Latino immigrants and the renegotiation of place and belonging in small town America

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This article compares the politics of place and belonging within two non-metropolitan communities—Woodburn, Oregon, and Leadville, Colorado—that have witnessed a significant increase in Latino immigration during the last fifteen to twenty years. Today both communities are approximately 50 per cent Latino, a demographic change that has reworked understandings of place identity and social belonging in each. Through a comparison of the two towns we seek to chart the unique regional political economic dynamics driving these changes, examine their spatial imprint, and interrogate how local context shapes the extent to which new arrivals are able to make effective claims to a sense of place and belonging despite hierarchies of race, class and ‘illegality.’ Assessing the differences between these two immigrant destinations provides insights into how sociospatial relations are crucial to analyzing immigrant–receiving society interaction, and contributes to scholarship on the uneven geography of immigrant incorporation in the contemporary USA.

Key words: Latino immigration, place, race, belonging, rural USA.

Introduction

Today’s immigrants have a much different attitude than immigrants who settled here one hundred years ago. This newer, post-modern wave of immigrants isn’t assimilating into our culture because, unlike their predecessors, they have adopted a kind of parasitic approach to the United States. They aren’t interested in becoming citizens; they simply want to attach themselves to their American host and feed off of it while maintaining their native identities and cultures. In doing so, they lack any sense of American community. (Colorado Congressman Tom Tancredo 2006: 203)

The presence of millions of undocumented workers in the USA has recently re-emerged as the subject of contentious national debate. In Spring 2006, millions of immigrants and supporters across the country protested federal legislation proposing to further criminalize ‘illegal aliens’ and anyone assisting them (Gumbel 2006). Protestors highlighted contributions of immigrant workers and articulated a counter-narrative to the ‘parasitic’ discourse of Representative Tancredo. His book, while representing an extreme form of anti-immigrant rhetoric, invokes mainstream understandings of the issue: immigrants, by maintaining their language and cultural
identity, ‘lack any sense of American community’ and are not ‘assimilating.’ Formal political responses to this debate coalesced into two competing paradigms. Policymakers such as Tancredo advocate building a 700-mile wall along the US–Mexico border and deporting millions of undocumented workers, while others call for stricter employer controls and a ‘path to citizenship.’ Undocumented workers’ centrality to key sectors of the US economy is difficult to deny, even if one believes that they ‘take jobs,’ drain public services, and thus negatively impact society. Instead, the core debate raises social and political questions: even if millions of employers hire these workers, do they ‘belong?’ What is the ‘place’ of low-wage immigrant workers in US society?

This article examines the day-to-day negotiation of place and belonging between immigrant and non-immigrant residents in Woodburn, Oregon, and Leadville, Colorado. Both communities have witnessed significant increases in Mexican immigrant settlement during the last fifteen to twenty years. Today both are approximately 50 per cent Latino, a demographic change that has reworked understandings of community and social identity in each. Through a comparison of the towns we seek not only to chart the particular regional political economic dynamics driving these changes, but the sociospatial relations of daily life that shape immigrant–non-immigrant resident interaction and, potentially, create sites for mutual recognition and place-making. Among the key questions we address: in what ways do sociospatial patterns, relationships, and struggles facilitate or inhibit interaction between immigrant and non-immigrant residents? How do such interactions and mutual perceptions shape local enactments of place and belonging, and how are these dynamics crosscut by class, race, and ‘illegality’?

Our analysis draws on two different research projects conducted by the co-authors in Woodburn (Nelson) and Leadville (Hiemstra). From the mid-1980s on, immigrants arriving in Woodburn and Leadville were in roughly similar structural situations: they were low-wage, marginalized workers, culturally and linguistically distinct from most long-time residents, situated subordinately within racial hierarchies, and the vast majority were undocumented. These structural circumstances placed immigrants at an extreme disadvantage for enacting a sense of social membership and belonging. Yet the experiences of Mexican immigrants in each community are quite different. Our research indicates that Leadville’s immigrants confront entrenched social and spatial barriers to inclusion, whereas Woodburn’s immigrants have been able to forge important social and political spaces, expanding their sense of belonging and connection to place. Exploring these divergent outcomes provides insights into how sociospatial relations are crucial to analyzing immigrant–destination society interaction, and contributes to scholarship on the uneven geography of immigrant incorporation in the contemporary USA.

Because questions of immigrant ‘incorporation,’ broadly speaking, have been framed by debates on assimilation, multiculturalism, and transnationalism, the following section reviews these debates and proposes using the concepts of ‘place’ and ‘belonging’ as entry points for examining these issues. We then turn to our analyses of sociospatial relations between immigrant and non-immigrant residents in Leadville and Woodburn. The article concludes with a discussion of how these spatial imprints shape place and belonging in each community, and the implications for studies of migration in geography and beyond.
Theorizing immigrant ‘incorporation’

For over a century, most scholars have approached international migration, and interactions between immigrants and host societies, through three perspectives: assimilation, multiculturalism, or transnationalism. Geographers studying migration have engaged all three, from those seeking to find spatial, economic, and social measures of assimilation and ‘non-assimilation’ (Allen and Turner 1996; Frey and Liaw 1999; Hiebert and Ley 2003) to those who explore enactment of transnational communities (Cravey 2003; Staeheli and Nagel 2006; Walton-Roberts 2004).

Classic assimilation theory, one of the most enduring paradigms in migration scholarship, examines processes through which immigrants relinquish distinct cultures and identities in order to assimilate into ‘mainstream’ culture (Gordon 1964; Nee 2003). Assimilation has been critiqued for its treatment of immigrants as inherently ‘other’ and use of white, middle-class culture as the implicit norm to which new arrivals ‘must’ acculturate (see Bottomley 1992; Massey and Denton 1993). Unsurprisingly, scholars who continue to engage the concept seek to distance themselves from teleological notions of absorption and loss of difference by framing it as partial, contested, and segmented (Portes and Zhou 1993; McHugh, Miyares and Skop 1997). Despite these adjustments, many scholars reject the term assimilation due to its conceptual history, one predicated on the idea that immigrants must conform to dominant culture by giving up key markers of difference, from language to household structure (Basch, Glick-Schiller and Blanc 1994; Hein 1995).

Partially due to these critiques, some migration scholars turned in the 1980s to pluralist traditions (see Kallen 1915) as well as post-civil rights formulations of multiculturalism to create a new framework for exploring questions of immigrant–host interaction and adaptation (Gans 1997; Gleason 1992). In contrast to assimilation, this body of work explores interactions between and mutual transformations of immigrant and host cultures. Although multicultural perspectives seek to value cultural difference, and avoid the problematic assumptions of assimilation, multiculturalism has been faulted for a tendency to treat culture(s) as fixed and downplay relations of power within and between cultures (see Marden and Mercer 1998).

