Hispanic)		
o Yes, Mexican, Mexican-Am., Chicano		
o Yes, Puerto Rican		
o Yes, Cuban		
o Yes, other Spanish/Hispanic		
(Print one group, for example: Argentinean, Colombian, Dominican, Nicaraguan, Salvadoran, Spaniard, and so on.) —		
If Yes, other Spanish/Hispanic, print one group.	→	
2000		
Is this person Spanish/Hispanic/Latino? <i>Mark x the “No” box if not Spanish/Hispanic/Latino</i>		
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>No</b> , not Spanish/Hispanic/Latino <input type="checkbox"/> Yes, Mexican, Mexican Am., Chicano <input type="checkbox"/> Yes, Puerto Rican <input type="checkbox"/> Yes, Cuban <input type="checkbox"/> Yes, other Spanish/Hispanic/Latino— <i>Print group</i> <div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 100%; height: 40px; margin-top: 5px;"></div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 100%; height: 40px; margin-top: 5px;"></div>		

Figure 1 *Change in Hispanic Origin Question, US Census 1970 to 2000*

“origin or descent.” The format of the question has been altered slightly for each census since that time. This evolution is shown in Figure 1, which reproduces the question and approximates its display for each census. The most dramatic change in format occurred between 1970 and 1980, and because of the modifications made, responses to the 1970 Hispanic origin question are not typically deemed comparable with those for later censuses. However, the 1980, 1990, and 2000 versions rely on the same core question and have been used to track changes in the Hispanic population over time (e.g. Kandel and Cromartie, 2004; Kandel and Parrado, 2005).

Alterations to the wording of the Hispanic origin question are intended to more accurately capture this population and have undoubtedly improved the Hispanic population counts at each time. Nevertheless, the increasing number of Hispanics in the Midwest should not simply be mistaken for improvement in measurement. Rather, the “browning of the Midwest” (Aponte and Siles, 1994), is a real consequence of new patterns of Hispanic settlement (Kandel and Comartie, 2004; Ravuri 2004).

### *Religious Adherence*

Data on religious adherence comes from *Churches and Church Membership in the United States* (1980, 1990) and *Religious Congregations & Membership in the United States* (2000), each published by the Glenmary Research Center and distributed by the Association of Religion Data Archives (Quinn et al., 1982; Bradley et al., 1982; Jones et al., 2002). Using this data, I calculate the percentage of religious adherents from any tradition out of the total county population. In addition, I calculate the share of Catholics in each county as the ratio of Catholics to all religious adherents. These figures will be

used to trace change in the religious landscape vis-à-vis Catholic adherence in the selected counties.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Results

#### *Dallas County, Iowa*

In her ethnographic study of wage labor in rural Iowa, anthropologist Deborah Fink (1998) chronicled her experience as a production worker in porkpacking in Perry, a small town in Dallas County. Fink explains that, while Perry has housed at least one packing plant since 1920,<sup>1</sup> the composition of its workforce has changed dramatically over time. Prior to World War II, racial and ethnic animosity limited the employment opportunities available to Perry's Black, Latino, and Catholic residents in the packing house. Even into the 1980s, only three Black men worked alongside six hundred white workers at the packing plant, then owned by Oscar Mayer (Fink, 1998).

Aside from the few Mexican immigrants that remained in Dallas County after working in railroad construction, the Hispanic population was nonexistent by the middle of the twentieth century. By the 1970 US Census, Dallas County had zero persons of "Spanish Origin." By 1980, this figure had only risen to 72. In 1989, the Perry packing plant changed hands from Oscar Mayer to IBP. While US Census records for the following year show that the number of Hispanic residents in Dallas County had more than doubled since 1980 reaching a total of 191, the Hispanic population was scarcely 0.6% of the county total population. Then, in August of 1990, IBP's first Latino recruits arrived from California. By the time of Fink's study just two years later, she estimates

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<sup>1</sup>The plant closed for 6 years between 1956 and 1962.

