

THE CHIMERA OF KANSAS: AN EXPLORATION OF PLACE, POLITICS,
AND CULTURE

By

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Submitted to the graduate degree program in Geography and the Graduate
Faculty of the University of Kansas in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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THE CHIMERA OF KANSAS: AN EXPLORATION OF PLACE, POLITICS,
AND CULTURE

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Abstract

This dissertation first examines the role of geography in Kansas state politics, focusing on the years 2005 to 2008. A “spatial dialectics” is seen in the politics and policy-making process. This insight drives a process-oriented, critical interpretation of the cultural geopolitics. Four legislative issues are stressed: school funding, immigration, gambling, and the Holcomb power plant. New insights are offered into each of these, as well as the prevailing discourses of Kansas that can be taken from such analysis. The second part of the dissertation uses the sense of place and representative qualities of legislators to construct a cultural geography of contemporary Kansas. In this, dialectical and oppositional dimensions could be seen in the perception of place. In particular, place-by-place differentiation and rivalry, and schools, were identified as central to the cultural construction of places in Kansas.

Acknowledgements

This dissertation would not have been possible without the support and advice of many people, to whom I am very grateful. First, I am indebted to my committee chair and main advisor, Pete Shortridge, who introduced me to the great state of Kansas, and deepened profoundly my appreciation of place in geography. His knowledge, direction and, during the writing process, comprehensive editorial assistance were invaluable. Thank you for all your help.

I want to thank also the rest of my committee, Shannon O’Lear, Garth Myers, Terry Slocum, and Burdett Loomis, for their guidance, appraisal and support. And thank you Bird for your insights into Kansas politics, on your back porch and elsewhere. Many thanks must go to Bev Koerner and Bev Morey for their forbearance. And to Dave McDermott and RJ Rowley: Your cartographic pointers saved the day.

My research could not have progressed as it did without the participation and kindness of my political subjects – the many state representatives, state office-holders and other. I am grateful that they gave me their time and their perspectives. Although want to thank them all, I must especially note Jan Pauls, Forrest Knox, Julie Menghini, Bill Light, Clay Aurand, Bill Otto, Don Dahl, Delia Garcia, Pat Colloton, Terrie Huntington,

Tom Burroughs, Stan Frownfelter, Eber Phelps, Bob Grant, Ward Loyd, Dennis McKinney, Dan Johnson, and Phill Kline who gave me so much of their time.

Special and abundant thanks should go to Candy Ruff, my statehouse mentor and inspired friend. Her candor, door-opening abilities, academic interest, and sense of humor brought Kansas politics, and Kansas, to life for me. I am deeply grateful for all the opportunities she gave me, and the support she showed throughout my research.

I am grateful also for the help and good spirits I was fortunate to find in all my friends and family. Many times these great people brought me through challenging times, often without them knowing. I want to thank my father especially for his support during this and throughout my education; I am grateful to him in so many ways.

Finally, I want to thank Julie, my wife, for her kindness and patience throughout all of this research and writing. Her help has been invaluable, personally and academically. Thank you.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Between 1855 and 1859 as Kansas territory moved toward statehood, leaders there created four constitutions. Marked by very different visions of the state and identified by where they were written – in historical order: Topeka, Lecompton, Leavenworth and Wyandotte – their spatial denotation is an early hint of the importance of place to politics in Kansas. The first, conceiving Kansas as a state free of slavery, was composed in a town central to early New England settlement in the territory, Topeka.¹ Lecompton, home of the proslavery legislature, produced a rival constitution in 1857. The largest settlement of the state, Leavenworth, was the setting for the most radically progressive constitution, in 1858, giving the vote, for instance, to African-Americans and women. Finally, the Wyandotte Constitution of 1859, the one by which Kansas entered the Union, marked a compromise: Kansas would enter as a free state, but with restrictions on voting more typical for the time.² This founding fusion of politics and place is an example of a central

¹ For more discussion of the early settlement of Kansas, see James R. Shortridge, *Cities on the Plains: The Evolution of Urban Kansas* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2004).

² Craig Miner, *Kansas: The History of the Sunflower State, 1854-2000* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2002), 63-77.

thrust of this dissertation: that politics is rooted and contextualized. Politics and political decisions do not happen in the abstract; rather, place matters.

It was on this initial understanding that I began to explore the contemporary geography of Kansas through its politics. But as is often the way, this guiding aim has also provoked new considerations, new insights, and new directions for research. Most especially, it has demonstrated the critical role cultural geography and geographical imaginations play in the policy-making process in state government. My search for a geography of Kansas has revealed more than a simple map of the state.

This study, a cultural geography of politics and a new approach to the cultural geography of Kansas, naturally raises two initial questions: why Kansas, and why state politics? Some readers might see Kansas as an odd choice for a case study, but the choice makes sense from several perspectives. On a regional scale, the Midwest is often viewed as the “Heartland” of the United States, a region typified by traditional American values, the most American part of America.³ Kansas is the core of that geographical imagination. As geographers we should assess and analyze these claims and constructions, especially as they constitute a central part of the discourse of identity in this country. Edward Said advocated a critical understanding of

³ For a fuller discussion, see James R. Shortridge, *The Middle West: Its Meaning in American Culture* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1989).

“Orientalism,” the construction of an eastern “Other” in the discourse of imperialism.⁴ This study turns that attention on its head to ask how we create our *home* identity (the necessary corollary of the Othering process). It suggests an analysis of what might be called “Occidentalism,” the ways we root our identity and the geographical imaginations of our own cultures in the West. Kansas, as a state bound up in images of home, heartland, patriotism, pastoralism, faith, and family, is at the heart of that process. This study explores these notions, the discourses that propel them, and the reality of the state that “holds” them. It is a self-critical approach that takes apart not only the idea of an essentialized Kansas identity, but also the ways that identity is constructed. With a focus on the vivid arena of state politics, it reevaluates the stability of a set of ideas and identities that demand deeper critical geographical examination.

John Brown once described Kansas as the “cockpit of the nation,”⁵ pointing to the way it was leading the country in the argument over slavery. A case can also be made for Kansas’s leadership since then: a pioneer in women’s rights; an important home of populism; a durable champion of prohibition; the state of *Brown vs. Board*, pushing civil rights; the center of the social conservative move in Republican politics; and this past year, the first

⁴ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin Books, 1978, 2003).

⁵ Miner, *Kansas*, 58.

state to attempt to regulate carbon emissions because of global warming. Kansas is an interesting place to study because of this history. But its contemporary politics also demands a critical eye. The Kansas political scene has something of a reputation—internationally, as well as nationally—for its fraught nature and sometimes unconventional outcomes. From the “abortion wars” starting in the early 1990s, to the ongoing debate over the teaching of evolution in schools, to the alarming statements of some legislators (e.g. former State Senator Kay O’Connor’s skepticism of the necessity of women’s voting), to the present contest over global warming, Kansas is begging for closer scrutiny. Indeed, accounts of Kansas politics appear frequently in the national press, and Thomas Frank’s book, *What’s the Matter with Kansas?* proved popular (tellingly retitled *What’s the Matter with America?* for the international market).⁶

Kansas is a fascinating place to study, and the issues debated in the state provide intriguing and important material for scholarly analysis. It is time for a careful interpretation of the taken-for-granted categories in American politics, for a critical examination of the idea of the Midwest and especially Kansas. This dissertation asserts that formal state politics provide an appropriate entry point for this analysis.

⁶ Thomas Frank, *What’s the Matter with Kansas? How Conservatives Won the Heart of America* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2004).

Why select state politics as a “field” for research? A closer analysis of the role of democratic politics in geographical scholarship follows in the next chapter, but some important benefits should be noted at this stage. First, democratic, representative politics is geographically expressive. Districts are places, bounded and contiguous. They each contain distinct cultures and economies, and as such, are the very basis of representative politics. Variations in voting (or, indeed, party affiliation), the products of which are the differences among the political representatives, can be seen as tangible and quantifiable expressions of cultural and economic patterns.

Second, politics is representative. The people chosen by the electorate literally and figuratively represent that district (or state, or whichever spatial unit). As such, they are articulating the needs and views (as they see them) of their place at the Statehouse. Presumably, the electorate chose that individual because they seemed most like themselves. In these ways, representative politics produces a set of actors who should provide a vivid medium for geographical analysis. Moreover, considering broader questions of sampling in geography, these politicians constitute a methodological boon. The selection already has been done for the researcher (albeit, of course, with many caveats that this dissertation will explore later). State politicians provide a spatially sensitive delegation of place representatives. The premise of this dissertation is that politicians have a rich and attuned sense of place. In

fact, formal politics can perhaps make the most claims to being a distillation of place, on a range of scales.

Third, state politics is a part of culture, economy, and society. Geographers such as Don Mitchell remind us that “culture is politics by another name.”⁷ This dissertation suggests that politics is culture by another name. Whereas much geographical scholarship has been rightly concerned with “direct-action” politics (protests, mobilization, and such), formal representative politics is also integral to, and emerges from, cultural and economic processes. As posited above, state politics is necessarily connected to the places it constitutes. This politics cannot be convincingly disentangled from the dynamics of culture, economy and society in those places. To study politics, then, is to explore something at the very heart of a range of human (and, it will be seen, physical) geographies. Cultural geographers should also remember that political affiliation and action can be important parts of identity and senses of place.

Taking this fusion one step farther (as this dissertation demonstrates), representative politics not only reflects discourses of state identity or regional difference, but it is also active in and contributes to those processes. Debates in politics form part of the broader understanding of place, feeding into and

⁷ Don Mitchell, *Cultural Geography: A Critical Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 294.

interacting with non-political cultural dynamics, reinforcing or breaking down established identities. An analysis of state politics not only has important material effects (it is of course, officially the government), but also important, initially intangible, cultural effects.

Fourth, state politics is temporally sensitive. Looking into the past, the rich and extensively recorded history to state politics holds much interest for the historical geographer. More, the politics of the present day, this research has revealed, draws on a cultural dynamics that have fundamentally historical roots. Also exciting to the cultural geographer worried about the temporal validity of his or her research, is that state politics is mediated through time⁸ and reflects (at least every two years) change in the composition of its chambers. The agendas are different every year, the issues taking on different forms, reflecting changes in the problems or opportunities facing the state. State politics is dynamic, and any cultural geography of that politics will be enriched by this temporal context. A cultural geography of state politics actually brings together the key dimensions of time and space that have often been a source of struggle in our discipline.

For all the reasons above, the geographical study of state representative politics is a worthwhile and productive endeavor. It should be

⁸ For a pertinent example, see Burdett Loomis, *Time, Politics, and Policies: A Legislative Year* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1994).

reiterated that the study of U. S. state politics is important because of the substantive material outcomes of that unit of government: the Kansas state budget, for instance, ran to almost \$11.9 billion in 2007, playing a critical role in the funding of education, as well as providing substantial resources for health care, public safety, agriculture, and transportation.⁹ This dissertation demonstrates that a cultural geography exists behind these policy decisions. While concerned primarily with the imaginative and discursive use of place in politics, the outcomes of this imagination are quite material. Sense of place is personal, but this dissertation demonstrates that it can have very public effects.

The state-level focus, approach, and outcomes of this dissertation have not been widely taken elsewhere in geographical scholarship. I am trying to make the case for a new appreciation of politics as a way of bringing together cultural and economic issues in a productive way, and pointing toward a new geographical understanding of representative politics.

This dissertation explores the contemporary geography of Kansas through the lens of state politics. The result is a cultural geography that is shown to be complicated, contested and mediated by various dialectical tensions. Behind the (outsider's) image of a rural, solid, gingham-clad state is a space of contradiction and conflict. Battles over ethnicity, race, and poverty

⁹ Data from Kansas Division of the Budget, 2007.

are conducted through an unstable dynamic of rural against urban identity. Priorities of faith are spliced with disagreements over uneven economic development. Challenges of demographic change are inscribed in a regional division between east and west, a division inserted in sometimes surprising political debates.

Through such outcomes, this dissertation acts to destabilize the monolithic “idea” of Kansas. I present a Kansas that is a “chimera” – a mythical, illusory, composition, constructed from contrasting parts. In doing this I hope to encourage more critical thinking of the way ideologies and cultures are “rooted” in place. Many view the Midwest, especially Kansas (especially, perhaps by those driving the contemporary ruling political discourse) as a “keeper of American values.”¹⁰ This emotional emplacement of an idea gives it strength (as with all ideologies and cultures that can point to a heartland or home). By revealing the contested and muddled reality of the state, a better understanding of the disjuncture between image and material conditions may be prompted, a perspective that might lead to more sober expression and action. Pulling back the curtains on the Midwest and letting critical light shine in may even help the economic and cultural progress of both the region and the United States as a whole. Policy debate could then move away from the emotional and ideological toward a more

¹⁰ Shortridge, *Middle West*, 143.

pragmatic concern for the affairs of the country and the challenges facing individual states.

The picture of the state indicated above will weave itself throughout the discussions in this dissertation, culminating in a broad evaluation toward the end. But this guiding aim has also prompted other important ontological, epistemological, and, indeed, methodological insights. Beyond simply using representative politics as a tool to investigate the contextual geography, this research also demonstrates the very active role place plays in the political process. From campaigning to become an officeholder to debating policy when in government, geographical difference not only provides the material and cultural context for action, but also is inserted into debates and the policy-making process, guiding the discourse and charging the rhetoric. I have found that geographical conditions fuse with senses of place to steer voting in the Statehouse and to color the rhetoric of the chambers, committee rooms and campaign stump alike. Geography, in other words, is not simply a passive context for politics. It is also a part of the discourse and configures in profound ways the political process. An examination of this dimension constitutes a significant part of this dissertation. It thrusts what can sometimes be incidental or intangible dimensions of cultural geography into the very material outcomes of public policy.

An additional insight is the utility of a dialectical conception of the various cultural and political discourses found in Kansas. Emerging from the continual dialogue between Republican and Democrat, urban and rural, east and west, conservative and liberal comes the understanding that we can see in Kansas a form of “spatial dialectics.” Explored in greater depth in the following chapter, this perspective identifies the way interaction between two positions, typically in tension, gives rise to a compromise informed by the two positions. This process – so typical in the two-party state, of course – is spatially based. Two different positions, on school funding, for example, are put forth, each rooted in different parts of the state, say, simply, one rural, one urban. The ensuing debate is conducted along those same spatial lines and in those spatial terms. This research analyzes that process, evaluating the spatial roots for the opposing sides of the dialectic, considering the issue of scale, assessing how one position of the dialectic is stronger and what that says about the state as a whole, and how the resulting “synthesis” serves different places in different ways. This dialectical framework structures this dissertation, organizing the insights into cultural geography and indicating the importance of geography to the political process.

Finally, many questions and issues are raised in the course of this work that deserve fuller exploration in future studies. For example, physical geography influences cultural geography in important ways even today.

Environmental conditions are very much a part of the conception of place in some areas, one often translated into political action. The importance of school districts, and education generally, in place identification is also obviously strong in Kansas. Its general neglect by geographers is a critical oversight. Other topics, such as intercity rivalry in the development of identity, questions of ethnic integration in rural areas, and the role of roads in place-making are all presented here and demand much deeper analysis in the future. Such insights point toward a rich potential of engaging with formal politics: Through this medium we can obtain a holistic sense of the important things that are configuring, organizing and mobilizing a place today.

This dissertation is organized into groups of chapters. The first two chapters set out the academic and methodological background and provide a brief overview of the political structure of the state. Though this research takes a new approach and a new subject, the works of John Agnew, Pete Shortridge, and others provide highly useful starting points and scholarly justification for this study. Although the theoretical perspective—organized principally by the identification and analysis of dialectics found in the political scene—has not been widely used in this context, the approach is informed by others. This framework also will be connected to other developments in geography, especially the understandings offered by humanistic geography and postmodern demands. This part will also present

in some detail key methodological questions, explaining how the research was conducted, its limitations and advantages.

The following five chapters embark on the substantive analysis of the geography to the politics in the state. These chapters examine closely the role geography plays in the political process, beginning with the campaign for office and progressing to policy debates. Four such policy issues are explored in depth, being the most important things on the legislative agenda in the years of my research: School funding, immigration, gaming, and the Holcomb power plant question. Throughout these analyses, the discussion will focus on the geographical character of these debates and what this tells us about cultural patterns within the state.

Following a brief introductory chapter, the final two substantive chapters build on the perspectives gained from an immersion into state politics to focus more directly on political insights into place identity. Utilizing interviews with political figures in the state, I draw an overall picture of the state and its place-by-place regional character. Chapters in this part consider the state's regional divisions in rural and metropolitan settings. Again, the importance of oppositional relationships and sense of difference conceptualized in a dialectical approach provides a framework for the understanding of Kansas place. Lastly, a final conclusion ends the dissertation.

Former U. S. House Speaker Tip O’Neill argued on many occasions that “all politics is local.” This dissertation develops that contention, explores its scope for understanding those “local” places, and examines how that place-consciousness actually works in politics.

Chapter 2

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this research, in some sense emerged out of fieldwork, but has certainly been informed by existing scholarship in geography and elsewhere. Both epistemological and ontological in conception, these insights helped me to organize the approach and further my understandings. In this chapter, I first consider the regional literature of special relevance to this study. Then, the discussion undertakes something of a theoretical “two-step.” On the one hand, I focus on the potential for developing a deeper understanding of the linkages between politics and geography, following the important work of John Agnew. Second, I consider ways that we can think about geography in the political process, and what these roles can tell us about “place.” For this latter discussion I draw on the process-driven relational ontology conceptualized in dialectics.

The multiple-layered approach explored here helps to conceptualize not only the struggle over the identity of Kansas, but also the problematic issue of “place-making,” material divisions, and imagined discourses. Ultimately, I feel it furnishes us with a better understanding of the space and place of Kansas. Seen through the lens of state politics, Kansas is a “chimera”

partly because of its many imaginative and material parts, and partly because of the mythological, unstable basis of its identity as a place.

Regional Literature

Illustrative of the interest in Kansas politics as both a strange phenomenon and an indicator of wider trends is Thomas Frank's polemical recent analysis, *What's the Matter with Kansas?*¹ This book explores the rise of the conservative Republican movement in Kansas. He contends that at the urging of Republican politicians, through their assertion of emotional and cultural issues, voters go against their own economic interests. This research challenges some of Frank's viewpoints, and certainly adds some nuance to his interpretation. But the book is nevertheless a useful and energetic starting point for the political wars in Kansas.

More scholarly analyses have been pursued by political scientists. Burdett Loomis and Allan Cigler have investigated party political dynamics in Kansas and the rise of conservatism.² Loomis's exploration of the

¹ Thomas Frank, *What's the Matter with Kansas? How Conservatives Won the Heart of America* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2004).

² Allan Cigler, Burdett Loomis, "Kansas: Two-party competition in a one-party state," in *Party Realignment and State Politics*, ed. Maureen Moakley (Columbus OH: Ohio State Press, 1992); Allan Cigler, Mark Joslyn and Burdett Loomis, "The Kansas Christian Right and the Evolution of Republican Politics," in *The Christian Right in American Politics: Marching to the*

“legislative year” in *Time, Politics, and Policies* provided a valuable insight into the workings of Kansas state politics.³ It also opens the analysis for this study: His attention to the role of time in the political process can be logically matched by an assessment of the role of place, something my research suggests is central to the understanding of politics.

A range of texts focusing on particular issues and places in Kansas form an essential part of the background to much of this primary research. The history of western Kansas, for instance, is explored in two studies by historian Craig Miner.⁴ Issues associated with that part of the state – and shown in my research to be of some importance to regional perceptions – include the supply of water and the growth and effects of the meatpacking industry. *Ogallala Blue* is an effective introduction to the former, and the work of Donald Stull and others offers a revealing picture of the latter.⁵

Millennium, ed. John C. Green, Mark J. Rozell and Clyde Wilcox (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2003).

³ Burdett Loomis, *Time, Politics, and Policies: A Legislative Year* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1994).

⁴ Craig Miner, *West of Wichita: Settling the High Plains of Kansas, 1865-1890* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1986); *Next Year Country: Dust to Dust in Western Kansas 1890-1940* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2006). Miner has also produced two histories of Wichita: *Wichita: The early years, 1865-80* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1982); *Wichita, the Magic City* (Wichita: Wichita-Sedgwick County Historical Museum Association, 1988).

⁵ William Ashworth, *Ogallala Blue: Water and Life on the High Plains* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2006); Donald Stull and Michael J. Broadway, *Slaughterhouse Blues: The Meat and Poultry Industry in North America* (London:

Another regional dimension to Kansas, that of linguistic variation, has been explored by Albert Cook.⁶ Studies of the mining history of southeastern Kansas by William Powell and Arrell Gibson give an insight into one of the important bases for the distinctiveness of that part of the state.⁷ Likewise, bootlegging can be identified as an important regional marker.⁸ Robert Bader, bringing to attention both an issue and a mindset that this research has found resonances of today, has successfully analyzed the broader matter of prohibition in Kansas.⁹ The same author's *Hayseeds, Moralizers, and Methodists: The Twentieth-Century Image of Kansas*, is an excellent interpretation of identity that fuses history with perception.¹⁰ Again, trends identified in that study can be seen in the contemporary Kansas revealed in the course of this research.

Wadsworth Publishing Co., 2003); Donald Stull, Michael J. Broadway and David Griffith, eds., *Any Way You Cut It: Meat Processing and Small-Town America* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1995).

⁶ Albert B. Cook, "Perspectives for a linguistic atlas of Kansas," *American Speech* 53, no. 3 (1978): 199-209.

⁷ Arrell M. Gibson, *Wilderness Bonanza: The Tri-state District of Missouri, Kansas and Oklahoma* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1972); William E. Powell, "Coal and Pioneer Settlement of Southeasternmost Kansas," *Ecumene* 9 (April, 1977): 6-16; "The Little Balkans of Kansas: A Geographical View," *The Little Balkans Review* 3, no. 2 (1982): 78-84.

⁸ Patrick G. O'Brien, Kenneth J. Peak, & Barbara K. Robins, "'It may have been illegal, but it wasn't wrong': The Kansas 'Balkans' bootlegging culture, 1920-1940," *Kansas History* 12, (winter, 1988): 260-271.

⁹ Robert S. Bader, *Prohibition in Kansas: A History* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1986).

¹⁰ Robert S. Bader, *Hayseeds, Moralizers, and Methodists: The Twentieth-Century Image of Kansas* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1988).

Broader histories and historical geographies of Kansas provide a backdrop for this dissertation. In the light of my research, many of the historical patterns identified in these works can be seen to have persisted to the present day. Most generally, Craig Miner's comprehensive history of the state provides a useful survey.¹¹ Pete Shortridge's historical geographies of patterns of immigrant settlement in the state and the characteristics of urban development provide not only a useful understanding and context for what we see today in Kansas, but help demonstrate that local historical geographies matter today.¹² The sense of place evinced by politicians in my research drew very often on local heritage, and frequently revealed the persistence of the historical patterns identified by Shortridge.

Explorations of Kansan senses of place and regional perception have also offered useful information, comparative studies, and methodological frameworks. *PrairyErth*, the "deep map" produced by William Least Heat-Moon suggests a revealing way one can go about making sense of places—in

¹¹ Craig Miner, *Kansas: The History of the Sunflower State, 1854-2000* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2002). For other good histories, see: Rita Napier, ed. *Kansas and the West: New Perspectives* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2003); Virgil Dean, ed. *John Brown to Bob Dole: Movers and Shakers in Kansas History* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2006).

¹² James R. Shortridge, *Cities on the Plains: The Evolution of Urban Kansas* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2004); *Peopling the Plains: Who Settled Where in Frontier Kansas* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1995).

this case, the central Flint Hills region.¹³ Cary de Witt has provided an insight into contemporary life in rural Kansas, and a focus on the perspective of women and their sense of place.¹⁴ Another geographer, Steven Schnell draws out narratives of identity in Lindsborg, in central Kansas, to demonstrate the utility of thinking about the construction of place with this local example.¹⁵ Shortridge's examinations of regional images and perceptions in Kansas are also echoed in this dissertation, both in terms of focus and findings.¹⁶ Indeed, I hope this research offers an update to his 1980 work that used student responses to identify coherent regions in Kansas, such as the southwest and southeast.

Shortridge's study, *The Middle West: Its Meaning in American Culture* is a foundational text for this dissertation.¹⁷ Focusing, broadly, on the perception of the region, Shortridge explored the idea of the Midwest, alerting us to the imaginative construction of this muddled unit. The Midwest

¹³ William Least Heat-Moon, *PrairieEarth: A Deep Map* (Boston: Mariner Books, 1991).

¹⁴ Cary W. de Wit, *Sense of Place on the American High Plains*, unpublished dissertation (Lawrence, KS: Department of Geography, University of Kansas, 1997); "Women's sense of place on the American High Plains," *Great Plains Quarterly* 21, no. 1 (2001): 29-44.

¹⁵ Steven M. Schnell, "Creating Narratives of Place and Identity in 'Little Sweden, USA,'" *Geographical Review* 9, no. 1 (2003): 1-29.

¹⁶ James R. Shortridge, "Vernacular regions in Kansas," *American Studies* 21, vol. 1 (1980): 73-94; "Regional image and sense of place in Kansas," *Kansas History* 28 (2005): 202-219.

¹⁷ James R. Shortridge, *The Middle West: Its Meaning in American Culture* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1989).

is not an easy idea: Its meaning, bounds, and identity vary in time and space. This dissertation builds on this focus on place perception to consider the geography of a state typically considered to be at the heart of the region.¹⁸ It also follows Shortridge's attention to the more imaginative and meaning-oriented dimensions to place and regionalization, undermining the notion of a stable, straightforward set of identities. *The Middle West* also draws attention to the importance of pastoralism to the identity of the region, something that was important to explore in this research in the context of Kansas. Indeed, the rural dimensions to the meanings of Kansas are strong, and, importantly, seem to configure policy and political debate in the state.

Such insights highlight one way this study seeks to develop Shortridge's work. By focusing on state government, this research suggests some of the material effects that place perceptions, identities and imaginations can have. Shortridge was concerned principally with the construction and character of the image and meaning of the Midwest; this research seeks to also demonstrate the importance of those things, but in the apposite context of Kansas. In addition to offering an opportunity to assess the persistence of perceptions from the 1980s, this research also looks in more detail at the *internal* construction of place and place meaning within the region. Lastly, Shortridge makes the point that the Midwest has historically

¹⁸ Shortridge, *The Middle West*, 85.

been conceptualized as the “most American” part of the country. This represents an important reason why the internal geographical and imaginative construction of an (the?) archetypal Midwestern state is worthy of closer study. To understand a “culture,” we must understand its totems.

Politics, Scale and Place: The Perspectives of John Agnew

In considering the broader principles of this study, the work of John Agnew is central. Agnew has added a great deal to the fields of political geography and the conceptualization of space and place. For this dissertation, three contributions are of particular concern: rescaling the analysis of politics, the definition of “place,” and the exploration of the geographical context for politics. This discussion will consider each of these in turn, indicating how they frame this research and how this study develops his ideas.

Highlighting the dangers of the national scale of (geo-) political analysis, Agnew urges a rescaling of political understanding. Most explicitly in “The territorial trap,” but also in his explorations of Scotland, the United States, and, recently, Italy, he considers the local, regional and cross-border settings of political patterns and processes.¹⁹ Going beyond and beneath the

¹⁹ See especially, John Agnew, “The territorial trap: the geographical assumptions of international relations theory,” *Review of International Political*

national-territorial level has obvious appeal to the regionally sensitive geographer. It also reflects a contemporary reality of substate political movements, regional interaction, and shifting political-cultural identities. Even though studies of European political change, movements in the developing world, and the impact of globalization have occupied much of the literature that follows such an approach, serious consideration should be given to sub-national formal politics here in the United States. Indeed, Agnew attempted a more detailed analysis in this vein,²⁰ but much of the work of U. S. politics has remained electoral and national in focus.²¹ This dissertation seeks to demonstrate the fecundity of sub-national analysis, and indicates the profound regionalization of politics within even a subnational unit within the United States. It perhaps also may indicate the ways in which a more regionally or locally focused analysis of politics can provide useful insights on other scales.

Economy 1, no. 1 (1994): 53-80; *Place and Politics: The Geographical Mediation of Space and Society* (Boston: Allen & Unwin, 1987); *Place and Politics in Modern Italy* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002).

²⁰ John Agnew, "Beyond core and periphery: the myth of regional political-economic restructuring and sectionalism in contemporary American politics," *Political Geography Quarterly* 7, no. 2 (1988): 127-140. For a relevant exercise in Italy, see John Agnew, "Mapping politics: how context counts in electoral geography," *Political Geography* 15, no. 2 (1996): 129-146.

²¹ See the excellent work by geographers such as Richard Morrill, Clark Archer and Fred Shelley.

Articulating the need for a more geographically balanced approach to studying politics, Agnew necessarily explores the meaning of “place” as a productive unit of analysis. His understanding of the concept of place is multilayered, and represents one of the best ways it has been theorized since the notion’s renaissance in the 1970s. Agnew sees three dimensions to place. First is *locale*, or the concentrated setting for human activity and social relations, the everyday exchanges and interactions between people. Next, *location* refers to the setting for interaction on a wider scale, the node “that links the place to both wider networks and the territorial ambit it is embedded in.”²² Third, *sense of place*, the “structure of feeling” in a given place or the “symbolic identification with a place as distinctive and constitutive of a personal identity and a set of personal interests.”²³ This “sense of place” he sees as having scalar flexibility: “place” itself having flexible scales, and sense of place in particular being felt both from an immediate scale or projected onto a wider unit, giving rise to regionalism or nationalism.²⁴

Agnew’s conceptualization of place brings together social, material, networked and imaginative dimensions of the unit, making a combination of

²² Agnew, *Place and Politics in Modern Italy*, 16.

²³ Agnew, *Place and Politics in Modern Italy*, 16.

²⁴ See also Tuan’s conceptualization of sense of place, in Yi-Fu Tuan, *Topophilia: A Study of Environmental Perceptions, Attitudes and Values* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974), and elsewhere.

the material and perceived. This applies easily to Kansas – the state’s political process is influenced, for example, by the real material differences between poorer southeast Kansas and wealthy suburban Johnson County. Similarly, it is influenced by the different racial and ethnic experiences of those in urban Kansas City and in rural, Latino southwestern Kansas, and by the different senses of Wichita from the suburbs and from the inner city. All these things, and innumerable others, make up the distinctive experience of Kansas that is worked out politically. The outcomes of such processes are, as well, materially and imaginatively significant. This research pays particular attention to the “sense-of-place” dimension of Agnew’s conceptualization, politics being a vividly imaginative and discursive setting, but the full understanding of place is important because it brings together all the elements that, in our socio-economic reality, constitute geographical existence and, inevitably, the basis and output of representative politics. Agnew’s prioritization of place is exciting because he avoids framing it within a territorial dimension and he brings together its imaginative and social properties. This flexible and dynamic understanding guides the conceptual formation of place in this research: It can be regional, local, or statewide in scale, and is an active constituent of identity and politics.

Agnew’s understanding of place feeds into the third contribution he makes to the foundation of this study: focus on a geographical context for

politics. Taking a structurationist perspective, Agnew laments the relegation of place and space as a backdrop for political analysis in political and social-science analysis. In *Place and Politics: The Geographical Mediation of State and Society*, and later in explorations of Italian politics,²⁵ he suggests that responses (or resistance) to state institutions, reflected primarily in voting patterns, are best viewed in terms of the characters and qualities of places rather than in the abstracted understanding of wider categories (such as class or race) or the isolated subjectivity of individual agency. It is in places, he explains, that the structuration of social existence is mediated, that human agency and the broader structures of social existence interact. Taking, in Agnew's words, a "place perspective" allows for the synthesis of a range of contextual factors in understanding political patterns: This epistemological device prioritizes a dynamic, multilayered and multiscaled view of politics.

Using an integrative conception of place as a tool to map politics, Agnew demonstrates how local or regional histories, socio-economic conditions and cultural perceptions contribute to, for example, patterns of voting in northern Italy or the success of the Scottish National Party in parts of Scotland.²⁶ In Italy, for example, (looking especially at the rise of the Northern League) Agnew shows how place imagery, symbolism and

²⁵ See especially Agnew, *Place and Politics in Modern Italy* (2002).

²⁶ See for instance, Agnew's *Place and Politics: The Geographical Mediation of State and Society*, 160-167 on the SNP.

narratives can take an active role in political processes. Ultimately, however, his analysis is primarily framed by electoral geographies. In this discussion, I hope to build on Agnew's understanding of the role of place in politics in two ways.

Without the "place perspective" Agnew provides for the situating of politics, one part of my study, which draws on the connection between place and politics to understand the former, would be lacking a full geographical theorization. This dissertation uses this link to draw understandings of place from an analysis of the politics: in short, it reverses Agnew's insight. As suggested, however, there are two ways that Agnew's perspective can be deepened and extended. First, more can be said about identity politics. In Kansas, politics is enmeshed in cultural processes as much as party.²⁷ It is discursive and imaginative, a dynamic and contested conceptual terrain that is not only social, material or economic, but also imaginative and perceptual. Agnew gives some attention to these dimensions,²⁸ but my work makes them central. A sense of one's culture or one's identity is, like politics, not something abstract: it is rooted in place, and place is a part of that identity.

²⁷ For further support for this, see Thomas Frank, *What's the Matter with Kansas: How Conservatives Won the Heart of America* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2004).

²⁸ Especially in Agnew, *Place and Politics in Modern Italy*; but see also John Agnew "The rhetoric of regionalism: the Northern League in Italian politics, 1983-94," *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 20 (1995): 156-172.

Sense of place and the perception of place are keys to cultural understanding and, consequently (and, perhaps, inevitably, given representative politics' territorial organization) are central to political dynamics.

It is obvious that politicians in Kansas articulate and mobilize various senses of place in their attempts to muster electoral support or push a policy agenda. Although the "product" of politics might be categorical (Democrat, Republican, conservative, liberal, voting yea or nay, and so on), its appeals and bases are subjective, imaginative, and, if one remembers the individual voting decisions that go into the election of a politician, essentially humanistic. The politician is aggregating and articulating individual perceptions of place in an attempt to retain "power" in that place. The individual voter is selecting the candidate who is "most like them," the one who tallies best with their sense of that place (again remember representative politics is structured, organized by places: districts or a state). An election, of course, can be understood by the historical, social and economic context of places. But it is also a collection of many individual humanistic decisions that draw on imaginative discourses of place and culture and the emotional understanding of personal senses of place. Politicians reflect and articulate these senses of place; if we as geographers wish to better understand the constructions and perceptions of place – as well its the material, economic or social realities – representative politics is a potentially fertile place to start.

Agnew does not develop this dimension to politics as fully as he might. I go further here.

The humanistic concern for individuals' "sense of place" emerged in a meaningful way in geography in the 1970s.²⁹ Emphasizing human agency as a reaction to the dehumanizing quantification of previous scholarship, the turn toward subjectivity offered an opportunity to explore the perception of place and the creative, imaginative way humans interact with the world. In many ways this development was a precursor to the present-day constructivist and discursive understandings of place and identity, opening geography to the pursuit of a fuller human experience of place.³⁰ Recent work has shown how the seemingly highly individualistic concern for sense of place can be considered in a wider context. From Massey's liberating take on a "progressive" sense of place that emphasizes connection and interaction,³¹ to the new directions explored in a Tuan-inspired compendium, *Textures of*

²⁹ See for instance, Yi-Fu Tuan, "Place: An Experiential Perspective," *Geographical Review* 65, no. 2 (1975): 151-165; Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977); and others, such as Anne Buttner, "Grasping the Dynamism of Lifeworld," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 66, no. 2 (1976): 277-292.

³⁰ See for good examples, Tim Cresswell, *Place: A Short Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004); Cresswell, *In Place/Out of Place: Geography, Ideology and Transgression* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996); Rob Shields, *Places on the Margin: Alternative Geographies of Modernity* (London: Routledge, 1992).

³¹ Doreen Massey, "A Global Sense of Place," in *Reading Human Geography*, eds. Trevor Barnes and Derek Gregory (London: Arnold, 1997): 315-323.

Place, the potential for a focus on place and human perception has real value.³² Butz and Eyles, drawing on Habermas, articulate an approach that roots individual senses of place in a broader societal framework, taking the concept beyond its roots in humanistic geography.³³ They assert, echoing Agnew, that “social interaction, place and sense of place are mutually constitutive,” and that individual senses of place are not isolated from broader social frameworks, but are rather “the product of social interaction mediated through individual subjectivities.”³⁴ Such insights help justify this study’s attention to the more perceptual aspects of place, but also support the notion that politics embraces and mobilizes senses of place. The perception or emotional understanding of place is not isolated from broader imaginative (and, indeed, materially conditioned) geographical discourses. This study heeds Butz and Eyles’s call to consider sense of place in a broader framework (in this case, politics) and builds on their insights of a socially rooted sense of place to understand the places behind political discourse.

In a broader way, this dissertation points toward a means by which the sense-of-place concept can be taken to a more categorical level, opening it up

³² Paul C. Adams, Steven Hoelscher and Karen E. Till, eds. *Textures of Place: Exploring Humanist Geographies* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001).

³³ David Butz and John Eyles, “Reconceptualizing Senses of Place: Social Relations, Ideology and Ecology,” *Geografiska Annaler* 79, no. 1 (1997): 1-25.

³⁴ Butz and Eyles, “Reconceptualizing Senses of Place,” 23.

to more generalized (and quantified) analysis. A connection exists between the individual politician in a district (or the state) and the 20,000 (or 1.6 million³⁵) individuals within that unit. That politician must mobilize sense of place in their policy-making and governance, and articulate it in their words and actions. His or her values, identity, meanings and cultural dynamics – cannot be too removed from that of a substantial number of their constituents, otherwise he or she would not be supported (or accepted, without active support) for office. To be accused of being “out of touch” or a “carpetbagger” is a powerfully destructive thing to a politician.

Having drawn this connection, the geographer can then do something with the statistics, votes and discourses found in the formal political setting. Politicians and their words and actions are distillations of multiple individuals’ senses of place; those words and actions, including votes, comments in debates, and so on, can be mapped, quantified and categorized, going some way to “using” the subjective in an objective way, helping make sense of broader patterns and perceptions of place. This approach provides a way of quantifying the subjective, broadening that individualism and organizing the imaginative to gain a meaningful, more generalized understanding of the dynamics and discourse of place. Herein lies an irony, perhaps: In distilling multiple senses of place from a region into one person

³⁵ Data from the Kansas Secretary of State, 2008.

(the politician), we are actually liberating humanistic geography from a purely individualistic focus.

Studying the cultural geography of politics with a focus on the sense and perceptions of place articulated and acted upon by politicians allows a link between the particular and the general, between the individual and collective. It provides an avenue to the understanding of place, the senses of place, of the many people behind the singular politician. This frame of understanding directly informs the second part of this dissertation where politicians are interviewed for their sense of place, and more indirectly underlies the first part where the political process is explored for clues as to the construction of Kansas and its places and regions today.