Finally, over the last fifteen years a growing number of scholars have turned to the concept of transnationalism to question the assumption that immigrants will (necessarily) shed previous identities and political or cultural affiliations. In the context of globalization, with its attendant revolution in communication and transportation, ‘transmigrants’ maintain active social networks and conduct important life activities across national boundaries, creating translocal spaces of community, affiliation, and political action (Glick-Schiller, Basch and Blanc-Szanton 1992; Rouse 1995). From this perspective, it is problematic to analyze immigrant incorporation using classic categories based on spatially bounded understandings of home, culture, or political affiliation. A number of geographers studying migration have turned to transnational approaches to link multi-scaled political economic processes driving mobility with changing politics of citizenship and identity in sending and receiving communities (Ehrkamp 2006; Silvey 2004; Winders 2005).
Drawing on this literature, we use ‘place’ and ‘belonging’ as conceptual entry points for exploring the renegotiation of community, local affiliation and social inclusion (inclusion not predicated on erasure of differences) in the wake of transnational migration. Although place as a site of meaning and subjectivity has been central to geographic thought since the work of humanists in the 1970s (Tuan 1976), we situate our discussion more squarely within theorizations of place and identity that emerged later in Doreen Massey’s work (1994). Massey sees place as a site of meaning and subjectivity, but one not bounded or counterposed to abstracted space. Place is an arena ‘where people (of all ages) learn to negotiate with others’ and it is internally complex due to its ‘relations with elsewhere’ (Massey 2002: 294). From this perspective, the construction of place is crosscut by relations of power, highly contested and open-ended, even as ‘place-making’ links social identities and communities to a portion of geographic space.

The concept of belonging is intimately tied to place, as any understanding of community and affinity with specific landscapes—place-making—simultaneously constructs a sense of socially recognized membership (Trudeau 2006). Belonging captures ‘the desire for some sort of attachment, be it to other people, places, or modes of being, and ways in which individuals and groups are caught within wanting to belong, wanting to become’ (Probyn 1996: 19). Migration scholars have turned to the notion of belonging because it helps excavate exclusions often embedded within ‘place.’ Structures of race, class and (in our research) ‘illegality’ shape whether migrants are seen (and see themselves) as belonging to a particular place and community. It is this aspect of belonging that informs our analysis of immigrants in Woodburn and Leadville.3

Yet how can scholars assess the changing nature of belonging and place within immigrant-receiving communities? We draw inspiration from Ehrkamp and Leitner (2006: 1595), who write ‘there is a need to make the sociospatial relations and struggles between migrants and the receiving society integral to a conceptual analysis of migrant transnationalism, immigrant incorporation, and citizenship.’ Their work suggests that theorizing sociospatial relationships, including potential struggles over space, elucidates the (re)negotiation of place and belonging within immigrant-receiving communities. Sociospatial relations in this context encompass the material, and meaning-laden, geographies of everyday life, including public and private spaces of residence, work, consumption, recreation/celebration, education, politics, and religion (for examples see Cravey 2003; Stodolska and Santos 2006). And, while such sociospatial relations are enacted and experienced locally, they are not bounded by the local but embody relationships reproduced across multiple scales. The following case studies chart the unique histories of Woodburn and Leadville, as well as shifting sociospatial relations between immigrants and non-immigrants in each community.

**Leadville, Colorado**

Mexican immigrants began to arrive in Leadville as another chapter in the town’s history, the mining era, closed. At over 10,000 feet altitude, Leadville sits in a Rocky Mountain valley once rich in easily extractable minerals (see Figure 1). In the late nineteenth century thousands of prospectors—among them Central and Eastern European immigrants—were drawn to the area’s numerous mines (Larsh and Nichols 1993). By the
mid-twentieth century, however, most Lake County residents worked for one massive operation, Climax Molybdenum Company (Goldberg 1975). Climax Mine’s 1982 closing, due to increased global competition, profoundly impacted Leadville. Within two years, the population of 13,500 halved, the county’s commercial tax base evaporated, and property values plummeted (Voynick 2003).

While Lake County was bottoming out in the 1980s, a new-found resource—the recreation industry—was expanding in neighboring Eagle and Summit Counties (see Figure 2). The boom of ski and vacation resorts, including Vail, Breckenridge and Keystone, quickly transformed Lake County’s social geography. First, rapid expansion of vacation homes, hotels, restaurants and retail centers provided Leadville’s remaining residents with needed employment. Second, and perhaps less anticipated, was the fact that the expansion led (by the mid-1980s) to permanent settlement of a growing number of low-wage immigrant workers, primarily from Mexico (Coleman 2004; Rothman 1998). Ski resort employers had begun to look to immigrants, documented and undocumented, to fill jobs in construction, food service, housekeeping, and childcare.

Over the next twenty years, Leadville was transformed from a white majority mining town to a bedroom community for the resort industry, one split evenly between whites and Latinos. Essentially, rising housing costs and property values in resort counties resulted in acute housing shortages for low-wage workers near their places of employment (Ring 1995). Lake County’s lower cost of living made it a much cheaper option; thus, as resort county industries hired more immigrant workers, Leadville’s resident immigrant population rose (Coleman 2004). The 2000 Census reported Lake’s Latino population as 36 per cent of the county’s 7,812 residents (US Census Bureau 2000). However, a 2002 local census, undertaken by the sheriff’s department, estimated total county population to be closer to 10,000, and categorized 50 per cent as Latino.

Based largely on interviews and participant observation conducted in 2004, the Leadville project evaluated sociospatial relations and interactions between immigrant and non-immigrant residents in Lake County. Specifically, residential segregation and use of public spaces were examined as entry points for understanding the negotiation of place and belonging in the wake of this profound demographic transition. Research found that incorporation of Mexican immigrants into the regional political economy of the mountain resort industry has not translated to social inclusion, a finding that mirrors processes occurring in other new immigrant destinations across the USA (Cravey 2003; Smith 2006; Zúñiga and Hernández-León 2004). Altha Cravey’s research finds ‘the literal spaces of transnational social reproduction for Latinos and Latinas in central North Carolina...”

Figure 1 Downtown Leadville, Colorado.
constitute a parallel universe, a world that is largely invisible to long-term residents’ (2003: 604). A ‘parallel world’ has also been created in Leadville. There are certainly signs of the growing Latino population, particularly in the built environment. Three stores sell goods imported from Mexico, there is a Latino-owned hair salon, and an all-Spanish Evangelical church occupies a main street historical building. Yet patrons are almost exclusively Mexican immigrants, and two of the stores are located on the town’s fringes. Interactions between immigrant and non-immigrant residents can generally be characterized by paucity of substantive contact—the time-space geographies of each group rarely intersect.

Before exploring contemporary sociospatial relations between immigrants and non-immigrant residents in Leadville, it is important to note that Mexican Americans, overwhelmingly US-born, comprised a significant portion of the population during much of the twentieth century. Local historians reported
that the first ‘Hispanics’ settled in Lake County in 1917, corresponding to Climax Mine’s opening (Voynick, Ring and Clifford 2002). Nostrand (1992) notes that a contingent of ‘Hispanos’ from northern New Mexico moved to Lake County in the 1950s. By 1980, 24 per cent of Leadville’s residents self-identified as Hispanic on the US Census (US Census Bureau 1980).