Table 1  
*Change in Catholic and Hispanic Populations with Selected Demographics, 1980-2000:  
Dallas County, Iowa*

Variable	1980	1990	2000
Total Population	29,513	29,755	40,750
White, Non-Hispanic	29,377	29,580	37,706
(%)	99.5	99.4	92.5
Males	14,258	14,405	18,518
Females	15,119	15,175	19,188
Sex Ratio	94	95	97
Hispanic	72	191	2,176
(%)	0.2	0.6	5.3
Males	36	135	1,280
Females	36	56	896
Sex Ratio	100	241	143
Per Capita Income (\$) <sup>a</sup>	9,631	9,728	9,252
Individuals with at Least High School Education (%) <sup>b</sup>	75.7	83.6	89.5
Individuals below Poverty Level (%) <sup>c</sup>	7.2	7.6	5.7
Median Age	31.3	34.6	35.1
Rural (%)	66.5	58.1	47.3
Total Religious Adherents	14,598	16,085	17,473
(%)	49.5	54.1	42.9
Total Catholic Adherents	2,857	4,161	5,172
Catholic Share of Total Adherents (%)	19.6	25.9	29.6

<sup>a</sup> Figures are given in 1979 dollars<sup>2</sup>

<sup>b</sup> Population 25 years and older

<sup>c</sup> Figures are for the year prior to that listed in the column heading

Note: Data from the U.S. Bureau of the Census (1980, 1990, 2000), *Churches and Church Membership in the United States* (1980, 1990), and *Religious Congregations and Membership in the United States* (2000).

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<sup>2</sup>In each table shown, per capita income is listed in 1979 dollars in order to provide a comparable metric across time points. Because the Census provides data on income for the year prior to the decennial census, 1979 is used as the baseline for income rather than 1980.

that the Hispanic share of the labor force in the Perry packing plant was approximately one third of all workers.

The changing composition of the labor force is reflected in the religious adherence of Dallas County. Table 1 shows that as the Hispanic population increased in Dallas County, the Catholic adherence rate likewise rose. More important than the absolute number of Catholic adherents in the county is the share of Catholics out of all religious adherents. From 1980 to 2000 the proportion of Catholics rose ten percent, from 19.6 to 29.6, paralleling the growing proportion of Hispanics. Even as the rate of overall religious adherence declined, the proportion of Catholics among all adherents grew.

#### *Marshall County, Iowa*

Eighty miles northeast of Dallas County is Marshall County, Iowa. In recent years, Marshall County's Marshalltown made headlines as a result of raids by federal immigration agents, which led to the deportation of many undocumented workers employed at the local Swift and Co. packing plant, the small town's biggest employer (Abraham, 2007; Inskeep, 2007).

Anthropologists Mark Grey and Anne Woodrick have pioneered a series of studies on meatpacking in Marshalltown based on ethnographic research conducted there (e.g. Grey, 2000; Woodrick and Grey, 2002; Grey and Woodrick, 2002). Grey and Woodrick (2002) describe an interdependent relationship between Marshalltown and Villachuato, a rural town in Mexico, which developed as a result of restructuring in the meatpacking industry and the resultant dependence on immigrant labor that it created.

Like much of the rural Midwest, Marshall County was struck by the “farm crisis” in the 1980s, resulting in a substantial out-migration of the white population as farmers lost their land to overexpansion and debt (Gouveia and Stull, 1997). Though the Swift & Co. packing plant had operated in the county for decades, the company did not begin to recruit immigrant labor until 1989. At that time, Swift began to bus young Latino men from Waterloo and Des Moines to work in the production lines of its Marshalltown plant. In other words, while there was general exodus of the Anglo farm population in Marshall County, the Hispanic population began to trickle in. Grey and Woodrick (2002) report that, while Swift’s Latino workforce was small in the early 1990s, by the beginning of 1997 there were almost equal numbers of Hispanic and non-Hispanic workers. By the end of 1998, Hispanics were a majority of the Swift labor force.

As shown in Table 2, county population totals for Marshall County indicate an overall decline between 1980 and 1990 coinciding with the timing of the “farm crisis.” Between 1990 and 2000, this trend reversed as the population increased once again. However, as evidenced by the Hispanic population totals for these years, this growth was essentially due entirely to Hispanic population increase.