The Workings of “Place” within Politics: Dialectics

Given that politics can be seen as a distillation (however imperfect) of place, we should be able to explore the political process – at a legislative level – for insight into how places get meaning, how they interact and form a dynamic in the “space” of Kansas, and how Kansas is constituted as a place. The discourses of politics and the voting and machinations of the lawmaking

process, tangibly reveal many ways in which place is a “process.”³⁶ Exploring the cultural geographies to be found in Kansas state politics provides a manifestation of what Peter Jackson, following Raymond Williams, sees as the dynamic process that is “culture.”³⁷ Culture is not something reified or stable, in other words, but something fought over, constructed, and reconstructed. This study of Kansas politics, with an attention to the dynamics of place as seen through that politics, reveals the truth of this statement.

In examining the role of place in Kansas politics, and what we can learn from that role, two broad conceptual insights emerge. First, simply, place is integral to the policy-making process. As will be seen, that role is rhetorical, organizational, ideological, and material. The imaginative elements of place have very material outcomes in terms of policies and budgets.

The second conceptual insight refers to *how* place works in politics. It is strikingly dialectical. On different issues and in different ways, alternative positions in political debate are rooted in *place*, and the outcome (or compromise) of that opposition is a synthesis that constitutes the outcome of

³⁶ See Doreen Massey, “A Global Sense of Place,” and also Massey, *Space, Place and Gender* (London: Methuen, 1994); Massey and John Allen, *Geography Matters!* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), and other works by Massey. Also Don Mitchell, *Cultural Geography: A Critical Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000): 294.

³⁷ Peter Jackson, *Maps of Meaning: An Introduction to Cultural Geography* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989).

the whole, a policy for all of Kansas. In the following pages I outline the history of dialectical understanding in geography and the principles and priorities of the dialectics, before exploring in more detail this relational ontology as it is seen in Kansas.

Dialectics, as a vision for how the human world works and a means for its study and explication, draws on multiple traditions in western philosophy. Hegel was perhaps the most prominent postclassical proponent of the approach, articulating an idealist conception, developed by Fichte as the well-known thesis – antithesis – synthesis model.³⁸ Marx inverted Hegel's dialectics by taking a materialist stance and applying the theory to capitalism.³⁹ Within geography, dialectics has perhaps been most vigorously employed by Marxist geographers such as Neil Smith and David Harvey, whose analysis of the workings of capitalism follows the historical-material model developed by Marx.⁴⁰ A more complicated reworking has been proposed (most prominently) by Soja, who, following Lefebvre, explored a "trialectics" of space;⁴¹ Lefebvre and Soja return to an early, more idealist

³⁸ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Science of Logic* (London: Routledge, 2004).

³⁹ Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Parts 1 & 2* (London: Penguin, 1993).

⁴⁰ See for instance, David Harvey, *Limits to Capital*, 2nd ed. (London: Verso, 1999); Neil Smith, *Uneven Development: Nature, Capital and the Production of Space* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991).

⁴¹ Edward Soja, *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996).

Marx, conceptualizing the “production” of space as the three-way interaction of perceived, conceived and lived space.⁴²

All of these above approaches are, in their different ways, useful and enlightening, depicting an ontological reality with sophisticated epistemological insights. While informing this understanding of the political and spatial dialectics in Kansas, none are entirely satisfactory for capturing the place-making at work in the state. Hegel’s approach is problematically divorced from material reality; the class-driven categorization of Marx is too deterministic and focused on economic processes. Harvey gives almost all his attention to material conditions and the explanatory power to economic structures.⁴³

Soja’s understanding of the spatiality of social life attempts to break out of an economic dialectic. His vision of a “thirdspace” which is both real and imagined, a “space of extraordinary openness” where one can be Marxist and idealist at the same time, is indeed liberating.⁴⁴ His spatialized “trialectics,” helpfully integrates space into social understanding, foregrounding geography, and seeing the full meaning of being as constituted by the social, historical and spatial. Soja’s insights, as those of

⁴² See also Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991).

⁴³ David Harvey, *Justice, Nature and the Geography of Difference* (London: Wiley-Blackwell, 1996).

⁴⁴ Soja, *Thirdspace*, 5.

Lefebvre before him, have opened a path for this dissertation work. Soja points to the fusion and interaction of the real and imagined: unquestionably a feature of political discourse where words are overlaid on material geographical realities and laws are substantive renderings of imaginative understandings. His work also supports the conception of space being “produced,” that it is not something incidental or prior to human action and thought. Soja also points toward a dialectic that is freed of a temporal shackle. Again, this opens up the dialectical approach to a far broader application, allowing a move toward an understanding of the simultaneous tension within a particular social setting.

Although the work of Soja and Lefebvre (and articulated lucidly later by Merrifield⁴⁵) opens a new, more flexible and spatialized understanding of dialectics, their conceptions do have limitations. First, the underlying foundation remains economic processes.⁴⁶ This is a valid understanding, but I hope to break more clearly into the realm of the subjective, individual, cultural identity politics of place. This is the foundation of the dialectics that can be seen in Kansas politics.

⁴⁵ Andrew Merrifield, “Place and Space: A Lefebvrian Reconciliation,” *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 18, no. 4 (1993)

⁴⁶ Edward Soja, *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (London: Verso, 1989).

As well as breaking away from a material foundation for dialectical understanding, this dissertation differs from Soja and Lefebvre's conception in that it is concerned not with the full spatiality of existence, of the socio-spatial foundations of being, but on the particular ways in which people understand place. Soja's understandings are important for this, as they liberate, to some extent, the dialectic from traditional Hegelian or Marxist foundations and explore in sophisticated ways the process-driven reality of space. His explication of "thirdspace" is revelatory and underpins many of the ways this research understands the social working of space. This study takes a different approach from Soja, however. I have a more modest and focused goal: to better understand how humans organize their world into places and how, in the particular setting of Kansas politics, those places are constituted, articulated and mobilized.

The discussion will now turn to the ontological insights of dialectics used in this research. Dialectics emphasizes the process-driven or dynamic nature of things. This perspective sees things—conceptual, social, cultural, economic—as embodying tension or dynamic interaction. Harvey described this well, suggesting that "elements, things, structures and systems do not exist outside of or prior to the processes, flows, and relations that create,

sustain or undermine them.”⁴⁷ This forces us to examine the process by which things come to be, to uncover the internal relations and dynamics that constitute the “wholes” under analysis.

The dynamism or interaction “behind” things is typically understood in the dialectical approach as a binary of contradiction. The relationship need not necessarily be of opposites, but a certain antagonism is seen as producing the dynamic tension that makes up the whole. Nothing is “stable” or unproblematic from this perspective; everything is constituted by interaction and dialogue. The traditional model of this process-driven understanding is the thesis – antithesis – synthesis summary. One position is modified by another to produce a synthesis (or negation of the negation, in Hegelian terms). A more sophisticated reading sees the process not arranged necessarily temporally (one, then the other, then the synthesis), but as a continual interaction within the “totality.” Merrifield, citing Ollman and Lefebvre, provides a neat summary, asserting that all contradictions should be viewed relationally “within an internally-related holistic framework. . . . Totality. . . represents ‘the way the whole is present through internal relations in each of its parts;’ it is a dynamic, emergent and open construct.”⁴⁸ Such an understanding avoids reifying things or ideas, seeing the conflict and

⁴⁷ Harvey, *Justice, Nature*, 49.

⁴⁸ Andrew Merrifield, “Place and Space: A Lefebvrian Reconciliation,” *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 18, no. 4 (1993): 517.

negotiation behind, not necessarily as a temporally extended process, but in every position, thing or perception at any moment.

Seeing the human world as filled with multiple, momentary or extended dialectics allows for a geography that is concerned with process and dynamism, without objectifying or totalizing. It provides an opportunity to theorize both difference and persistence across space and time: All are embodiments of tension and interaction in the human mind and in human systems. Taking dialectics away from its Marxist roots opens it up to an engagement with discourse and imagination, but without the philosophical idealism propounded by Hegel. In short, there is some potential to take dialectics toward an interpretation of the dynamism of culture. Culture is a process,⁴⁹ and this focus on the non-economic production of place is an example of that.

This research explores the profoundly dialectical reality of Kansas politics. It contends that these dialectical processes have their roots and effects in the material and imagined qualities of places.

⁴⁹ See Raymond Williams, *Culture* (London: Fontana, 1981), for instance.

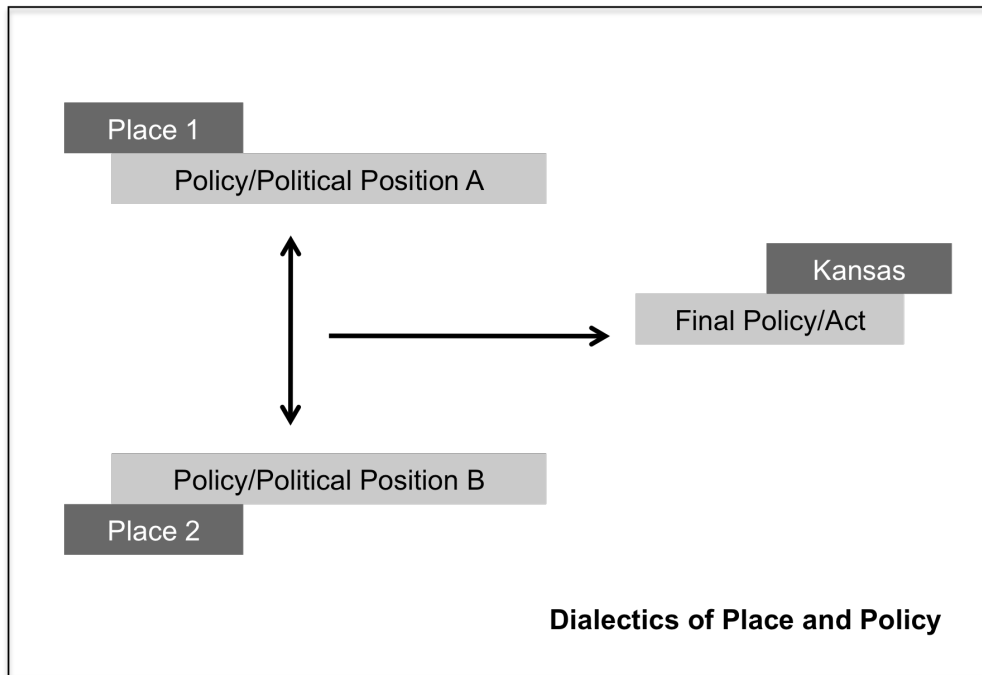


Figure 1: Dialectics of place and policy

In a diagrammatic summary of the operation of political discourses in a dialectical form in the Kansas legislature, we can see both the interaction of ideas, and places (Figure 1). Policy positions, sometimes organized along party lines, Democrat versus Republican, are necessarily organized into an oppositional framework in the Kansas legislature. Whatever the nuances, the politician has to vote either for or against the bill or resolution. Those speaking in debate, or giving speeches on a subject, articulate a position either for or against a policy. These politicians are all rooted in place; they each represent an area. The two sides interact, sometimes constructively, sometimes in a dogmatic fashion, and the policy is modified to some extent,

the bill amended in committee or in the House or Senate chamber, and the product becomes something of a compromise – sometimes only marginally so, sometimes wholeheartedly. The final outcome, the act or amendment, etc., represents a synthesis (sometimes multiple stages) of oppositional positions, positions that are rooted in place and often articulated in geographical terms.

Opposing positions on a particular policy interact, policy or political position “A” and “B,” for or against a measure, stemming from places “1” and “2.” These places might be particular types of districts – rural or urban, perhaps – or be from certain parts of the state – the west, or districts along the state border, for instance. The process sees two positions on a policy interact with two sets of places “behind” these articulations of the debate at various stages of the policy-making process. The final outcome, a measure for Kansas, is a compromise (to whatever extent) between the two policy positions. The interaction between places – as all representative politics is – is also resolved into a broader “whole,” Kansas. Of course, this is a simplified scheme, and as this research will show, many stages and turns in the policy-making process exist that reconfigure this dialectical relationship. This simplified structure, however, underlies much of the political process I have seen in this research.

Of course, the interaction of two opposing views on a position, once again rooted in place, is not always an interaction of “equals.” Some perceptions of place have greater power or currency than others; some are

seen to be more “appropriate” for Kansas, and thus have more political power. Typically, then, the diagram of the political dialectics at work looks something like Figure 2, where one position has a greater dominance in the process.

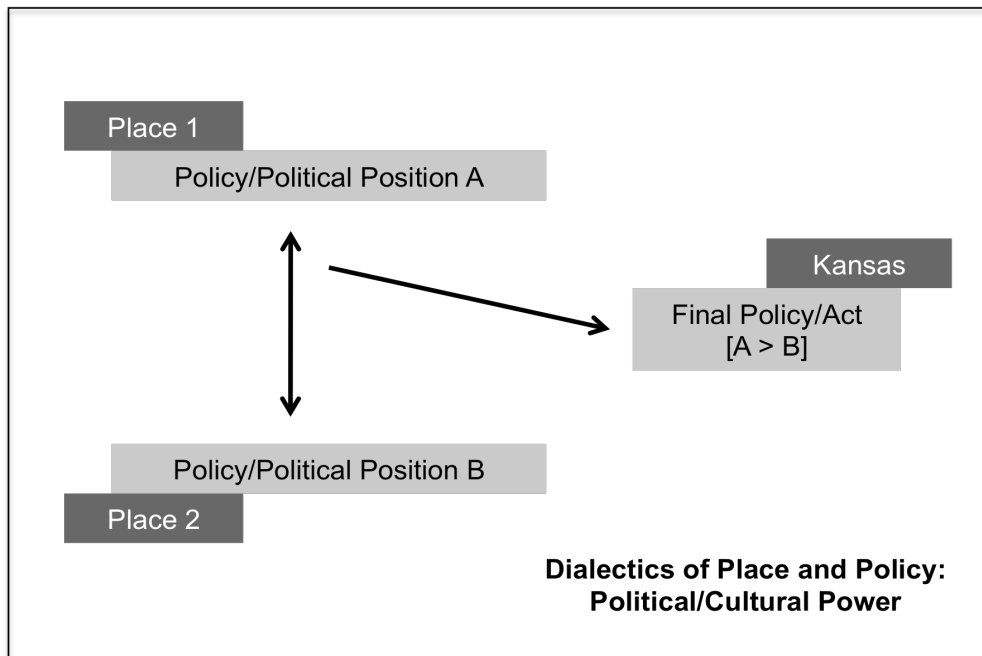


Figure 2: Dialectics of place and policy: Political/cultural power

Multiple dialectics exist in the creation of policy for Kansas, because the legislative agenda is complex. This multiplicity is not a problem, it merely points toward (and reflects) the diversity and dynamics behind the construction of place outside the political realm. Many issues are resolved along party lines, where one group (typically the Republicans) has a majority;

but here too we should remember that party alignment is not an abstract thing: Republicans, like the Democrats, are from *places*. And on many issues, votes are not on straightforward party lines. A surprising number of decisions, in fact, follow some sort of geographical rather than partisan pattern. Representative politics is about building coalitions of support, along and beyond party lines. It is also, quite clearly, about building geographical coalitions to forward an agenda. That process, too, is dialectical.

An insight of this study is that politics cannot be disassociated from place. Taking state politics as a lens to view cultural geography, we can translate the schema depicted above into a conception of the dynamics and construction of place. First, echoing Figure 1, Figure 3 illustrates the dialectical construction of “Kansas” and the dynamic interaction of places within Kansas.

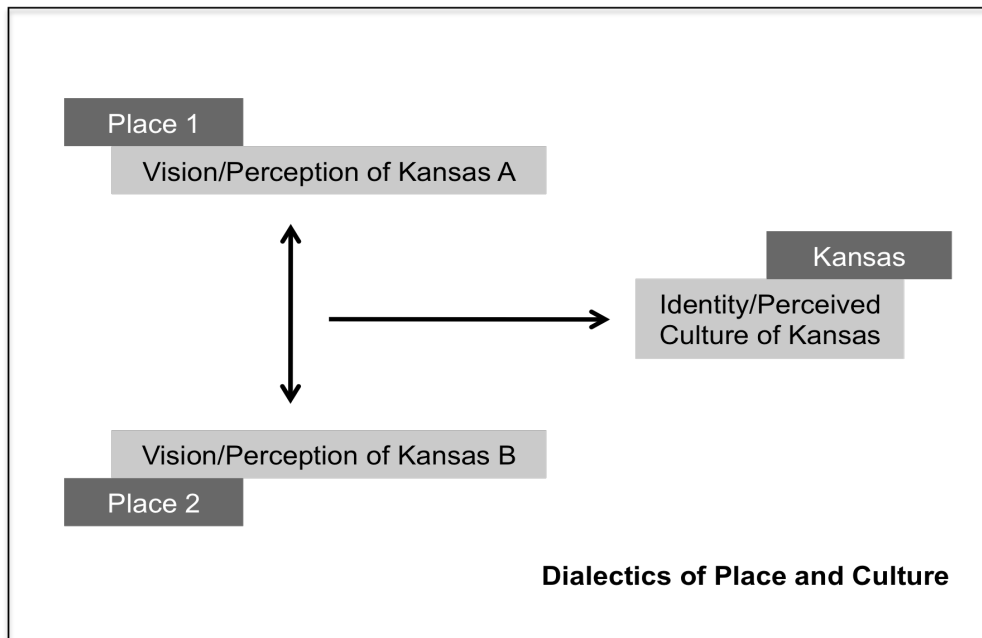


Figure 3: *Dialectics of place and culture*

Drawn from the same dynamic as seen in the policy-making process, perceptions rooted in different places interact to constitute the place of Kansas and contribute to a wider identity of Kansas as a whole. The identity of Kansas as a whole does not just “exist.” If the politics of the state reflects the perceptions of its inhabitants, then the concept of “Kansas” is a complicated, contested and dynamic process that is configured by the interaction of people of different places within its bounds. To make a theoretical leap, Kansas is, then, both a place and a space. It is a place that has an “identity” via the ongoing process of cultural and imaginative interaction, and it is a space in that, within its bounds, places are interacting in the

continual creation of that place. This particular dialectical process does not lead to the annihilation of space by place, but rather indicates the *edification* of space by place.

Any state representative is a representative (however incomplete) of the sense of place of his or her constituents. If we see in the political setting the multiple moments of dialectical interaction (imagined or articulated or voted) that drive the construction of place and cultural geography, we can suggest that the many others who voted for this individual also hold a similar understanding of place, mobilized to some degree by a dialectical set of perceptions or relations. "Real" life is of course not organized as oppositionally as state legislative politics, but a sense of difference and distinction must be part of the cultural understanding of place given how vivid the articulation and vigorous the defense of place perception is in the political discourse. That discourse must tap into some broader sense of place, and politics itself works back (as a public and prominent discourse) into the culture of place, helping to form the perceptions of places. Through in-depth interviews with state politicians, this research has uncovered just how important a sense of difference and distinction is to local senses of place, providing empirical evidence for the basis of the appeals to difference that can be seen in the discourse of politics.

This interaction of places as conceived above is, like the policy-making process, not a simple or “equal” process (Figure 4).

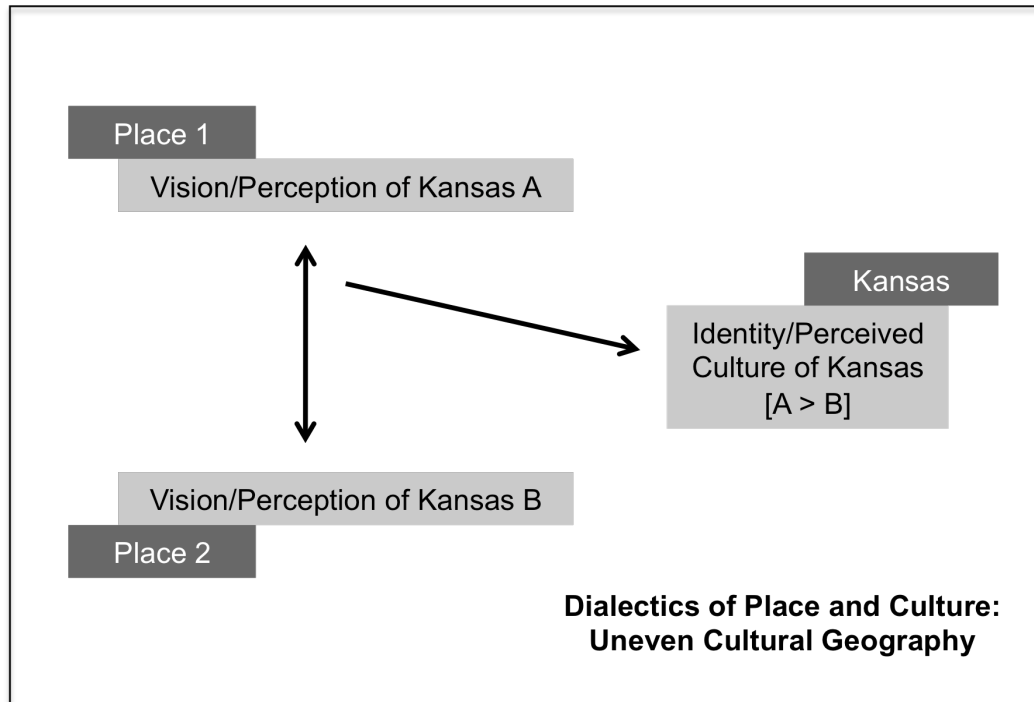


Figure 4: Dialectics of place and culture: Uneven cultural geography.

Some identities have more power than others in Kansas; some even operate hegemonically. This can be seen in the politics as policy is toward these biases, and it can similarly be seen in the state identity. Such an approach also indicates the possibility for change.

The unequal interaction of various cultural meanings and perceptions of place in Kansas leads to spatial as well as temporal variation. Just as in

classic Marxism, capital inequalities lead to “uneven development,”⁵⁰ so in cultural dialectics one can see an “uneven cultural geography.” Some places are imbued with greater meaning and have a more powerful position, whatever the economic, demographic or material realities. This uneven perception, a more internal version, perhaps, of Said’s “Orientalism,”⁵¹ contributes to a skewed understanding of the state, and to differentials in policy provision. Uneven cultural geography is not an unproblematic or innocent thing. This is the subjective, individual sense of place institutionalized and writ material.

This discussion has been an introduction to the approach this dissertation takes. The results, as articulated in the following chapters, demonstrate the complexity and subtleties of this place-based, dialectical perspective, and reveal the dynamic processes behind these identities. This dialectic leads to an understanding of Kansas as rooted in place interaction on different scales and in different ways. Kansas is a chimera because it does not exist as a stable, homogenous or uncontested unit. It is an ongoing dynamic, contested, changing idea, it is never finished and never complete. Emphasizing the importance of place interaction (real and perceptual), this

⁵⁰ See Smith, *Uneven Development* (1991).

⁵¹ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (London: Routledge, 1978).

study of state politics sheds light on the material and imaginative geographies of the state and the places within.

Chapter 3

The Research Setting

Close attention to research design and methodological rigor are important to studies that are largely qualitative in nature, dealing as they do with “fuzzy” data and subjective forms of analysis.¹ Moreover, since I present this study as an “exploration,” no immediately comparable existent research plan exists in geographical scholarship that could be simply applied to this case study. With a new topic and a new approach in cultural geography, a full discussion of the methodology also may be instructive for future work in this field. Following such discussion, I will move on to an overview of Kansas politics and the political context for this work.

The primary research questions may be summarized as follows:

1. *How does geography play a role in state politics?*
2. *What can we learn about the geography of Kansas from state politics?*

¹ For useful recent discussions, see Melanie Limb and Claire Dwyer, eds. *Qualitative Methodologies for Geographers: Issues and Debates* (London: Arnold, 2001); Iain Hay, *Qualitative Research Methods in Human Geography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Jamie Baxter and John Eyles, “Evaluating qualitative research in social geography: establishing ‘rigour’ in interview analysis,” *Transactions of the Instituted of British Geographers New Series* 22.4 (1997): 505-525.

In considering the best design to address these questions, a number of strategies were evaluated, but I decided on the following plan simultaneously to make best use of the opportunities presented to me as an English “outsider” and to best answer the above questions. Four main activities summarize the approach, for the most part conducted in sequence:

- A. Observe closely, immersing myself in the “world” of state politics in Kansas to explore the process and the discourses of governing.
- B. Using legislative data, map House votes and trace voting patterns.
- C. Critically analyze the “texts” of politics: newspaper articles, media reports, campaign ads, vote explanations, and so on.
- D. Interview elected political figures – especially state legislators and statewide office-holders.

These four strands were each revealing in terms of geographical perspectives, and each in different ways helped address my two fundamental questions. Following a consideration of the work of Richard Fenno, this chapter will examine each of the four activities in more detail, along the way evaluating

broader methodological questions such as my position as an outsider, the challenge of researching “elites,” and the changing environment of politics. Part “A,” the participant observation element of the research, requires the longest discussion. It is complex, it took up most of the time of the research, and it provides an essential backdrop for the rest of the research directions.

A key influence on the design and methodology of this research was the pioneering work of political scientist Richard Fenno. Fenno’s book *Home Style* investigates how the perception members of Congress have of their constituency affects their political behavior.² In it he develops a participant observation approach for the study of political actors. *Home Style* is lucid and candid. It also contains an extended essay on methodology that introduces participant observation to the study of U. S. political elites, with the help of field anecdotes. Fenno’s work is not only topically informative, but also represents the fullest exploration of research design and application most akin to the “field” of this dissertation.

Fenno identifies five principal areas of attention when designing participant observation research: questions about the sample; problems of access; issues of rapport; the relationship between the observer and the observed; and questions about the collection and quality of data. In *Home*

² Richard Fenno, *Home Style: House Members in their Districts* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1978).

Style, Fenno followed eighteen representatives as they interacted with others in their districts, noting how they cultivated trust and connected themselves to their “places.” He discusses their actions and self-presentation, following from *how* they understand and perceive their districts. As such, it was important that he not only gain access to those representatives in the first instance, but also develop a comfortable rapport with them, facilitating a more in-depth analysis of their perceptions and motivations. Warning against excessive rapport, he attempted to retain a critical distance and scholarly eye, enabling his final “data” to be as balanced, comprehensive, and accurate as possible.

This methodological framework was of immense help when designing this research, and was a frequent recourse between stints “in the field.” Discussion will now turn to how the research was planned and carried out in the four directions introduced above, beginning with the “observation” part of the work. Fenno’s areas of concern will be considered in each part of the research plan. In addition to adapting Fenno’s methodology, I also employed the standards of rigor identified by Baxter and Eyles.³ Questions, as they present them, of credibility (“authentic representations of experience”), dependability (“minimization of idiosyncrasies in interpretation,” sometimes

³ Jamie Baxter and John Eyles, “Evaluating qualitative research in social geography: establishing ‘rigour’ in interview analysis,” *Transactions of the Instituted of British Geographers New Series* 22.4 (1997): 505-525.

described as reliability) and confirmation (“extent to which biases, motivations, interests or perspectives of the inquirer influence interpretations”) will be prime in evaluating the strength of the outcomes. In short, Fenno has provided the broad methodological framework and specific considerations for this type of research; Baxter and Eyles (along, of course, with other methodological writers) have provided some key standard criteria for evaluating the robustness of the work.

Observation and Immersion in Kansas State Politics

In my research, Fenno’s concern for a valid sampling of subjects for closer analysis and, later, interviewing, had to be delayed until after I had secured initial access to the political world in which these actors operated. Access is perhaps the most critical and practically important stage of researching political elites. Whilst Fenno’s participant observation took place mostly in representatives’ districts and he had to win access to the politician in that setting, my field for observing geography at work in politics was the Kansas Statehouse. I had to find ways to closely interact and experience first-hand both the open and “behind closed doors” aspects of politics. Determining the specific bounds of my research field, therefore, was largely dependent on what access I could be granted. The first step in my case was to

build a relationship (beginning in 2005) with one legislator, state representative Candy Ruff, a Democrat from Leavenworth in northeast Kansas. This relationship came about serendipitously from an academic contact and, throughout my experience in Kansas politics, I have benefitted greatly from her help, knowledge, and understanding of the academic endeavor. Representative Ruff became my “mentor” in the Statehouse. I would urge any geographer who is new to a political forum to build a close relationship with a trusted informant. A reliable guide to the process, the personalities, and the politicking is indispensable.

After discussing research ideas and my need to “get into” (ethnographically) Kansas politics, Ruff agreed to supervise me in an internship. The Kansas Legislative Internship Program is a competitive scheme that allows intimate access to the workings of the Statehouse. An intern is connected to a specific legislator and, in this way, is brought into the confidence of the party with which that legislator caucuses. It also grants access to the House floor, a place off-limits to all but staffers, special guests, and credentialed journalists. To have the ability to roam the House of Representatives (and occasionally, the Senate) while it is meeting was invaluable to my research. Not only did it allow me to note what was being said “at the Well” (the central lectern for debates in the House), but I could also talk with representatives informally and discern their perspective on

proceedings. These were opportunities for me to build relationships with many of the 125 state representatives (and staffers) and thereby deepen my understanding of the various geographical characters of the political process. Indeed, after a second year as an intern, such was their familiarity with me, that representatives were eager to explain things to me at the side of the House itself. A further benefit of being on the House floor was access to the Clerk's station, a source of tabulations necessary for mapping key House votes.

Aside from access to the House, the internships brought me "officially" into the world of the House Democratic caucus. In addition to attending morning caucus meetings, I participated in more private strategy sessions, social events and lobbyist meetings. I experienced the full range of political activity, including social functions in the evening, and on occasion, active participation in policy research, reporting and communication. A typical day consisted of a House Democratic caucus meeting in a committee room at 8:15 a.m., outlining the agenda for the House meeting that day and reporting any other developing issues, including some words from the Minority Leader, Representative Dennis McKinney. Following this, morning committees met, and I would attend one that was scrutinizing bills of interest. Usually at 11 in the morning the House would "gavel in," beginning legislative proceedings with debate and votes. Lunch would follow, often

hosted by a particular interest group: Kansas State University, for example, has a very popular “day at the Capitol” where they serve their ice cream and lobby for their interests; other 2007 examples include lunches from the Kansas Society of Land Surveyors, the Kansas Health Institute and Health Policy Authority, and the Kansas Society of Association Executives (with tasty barbecue). Alternatively, I would go out to lobbyist lunch with Rep. Ruff and a small number of other legislators with lobbyists. There a certain piece of legislation would be discussed in a more informal way. The afternoon would consist of more committee meetings, and I would also try to fit in an opportunity to meet with other staff, lobbyists, or other political actors, again to build a fuller understanding of the political process or a particular issue. The evening often brought another event that merged policy/political discussion with pleasure: I attended dinners at the governor’s mansion, Cedar Crest, chili feed Democratic fundraisers, and lobbyist-driven gatherings such as the Kansas Trial Lawyers Association social. I certainly could not attend these every night (and neither did legislators), but the social calendar while the chambers are in session is as busy as the legislative one.

It was important to me that I experience the full range of political activity, offering as it did opportunities not only for immediate research, but also to gain access and build relationships with legislators for the future. One of the more important lessons my observation “in the field” gave was that

politics is about relationships. As a researcher fitting into that world and attempting to gain insight, building relationships was key. Before discussing more fully the development of what Fenno calls “rapport,” some methodological limitations of this internship-based entry into state politics should be addressed.

I undertook internships with the House Democratic caucus in 2006 and 2007, and having built trusting relationships with House leadership, was able to have internship access privileges again in 2008. The legislature is in session for about ninety days from January to the middle of May (with a hiatus between the end of the regular session and veto session for three weeks in April). A practical problem for me was the need to balance the desire to spend as much time as possible “in the field” at the Statehouse with my academic and professional work (taking courses, preparing, in 2007, for comprehensive examinations, literature research, teaching responsibilities and tutoring). Teaching and the courses I was taking were fixed-time commitments to work around, and some debates and votes had to be missed. In those instances I made sure to piece together the story later. Because I was not “full time” in the Statehouse, this was not a truly immersive ethnography, and so I was often catching up with what had been going on. But on the key issues I selected for attention, I made sure I could follow the process as seamlessly as possible. On a personal issue, not having a background either in

American politics or political science generally, much of my time – especially in the early days – was spent learning the “language” of politics. But as I will discuss later, on balance I think my outsider’s status was an advantage.

These internships and opportunities to access Kansas state politics also had an important temporal context: certain key items dominate the political agenda in any given year. In 2005/2006 it was school funding; 2006/2007 immigration, and concealed carry of guns; 2007 gambling, and deferred maintenance at Regents institutions; 2008, the Holcomb power plant expansion. In previous years it might have been transportation, abortion or TABOR (Taxpayers’ Bill of Rights); in future years, other issues will consume lawmakers’ attention. This dissertation, then, is necessarily an analysis of some of the more important political challenges on the agenda in the years I attended the Statehouse. In terms of the “credibility” (or validity) criterion that Baxter and Eyles discuss as being critical to the rigor of a piece of research, I feel that the issues I focused on particularly (K-12 funding, immigration, gambling, and Holcomb) reflected the emphases of the politics in each year, rather than my own biases.⁴ Indeed, my aim has been to reveal the geography behind, and explore the role of geography in a range of political topics, especially ones that do not immediately seem to have geographical roots. Since the particular issues on the agendas of 2006, 2007,

⁴ Baxter and Eyles, “Evaluating Qualitative Research,” 512.

and 2008 did not constitute the full spectrum of potential policy areas, my research cannot make an exhaustive claim. I nevertheless believe that it is broad enough to be a valid and indicative case study.

The internship was focused on only one chamber of the legislature. I knew prior to starting that working in the House would be preferable to the Senate: it is a more rambunctious, vibrant chamber, and – critically – with smaller district sizes, it is more geographically expressive. The sample number is larger and the voting coalitions more diverse. Although work on the other side of the bicameral government might be desirable in the future to broaden this focus, I believe that my current study, is reliably illustrative of the potential in studying politics from a cultural geographical perspective.

Another limitation of the internship route (as opposed, say, to Fenno's more ad hoc approach) was the partisan focus. As an intern you are connected to a particular legislator, and, by default (and convention) their caucus, Republican or Democrat. My connection with the House Democrats, perhaps on the surface a perverse position, given the dominance of the Republican party in Kansas politics, turned out not to be especially limiting to broad political access. It did, of course, give my research – and this dissertation – a partisan skew. It was not appropriate, for example, for me to attend Republican caucus meetings or participate in their strategy sessions. I socialized principally with Democrats. I mostly stood on the Democratic side

of the House. This dissertation is restricted by this partisan reality; I am sure that my insights and perspectives would have been different to some extent had I been “officially” on the other side.

But a few things can be said to excuse or justify this partisan experience, and I did take a number of steps to ensure that I was getting as balanced a picture as possible. First, although I was exposed to much of the “strategy” side of things from a Democratic perspective, much of the debate, all of the voting, and all of the speechmaking was in the open. I did not miss much of the discourse of politics from being a Democratic intern.

Additionally, although the positions would have been different, the strategizing and “behind-the-scenes” parts of the policy-making process were similar on the Republican side. Attempts to build coalitions to push legislation through were similar on both sides. By spending most of my time with the Democrats, my perspective was partial, but it nevertheless provided good insight to the role geography played in such discussions. Moreover, partisanship is not as rigid as one might imagine. On most issues, Democrats and Republicans in favor (or against, or wanting to modify) some particular issue or bill would come together (often with the help of lobbyists) to discuss and debate strategy and content. Committee meetings were, of course, the public form of this, but the private side was crucial too. I was exposed to plenty of this. Additionally, my legislative mentor, Representative Ruff,

drawn perhaps from a long tenure in the House (sixteen years in 2008) and a more conservative position on some issues, had excellent relations with many Republicans, from which I benefitted in terms of establishing partisan balance in my research.

I took a number of steps to actively establish more partisan balance to my research and ensure I was getting as full a picture as possible. I used connections Rep. Ruff facilitated with Republicans to develop trusting friendships, giving me political actors I could tap for alternative perspectives. I made a special point of nurturing a close relationship with Republican leaders (and key staffers), from both its conservative and moderate factions (a very important division). In the 2008 session, as I was not an official intern, and had by that point developed strong ties on both sides of the House – I was a known, and trusted, quantity – I made sure to attend Republican caucus meetings. I was invited also to attend moderate Republican strategy meetings (such things a sign of how split the Republican party in Kansas was). I made full use of such relationships to participate in many Republican “behind-closed-doors” forums, especially in 2008. It was not in my interest to restrict myself to the Democratic perspective. I took as many steps as possible to ensure balance, and I am comfortable with the output of this research from a partisan point of view.

Richard Fenno urged methodological consideration of the question of *rapport*. He urged not only the development of personal relationships with the research subjects in the course of participant observation, but also the need for the critical evaluation of compatibility, understanding and trust that makes up those relationships.⁵ The quality of data a researcher is getting is to some degree determined by the quality of the relationships one has with informants in the field. I have indicated above that good, trusting relationships with Republicans was important to establishing balance to my research. As I was in the Statehouse, I was always thinking ahead to in-depth interviews I wanted to pursue. But I was also genuinely interested in what all these members (and staffers) had to say, and I was fortunate that almost all of my relationships at the House were genuinely reciprocal and friendly.

Fenno wrote of his difficulties as a political scientist and academician with the attitudes some members of congress had to that status.⁶ I experienced the same unease from a few legislators as Fenno described, but overwhelmingly they seemed interested in what I was doing and (especially toward the end of my time in Topeka) actively sought me to talk about their perspectives.

⁵ Fenno, *Home Style*, 263.

⁶ Fenno, *Home Style*, 254.

Of course, when interacting with legislators I was conscious of power relations – these were people in government, members of a political elite, whose position I had to respect and acknowledge, but balance with a critical engagement in the pursuit of my research.⁷ Ultimately, questions of power as they related to access and rapport were more critical when dealing with statewide officeholders. Legislators, especially when I was better known, were for the most part more informal and accessible individuals. I attribute this to a number of practical reasons. First, the subject and discipline of geography was new and fascinating to most legislators when I spoke of my research. Most other interns were political scientists, of course, and I do think representatives appreciated my different approach. Second, I was asking about places, about regions, and about the state when I was discussing political issues with politicians in the statehouse. Testament, perhaps, to the importance geography has to politics, they were all – without exception – eager and ready to talk about their districts, and how they saw the regionalization of the state. These were new topics of (political) conversation that, I got the impression, were refreshingly not immediately partisan. Although I worked hard at my self-presentation, questioning style, and social approach, I think their receptiveness was because of the interesting, new, and

⁷ See for a useful discussion of power relations and “elite” research: Allan Cochrane, “Illusions of power: Interviewing local elites,” *Environment and Planning A* 30, no. 12 (1998): 2121-2132.

substantively engaging subject of my research. It was heartening to see that when I would meet a legislator for the first time, even before I had explained fully my research and what I was doing, they would talk about their district, reeling off anecdotes or facts of their places. My research tapped into this inclination in a more formal way.