Interviews with longtime Mexican American and white residents of Leadville suggest that the presence of ‘Hispanics’ in the 1960s and 1970s (and their interaction with the white majority) was notably different than the situation of Mexican-born immigrants today. There are some similarities: Mexican American residents of the 1960s and 1970s confronted racialized barriers to a sense of equality with whites. Greg, a Mexican American who grew up in town, framed the history of Mexican American–white interaction in this way (using ‘Mexican’ to refer to Mexicans and Mexican Americans): ‘Leadville has always been a prejudiced town—people look down on Mexicans. Up to fifteen years ago, a Mexican couldn’t be in the Elks.’ When I was in high school, Mexicans could never date white people.’ Grace, a white woman living in Leadville since the 1970s, recalled that when a Mexican American male student was elected prom king, and a white student elected queen, they could not hold hands when pictures were taken for the newspaper.

Yet based on these and other conversations with longtime residents of different ethnicities, it appears that race was not as deeply correlated to class as it is today, and it did not connect to any notion of someone being ‘illegal.’ Hispanic residents had many of the same opportunities for class mobility as did whites—they joined the union along with other Climax employees, and earned similar salaries and benefits. As importantly, these residents were generally US-born, and so did not face the barriers of language or documentation.

In contrast, Mexican immigrants arriving in the 1980s and beyond have confronted deep cultural, economic, and political marginalization that dramatically limits their ability to claim belonging even if they have lived in Leadville for over a decade. In general, for white and Mexican American non-immigrant residents, immigrants are a shadowy presence in the community. Although some white residents are openly hostile to immigrants, the vast majority are indifferent—they simply do not see them due to the spatial organization of Leadville’s daily life, as detailed below. Mexican Americans also interact little with immigrant residents on a day-to-day basis, but their perspective on the presence of immigrants could not be described as indifferent. Yesenia, a recent Mexican immigrant, commented, ‘It’s the Hispanics [hispanos] that try to humiliate you.’

As has been found in a range of scholarship on the relationship between Mexican Americans and new immigrants (Browning and De la Garza 1986; Ochoa 2004), Mexican Americans in Leadville often see immigrants as a threat to their own sense of belonging. Mexican Americans feel the sting of racialization positing them as ‘illegal’ others, and sometimes resent immigrants for the situation.

Tensions between (US-born) Mexican American residents and Mexican immigrants notwithstanding, the most salient characteristic of sociospatial relations between immigrants and non-immigrants in Leadville is immigrants’ invisibility. Residential segregation is the primary factor contributing to a fragmented sense of place: Mexican immigrant residents live, for the most part, in trailer parks outside of town. In contrast, white and
Mexican American residents typically live in houses or apartments within city limits. It is a segregation pattern common throughout resort communities in the US West (Coleman 2004).

Lake County trailer parks provide stark spatial testimony to the exclusion of immigrant workers and their families despite regional economic dependence upon their labor. The parks often lie two to five miles outside of town, including one that is literally separated from the main road by railroad tracks (see Figure 3). This distance limits access to town services and resources, a situation worsened by lack of local public transportation—with the notable exception of buses provided by some resorts to transport employees between Lake County and the resorts. It is therefore comparatively easier for trailer park residents without a vehicle to get to work an hour away over high mountain passes than it is to get into the town where they nominally reside, particularly in winter when road shoulders are blocked by snowbanks.10

Residential separation of Mexican immigrants and non-immigrant residents has become, in many ways, structurally entrenched and naturalized by both groups.11 Mexicans moving to Lake County look for housing first in trailer parks where they often have personal contacts, and assume that the parks present their only option. Francisco explained, ‘We look for the most economical place … the Mexican earns less money than Americans, so he doesn’t have the means to live like an American.’ Interestingly, there are equivalently priced rentals and houses for sale in town, but new arrivals often are unaware of these opportunities. Additionally, parks provide an opportunity for home ownership not otherwise available to those immigrants who are undocumented; payments are made directly to trailer park owners, circumventing the need for a bank loan. Furthermore, in many ways immigrant-dominated trailer parks provide a ‘safe’ environment for undocumented residents. Thus, residential separation is often a conscious choice by immigrants, even though it must be seen as one made in the context of broader social hierarchies.

Interviews with trailer park residents indicate that many see positive aspects of the parks: they live close to family members, feel the parks are more quiet than town living, and believe it is cheaper than town rentals. However, the majority of immigrants interviewed who lived in the parks indicated they would prefer to live elsewhere, citing, for example, the difficulty heating trailers in the winter and distance from town. Those immigrants who do attempt the move into town have faced numerous challenges. Mexican immigrants who rented houses in Leadville relayed various incidents of discrimination by landlords and neighbors. One immigrant (a naturalized citizen) reported that his mortgage applications were repeatedly ‘lost’ by a local bank. It appears that even documented immigrants (legal immigrants or naturalized citizens) find the move difficult.

A second sociospatial marker of division and lack of cross-cultural engagement is more subtle,
yet equally important: the temporally-distinct use of public spaces. The greatest influence on immigrants’ time is directly tied to their position as low-wage laborers. While 52 per cent of Lake residents commute to work across county lines, the resulting time disjuncture is more severe for immigrants: 70 per cent of the Latino population versus 48 per cent of the white population (US Census Bureau 2000). What is more, data from interviews and participant observation indicate that Mexicans frequently work more than whites to supplement low wages or because of employer pressure. They clock more overtime hours, hold two or even three jobs, and often commute at least six days per week. Juanita (an immigrant resident) remarked, ‘It seems like I’m always on the road. From [home] I go to work and then I come back again. I’m always tired.’ Immigrant interviewees reported they spend their limited free time with their families, leaving little time for community activities in town.

The greater intensity of Mexican immigrants’ commute, together with residential separation, result in use of key public spaces at different times of the day as compared to non-immigrant residents. Residential apartness does not necessarily proscribe entrance of Mexican immigrants into public spaces; Leadville is small enough that all residents necessarily move through the same stores, government and service offices, and churches. However, commuting workers leave the county early and return late; many are simply not present during daytime hours. Also, immigrant households often only own one vehicle, and when commuting workers drive to work, remaining household members have no means to get to town. As a result, at mid-day most shoppers in Leadville’s only grocery store are white. However, after 8 p.m. most shoppers are Mexican immigrants. Additionally, there are several churches offering services in Spanish, but at different times than English-language services. Therefore, while both whites and Mexicans may attend the same church, they usually do not interact in that context. In sum, immigrant and non-immigrant residents may occupy the same community spaces, their respective use is temporally distinct.