At 18.8 percent of total adherents, the Catholic share of adherents in Marshall County was relatively low in 1980. But coinciding with the increase in the Hispanic population, the share of Catholics increased steadily over the following decades, rising by almost ten percent to 28.3 percent of all adherents in 2000. Here, as in Dallas County, this increase in the overall share of Catholic adherents occurred while overall adherence declined.

Table 2  
*Change in Catholic and Hispanic Populations with Selected Demographics, 1980-2000:  
 Marshall County, Iowa*

Variable	1980	1990	2000
Total Population	41,652	38,276	39,311
White, Non-Hispanic	40,837	37,477	34,672
(%)	98.0	97.9	88.2
Males	19,919	18,305	17,003
Females	20,918	19,172	17,669
Sex Ratio	95	95	96
Hispanic	276	313	3,481
(%)	0.7	0.8	8.9
Males	103	117	1,845
Females	173	196	1,636
Sex Ratio	60	60	113
Per Capita Income (\$) <sup>a</sup>	4,415	5,655	7,723
Individuals with at Least High School Education (%) <sup>b</sup>	74.7	81.8	82.3
Individuals below Poverty Level (%) <sup>c</sup>	7.7	8.3	9.9
Median Age	31.4	36.7	38.6
Rural (%)	35.3	34.2	33.6
Total Religious Adherents	24,378	22,062	22,372
(%)	58.5	57.6	56.9
Total Catholic Adherents	4,580	5,398	6,337
Catholic Share of Total Adherents (%)	18.8	24.5	28.3

<sup>a</sup> Figures are given in dollars for the year prior to that listed in the column heading

<sup>b</sup> Population 25 years and older

<sup>c</sup> Figures are for the year prior to that listed in the column heading

Note: Data from the U.S. Bureau of the Census (1980, 1990, 2000), *Churches and Church Membership in the United States* (1980, 1990), and *Religious Congregations and Membership in the United States* (2000).

*Finney County, Nebraska*

Garden City is the county seat of Finney County, Nebraska which has been the subject of several studies regarding meatpacking and immigration (e.g. Stull and Broadway, 1995; Stull and Broadway, 2001; Broadway, 1990). According to researchers Donald Stull, Michael Broadway, and Ken Erickson (1992), who have conducted extensive research in Garden City, in 1980, the town fit the heartland stereotype. Garden City's population was 82 percent white, with the largest majority belonging to the Hispanic population, essentially a remnant those Hispanics who had come to the area for work on the railroad and in the sugar-beet fields in the early 1900s.

That year, IBP opened the world's largest beef-packing plant in Holcomb, a town just outside of Garden city. The plant became fully operational in 1982, but like many packing plants that relocated to rural areas, IBP's Holcomb facility did not have an adequate local labor force to sustain itself. To address this issue, the company launched an extensive campaign to recruit workers which included running newspaper and TV ads in nearby packing towns and sending recruiters to areas of high unemployment. Simultaneously, in 1983, Val-Agri purchased an idle processing plant in Garden City, modernized it, and doubled its capacity (Stull et al., 1992).

The timing of these plant openings coincided with a recession in the economy, which enhanced the appeal of packing work to individuals in nearby communities, particularly those laid off from similar jobs (Stull et al., 1992; Broadway and Stull, 2006). Shrinking federal assistance to refugees likewise encouraged those in nearby Wichita to seek work in the Finney County plants (Stull et al., 1992). These two circumstances constitute "push" and "pull" factors, both driving nearby immigrants from areas with

Table 3  
*Change in Catholic and Hispanic Populations with Selected Demographics, 1980-2000:  
 Finney County, Nebraska*

Variable	1980	1990	2000
Total Population	23,825	33,070	40,523
White, Non-Hispanic	19,980	26,403	20,935
(%)	83.9	79.8	51.7
Males	9,819	13,003	10,137
Females	10,161	13,400	10,798
Sex Ratio	97	97	94
Hispanic	3,464	8,336	17,553
(%)	14.5	25.2	43.3
Males	1,799	4,585	9,245
Females	1,665	3,751	8,308
Sex Ratio	108	122	111
Per Capita Income (\$) <sup>a</sup>	9,295	8,722	6,193
Individuals with at Least High School Education (%) <sup>b</sup>	71.2	70.9	67.4
Individuals below Poverty Level (%) <sup>c</sup>	9.3	10.5	14.2
Median Age	26.2	27.2	28.1
Rural (%)	23.4	27.1	19.1
Total Religious Adherents	14,560	16,800	21,162
(%)	61.1	50.8	52.2
Total Catholic Adherents	5,600	6,546	10,001
Catholic Share of Total Adherents (%)	38.5	39.0	47.3