I used my rapport with politicians on both sides of the aisle to extend my network of contacts. I entered the “field” knowing one person, Representative Ruff. I have emerged three years later, with reasonably close relationships with around one hundred legislators, staffers and other officeholders. Specifically, I made sure to identify and nurture relationships with “gatekeeper” individuals. These were of two kinds: “facilitators” and “citters.” Facilitators were those who could introduce me to someone else, or some other group. In a formal way, this might be an aide to a leader or a diary secretary. More extensively, this could be an informal position, of someone who straddles two sub-groups of legislators (after I had made my acquaintance in one), or someone who is especially respected, or enjoys an informal seniority. This can help in gaining access to the more formal leadership, of course. Facilitators – of whom, again to my good fortune, Rep. Ruff was a good example – allowed me to extend my network in meaningful ways.

"Citers" were another category of gatekeeper. Whereas facilitators actively assisted my informant collecting, citers were those I could mention as being friends or having met in order to put another legislator at ease or gain access to that individual. Politics is not only about relationships; it is the territory of personalities, and knowing certain people can take you farther than knowing others. I was sure to identify and build contact with such people whom I could cite, on each side of different issues and in the conservative, moderate and liberal elements of each party. This helped enormously, especially when it came to asking for and setting up interviews. Legislators were happier to help if I mentioned that I had met Representative "X," or was friends with Representative "Y." This may seem cynical, but the technique emerged from witnessing the very human nature of politics. Again, almost all the relationships I developed *were* meaningful, friendly and reflected a genuine interest on both sides to learn more.

Fenno remarked that his type of participant observation in politics was exploratory.⁸ So, too, did I refine my techniques, based on each experience. Fenno's attention to the relationship between the *observer and the observed*⁹ is also important, and this also was something that changed in important ways as I progressed in my research. Going beyond simple rapport, this area of

⁸ Fenno, *Home Style*, 250.

⁹ Fenno, *Home Style*, 274.

methodological concern critically evaluates the relationship between the research and their informants, raising questions of perspective, positionality, and the role the researcher plays in the field. I have suggested above how my insight, position, and network changed throughout my time in the Statehouse. My deepening position had an important influence on the conduct of my research: In some ways, I moved from being very much an “outsider” to something of an “insider,” with inevitable methodological and reflexive considerations.

I am from Great Britain, of course, and when I first went to the Statehouse, I had been in the country less than a year. This meant I was ignorant of many things political, cultural and economical about the United States, Kansas, and state politics. Although I have learned a great deal in my time here, I am sure limitations to my work remain because of this ignorance. I feel, however, that my foreign perspective – the extreme “outsider” position, perhaps – has brought benefits, both epistemological and methodological. Epistemologically, it has allowed me to challenge some taken-for-granted features of Kansas and American politics and culture. Bringing a fresh eye has, I hope, revealed some things an American might not have noticed or examined in the same way. Confucius remarked that it would not be a bird that discovered the sky or a fish that discovered the sea.

Methodologically, my position as a foreigner presented wonderful opportunities. First, I was perceived as peculiarly nonpartisan. Not being an American, I officially could not be registered with any party, and culturally could not be identified either. I could therefore easily practice an ambiguous bipartisanship in my research, enabling cross-party communication and confidence that perhaps Americans could not manage.

In addition to being “neutral,” my foreign status was of some interest to my research subjects. In the crowded, busy world of the Kansas State Capitol where legislators meet many new people every day, being non-American made it easier for people to remember me, something I could parlay into further communication. I also came from the “right” foreign country, because of the strong and special relationship between the United Kingdom and the United States. Many politicians could cite some British ancestry, and there was plenty of interest in British affairs. In short, my nationality was a conversation-starter, an important part of building relationships. Additionally, my relationship with the “observed” was politically safe as a Briton: many legislators noted how the UK was on the “right” side of the War on Terror. My foreignness also allowed me to ask “dumb” questions, questions which would perhaps be elementary or unnecessary for an American, but which could elicit a revealing response.

Debate exists about the value of being an “insider” versus an “outsider” in social science research, and whether the dualism is meaningful at all.¹⁰ Aside from my international status, I found that as time passed in Topeka I moved noticeably toward being an insider. My knowledge expanding, people knew who I was and what I was doing. I felt confident to speak to more people and so deepened my research and accumulated more information.

Becoming enmeshed in a political setting carries risks, of course. Fenno talks of “over-rapport,” or losing the critical eye and becoming overly loyal.¹¹ Many times I, too, felt a strong allegiance with a legislator or group of legislators, because of the confidence they had shared with me. I noted this feeling but tried to keep the broader perspective. I was told many secrets, much gossip, a great deal of strategy that had a co-opting effect on me. Ultimately, however, such things were mostly momentary and peripheral to the broader thrust of my research. They provided perhaps, merely “context.”

The fact that my research was broadly nonpartisan certainly lessened the impact of any possible partisan collusion I might have experienced or felt. Political parties were merely the framework through which I was

¹⁰ For example, Andrew Herod, “Reflections on interviewing foreign elites: praxis, positionality, validity, and the cult of the insider” *Geoforum*, 30, no. 4 (1999): 313-327.

¹¹ Fenno, *Home Style*, 274.

investigating geography, rather than the object of the research itself. In some ways, therefore, the issue of the “confirmability” of the research, the extent to which my biases influence interpretation,¹² is not much affected by the political biases that inevitably develop as one spends active time in a political environment. Rather, the question of confirmability for my participant observation in Topeka must be answered by evaluating the nature, balance and representativeness of the *data* collected: the geographical rather than abstract political data.

The “data” I was collecting while in Topeka and on various campaign trails was important because it both gave me a fuller understanding of the political process, and yielded a great deal of information needed for my interpretation of how geography “works” in this political forum. My aim, then, when collecting data was twofold: to get a broad picture of the political process and to identify the ways geography was active in that process. Getting the full sense of the former was necessary to identify accurately the latter. I spent in total seventy-six full and part days in Topeka or on the campaign trail (plus, of course, much more time in more passive collection of data) and attempted, as discussed above, to build a balanced picture of proceedings. Beyond in the Statehouse, I also journeyed away from Topeka to several “legislative forums” wherein a local legislative delegation meets with

¹² Baxter and Eyles, “Evaluating qualitative research,” 517.

the public in a “town-hall” setting, giving speeches and answering questions. These were useful occasions to witness politicians interacting with their constituents, and, alongside the “textual” part of the analysis described later, form another part of the range of political communication. I attended such events in both urban and rural areas, in different parts of the state, to ensure a balanced picture.

I also attempted to build as full a picture as possible of the campaigning side to politics. Again, I tried to ensure party balance and a wide spread of offices. I attended (and in a couple of cases, participated in) various rallies with either one or a number of candidates, a Republican bus tour (with all the principal statewide candidates) around the state, some set-piece speeches from both the Republican and Democratic sides, numerous parades, and fundraisers. Once more, this was not exhaustive. I could not attend every event, but I feel I have covered a broad range of activities and attended events with each of the principal candidates at least twice.

Both in Topeka and outside, my method of data collection was to take extensive fieldnotes (I never used a recorder of any kind), which were later transcribed and filled when back home. I took notes on the full extent of proceedings – easy in committee meetings and on the House floor, but more tricky at some social events – and, as each session progressed, focused more on key items on the agenda. When it became clear that gambling would

become the big issue in 2007, for instance, I made sure I attended as many debates and meetings on that question as possible, following the House calendar to see when relevant bills or amendments might be discussed. I also built good relationships with the Kansas Legislative Research Department, a nonpartisan office that assists legislators in the development of policy. People there supplied me with, for example, studies of the effects and costs of gambling in the state. My observational “data” were supplemented not only by such textual assistance, but also by brief meetings or interviews with legislators, staffers and lobbyists. I would ask about an issue, its progress or character, getting an examination, for instance, of both sides of the gambling (or “gaming” if you were for it!) question. In my first year, my observational data were supplemented by a questionnaire I gave to House Representatives, asking about their connections with their district, their perspectives on what would be the key issues, and probing their sense of the regions of Kansas. This was a somewhat troublesome task, since legislators received an enormous amount of “paperwork.” Though I did receive some interesting responses, my in-person, in-depth interviews provided a much more complete picture of the connections legislators have with their districts and their perceptions on all manner of things.

I believe my data in this participant observational part of my research are as complete as I could practically make them, and the geographical

information I gathered on the discursive and electoral processes of politics was accurate. I was not “looking” for geography, per se; I attempted to get the “full” picture of politics, and identified the role geography and place perception played within that. My observational “data,” reams of paper and many notebooks, are drawn from the fullest experience I could achieve of the Kansas political world. There is no way to run a “control” experiment or replicate my data, but most of the events, debates, and meetings I attended were at least somewhat public and officially recorded, so my depictions can be evaluated to some extent. This dissertation, of course, is a subjective research exercise, but the data I have collected can be both verified and validated by other observers and the political actors themselves.

Mapping House Votes

Moving to the more quantifiable aspect of this research, I have produced maps of votes on certain bills and amendments in the House that visually represent the geographical patterns of politics. Conducting a cultural geography of politics provides a wonderful opportunity to visualize and quantify otherwise qualitative data. Politicians have to categorize, in vote form—yea or nay—their perspective on an issue, giving an objective classification to their broader political or cultural perception. These maps

visualize each state representative's vote on a piece of legislation. Using data from the Clerk of the House and from House Journals, I have produced maps on legislation relating to school funding, immigration, gambling and Holcomb to illustrate the geographical divisions found with these issues, and how different parts of the state come together to push forth an agenda. Data for every vote are not available: only "final action" votes and other roll-call votes, when prompted by the urging of at least fifteen House members. This is not a serious handicap, however, since final-action votes are numerous and represent final thinking on key issues.

Analyzing the "Texts" of Kansas Politics

Building on the observations gathered as I spent time in the "field" of Kansas politics, I gave significant attention to the various "texts" of politics in the state. Texts here are defined broadly, including not only written accounts such as vote explanations (representatives can attach a brief rationale for each vote for the Journal record), newspaper articles, and campaign literature, but also television and radio advertisements, speeches (whether transcribed or not) and other visual articulations of politics. Such material constitutes an important part of my discourse analysis, focusing attention on how geographical awareness is present in the full spectrum of political articulation

and how senses of place are conveyed in the written, spoken, and visual media. Broadening the scope of this inquiry, I have collected and analyzed candidates' websites. The internet is growing in importance in the political process, and geographical engagement with this format is an essential part of any broad political research. As with "texts" of other sorts, I tried to be balanced in gathering this information, consulting both Republican and Democratic sites from a variety of locations in the state and for a variety of offices.

Interviewing State Representatives

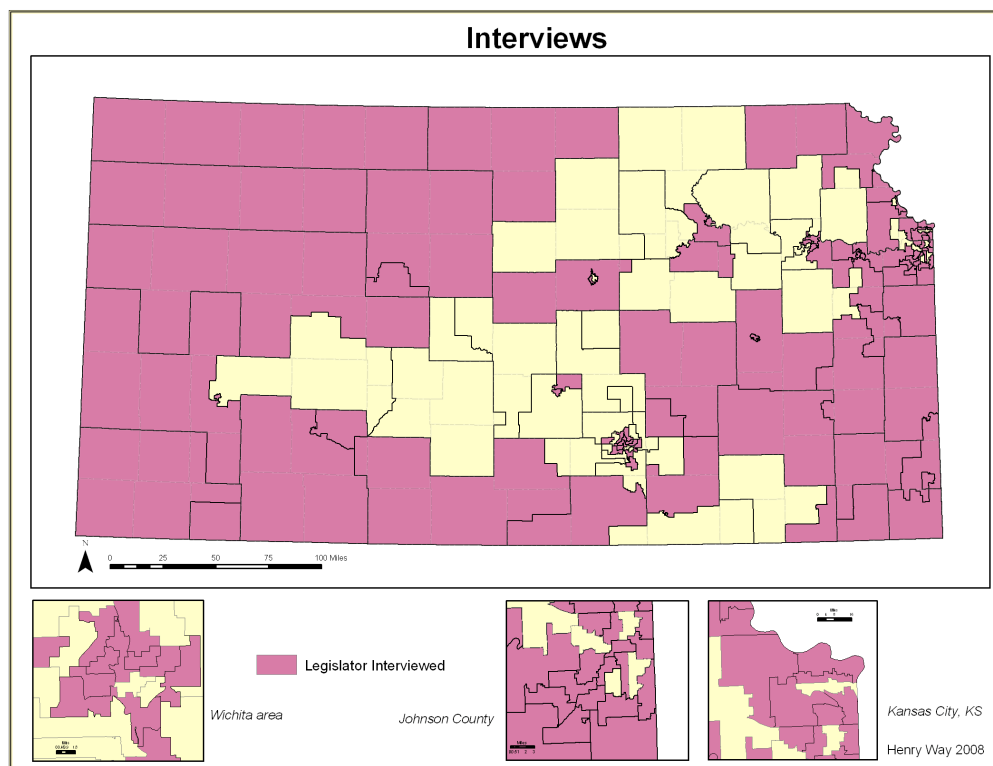
After developing a network of informants at the Statehouse and building productive relationships with many House representatives, I began to arrange interviews to uncover more about the realities and perceptions of place. As I argued earlier, State Representatives were chosen by their electors because of their close association with that place, and I hypothesized that they could provide valid insights into their districts and their state.

Echoing the considerations of Richard Fenno, I was careful to ensure a balanced selection of interview subjects within limits afforded by access and

availability.¹³ Most interviews were conducted from late spring 2007 to January 2008. I pressed all those I had developed a relationship with in the Statehouse for a meeting, and then extended my net to ensure a larger and more balanced sample. I wrote letters of inquiry to ninety legislators, and to the present time, have conducted seventy-four in-depth interviews (I have had additional, briefer conversations with a number of others, and have interviewed a number of state-wide officeholders as well). My sample is large enough to ensure a broad picture (125 state representatives exist in total) and as balanced as possible across party lines. I made sure I met with Republicans and Democrats, and, following the composition of the House to some extent, I have a majority of the former. My sample includes 41 Republicans and 33 Democrats (the current composition of the House is 77 Republicans and 48 Democrats). I also made sure to include the ever-important internal party divisions in my analysis, interviewing members of the liberal, moderate and conservative wings of each party. Accordingly within my sample of 74, I met with 25 conservative Republicans, 16 moderate Republicans, 17 liberal Democrats and 16 moderate/conservative Democrats. These labels are tricky and identification shifts from issue to issue, but the categorization was performed in a fair way, and any difficulties are acknowledged within the

¹³ Fenno, *Home Style*, 253.

discussion of a particular interview later in the dissertation.¹⁴ I ensured also that I drew a geographically balanced sample (Map 1), conducting interviews with representatives from urban, suburban, and rural seats, and from all parts of the state. I also made sure to include the full racial, ethnic, age and gender range of State Representatives. I think the outcome is, politically, demographically and geographically, a balanced and informative sample.



Map 1: Legislators interviewed, 2006-2008

¹⁴ For the Republican party, observers – and legislators themselves – have a firm understanding of who was “conservative” and who “moderate.” Indeed, the two groups sometimes caucused separately, occasionally organizing against each other.

I conducted almost all the interviews in the member's home district, beginning often at their house or a local meeting place, such as a café. Again, following Fenno, this was a comfortable setting for them, and an especially informative one for me: They could show me something of their district. I enjoyed many guided tours of different parts of Kansas, and am pleased to say that most state representatives are excellent drivers. Interviews also sometimes took on a participant-observation character. I spent two days on combines in different parts of the state, I went on a Latino parade and attended a *quincenera* in Wichita, and I was the British representative at the Shrove Tuesday pancake race in Liberal.

A majority of the interviews lasted more than two hours, some taking a whole day, and some occurring over whole weekends. The subject matter was interesting to the representatives, and they were often proud to show off their districts. These long in-depth interviews also gave me a chance to build trust and rapport. I am grateful for the time these representatives gave me. Two interviews were conducted over the telephone and were not so informative. Again following Fenno, no tape recorders were used.¹⁵ A more informal, flexible and honest interview was possible just with my hand-

¹⁵ Fenno, *Home Style*, 280.

written notes. And, in many cases, it would have been impractical to record the conversations: Combines, for example, are noisy machines.

The interviews were semistructured, in that they were built around some questions that I tried to ask each person. These were used to test the connection the legislator had with his or her district (such as “how long have you lived here?” and so on). They also helped answer some standard “cultural” or place-perception questions I asked when interviewees needed prompting: What is the most important religion here? Would you say this area is conservative/liberal? Who would be a “typical” person in this district? What do you think of place X? Is this place ethnically or racially diverse? Such questions often led to further discussion on a particular topic.

I also brought a map of the person’s district with me to interviews and asked each representative to describe differences across their district. I gained plenty of rich information from poring over maps with state representatives, in this way. I also made sure to ask about Kansas as a whole, such as how their place fit into the state, culturally and economically. What was their sense of the identity of Kansas? Where did people in their district move to/move from in Kansas? I also added a few other standard questions that I hoped to map, including: What would be the most popular type of vehicle in your district, trucks, SUVs, minivans or cars? What sports teams do people support here? Which university? What other district is most unlike your district?

These staple questions started and structured many of the conversations, but invariably the interviews ranged broadly across many areas of concern and provoked many different dimensions of geographic thought. The interviews were open ended in a very productive way.¹⁶

State Representatives I interviewed were, for the most part, happy to talk with me and explore the questions I was raising. As I built trust and rapport during the interviews, they were almost always forthcoming on all sorts of issues, and often wanted to talk for longer. Part of this was sense of pride in their areas, wanting to show them off and demonstrate their deep knowledge of their places. All this helps my contention, I suppose, that politicians are good people to talk to for an aggregate sense of place and a firm grasp of local goings-on. Another benefit of geographers talking to politicians, perhaps, is the holistic (or at least broader) view we can get of a the processes and conditions of the place in question. It is, I would argue, often better for the people of a place to tell us what is important, than for us as researchers to decide in advance.

I ensured that all my informants knew what I was doing, and that the results of my research would be published and therefore be in the public domain. On a few occasions individuals told me something “off the record”

¹⁶ Additional standard questions that I had in hand were: “What are people like [here/in this city/district]?” “What would you say was the spirit of this place?” “What is the most notable thing about your [place/district/city]?”

and, of course, I honor that request. On other occasions politicians told me things that really *should* have been off the record. I used my judgment in these latter cases. I do not want to embarrass people, but where I felt it was necessary I have used the information in a circumspect way to convey understanding. A few things I was told I cannot use in any circumstance.

Conclusion

My methodology is intended to strike a balance between building as full an understanding of Kansas politics as possible and enabling a closer scrutiny of the cultural geographies that could be seen in, and from, that politics. Particular issues or conundrums are addressed in each of the substantive research sections of this dissertation, but I hope this initial discussion has dealt with how I established rigor, and the need to develop as many contacts and to obtain as much reliable information as I could. In the end, I greatly enjoyed conducting this research. I am left convinced that the approach is valid, informative and a useful way to understand the processes and qualities of place.

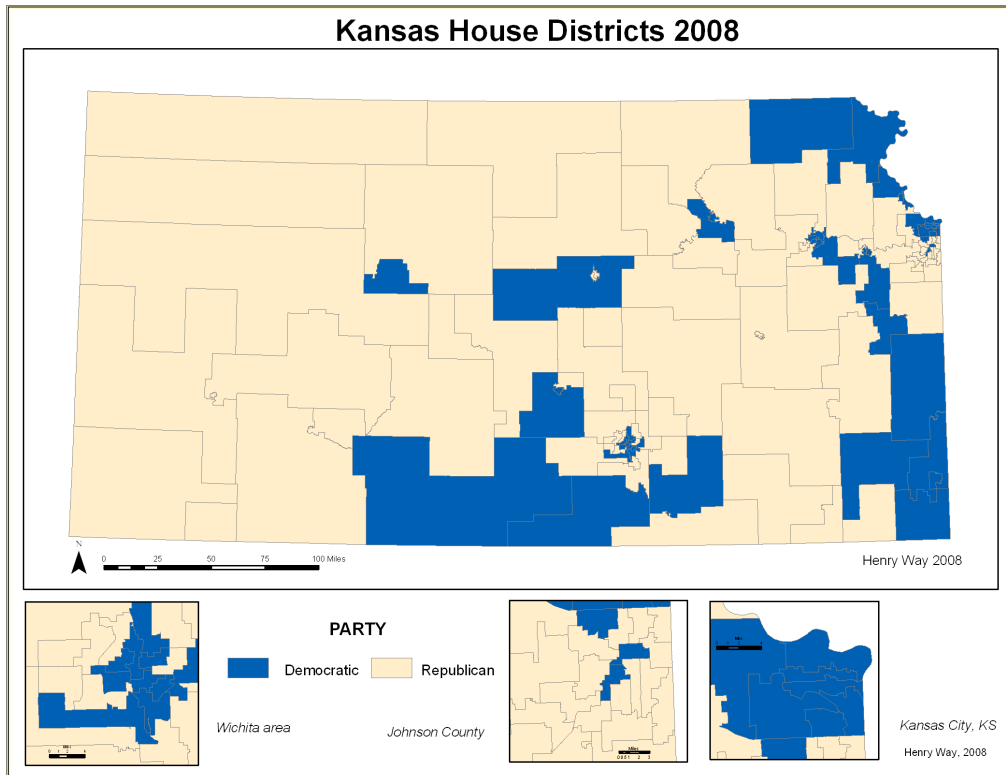
A Few Notes about Politics in Kansas

Kansas has a bicameral elected legislature, consisting of a House of Representatives where members are elected from districts of around twenty thousand people every two years (for a total of 125 members) and a State Senate with larger districts (40 members in total) and with elections every four years. The governor (assisted by a lieutenant governor) leads the executive branch, and other important statewide elected officeholders include the attorney general, secretary of state, state treasurer, and insurance commissioner. All of these, including the governor, were up for election in the fall of 2006, following primaries in the preceding summer.

In terms of party registration, Kansas is dominated by Republicans. According to figures from the office of the Kansas Secretary of State, 27 percent of the electorate is registered Democratic, 46 percent Republican and 27 percent unaffiliated.¹⁷ These figures belie, of course, not only the regional complexity of party alignment, but also the divisions within these groupings (especially the Republican party) and the crossparty reality of some of the electoral politics of the state: the governor and attorney general, for instance, are currently Democratic. In the legislative branch, the Senate is heavily Republican, 30 to 10 over Democrats. The House is a little less Republican but

¹⁷ Kansas Secretary of State, 2006.

still contains 77 Republicans to 48 Democrats in 2008. Again, this glosses over the division within the Republican party, where, depending on the definition, perhaps 20 to 25 members are considered “moderate” and pursue somewhat different goals to the conservative balance. Map 2 depicts the composition of the House by district.



Map 2: Kansas House districts by party representation, 2008.

Party politics have been remarkably stable in Kansas since its formation. The Republican party held early dominance because of the free-state issue and since World War II, formed the majority in the House for all

but four sessions. Democrats have been more successful with the governor's office, with, notably, four terms by Robert Docking, beginning in 1966, two by John Carlin after 1979, and most recently, two by Governor Kathleen Sebelius.

Both United States Senators are Republicans, Pat Roberts and the especially conservative and one-time presidential candidate, Sam Brownback. Of the four current U. S. House districts, two are occupied by Democrats (Nancy Boyda in the Second, a district that extends across much of eastern Kansas, including the cities of Topeka and Pittsburg, and Dennis Moore in the Third, encompassing Johnson, Wyandotte and parts of Douglas counties). Republicans Jerry Moran, from Hays, represents the large western First District, and Todd Tiahrt the Wichita-dominated Fourth. Such mixed representation indicates the complicated nature of political affiliation in Kansas, one that is often characterized by alliances of moderate Republicans and Democrats.¹⁸ These things make Kansas an especially interesting forum for study.

¹⁸ See, for a good discussion of such features, Allan Cigler and Burdett Loomis, "Kansas: Two-Party Competition in a One-Party State," in Maureen Moakley, ed. *Party Realignment and State Politics* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1992).

Chapter 4

The Geographical Art of Campaign Politics

Attention to place is pervasive in the rhetoric of political campaigns. “It’s easy to know where you’re going if you just remember where you’ve been,” suggested Jerry Moran, Republican U. S. Representative from Kansas’s First District, in a campaign television advertisement.¹ Moran’s contention in his ad, which depicts him touring the open roads of western Kansas and meeting “real people,” is that he is part of the district, knows the area, and is thus a good choice as representative. Politics, seen as a fight over places, demands that candidates demonstrate a valid claim on that territory. They must root themselves in the place they hope to represent. Representation of people is, of course, the essence of democratic politics, but those people are organized in space (state, district, etc.) and the units of democratic politics are also spatial (again, state, district, etc.). Accordingly, campaigning politicians must articulate claims on representation through discourses of place. Yes, elections are about people voting for politicians to represent those people, but

¹ U. S. Rep. Jerry Moran (R), “Car Spot” advertisement, aired fall 2006.

the electorate has a geographical context and a sense of place, and each lawmaker represents people in a bounded territory.

Geography is at the heart of representative politics. Its first, and often most vivid, expression is during the campaign for office. In a general sense, though not primarily the concern of this section, campaign politics is spatialized in terms of what issues are raised, to what party the candidate belongs, or the race or ethnicity of the candidate. All these things (and many others) are place contingent and form part of local discourses of identity. This analysis, however, will focus on the *act* of campaigning. Of primary concern will be its rhetorical, textual and practical elements. Here “campaigning” will be conceived broadly to include not only typical forms such as speech-making and television ads, but also other “public” political acts such as local representative forums and state representatives’ newspaper articles – things which, essentially, communicate to the electorate reasons for supporting their representative.

The analysis that follows explores the “geographical techniques” of candidates and incumbents in various settings. These represent a fundamental way political figures convey claims on their territory, and hence claims on office. This is not to displace – in either sense of the term – the importance of other factors such as prevailing concerns of the moment, the popularity of certain parties, or national issues. Indeed, these things touch

down in different ways in the discourses of different places. Rather, this analysis emphasizes what the candidates themselves seem to emphasize: their geographical awareness. It will explore not only what they do, but also why they do it.

The rooting of ideas in places and the use of spatialized discourses are truisms throughout the political world. Some recent examples bear this out. Closest to Kansas, and closest to our heart, perhaps, Senate Bill 971 in the Missouri State Senate recently made the Kansas Jayhawk the state game bird of Missouri.² This bill was introduced by State Senator Dan Clemens on January 17, 2008, before the KU-MU basketball game the following Saturday – clearly a shameless piece of campaigning that draws on the anti-Kansas geographical imagination of Missourians. Away from statehouses, U. S. Senate campaigns can be laced with geographical imagery. Criticizing Hillary Clinton (and her residency in New York), Rudy Giuliani attacked what he saw as her disconnection from the state during the 2000 race: “When Mrs. Clinton flew to New York from Washington for a parade, Mr. Giuliani welcomed her with sarcasm. ‘I hope she knows the way,’ he said. ‘I hope she doesn’t get lost on one of the side streets.’”³

² Missouri Senate, Senate Bill No. 971, 94th General Assembly, second session, (January 17, 2008).

³ Adam Nagourney, “Senate race that fizzled honed skills for ‘08,” *New York Times*, November 28, 2007.

At the presidential level, examples of geographical rhetoric can be found from all quarters. Aside from the practice of wrapping yourself in the flag or appealing to key state identities (especially evident in presidential primary seasons), senses of place are manifested multiple ways. “Balancing the ticket” is a commonly understood strategy, one articulated expressly by Chuck Hagel, a former U. S. Senator from Nebraska, after speculation that he might run for president with New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg: “It would be great . . . to see a New Yorker and a Nebraska boy leading this nation.”⁴ Campaign staff also get into the act, using geographical imaginations to support their candidate. For example, Karl Rove asserted President George W. Bush’s “Middle America” qualities on the Rush Limbaugh Show, and defended the perception of the President as not intelligent:

I think to some degree he cultivates [that image] because it doesn’t matter to him if somebody on the Upper East Side is putting their nose in the air about him. You know, he is who he is . . . he’s not going to change just to win popularity with the elites.⁵

⁴ Chuck Hagel on *Face the Nation* (CBS Television), May 12, 2007.

⁵ Karl Rove on the *Rush Limbaugh Show*, August 15, 2007.

In this case, by casting Bush as the enemy of the Upper East Side, Rove implied that he is the friend of rural America: a good example of playing to your base through geography.

Tellingly, Barack Obama's first national general election campaign ad was framed around a conception of Kansas. The words show not only how a place can be deployed for political meaning, but also how such are reinforced in the public discourse. Called "The Country I Love," the ad restores Kansas to its traditional role at the heart of that country, and – pushing his patriotism by implication – the heart of his own identity:

I was raised by a single mom and my grandparents. We didn't have much money, but they taught me values straight from the Kansas heartland where we grew up. Accountability and self-reliance. Love of country. Working hard without making excuses. Treating your neighbor as you'd like to be treated. It's what guided me as I made my way up.⁶

This investigation will now turn to Kansas campaigns to consider the imperative of geography more closely. I have identified six (but connected) ways that politicians use place in their campaigns. First is "rooting," the ways in which candidates demonstrate ancestral ties to a place. "Embedding" emphasizes profound links to a place beyond ancestral ties, and "connecting"

⁶ Barack Obama, campaign advertisement, "The Country I Love," 2008.

the rhetorical techniques employed beyond personal familial ties to connect to a place. Fourth, “associating” refers to ways candidates associate themselves with a place through its values or identities (and through their values, connect to that place). Fifth, “understanding” is the demonstration of knowledge of both the material facts of a place and its discourses of meaning. Finally, “participating” includes the activities of candidates and what they mean for connections with places. In each of these techniques, I will demonstrate that politicians mobilize senses of place and discursive understandings in significant ways as they campaign.

Geographical Techniques of Campaigns: Rooting

Almost universally, the campaign literature I surveyed made statements of the candidate’s deep roots in either their district or in Kansas as a whole. These statements often take the form of expressing an ancestral connection, such as the candidate being “a Kansas-educated, third generation Kansan.”⁷ Moreover, these articulations feature prominently on many candidate publications, frequently appearing at the top of qualifications for office (as in the previous example, of the Republican candidate for insurance commissioner, where her roots were written in bold type at the top of the

⁷ Insurance Commissioner Sandy Praeger (R), campaign flyer, 2006.

flyer). Figures 5 to 7 provide some examples of the prominence given to roots, in these cases on flyers given out by candidates for the Republican nomination for governor in the summer of 2006.

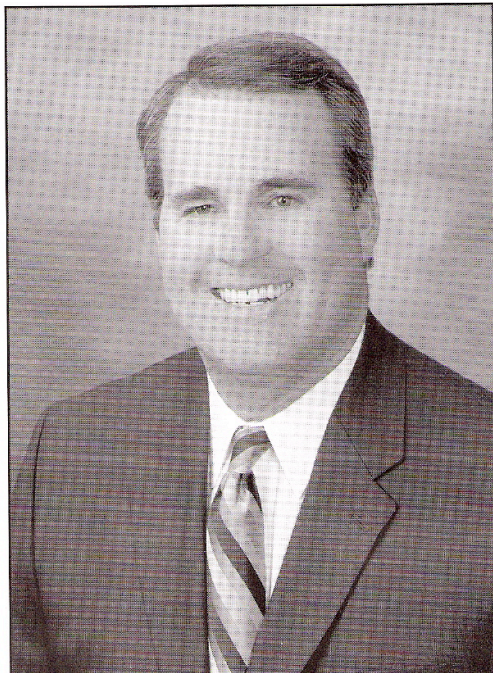


“I am a pragmatic idealist, someone who seeks decisions that serve the greatest good for the greatest number of people.”

- Fourth generation Kansan, with deep roots in Clay, Wyandotte, Leavenworth, and Johnson Counties
- Son of wonderful Kansas parents: Col. Clyde Vernon Pickell, a decorated soldier who twice served on Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower's Senior Military Staff; and Dorothy D. Pickell, a soft-spoken lady, who together taught their son to live by the Golden Rule; to be grateful for God's blessings; to respect all people; and to humbly serve others, as best he can.
- Former Vice-Chairman of the Wyandotte County Republican Party
- Republican Committeeman in Wyandotte and Johnson Counties
- Elected member of the 1984 Delegation to the Republican Presidential Convention Dallas, Texas (go Reagan!)

Figure 5: Tim Pickell flyer, 2006.

Robin Jennison GOVERNOR



**Republican
for Governor
Kansas**

Robin's Kansas Roots:

- ★ Fourth generation Kansan.
- ★ Born, raised and still resides in Lane County.
- ★ Rancher/farmer for 30 years.
- ★ 40 year member of Healy United Methodist Church.
- ★ Co-founder of *Kansas Outdoors*, a company that promotes tourism and outdoor recreation in Kansas.

Robin's Leadership:

- ★ Kansas State Representative, 1991-2000.
- ★ House Majority Leader, 1997-1998.
- ★ Speaker of the House, 1999-2000.
- ★ President, Kansas Water Congress, 2003-2006.
- ★ Appointed by President George W. Bush as Federal Commissioner/ Chairman of Arkansas River Compact Commission, 2002 to Present.

Robin's Priorities:

- ★ Reducing taxes and eliminating government waste.
- ★ Ensuring local control of Kansas schools.
- ★ Keeping liberal activist judges out of our courts.
- ★ Creating a business environment enhancing economic development for all of Kansas.



PO Box 110
Healy, KS 67850
(620) 398-2238



www.jennisonforkansas.com

Paid for by Jennison for Governor, V. Russell Petty Treasurer

Figure 6: Robin Jennison Flyer, 2006.

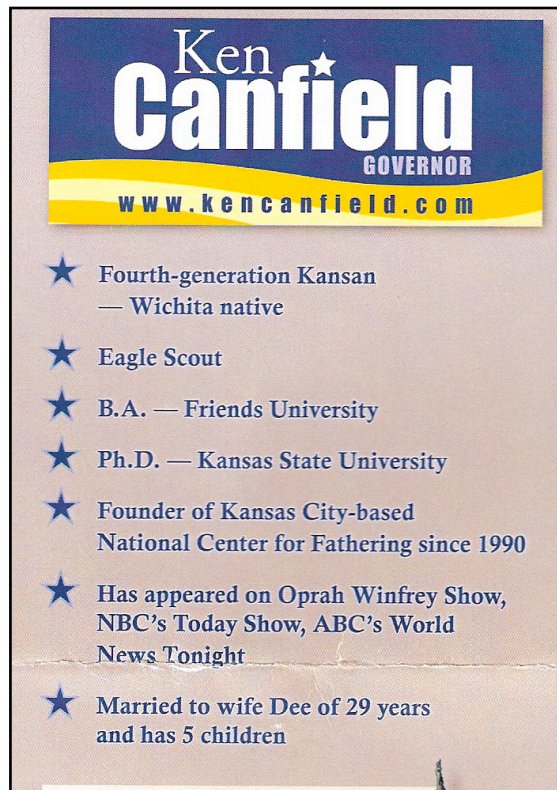


Figure 7: Ken Canfield flyer, 2006.

Websites also typically emphasize a candidate's roots in a place, usually at the start of the "About the Candidate" section. An example comes from Representative Dan Johnson's web page for his biography: "Dan Johnson is a fourth-generation Ellis County farmer. He has lived on the ranch originally homesteaded by his grandfather, William Johnson, Sr. all of his life. He attended school in Ellis County. . . ."⁸

⁸Rep. Dan Johnson (R—Hays), "Biography," <http://www.dailynews.net/ads/johnson/biography.html>, (accessed January 12, 2008).

Such assertions, indicate the perceived value to the candidate of deep local and state roots. Insurance Commissioner Sandy Praeger opened a speech to a Republican rally by talking about her grandchild who is “named after my grandmother, who lived in Paola, Kansas.”⁹ Jim Barnett, a Republican physician running for governor, often started speeches with, “I’m a fourth-generation Kansan.”¹⁰ He was especially articulate in Emporia (his hometown), beginning, “I see all my wonderful supporters, friends and patients here . . . I see the doctor who delivered me!”¹¹

Expressions of well-rooted locality or ancestry in Kansas are an uncomplicated and easy way to build credibility for representative office. The notable priority given these testaments suggests that deep attachment to place matters in the pursuit of office. Being an “insider” and, by implication sharing that sense of place with the voters, makes the candidate a better choice of representative for that place and its people.

Connecting the facts of candidate roots – their ancestral connections or longtime residency – with certain values and identities brings together Yi-Fu Tuan’s distinction between “rootedness” and “sense of place,” the former representing a more unconscious connection to place, referring to continuing

⁹ Commissioner Sandy Praeger, speech at the Republican Unity Rally, Overland Park, KS, October 3, 2006.


¹⁰ Sen. Jim Barnett (R – Emporia), opening remarks, Chambers of Commerce Debate, Kansas City, KS, October 11, 2006, for example.


¹¹ Sen. Jim Barnett, speech in Emporia, KS, November 4, 2006.

ways of life and values from previous generations. Sense of place, in context, embodies more a conscious identification with and understanding of the character of a place.¹² These candidates are indeed deeply rooted in their places, the persistence of mores and modes of existence forming part of their worldview and way of life, if only because of convention. But they are also conscious of what their place stands for, what that rootedness represents. They reflect on, and then articulate their rootedness repeatedly.

Figure 8 shows a flyer produced by Ron Thornburgh, Republican candidate for secretary of state. Apart from touting his Kansas roots as one of the three most important reasons to vote for him, he claims that as a third-generation Kansan, he “understands and shares the values that are important to our state.”

¹² Yi-Fu Tuan, “Rootedness vs. Sense of Place,” *Landscape* 24 (1980): 3-8.

Thornburgh
 SECRETARY OF STATE 
 www.kansansforthornburgh.com



Ron Thornburgh is an experienced leader who works hard for the people of Kansas. As Secretary of State, he has made his office the least complicated, most accessible agency in state government.

Protecting our most important right. Ron is a national leader in elections administration. With his guidance, the state is successfully implementing new technology that will make Kansas elections among the most uniform and secure in the nation.

Making Kansas business friendly. A business friendly environment is essential to creating a thriving state economy. During his time in office, Ron has worked to eliminate unnecessary taxation on our businesses and streamline the filing process, making Kansas companies more competitive in the world market.

A Kansan. A third generation Kansan, Ron understands and shares the values that are important to our state. He incorporates these values into his daily work as your Secretary of State.

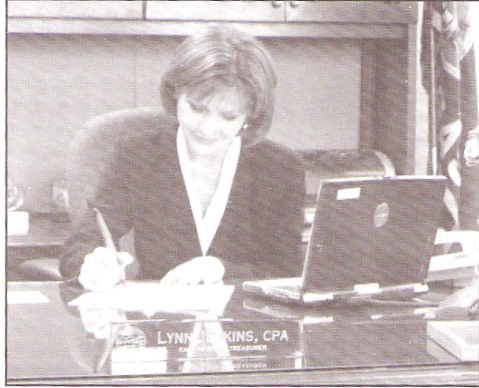
Kansans for Thornburgh, P.O. Box 4872, Topeka, KS 66604
 Paid for by Kansans for Thornburgh, Mike Callison, treasurer.