Residential and temporal divides could be interpreted as fairly innocuous—they are produced, usually unconsciously, as people move through their daily routines. However, such an interpretation overlooks critical ways in which power operates, and its consequences. These sociospatial relations reflect and reproduce profound hierarchies based on racial classification, class difference, and discourses of illegality. As a result, the fragmented geographies of everyday life in Leadville inhibit immigrants from developing a sense of belonging in the community and work against the breakdown of prejudicial assumptions held by some non-immigrant residents, particularly those who continue to be the community’s most economically and politically powerful actors. Without changing these geographies it is difficult to imagine emergence of cross-cultural understandings of place and community despite the new demographic makeup of Lake County.

The social and political meaning given to migrants’ legal status also operates to profoundly infiltrate and spatialize local interactions. The undocumented status of many Leadville immigrants, and the racialized discourse of ‘illegality’ constructing all immigrants (regardless of actual status) as criminals, serves to deepen hierarchies of race and class (see Nevins 2002). Discourses of ‘illegality’ not only provide non-immigrants a publicly acceptable narrative justifying exclusion, it creates an internalized narrative among immigrants that they can never belong. Furthermore, ‘illegality’ instills a climate of
fear among immigrants and naturalizes their spatial containment in trailer parks. María, an undocumented immigrant who has lived in a park for nearly a decade, spoke about how many women such as herself ‘shut themselves in’ because they are afraid. This happened to her for several years: ‘I tell you at the beginning I didn’t go out, because I said “it isn’t my place, it isn’t my people, I am here without permission.” It felt like it said here on my forehead “illegal.”’ Public emphasis on legal status also produces misconceptions about ways in which immigrants can and/or should participate. For example, a school administrator once announced that immigrant parents could not volunteer in classrooms without proof of legal residence. Through such incidents, immigrants are constantly reminded of their outsider status.

Infrequent interactions between immigrant and non-immigrant residents also allow perpetuation of racialized stereotypes. For instance, when asked about the role of immigrants locally, Tom (white resident) commented, ‘Look at the newspapers. There’s always something going on in one of the trailer courts, either drugs or fighting or gunshots, or domestics, or whatever.’ In addition to racialized coding of space revealed in Tom’s comments (what ‘goes on’ in trailer parks), when asked about his actual observations or conversations with immigrants, it became clear that Tom had little interaction beyond occasionally passing them on the street. He said he spoke with Mexican immigrants ‘As little as possible.’

Textual analysis of local news stories from the Leadville Chronicle and the Herald Democrat between 2001 and 2005 reveal that coverage of Latino immigrants’ lives was strikingly limited, particularly considering they constitute a significant portion of the local population. Most media representations of Mexican immigrants were negative, including police reports and articles citing infractions such as driving without a license or insurance, and domestic violence. There were a handful of positive stories during that period, such as photo coverage of Mexicans donating money to the Catholic church (Herald Democrat, 5 February 2004: 12), a parade honoring the Virgin of Guadalupe (Herald Democrat, 16 December 2004: 1), and an article on school programs for migrant children (Wiant 2004).

Not all, or even a majority, of non-immigrant residents interviewed held strongly negative stereotypes about immigrant residents. For example, Laura commented ‘It’s really cool to hear Spanish at my kids’ soccer games’ and Sam pointed out, ‘This region’s economy would simply fall apart without the Mexicans!’ Moreover, non-immigrant interviewees frequently emphasized how hard local immigrants work. Nevertheless, we argue that sociospatial relations between immigrants and non-immigrants in Leadville naturalize hierarchies of race, class, and illegality. This fragmented social geography inhibits emergence of a politics of belonging and a reconfiguration of Leadville’s place identity. As Diego, a naturalized citizen, laments:

[A]utomatically we encounter a wall, a wall that we are never going to be able to knock down, because they don’t respect us, that we also have a right to live, because they live here.

As of yet, neither immigrant or non-immigrant residents have been motivated to confront, in an organized manner, processes of social, political, and economic differentiation and
marginalization. Locked into low-wage and insecure jobs, raced and marked as illegal outsiders, Mexican immigrants are not empowered to claim belonging locally.

Woodburn, Oregon

Immediately prior to the rapid increase in Mexican immigrant settlement (in both Leadville and Woodburn) during the 1980s, ‘Hispanics’ respectively comprised 24 and 17 per cent of the towns’ populations (US Census Bureau 1980). Yet the historical and geographical contexts of this diversity were remarkably different. Hispano migrants from the US Southwest who came to work in Leadville’s Climax Mine in the 1950s clearly confronted racism in their new community. However, as described in the previous section, most also had access to union-mediated mine jobs and salaries, and by the late 1970s many had developed a feeling of belonging and potential for social mobility in the Rocky Mountain town. In contrast, Mexican American residents of Woodburn in 1980 had largely settled there as agricultural workers in the post-World War II era. Although by the 1980s many original Mexican American ‘pioneers’ had moved out of farmwork, they were nevertheless situated within a broader political economy and cultural politics based on the racialization, invisibility, and extreme socio-economic marginalization of farmworkers. As we examine below, this contributed to a class- and race-consciousness among Woodburn’s Mexican Americans that was comparatively muted among Leadville’s Mexican Americans. Understanding this history is crucial because the consciousness and political activism of self-identified Chicano and farmworker activists in the 1970s created unique social and political landscapes in Woodburn that made it possible for low-wage and undocumented Mexican immigrants arriving in the 1980s and 1990s to claim a sense of place and belonging that would be difficult to imagine in Leadville.

Woodburn (population 20,100 in 2000) is located at the heart of Oregon’s agriculturally rich Northern Willamette Valley (see Figure 4). Founded in 1889, a decade after Leadville, Woodburn historically functioned as a transportation and service hub for the valley’s farming economy. By the 1950s Mexican and Mexican American farmworkers had become integral to that economy, a dynamic traceable to the Bracero Program. According to historian Ernesto Gamboa (2000), between 1942 and 1947 the Program brought 47,000 Mexicans to the Pacific Northwest. Approximately 15,000 of these ended up in Oregon (Turner and Wood 1998). Despite the virtual abandonment of the Bracero Program by Pacific Northwest growers after 1947 (it continued in other US regions until the early

Figure 4 Woodburn and the Northern Willamette Valley. The top five farmworker-receiving counties in Oregon are labeled.
1960s), it had a lasting impact. Ex-braceros not only continued to find employment in the Pacific Northwest extra-legally, but growers began to recruit Mexican American farmworkers from the Southwestern USA to fill gaps after the Program’s official demise (Gamboa 2000). For farmworkers who settled in the area during the 1960s, Woodburn became a key place to call home in the state.\footnote{15}

The region’s growing economic dependence on Mexican and Mexican American farmworkers post-WWII did not translate into a sense of farmworker belonging, either socially or politically. Despite some permanent settlement beginning in the 1960s, most passed through Oregon for only weeks or months at a time and were housed ‘on farm.’ In his historical geography of California farmworkers during the first half of the twentieth century, Don Mitchell (1996) links the farmworkers’ highly marginalized position to the ‘social and spatial relations of agricultural labor reproduction.’ Under this structure farmwork was seasonal and low paid, and the labor camp acted as a key spatial mechanism for containing the social reproduction and visibility of a workforce integral to rural economies. Conditions in labor camps, usually located in isolated areas, were often abysmal.\footnote{16}

Some of the original Mexican American families who settled in Woodburn in the 1960s initially lived in labor camps, and chose to stay in Woodburn because of its location between agriculturally rich areas of Oregon, Washington, and Idaho. Many eventually moved into different lines of work, such as opening small businesses (Nusz and Ricciardi 2003). Diversity of economic activities notwithstanding, interviews with Mexican Americans who grew up in Woodburn in the 1960s and 1970s indicate they were proud of their farmworker roots and felt a sense of shared racialized marginalization with farmworkers in the region.