<sup>a</sup> Figures are given in dollars for the year prior to that listed in the column heading

<sup>b</sup> Population 25 years and older

<sup>c</sup> Figures are for the year prior to that listed in the column heading

Note: Data from the U.S. Bureau of the Census (1980, 1990, 2000), *Churches and Church Membership in the United States* (1980, 1990), and *Religious Congregations and Membership in the United States* (2000).

poor employment prospects and attracting them to Finney County (Stull et al., 1992; Broadway and Stull, 2006). By 1985, the county's two plants were collectively employing approximately 4,000 workers (Broadway and Stull, 2006).

Table 3 indicates that Finney County's 1980 Hispanic population is much larger than either Marshall or Dallas County in Iowa. This is more than likely the reason that Finney County's Catholic population is already high—38.5 percent of all adherents—relative to other counties in this study in at that time. Despite this relatively high starting point, Finney County, too, demonstrates a consistent pattern of Catholic growth from 1980 to 2000, with the Catholic share of total adherents rising to 47.3 percent of the total population.

Notably, a larger increase in the share of Catholic adherents might be expected given the change in the number of Hispanics in the county between 1990 and 2000. However, there are at least three reasons that the Catholic increase would not be greater. First, not all immigrants are religious, regardless of whether or not they come from a heavily Catholic culture. Second, as suggested above, recent research indicates that only approximately 70 percent of Hispanics can be identified as Catholic. Using this marker, of the roughly 4,900 increase in Hispanic persons between 1980 and 1990, 3,430 individuals are presumed to be Catholic. Likewise, of the 9,200 Hispanic person increase between 1990 and 2000, 6,400 should be Catholic. Yet, the increase in Catholic persons does match these estimates.

I propose that this discrepancy between the Catholic increase and Hispanic increase is the result of the Hispanic immigrant sex ratio. As is true of the other meatpacking communities, immigration to Finney County has been led by young males.

Table 3 shows that Hispanic males outnumber females at each year under investigation. Given that there is a precedent for both men and younger individuals to be less religious, it is likely that the potential increase in Catholic adherence is being offset by this traditionally less religious demographic. This pattern is generalizable to each of the four counties in this study.

#### *Madison County, Nebraska*

Meatpacking has contributed significantly to the Madison County economy since BeefAmerica opened its Norfolk plant there in 1964. County Business Patterns records (1971; 1980; 1990; 1997) indicate that the county has contained at least three meat processing plants since the early 1970s. While the total number of establishments has fluctuated between three and four plants, the total number of employees among all establishments has increased over time. Records for 1980 indicate four establishments in the county employing between 250 and 499 individuals. Though the total number of establishments had decreased to three again by 1990, the plants were collectively employing 500-999 workers. By 1997, the employment for the three packing plants was 1,000-2,499.

Rochelle Dalla et al. (2005) have studied Madison County communities containing two of these plants: Madison (city) and Norfolk. In the City of Madison, Armour Foods opened a pork processing plant in 1973. Like the early plant in Perry, Iowa, the Armour plant employed a mostly white workforce and paid its employees well (\$12-\$14/hour) (personal communication, February 29, 2008). Though a strike would later lead Armour to close the plant, it was re-opened under IBP in 1984. Shortly thereafter, IBP began to recruit workers from California and along the Texas-Mexico

Table 4  
*Change in Catholic and Hispanic Populations with Selected Demographics, 1980-2000:  
 Madison County, Nebraska*