Figure 8: Ron Thornburgh flyer, 2006.

Lynn Jenkins, a candidate for state treasurer, in her flyer shown in Figure 9, links being a “lifelong Republican” to being a sixth-generation Kansan. Indeed the latter, judging by its placement on the flyer, was her

second-highest qualification for office. Being a true Kansan, one might surmise, involves the natural condition of being a true Republican. Lynn Jenkins represents the true identity of Kansas through her Republicanism, the logic goes, and she therefore deserves our vote.

Treasurer Jenkins Works Hard For You!



- ★ CERTIFIED PUBLIC ACCOUNTANT, NEARLY 20 YEARS EXPERIENCE
- ★ LIFELONG REPUBLICAN & 6TH GENERATION KANSAN
- ★ STATE SENATOR 2001-2003
- ★ STATE REPRESENTATIVE 1999-2000

State Treasurer Lynn Jenkins, CPA...

- ★ EXPANDED LEARNING QUEST, KANSAS EDUCATION SAVINGS PROGRAM
- ★ CREATED SEVERAL FINANCIAL LITERACY PROGRAMS TO BENEFIT KANSANS
- ★ RETURNED OVER \$8 MILLION IN UNCLAIMED PROPERTY ANNUALLY

Vote Lynn Jenkins State Treasurer

Looking for Treasurer

Figure 9: Lynn Jenkins flyer, 2006.

Candidate websites are often eloquent in the connection between rootedness and its implications. “Five generations of Kansas values are in Jeff Colyer’s heart. He grew up with that special spirit that propels Kansans to

make our community a better place. And he's already left his mark on countless lives,"¹³ begins one biographical statement from a southern Overland Park Republican. From a Wichita Democratic candidate, Raj Goyle:

Hard work. Community. Love of family. Service. I learned these simple values from my parents growing up in Wichita – and they are the same values that guide me every day in my career as a lecturer at Wichita State University, attorney, and active member of the Wichita community. . . . My life in Wichita began at the tender age of nine months old and it wasn't long before I was bringing people together to help improve our community.¹⁴

A Johnson County Republican, Kevin Yoder, excuses not being from that county by drawing on the esteemed pastoral values of rural Kansas (an association I will analyze more closely in a later section). He "grew up on a grain and livestock farm south of Hutchinson near Yoder, Kansas. Yoder is an excellent community with bedrock values and strong roots."¹⁵ Jerry Moran, as U. S. Congressman for Kansas's "Big First" western district, similarly articulates the values he acquired while growing up in that area:

¹³ Jeff Colyer, "About Jeff," <http://www.jckansas.com> (accessed January 15, 2008).

¹⁴ Raj Goyle, "About Raj," <http://www.rajforkansas.com> (accessed January 9, 2008).

¹⁵ Kevin Yoder, "Biography," <http://www.kevinyoder.org> (accessed January 15, 2008).

Raised in Plainville, Kansas, Congressman Jerry Moran was taught from an early age the value of a hard day's work, to look after one's neighbors and to serve his community. These same values guide Moran today as he serves his sixth term, representing the people of Kansas¹⁶

Not only is Moran rooting himself in the heart of his district (Plainville is just north of Hays), he is extolling the meaning of this rootedness. It is an explicit articulation of a sense of place, again published at the very top of a prominent part of his website.

Expressions of the values of places, like the more straightforward claims of rootedness discussed earlier, represent an easy way politicians can make a claim on a territory. As geographers this must tell us something about the power of place. Not only can we begin to see the emergence of discourses *about* places (what "values" and so on are associated with certain places), but also that the discourse *of* place flows deep in representative politics. People running for office feel they *have* to demonstrate their localism. This is understandable, given the territorial nature of politics, but it also indicates the importance of the humanistic notion of sense of place as part of a wider

¹⁶ U. S. Rep. Jerry Moran, "About Jerry," <http://www.jerrymoran.house.gov> (accessed December 10, 2007)

discourse of place and the political process. Representative politics puts a premium on geographical rootedness.

With candidates emphasizing the generational quality of their residence, we might adapt Tuan's notion of *topophilia* to consider the *topofilial* sentiment.¹⁷ These candidates are drawing explicitly on their position as sons and daughters of previous inhabitants of these places. They draw meaning from this feeling, and rest their all-important election credibility on their inheritance of a particular place, its values, meaning and identity.

Geographical Techniques of Campaigns: Embedding

The practice of "embedding" develops place connection based more on recent life experience of the candidate than on ancestral heritage or place of birth. Embedding is the candidate's technique for putting himself or herself into a place.

Imagery can convey embedment effectively. Wrapping oneself in the Kansas flag is a straightforward way to demonstrate your attachment to the state (Figure 10).

¹⁷ Yi-Fu Tuan. *Topophilia: A Study of Environmental Perceptions, Attitudes, and Values*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1990.



Figure 10: Canfield/Decker flyer, 2006.

Jerry Moran actually *is* Kansas, or at least is certainly *in* Kansas if we go by his website title banner (Figure 11). This is probably a wise image to project, given that a persistent criticism of incumbent congressmen has been disconnection from their home district (an issue that will be explored later in this discussion). Indeed, one of the reasons given for Jim Ryun's defeat in the second district was that he "went to D. C. and never came back."¹⁸

¹⁸ Interview with Peter Frieund, Chief of Staff to the Kansas House Speaker Pro Tem, December 9, 2006.



Figure 11: U. S. Rep. Jerry Moran, official website.¹⁹

Moran fully embeds himself in his district as a way of countering claims of remoteness. The physical distance between Kansas and Washington D. C. means something in the discourse of politics, as will be explored later. To images of Moran meeting constituents in various rural settings, a narrator in one of his television ads that intone, “Jerry Moran is different. He works in Washington, but every weekend he returns to Kansas.” After more comments about how he listens to Kansans and not lobbyists, the ad concludes: “It’s a little different, but then Jerry Moran’s never changed, he’s still a Kansan.”²⁰

Another Moran ad from 2006 demonstrates embedment so potently that it is worth quoting in full. Again, the visual imagery is of Moran driving around rural roads and meeting with constituents next to tractors, in small-town cafes and in similar settings:

When you drive the 69 counties every year, you rack up a few miles, but it’s a great way to see Kansas. You visit small towns,

¹⁹ <http://www.jerrymoran.house.gov/> (accessed November 1, 2007).

²⁰ U. S. Rep. Jerry Moran, “Different,” television advertisement, 2006.

meet with farmers and ranchers, and you get a real sense for what's going on. It's not like Washington where they do polls and surveys. Out here we listen to people, we help each other out and we try to make a difference. I'm Jerry Moran and I approved this message because *it's easy to know where you're going if you just remember where you've been.*²¹ (Emphasis mine)

He begins by pointing to his active attention to the first district, driving around *every* county. The local pride is then subtly stoked by saying that this is where the true Kansas is: "it's a great way to see Kansas." Putting himself in the heart of the rural dimension of the district he talks about small towns and farmer and ranchers. Again, he distances himself from Washington and embeds himself further: "*Out here we* listen to people" The people of western Kansas are depicted as superior, and he is "one of them," doing things in Washington in the way that Kansans – people in that place – would. Finally, the last statement of the ad makes the case explicitly.

Examples from a Democratic rally in Kansas City similarly demonstrate the rhetorical role of embedding oneself in the relevant locality.²² To a hall full of cheering people, Mark Parkinson (the candidate for lieutenant governor) spoke first. "It's great to be here in Wyandotte County so close to

²¹ U. S. Rep. Jerry Moran, "Car Spot," television advertisement, 2006.

²² Democratic Party Get out the vote rally, Kansas City, KS, November 1, 2006.

the election. This county means so much to me," he began, before talking of his experience working with the mayor of the city.

Mike Peterson, a local Democratic state representative and emcee of the proceedings, rallied support for certain candidates from the local crowd: "For the first time we have three people who have Wyandotte County ties running for statewide office. They went to school here, lived here, worked here." Embedding the candidates locally visibly excited the crowd. David Haley, a Kansas City state senator running for secretary of state, spoke first. Then Bonnie Sharp, running for insurance commissioner, was introduced by Peterson: "Now another candidate and another Wyandotte Countian, who calls herself a 'Dotte,' Bonnie Sharp!" The appeal to an insider's Wyandotte County identity was effective and Sharp reemphasized her pride in her attachment to the place: "It's been quite a journey, but it's been an honor to be from Wyandotte County . . . we're about working people," and these, she explained, are the people she wanted to help as insurance commissioner. In a rhetorically effective way, Sharp connected her political viewpoint to that place giving her ideology apparent credence and localized appeal.

After Governor Sebelius spoke at the Wyandotte rally, thanking the county for its help with her election, attorney general candidate Paul Morrison rose to energetic cheers from the audience. Morrison can boast a diverse personal Kansas geography: He was born in Dodge City but went to

high school in Kansas City, Kansas, then to Washburn University in Topeka, and finally to Johnson County as district attorney before running for statewide office. This enabled him to be flexible about his embedment. He could speak, for example, about being born and raised on a farm in television ads, but also could emphasize more urban and Johnson County connections in other speeches.²³ On this occasion, naturally, he spoke on his experience in Kansas City. He talked about where he went to get the *Kansas City Kansan* newspaper, about another building that used to be a bank “where I had my first savings account,” and about working and having fun with friends at places at “78th and State.” He was a “proud graduate” in 1972 of Washington High School. His time, he concluded, at “79th and Swartz Road were the best years of my life.”

Away from election time, local political forums are venues where embedding techniques can be found in action. Take the Ellsworth delegation forum of March 2007. Answering questions from a gathering of about forty constituents at an American Legion hall were State Representative Joshua Svaty and State Senator Jay Emler. While discussing a range of issues from gaming to presidential primaries, the two would often mention something that revealed their attachment to the area. In response to a question about

²³ For example, at a speech to the Douglas County Democratic Party, Lawrence, KS, October 21, 2006.

deferred maintenance at state universities, for example, Svaty spoke about his experience at Sterling College, a relatively local institution. Emler followed up by indicating that he was a “graduate of Bethany College,” another regional college. Svaty responded to a question about the construction on Highway 156 across Wilson County by commenting that he “met with the transportation director after my parents couldn’t get onto the highway.”²⁴ The use of deeper local connections in this setting was probably not necessarily planned, but gently reminding people of one’s attachment does no harm to representational credentials.

Techniques of embedding differ from “rooting” in that they make no claim to ancestral or lifetime connection, just that the candidate has a special connection to an area. Such attachment is a powerful rhetorical tool, for it clearly aligns the candidate with the place and indicates to the electorate that this person might share their sense of place and the meanings and values that go along with it.

²⁴ Rep. Josh Svaty (D—Ellsworth) and Sen. Jay Emler (R—McPherson), Ellsworth Political Forum, Ellsworth, KS, March 17, 2007.

Geographical Techniques of Campaigns: Connecting

Another level up, as it were, from embedding is the technique of “connecting.” This moves the discourse of place away from personal attachment toward a looser link with place. This section will first explore various ways connections to Kansas as a whole are displayed, then consider the techniques used to connect candidates to local places.

For statewide offices, candidates can remind voters that they may be “sixth-generation” Kansans, or have lived their life in the state, but they also need to articulate a continued connection. Such rhetoric is to validate the candidate’s claim on the territory partly by implying a shared sense of place, but firstly by reminding the audience that he or she is “one of them,” that they share a common bond of place.

The subjects of this research articulated a connection to Kansas in a number of ways. “As I travel the state. . .” could be frequently heard prefacing the discussion of an issue of concern, for example. Robin Jennison, Republican primary candidate for governor, was more specific. At a debate, he commented that he had “been in 105 counties, then 60 again” since picking

a running mate.²⁵ Jennison reprised the line later in the debate: “I’ll say it again, I’ve traveled to 105 counties.”

Speakers at a campaign rally for Jim Ryun at the state capitol were insistent in their connection of Ryun to Kansas (largely, perhaps, because he had been criticized for ignoring his district). Lynn Jenkins (State Treasurer), for instance, began her speech, “Ryun has been a friend to this district, to this state. . . for years and years.” Republican Kansas House Speaker Doug Mays reiterated this point: “Ryun has been a great Kansan for most of his life. . . we are lucky to have him.”²⁶ At a “Unity Rally” earlier in the campaign, Republican candidates for statewide office gathered to express their cooperation and shared principles, and also took the opportunity to extol their connection to the state. “We have an opportunity as Kansans,” remarked Jim Barnett, “to work for Kansans.” Lynn Jenkins again: “This has been a dream job for a CPA who loves this state!” Ron Thornburgh at the same event commented that “we are unified for the good of Kansas. We can get beyond these little differences.” He concluded by saying, “we can do things that we disagree about, but I can go home and look my wife in the eye and say I did something that was good for the people of Kansas.”²⁷ Here, perhaps, the

²⁵ Robin Jennison, speech, Channel 27 News Republican Governor’s Race Forum, Topeka, KS, July 23, 2006.

²⁶ Ryun Rally, State Capitol Rotunda, Topeka, KS, October 31, 2006.

²⁷ Unity Rally, Overland Park, KS, October 3, 2006.

connection with Kansas was turned into a way of uniting these divided Republicans.

Clinton in Kansas

Probably the best display of place connection I witnessed during my research was Bill Clinton's speech at Kansas State University.²⁸ Clinton is known for being an effective (and indeed, affective) speaker, but his address as part of the Landon Lecture Series was notable for its attention to geography. To a full Bramlage Coliseum, he began with a reference to the college dynamics of the state: "Bob Dole said to me, 'you've been to KU, you know how Kansas works, now you have to go to K-State!'" This immediately gave the impression he was both aware of the state, and comfortable enough in his knowledge to joke about the issue. His speech was a musing on the twenty-first century world, but it was filled with references to Kansas. Talking about the importance of globalization, Clinton remarked, "you know this if you're a Kansas farmer, or a student at K-State on the internet." He continued in a similar vein, "I'm here in the heartland of America surrounded by people who are more connected to the world than

²⁸ Bill Clinton, speech, Kansas State University, March 2, 2007.

people were forty-one years ago on either coast.” Discussing the positive and negative dimensions to globalization, he talked of what was going on “in small towns in Kansas,” and let his analysis range to “soil erosion and biodiversity loss” in the state. Clinton made a connection between clean energy production and the revitalization of small towns, again a nod to local concern. For some reason (I was busily scribbling notes on a previous comment he made and missed the context) he mentioned that the Spanish Flu epidemic of 1918 started “on an army base in Kansas” [Fort Riley]; a commendable piece of local knowledge, but not perhaps a particular source of pride. Clinton turned his attention to what can be done to address problems wrought by globalization, but couched it in terms of the local. We cannot just deal with the global, he suggested, when problems exist closer to home. He deployed more regional connection: “What about people in Dennis Moore’s district? Every third storefront is closed.” He might have been better using the second district as an exemplar, but the localization of his message was nevertheless effective.

Clinton’s speech was an excellent example of geographical connection by a politician. His warm reception and the positive association for Governor Sebelius – who was also on stage, wearing, appropriately, a vivid purple pant suit – suggested the success of his

speech. It was a thoughtful and interesting analysis of our present world, to be sure; but the tactics of localization also made the speech not only more meaningful but more powerful.

Articulating a connection to Kansas was an important feature of much of the rhetoric I heard, but more local, immediate connections were also deployed effectively. “Everyone wants to be like Wyandotte County” (talking about the issue of developments such as “Village West”) remarked Kathleen Sebelius at a debate in, of course, Wyandotte County.²⁹ In the same forum, her Republican opponent, Jim Barnett, made connections to the place in his opening statement: “My wife Yvonne is from the Argentine district here in Wyandotte County . . . it’s good to be back in God’s country!” Shameless though these expressions might be, they are used for a reason: local connections must help the candidate’s cause.

A fuller analysis of connection-making can be performed if we keep the candidates constant and vary their place. On a Republican “Victory Tour” (in hindsight, something of a misnomer) prior to the general election in 2006, the bus began in Topeka, ranged across western Kansas, back to Wichita, and finished in Johnson County. I joined the trail in Russell in north-central

²⁹ Gov. Kathleen Sebelius (D), response at Governor’s Debate, Kansas City, KS, October 11, 2006.

Kansas, and attended tour events there and in Great Bend, Hays, Emporia, Lawrence, and Shawnee. The format was similar in each place: a Republican party leader would introduce candidates, then Barnett (running for governor) would speak, followed by Phill Kline (attorney general). In addition, local or congressional candidates would also speak, and other statewide candidates joined at various points.

Jim Barnett drew local connections at each stop, often at the beginning of his speech. In Russell: “The first public figure who called me after the primary election was Bob Dole. It’s great to be back in Russell, in Bob Dole country.” In Great Bend: “It’s great to be in Great Bend, it was a pleasure to work in the Statehouse with John Edmonds [retired representative for Great Bend] . . . I’m not going to forget about you here in Great Bend.” In Hays: “I see people here that I’ve met. I was downtown and met Jim . . . and met Rob there.” In Emporia: “I see all my wonderful supporters, friends and patients here. . . . I see Don Hill and Peggy Mast [local state representatives].” In Lawrence: “I’m pleased to be in Sandy Praeger’s hometown. I am a graduate of KU Med It’s good to be with Roger Pine [local state senator].” In Shawnee: “This is a great place for the grand finale of a bus tour around the state. I don’t think I see more young people around Kansas anywhere but

here in Johnson County.”³⁰ At each stop he would acknowledge local leaders and politicians and draw some connection to the town, as these examples demonstrate.

Phill Kline extended the technique to talk of policy issues as well as the simple connection he had with the place. In Russell:

It’s great to be in Russell. The American dream is defined in communities, with people who make a difference on a local level. As I travel around I meet real heroes. Not in Topeka, not in Washington, but in places like this. I met Dean Barker [a local resident in the audience] who was captured in World War II.

People like Bob Dole, who’s from here.

In Great Bend: “It’s great to be back in Great Bend I knew John Edmunds in the House, he’s a fiscal conservative. We have some of the toughest laws in the nation now on children. I got Jessica’s Law jointly with John Edmonds” In Hays: “I teamed up with Senator Ostermeyer [local state senator] and passed Jessica’s Law.” In Emporia: “Teaming up with Don Hill and Peggy Mast and Jim [Barnett], I toughened child sex offender laws.” In Shawnee: “Senator Brownlee, Representative Kinzer [local politicians in attendance] and others stood in the governor’s way and stopped tax raises I would

³⁰ Jim Barnett, speeches, Russell, Great Bend, Hays, Emporia, Lawrence, Shawnee, KS, November 2 & 4, 2006.

prefer to have a root canal than read the *Kansas City Star*.”³¹ In all these cases Kline makes a connection to his audience through local links. None of the connections are deceptive, but they do serve to make him less the “state” candidate and more the “local” candidate. In this context, we have discursive evidence that all politics is indeed local.

In addition to these “positive” connections to place, the political discourses of geographical connection can also operate in a negative fashion. Rhetoric can “disconnect” another candidate from the place in question. Tim Shallenberger, then chair of the Kansas Republican Party, said at the Lawrence stop of the “Victory Tour” that he wanted Jim Ryun to “thump Nancy Boyda and send her back to whatever state she goes to every other election.”³² More recently, e-mails from the Kansas Republican Party sought to disconnect Democrats from their districts or the state. Highlighting the Governor Sebelius’s apparent contempt for Kansas wine, an e-mail sought to separate her from the state and its concerns:

Evidently, it’s not enough for the governor to lose jobs in Kansas, now she is mocking Kansas industry as well. This is what she said earlier this week in Washington State. Sebelius

³¹ Phill Kline, speeches, Russell, Great Bend, Hays, Emporia, Shawnee, November 2 & 4, 2006. Kline had had emergency root canal surgery the day before his speech in Shawnee.

³² Tim Shallenburger, speech, Lawrence, KS, November 4, 2006.

joked about Sunflower State vintages, “you should be thankful we don’t make wine in Kansas,” she said. “If you ever see Kansas wine, don’t drink it.” If the Governor were not so busy traveling all over the country, she might know that Kansas has a thriving wine industry.³³

Comments from the state GOP chairman and executive director reprise this notion of the governor’s literal disconnection from Kansas. Responding to the appointment of a new attorney general in early 2007, Kris Kobach remarked that:

[T]he Attorney General’s Office has been adrift for the past month, with no leadership in place. Meanwhile, Governor Sebelius. . . has been auditioning with Democrats in Washington, D. C., to give the Democratic response to the State of the Union [Her] national political ambitions once again took precedence over the needs of Kansas.³⁴

On the same day, the executive director of the Kansas Republican Party was quoted in the press, saying: “I’m honestly just glad that the governor finally came around, found some time between Vogue photo shoots

³³ Kansas Republican Party, e-mail message to author, November 24, 2007.

³⁴ Kansas Republican Party, e-mail message to author, January 18, 2008.

and Washington, D. C. cocktail parties to make an appointment.”³⁵ All these examples seek to place Sebelius (or Boyda) away from their electoral territory. It hints at disconnection also from the values of a place (a theme that will be analyzed more closely later). Such techniques are, in a way, accusations of “retroactive” carpetbagging: The political figure has deserted their place after being elected to office.

Articulations of connectedness, whether positive or negative, seek to demonstrate how attached a candidate or political figure is to the place they represent. Certainly geographical connection operates as a rhetorical tool, but empirical evidence of connection deployed in speeches or texts helps counter any claims of remoteness or carpetbagging—two of the more visceral criticisms in democratic politics. These assertions of connection (or disconnection) can also serve to establish how connected the candidate is to the particular values or identity of a place, an issue that will be examined more closely in a following section of this discussion.

Before we turn in the next two sections to an analysis of the more imaginative uses of place in campaign politics, some observations should be made about candidates’ use of the “facts” of their geographical position. All three geographical techniques (rooting, embedding, and connection) project a

³⁵ Christian Morgan, “Six named new Attorney General,” *Lawrence Journal-World*, (Lawrence, KS, January 18, 2008).

certain persona on the political stage: the intention is for the audience to identify with a candidate through sharing a place. On one level this is central to representative politics as candidates are seeking to represent *places*. But it also suggests that the discourse of representative politics is, in a central way, a geographical conversation. The effective performance of campaigning seems to be driven by an awareness of place and the candidate's links to that place. Geography is, in addition, manifested in more imaginative ways in the conduct of campaigns, as the next two sections will explore.

Geographical Techniques of Campaigns: Associating

Techniques of "association" are those in which candidates seek to align themselves with the meanings of a particular place. First, it cannot be denied that the tactics of connecting, embedding, or rooting described above operate in isolation from the meanings attached to the places in question. The attachment to place fundamentally implies a shared sense of place, a shared concern for the values or culture of the place. But the expression of connection outlined in the three sections above was explicit and often material (or social, or familial). The geographical technique of association, however, can be more implicitly conveyed through imagery. This tactic puts

identity and culture first, and is articulated through powerful geographical imaginations.

Is Kansas a Republican or Democratic state? It was difficult to tell in 2007 if you listened to both parties. Kansas, according to Tim Shallenburger, is “still a Republican state.”³⁶ “Republicans believe in low taxes, strong defense,” explained Ron Thornburgh in an effective speech in Johnson County.³⁷ Jim Barnett put it emphatically on a campaign stop in Great Bend: “This is a Republican state; you should elect people who reflect your values.”³⁸ To Doug Mays, house speaker, in a campaign address in Topeka, “Republicans are the party of the people of Kansas.”³⁹

Not surprisingly, Democrats also claim state identity, associating their party with the culture of Kansas. “Kansas values are Democratic values, Kansas values are Wyandotte values,” exclaimed the mayor of Kansas City, bringing together the identity of two scales.⁴⁰ Governor Sebelius reiterated the theme later, repeating, “Kansas values are Democrat values.” One of their more commonly used party logos literally puts the Democratic Party in the state, as seen in Figure 12 below.

³⁶ Tim Shallenburger, speech, Emporia, November 4, 2006.

³⁷ Secretary of State Ron Thornburgh, speech, Overland Park, October 3, 2006.

³⁸ Sen. Jim Barnett, speech, Great Bend, KS, November 2, 2006.

³⁹ Rep. Doug Mays (R – Topeka), speech, October 31, 2006.

⁴⁰ Mayor Carol Marinovich, speech, Kansas City, KS, November 1, 2006.



Figure 12: Kansas Democratic Party logo, from a party flyer, 2006.

The employment of association is a means to “naturalize” each party, to make it the natural choice for the electorate of a place. It is also an easy way to co-opt the values and meanings of Kansas into party identity. Parties, as well as people, it seems, have to demonstrate their attachment to place, and capturing the identity of a state is one way to discursively achieve that.

Rooting a party in place – especially Kansas or the Midwest – was especially important in 2006. Republicans on a national level (especially the president and Congress) were becoming increasingly unpopular. Republicans in Kansas, therefore, had to ensure that they were identified with the state, not Washington, D. C. and the national scene. Hence, perhaps, the irony of both Jerry Moran and Chuck Ahner condemning Washington whilst also running to be there. Democrats, on the other hand, sensing an opportunity for significant political gains in the state, had to be sure also that their party was identified at a Kansas or Midwestern level. The national party, in the political discourse of the Midwest and the South, was to some extent associated with a

degree of liberalism or elitism. Kansas Democrats, then, were anxious to change the scale and articulate a Midwestern Democratic identity and draw attention to actions in the state rather than on the coasts.

Attaching an idea to a place – as will be seen later in this dissertation – is a powerful metonymical tool. Places have meanings: People have a sense of place, an attachment that is emotional and valuable. To fit an idea (in this case a partisan idea, a party) to a place taps into that sense of place or a discourse of spatial understanding helping to bolster or (if used negatively) undermine that idea. Places come to mean something through the operation of certain discourses. Attaching ideas (in this case party political ideas) to those places gives the ideas a certain shorthand identity. But even more powerful, perhaps, is the emotional attachment to *our* place, our “home” place: our sense of place. Associating a party with the home place taps into emotional attachments. Associating a party with elsewhere identifies it as “not ours,” and so (especially in the context of a territorialized politics) less attractive.

Hope in the Heartland

Barack Obama returned to his mother’s home state on a wave of local and partisan pride. As keynote speaker at the Kansas Democratic

Party's annual "Washington Days" celebration and fundraiser, he lent charismatic flair to the occasion.⁴¹ The theme of the event, which involved fundraising, meals, liquid hospitality and general pep-rousing, was "Hope in the Heartland." The party was keen to emphasize its distinction from the national or "coastal" party and through this tagline clearly hoping to associate the party with the Midwest and a pastoral identity. In case the title was not evidence enough, the table centerpieces were small sheaves of wheat combined with a sunflower and tied with a blue ribbon. Likewise, the official imagery on the title banners was a windmill and prairie crops (see Figure 13) and pictures of the Kansas countryside formed a backdrop behind the main Grand Ballroom stage.

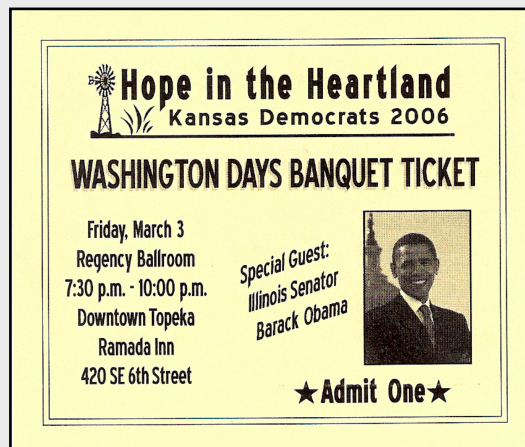


Figure 13: Washington Days ticket, 2006.

⁴¹ All quotes from the Washington Days Banquet, Topeka, KS, March 3, 2006.

Attempting to till the momentum of the Democratic party into the soil of the Midwest, the speeches in front of that pastoral backdrop were filled with local imagery and association. “From Liberal to Leavenworth, from Johnson City to Johnson County. . . there is hope in the heartland!” exclaimed Governor Sebelius as she set forth the Democratic agenda. Introducing Obama, she pronounced to cheers, “and most of all, he’s the son of a Kansan!” Obama himself continued the association of Democrats with the middle of the country (and, of course, the symbolic center of the nation – another dimension to the concept’s meaning). “We meet today,” he began, “in America’s heartland, at a time that is a turning point in American history.” It may have been a little audacious of him to center the hope for the future in the Middle West, but the association was powerful nonetheless. The success of the governor and other Democrats later in the year must be some testament to their success in making the party seem not entirely incompatible with Kansas and Midwestern values.

Imaginative geographical association is a technique employed also by individuals about themselves or other candidates. In one of his television spots, Jerry Moran is described by a “constituent” on screen as “one of the most authentic people I’ve ever known.” Later in the same ad, a different

speaker explains, “we need someone who can represent our values . . . Jerry believes in the people of Kansas and we believe in him.”⁴² The association with Kansas and its values also was expressed clearly in Topeka at a rally for Jim Ryun in 2006. Ryun himself said that he appreciated “the opportunity to represent Kansas values and Kansas issues. I want to take Kansas values back to the people’s house!”⁴³ Ron Thornburgh at the same event commented that “I talk to Kansans, and as I travel Kansas and the second district, they talk like Jim Ryun.”⁴⁴ Finally, Doug Mays: “[Ryun] is a Kansan who speaks for Kansans.”⁴⁵

On the Democrat side, similar cases of association can be found. Mark Parkinson took a somewhat more aggressive approach by suggesting that “if the voters of Kansas have a lick of sense they’ll re-elect [Kathleen Sebelius] next week,”⁴⁶ It is not only the candidates who express association. At a fair in Wyandotte County, for example, a campaign worker explained in some detail to me how Ken Canfield (a Republican primary candidate for governor) “lives Kansas values.”⁴⁷

⁴² Television advertisement, “Authentic,” 2006.

⁴³ U. S. Rep. Jim Ryun (R), rally, Topeka, KS, October 31, 2006.

⁴⁴ Secretary Ron Thornburgh, speech, Topeka, KS, October 31, 2006.

⁴⁵ Rep. Doug Mays, speech, Topeka, KS, October 31, 2006.

⁴⁶ Mark Parkinson, speech, Kansas City, KS, November 1, 2006.

⁴⁷ Unnamed activist, conversation with author, Kansas City, KS, July 29, 2006.

Association using iconography is also a common technique.

Candidates want to associate themselves with entities at two scales: Kansas and the United States. Working in a similar way to the techniques of connection discussed above, candidates project themselves as defenders of the ideals of these places. The use of symbolism indicates to the viewer that they are not merely connected to these entities, but also are entwined in the very essence of these units. The cultures and meanings of those units – the state and the nation – are, in short, *in the candidate*. It may be a simplistic thing to wrap yourself in the flag or put a sunflower behind your ear, but it also represents the essence of the imaginative geographical association of an idea or agenda.

Front pages of candidate or political websites display vividly the desire to associate with the state or the nation. The Kansas Republican website repeats the Democratic tactic of placing the party in the state outline, and placing the logo in a field of sunflowers (Figure 14). Congressional candidate, Todd Tiahrt, besides headlining his website “Kansans for Tiahrt,” prominently features an American flag *and* sunflowers, as seen in Figure 15.



Figure 14: Kansas Republican Party homepage.⁴⁸



Figure 15: Todd Tiaht campaign homepage.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ <http://www.ksgop.org/> (accessed January 8, 2008).

At the state government level, Democrats and Republicans alike combine both iconographies to associate themselves with the values and culture they connote. Kevin Yoder on the Republican side, for example, literally places himself between each (Figure 16), while Tom Holland for the Democrats goes one better and includes an eagle for good measure (Figure 17). Indeed, the use of patriotic symbols is something encouraged in the Democratic Party. At a strategy meeting of the Johnson County Democrats, county chair Bill Roy urged the use of patriotic symbols to an audience of prospective candidates and campaign workers: “Don’t cede patriotism to the Republicans.”⁵⁰



Figure 16: Kevin Yoder website banner.⁵¹



Figure 17: Tom Holland website banner.⁵²

⁴⁹ <http://toddtiaart.com/> (accessed January 8, 2008).

⁵⁰ Bill Roy, speech, Olathe, KS, February, 2006.

⁵¹ <http://www.kevinyoder.org/> (accessed January 5, 2008).

⁵² <http://www.tomhollandforkansas.org/> (accessed January 8, 2008).

Republican candidates always used the flag prominently. On Arlen Siegfreid’s website, only the flag comes between him and Olathe (Figure 18). The use of the sunflower (the state flower of Kansas) was also prolific. Kasha Kelley, a Republican state representative from Arkansas City, provides an artistic use of the icon, for example (Figure 19), while a postcard from the Barnett gubernatorial campaign deploys the flower in a merge of two worlds (Figure 20).



Figure 18: Arlen Siegfreid website banner.⁵³



Figure 19: Kasha Kelley website.⁵⁴

⁵³ <http://www.arlensiegfreid.com/> (accessed January 5, 2008).

⁵⁴ <http://www.kashakelley.com/> (accessed January 8, 2008).

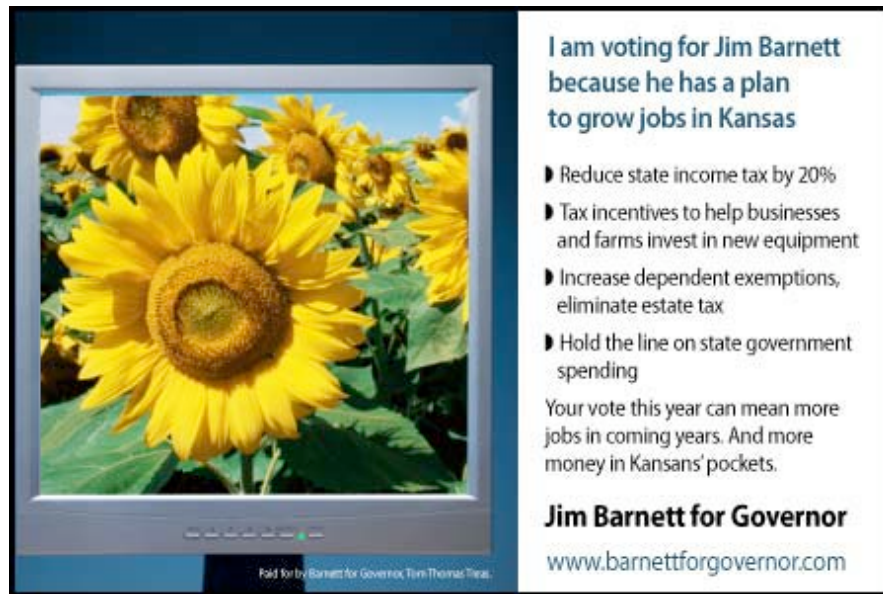


Figure 20: Barnett for Governor postcard, 2006.

Equally as effective as association can be techniques of disassociation, deployed either explicitly or by implication. John Doll, the Democratic challenger to Jerry Moran in the first congressional district, sought to associate himself with the values of western Kansas and encouraged electors to compare his views to those of Moran. Couching it in anti-partisan terms was probably necessary given the overwhelmingly Republican registration in the district: “Look at the issues,” he said, “If my views aren’t the most like your views, then I don’t want your vote, but don’t vote because it says Democrat or Republican.”⁵⁵ Finney County Democrats chair Lon Wartman

⁵⁵ John Doll, quoted in Kursten Phelps, “Doll, Cruz address county’s Democrats,” *Garden City Telegram*, January 18, 2006.

put it more directly. The national Republican party has become tainted by scandal and “good old moderate western Kansans are really sick and tired of that sort of thing,” he suggested in support of Doll.⁵⁶

Jim Barnett, running for governor, argued for his position on abortion in a televised debate: “Do we want to known as the capital of the nation or the world for late-term abortion? I don’t think that’s consistent with Kansas values, and I hope the people of Kansas will look very closely at the difference between their values and those of the governor.”⁵⁷ Ken Canfield, in a governor’s Republican primary race also questioned the alignment of Governor Sebelius’s views with those of Kansans’: “I believe we should show how Kansas values are different from those of the governor.”⁵⁸ Jim Ryun, in a press huddle after a campaign speech in Topeka, criticized Nancy Boyda, his Democratic second congressional district challenger: “Boyda does not vote Kasnas values. She said she wouldn’t be getting any money from Washington, but she is.”⁵⁹ On the other side, Paul Morrison asked if Phill Kline was out of step with Kansans’ priorities in a television advertisement.⁶⁰

⁵⁶ Lon Wartman, quoted in Kursten Phelps, “Doll, Cruz address county’s Democrats,” *Garden City Telegram*, January 18, 2006.

⁵⁷ Jim Barnett, Gubernatorial Debate, WIBW Channel 13, Topeka, KS, 2006.

⁵⁸ Ken Canfield, Channel 27 News Republican Governor’s Race Forum, Topeka, KS, July 23, 2006.

⁵⁹ Jim Ryun, Topeka, KS, October 31, 2006.

⁶⁰ Paul Morrison, “Board,” television advertisement, 2006.

Other political figures were more pugnacious in their attempts to disassociate opponents from the culture of their place. Kansas political veteran Tim Shallenburger, the state Republican chairman at the time, was emphatic in his association of Sebelius with other cultures. “We have to fight hard,” he argued, “because Sebelius is getting money from Streisand – New York and Hollywood types!”⁶¹

The process of disassociation continued after the election. E-mails from the Kansas Republican Party frequently attempted to disassociate Boyda from her district. After citing an article from *Roll Call* newspaper about her vulnerability, an e-mail concluded that “Roll Call is just pointing out something we have known all along. . . Nancy Boyda does not represent the values of the 2nd Congressional District.”⁶² The following text from a association-laden fundraising e-mail seeks to distinguish Boyda from the values of her district:

A while back Ms. Boyda proclaimed that she does not need help from her Democrat friends in Washington [So] we were confused last Friday, when Senator John Kerry from Massachusetts sent out a fundraising e-mail to his supporters asking them to give money to the freshman Congress person

⁶¹ Tim Shallenburger, speech, Emporia, November 4, 2006.

⁶² E-mail from the Kansas Republican Party, received November 6, 2007.

from the 2nd District We need your help today to defend against liberal money streaming into Kansas from John Kerry and Nancy Pelosi.⁶³

In a similar vein, another indictment using the technique of disassociation painted Boyda as someone more in common with San Francisco than her district:

Yesterday, we found out that San Francisco liberal House Speaker, Nancy Pelosi, cancelled her visit to the Second Congressional District. Apparently Nancy Boyda finally buckled under our criticism of her lack of “independence” and told Pelosi her money was needed, but not her actual presence. Or Boyda is afraid that the voters of the 2nd District will realize what we all know – that she is just as liberal as the Speaker of the House.⁶⁴

Attempts to associate Dennis Moore with Washington rather than his district are also common. The Kansas Republican Party sent an e-mail which outlined the contrasts between his actions in Washington and his words in his district, characterized as “D. C. Step – District Step.” “We want to know,” the e-mail continues, “why isn’t he taking the same steps in D. C. that’s he [sic]

⁶³ Kansas Republican Party, e-mail message to author, October 15, 2007.