This sense of solidarity often became politicized as young people, children of farmworkers or ex-farmworkers, began to adopt identities and discourses of the Chicano movement. Several interviewees spoke passionately about their ‘awakening’ through engagement with Chicano politics. Rafael, age 49, came to Woodburn from Texas at age 6. When asked about political activism as a youth he explained, ‘In high school I got very excited about the idea of being a Chicano. We always felt like we were on the outside, and I wanted to fight for our rights. I went to college for a few years and worked with César Chávez in California before coming back here.’ Though Rafael did not remain an activist over the long term, others in his generation translated their political activities as youth into a life-long devotion to farmworker and immigrant rights.

The political energy of many young Mexican Americans in the 1960s and 1970s led to establishment of a number of Woodburn area farmworker advocacy organizations and Chicano cultural groups. For example, the Valley Migrant League (VML) was established in 1964 to advocate for migrant workers and provide bilingual services, a healthcare clinic, and a child care center (Nusz and Ricciardi 2003). In 1969 the Centro Chicano Cultural of Woodburn purchased land on Highway 99 between Woodburn and Gervais for the construction of a cultural center, completed in 1971 (Woodburn Independent 1973). The Willamette Valley Immigration Project (WVIP), founded in Portland in 1977 to provide legal services to farmworkers, moved to Woodburn in 1978 (Stephen 2007: 243). Leaders of these organizations included many Mexican Americans raised in the Northern Willamette Valley, and represented a coming of age of Chicano politics in Oregon (Slatta 1975).
While these organizations, and Chicano activists more generally, faced numerous obstacles during these early years their legacy was significant: the WVIP contributed to the 1985 creation of Oregon’s first farmworker union Piñeros y Campesinos Unidos del Noroeste (PCUN; Northwest Treeplanters and Farmworkers United) (Stephen 2001, 2007). Chicano activists were also involved in Salud Medical Center’s opening (a farmworker health clinic) in 1972 as well as Oregon Human Development (farmworker training and assistance organization) in 1979, both of which still serve farmworkers today. These organizations and activists created significant amounts of social, political and cultural capital that proved invaluable to immigrants seeking to develop a sense of place and belonging in Woodburn during the early 1990s.

The importance of early organizations and activists notwithstanding, the fundamental sociospatial structure of farm labor and immigrant ‘incorporation’ remained unchanged into the 1980s, when containment of (most) farmworkers in labor camps began to erode in the Northern Willamette Valley—as it did in California (Allensworth and Rochín 1999). Structural changes in the regional economy, coupled with shifting labor flows between Mexico and the USA, rapidly increased numbers of Mexican laborers arriving to work in Woodburn’s hinterlands (for discussion of Mexico–USA immigration during this period see Cornelius and Bustamante 1989; Massey, Durand and Malone 2002). Agricultural production in the Valley, which had long depended on the steady flow of seasonal workers, began to intensify and diversify in ways that created an increasingly year-round demand for rural labor. The greenhouse and nursery industry, dependent on skilled farmworkers year-round, expanded dramatically during this period. The timber industry also began to replace white treeplanting crews, who were well-organized and disposed to labor activism, with Mexicans—many of whom were undocumented (Mackie 1990; Prudham 2005). These industry-specific changes had dramatic impact: in 1977 the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) estimated Oregon hired an average of 64,000 farmworkers per year and by 1992 that number was 120,000 (USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service 1992).

If Oregon’s rural labor force was characterized by invisibility in the 1970s, due in part to spatial containment in labor camps, by the late 1980s it was characterized by visibility in towns such as Woodburn. More important than overall numbers during this period is the significant lengthening of the hiring season. By the 1980s a growing percentage of farmworkers were able to cobble together year-round employment and settle permanently in the region (Mason 1989). Thus, while Woodburn and the Northern Willamette Valley had a long history of dependence upon migratory immigrant workers, changes during the 1980s and early 1990s dramatically shifted that relationship’s character.

As more farmworkers settled for longer periods, or permanently, in the Valley’s towns—particularly Woodburn—demand for low-income housing quickly outstripped supply. This was due not only to political economic changes increasing permanent settlement of immigrant workers and their families throughout the USA at this time (see Massey, Durand and Malone 2002; Massey and Espinosa 1997), but to the fact that, even as demand for farmworkers grew in the 1980s, the number of labor camps in Oregon declined (Marion County 1988). Consequently, farmworkers began to seek shelter in the Valley’s small and medium-sized towns. Landlords often took advantage of the situation, crowding multiple
immigrant families into single-family homes and apartments. In Woodburn overcrowding contributed to decaying housing stock in many neighborhoods, unkempt lawns, uncollected garbage, and social tension. Farmworkers often found no housing at all, and slept in parks or their cars.\textsuperscript{18}

Increasing visibility of the region's low-wage, racialized and largely undocumented workforce generated a political backlash by (mostly) white residents, the outcome of which tells us something about the renegotiation of place and belonging in Woodburn during this period. The backlash, and efforts by advocacy groups to claim a space for farmworkers in the face of it, represented the primary focus of research in Woodburn. The project's central focus was local political struggles over the construction of subsidized farmworker housing units within city limits in 1991 and 1996. Based on interviews with key actors and analysis of public meeting transcripts and newspaper reports, the struggle over farmworker housing served as an entry point for understanding the renegotiation of place and belonging in the community as its population shifted from 16 per cent Latino in 1980 to over 50 per cent in 2000.\textsuperscript{19} While the Woodburn project was motivated by a discrete set of research questions, it provides a point of comparison for parallel issues in Leadville.

In 1991, in response to the housing crisis described above, the founding of the Farmworker Housing Development Corporation (FHDC) brought together a group of activists from several long-standing farmworker and immigrant rights advocacy organizations of the Northern Willamette Valley.\textsuperscript{20} It had become apparent to these organizations that decent housing was fundamental to their respective agendas, specifically urban farmworker housing: the new organization's charter explicitly required that all the organization's housing projects ‘be located within urban growth boundaries’ (FHDC 1992: 1).