Variable	1980	1990	2000
Total Population	31,382	32,655	35,226
White, Non-Hispanic	31,032	31,751	31,190
(%)	98.9	97.2	88.5
Males	14,919	15,467	15,283
Females	16,113	16,284	15,907
Sex Ratio	93	95	96
Hispanic	140	488	3,027
(%)	0.3	1.5	8.6
Males	38	311	1,733
Females	102	177	1,294
Sex Ratio	37	176	134
Per Capita Income (\$) <sup>a</sup>	8,431	8,682	6,768
Individuals with at Least High School Education (%) <sup>b</sup>	68.9	78.3	82.6
Individuals below Poverty Level (%) <sup>c</sup>	9.2	9.8	10.8
Median Age	29.5	32.2	35.0
Rural (%)	38.0	34.2	30.3
Total Religious Adherents	26,088	28,224	28,430
(%)	83.1	86.4	80.7
Total Catholic Adherents	7,017	8,618	9,399
Catholic Share of Total Adherents (%)	26.9	30.5	33.1

<sup>a</sup> Figures are given in dollars for the year prior to that listed in the column heading

<sup>b</sup> Population 25 years and older

<sup>c</sup> Figures are for the year prior to that listed in the column heading

Note: Data from the U.S. Bureau of the Census (1980, 1990, 2000), *Churches and Church Membership in the United States* (1980, 1990), and *Religious Congregations and Membership in the United States* (2000).

border to meet the labor requirements of the plant. As a result, the composition of the town's population began to shift as white workers accustomed to receiving higher wages for work at the plant left, while the Hispanic population continued to increase. A recent account indicates that the town, whose population is roughly 2,400 people, is 60 percent Hispanic (personal communication, February 29, 2008).

The Norfolk plant, previously operated by BeefAmerica, shut down in 1998 but was purchased in the same year by IBP (Dalla et al., 2005). After renovations in surplus of \$30 million to expand its capacity, the plant was re-opened in 2000 (Ruff, 2006). Immigrant labor recruitment, however, had begun even before this acquisition. Laborers at the BeefAmerica plant report having been attracted to the job in response to recruitment tactics including offers to pay for initial transportation to the town (Dalla et al., 2005).

While the Hispanic population increased modestly from 1980 to 1990, Table 4 shows a greater increase from 1990 to 2000, perhaps corresponding to more aggressive recruiting practices on the part of the packing company. That a greater increase in the Hispanic population is not evident between 1980 and 1990 when recruitment of immigrant labor is known to have occurred suggests that the census is not capturing the total Hispanic population in Madison County at that time. This may a consequence of the undocumented status of much of this population.

Nevertheless, consistent with the pattern described in the preceding three counties, a parallel between the increasing Hispanic population and share of Catholic adherents is evident from 1980 to 2000. Though the rise in the Catholic share is slightly less than was witnessed within the other packing communities, the increase over time is

still substantive. In fact, when the change in Catholic adherents and Hispanic persons is compared across 1980 to 2000, the increase in Catholic adherents corresponds to 82.5 percent of the Hispanic increase. Following Perl et al.'s (2006) estimate for the proportion of Hispanics who are Catholic, this suggests a relationship between the change in Hispanic and Catholic populations.

#### *State-Level Comparisons*

While each county has demonstrated a relationship between changes in the meat processing industry and local Catholic adherence, these patterns do not preclude the possibility that the county-level trends shown are little more than a microcosm of a regional or state-level phenomenon unrelated to the labor market. A comparison of county and state-level data for race/ethnicity and religious adherence informs this question. Table 5 shows that, consistent with previous research, the Midwestern Hispanic population increased significantly between 1980 and 2000 (Aponte and Siles, 1994; Kandel and Parrado, 2005; Kandel and Cromartie, 2004). Indeed, the Hispanic male to female sex ratio in each state suggests that Hispanic immigration to the Midwest has been driven by Hispanic male immigrants in search of employment (Durand et al., 2001). Likewise, Catholic adherence as a proportion of overall adherence increases modestly in each state from 1980 to 2000.