⁶⁴ Kansas Republican Party, e-mail message to author, November 9, 2007.

telling his constituents he's taking? Dennis Moore isn't the only Washington liberal who has forgotten where he's from"⁶⁵

The geographical imaginations in this sample of e-mails, and the spoken and iconographic demonstrations of association are an important part of political rhetoric in Kansas. Each individual voter has their own sense of what Kansas values are. Politicians, associating themselves with these same traits are at once showing themselves to be attentive and dedicated to the needs of that place and allowing the electorate to project what they understand the place to be onto that candidate. Politicians, of course, pronounce positions on issues that one might or might not agree with. But positioning themselves with the place – and its ascribed meanings – is a less controversial starting point. As explained earlier in this section, to be so identified with a place can be powerful. The spatial organizing of ideas and ideologies lies at the heart of social and political discourses, and indicates in itself the importance of place to the human comprehension of society. For politicians to tap into this is therefore not surprising.

⁶⁵ Kansas Republican Party, e-mail, received November 20, 2007.

Geographical Techniques of Campaigns: Understanding

Politicians and candidates for office must “know” their place in two ways. First, they should have a firm grasp of the economic, social, and material conditions of their district or the state. Knowledge of the “facts” of a place are important not only because their job when in office is to change, protect or improve those conditions, but also because they demonstrate in a substantive way a legitimate connection to the territory. Once again, this helps voters to consent to be represented by this individual.

The second area where a candidate must knowledge is an understanding of the discourses of that place. This, in some ways, demands an understanding of what those material realities mean, what they represent and how they are perceived. This section of the analysis will be concerned not with how politicians connect themselves physically to places, but how they tap into specific discourses and local knowledge. This takes spatial attachment into the role of the geographical imagination and toward a fully cultural understanding of place in the political campaign.

Demonstrating a cognizance of local affairs is important both to potential policy-making and to convincing an audience that a candidate is in touch with his or her territory. Jim Ryun, for example, in a tight reelection campaign in the second congressional district, sought to emphasize his work

for the military, acknowledging the importance of two army bases to his district. "I wanted to serve on the Armed Services Committee," he explained at a rally, before talking about his work for the bases in his district.⁶⁶ Sam Brownback backed this up at the same event: "Jim [Ryun] and I were just in Leavenworth, and he's working hard there just as he is at Fort Riley He went to Germany to bring Big Red One back to Kansas."⁶⁷ The emphasis given these achievements at the rally indicates the importance of the army bases to the district. Having that particular knowledge showed local awareness on Ryun's and Brownback's parts, and reinforced the Republican connection with strong national defense.

Phill Kline, tailoring his message at each stop on the 2006 Republican pre-election "Victory Tour," also ably demonstrated his local knowledge, sometimes couching it in terms of what he had achieved for the area. While in Shawnee he talked about tax issues, in Hays and Russell about water problems. Kline highlighted victories he had achieved against Nebraska and Colorado, resulting in "thirty percent more water in the Republican River and fourteen percent more in the Arkansas," and discussed in some depth these

⁶⁶ U. S. Rep. Jim Ryun, speech, Topeka, KS, October 31, 2006.

⁶⁷ U. S. Senator Sam Brownback (R), speech, Topeka, KS, October 31, 2006.

issues that might be of concern to the water-poor central and western parts of the state.⁶⁸

The candidates for governor attempted to demonstrate their local knowledge at a Kansas City debate, engaging in an informed discussion of education funding and the use of the “local option budget” (local control over property taxation for schools) – an issue especially pertinent to the voters in Johnson County.⁶⁹ Governor Sebelius also used the occasion to tout her property tax relief proposal for machinery, something that “here in Wyandotte County, GM is very excited about,” illustrating her knowledge of local industrial concerns and operations (General Motors has a large plant in the Fairfax district of Kansas City, Kansas).⁷⁰ Beyond a knowledge of specific features of places, a broader awareness can also be useful: Robin Jennison, for instance, at a Republican gubernatorial debate, pointed to the diversity of the state and the need for a balanced ticket when he said “Dennis [Wilson, Jennison’s running-mate] and I represent diverse geography – he’s from Johnson County, I’m from western Kansas. He’s been successful in business, I’ve been a farmer.”⁷¹ This communicated practically to the audience that he

⁶⁸ Phill Kline, speeches, Shawnee, Hays, Russell, KS, November 2 & 4, 2006.

⁶⁹ Gov. Kathleen Sebelius, Sen. Jim Barnett, Kansas City Chamber of Commerce forum, October 11, 2006.

⁷⁰ Sebelius, speech, Kansas City, October 11, 2006.

⁷¹ Robin Jennison, speech, Channel 27 News Republican Governor’s Race Forum, Topeka, KS, July 23, 2006.

had put together a representative ticket, and also indicates that he was aware of differences within the state.

Legislative forums provide an opportunity for politicians to communicate their knowledge of various local or statewide matters. Typically held a few times each legislative session, these events are sponsored by local chambers of commerce or a media outlet, and are usually attended by concerned citizens and local community leaders. At a forum at the city hall in Olathe, for instance, the local delegation responded to question on topics as varied as HPV immunization and tax policy. State representatives Mike Kiegerl and Arlen Siegfried, both Republicans, also spoke at length about the prospects of the BNSF railroad investment bringing 1,300 jobs into the area.⁷²

In a more rural setting, the Ellsworth Political Forum saw a similar broad-ranging deployment of local knowledge. Representative Josh Svaty, for instance, discussed both the problem of limited ground water availability and the possibility of prison expansion, arguing that the latter would “help this rural economy.” Such insider knowledge, both to the political process and to the affairs of the area, helps sustain Svaty’s claim on office.

Knowledge and understanding also involve comprehension (and deployment) of the perceived culture or mindset of a place. Such understanding actually can help guide a campaign. For example, Kay

⁷² Local Delegation forum, Olathe, KS, February 10, 2007.

O'Connor, an arch-conservative from Olathe who was challenging Ron Thornburgh for the Republican nomination for Secretary of State, was frank in her prospects in certain parts of Kansas: "I'm not excited about going to Lawrence I can count on support in Olathe: I made it conservative!"⁷³

Understanding of geographical discourses of identity is also expressed rhetorically. Paul Morrison helped his cause in Kansas City by articulating a distinction between that place and Johnson County. "I didn't really go to Johnson County," he said to a Wyandotte crowd. "I rarely went to Johnson County because that's where all the rich people are. I will always consider Kansas City my home."⁷⁴ This tapped into the rivalry with the neighboring county, as well as local class conceptions.

Other candidates for statewide office and their supporters deployed similar tactics in their speechmaking. Ron Freeman, then executive director of the state GOP, introduced the Republican candidates at a rally with President Bush in Topeka. He talked of Kansas's identity as a free state and a Republican state, and then demonstrated an understanding of the contemporary collegiate rivalry in the state, articulating the discourse of intra-state rivalry as a way of emphasizing his insider's perspective: I'm

⁷³ Sen. Kay O'Connor (R–Olathe), interview with author, Kansas City, KS, July 29, 2006.

⁷⁴ Paul Morrison, speech, Kansas City, KS, November 1, 2006.

pleased to see Wildcats here; OK, OK, and Jayhawks too!”⁷⁵ Jim Barnett, attempting to woo voters in rural Kansas, articulated a sense of the western Kansas identity, an identity that is often, it seems, at odds with the more metropolitan eastern part of the state. “We won’t forget about you here in western Kansas, this is our seventh trip out here; we won’t forget,” he explained in Hays.⁷⁶ At another stop in Great Bend, Barnett explained, “the world doesn’t end in Topeka – as it does for the governor – I’m not going to forget about you here in Great Bend; I’m going to stand up for these western parts.”⁷⁷ These sentiments suggest a sense of alienation from the rest of the state amongst the residents of western Kansas. Barnett, as a “farm boy” himself, was eager to voice that identity.

The examples above illustrate the use of association, disassociation, and the geographical adjustment of a message. Along with a sense of local distinctiveness often comes a sense of pride: our place is better than another place. That feeling lay behind both Paul Morrison’s words about Johnson County to the Wyandotte audience and Barnett’s support for western Kansas. At a state level, pride in Kansas can also be mobilized. This can be seen implicitly in the use of state icons (such as those examined earlier, or through

⁷⁵ Ron Freeman, speech, Topeka, KS, November 5, 2006.

⁷⁶ Sen. Jim Barnett, speech, Hays, KS, November 2, 2006.

⁷⁷ Sen. Jim Barnett, speech, Great Bend, KS, November 2, 2006.

using official state symbols, seen in Figures 21 and 22.



Figure 21: Pat Colloton website.⁷⁸

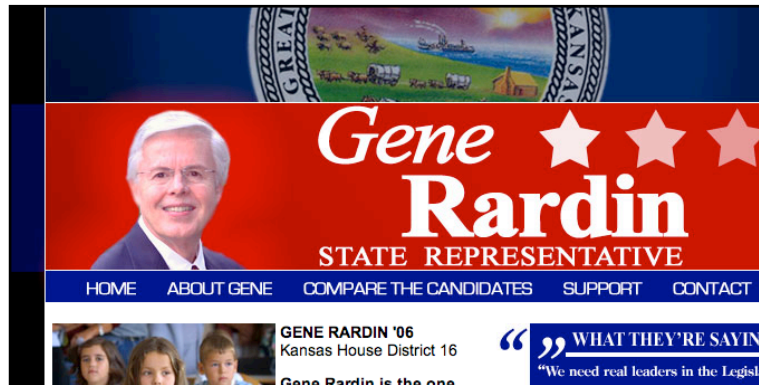


Figure 22: Gene Rardin website.⁷⁹

Pride was also expressed more explicitly, often through comparisons of Kansas with other states. For an incumbent, these usually take the form of high rankings (e.g. “first in economic freedom,” “top 10 pro-business

⁷⁸ <http://www.patcolloton.com/> (accessed January 5, 2008).

⁷⁹ <http://www.rardinforkansas.com/> (accessed January 8, 2008).

state”⁸⁰); for a challenger, the converse. “Kansas. . . is fiftieth in private sector [job] growth,”⁸¹ commented Jim Barnett. Geographical comparison can be especially effective if the other states referenced are close by: “the economic engine of this state is broken, it’s worse than neighboring states,” was an example from the same challenger.⁸² Such statements – whether negative or positive – were intended to mobilize people’s pride in their place, and present the candidate as a champion of that territory.

If we were to survey the publications, images, and words of the 2006 political campaigns in Kansas, what might we discern as important to the identity of the state? First, almost all candidate flyers, leaflets, and websites emphasized their families. Typically, this took the form of a picture of the candidate surrounded by young children, spouse, and other family members, sometimes supported by a proud announcement of the number of grandchildren to which they lay claim (Figure 23).

⁸⁰ Governor Sebelius, “Work” television advertisement, 2006.

⁸¹ Jim Barnett, opening remarks, WIBW Channel 13 (Topeka) Gubernatorial debate, October, 2006.

⁸² Sen. Jim Barnett, speech, Channel 27 News Republican Governor’s Race Forum, Topeka, KS, July 23, 2006.



Figure 23: Screenshot from Morrison ad, "Family," 2006.

Many times, a candidate articulated expressly their desire to work for the good of the "family" when in office, or described themselves as "pro-family,"⁸³ not always with antigay overtones. The first words on Jim Barnett's principal campaign flyer read: "A proven leader who stands up for Kansas families." Reiterating the point later on, he writes, "As your next Governor, I will. . . put Kansas families first. I hope I can count on your vote as I continue my campaign to put Kansas families first."⁸⁴ Governor Sebelius, though to a lesser extent, also used imagery of the family.⁸⁵ Such rhetoric and points to a certain structuring of society and valorization of that structuring, one that

⁸³ For example, Rep. Bill Otto (R—LeRoy), campaign flyer, 2006.

⁸⁴ Sen. Jim Barnett, campaign flyer, 2006.

⁸⁵ For example, in the "Kansas" television advertisement, 2006.

differs markedly from that seen in British political campaigns, for instance, and is likely to some degree from in other states in the U. S. This traditionalist presentation of the family in Kansas obviously emerges from and reflects the cultural meaning in the general populace (or why would the politicians use it?).

“Hard work” and optimism are other themes featured prominently in the political-cultural conception of the state. Governor Sebelius, for example, used this idea in one of her television ads, called “Work.” The spot begins with an alarm clock sounding at 6:08 a. m., and continues with shots of predawn preparations for work, commuting, and offices opening. Then the last scene depicts the governor already at her desk, already working hard. The narration carries the message clearly: “It’s as clear as day, Kansas is rising, with the hard work and commitment of its people, and before the workday even begins, the determination of a governor, determined to keep Kansas moving forward.”⁸⁶ This ad combines the themes of hard work with optimism. Although many candidates utilized the theme that for Kansas, the best days were ahead, Governor Sebelius, and other Democrats especially, asserted this sense of expectation and progress. Such emphasis was understandable given that the governor was an incumbent running on a message of success and Democrats were voicing a desire for change on the

⁸⁶ Gov. Kathleen Sebelius, “Work” television advertisement, 2006.

back of perceived Republican inertia. But a real sense of vivid optimism was expressed in “Hope in the Heartland,” the Democratic Party motto for 2006, and a quest for progress and betterment, especially in the governor’s ads. The extent to which this theme taps into a discourse of statewide optimism and expectation is something for discussion. My in-depth interviews reveal the importance of this value in Kansas, but its prolific use must come from the discourse of Kansas. This ad is ingenious in its combination of work and optimism: getting up before dawn is clearly a symbol of application; dawn itself represents a “new day” and progress. The line “Kansas is rising” is an artful deployment of dual meaning, and connects on a discursive level with two conceptions of what it means to be a Kansan. Many other ads from the Sebelius campaign echo these themes, and all are quite vivid.⁸⁷

One of the most pervasive and commonly shared discourses of Kansas exhibited in campaign rhetoric is rurality. The pastoral ideal is alive and well in the state, if we use political communication as our guide. Democrats and Republicans both expressed this as central to the identity of Kansas. Granted, urban legislators focused less on the theme; but all the statewide candidates emphasized the pastoral, despite the urbanity of the majority of the population of Kansas.

⁸⁷ See, for instance, “Sebelius,” “Office,” and “Kansas” television spots for other good examples (all from 2006).

I have indicated earlier how Jim Barnett would start almost every address (even to urban audiences) with a comment along the lines of “as a farm boy from Reading, Kansas. . . .” A Republican primary challenger, Robin Jennison, would talk of being “very aware of rural Kansas,” his farming roots seen as a source of strength.⁸⁸ Kay O’Connor felt like she was ready for statewide office partly because she was a “country girl from Alaska.”⁸⁹ President Bush, in a campaign speech for Jim Ryun, also emphasized rural Kansas and the agricultural economy, receiving his biggest cheer when he remarked: “We are going to use Kansas products to power our automobiles instead of foreign oil!”⁹⁰

Such practical endorsements of Kansas farming were matched by the imaginative use of the rural identity in many political speeches and writings. Phill Kline, for instance, writing in the *Kansas City Star*, began a piece entitled “What’s right with Kansas” by suggesting that, “[T]here’s something about living in a place where you rely on the earth, have your hands in the dirt and eye on the sky.” He explains how this underpins the Kansas quality of conviction and other strengths, later arguing, “give us a front porch, a big sky, time with family and God, and then watch us stand for what we believe

⁸⁸ For example, the Channel 27 News Republican Governor’s race forum. Jennison emphasizes his farming roots prominently on his campaign flyer, see Figure 3.2.

⁸⁹ Kay O’Connor, interview with author, Kansas City, KS, July 29, 2006.

⁹⁰ President George W. Bush, speech, Topeka, KS, November 5, 2006.

in.”⁹¹ Kline’s evocations of rural imagery are especially suggestive of their importance, given that they are published in a metropolitan newspaper and written by a man very much connected to northern Johnson County and Topeka concerned with being elected to a statewide office in a state whose residents live mostly in cities.

It is in the visual imagery, however, of campaign politics that the affirmation of Kansas’s pastoral identity can be most vividly seen. As one might expect, most websites for candidates whose districts *are* predominantly rural employ agricultural or pastoral imagery as a way of associating themselves with the realities of their place (see Figures 24, 25, 26).

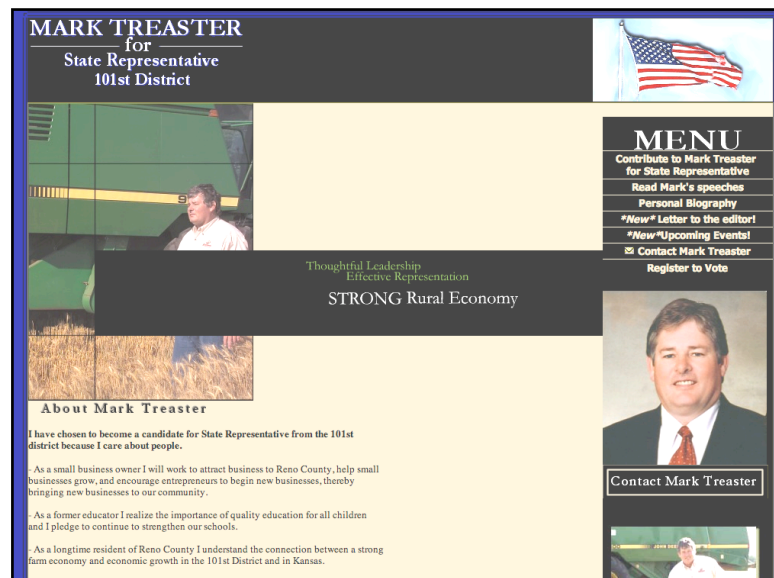


Figure 24: Mark Treaster website, depicting combines.⁹²

⁹¹ Phill Kline, “What’s right with Kansas” *Kansas City Star*, March 13, 2005.

⁹² <http://www.marktreaster.net/> (accessed January 8, 2008).



Figure 25: Detail from Jerry Moran website.⁹³



Figure 26: Lynn Jenkins website.⁹⁴

At the statewide scale, however, the technique of using rural images is more culturally telling. Note, for instance, the preponderance of (rustic) rural imagery on the Kansas Democratic Party website (Figure 27): the prairie, the windmill in the KDP “brand,” the wooden beam, the “Buffalo Blog,” and so on.

⁹³ <http://www.jerrymoran.house.gov/> (accessed January 8, 2008).

⁹⁴ <http://www.lynnjenkins.com/home.asp> (accessed January 8, 2008).



Figure 27: Kansas Democratic Party website.⁹⁵

Governor Sebelius, while not having a rural banner on her campaign website, does feature a “Rural Kansas: Preserving a Way of Life” section link as the only topical feature on the top part of her front page (Figure 28). Her opponent, Jim Barnett, litters his website and paper publications with rural imagery (Figures 29 and 30). And the official website of the Governor of Kansas is clear in its message (Figure 31): With the authority of the highest office in the state, this is a rural state.

⁹⁵ <http://ksdp.org/> (accessed January 10, 2008).

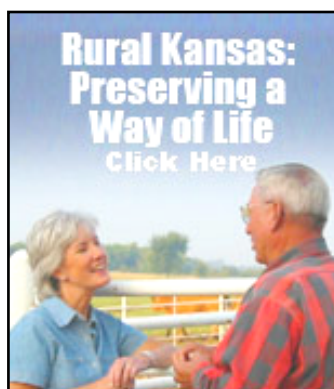


Figure 28: Sebelius campaign website icon.⁹⁶



Figure 29: Barnett campaign website.⁹⁷

⁹⁶ <http://www.ksgovernor.com/ShowPage.asp?page=default.asp> (accessed January 8, 2008).

⁹⁷ <http://barnettforgovernor.com/> (accessed December 12, 2007).



Figure 30: Barnett campaign flyer, 2006.



Figure 31: Banner of the official website of the Governor of Kansas.⁹⁸

A more recent example, shown in Figure 32, comes from Jim Slattery's campaign for United States Senate against incumbent Pat Roberts.

⁹⁸ <http://governor.ks.gov/> (accessed January 8, 2008).



Figure 32: Jim Slattery website banner.⁹⁹

Paul Morrison, earlier shown cataloging his attachment to Kansas City and how that place “will always be home,” takes a different attitude in another of his ads, shown around the state. In it, Morrison is standing next to a tractor, chatting with two men (see Figure 33) – one can assume they are farmers, decked as they are in dungarees and feed caps. Meanwhile, in the foreground, his brother (himself a farmer, we can assume, see figure 34) speaks to the camera: “That’s my brother, Paul Morrison, he’s running for attorney general. We both grew up around the farm, we both like to hunt, we both believe nothing’s more important than family”

⁹⁹ <http://www.slatteryforsenate.com/?home> (accessed July 3, 2008).



Figure 33: Morrison ad screenshot, "Brothers," 2006.



Figure 34: Another Morrison ad screenshot, "Brothers," 2006.

Morrison was running for an office that did not necessarily demand a cultural understanding – his was a legal position, not a representative or really political one. Still, he chose to deliver a clear message promoting rural

values. He would not have the ad say “we both grew up around the farm” and lean against a tractor if he did not think it was a meaningful and positive idea, capable of gaining his candidacy some support.

Ads produced by the Sebelius campaign also give some attention to the countryside. The spot, “See it,” for example, shows rural images while the narrator explains that “Kansas is moving forward.”¹⁰⁰ It begins with a shot of a mailbox on a county road and includes, amongst other things, a shot of a man standing in front of a tractor. The same “farmer” is used in another ad where he holds a sign referring to the progress Sebelius has made in state government (Figure 35).¹⁰¹ Finally, an unnamed ad places Sebelius in a field (Figure 36), as she talks about her plans for a second term, the road ahead being, symbolically, a rural road.¹⁰² The end result of this and other ads is an odd Kansas compromise of a future articulated in the terms of a past rural idyll.

¹⁰⁰ Kathleen Sebelius, “See it” television advertisement, 2006.

¹⁰¹ Kathleen Sebelius, “Kansas” television advertisement, 2006.

¹⁰² Kathleen Sebelius, unnamed television advertisement, 2006.



Figure 35: Screenshot from Sebelius campaign ad, "See It," 2006.

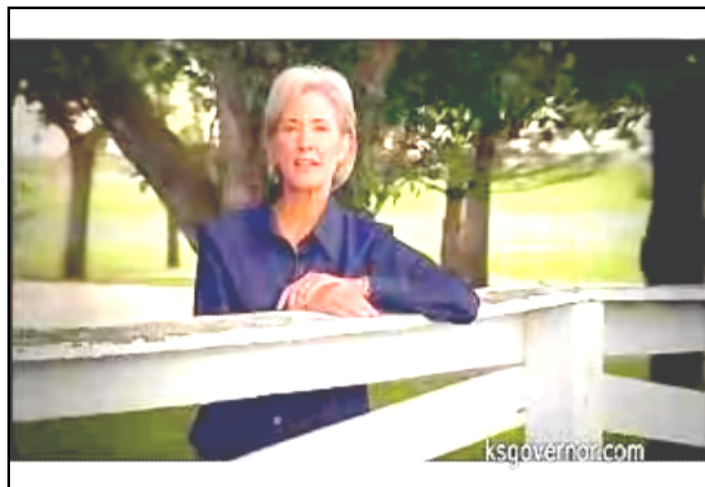


Figure 36: Screenshot from unnamed Sebelius campaign ad, 2006.

A pastoral discourse is vividly and frequently communicated of the pastoral in the rhetoric and imagery of political campaigns in Kansas, indicating its importance to the state's meaning. This is surprising given recent transformations in the rural economy and the decline in the

nonmetropolitan population in the state. But, if we are to credit politicians with understanding the discourses of place (necessary to convince the electorate of their representative power), then the knowledge revealed here still puts the rural at the heart of Kansas regional identity. Again, politicians are experts at articulating the discourses of place, even transforming them into some sort of “hyperreality” of confected, constructed, militantly mobilized iconographic power.¹⁰³ All the techniques of understanding and knowledge-expression examined here reflect and reinforce the character of places. While a dynamism in the formation of place identities exists through their discursive formations, there is also a profound countercurrent of stabilization. Politicians participate in a discourse of place that is by its nature open to change, but because they must articulate as closely as possible the electorate’s sense of place (which is itself informed by the discourse of place), deviation or challenge is not a wise strategy. Accordingly, place images and identities tend to become more fixed over time and more distinct and more caricatured in discourse. The geographical imagination in state politics thereby inclines toward a conservative sense of place, as a rupture might suggest a disconnection of the politician from his or her place. This process is a powerful factor in the persistence of rural idolatry in Kansas.

¹⁰³ See Jean Baudrillard, *America* (London: Verso, 1988).

In a very material way, a stabilization of spatial difference is furthered by the policy- and law-making process. Governing, with all its concrete outcomes, is conducted by politicians who always attend to place discourses. Consequently those material outcomes will largely reinforce existing cognitive spatial patterns as politicians legislate according to their localized perspective. As will be seen later in this dissertation, the perpetuation of Kansas's identity as a rural state has very real policy implications and legislative outcomes. The discourses of place in politics (indeed, perhaps all the discourses of politics) draw on the senses of place of the electorate, who in turn draw that imagination from the discourses of place expressed in the public sphere. It is a circular dynamic, but it does help sustain an interesting cultural geography in Kansas.

Geographical Techniques of Campaigns: Participating

Campaigns are conducted not only by words and images, but also by action. In its search for the geographies of the rhetoric and discourses of campaigning, this analysis has necessarily focused on texts and talking. The *acts* of campaigning do, though, represent geographical expression of sorts. Much of what I explored in this chapter concerned how candidates demonstrate an attachment to a place. One of the more obvious ways to do

that is to actually be in that place and meet with the electorate. Such a “ground war,” getting out there, meeting and greeting, giving speeches, and going door to door, is inherently spatialized. Bill Roy emphasized to prospective Democratic house candidates in Johnson County that going door-to-door and local interaction “were the foundation for everything else.”¹⁰⁴ The importance of local contacts is not only that they provide opportunity to learn the concerns of the electorate, but they are also a straightforward demonstration that the candidate is connected to and is active in his or her place.

Conducting a statewide campaign cannot follow the same door-to-door principles, but ways exist to physically connect a candidate with the state. Campaigns were always sensitive to visit rural areas as well as cities, western and eastern Kansas, Wichita and Kansas City. Most statewide candidates traveled widely for a campaign is not merely a verbal claim on a territory, but a social one too. Candidates must be strategic about where they campaign: Paul Morrison, for instance, knowing he was already strong in Johnson County, focused more of his resources and time on Wichita and western Kansas.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁴ Bill Roy, Chair of the Johnson County Democratic Party, speech, Olathe, KS, April 24, 2006.

¹⁰⁵ Interview with Dakota Loomis, Lawrence, KS, October 20, 2006.

As an incumbent, especially a state representative, participation in the local community must take the form of both frequent “legislative coffees” or delegation forums and attendance at local events such as fairs, parades and openings. Through the summer months especially, legislators fill many weekends with such community functions, keeping up their profile and demonstrating their attachment to place.

Playing the Pancake Card

Shrove Tuesday, or Pancake Day as it is more popularly known in Britain, is an opportunity for gluttonous indulgence before the fasting of Lent begins. Traditionally in Britain we would make pancakes and indulge our sweet tooth with plenty of sugar, as well as lemon juice, added to the finished products. Olney, a small village in Buckinghamshire, northwest of London, has conducted a “pancake race” almost every year since 1445. Female contestants run a short course carrying a pancake and pan as they go. Since 1950, the city of Liberal, in southwest Kansas, has challenged Olney in this race (a returning American soldier from World War II had learned of the tradition from a British soldier), giving the pancake contest an international flavor. As of 2007, Liberal was, unfortunately, beating Olney 32 to 25.

Liberal has constructed quite a set of events around the actual race, including talent shows, beauty contests, a town pancake feed and parades. In 2006 I was asked to be the British representative at the events, my most important role being to give the winner a “kiss of peace” after the race. After attending receptions and the talent show

the night before (at which all the main statewide officeholders, with the exception of the governor, were presented) the morning of the race started with a pancake feed for over two thousand people in a large gymnasium. Attorney General Phill Kline asked me the night before how we ate pancakes in Britain; at the morning pancake feed he challenged me to an international exchange: I should eat pancakes the American way, with lashings of sickly syrup, while he would take them the British way, laced with a delicious combination of lemon juice and sugar. The press was called, pictures were taken and, to be honest, it was quite fun. But it also demonstrated Kline's political awareness of the importance of getting involved in places and their practices. He garnered good press in Liberal and everybody enjoyed the contest.

The attorney general and other statewide officeholders (and me and Miss Kansas) gave speeches to the assembled crowd; once again Kline's attentiveness to local culture made his probably the most effective. (I'm sure mine was profound, but I don't think they could understand my strange accent.)

All the politicians, local leaders and other VIPs gathered on a stage outside next to the finish line to prepare for the race. Kline again engaged me in a contest: this time a flag-raising race for the Union Jack

and the Star Spangled Banner. We matched off and, somewhat inevitably, the American won. Again, Kline participated in a local cultural event (and indeed, initiated the contest in the first place), that could only help his image in the town. After the race was over, it was time for the parade down the principal thoroughfare, with your British representative waving in monarchical fashion from the back of a convertible Ford Mustang.

Conclusion: Winning places

This chapter has examined the various ways politicians use geography and articulate a geographical imagination in the course of their campaigns. Representative democracy is a battle over territory, over places, so spatial tactics are important. I have offered examples of six techniques I identified in action. This was not an exhaustive collection, of course, but it demonstrates the dynamics of place discourses and connections to senses of place in state politics. Moreover, this survey has indicated a number of elements to the identity of Kansas, and places in Kansas, that warrant further investigation. Later chapters build on this introduction.

Chapter 5

School Funding

Representative Clay Aurand, the new chair of the House Education Committee, remarked in 2007 that it was his “comfort level” with both rural and Johnson County lawmakers that secured him the post. He also acknowledged the difficult balance to be made between rural and urban school districts.¹ The context for Aurand’s comments was the geographically fractious 2006 legislative session. The Kansas Supreme Court had ruled that Kansas’s schools suffered from inadequate and inequitable financing, and so proceedings that year were dominated by the formulation of a new K-12 funding formula. The focus was a funding plan to better serve students in urban and poor school districts. Throughout the contentious policy-making process, place trumped party as legislators wrestled with the interests of schools in their districts and their visions for the state.

Court cases were not new to education funding in Kansas. The previous school finance plan, adopted in 1992, had likewise been spurred by legal action. By 1999, the Salina and Dodge City school districts determined

¹ Rep. Clay Aurand (R—Courtland) in Chris Green, “Ed chairman must balance rural, urban interests,” *Hutchinson News*, February 12, 2007.

that the education funding formula, as it stood, failed to provide adequate schooling for their students. Of particular concern was the insufficient funds given children from poor backgrounds and those considered at risk of dropping out. Viewing the existing aid as a violation of the education provisions set forth in the Kansas constitution, these districts filed suit and the case eventually was taken up by the Kansas Supreme Court.²

The Legislature was ordered in January 2005 to restructure the school finance formula to increase aid to more deprived or needy urban areas. Lawmakers during the 2005 session amended the formula somewhat and appropriated an additional \$141 million for schools. In June of that year, the Supreme Court issued response to this legislation. The Legislature's efforts were not enough, it said; funding was still inadequate and imbalanced, and local property tax measures were producing inequalities.

A fraught special session ensued. For twelve days over the summer, conservatives pushed constitutional amendments to restrict judicial power in such areas, while Democrats and moderate Republicans attempted to provide extra money for schools. Both sides called for a cost study of K-12 education. This set the scene for renewed debate in the 2006 session, the progress of which will be analyzed in this chapter. It was not a smooth process: The

² Kansas Constitution, art. 6, sec. 6; Montoy, et al. v. State of Kansas, et al., opinion filed January 3, 2005.

debate moved in fits, characterized by key periods of intense activity. At each of these periods, I explore an element of the geography of the issue.³

The Post Audit Scare

Released on January 9, 2006, the Legislative Post Audit cost analysis report made statehouse leaders realize that difficult negotiations lay ahead.⁴ The Legislature had previously commissioned a study into K-12 funding in 2001. When this report was published in 2002, many Republicans dismissed it as it called for a significant reworking of the finance formula and suggested the need for an extra \$850 million in state aid.⁵ These same legislative leaders hoped that the findings of the new report would be more conservative than those there in the one of 2002.

The Legislative Post Audit (LPA) cost study called for a minimum of an extra \$400 million for school districts across the state. Such a figure, on top

³ For insight into the condensed timeframe of legislative action see Burdett Loomis, *Time, Politics and Policy: A Legislative Year* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1989).

⁴ Legislative Division of Post Audit, *Cost Study Analysis of Elementary and Secondary Education in Kansas: Estimating the Costs of K-12 Education Using Two Approaches* (Topeka, KS: Legislative Division of Post Audit, 2006).

⁵ Augenblick & Myers, Inc., *Calculating the Cost of a Suitable Education in Kansas in 2000-2001 Using Two Different Analytic Approaches* (Denver: Augenblick & Myers, Inc., 2002). A frequent Republican jibe at the report was that since the researchers were from Denver, they knew nothing of Kansas schools.

of the almost \$300 million extra allocated the year before was a daunting amount. Conservative Republicans raised concerns about where that money would come from. But an equally prominent concern was LPA suggestion to reduce the funds going to smaller school districts (by number of students), so as to balance the increased needs of larger, urban districts with higher levels of poverty and more non-English speaking students. Just as the intervention of the courts and the demands in the new formula for large amounts of tax revenue stoked the ideological convictions of conservative Republicans, so this “attack” on smaller school districts riled people identified with rural Kansas.

The post-1992 school finance formula included a weighting for districts with “low enrollment.” This weighting recognized the higher cost to smaller school districts – in the formula, those with fewer than 1,750 students – of fixed administrative responsibilities, fewer students per teacher, and so on. Many such districts existed all in rural areas. In total, of the 296 school districts in 2006, forty-eight boasted fewer than 250 students.⁶

Generosity to smaller districts had been the fruit of political compromise during the plan’s formulation in the early 1990s. To secure Republican votes for expanded education funding, Democrats acceded to demands to protect and sustain rural schools. “It was a political decision,”

⁶ Kansas State Department of Education, 2006.

commented Wichita Representative Jim Ward in a House Democratic caucus meeting. “We’re giving more money to small districts now because more of their representatives were in the legislature in 1992 and we had to get 63 votes.” He went on: “We also like the values that small schools provide and stand for.”⁷ This latter comment, perhaps surprising coming from an urban representative, points to the continued fidelity legislators expressed for traditional rural identity in Kansas. Representative Josh Svaty reiterated the same point: “The legislature made a conscious decision [in 1992] that rural life, rural values, were intrinsic to the state of Kansas.” He went on to suggest that the same sentiment, the same sense of place, was prevalent in 2006: “This goes beyond the Post Audit – intangible things will sustain this time as well. It’s an emotional issue, it goes beyond the numbers.”⁸ Rural identification would play an important part in the school funding debate as it progressed.

When the LPA report was published and the cuts it recommended to the low-enrollment weighting were revealed, a singular chorus of opposition followed. “Don’t take money from small districts,” argued Hutchinson Representative Mike O’Neal. “Don’t bring them down to the average just so

⁷ Rep. Jim Ward (D – Wichita), remarks at House Democratic Caucus meeting, Topeka, KS, January 19, 2006.

⁸ Rep. Joshua Svaty (D – Ellsworth), interview by author, Topeka, KS, January 19, 2006.

others can move up to the average.”⁹ “It’s political suicide if we take money from rural schools The school is part of the community identity, at that point it becomes political,” asserted Wichita Representative Jason Watkins in a later debate.¹⁰ As Rep. Svaty had earlier predicted, the defense of rural schools became prominent in the political discourse. Even from urban legislators hoping to increase urban poverty weightings no talk came of taking aid away from small districts. “We don’t want anywhere to lose out,” said Leavenworth Representative Marti Crow. “But it is an emotional issue about small districts,” she added, acknowledging the imaginative power of small-town schools and the rural life they represent.¹¹

The calls in support of rural schools, and the defense of the existing low-enrollment weighting, stemmed also from local interests. Rural Democratic Representative Steve Luckert raised a typical concern about the LPA plan, when suggesting that he “couldn’t support this proposal for what it does to the seven schools in my district. It’s a tough sell. The state’s spending \$400 million on education and we’re not getting a dime.”¹² Minority

⁹ Rep. Mike O’Neal (R–Hutchinson), remarks at the House Select Committee on School Finance, Topeka, KS, February 2, 2006.

¹⁰ Rep. Jason Watkins (R–Wichita), speech in House debate on HB 2986, Topeka, KS, March 23, 2006.

¹¹ Rep. Marti Crow (D–Leavenworth), remarks at House Democratic Caucus meeting, Topeka, KS, January 19, 2006.

¹² Rep. Steve Luckert (D–Sabetha), remarks at House Democratic Caucus meeting, Topeka, KS, January 19, 2006.

Leader Dennis McKinney, himself from Greensburg, commented on the proposal: “A lot of legislators from rural areas . . . are waking up to the fact that our schools are threatened.” Agreeing that more money should be spent on urban schools, he nevertheless warned that “we don’t have to take money away from small schools to accomplish that.”¹³

The publication of the LPA report stoked a defense of rural schools that drew both on vested interests and the imaginative iconography of the traditional rural way of life. A clear understanding that small town schools were “part of the dynamics of communities” in rural Kansas.¹⁴ Whereas football, in a Johnson County school district, is just an activity for students, in Wilson, in rural Ellsworth County, “football is needed; it’s for entertainment, social life; it’s central to community; it’s important for life there.”¹⁵ This awareness, combined with an overarching emotional subscription to the sanctity of pastoralism in Kansas contributed to the defense of small schools, no matter how disproportionate their state aid and the added expense to education funding.

¹³ Minority Leader Dennis McKinney (D – Greensburg), in Steve Painter, “Resolved to solve school funding,” *Wichita Eagle*, January 23, 2006.

¹⁴ Rep. Mike O’Neal (R – Hutchinson), remarks at the House Select Committee on School Finance, Topeka, KS, February 2, 2006.

¹⁵ Rep. Josh Svaty (D – Ellsworth), interview with author, Topeka, KS, January 19, 2006.

The Leadership Plan, Without the Leadership

Following the publication of the Post Audit report, the governor and legislative leaders met behind closed doors to develop a new school funding formula. Responding to criticisms of the LPA, Governor Sebelius assured that rural districts would not be harmed in their legislation: “The worst of all worlds is to help one group of children by putting another group at a disadvantage.”¹⁶ Similarly, Representative Kathe Decker, chair of the House Select Committee on School Finance and another negotiator, commented that the developing policy “will not shift any money from small districts to large districts. When [the study] came out, we decided we didn’t want an urban-rural fight here.”¹⁷ The product of their negotiations, House Bill 2986, was a geographical compromise, including a slight raise of the base state aid per pupil that would benefit all districts, and little change to the low-enrollment weighting. To meet the principal demands of the court, the bill increased funding for “at-risk” students, defined as those receiving free or reduced lunch (a common proxy for lower income levels), and a new urban poverty rating that granted extra money for school districts with higher density

¹⁶ Gov. Kathleen Sebelius (D) in Scott Rothschild, “Sebelius: State won’t adopt school study,” *Lawrence Journal-World*, February 16, 2006.