As much as decent housing—within reach of city spaces and services—was an inherent farmworker right in activists’ eyes (and gave farmworkers a ‘place’ in the community), it provided a focal point for long-simmering tensions felt by white residents in relation to Mexicans, particularly farmworkers, settling in town. Many white Woodburn residents, and most elected city leaders, vigorously resisted construction of farmworker housing. Resistance to these projects was both formal and informal, ranging from city council efforts to stop them—including several heated public debates—to anonymous racist hate mail directed at FHDC.

By late 1991, FHDC activists had lined up public and private sources of financing for their first project, Nuevo Amanecer (New Dawn). They also had strong political support from state and county officials. City officials, however, were able to stall the project (ultimately for two years) because the City of Woodburn held the title to the property FHDC felt would be the ideal location for Nuevo Amanecer. This resistance was particularly conspicuous because turning the property over to FHDC would have absolved the city of $245,000 of debt owed the Housing and Urban Development Agency (HUD) for a failed community development project on that same site. Nevertheless, it was only when the Oregon Economic Development Agency threatened legal action that the city turned it over.\textsuperscript{21}

Once there were no legal or public means to resist Nuevo Amanecer’s construction, some Woodburnites turned to overtly racist language to denounce it. The day after the groundbreaking ceremony for Nuevo Amanecer (December 1992) FHDC representatives
found a spray-painted plywood sign at the site: ‘Future home of Salud’s slum.’ In March 1993, as planning for Nuevo Amanecer proceeded, the manager from an adjacent apartment building received anonymous hate mail signed by ‘Americans for the Last Crusade.’ The Oregonian newspaper’s coverage included this excerpt from the letter:

The Mexicans are going to have a housing project in Woodburn, right across the street from the high school where their gangs can freely mingle with our kids … The Mexicans will work the summer season and then spend the winters in living quarters built for them with our money. They will create a bigger dope problem and crime will increase … What our politicians (Governor Roberts and her gang) are creating will become a cesspool of humanity. (Rede 1993)

These two events, while likely perpetrated by a small group of people, were an expression of racist anxieties underlying public struggles over farmworker housing.

The resistance met by FHDC represents the degree to which privileged groups are invested in maintaining sociospatial relations that normalize separation (not belonging) and reinforce social hierarchies. In other words, farmworker housing was met with resistance from an overwhelmingly white group of residents because it visibly and publicly undermined the taken-for-granted and racialized exclusion of farmworkers (Nelson 2008).

On the flipside, FHDC’s ultimate success enacted a highly public claim to spaces of belonging by low-wage, racialized, and ‘illegal’ farmworkers in Woodburn.

This new claim to belonging in Woodburn can be understood in two ways. First, construction of clean and decent housing close to city services fosters a sense of belonging for low-wage immigrant workers previously living in precarious situations (Nelson 2007). Ana, who came to the Northern Willamette Valley from Los Angeles in 1997, lived for several years in an unheated garage with her four children before moving to Nuevo Amanecer in 2000. She began to know her neighbors and access services of which she had been unaware:

We have a monthly residents meetings … I go to the library, to the church, to the parks. It helps, it has helped me think. It all started when my son grew and he went to Head Start, then I decided to study for my GED. It was there that I began seeing more things. Then I learned to drive and feel more confident … I like Woodburn better than Los Angeles because it is safer, smaller. My children can walk to school.

Beyond making a crucial material difference to farmworkers such as Ana, including providing an important means of constructing a sense of belonging and community in Woodburn, the construction of Nuevo Amanecer—and another farmworker housing project a few years later, called Esperanza Court—had a second and largely symbolic effect. In short, these housing units further undermined classic, normalized geographies of exclusion that assumed farmworkers belong in fields and labor camps, but not in communities and within reach of services. It contributed to normalizing the presence and belonging of low-wage, racialized and often ‘illegal’ farmworkers in the city’s heart (see Figure 5).

Important to the comparison with Leadville is how and why FHDC was successful: it was based on effective mobilization of a web of Mexican American organizations, activists, and citizens who shared a sense of identity and affiliation with new immigrants, and who also had the capacity and knowledge to wage the complicated battle for farmworker housing construction.22 This sense of solidarity can
Figure 5  Esperanza Court, the second farmworker housing complex built by the Farmworker Housing Development Corporation. It is located directly across from the Woodburn City Hall.
be seen in a Mexican American woman’s testimony at a highly contentious city council meeting regarding Esperanza Court’s building permit. Rosa, a Mexican American who grew up in Woodburn and is the director of a farmworker service organization, invoked her personal history and sense of solidarity with newly-arrived migrants:

It is difficult to see hard-working farmworkers … who cannot afford housing, who are forced to double-up or go into hotels. In my job I go out to the labor camps, it is very sad that children do not have a place to play, women are stuck inside in one room dwelling … I think a lot of families, we take a lot of things we have for granted. But we know where we came from, and we don’t forget … In 1962 I lived in a labor camp in Woodburn, I remember the housing conditions. Believe me, it makes a difference when we can settle in a community, afford a decent home, have a yard and have neighbors.

Support of Mexican Americans like Rosa was essential to the victory for farmworker housing in Woodburn.

Beyond capacity for mobilization, the presence of these organizations and activists in Woodburn also created a cultural and social milieu critical for newly-arrived farm laborers: organizations from PCUN to Salud Medical Center to the FHDC conduct activities fostering a sense of belonging among immigrants—from organizing fiestas, protest marches, and health fairs to publicizing to parents the availability of scholarships for summer basketball camp. None of these organizations or events, implicitly or explicitly question immigrants about their legal status. Spanish and a growing number of indigenous languages are spoken and celebrated. We do not mean to insinuate that repressive structures based on race and ‘illegality’ have been eradicated from Woodburn; this would be a naïve, and incorrect, statement. It is better stated that certain conditions have allowed more effective resistance and a politics of respecting difference to emerge in Woodburn to an extent not yet possible in Leadville. 23

Conclusion

Contemporary public discussions of immigration (especially immigration from Latin America) often treat immigrants as an undifferentiated mass in homogenous circumstances. Our comparison of two distinct immigrant destinations highlights analytical shortcomings associated with theorizing processes of settlement and integration in a similar way—as a singular and a-geographical process. Mexican immigrants arriving in Woodburn and Leadville in the late 1980s and early 1990s were similarly positioned in terms of hierarchies of race, class and illegality. Low-wage and highly insecure immigrant employment was (and is) the norm in both towns, a reality profoundly inhibiting social belonging and place-making. Likewise, immigrants in both towns faced exclusion based on privileging of whiteness (and its flipside, racialized othering) as well as discourses of ‘illegality’ normalizing these exclusions. Yet while these structures are powerful, they are geographically mediated. The case of Woodburn shows that the depth of ‘social mobilization capital’—that is, existing grassroots political networks, organizing knowledge, and politicized ethnic/racial identities—is crucial to claiming belonging for low-wage, racialized and often undocumented immigrants. While such political capital was important in Woodburn, other factors might emerge as important for other immigrant destinations—the critical point is the uneven geography of these dynamics, a geography that continues to require scholarly attention.
In contrast to Woodburn, Mexican immigrants in Leadville face profound obstacles to creating a shared sense of place and belonging with non-immigrant residents. As the local economy shifted from its mining base to become a bedroom community for the mountain resort industry, Mexican immigrants’ arrival rapidly changed Leadville’s social geography. While most non-immigrants in the town have not actively attempted to exclude new residents, exclusion is accomplished and naturalized through local organization of space. Mexican immigrants typically reside in trailer parks outside of town, an arrangement separating them from non-immigrant residents and also limiting access to potentially shared spaces. Thus far, immigrants have felt largely unable to effectively claim a sense of place and belonging, a situation conditioned by effects of low-wage and highly insecure employment, the operation of race, and discursive and political emphasis on illegality.