While less dramatic than the county-level patterns, these statewide patterns are also suggestive of a relationship between the labor market and the religious landscape of the region. As a consequence of scale and aggregation, state-level figures smooth over county-level variation in the Hispanic population, as counties with relatively few Hispanics effectively offset those with larger Hispanic populations. Nevertheless, the

Table 5  
*State-Level Comparisons of Racial/Ethnic and Catholic Composition*

Variable	1980	1990	2000
<i>Iowa</i>			
White, Non-Hispanic (%)	96.9	96.1	92.7
Sex Ratio	94	94	95
Hispanic (%)	0.9	1.1	2.8
Sex Ratio	98	107	119
Adherents of Total Population (%)	60.8	60.5	58.5
Catholic Share of Total Adherents (%)	30.5	31.0	32.6
<i>Kansas</i>			
White, Non-Hispanic (%)	90.5	88.5	83.1
Sex Ratio	95	95	96
Hispanic (%)	2.7	3.6	6.9
Sex Ratio	109	112	116
Adherents of Total Population (%)	52.3	54.7	49.4
Catholic Share of Total Adherents (%)	27.2	30.0	30.6
<i>Nebraska</i>			
White, Non-Hispanic (%)	94.1	92.6	87.4
Sex Ratio	95	95	96
Hispanic (%)	1.8	2.2	5.5
Sex Ratio	104	105	119
Adherents of Total Population (%)	62.7	63.8	58.8
Catholic Share of Total Adherents (%)	33.8	37.0	37.0

*Note:* Data from the U.S. Bureau of the Census (1980, 1990, 2000), *Churches and Church Membership in the United States* (1980, 1990), and *Religious Congregations and Membership in the United States* (2000).

magnitude of the overall increase survives at the state level, though provides more tentative support for the relationship between the labor market and religious adherence. At the county-level of analysis, however, this relationship is more explicit because of the detail provided on the local context in which both the Hispanic and Catholic increase have occurred.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Conclusion

The four Midwestern counties detailed here have consistently suggested a relationship between the labor market and the religious landscape. Prior to the establishment or expansion of a meatpacking plant, these communities generally contained scant Hispanic populations. However, in order to sustain the local plant's labor force given the industry's characteristically high rate of turnover, Hispanic immigrants were recruited for work in the production lines, thus increasing the Hispanic population in each county. Paralleling the increase in the Hispanic population, the Catholic share of total religious adherence rose between 6 and 10 percent in each county in this study.

While the increasing share of Catholic adherents coincides with the increasing Hispanic population, these rates are not always commensurate with one another. This incongruity is likely a consequence of an immigrant group that is dominated by young males (Durand et al., 2001). Previous research indicates that demographic and life-course variables influence religious adherence. In the context of the immigration process described, two of these variables are of particular relevance to explaining the discrepancy between the Catholic and Hispanic populations: gender and marital status. Gender consistently exerts an influence on religiosity, with women exhibiting higher levels of religiosity relative to men on a variety of measures including church attendance and religious adherence (Miller and Stark, 2002; Ploch and Hastings, 1994). Family and life-course factors including marital status and whether an individual has children have

likewise been found to predict measures of religiosity. Church attendance, for example increases after marriage and peaks when couples have school-age children (Bahr, 1970).

The Hispanic male to female sex ratios shown above support the observation that Hispanic immigration has principally been a movement of males of labor force age (Durand and Massey, 1999; Durand et al., 2001; Cerutti and Massey, 2001). Regardless of whether this group of males is married, their tendency to initiate migration independent of their wives and children suggests that these family and life-course variables will not be present to encourage religious behaviors because such individuals are not living as married (Suarez-Orozco et al., 2005; Massey, Fischer, and Capoferro, 2006; Cerrutti and Massey, 2001). These sex ratios likewise lend support to the proposition that overall religious adherence is likely to be lower in predominantly male populations (Finke and Starke, 2005). Unfortunately, this conclusion remains somewhat speculative, given that it is impossible to determine the number of unauthorized Hispanic immigrants not captured by the census enumeration. Measurement error is particularly likely to affect the figures for Hispanic males, who constitute a majority of the undocumented workers.