¹⁷ Rep. Kathe Decker (R—Clay Center) in Steve Painter, “Sebelius remarks hint at less urban-school money,” *Wichita Eagle*, February 16, 2006.

populations, acknowledging the particular challenges of the inner-city poor. The criteria for districts to tap this latter funding stream were at least 212.1 students per square mile and a level of poverty of at least 35.1 percent. The new funding plan, totaling around \$500 million, would be phased in over three years in an attempt to avoid a tax increase.

The new plan, presented on February 22, was initially welcomed as a step forward. There was now something “on the table” to work with. But as the details of the proposal were looked at more closely, opposition grew. Conservatives attacked the plan as too expensive. House Appropriations Committee chair Melvin Neufeld asserted that the legislature could not afford the bill.¹⁸ After the Senate introduced an even larger plan, fifteen conservative House and Senate Republicans announced that they found both plans “fiscally irresponsible and unaffordable.”¹⁹ Majority Leader Clay Aurand introduced an alternative proposal, a one-year, \$120 million plan that used property taxes in a creative way to the advantage of poorer districts. The battle lines at this stage were between a coalition of rural and some suburban conservative Republicans and the Democrats.

More defined geographical criticism came as Johnson County legislators joined the opposition. Johnson County, a wealthy, suburban

¹⁸ Chris Moon, “Schools could win big,” *Topeka Capital Journal*, February 24, 2006.

¹⁹ Speech in State Capitol, Topeka, KS, March 2, 2006.

county in the metropolitan Kansas City area, gained little from the plan “Rather than take into account the unique challenges of every district,” Roeland Park Representative Ed O’Malley argued, “this plan focuses on assisting rural and inner-city urban school districts all the while ignoring the needs of Johnson County schools.”²⁰

Another Republican leader joined the geographical disintegration of the leadership plan. Ray Merrick, a Johnson County Representative and Speaker Pro Tem, echoed O’Malley’s concerns, arguing that the funding was not fair to his school district. It failed to recognize, as he saw it, students who were not poor, but were also not meeting proficiency standards and “at risk” of dropping out. “To me, there’s a heck of a disconnect,” said Merrick to the House Select Committee on School Finance.²¹

Representatives from elsewhere often cited Johnson County schools and school districts as examples of educational privilege. References to “Blue Valley,” a wealthy school district in southern Johnson County, were frequent and commonly disparaging. A certain amount of envy and financial resentment permeated the discourse. There was, indeed, a geography to the

²⁰ Rep. Ed O’Malley (R—Roeland Park), in Bob Sigman, “We got shortchanged,” *Johnson County Sun*, March 2, 2006. “Anyone who stands between Johnson Countians and their outstanding schools is in dangerous territory,” is a telling statement from the author of this article.

²¹ Speaker Pro Tem Ray Merrick (R—Stilwell), comments at meeting of House Select Committee on School Finance, Topeka, KS, March 6, 2006.

wealth of school districts. Blue Valley, Olathe, and Shawnee Mission, all Johnson County districts, drew on the wealthiest population in the state and could garner the most local property tax revenues. Blue Valley had the lowest poverty rate among its students, at 3.7 percent. Kansas City, in contrast, had the highest proportion of students on free and reduced lunch (the measure of poverty), at 76.2% in 2006.²²

Johnson County quickly became a “third” player in the school funding debate, a place whose interests were aligned neither with rural nor inner-city urban areas. The twenty two representatives from the county, particularly moderate Republicans from its northern and eastern reaches, became an important voting bloc, because, allied with the unified Democratic caucus and other scattered moderate Republicans, they could constitute a majority in the House. There was little sympathy, however, for their concerns in this part of the school funding debate.

Johnson County representatives had long complained that their county was served poorly by the state. As the wealthiest in the state, the county’s large tax revenues were spread to poorer parts. But, “unless you live in Johnson County you don’t know what it’s like,” complained one local representative. “You want our money, it goes out to the rest of the state. All

²² Kansas State Department of Education, 2006.

we want is to keep a little bit of our money, thank you.”²³ In the school funding debate, members of the Johnson County delegation would often cite statistics demonstrating the skewed revenue flow. “Johnson County pays for 30% of the school budget plan and we get just 9% back,” was a typical claim.²⁴ Such complaints were echoed in local newspapers as well: “Politicians in rural Kansas do not want to allow Johnson County schools to excel. They want our schools to be no better than the rest. That is the hallowed prayer that drives state policy. It is socialistic and shortsighted as well.”²⁵

The discourse of a put-upon Johnson County was obviously not shared by all in the statehouse. Many saw the county as benefitting from abundant economic blessings, which for the good of Kansas should be shared across the state. The irony of an apparently “suffering” Johnson County was not lost: “Johnson County, where the sun never sets!” was a typical refrain from wry representatives.

One concern of many Johnson County representatives was the definition of “at risk” students. Under the existing funding system and the February 22 leadership plan, extra aid was and would be given proportionate to the number of students considered at risk of not completing their high

²³ Rep. Judy Morrison (R—Merriam), comments at House Federal and State Affairs committee meeting, Topeka, KS, March 1, 2007.

²⁴ Lance Kinzer (R—Olathe), House speech in debate on House Sub. for Sub. SB 584, Topeka, KS, May 3, 2006.

²⁵ Steve Rose, “Where is anybody?” *Johnson County Sun*, January 19, 2006.

school education. This at-risk weighting was determined using the number of children receiving free and reduced lunch. The “disconnect” Speaker Pro Tem Merrick and others saw was that Johnson County school districts received little of this money, despite having failing students. Merrick introduced a new at-risk proposal to the House Select Committee working the education bill, redefining students “at risk” as those with scores below proficient on state math or reading tests. The number of at-risk students in the Blue Valley school district would thereby rise from 447 to 2,903, and funding would increase accordingly.²⁶ To rally Johnson County support for the bill, this was a necessary step, argued Merrick.

At a tense select committee meeting, Merrick’s measure won passage by a five to four majority. Chair Kathe Decker, in opposition, argued that this would “help Johnson County but it will hurt a lot of other districts.”²⁷ Beyond the committee, opposition was more widespread, but with a sense that this was part of a compromise needed to ensure the progress of school finance legislation.²⁸ “This isn’t Sunday school,” said one legislator speaking off the record of the process in general. “You have to hold your nose and deal with the devil to get anything done.” In the school funding debate, the “devils” for

²⁶ Kansas State Department of Education, 2006.

²⁷ Rep. Kathe Decker (R—Clay Center), remarks at House Select Committee on School Finance, Topeka, KS, March 16, 2006.

²⁸ The Merrick proposal for at-risk students was dubbed by some the “stupid but not poor” provision, off the record of course.

all representatives were other places, other districts, with different interests and demands.

The First House Debate

The willingness of many rural and conservative legislators to accede to Johnson County's request for a redefinition of "at risk" hinted at their ambivalence toward inner-city needs. This move deprived many urban districts of potential funds. Kansas City, for example, had 12,600 at-risk students with the original proposal, but 9,722 after Merrick's amendment.²⁹ The extent of the defense of rural districts and the unwillingness to meet the demands of urban areas became clear as the school funding bill reached the House floor.

House Bill 2986 emerged from the select committee in a form very different from how it entered. After conservative Republican pressure, the committee stripped it to a one-year plan, contributing an extra \$175 million to Kansas schools. Far short of the original leadership proposal, the governor, Democrats and many moderate Republicans opposed the rewritten bill. The argued that it did not meet the demands of the court. House Democrats and moderate Republicans met in private to develop an alternative funding plan.

²⁹ Kansas State Department of Education, 2006.

Their proposal added \$610 million to schools, with a large increase for urban areas using the “high-density,” at-risk weighting and bilingual education measures. To secure the support of Johnson County representatives, the plan raised and after three years eliminated a cap on what was known as the local-option budget (albeit with some equalization measures). The local option budget (LOB) was a particular focus for Johnson County legislators.

Increasing the ability to raise school funds through local property taxes was important to the county delegation: Property values in Johnson County were high and, in the absence of money from at-risk or other socio-economic weightings, a greater proportion of schools’ budgets had to come from property taxes. A more intense battle over the LOB was waged in May; I will discuss the issue in more detail later.

The bipartisan plan was a compromise that primarily served the interests of urban and Johnson County legislators. To its supporters, it constituted a way of satisfying the court and granting much needed aid to poorer school districts. Although some discomfort existed with the potentially disequalizing effects of the LOB changes, the policy was accepted as a way to build a broad coalition that could push an increase in state education funding. “We’ll deal with Johnson County votes like we always

do,” remarked Representative Ward in the Democratic caucus meeting before the main floor debate.³⁰

Beginning work on HB 2986 in the full House in the evening of March 23, a sense of the significance of the debate was obvious. As expected, however, policies unraveled quickly. As presented, the revised HB 2986 was the one-year \$175 million plan supported by rural and conservative Republicans, including the House Republican leadership. Shortly after the introduction, Representative Ward Loyd, a moderate Republican from Garden City, introduced the bipartisan \$610 million proposal as three amendments, gutting the original bill. Conservative Republicans criticized the Loyd plan vociferously, exercised about the cost of the formula. They couched their complaints in terms of the benefits of Kansas or their constituents. “I don’t think a majority of people in Kansas want a tax increase of this magnitude,” said Representative Decker.³¹ “Let’s vote for what’s fiscally responsible. What’s best for Kansas children is to have a good economy,” asserted Appropriations Committee chair Melvin Neufeld.³² “We have an obligation to the whole of Kansas,” proclaimed Representative

³⁰ Rep. Jim Ward (D—Wichita), House Democratic caucus meeting, March 23, 2006.

³¹ Rep. Kathe Decker (R—Clay Center), House speech on HB 2985, Topeka, KS, March 23, 2006.

³² Rep. Melvin Neufeld (R—Ingalls), House speech, Topeka, KS, March 23, 2006.

O'Neal. "It's not just education, we can't create economic disincentives for those educated kids to stay here."³³ Representative Carl Kriebel condemned the fiscal basis of the plan: "We're leading the state into bankruptcy!"³⁴ a concern echoed by Representative Lynne Oharah: "I can't support this. My constituents don't want this, they want fiscal responsibility."³⁵

Supporters of the Loyd amendments were also assertive of their position, citing the existing disadvantages suffered by urban schools and the need to satisfy the court and follow the LPA proposals. Also seeking to frame the plan as beneficial to the whole state, the most frequent refrain was a call to support it as "good for *all* Kansas children." Representative Ward sought to steer the debate away from an urban-rural conflict: "How do we provide the best for our children, not just the children of Wichita, but children all over Kansas?"³⁶ The effort reflected a school funding proposal from the previous year that was dubbed the "Mo-Jo" plan, having as it did sponsors from Morton County in far southwest Kansas and Johnson County in the northeast. Supporters of the amendments were dedicated to framing their position in statewide terms. The bipartisan plan put money behind such a notion by

³³ Rep. Mike O'Neal (R—Hutchinson), House speech, Topeka, KS, March 23, 2006.

³⁴ Rep. Carl Krehbiel (R—Moundridge), House speech, Topeka, KS, March 23, 2006.

³⁵ Rep. Lynne Oharah (R—Uniontown), House speech, Topeka, KS, March 23, 2006.

³⁶ Rep. Jim Ward (D—Wichita), House speech, Topeka, KS, March 23, 2006.

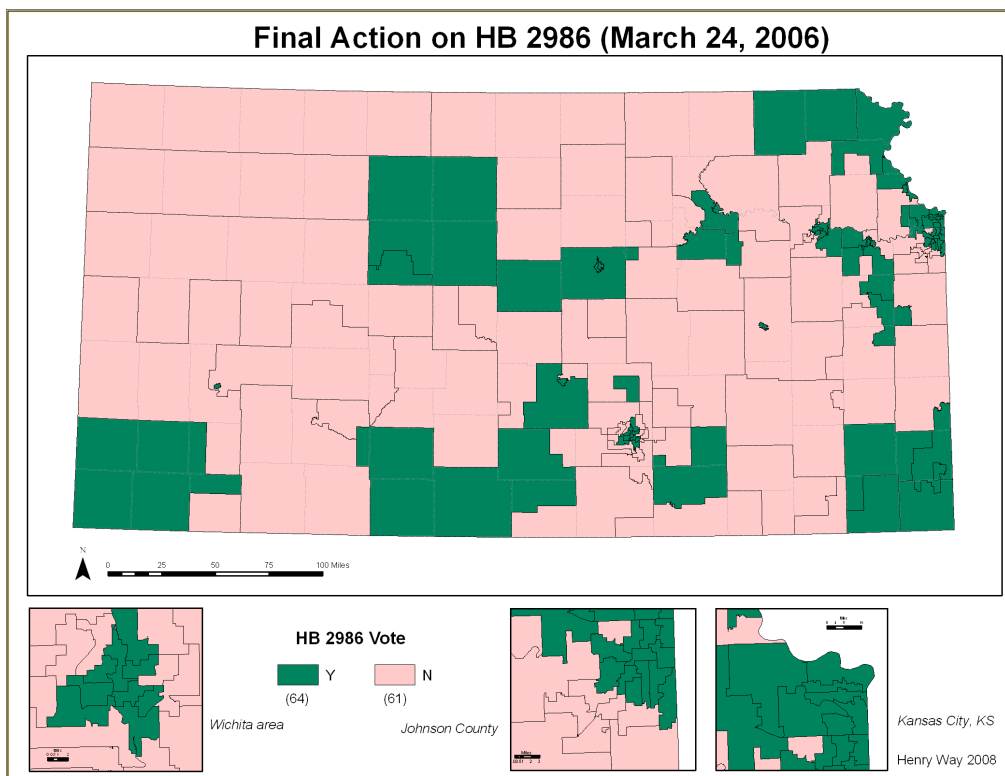
increasing base state aid per pupil and not following the LPA proposal of reducing low-enrollment weighting. The plan did not hurt rural areas.

But, because most of the money in the bipartisan plan went to urban school districts, the drama in the statehouse during this debate was intense. Representative Weber, a Republican from Herington, began reading out line-by-line statistics on Kansas school districts from heavy files in an effort to stall debate to give conservatives time to draft more amendments. Such filibustering was rare in the Kansas statehouse. “This is like herding cats!” exclaimed Minority Whip Eber Phelps as he attempted to gather all Democrats in the House – the voting was very close on most of the amendments and counteramendments.³⁷ The microgeography of the statehouse took on an important role when Representative Loganbill went missing just before a critical vote. To the relief of the bipartisan coalition, she was found in short order.

After a series of attempted amendments and moves by each side to muster support, a vote on the Loyd-amended bill came after midnight. That vote successful, attention turned to ensuring the passage of the bill in final action later that day. During that final action, the vote was equally close. On

³⁷ Rep. Eber Phelps, remarks in the House, Topeka, KS, March 23, 2006. Loyd’s three amendments passed by close margins: 66-57, 63-61, 63-62; after each roll call vote legislators pored over the voting lists attempting to see who wavered and what the patterns were.

the initial count, the vote stood at 63-62 in favor. Before being recorded as final, however, legislators can change their votes. Representatives Judy Morrison and Ted Powers switched theirs multiple times, Morrison seven times while the roll call was open. The bill flipped repeatedly between passage and defeat. Another switcher, Representative Deena Horst from Salina settled on a “yea,” Morrison followed soon after and the bill passed the House by 64 to 61 votes. The geographical distribution of the vote can be seen in Map 4.2.



Map 3: Final Action on House Bill 2986. (Source: Kansas House Journal, 2006)

The drama of the House voting on HB 2986 provides a good example of the frequent importance of building reliable coalitions that go beyond party lines. It also draws our attention to these “swing” legislators. The changing support of Representative Horst throughout the session might indicate the middling position of her home town, Salina: neither very conservative, nor truly urban in leaning, looking to rural Kansas but also to suburban development. Both of the representatives from Salina were broadly “moderate” Republicans, but Horst’s western Salina district was obviously less certain in its support for education reform than Representative Roth’s eastern district. Representatives from second-tier cities across Kansas – Salina, Emporia, Garden City, Liberal, Junction City, Hutchinson, and so on – would often play a key role in the progress of many issues at the statehouse. Their cities were connected more than the larger ones to rural areas, evidenced, perhaps, by their fairly solidly Republican tendencies. But they also had many of the problems characteristic of larger urban areas: poverty, crime, difficulties associated with multi-ethnic populations, and so on. Their legislators were often torn on issues, and voted inconsistently with others in their party. Representative Pauls, a Hutchinson Democrat, was more conservative than most of her caucus. Representatives Ward Loyd and Don Hill, Republicans from Garden City and Emporia respectively, were to the left

of many of their colleagues, especially with their persistent support for the revised education plan.

Judy Morrison provided another interesting case study of the torn legislator. By repeatedly switching her vote, this conservative Republican representative inadvertently demonstrated a difficult relationship with her district. Though a fairly consistent arch conservative, her district pulled another way on this issue, and indecision was the result. This suggests the importance of education to that part of Johnson County, and further illustrates the central role the qualities of place play in such voting decisions. Indeed, her neighboring representative, Mary Pilcher-Cook, also took a position against these school funding plans and was ejected at the following election. "Anyone who stands between Johnson Countians and their outstanding schools is in dangerous territory," remarked one newspaper that session.³⁸

Swing representatives can be of interest to the geographer in two ways. First, the places these people hail from may be sites of particular change or struggle over their cultural, economic or social direction, depending on the issue. They may be places that are, like their representatives, torn on certain questions and embody a certain ambiguity. They may, as Representative Morrison's troubles attest, be on a margin on in

³⁸ Bob Sigman, "We got shortchanged," *Johnson County Sun*, March 2, 2006.

a transition zone between different types of places; or they may be in significant temporal transition, as the place changes economically or demographically. Second, these crucial votes point to the importance of swing people in the geography of House voting. These representatives contribute disproportionately between two competing visions for the state. In such a way, the struggle these representatives – and their places – have reflects the struggle writ large across Kansas as a whole. It is ironic that it is often their votes that push the contentious dialectic toward synthesis.

At this critical point in the school funding debate, the first House vote on a new plan, it is worth exploring the geography of support for such education finance reform. Party-line support or opposition tells part of the story. The unity of the Democrats – urban, rural, and suburban – in support of the Loyd plan points toward party identification. The Republican leadership, on the other hand, saw the issue partly in terms of an ongoing fight against the governor. But Republican opposition went beyond simple partisan opposition. And crucially, many Republicans dissented from their conservative leadership to support the new formula. Underlying much of the patterns of opposition and support that can be seen in Map 4.2 were material and imaginative geographies.

Representatives from inner-city areas were uniformly for the Loyd proposal. These people formed the core of the Democratic support and

reflected the pecuniary interests of the school districts in their territories. The high numbers of poor and minority students in such areas stood to benefit most from school finance reform, so support from those legislators was unsurprising. The vigorous assertion of the need for reform and the unanimity of urban representatives indicated the depth of the problem. Kansas City, for example, suffered from high levels of poverty, crime and homelessness, and other particular issues arising from its 78 percent minority student body.³⁹ Urban Democrats spoke for these places and embodied the focus of legislative reform efforts. Representative Winn, a Democrat from Kansas City, articulated the main concern in a select committee meeting: “The central focus is the poverty. Urban poverty and at-risk go hand in hand. Children are moving every three months, that’s how long it takes to avoid paying rent. Urban poverty is different from rural poverty, and there are so many different languages in Wichita.”⁴⁰ Non-urban Democrats, whilst arguing for sustained rural support (see the comments from McKinney and Luckert above), followed the lead of their urban colleagues, who made up a majority of the caucus. Important to note here is the size of the Democratic party in the House. In 2006 there were forty-two House Democrats, compared to eighty-three Republicans. The scope for dissent in the case of the latter is

³⁹ Kansas State Department of Education, 2006.

⁴⁰ Rep. Valdenia Winn (D—Kansas City), remarks at House Select Committee on School Finance, Topeka, KS, January 31, 2006.

more likely, and the need for stricter unity with the former more pressing. While the Democrats coalesced around a common purpose, House Republicans presented a more fragmented caucus, one that points more clearly to the importance of place than was the case with the unified Democrats.

Not all suburbs are the same. Although they all shared interests that made them a third “bloc” in the school funding debate, suburban representatives ultimately had to choose either the more rural or the more urban position. The geography of such decisions reveal notable differences. The votes and speeches of Johnson County legislators reveal a striking variation within that county, for instance. Map 4.2 indicates that those in northern and eastern sections mostly favored the Loyd amendment. Toward Olathe and in the south and west of the county, members opposed the plan. This difference existed despite the funding plan, as set out in HB 2986, being favorable to all of Johnson County. Moreover, little difference exists in poverty levels or demographics among the county’s school districts, especially Shawnee Mission, Blue Valley and Olathe, the three largest.⁴¹ So, the observed distinction in the voting, between the “moderate” Republican delegation to the north and east and the “conservative” Republicans of the south and west, must have its roots in the differences between these places.

⁴¹ Kansas State Department of Education, 2006.

It is the job of the second part of this dissertation to investigate more deeply the geographical distinctions exposed in House politics, but some initial analysis can be given at this stage. While Olathe does have an older core, most of its housing is new as suburbanization has grown to the west and south in Johnson County. Closer to central Kansas City, Missouri, the settlement is older. Could there be some correlation between settlement age and political outlook? Do the newer suburbs retain more of a rural perspective, perhaps because of where their inhabitants have come from? Do the more established suburban with their longer-standing communities promote a more moderate or liberal outlook? Does Olathe, the county seat once separated by farmland from other cities, still forge its own path? Or, is the pattern more connected to wealth, with the richer parts of the county in Mission Hills, Prairie Village and Leawood (all in the north and east) leading the way? The suggestion that education is a driver of economic development and business attraction in the county might support that notion. Business leaders and professionals would be anxious to retain the cachet of the county's schools (especially vis-à-vis the apparently lamentable Missouri offerings) and would support continued investment.⁴² Parts of Olathe and southern Overland Park are wealthy too, but their representatives swung

⁴² See later discussion of interview with Rep. Pat Colloton (R – Leawood) of November 26, 2007, for more on this.

behind the rural/conservative position. And some of the poorer parts of the county, toward the Wyandotte County line, were represented by leaders of the pro-Loyd moderate faction.

The question of Johnson County's internal political culture will be looked at in more detail later, but clearly it is important and real. Sedgwick County, a similar size to Johnson County, presented a somewhat different division. The urban core voted as expected for the Loyd plan, but little evidence existed of an intrasuburban division. Whereas a good number of Johnson County representatives joined with their Kansas City colleagues in support of the new formula, no suburban Sedgwick County Republicans joined with Wichita in the vote. Again the questions arise. Are these all newer suburbs? Why are Wichita suburbs and outer suburbs more conservative than many of those in Johnson County? For certain, the division within Sedgwick County on education funding hints at the division between urban Wichita and its suburbs. "We're terrible," said a Wichita Democrat lamenting the divided Sedgwick County delegation. "We don't work together and that doesn't help Wichita."⁴³

In voting for the conservative position on school funding, Representatives from suburban Sedgwick County and parts of Johnson

⁴³ Rep. Geraldine Flaharty (D – Wichita), comments to author, Topeka, KS, March 7, 2006.

County were aligning themselves with the leading rural position on the issue.

What could explain this rural and conservative Republican opposition?

Explicitly the cost was one reason, as indicated above. Most rural and conservative suburban Republicans resist government expansion and the possibility of increased taxation. But resistance to the Loyd plan, and others, went deeper than fiscal rectitude. Rural and many suburban legislators shared an attitude toward education that drew on ideas about place, identity and community.

Opposition to the urban-oriented school funding plans can be considered in the same light as support: local interests were at stake. Fear existed that a reworked education funding formula would deprive smaller districts of revenue and hurt their schools. While largely a misplaced concern, the perception from many rural areas was that the 1992 formula worked well for them, and change was to be resisted. As can be seen from some of the discourse presented above, the “idea” of the rural school was seen to be almost iconic in the 2006 session. It was something to be valued and protected, especially when set against the challenging and often troubled urban schools. By projecting rural schools in an ideological way, it was possible and straightforward for suburban legislators to support them, even against their own local interests. Rural schools stood for a true, traditional,

pastoral Kansas, a conflation that appealed especially to the conservative perspective.

The idolatry of rural schools went beyond – and in some ways replaced – the quality or form of education to be found in them. Schools in small towns were largely seen not simply as places children could develop skills to open opportunities (the urban perspective) or as places to sustain economic development or business investment (a suburban perspective); rather, they were a community good. Schools in small towns were social centers, vital to the life of the town. They represented the future and survival of these demographically beleaguered places. To protect rural schools, then, was to protect rural Kansas. The school funding debate demonstrated just how powerful the idea of rural Kansas was, as the plans all sought, contra the LPA, not only to protect, but to increase funds to small districts. No legislator openly criticized the demands of support for rural schools. That urban legislators were prepared to accommodate rural demands but few rural legislators voted for the urban proposals tells us something about the balance of cultural power and identity in the state.

If the proposals were all supportive of rural districts, why did so many rural legislators vote against them? Partisanship again provides some of the answer, but the dynamics go deeper. And party alignment itself is, of course, a reflection of deeper cultural, social or economic sentiments. The voting of

rural lawmakers spoke to the defensiveness they felt of their places vis-à-vis growing metropolitan Kansas. They were, in effect, “othering” the cities, seeing them as a material and moral threat. Economically and demographically, urban and suburban Kansas is outpacing a declining rural contingent. Many young people are leaving the country for the city. And rural values, traditional ideas, the loci of which are in the country, are being challenged by the rising metropolitan society. As legislators perceived things, it was *gemeinschaft* versus *gesellschaft* and at stake was the survival of a traditional, pastoral Kansas.⁴⁴ Rural legislators, with their ambivalence toward the educational problems of urban Kansas, were revealing the threat they perceived toward their own culture.

The “other” or threat of urban places was something that rural Kansas could share with those in newer suburban areas. From the suburban perspective the inner cities were something to be wary of, too. The suburbs, though physically connected to the urban core, were purposefully distinct, people moving there to find a different type of community. If the perceived character and issues of the inner urban areas infiltrated the suburbs, their *raison d’être* would be in jeopardy. Suburbia is a point of view as much as a

⁴⁴ Ferdinand Tonnies, *Community and Civil Society*, ed. Jose Harris (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

material reality, and the conservative antiurban position taken by suburban representatives in the school funding debate reflected that.

The proximate threat seen by suburban legislators and the existential and ideological threat seen by those in rural areas helped guide the dynamics of opposition to wholesale education reform. Another form of oppositional identity-formation could be posited, however: racial and ethnic identity. Never voiced in public or on the record, these factors were nonetheless invoked as defining qualities by both sides. Urban legislators spoke candidly to me about how they felt conservative and rural opposition was racially motivated, that those legislators did not care for people of other races or ethnic origins. Behind a conciliatory and constructive façade, these inner-city legislators felt a sense of injustice, and hoped through the policymaking process to ensure a better deal for their minority constituents.

This perception of prejudice was alloyed geographically. It was “those people” in the “whitey-white” suburbs who were resisting change. A concern about the perceived racism of rural and suburban legislators was translated into a perception of prejudice against urban minorities from rural and suburban areas generally. “It’s all about race,” said one legislator to me after a particularly contentious select committee meeting. “Half of Kansas doesn’t care for the other half of Kansas.”

Many urban legislators also saw a hostile attitude toward Latino populations. Wichita Representative Delia Garcia spoke to what she saw as resistance to aiding Latino children through bilingual education measures and other English-as-a-second-language provisions: “They [conservative Republicans] don’t really want to help Latinos, they don’t like it.”⁴⁵ Democrats saw an antiimmigrant sentiment underlying opposition to the Loyd amendments, rooted in a resistance to “brown-faced” newcomers and a changing Kansas. That Garden City schools, home district of the principal reform proponent, Ward Loyd, were 62 percent Latino drove home the linkage, as it was perceived, of immigration and education finance change.⁴⁶

Like the perceived racial prejudice, the sense of an antiimmigrant attitude was constructed in space. The conflation made small towns and suburbs resistant to Latinos, according to the Democratic perspective. From the standpoint of urban Democrats in particular, rural Kansas was the “other” for the intolerance they perceived in those places and in the *idea* of rural Kansas. Rural Kansas stood for a white, Anglo, traditional, agricultural conception of the state. By willingly providing for rural interests in the school funding plans, urban legislators accepted and helped to empower the idea of a traditional, pastoral Kansas. Because of the discrimination they saw in that

⁴⁵ Rep. Delia Garcia (D – Wichita), interview with author, Wichita, KS, March 31, 2006.

⁴⁶ Kansas State Department of Education, 2006.

geographical imagination, however, they could not fully subscribe to it. Their position was weak because they were in Kansas but fighting against “Kansas.” The school funding debate embodied a wider tension in Kansas between urban realities and rural perceptions.

What of the conservative rural and suburban perspective? I could not discern an explicit racism and certainly no representatives articulated that kind of prejudice either on or off the record. Some veiled references to dysfunctional African American families existed, but little more. Antiimmigrant positions – and by implication, anti-Latino sentiment – were more openly stated, with frequent off-the-record (and occasionally public) assertions of the criminality, degeneration, illegality of “Mexicans.” The common designation of Latino immigrants and their families as “Mexicans” served an important discursive function to convey their outsider position. Though couched in terms of upholding immigration law, prejudice against Latinos was clear. Rural and some suburban legislators shared this perspective. A geographical understanding of the school funding debate might posit that suburbs were materially connected to urban areas but ideologically connected to the countryside. It might further suggest that many in the suburbs look outward, away from the city for their identity, and toward the city for their other, for the negative element of their binary self

conception. In sum, for rural and many suburban legislators, Latino immigration challenged the traditional Anglo conception of Kansas.

The complete picture is, of course, more complicated than unanimous and simplistic rural prejudice. Rural Democrats in the northeast and southeastern part of the state took a proreform line. Representative Johnson, from north of Hays, was a consistent moderate western Kansas Republican. The support for proimmigrant education finance reform from representatives from southeastern Kansas, in Ellsworth, Saline and Ellis counties in the central part of the state, may have something to do with the history of immigrant groups in those areas. Southeast Kansas is still known as the “Little Balkans” for its varied immigrant past, and the Bohemians and Volga Germans are similarly important politically in the central parts of the state. Moreover, differences between the largest cities in southwest Kansas can be discerned. Representative Loyd’s position as the prime proponent of education funding reform suggests that a more progressive attitude toward immigration and diversity exists in Garden City than can be found in Liberal and Dodge City. This distinction is something that will be looked at more closely later.

The May Climax

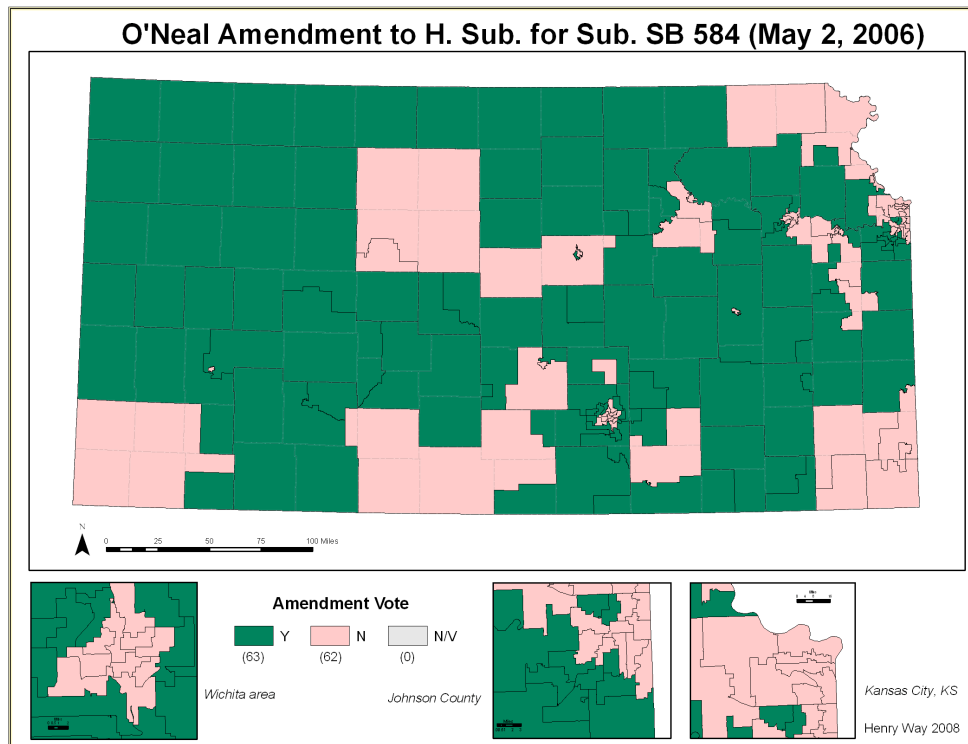
The demarcations and imaginations explored above continued to frame the progress of school-funding legislation that culminated in the final act in May of 2006. After the House narrowly approved the bill with the Loyd amendments, the Senate considered a number of proposals and passed a \$466 million plan, over the objections of Johnson County senators. No provision was included in the bill for raising the local-option budget cap.⁴⁷

During another intense house meeting on May 2, lawmakers rejected sixty-two votes to sixty-two the Senate plan, then also gutted a revised three-year House select committee proposal, first by removing the LOB cap (brought by conservative Johnson County representative Arlen Siegfried), then by once again adding the Loyd amendments.⁴⁸ Later in the day, a revised conservative plan was proposed, with amendments offered by Hutchinson Republican Mike O'Neal. Critical to its passage was the return of conservative Wichita Republican Mario Goico who had been absent in the morning. With his vote, and the switch of Deena Horst after much House wrangling, the O'Neal amendments passed, gutting the Loyd-amended bill. The vote for this plan was similarly close at sixty-three, sixty-two, with a

⁴⁷ Substitute for Senate Bill 584; passed the Senate 24-16, April 27, 2006.

⁴⁸ House substitute for Sub. SB 584; the bill passed with the Loyd amendments 63-61 along similar lines as HB 2986.

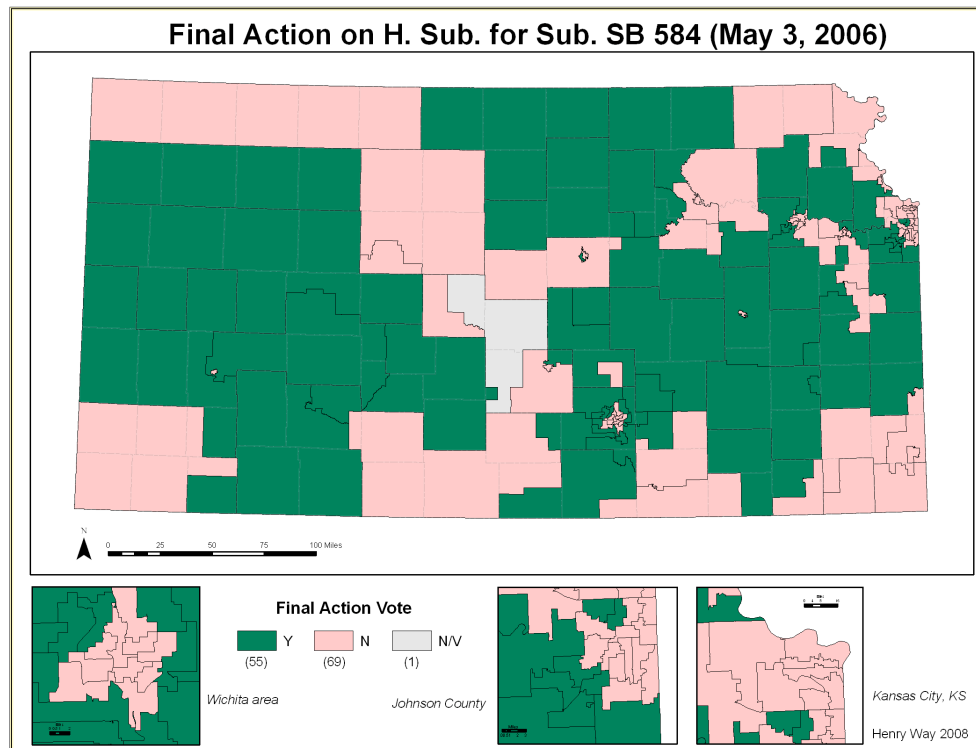
coalition of Democrats and moderate Republicans from Johnson County and elsewhere forming the opposition (Map 4).



Map 4: Vote on the O'Neal amendment to H. Sub. for Sub. SB 584, May 2, 2006. (Source: Kansas House Journal, 2006)

This amendment bill was criticized for not being enough to satisfy the court, and by final action the following day support had fallen away, the vote standing sixty-nine against to fifty-five in favor. This increase in opposition, as shown in Map 5, cannot be easily explained geographically, but a

reassertion of conservative opposition because of cost underlies some of the dissent.



Map 5: Final Action vote on H. Sub. for Sub. SB 584, May 3, 2006. (Source: *Kansas House Journal*, 2006)

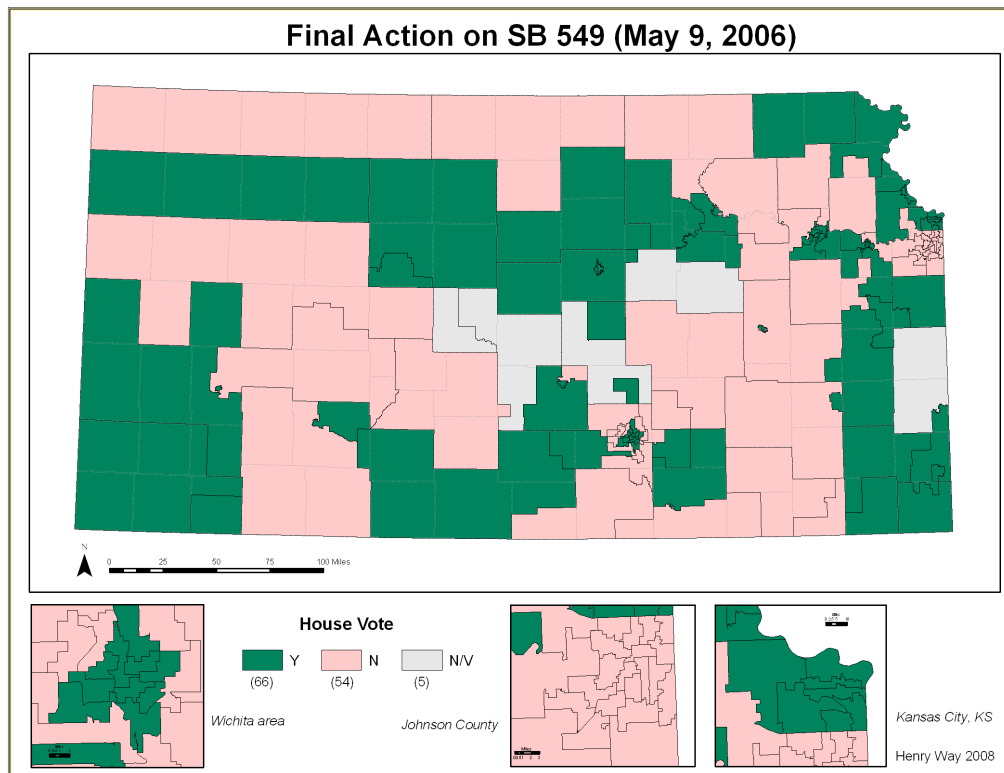
With no plan having passed both chambers and the end of the legislative session drawing near, great pressure was felt to draw some kind of compromise between the more reform-minded House and the more frugal

Senate. A conference committee began work on a revised bill based on the Senate's \$466 million plan. The outcome, Senate Bill 549, contained many of the demands pushed by urban legislators and the LPA, but was also generous to smaller school districts, with a significant increase in base state aid per pupil and the protection of the low-enrollment weighting. Unlike previous bills, however, it did not raise significantly or remove the cap on the LOB. The cost of the plan was \$541 million, less than the amount needed when the LOB measures were included, but more than the pared-down version favored by most conservatives. There was some uncertainty as to whether this bill would satisfy anybody.