In contrast, Mexican immigrants arriving at a similar historical moment in Woodburn found existing political and cultural spaces that provided important opportunities to claim local place and belonging. While labor camps had historically contained farmworker bodies and made them less visible, this sociospatial status quo broke down by the mid-1980s. Arrival of a large number of farmworkers into Northern Willamette Valley towns overwhelmed existing low-income housing stock and led to significant overcrowding and homelessness among farmworkers—a situation representing for many white residents a crisis for ‘their’ community and place identity. In this context, and against many obstacles, a coalition of Latino and farmworker advocacy organizations launched FHDC and built beautiful farmworker housing within reach of city services. Their ultimate success was due largely to seeds of activism and political mobilization planted during previous decades by Mexican Americans struggling for labor and cultural rights in an overwhelmingly white state. In other words, the legacy of Chicano activism and organization in the 1970s created the social and political capital necessary for successfully waging battles for farmworker housing in the 1990s.

In sum, the convergence of several historical processes made Woodburn a community where low-wage and racialized immigrants arriving in the mid-1980s and beyond could more easily develop a sense of place and contribute to a politics of belonging that included ‘Mexicanness’ and difference (we use the term ‘easily’ with caution—it was a long struggle on various fronts). Leadville’s existing social and political terrain, in contrast, has made it much more difficult for immigrants to develop a sense of belonging and engage in place-making. Instead, low-wage Mexican immigrants have been incorporated in ways that make them almost invisible to non-immigrants, particularly white residents.

Beyond the details of these two cases, the comparative analysis presented here has several implications for scholarly work on immigrant incorporation broadly defined. First, dynamics of immigrant settlement and place-making in Woodburn and Leadville contribute to scholarship critiquing the notion of assimilation. As a number of scholars have pointed out, an uncritical understanding of assimilation assumes immigrants should eventually ‘melt’ into white-dominated US society and leads to views of such melting of difference as an important political and policy goal (De Genova 2002; Wright and Ellis 2000). Framing immigrant settlement and incorporation in terms of assimilation privileges whiteness and obscures how hierarchies of class, race and legal status prevent a sense of community and belonging from developing.
among and between immigrant and non-immigrant residents. By downplaying these structures, assimilationist approaches implicitly blame immigrants for ‘non-assimilation’ and predicate such assimilation on the loss of language and other markers of difference. This attitude of intolerance, exemplified by the Tancredo quote at this article’s beginning, underlies contemporary changes to immigration policy debates. Instead, we need to understand immigrants’ lived realities and the complex political economic dynamics driving immigration flows.

By approaching immigrant and non-immigrant interaction through a framework of place and belonging, as we suggest here, problematic assumptions embedded within an assimilationist narrative can be avoided. While questions of integration and interaction remain paramount, they are explored not through an assumption of white privilege and a process of homogenization, but through a recognition of the possibility of community and place based on difference and multiplicity—or a ‘progressive sense of place’ as discussed by Doreen Massey (1997).

Second, this story shows that ‘place’ matters in another way. Within contemporary immigrant destinations, broader socio-economic and political forces coalesce with local economies, histories, and individuals to create unique settings for interaction between new arrivals and longtime residents. The contrasting stories of Leadville and Woodburn demonstrate that renegotiation of place identity and social belonging within immigrant-receiving communities is geographically mediated. Only through attention to specific histories of receiving communities, and the concrete social relations that develop in place, can we begin to chart processes of exclusion and inclusion, particularly spatial dynamics that produce invisibility or provide opportunities for mutual recognition and respect.

Third, in examining contemporary immigrant destinations, a focus on space reveals how power operates. In both Leadville and Woodburn the organization of space acts as a naturalizing barrier to inclusion and belonging. For many decades the labor camp contained the social reproduction of brown bodies essential to the Willamette Valley’s regional economy, making farmworkers invisible to the largely white communities. As a spatial strategy to contain low-wage and racialized immigrant workers, trailer parks in Leadville and other mountain communities are akin to labor camps. Although comparison of farmworker camps in the Northern Willamette Valley with Rocky Mountain trailer parks can only be taken so far, both represent an organization of space that naturalizes and makes invisible (to non-immigrant residents and most political leaders) a labor force essential to regional economies, segregating and containing the social reproduction of bodies critical to economic production.

In an age of globalization the intensity and complexity of migration flows will likely deepen worldwide. Understanding these flows, and their impacts on sending and receiving communities, requires not only seeing the negotiation of place and belonging as highly contested and crosscut by relations of power, but requires taking geographical context seriously. Geographically-sensitive analysis of immigrant incorporation is a crucial step towards developing interventions that foster a progressive sense of place and belonging.

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Notes

1. We place the term ‘illegality’ in quotations to disrupt it as a naturalized category and, following De Genova (2002), problematize sociopolitical processes of illegalization. Quotations are not always deployed around the word, purely for readability, but it should be read throughout as a highly problematic category.

2. We draw on Omi and Winant’s (1986: 55) argument that race ‘plays a fundamental role in structuring and representing the social world.’ Thus, ‘racial hierarchy’ refers to the positioning of different ‘races’ in terms of power and perceived social value, and cannot be separated from subordination and disempowerment linked to class and legal status.

3. Transnational theory argues that ‘place’ and ‘belonging’ are profoundly globalized in the contemporary migration era, that many migrants maintain an intimate sense of affiliation to communities and landscapes of origin. For the purposes of our analysis we bracket a discussion of how immigrants maintain transnational place affiliations and instead focus on dynamics within communities of settlement.

4. We use the category of ‘Latino’ to refer to US-born Mexican Americans, naturalized Mexican Americans, and documented and undocumented Mexican immigrants. While running the risk of reinforcing a problematic racial category, it is important to delineate these broad demographics. Below we differentiate between the roles of Mexican Americans, whites, and immigrants in processes of place-making and belonging.