This study was intended as a preliminary examination of the relationship between the labor market and religious adherence. In order to make this study more manageable, I have focused exclusively on the particular effects of economic restructuring on the religious landscape through a study of the meatpacking industry in the rural Midwest. Though the current study was limited to the presence of Catholicism in the religious landscape, other religious traditions could likewise be examined. For instance, in Storm Lake, another packing community in Iowa, a large share of the meatpacking plant labor

force consists of Southeast Asian immigrants and refugees. The increasing presence of this ethnic group should likewise result in alterations to the religious landscape, presumably increasing the share of “Other” religious adherents.<sup>1</sup>

Future research would be useful in better discerning the particularities of the labor market-religion relationship. For instance, do Asian immigrants, such as those in Storm Lake, who practice non-Judeo-Christian faiths assimilate into the religious landscape with the same facility as those who bring with them a Judeo-Christian tradition? How does the ethnic composition of the receiving community inhibit or facilitate these changes? Or, when the labor market attracts immigrants from cultures of different religious traditions, how do these immigrant groups interact with each other and the existing traditions in reshaping the religious landscape?

In addition, further research would also be helpful to understanding the role of gender in the process described. The current study suggests that the male to female immigrant sex ratio affects the extent to which the sending religious culture will change the receiving one. However, another possibility that may inhibit immigrant religion from realizing a fuller impact is suggested by the theory of social disorganization. Social disorganization contends that social heterogeneity in a community interferes with the health and well-being of that community because members do not share a common set of values and behavioral norms (Bellair, 1997). Meatpacking plants that emerge in rural communities, rapidly drawing a population of “outsiders” from dissimilar cultural backgrounds, increase local factionalism and thus undermine social cohesion. To the extent that a packing community resembles a “boom town” by appealing to a transient

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<sup>1</sup>“Other,” here, refers to one of seven religious traditions delineated by Steensland et al. (2000), and includes non-Christian and Eastern religious faiths.

population of workers driven by economic incentives, overall religious adherence is likely to suffer. In fact, results from the present study offer some support for this possibility in that the total proportion of religious adherents declined in each county examined as the ethnic heterogeneity increased. That the share of Catholic adherents increased in this context lends support to this proposition in that the Catholic increase is assumed to occur only within the Hispanic population, in other words fostering social cohesion within a homogenous group. Greater support for this hypothesis awaits future research and presents another fruitful avenue for future study.

This study makes an important initial contribution toward understanding the relationship between the labor market and religious adherence. In the present example, the labor market increased not simply the absolute number of Catholics, but the overall Catholic share of the religious market. This increase necessarily indicates that one or more other religious traditions have lost religious market share over the period examined. In the context of these four counties, changing conditions in the labor market led to an exodus of the non-Hispanic White population. A review of the religious adherence rates in these counties over time suggests that this white out-migration had the greatest impact on Mainline Protestants, whose share of the religious landscape declined over time in each place (Quinn et al., 1982; Bradley et al., 1982; Jones et al., 2002).

The degree of this loss is likely to be more severe in counties that also experience an increase in Asian immigrants attracted to employment in meatpacking plants. Estimates for religious adherence to the faith traditions of this immigrant group are more difficult to obtain. For example, while the Religious Congregations and Membership Study indicates the presence of a Buddhist organization in Finney County by 2000, the

dataset does not provide information on the number of Buddhist adherents (Jones et al., 2002). More generally, few Eastern faith traditions are represented in the dataset at all. Because of this, the specific impact of the presence of this immigrant group on the local religious landscape is unknown. Nevertheless, extending the assumption that immigrants bring the religion of their sending culture to that of their destination, it is reasonable to expect that this immigrant group will likewise alter the religious landscape. Because Asian immigrant faiths are not typically of the Judeo-Christian tradition, this change is likely to be in the form of increased religious diversity.

From this perspective, the findings in this study comment on the debate over the relationship between religious pluralism and commitment. While one side of the debate contends that pluralism increases religious commitment as a result of greater competition for members among religious firms (Finke and Stark, 1988), another faction argues that increased diversity of faiths “undermines the social networks that reinforce the plausibility of belief” (Olson, 1999, p. 149). In the context of immigration to the rural Midwest, increasing religious diversity is inextricably linked to increasing ethnic diversity, a factor shown to decrease participation in religious groups (Alesina and La Ferrara, 2000). This is, perhaps, part of the explanation surrounding the decline in total religious adherence in the counties examined here, where increased diversity does not seem to inspire greater commitment among the general population. The degree of religious commitment in this setting seems to be related more to the principle of social homophily than to religious competition.

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