An odd coalition came together on May 9 to secure passage of this bill in the House (Map 6).⁴⁹ Democrats and some moderate Republicans saw it as a last chance to pass meaningful reform and gave their support. A number of rural Republicans also joined in, acceding to the inevitability of reform, but realizing the benefits to rural areas embodied in the bill. In particular, a number of legislators in western Kansas flipped their support: most significantly, perhaps, representatives from Dodge City, Liberal, and west of Garden City. Perhaps acknowledging the needs of the growing Latino populations in their area, the votes of these legislators point toward the

⁴⁹ SB 549 passed the House by 66-54 on May 9, 2006.

difficult relationship between conservative ideals and socio-economic realities in southwest Kansas.



Map 6: Final Action vote on SB 549, May 9, 2006. (Source: Kansas House Journal, 2006)

Notably absent from the coalition of support was the entire Johnson County delegation, both conservative and moderate, including the only Democrat to vote against the plan. The reason for this strikingly unified and bipartisan opposition was the absence of a provision to lift the cap on LOB

funding. Though the bill included a measure to raise the LOB to 31 percent of total state aid, Johnson County legislators were anxious to see the cap eliminated, arguing for the particular needs of their schools which received little in the way of supplementary state aid.

Opposition to raising the LOB cap came from all quarters external to Johnson County. Urban legislators saw it as a disequalizing measure, allowing richer suburban areas to raise much more money for schools. Rural legislators saw it in a similar way, the prospect of further inequality between wealthy Johnson County school districts and their smaller units. There was concern also that the supreme court would not deem such a move acceptable since it had explicitly stated the need for equitable school funding in its order.⁵⁰ In this way, a strong geographical division was drawn between, simply, Johnson County and most everywhere else. Johnson County legislators were aggrieved at this turn, and complained about the disloyalty, as they saw it, of other moderate and Democratic lawmakers. "People will have a long memory about this," remarked Representative O'Malley. "It goes to show you goodwill built up does not necessarily translate into a loyal relationship."⁵¹

⁵⁰ Kansas Constitution, art. 6, sec. 6; Montoy, et al. v. State of Kansas, et al., with the opinion filed January 3, 2005.

⁵¹ Rep. Ed O'Malley (R—Roeland Park), quoted in Chris Moon, "School finance approved," *Topeka Capital-Journal*, May 10, 2006.

The unanimity of Johnson County was striking. It indicated not only the central importance of regional interests in the progress of policy, but also tells something about the county and the state. It indicates first the limits to Johnson County support for education reform: Local concerns did ultimately trump a more altruistic desire for helping urban areas, even for the lone Democratic representative. It also suggests how important well-funded schools are to Johnson County. Much of the success and attraction of the county has been its successful schools. They attract young families, support business investment decisions, and are an important part of the county identity.⁵² Votes such as this gave empirical and material credence to such ideas, demonstrating in quantifiable form the extent to which Johnson Countians might cherish their schools.

In this vote, and throughout the school funding debate, Johnson County was a distinct and important unit in political and cultural discourses. Its image, of course, is built around perceptions of wealth, population growth, cultural attitudes and a certain superiority and exceptionalism. It loomed large throughout the debate, more so than any other county or specific region. Representative Don Dahl, a Republican from Hillsboro in central Kansas commented to me that, “it’s like that’s another state, up there in Johnson County,” a remark that summed up the perspective that many

⁵² Further exploration of this issue can be found in later chapters.

seemed to hold.⁵³ This exceptionalism, part mythical, part material, would resurface in many issues in the statehouse during my research.

Conclusion

Both chambers passed, and the governor signed, Senate Bill 549. The Supreme Court approved the plan as suitable for better and more equal funding of Kansas schools, and the school crisis was brought to an end by the summer of 2006. Questions of funding the second and third years of the plan were deferred to the future; hopes for increased tax revenue or the initiation of state-owned gambling as a means for support.

The school finance crisis was a wonderful case study for the role place plays in policymaking. At every stage of the debate, geography helped organize support, and was mobilized in discourse. The final successful bill constituted the end-point of a series of dialectical moments where representatives had to choose between competing positions. The process was dynamic and demonstrates the importance of discursive “othering,” with positions rooted in a spatial awareness that draws on both the ideas and realities of places. This was not anything abstract, but rather a partisan fight

⁵³ Rep. Don Dahl (R – Hillsboro), interview with author, Topeka, KS, May 3, 2006.

with an end product of a spatial compromise for the benefit of Kansas as a whole. As such, it reveals the process of place-making in Kansas.

The school funding debate clearly demonstrates the strength of pastoralism to the identity of Kansas. Rural schools were idolized as part of that discourse, and small schools were protected in all the plans put forth. The school finance issue also revealed the problems facing urban areas, and the significant social and economic challenges brought by increased immigration. It showed the conflict between this reality and the cherished traditional idea of Kansas, and hinted at latent prejudice that might be a part of that. Again, the material and imaginative versions of Kansas were brought into conflict. The session as a whole illustrated that “middle America” was struggling with questions of race, ethnicity and economic and cultural power as much as anywhere else.

Other geographical features can be gleaned from the debate, including variation within rural Kansas and between second-tier cities. Not all rural places fell into line with the conservative faction, for example. Such an insight points toward the value of further geographical study into such variation. It also suggests the continued and material impact of cultural or ancestral difference within the state. The divided Sedgwick County delegation might alert us to the particular urban dynamics of Wichita, where a clear and

consistent distinction existed between the conservative suburbs and the urban core.

Johnson County presented another, but very distinct, case. A divide within Johnson County could be seen, along with the prevailing importance of education to the county. Moreover, the exceptionalism of Johnson County was clear, its distinct identity and the way it animated the rest of Kansas.

Finally, the debate pointed toward a fact overlooked in much geographical scholarship: the extent to which places cherish their schools, how they played different roles in the inner cities, suburbs, and rural areas, and how they help to define differences between places. There is a geography to schooling, and variations in schooling itself constitute part of the diverse geography of Kansas. This analysis of the school funding debate has suggested that if we are to understand fully the material and imaginative constructions of place, the role of K-12 education should not be forgotten.

This discussion has revealed the constitutive role geography plays in a policy debate. Politics, in short, is about places. It has shown the process to be dialectical, with two sides interacting to form a compromise position; this dialectical process is rooted in the interaction between different places. Place-making in Kansas, as seen through the politics, is a process of dynamic material and imaginative engagement. In the statehouse, the final compromise was a policy for Kansas. Translated to the state as a whole, this

process has shown Kansas to be a contested terrain, though still in spirit a rural one.

Chapter 6

Immigration

“Remember the postcards that will go out before the elections,” warned Representative Becky Hutchins at a House debate, arguing against the provision of in-state university tuition rates for the children of undocumented workers.¹ The debate over this measure, first passed in 2004, was emotional and recurrent. Those like Hutchins opposed to the favorable rates saw the matter having political power and openly pushed it as an electoral issue, suggesting, as above, the negative consequences of support. The broader question of immigration in Kansas has stoked much debate and discussion in recent years that reveals both the power of cultural identity – revealed by Hutchins’ threat – and a significant tension found within the discourse of state identity, continually challenging and reworking any apparent cultural stability.

This chapter explores the principal thrusts of the immigration issue in Kansas politics between 2004 and 2008, casting light on the struggle over

¹ Rep. Becky Hutchins (R-Holton), House debate on HB 2615, Topeka, KS, March 7, 2006. Campaign postcards would attack House candidates as being “pro” illegal immigration, she believed.

ethnicity, identity and place in a predominantly Anglo, Midwestern state. Several dialectical processes will be examined in this multidimensional debate. I introduce the discourse initially through the gubernatorial contest of 2006. The discussion then explores the issue through specific policy-making processes – an English language law and instate tuition, and in doing so suggests why immigration was so prominent and what this might say about the construction of place in Kansas. Finally, I examine the tension between the cultural and economic demands of immigration via the debate over a comprehensive immigration reform bill in 2008. Kansas will be shown to be on a frontier of ethnic change, both demographically and conceptually.

The Potency of Immigration and Identity

Illegal immigration was the most prominent issue of the 2006 governor's race. Pushed relentlessly by Republican challenger State Senator Jim Barnett, a variety of policy questions were presented, including the provision of driver's licenses for illegal aliens, instate tuition, English as the official language, employer sanctions, voter fraud, and others. Such an agenda was not unique to Kansas. That year, eighty-four immigration-related

proposals became law in over thirty states.² But the policy challenges presented by illegal immigration dominated the local electoral discussion to an unprecedented extent. Barnett infused his rhetoric and pronouncements with regular rebukes of the governor's approach. "Under Kathleen Sebelius," he wrote in a letter to fundraisers, "a 'Welcome to Kansas' sign has been hung out for illegal immigrants."³

On the Republican "Victory Tour" shortly before the general election, Barnett launched a typical salvo. As was usual, it garnered the most applause of his speech: "You all know that illegal immigration affects every community in the state. The Governor wants to give driver's licenses to illegal immigrants. And I say 'no' to instate tuition for illegal immigrants. We need a common language – English should be the official language!"⁴

Campaign literature and advertisements prominently conveyed Barnett's position, and the Sebelius camp was inevitably drawn to respond. A television advertisement for the governor spoke to the language, if not the policy realities, of anti-immigrant attitudes in Kansas. She appeared tough, but did not propose the more punitive approach advocated by Barnett:

"Kathleen Sebelius: committed to tough border security, a real crackdown on

² Carl Manning, "Legislators seek ways to deal with illegal immigrants," *Lawrence Journal-World*, March 7, 2007.]

³ Sen. Jim Barnett (R-Emporia), letter, quoted in John Hanna, AP State and Local Wire, September 26, 2006.

⁴ Sen. Jim Barnett, speech in Hays, KS, November 2, 2006.

employers who hire illegal immigrants, and a strong national guard. Because Kathleen Sebelius knows states like Kansas have to step up when Washington fails to lead.”⁵

This example not only illustrates Sebelius’s principal strategy on the issue, but also demonstrates a way geography could be deployed in the rhetoric. Her team sought to deflect the matter through changing the scale of the debate, shifting the blame for any perceived problems to the federal government, and asserting the need for “Washington” to do more. The repeated contention was that the federal government should adopt a comprehensive border security plan.⁶ Barnett noted this geographical deflection and repeated the message that though immigration was often seen as a national issue, “unlike our current governor, I am unwilling to pass blame to the federal government.”⁷ For good measure, he often invoked patriotic identity: “Kansas should not treat illegal immigrants better than American citizens.”⁸

All this rhetoric points to the prominence of illegal immigration. Why was it such a big issue, and what can the contents of its debate tell us about the construction of place identity in Kansas? Barnett, and some Republicans

⁵ Sebelius television advertisement, “Immigration,” September, 2006.

⁶ For example, in John Hanna, *AP State and Local Wire*, September 26, 2006.

⁷ Sen. Jim Barnett, quoted in Steve Vockrodt, “Immigrants big issue for Barnett,” *Olathe Daily News*, September 14, 2006.

⁸ Sen. Jim Barnett, quoted in an editorial, *Wichita Eagle*, September 15, 2006.

in other electoral races, were drawing on a sentiment that reflected the concerns of voters. A statewide poll that year showed that immigration to be the most important issue to voters with education coming second.⁹ According to the *Wichita Eagle*, seventy-three percent of Kansans thought that the United States should attempt to deport illegal immigrants while nationwide that figure stood between eighteen and twenty percent.¹⁰ The extent to which the issue was raised in prominence by the political discourse itself is of course open to question. Certainly Barnett's assertions of the issue served to implant immigration toward the center of political and media debate throughout the election year. The attention also followed national trends at the time.

In demographic terms the state was indeed changing. In 2006, an estimated 245,401 Latinos lived in Kansas, a thirty-two percent increase from 2000.¹¹ This number represented slightly less than nine percent of the total population of Kansas. The Pew Hispanic Center estimated the following year that up to 70,000 illegal immigrants were residing in the state.¹² Kansas had by 2006 reached, perhaps, a tipping point where the number of Latino

⁹ SurveyUSA poll, cited in Sarah Kessinger, "Survey: Illegal immigration top voter concern in state," *Hays Daily News*, September 8, 2006.

¹⁰ Brent Wistrom, "Deportation dilemma," *Wichita Eagle*, April 20, 2006.

¹¹ Pew Hispanic Center, "Statistical Portrait of Hispanics in the United States" <http://pewhispanic.org/factsheets/factsheet.php?FactsheetID=35> (accessed March 5, 2008). The increase in the U. S. as a whole was around twenty-five percent.

¹² Pew Hispanic Center, cited in Carl Manning, "Legislators seek ways to deal with illegal immigrants," *Lawrence Journal-World*, March 7, 2007.

immigrants was high enough to shift immigration from a merely demographic matter to a central cultural and political one.

Though it is difficult to prove that racism, per se, underlay the opposition to illegal immigrants in the state, xenophobia and a resistance to outsiders certainly lay at the heart of the issue.¹³ Codified as a defense of the “rule of law” and the constitution – themselves, indeed, institutional emblems of the United States – this was nevertheless a campaign against a group of people who were seen to be different and certainly foreign. While those who advocated a softer approach used terms such as “undocumented workers,” hardliners’ insistence on describing these people as “illegal immigrants” pointed to both their supposed criminality and transient status. The similarly pejorative “illegal aliens” or simply “illegals” also served to dehumanize the group. Such generalized xenophobia was at times more explicit. Bonnie Huy, a representative from Wichita, mused during a debate: “Why do you think these immigrants waved Mexican flags during the rallies? Their allegiance is

¹³ A staffer for the governor told me, however, that racist phone calls from members of the public to the governor’s office were common that year, Sebelius’s position being seen as too soft on Latino immigrants.

to Mexico, that's why."¹⁴ "You've got this group," warned Speaker Melvin Neufeld, "who want to make [Kansas] into northern Mexico."¹⁵

While xenophobia and hostility toward "outsiders" can be identified in the immigration debate, the bases of the struggle are more complex, more subtle, and more complicatedly geographical than a simple insider-outsider opposition. The politics of the English language bill of 2007, for example, suggests that some of the fear and frenzy over Latino immigration drew on the challenge it brought to the perceived identity of Kansas. Neufeld's above comment alone spells that out quite explicitly.

Governor Sebelius promised during the 2006 election campaign that she would sign, if presented, a bill designating English as the official language of Kansas. Conservative Republicans, seeing an opportunity to both forward their agenda and put the governor in an uncomfortable position, introduced two punitive and expansive bills in the 2007 session.¹⁶ Justifying this action, Speaker Neufeld commented that, "for the first time in history we've got some immigrants who've decided not to learn English." With this

¹⁴ Rep. Bonnie Huy, R—Wichita, quoted in Sarah Kessinger, "House adds plan to crack down on employers hiring illegals," *Hays Daily News*, April 30, 2006.

¹⁵ Speaker Melvin Neufeld, R—Ingalls, quoted in Sarah Kessinger, "Immigrants target of legislation this session," *Chanute Tribune*, January 12, 2007.

¹⁶ Sebelius was known to be tepid on the language issue, only agreeing during the campaign as a nod toward the prevalent anti-immigrant sentiment

language declaration, “you send notice to people,” he argued.¹⁷ Such a position apparently reflected wider wishes. A poll taken in September 2006 indicated that almost eighty percent of Kansans believed English should be the official language of the state.¹⁸

The benefits and historical value of assimilation were presented as an important justification of the bill, as was the economic value of the workforce sharing a common language. But many saw the two Republican bills were seen as excessively punitive, and Democratic representatives Candy Ruff and Raj Goyle presented an alternate plan that might get bipartisan support and was more palatable for the governor. In short, this bill had very little substance, changed virtually nothing, but sounded solid and significant.¹⁹ As Representative Ruff explained to me later: “it was all show, there was nothing in it!”²⁰ The bill kept in place all the federal exceptions, allowed cities and counties to retain flexibility to provide services in languages other than English, and ensured that other languages could be used in cases of public health and safety, court proceedings, and the promotion of interstate commerce.

¹⁷ Speaker Melvin Neufeld quoted in Sarah Kessinger, “Immigrants target of legislation this session,” *Chanute Tribune*, January 12, 2007.

¹⁸ Poll cited in Scott Rothschild, “Kansans speak up for state English,” *Lawrence Journal-World*, October 11, 2006.

¹⁹ House Bill 2140, 2007.

²⁰ Rep. Candy Ruff (D – Leavenworth), telephone interview by author, May 7, 2008.

The Democratic bill, this attempt to bring “not division, but commonness”²¹ reached the House floor where it passed by 114 votes to 7, and was signed by the governor later in the session.²² Some opposition was articulated. Representative Johnson, a moderate Republican from Ellis County, questioned the need for any legislation, asking perspicaciously: “The flag of the great state of Kansas has some things on it that are not in English. Are we going to have to change those?”²³ But as could be seen from the voting numbers, the measure was acceptable to the broad majority of legislators.

Though it produced essentially an empty bill, the debate indicates another dimension to the immigration question. In their willingness to produce a symbolic piece of legislation, lawmakers revealed immigration to be an imaginary as well as demographic issue. Beyond simple xenophobia or racial prejudice, opposition to undocumented migrants – and, by coded extension, the growing Latino population in general – had its roots in the defense of the identity and image of Kansas. This was indeed a cultural conflict: not just about these “new” people with their different ways, but

²¹ Rep. Don Myers (R – Derby, committee Chair) comments in House Military, Veterans and Homeland Security Committee, Topeka, KS, January 31, 2007.

²² And the governor called Rep. Ruff on the House floor just after the vote to thank her for her help in putting forward a significantly diluted bill.

²³ Rep. Dan Johnson (R – Hays), quoted in Tim Carpenter, “Bill on English en route to House,” *Topeka Capital-Journal*, February 14, 2007.

more the threat they posed to the *idea* of Kansas. Latino immigration could be seen to strike at the heart of the white, Protestant, English-speaking, quintessentially American conception of Kansas. This was why politicians of many stripes, but especially conservative Republicans, pushed the issue so vigorously. What, after all, is Kansas, if not the essence of the traditional heartland? How could the heartland be the heartland if it was “undermined” by different cultures – and with the question of language so critical to cultural identity, the English language bill was an attempt to make a powerful cultural statement.

As in the debate over education funding where those protecting the existing formula were really defending a rural, small-town view of Kansas, the immigration debate revealed the defense of another particular image of the state. It vividly indicates that the identity of Kansas *was* perceived to be in some danger. Abstracting this particular political struggle, it is through place that racial or ethnic issues become ideological. Cultural variation becomes something political when the meaning of place is at stake. The fundamental cultural geographical basis of representative politics leaves little room for the disinterested consideration of ethnic change when the identity of a place is being challenged.

Conflicting Senses of Place

The cultural and ethnic struggle over a changing Kansas points also toward something beyond an identity in tension between an Anglo and more cosmopolitan vision of the state. It also suggests a state torn between fundamentally different conceptions of place: between a conservative (in a non-political sense), reactionary view and a more open, progressive view of place. In short, it pitched those who wanted the place to stay the same against those who were open to change. However, it also reveals that these two understandings of place can exist concurrently, if in dialectical tension.

A good demonstration of this comes from the debates over instate tuition. First passed in 2004, the measure allowed students at Kansas Board of Regents institutions who were the children of undocumented aliens, pay tuition at the instate rate, provided they had graduated from a Kansas high school and lived in the state for at least three years. In 2006, the tuition cost for an instate student was \$2,412, compared to \$6,638 for those from out of state, representing quite a significant savings.²⁴ As a means to encourage education in the state, and avoid penalizing children for the actions of their parents, supporters saw the measure as progressive and to the benefit of some of the poorest Kansans. Opponents felt it to be anti-constitutional,

²⁴ Kansas Board of Regents, 2006.

rewarding law-breaking, as they saw it, and further encouraging illegal immigration.

This controversial measure was challenged in the legislature in 2006, 2007, and 2008. In the 2006 election year, instate tuition became a particularly potent issue. Opponents, driven by the House Republican leadership, fought to ensure that the matter was heard in committee and reached recorded voting in the House. All the while criticizing the provision – not because of racism, but in an effort to uphold the rule of law²⁵ – opponents forced the issue to a tense 11-11 (failing) vote in the House Federal and State Affairs committee.²⁶ In a moment of high drama, committee chair Representative John Edmonds, a Republican from Great Bend, cast the deciding vote in opposition, preventing the bill from reaching the House.²⁷

Reintroduced to the committee later, at the emphatic request of the Republican leadership, the debate over House Bill 2615 revealed contrasting senses of place. On the one hand, advocates of a more conservative conception of place, again articulated a more restrictive view, citing the “rule

²⁵ For example, Comments by Reps. Anthony Brown (R – Eudora) and Judy Morrison (R – Merriam), House Federal and State Affairs Committee, Topeka, KS, March 1, 2006.

²⁶ House Federal and State Affairs Committee, vote on HB 2615, February 16, 2006.

²⁷ And in doing so apparently making Rep. Becky Hutchins cry; he had promised her his support. See Chris Moon, “Immigrant tuition vote typifies fragile Statehouse ties,” *Topeka Capital-Journal*, February 17, 2006.

of law,” the importance of the “legal process,”²⁸ and the defense of education access for “proud Kansans.”²⁹ By contrast, Democrats on the committee, often from more urban districts, voiced a more open conception of Kansas.

Representative Burroughs, from southern Kansas City, argued that:

We are a very diverse state. Coming from Wyandotte County, I know this great diversity in history, especially with the railroads This is a despicable position to take, we should be embracing diversity in this state. I am embarrassed as a representative that we are considering this.³⁰

Representative Loganbill, from Wichita, also attempted to integrate Latinos into the identity of the state by asserting that they too were Kansans. In so doing she forcefully presented a more progressive understanding of Kansas:

We’re missing a point here. It’s the kids, not the parents. They didn’t know they were undocumented when they came in at two years old. These are proud Kansans. They’re upset because

²⁸ Rep. Ray Merrick (R—Stilwell), speech, House Federal and State Affairs Committee, Topeka, KS, March 1, 2006.

²⁹ Rep. Lance Kinzer (R—Olathe), speech, House Federal and State Affairs Committee, Topeka, KS, March 1, 2006.

³⁰ Rep. Tom Burroughs (D—Kansas City), speech, House Federal and State Affairs Committee, Topeka, KS, March 1, 2006.

they can't live the American Dream. For us to deny it is reprehensible.³¹

After the bill passed the committee on this second attempt, the full House debate, where the bill ultimately died, was similarly passionate. Again, those against instate tuition rates drew on a more reactionary sense of place, sometimes quite explicitly: there was no fairness, one legislator argued, of "providing a break to people who don't belong here."³² On the other side, two Republican legislators from middle-sized cities, places with a long history of Latino populations, moved to defend the existing law, and spoke vividly to a more open, progressive sense of place. First, Representative Loyd, from Garden City, expressly described these students as Kansans, thereby fitting into his more open sense of place and understanding of the identity of America:

There are many myths about undocumented migrants, and we're talking here about the children of undocumented workers. It's unfortunate that we use the term "illegal" when we're talking about Kansas children. Why do I support [instate tuition]? It was how I was raised: we're one nation under God.

³¹ Rep. Judith Loganbill (D – Wichita), speech, House Federal and State Affairs Committee, Topeka, KS, March 1, 2006.

³² Rep. Mike Kiegerl (R – Olathe), speech, House debate on HB 2615, Topeka, KS, March 7, 2006.

This is an issue of human rights and dignity. It's in the Bible . . . "for I was a stranger and you welcomed me." And in the Constitution it says, "all men are created equal." Instate tuition is open to anyone who is a resident of Kansas. We put a great burden on these people to prove it, having to be a resident for three years and so on. We can't prejudice against people who want to better themselves.³³

And from Emporia representative Don Hill, an explicitly progressive perspective:

Many in my district are for the repeal of this law, but there's a Chinese proverb: "we can curse the darkness or light a candle." A few years ago we made a progressive decision. In my district there are four of these students at Emporia State and three at Flint Hills Technical College. I think that it is a good investment.³⁴

Through their support of instate tuition, Loyd, Hill, and other legislators invoked traditional icons and understandings of Kansas and American culture to emphasize diversity and openness. By embracing these

³³ Rep. Ward Loyd (R—Garden City), speech, House debate on HB 2615, Topeka, KS, March 7, 2006.

³⁴ Rep. Don Hill (R—Emporia), speech, House debate on HB 2615, Topeka, KS, March 7, 2006.

students as Kansans, theirs was a more multiethnic, multicultural conception of place. In contrast, the policy advocated by opponents reflected a closed conception of Kansas and America, also rhetorically attached to traditional totems. Both sides were drawing on understandings of the history and character of Kansas. The state can boast many examples of adaptability and openness, political progressivism and cultural cohabitation. But defensiveness and resistance, conservatism, and cultural consistency are also important strands of its identity. Racial and ethnic relations have a likewise mixed history in Kansas. The contemporary political debate suggests that the historical elements of place construction remain contested terrain.

With the repeated failure to change the instate tuition provision, it could be said that the more progressive position “won” in the legislature. But the debates make clear that the state as a whole, which the discourses in politics reflected, could not be simply categorized as either reactionary or open. That the issue was repeatedly on the agenda, and garnered significant support, points to the strength of the former; its ultimate failure suggests the power of the latter. Kansas is a state struggling with change.

Internal Colonialism: Culture versus Economy

Immigration issues in Kansas are closely tied to the growth of the meatpacking industry. This economic development can be seen as a form of what might be called “internal colonialism.” This type of food processing is difficult to out-source, difficult to do far from the market, and is confronted by varying standards of food safety in different countries. Meatpacking in Kansas, and its use of immigrant, principally Latino, labor, represents an attempt to internalize or domesticate the typical practices of colonization— or outsourcing, in its arguably contemporary form. Rather than making use of cheap, pliable labor overseas, the theory goes, bring that labor to the home territory and exploit it here in unpleasant and unskilled lines of work. The notion that, in meatpacking and other laborious trades, immigrants are doing jobs that “*Americans* don’t want to do” is a blindingly explicit admission that this is a form of colonialism and exploitation. Standards and conditions are challenging and unions are wholeheartedly discouraged. Sympathy for working conditions can be kept to a minimum if that work is performed by noncitizens, especially people of an apparently different ethnicity or culture.

Meatpacking in Kansas has its roots partly in an attempt to avoid the unions and the close scrutiny of metropolitan monitors (especially the churches, but also the government). Southwestern Kansas, where many

plants are located and which now boasts a large Latino population, was sufficiently distant from the old centers such as Chicago and Kansas City to restrict unionization and public attention, and had the benefit of being nearer the heart of cattle-raising country.³⁵

Bringing the colony to Kansas certainly has yielded economic benefit in the form of jobs and tax revenue. Alongside the economic effects, however, came cultural impacts. Whereas with traditional colonialism the cultural effect is felt primarily overseas with little impact on the metropole (the “foreign” population and workforce remains elsewhere), internal colonization brings what might be termed the “cultural externalities” home. Such change, in turn, produces tension that eventually makes its presence felt in political forums such as the Kansas statehouse.

This tension between the economic and cultural effects of immigrant-based business development is perhaps most stark within the Republican party. Conservative Republicans were often more concerned about restricting immigration – and its cultural effects – than they were about supporting economic interests. Moderate Republicans, in contrast, saw business interests

³⁵ See, for example, Donald Stull’s vivid investigations of these matters and the life of immigrant meatpacking workers in southwest Kansas and elsewhere: Donald Stull and Michael J. Broadway, *Slaughterhouse Blues: The Meat and Poultry Industry in North America* (London: Wadsworth Publishing Co., 2003); Donald Stull, Michael J. Broadway and David Griffith, eds., *Any Way You Cut It: Meat Processing and Small-Town America* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1995).

as a priority and worked to ensure the needs of the economy were met, by trying to deal practically with the associated cultural or social questions.

That the Conservative Republican position was hostile to immigration in general – especially immigration that brought people of a different culture – was occasionally revealed. Gubernatorial candidate Jim Barnett’s spokesman commented, inadvertently or candidly, that “individual states with their own policies . . . can either do things to attract additional immigration, or they can do things to make their states less attractive.”³⁶ Republican Representative Bill Otto introduced a bill in 2007 that would have increased the state income tax for noncitizens by three percent, to pay, as he saw it, for the expenses caused by immigrants.³⁷ Such explicit resistance to immigration was, however, rare. More typically the worries over its cultural impact were articulated through an opposition to its illegal component, considered to be a more justifiable target.

A number of debates illustrate the conflict between economic and cultural interests, but the challenge posed by a comprehensive immigration bill in 2008 was a particularly vivid example. The March 27, 2008, afternoon session of the House was the occasion for the principal debate over an

³⁶ Roger Woods, quoted in John Hanna, AP State and Local Wire, Topeka, KS, September 26, 2006.

³⁷ House Bill 2023, introduced by Rep. Bill Otto (R–LeRoy), January 9, 2007. It later died in committee.

immigration reform bill pushed by Republican Representative Brenda Landwehr. Prior to that debate, the House moderate Republican contingent met—behind closed doors—to decide its strategy. Twenty representatives were present, from districts around the state. At issue was support for an amendment expected to be offered by Representative Carlson that would be less punitive to immigrants and businesses that employ undocumented workers than the existing bill. The Carlson amendment was a compromise that avoided what the moderates in attendance saw as the excesses of conservative Republican and potential Democratic proposals. Conservative Olathe Republican Lance Kinzer was planning to introduce a particularly harsh set of policies as an amendment, and Democratic Topeka Representative Ann Mah was expected to offer a misclassification measure that was especially firm on businesses.³⁸ The Carlson amendment, which offered a much more modest set of proposals, was supported by the Kansas Chamber of Commerce (KCCI) and other business, industrial and agricultural groups.

In the moderates' meeting, the discussion over these proposals revolved around their economic effect and the interests of the business community. From an economic perspective, immigration was seen as

³⁸ “Misclassification” came to be the term used to describe how businesses misclassified undocumented workers as independent contractors rather than employees, thus avoiding penalties for hiring such people.

beneficial to Kansas. Moderates also wanted to protect commercial and industrial interests from punitive immigration laws. The Mah amendment “is more severe on business, it’s ugly,” commented Representative Aurand.³⁹ Representative Bill Light agreed that the Carlson amendment should be the one to go for, partly because “business is OK with it.”⁴⁰ Jokingly acknowledging their apparent obedience to business interests, Representative Huntington remarked that “there is life after voting against the KCCI!”⁴¹ Debate on the issue was vigorous, a struggle within this group whether to hold firm on what they saw as the interests of business in the state or to acknowledge the cultural criticism and be tougher on immigrants. These latter directions would prioritize the cultural impact of immigration over the economic effects. “Passing something much stronger would play well in some districts,” noted Representative Worley.⁴² Business was “afraid” of the Kinzer bill, but “if Kinzer is the last version standing, how many of us must support that?” asked Representative Light, a moderate from southwestern Kansas.⁴³

³⁹ Rep. Clay Aurand (R – Courtland), comments at moderate Republican meeting, Topeka, KS, March 27, 2008.

⁴⁰ Rep. Bill Light (R – Rolla), comments at moderate Republican meeting, Topeka, KS, March 27, 2008.

⁴¹ Rep. Terrie Huntington (R – Mission Hills), comments at moderate Republican meeting, Topeka, KS, March 27, 2008.

⁴² Rep. Ron Worley (R – Lenexa), comments at moderate Republican meeting, Topeka, KS, March 27, 2008.

⁴³ Rep. Bill Light (R-Rolla), comments at moderate Republican meeting, Topeka, KS, March 27, 2008.

The March 28 meeting epitomized the struggle many representatives had between economic interests and the cultural dimension of immigration in Kansas. Ultimately the group agreed to prioritize the economy and do what was “best for business, the farm bureau, KVA and KCC,” among others and push hard for the Carlson amendment.⁴⁴ Demonstrating clearly the extent to which the Republican party was organizationally divided, the moderates arranged a “phone tree” for use during the debate on the House floor, to coordinate their action.

While the moderates fought for the interests of business and industry, conservatives were equally vociferous about the need to “do something” about immigration, meaning to prioritize the cultural dimension to the debate. The Carlson amendment was attractive to moderates because, while it gave the impression of doing something about immigration (and so addressing the cultural issue), in reality it was merely a “very light slap on the wrist” for business, as one representative told me. This was not enough for the conservatives. A vigorous proponent of action and, implicitly and explicitly, a frequent fretter of the cultural woes of immigration, Representative Landwehr argued that she was in the debate “to represent the

⁴⁴ Rep. Clay Aurand (R – Courtland), comments at moderate Republican meeting, Topeka, KS, March 27, 2008.

people of the ninety-first district, not the business lobby!”⁴⁵ Up a geographical scale, other conservatives commented on how Kansas compared to other states, and drew on examples of what had been done elsewhere.

Representative Kinzer noted action taken in Oklahoma and Idaho, and Landwehr pushed the notion that, since all the states surrounding Kansas had more punitive policies in place, the state was liable to become an “attractive destination.”⁴⁶

The bill, with Carlson’s amendment attached, successfully passed the house. Later, however, on being re-referred to committee, it died, leaving another year with little substantive progress on immigration. But the debate illustrates the tension between economic and cultural interests. Both sides advocated what they saw as the best interests of the state – either a defense of its culture and identity or a defense of its economy.⁴⁷ The readiness of conservatives to jettison their business-friendly platform for the sake of the more intangible cultural questions raised by immigration suggests a

⁴⁵ Rep. Brenda Landwehr (R – Wichita), speech at House debate on H. Sub. for SB 329, Topeka, KS, March 27, 2008.

⁴⁶ Rep. Brenda Landwehr (R – Wichita), speech at House debate on H. Sub. for SB 329, Topeka, KS, March 27, 2008.

⁴⁷ Democrats were mostly in the middle, often pushing both a more vigorous approach to businesses and a more humanitarian and welcoming stance on immigrants.

contradiction to the notion that cultural “wedge” issues are simply a means to pro-business policies.⁴⁸

Aside from a remarkable divergence within the Republican party to which this issue points, the configuration of the immigration debate via economy and culture reveals another dialectic within the state. In the first years of the twenty-first century, economic needs appear to have the upper hand, but nevertheless, more intangible questions of place-based identity and culture remain powerful, and when perceived to be under threat, can drive the discourse.

As an urbanizing state travels, perhaps, in a more open, cosmopolitan direction, embracing more readily the progressive and open sense of place championed by many metropolitan legislators, the immigration issue may in the future turn to question economic conditions more vigorously than the cultural impacts. Specifically – as already raised by Democrats in the Statehouse – what are the working conditions of these immigrants? How much are the undocumented people being exploited? How can conditions for those laboring within a system of internal colonialism – either concentrated in the meatpacking plants of southwest Kansas, or diffused atop the roofs of suburban houses – be improved? To get to these important questions,

⁴⁸ Contra, especially, Thomas Frank, *What's the Matter with Kansas?* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2004).

however, the new immigrants must first be absorbed into the identity of Kansas, to become, in the eyes of native residents, culturally Kansans, and no longer perceived as a “threat” to the conception of the state.

As exposed in the politics of Kansas, the dialectics of immigration remain in a stage of cultural tension. They encompass a debate over the identity of Kansas, differing senses of place, and a bifurcated understanding of the economic and cultural impacts of immigration. Internal colonialism and immigration represent, perhaps, a peculiar postcolonial challenge for Kansas. If we are to read state politics, a conundrum exists, that at present embodies the interaction of confused and antagonistic discourses struggling over the meanings and priorities of place. Such a new frontier still poses a challenge for native and immigrant residents alike.

Chapter 7

Gambling

John Hanna, a veteran Associated Press reporter, described the legislative history of gambling as “a swirling vortex of doom!”¹ Arresting language notwithstanding, the recent history of attempts to expand gambling in Kansas has indeed been complicated. Thwarted in the Statehouse by competing interests, geographical competition and ardent appeals to morality, until 2007 casino gambling – or “gaming,” the preferred term by many supporters – remained the legal preserve of a few Indian operations, with little money going to the state. In a turn that took many by surprise, a bill was passed in 2007 that facilitated the construction of new state-owned “destination” casinos, and allowed for extra slot machines at racetracks.²

This chapter explores the geographical character of the gambling debate. The legislative geopolitics reveals how gambling policy was framed both by a sense of interstate rivalry and the interests of particular regions of Kansas. It illustrates the power of place-based interests in state politics, and how such a configuration of the policy-making process mobilizes the

¹ John Hanna, conversation with author, Topeka, KS, March 13, 2007.

² Senate Bill 66 (2007 Session).

dynamics of government. My analysis then turns to the wider conceptual basis of the issue. A broad dialectic framing this debate pitched those for expanded gambling against those who, for moral reasons, opposed the policy. The former camp drew on localized economic interests, the latter on a sense of visionary righteousness with a long history in Kansas. As could be found in the debate over immigration as well, here was another struggle between economy and culture, this time wrapped in the apparently competing demands of progress and piety.

Couching their argument in terms of the interests of the state, supporters of expanded gambling stressed an interstate competitiveness that transcended party lines. Gubernatorial Republican candidate Robin Jennison, awkwardly melding an acknowledgement of the perceived social ills of gambling with an economic nativism, supported expansion: “We’ve got the problem. We just don’t have the benefit; we’ve got to recognize how much money is leaving this state.”³ To drive the point home, he also noted that Las Vegas was the most popular destination from Wichita’s airport.