5. E. Holte, interview with Nancy Hiemstra, 26 August 2004, Leadville, CO. The substantial increase between 2000 and 2002 is likely due to combined effects of undercounting of Latino immigrants in the US census, particularly undocumented immigrants (Rodríguez and Hagan 1991), and an increase in numbers of immigrants in Leadville during the intervening years. Another contributing factor could include timing of the local survey during the winter season (during peak demand for immigrant labor).

6. The bulk of fieldwork in Lake County was conducted during summer 2004, and consisted of interviews, focus groups, and participant observation. Eighteen immigrant residents and twenty-four white residents were interviewed utilizing a semi-structured interview format. Three focus groups involved an additional fifteen immigrants. Additionally, the two local newspapers were reviewed from 2001 to 2005 to analyze coverage of immigrant issues.

7. The Elks Club (The Benevolent and Protective Order of the Elks of the USA), is a nation-wide community service organization whose membership is based in local chapters. The Elks state their mission as religious, patriotic, and social; typical activities include provision of scholarships, youth activities, and veteran services.

8. All names used in this article are pseudonyms.

9. The census block encompassing most of these parks, one that lies in the northwest corner of the county outside of Leadville’s city limits, is 78 per cent Latino according to the 2000 US Census. Census blocks within city limits are 25–38 per cent Latino. Latino residents who do live in Leadville typically occupy low-rent, often subsidized apartments.

10. By discussing the ways in which this segregation inhibits access to stores, services and important community spaces, we do not want to imply that Mexicans must ‘blend in’ to white residents’ neighborhoods in order to belong, nor that spatial proximity necessarily builds social inclusion and mutual respect across difference (for critique of such assumptions within ‘spatial assimilation’ approaches, see Ellis and Wright 1998).

11. By referring to non-immigrant and immigrant ‘groups’ we risk implying that they are homogenous, when in fact they are not. For example, Mexican Americans are non-immigrant residents but have a distinct relationship to new arrivals as compared to white non-immigrant residents.

12. A number of households encountered during this research did not own any vehicle. This group paid for rides to work or to shop.

13. It should be noted that in his vitriolic discussion of immigrants Tom differentiated between Mexican Americans and new Mexican immigrants. In fact,
he carefully pointed out, ‘Even long-time Hispanics that were born and raised here don’t like them’—a discursive strategy that allows Tom to attempt to distance himself from racism while showing deep disdain for immigrants.

14 For examples of stories framing immigrants in a negative light, see Davis (2005), Peterson (2001, 2004) and Wibbenmeyer (2005).

15 Based on interviews with longtime Mexican American residents of Woodburn, these early settlers were mostly Mexican American farmworkers, originated from Texas and other parts of the southwest, not Mexican immigrant workers (see also Nusz and Ricciardi 2003).

16 A 1982 study indicated only 25 per cent of labor camps in Oregon complied with codes: ‘problems include poor quality water, hazardous electrical service, unsanitary toilet facilities, inadequate hot water, sewage backflow in drain fields adjacent to housing facilities, garbage overflow and some incidence of overcrowding’ (Oregon Rural Housing Coalition 1982).


18 The Woodburn Independent ran numerous stories on the farmworker housing crisis in the late 1980s and early 1990s (see e.g. Henderson 1990, 1991). The situation was also examined in various non-governmental and governmental reports (see FHDC 1991; Marion County 1988; Roberts 1986).

19 Interviews (twenty-six) included ex-city councilors, an ex-mayor of Woodburn, an ex-city planner, ex-board members of FHDC, activists in PCUN, Mexican American and white residents of Woodburn, and farmworkers (documented and undocumented).

20 Salud Medical Center; PCUN; Legal Aid Services of Oregon Farmworker Program; and CASA of Oregon (a statewide farmworker housing organization).

21 City of Woodburn council meeting minutes, 22 June 1992.

22 While some whites testified in support of farmworker housing, most were not local but traveled from Portland or Salem to the hearings. The key activists struggle to build farmworker housing in Woodburn were US-born Mexican Americans.

23 There are several organizations recently established in Leadville that assist Mexican immigrants and their children. These organizations, however, were founded by entities external to the community and their staff not originally from Leadville. While providing important services, these organizations do not reflect an emerging, grassroots politics of immigrant belonging.

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Abstract translations

Les immigrants latinos et la renégociation du lieu et de l’appartenance dans les petites villes aux États-Unis

Cet article compare les politiques du lieu et de l’appartenance au sein de deux collectivités non métropolitaines que sont Woodburn, Oregon et Leadville, Colorado dont la population latino-américaine issue de l’immigration a augmenté de façon importante au cours des quinze ou vingt dernières années. Dans les deux cas, environ 50% des habitants sont d’origine latino-américaine. Ces collectivités ont donc subi un changement démographique qui a redéfini les connaissances sur l’identité du lieu et l’appartenance sociale. À travers une étude comparative des deux petites villes, nous dressons un portrait de la dynamique politico-économique régionale unique qui est l’élément moteur de ces changements, nous étudions leur empreinte spatiale, et nous nous intéressons à la manière dont le contexte local détermine la mesure dans laquelle les nouveaux arrivants peuvent revendiquer un sentiment d’appartenance envers ces lieux en dépit des hiérarchies liées à l’appartenance raciale, la classe sociale et à «l’illégalité». L’évaluation des différences entre ces deux choix de destinations des immigrants jette un nouvel éclairage sur les relations socio spatiales et sur leur rôle critique dans l’analyse des interactions entre les immigrants et la société d’accueil, permettant ainsi un avancement des connaissances sur la géographie inégale de l’intégration des immigrants dans la société américaine contemporaine.

Mots-clés: immigration latino-américaine, lieu, race, appartenance, milieu rural aux États-Unis.

Inmigrantes latinas y la renegociación de lugar y pertenencia en las pequeñas ciudades de los Estados Unidos

En este artículo comparamos la política de lugar y de pertenencia en dos comunidades no metropolitanas—Woodburn, Oregon y Leadville, Colorado—que han sido testigo de un aumento importante en la migración de latinos durante los últimos quince a veinte años. Actualmente, los latinos constituyen aproximadamente el 50 por ciento de cada una de las comunidades, un cambio demográfico que ha tenido un impacto sobre lo que se entiende por identidad de lugar y pertenencia social en cada una de las ciudades. Mediante una comparación de las dos ciudades, tratamos de trazar la especial dinámica de la política económica regional que impulsa estos cambios, examinamos su impacto espacial y cuestionamos cómo el contexto local determina hasta qué punto los nuevos residentes pueden reivindicar un sentido de lugar y pertenencia apesar de las jerarquías de raza, clase social e ‘ilegalidad’. Una evaluación de las diferencias entre estos dos destinos para inmigrantes nos permite comprender mejor cómo las relaciones socio-espaciales son de importancia fundamental en el análisis de la interacción entre los inmigrantes y la sociedad acogedora y además contribuye al conocimiento de la geografía desequilibrada de la incorporación de inmigrantes en los Estados Unidos de hoy en día.

Palabras claves: migración latina, lugar, raza, pertenencia, EE.UU. rural.