As the debate reached the legislature in 2007, the same oppositional geography could be heard. At a House debate, Kansas City Democratic Representative Mike Peterson argued: “Those gambling are traveling fifteen

³ Robin Jennison, in Chris Moon, “Betting divides hopefuls,” *Topeka Capital-Journal*, April 20, 2006.

minutes to Missouri and Oklahoma. This money should stay in state, where it would be spent at Kansas-owned businesses and help our economy grow.”⁴ From Wichita Representative Tom Sawyer: “The realization is gambling is here. More Kansans are gambling than ever before. Maybe it’s time for us to try to keep some of that money in Kansas.”⁵ This was echoed by a similar sentiment from Representative Doug Gatewood, whose district was close to casinos across the border in Oklahoma: “you really don’t know that you aren’t still in Kansas when you drive there, but the tax dollars know.”⁶

State borders also featured prominently in another oft-cited economic rationale for expanding gambling. Casinos should be sited “where they can have the most out-of-state users, not just local,” argued the chair of the House Federal and State Affairs Committee, Arlen Siegfroid.⁷ Governor Sebelius, a supporter, asserted that, “[t]his is an opportunity for our state to generate out-of-state dollars from visitors to destination casinos.”⁸

⁴ Rep. Mike Peterson (D – Kansas City), House debate on SB 66, Topeka, KS, March 23, 2007.

⁵ Rep. Tom Sawyer (D – Wichita), in John Milburn, “Gambling in Oklahoma having effect on Kansas debate,” *Topeka Capital-Journal*, March 13, 2007.

⁶ Rep. Doug Gatewood (D – Columbus), in John Milburn, “Gambling in Oklahoma having effect on Kansas debate,” *Topeka Capital-Journal*, March 13, 2007.

⁷ Rep. Arlen Siegfroid (R – Olathe), comment at House Federal and State Affairs committee, Topeka, KS, March 13, 2007.

⁸ Gov. Kathleen Sebelius, press release, “Sebelius voices support for responsible expansion of gaming,” March 26, 2007.

While the desire to keep “Kansan dollars in Kansas” could be thought of as a territorially rational economic motive, the frequent expressions of the gain in “out-of-state” money with expanded gambling perhaps also points to a deeper cultural sensibility. On the one hand this rhetoric appeals to the same border-fixated economic sentiments as the “Kansan dollars” arguments, but it also reveals a certain relish at gaining at the expense of other states and a tacit acknowledgement that casino income might be considered “bad” money. Considering the social distastefulness of gambling, the underlying warrant seems to suggest that it would be preferable for those not from Kansas to be paying for it.

These perspectives illustrate the mobilizing power of state borders in political debate and the oppositional spatial constructs that can serve political rhetoric so well. But the gambling debate also reveals the importance of regional and local interests in organizing and propelling the dynamic of policy-making. After all, only certain places – where the new “destination” casinos would be located – would receive a potentially significant boost to the local economy.

“Location, location, location,” commented Representative Melody McCray-Miller on what she saw as the most important prevailing question of

the gambling debate.⁹ Where should the casinos be sited? Kansas City and Wichita were acknowledged as the most likely locations because of their large populations and proximities to state lines (again, perhaps, reflecting that moral worry about the justifiability of gambling). Southeast Kansas was also seen as an attractive location, again near state lines and in need of economic development. Dodge City and Junction City were two other possibilities.

One of the more notable state representative races of the 2006 election occurred in the eightieth district, centered on Sumner County south of Wichita. Effectively a one-issue race, challenger Wellington Democrat Vince Wetta campaigned on a platform of bringing casino gambling to the area, something the Republican incumbent, Bill McCreary, opposed. Wetta won the race and became a vigorous advocate for expanded gaming the following session. He amended the gaming legislation to ensure that a casino, or money from a casino, reached the Sumner County coffers. His amendment to Senate Bill 66, offered in the midst of a long debate, forced Sedgwick County to hold a referendum on a casino. If voters agreed to the plan, one percent of the profits generated by gaming at the new casino would go to Sumner County. If they voted against the casino, it would be built in Sumner County, to the

⁹ Rep. Melody McCray-Miller (D – Wichita), comment at House Federal and State Affairs committee, Topeka, KS, March 13, 2007.

more immediate benefit of the local economy and county budget.¹⁰ Wetta lobbied hard for expanded gaming and his electoral success and agenda no doubt contributed to the momentum behind gaming legislation in 2007. He advocated it not only from a local standpoint, but also couched in terms of the small-town iconography of Kansas. “Residents of small towns work hard and have a deep sense of community,” he remarked in a speech calling for extra casinos. “Our small-town life will disappear without jobs and economic development.”¹¹

Wetta’s enthusiasm marked one pole of support; another came from southeast Kansas, representatives of which saw the economic potential of destination casino development. Local representatives attended relevant committee meetings often, watching the progress of the debate. Southeastern leaders and local interest groups came to the hearings and made their voice heard on the issue. The mayor of Baxter Springs, Huey York, spoke emphatically about the economic desirability of gaming for the region, for example, and the challenge of “twelve casinos within thirty minutes” of his city.¹² As the 2007 bill moved forward, I asked Representative Bob Grant, a

¹⁰ Sixty-three percent of voters in Sumner County had voted for a destination casino in their county in 2005.

¹¹ Rep. Vince Wetta (D–Wellington), speech to the House Federal and State Affairs committee, Topeka, KS, March 12, 2007.

¹² Huey York, testimony to the House Federal and State Affairs committee, Topeka, KS, March 13, 2007.

Democrat from Cherokee in southeast Kansas, how he felt about the progress on gambling. “Let the good times roll!” he replied exuberantly.¹³

Though many of the districts that stood to gain from expanded gambling, such as those in Kansas City, Wichita and southeast Kansas, were Democratic, some Republican support also existed, especially when local interests were served. Republican Representative Pat George lent his support after he included an amendment giving his home city, Dodge City, a vote on a casino permit, for example. At a legislative forum, central Kansas legislators Representative Josh Svaty and State Senator Jay Emler also explained their support for gambling based on local interests. In their case, horse and greyhound breeding were significant to Dickinson County, adding an estimated total of \$40 million to the local economy.¹⁴ One Holyrood breeder had the top dog in the nation, Representative Svaty recalled, worth half a million dollars. With increased numbers of state-owned slot machines for race tracks as part of the legislation being proposed, both legislators saw a benefit to numbers of their constituents. One of Emler’s remarks also revealed the tension between economic demands and cultural positions:

¹³ Rep. Bob Grant (D – Cherokee), conversation with author, Topeka, KS, March 23, 2007.

¹⁴ Rep. Joshua Svaty (D – Ellsworth), State Senator Jay Emler (R – McPherson), Ellsworth Political Forum, Ellsworth, KS, March 17, 2007.

Personally I don't gamble. If I just represented McPherson County I wouldn't vote for it—they didn't even pass the lottery. But I represent seven counties, I don't just represent one; that includes Dickinson, which is the largest county in the world for greyhound breeding . . . therefore, I will vote for gaming.¹⁵

The views of constituents also worked, of course, the other way.

Opponents felt that their voters were opposed to the expansion plans, for reasons explored in more detail later, and articulated this. Olathe Representative Mike Kiegerl, for instance, argued that gambling was “sinful and godless, and I want my constituents to have a say!”¹⁶ The Olathe delegation, unlike most of the rest of Johnson County, was adamantly opposed to gambling, another example of the apparent conservatism and distinction of the city.

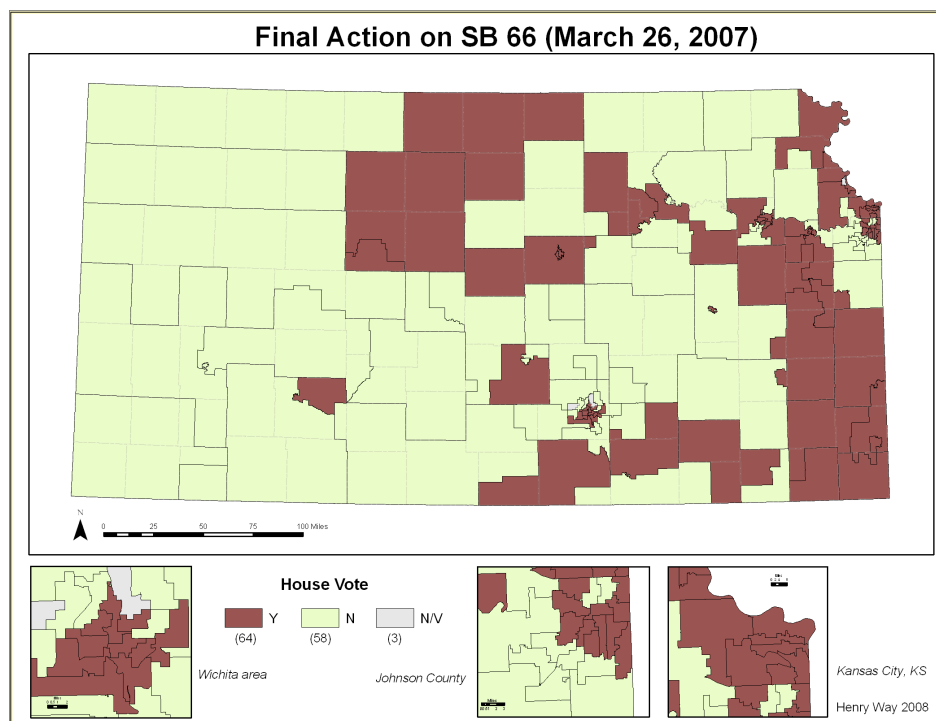
If the successful passage of legislation in state politics is seen as a matter of building geographical coalitions of legislators, the gambling drive was perhaps the ultimate exemplar. Because it was largely localized in its effects (despite the wider contribution to the state budget) the coalition had to be built by including as many areas as possible. In previous years, “there had

¹⁵ Sen. Jay Emler (R—McPherson), speech, at the Ellsworth Political Forum, Ellsworth, KS, March 17, 2007.

¹⁶ Rep. Mike Kiegerl (R—Olathe), speech, House debate on SB 66, Topeka, KS, March 23, 2007.

always been lots of opportunities to fight,” explained AP reporter John Hanna. “It was always, ‘if I add in Sedgwick County, how many votes do I pick up? If I put in Ford [County], will I pick up votes?’ and it always led to lots of disagreement and never enough votes.”¹⁷

Through a twelve-hour House debate, the gambling bill was rewritten in such a way as to garner broad geographical support. Enough, it turned out, to build a winning geographical coalition and make it the defining legislation of the session. Map 7 shows the final vote on the gambling bill in the House.



Map 7: House Final Action on Senate Bill 66, March 26, 2007 (Source: Kansas House Journal, 2007)

¹⁷ John Hanna, conversation with author, Topeka, KS, June 21, 2007.

Though a close vote, and supported by Democratic caucus unity, a geographical coalition was built by developing a bill that satisfied local needs and included a number of locations. The plan allowed the development of large destination casinos in Kansas City, southeast Kansas, and Sedgwick/Sumner Counties and so drew support from all those places. Wichita was once again split (reflecting a later unsuccessful referendum in the city). Democrats and Republicans from the inner city and inner suburbs voted in support of the bill, those further from the center voted against. A similar pattern could be seen in Johnson County. Support was also garnered from Representative George of Dodge City, following his amendment for a casino there. A number of other moderate Republicans were brought on board by the prospect of extra money for school funding as a result of the expansion, and from a sympathetic concern for economic development over the social questions of gambling. This broadened support beyond the immediate regions that would benefit from casinos, especially to mid-sized cities with particular concern about economic development and schools (such as Salina, Emporia and Junction City).

The gambling bill of 2007 was an exercise in geographical policy-making. How could area "X" as well as county "Y" be encouraged to support the policy, ran the thinking. Amendments and inducements, such as those for

Representatives Wetta and George, aided coalition-building. Equally, avoiding certain measures – such as the need to seek approval from surrounding counties for a casino – was critical in bolstering the support from some sections. Interestingly, while the support for gambling legislation had its roots in economic opportunity (some would say opportunism), and coalitions were built on these grounds, opponents based their position on a cultural perspective. It was, moreover, a cultural perspective that drew on a broader sense of morality having deep roots in the history of Kansas. Sometimes opponents even framed their position and rhetoric explicitly on this moral identity; often it was an implicit call that summoned the full ardor of past zealotry.

A puritanical streak has always been an important part of the cultural – and political – history of Kansas, and, based on the legislative opposition to gambling, appears to remain a powerful force.¹⁸ Echoes of the pious campaigns of temperance advocates in the past could be seen in the words of gambling opponents in 2007.¹⁹ Prohibition was a pietistical attack on contemporary indulgence; opposition to gambling was a religiously-inspired

¹⁸ For a fuller discussion of this, see Robert S. Bader, *Hayseeds, Moralizers, and Methodists: The Twentieth-Century Image of Kansas* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1988).

¹⁹ Bader again offers a useful analysis of prohibition, in Robert S. Bader, *Prohibition in Kansas: A History* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1986).

condemnation of present-day aberration. Perhaps the best way to illustrate the perspective of gambling opponents is to present their words at the final House vote on Senate Bill 66, on March 26, 2007. The following quotes all come from that occasion:

This debate was the lowest point of my legislative tenure. I am reminded of Galatians 6:7-8, "Be not deceived, God is not mocked. For whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap. He that soweth to the flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption. He that soweth to the Spirit shall of the spirit reap everlasting life." I want posterity to know that there were those of us that still believed and respected God's Word. I vote no on Senate Bill 66.²⁰

With the rapid increase in the size of the gambling footprint in Kansas, there will be a sizeable increase in number of persons addicted to gambling. The number of families affected by this

²⁰ Rep. Peggy Mast (R – Emporia), explanation of vote for SB 66, Topeka, KS, March 26, 2007.

addiction grows exponentially. I will vote no on Senate Bill 66 and my conscience will be clear. Will yours?²¹

Supporters of gambling agree that lives and families will be destroyed as a result of Senate Bill 66. They admitted it during debate and put language in Senate Bill 66 that requires two percent of the gambling profits go to the Problem Gaming and Addictions Fund. They vote yes knowing full well that lives and families will be destroyed, but point to the amount of money the state is projected to bring in. It is written, “what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?” Mark 8:36.²²

What are we doing here? We are opening up a pandora’s box that will have dire consequences for everyone in this room. Each of you will be impacted negatively by the passage of this bill. You say, “look at all the money it will bring to Kansas!” I say,

²¹ Rep. Don Myers (R—Derby), explanation of vote for SB 66, Topeka, KS, March 26, 2007.

²² Rep. Virgil Peck (R—Tyro), explanation of vote for SB 66, Topeka, KS, March 26, 2007.

“see all the grief you have caused!” You say, “gambling is already here.” I say, “you are enabling an addictive behavior.” The benefits of the money that will come from this cannot outweigh the grief it will cause.²³

I vote no on Senate Bill 66, for lack of good government reporting and the biggest reason is in regard to access to instant money and credit by problem gamblers. As I left Saturday morning, I was utterly disappointed in people that I once referred to as friends. This anger grew Saturday, but a wonderful thing happened on Sunday morning at Mass. Through God’s wonderful grace the anger was replaced with peace through my forgiveness of those whom angered me on Saturday. I ask the body to forgive me for my anger toward folks in this room, just as I through God’s help have forgiven.²⁴

I vote no on Senate Bill 66. A vision for Kansas: Strong intact families actively engaged in the life of their community;

²³ Rep. Virginia Beamer (R – Oakley), explanation of vote for SB 66, Topeka, KS, March 26, 2007.

²⁴ Rep. Anthony Brown (R – Eudora), explanation of vote for SB 66, Topeka, KS, March 26, 2007.

veneration of one's elders, the rearing of sober, upright and pious children; thrift, diligence and honest labor; temperance, prudence, fortitude and justice. Vibrant churches, schools, and voluntary associations; parochial communities, mediating between the individual and the state. Faith, hope and charity serving as the glue of civil society. Love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and temperance. These constitute the unbought grace of life. Gambling gnaws away at all these things, impoverishing us regardless of financial gain.²⁵

As these arguments, and many others in the House, make clear, religious fervor and the desire to legislate moral social standards have not left Kansas. The spirit of Carry Nation and other social reformers of the past persists amongst a good number of political actors today. The juxtaposition of this Puritanism and moral vigor against the pragmatic, economic interests of many supporters of expanded gambling is stark. It represents a political case study of what might be identified as a broader tension in the construction of Kansas identity between practicality and piety, between economic progress

²⁵ Rep. Lance Kinzer (R—Olathe), explanation of vote for SB 66, Topeka, KS, March 26, 2007.

and cultural traditionalism. On another level, the division in this particular issue is a contest of the geographical, the place-based, and the material, against the transcendental, the eternal, and the supernatural. In this difficult and profound dialectic, economic progress (and state tax revenue) ultimately emerged in a dominant position, but the politics – and culture – of Kansas was shown to be deeply uncertain about the move, and motivated almost as much by divinity as economic development.

Chapter 8

Holcomb

Outside Kansas, the small town of Holcomb is best known—if at all—as the setting for Truman Capote’s landmark nonfiction piece *In Cold Blood*.¹ In 2008, however, the southwest Kansas community again leapt to prominence, as the focus of the year’s most important public policy debate. The question over “Holcomb,” as the issue came to be known, was whether a coal power plant run by Sunflower Electric Power Corporation near the town should be expanded by 1,400 megawatts (see Map 8). Citing dangers of carbon dioxide emissions, the state secretary of health and environment refused a permit for the expansion. Legislative leaders took up the issue with vigor, looking to overturn this controversial decision. Three major spatialized dialectics framed this debate and form the basis of this chapter: an agricultural and rural perspective contending with an urban position, western Kansas interacting with eastern Kansas, and the positioning of Kansas against other places and scales.

¹ Truman Capote, *In Cold Blood* (1965, repr., New York: Vintage International, 1993).



Map 8: Holcomb, Kansas.

The decision to deny the permit in October 2007 was unprecedented, but not unexpected.² Many people were aware of the governor's, and especially the lieutenant governor's, desire to promote a more environmentally conscious agenda. Kansas Secretary of Health and Environment Roderick Bremby explained that it would be irresponsible to "ignore emerging information about the contribution of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases to climate change and the potential harm to our

² Rep. Joshua Svaty (D – Ellsworth), interview by author, Topeka, KS, March 11, 2008.

environment and health if we do nothing.”³ This was the first time in the nation that a state government had denied permission for power plant construction based on concerns about global warming.

Coal-based electricity generation certainly was not a new direction in Kansas, since the state currently derives seventy-five percent of its domestically generated electricity from that source.⁴ The proposed construction would have made Holcomb the second largest power complex in the state after the Jeffrey plant north of Topeka.⁵ Sunflower Electric Power Corporation, a Hays-based electric utility owned by six rural Kansas cooperatives that provided electricity to thirty-four counties in western Kansas, promoted the project. Partly, they wanted to bolster baseload supply in western Kansas, but also to further the interests of three partners outside Kansas: Tri-State, Golden Spread and Midwest Energy. As proposed, the first 700 megawatt unit would be owned by these groups, with Sunflower taking

³ Kansas Department of Health and Environment, “KDHE Denies Sunflower Electric Air Quality Permit,” news release, October 18, 2007, http://www.kdheks.gov/news/web_archives/2007/10182007a.htm (accessed February 21, 2008).

⁴ Kansas Energy Council, “Kansas Net Electrical Generation, July 2006 through June 2007,” http://kec.kansas.gov/chart_book/Chapter3/01_KansasNetElectricalGeneration.pdf (accessed March 11, 2008).

⁵ For a map and further information on Kansas coal power, see Kansas Energy Council, “Proposed and Existing Coal-Fired Power Plants in Kansas, 2007,” http://kec.kansas.gov/chart_book/Chapter3/10_CoalFiredPowerPlants.pdf (accessed March 11, 2008).

150 mw for its member systems. The second 700 megawatt (mw) unit would be owned by Tri-State and provide power for that cooperative's member systems.⁶ Sunflower led the project because of the Kansas site and their ownership of an existing plant outside Holcomb.

Supporters of the expansion pointed to its \$3.6 billion cost, an economic stimulus to a less-wealthy part of the state through tax revenue, construction support, and other regional commercial opportunities, in both the long and the short term.⁷ In addition to a large number of temporary construction jobs, the company estimated that some 250 new permanent positions would be created.⁸ The increased baseload electricity supply also was seen as important for supporting business, industrial and agricultural development in western Kansas. The prospect of the development of additional transmission lines in western Kansas and across state lines was also couched as dependent on the Holcomb expansion. Supporters frequently

⁶ Sunflower Electric Power Corporation, "Holcomb Station Expansion Project," <http://www.holcombstation.coop/> (accessed March 23, 2008).

⁷ Although the new development would probably be exempted from property tax for the first twelve years of operation. Also, the "Gamble Study" that looked at the economic impact of expanding the Holcomb plant points out that the project investment would be four times the total annual money income of Garden City residents, http://www.holcombstation.coop/Benefits/Gamble_Study.pdf (accessed March 23, 2008).

⁸ Sunflower Electric Power Corporation, "Project Benefits," <http://www.holcombstation.coop/Benefits/project-benefits.cfm> (accessed March 23, 2008).

claimed that transmission construction – which could help later development of wind farms – would be stalled. As the debate progressed, the need for “regulatory certainty” was raised, addressing the concern that the Bremby decision had made utilities, businesses and industry unwilling to invest in Kansas because of uncertainty over environmental regulation.

While supporters of expansion saw the project as an economic opportunity, those opposed questioned some of their claims and raised environmental concerns as paramount. Speaking with the lobbyist for ITC, the principal developer of transmission lines in Kansas, it was clear that new lines would be built (with the exception of the connection to Colorado) regardless of the Holcomb decision.⁹ Opponents also pointed to the large proportion of power that was going out of state, Kansas gaining little of the generation benefits but most of the pollution problems. A primary concern was an estimated eleven million tons of carbon dioxide per year from the expanded plant.¹⁰ Similarly, local and regional environmental concerns were raised, including the possibility for mercury contamination of local water supplies and excessive demand on water resources.¹¹ The expanded plant

⁹ Kimberley Svaty, interview by author, Topeka, KS, April 3, 2008.

¹⁰ Sierra Club, Kansas Chapter, “Reasons not to Build a Coal Plant in Kansas,” <http://kansas.sierraclub.org/Wind/Top10Reasons.htm> (accessed April 18, 2008).

¹¹ Great Plains Alliance for Clean Energy, “Our Energy Economy,” <http://www.gpace.org/?q=our-energy-economy/> (accessed April 9, 2008).

would potentially require five billion gallons per year from the already depleted Ogallala Aquifer.¹² The opportunity had arrived, opponents suggested, for diversification away from coal power toward renewable, “green” energy such as wind and solar.

The battle lines drawn, the debate progressed after the October 2007 permit denial. An opportunity was seen by the Republican leadership to both support what they saw as needs for western and rural Kansas and score a political victory over the Democratic governor. Legislation was drafted by the leaders of the House and Senate Energy and Utilities committees. House Bill 2711 and Senate Bill 515 allowed Sunflower to apply again for the expansion permit, limited the KDHE secretary’s powers in this area, and gave some attention to the regulation of pollutants and the need for alternative energy sources.¹³ Then, following public hearings and legislative debate, on February 8 work on HB 2711 was suspended because of conservative Republican opposition to the carbon tax provisions. Debate moved later in February to a new senate bill, SB 327, a stripped-down version of the original legislation with little in the way of carbon mitigation or other environmental measures.¹⁴

¹² Sierra Club, Kansas Chapter, “Reasons,” (accessed April 18, 2008).

¹³ Kansas Legislature. House Bill No. 2711; Senate Bill No. 515, 2008 Session.

¹⁴ Kansas Legislature. Senate Bill 327; House substitute for Senate Bill 327, 2008 Session.

After some amendment, this bill passed both houses. The governor vetoed it on March 21.

A second bill to expand Holcomb (SB 148) was introduced in early April because of fears that the House could not muster the 84 votes needed to override the governor's veto of SB 327.¹⁵ This new bill contained more environmental measures, but still allowed the plant's expansion. "Holcomb II," as it came to be known, was passed in the House and Senate, but again met the governor's veto. The House leadership repeatedly came close, but could never find the 84 votes needed to override. At the veto session at the end of April and early May, the Holcomb expansion measures were inserted into a wider economic development bill (House Bill 2412) in an attempt to once again pass favorable legislation. This failed as well.¹⁶

The concern in this chapter is less for the specifics of the various pieces of legislation and more for the ways the Holcomb debate progressed and was framed in the legislative process. The geographical patterns of House voting on the various bills will be an important focus, especially the three dialectical dimensions suggested above: Rural versus urban Kansas, western versus

¹⁵ Kansas Legislature. Senate Bill 148; House substitute for Senate Bill 148, 2008 Session. A justified fear as the veto override was ultimately unsuccessful for SB 327.

¹⁶ Kansas Legislature, House Bill 2412, 2008 Session.

eastern Kansas, and Kansas versus elsewhere. These conceptions will demonstrate quite clearly that in politics, place matters.

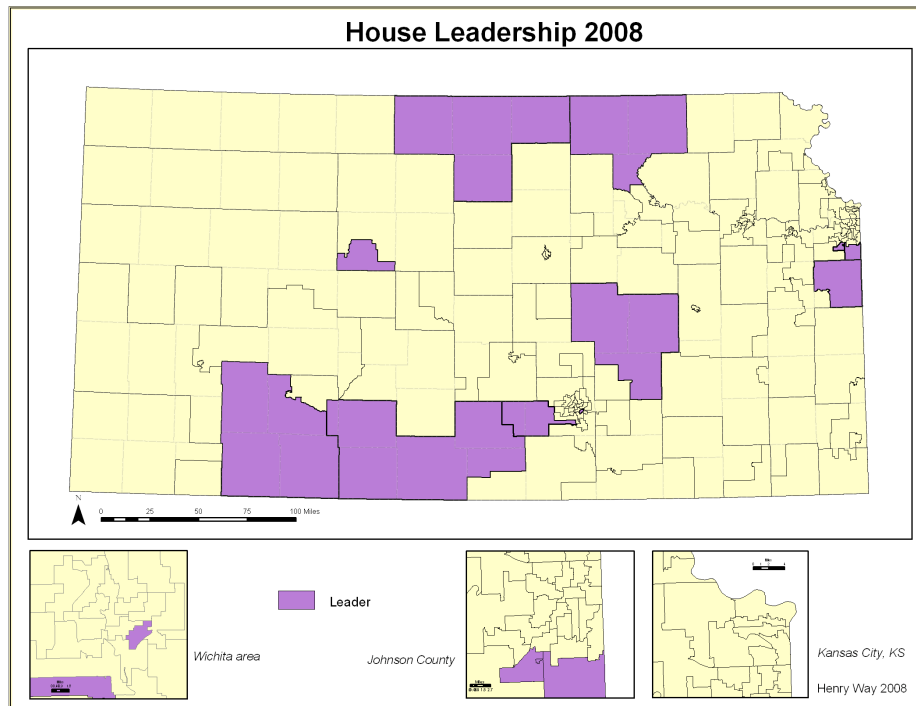
Rural Kansas vs. Urban Kansas

The Statehouse debate on Holcomb continued a long struggle over whether Kansas is an urban or a rural state. As such, the issue embodied the difficult dynamic between the more urban/suburban economic and demographic realities of most Kansans today and the state's traditional, pastoral ideals.

Sunflower's position was pushed so strongly in the legislature partly because it was tied to rural interests. The expansion of Holcomb was seen as assisting the provision of electricity to rural areas and the corporations involved were principally formed from rural cooperatives. As an opportunity to challenge the Democratic governor, the issue was taken up by Republicans, a party drawing much of its electoral support from rural areas. Further, as will be discussed below, discourse explicitly linked the expansion to rural and agricultural interests. Just as important, *leadership* in the House adopted the issue, by making it the main item on the legislative agenda and cementing the connection of Holcomb to rural interests.

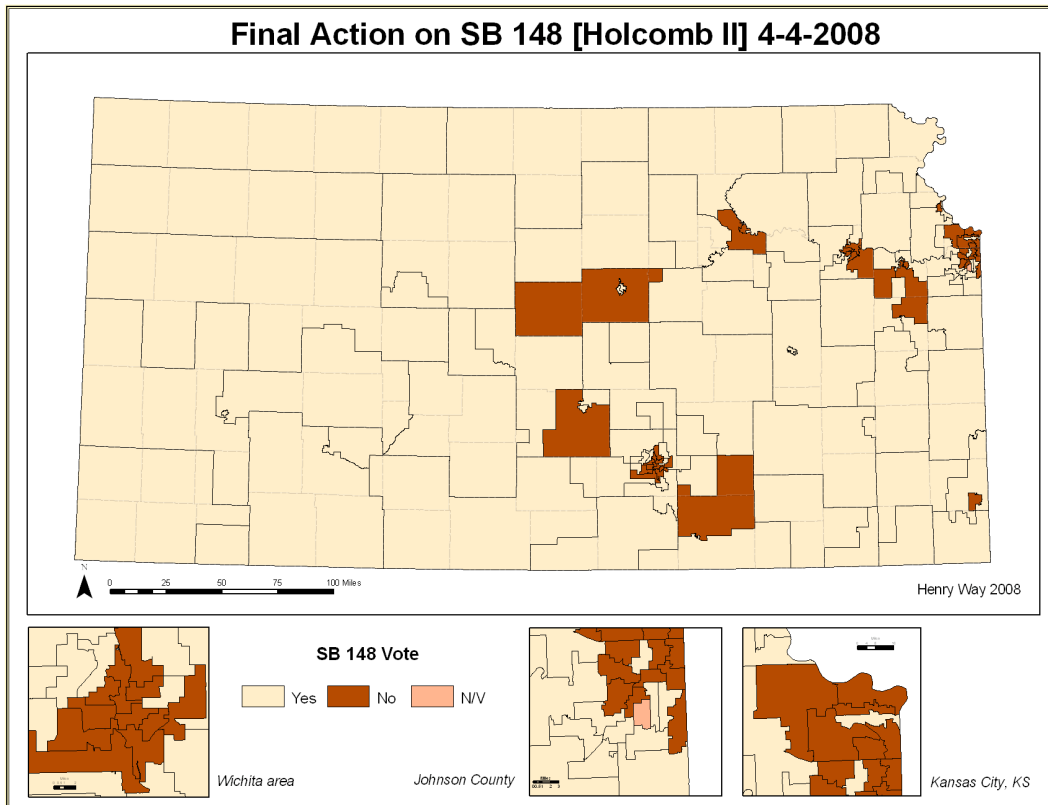
Map 9 shows the districts of leaders in the House in 2007. Rural (or mostly rural) legislators occupy seven of the nine most important positions in the House.¹⁷ Perhaps most significantly, the House Speaker hailed from Ingalls in rural southwest Kansas. Such rural-dominated leadership propelled Holcomb to the forefront of the session. Coupled with the partisan agenda, this made the issue both potent and prominent. Party divisions notwithstanding, one has to wonder how forcefully the Holcomb question would have been pushed had the leadership been more urban and had the speaker hailed from somewhere other than southwest Kansas.

¹⁷ If you include the Republican Senate leadership the rural focus is extended: President Morris and Majority Leader Schmidt both represent largely rural areas. The House Democratic leadership was split, with Minority Leader McKinney (from Greensburg) and Minority Whip Phelps (from Hays) for the plant, and Assistant Minority Leader Ward (from Wichita) against. This division reflected a wider rural-urban split in the House Democratic caucus. There were, of course, some exceptions most notably Rep. Svaty from Ellsworth, a rural legislator very keen for a “greener” energy portfolio. His opposition was perhaps buoyed by the development of a large wind farm near his hometown.



Map 9: House Leadership

While the geography of the leadership had plenty to do with the prominence of the Holcomb issue, the geographical patterns of the House votes reflect a rural-urban divide in the state. Map 10, for example, illustrates the voting on the “Holcomb II” bill, SB 148, which favored the Holcomb expansion. With some Democratic exceptions, most rural districts voted for, and most urban and many suburban districts voted against the bill.

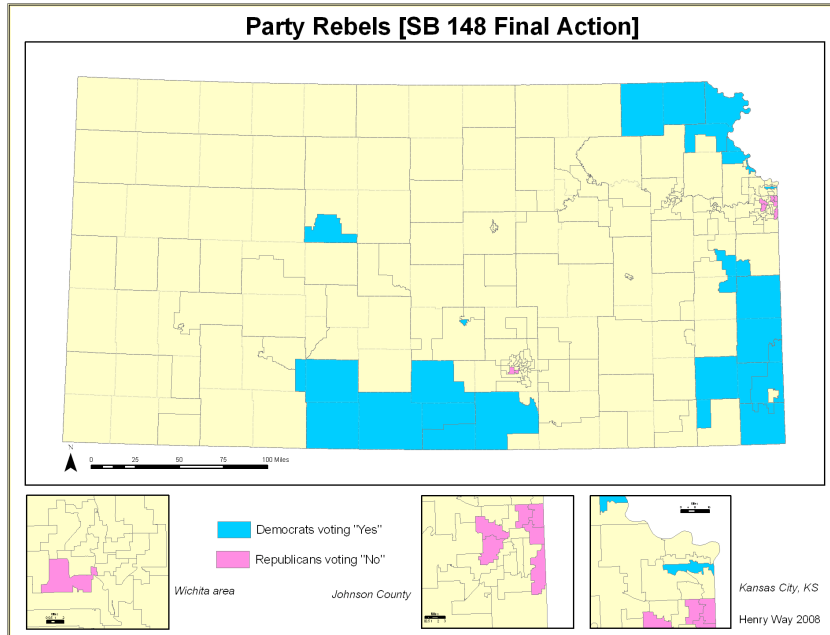


Map 10: Final Action on SB 148 (“Holcomb II”), April 4, 2008. (Source: *Kansas House Journal*, 2008)

Party membership of course underpins most of the pattern – rural areas being typically Republican and urban Democratic¹⁸ – but the number of party “rebels” illustrates the importance of place in this issue. Map 11 depicts the representatives who did not follow the majority of their party colleagues.

¹⁸ Ultimately, though, we should not ignore patterns such as this. Rural areas, for instance, vote Republican for cultural and perceptual reasons, and support for things like Holcomb come into that thinking. The partisan geography of the state is an important and instructive geography in itself.

Democrats from rural areas were somewhat supportive of the plant expansion and Republicans from some suburban areas, especially Johnson County, positioned themselves against the proposal.



Map 11: Party “rebels” on SB 148 Final Action, April 4, 2008. (Source: Kansas House Journal, 2008)

Republicans in Johnson County became an important swing group in the Holcomb story, with repeated attempts made to woo these representatives through carbon mitigation plans and renewable energy ideas, all in an attempt to reach the all-important 84 votes needed for a veto override. The suburbs, “in between” the urban and the rural, were also typically in the same position on the Holcomb question. It is also interesting

to note the divide *within* Johnson County, between the north and east, and the south and southwest, a persistent pattern this dissertation will look at more closely later.

To a great extent, place trumped party in the Holcomb votes. Representative Shirley Palmer, a Democrat from Fort Scott with a largely rural district in the southeast part of the state, spoke of how her support, despite pressure from the Governor, was an easy decision: “I have to vote what I think is right for my district. It was not easy going against the governor.”¹⁹ Representative Williams, a rural Democrat from Chanute, also remarked on his support for the bills: “I didn’t get here with people in Topeka voting for me. How I got here is by the people of the 8th District sending me here. So that’s who I represent when I vote.”²⁰

Votes on the Holcomb question were characterized mostly by an urban-rural split. The fusion of the expansion proposal and rural interests was reinforced and made clear through many remarks by legislators. Some examples from House debates serve to illustrate this process. A speech by Representative Richard Carlson, a rural Republican from St. Mary’s, sets the tone:

¹⁹ Rep. Shirley Palmer, (D – Fort Scott), quoted in James Carlson, “Coal Plant Bill Draws Lines,” *Topeka Capital-Journal*, March 10, 2008.

²⁰ Rep. Jerry Williams, (D – Chanute), quoted in Carlson, “Coal Plant Bill Draws Lines.”

If you take the GDP of Johnson County out of the GDP of Kansas, Kansas would be primarily an agrarian economy, farming's the biggest thing. Energy, this power plant, fits the mix of an agrarian economy well. Not everyone can have a Target distribution center.²¹

Carlson's statement mixes a perception of Kansas with a take on the place of electricity generation. His anti-urban jibe points to a wider sense of an embattled rural Kansas. This kind of avocation for Holcomb was not just a testament of support for the power plant, but part of a broader discourse that both connects the plant to rural places and asserts the importance and meaning of a rural identity of Kansas. Such statements were a rallying cry for rural Kansas. Urban and some suburban legislators took a much different tack. When I asked Representative Burroughs, an urban Democrat from southern Kansas City, why he opposed the plant he provided a typical answer: "this has become a rural-urban split. Wyandotte County is against this, that's what my people want."²² Urban and suburban legislators were simply articulating what they felt to be the perspective of their places, and

²¹ Rep. Richard Carlson (R—St. Mary's), House speech on H. Sub. for SB 327, Topeka, KS, February 18, 2008.

²² Rep. Tom Burroughs (D—Kansas City), conversation with author, Topeka, KS, March 13, 2008.

their success in stopping a veto override is testament to the power of the urban and less conservative suburban voice.

The most interesting perspectives often came from “border” districts, the marginal places where suburban, sometimes urban, and rural interests can be found. Representative Sloan, a Republican whose district covered parts of western Lawrence and rural Douglas County, is one such person. His many amendments to various bills were an attempt to “green” the Holcomb bills. Speaking of the need for such measures in SB 327, the original Holcomb bill in the House, he warned of the problems of a “science-free” bill: “this creates problems for those of us who are in urban areas, among our constituents.”²³ The candid perspective of another suburban Republican, Representative Colloton, highlights the perceived difference between such places and rural areas. Johnson County, she remarked, was “more green, more educated. A more environmental effort is what my constituents want.”²⁴ Representative Grant, a rural Democrat from Cherokee in southeast Kansas responded, vividly: “Johnson County ought to watch out when it

²³ Rep. Tom Sloan (R—Lawrence), House speech on H. Sub. for SB 327, Topeka, KS, February 18, 2008.

²⁴ Rep. Pat Colloton (R—Leawood), conversation with author, Topeka, KS, April 1, 2008.

rains, with their nose in the air like that!"²⁵ Here surely was a clear articulation of a rural-urban divide.

While most urban and some suburban legislators asserted their opposition or attempted to find a pragmatic middle way, rural representatives responded with a different perspective, seeing an advantageous relationship, for example, between the emissions of the power plant and agriculture. "One of the really good things about CO₂," argued Representative Powell, a Republican from a rural district to the east of Garden City, "is that plants perform better under stress, with drought and such like, with higher levels of CO₂ Over the next fifty years, atmospheric CO₂ enrichment will boost world ag output by fifty percent."²⁶ Similarly, from Representative Kiegerl, a western Olathe Republican: "Carbon dioxide is not toxic, it's required for plants. . . This is good for agriculture."²⁷ One can see in such contrarian sentiments a modern version, perhaps, of the "rain follows the plow" argument from the nineteenth-century settlement of the Great Plains.

²⁵ Rep. Bob Grant (D—Cherokee), conversation with author, Topeka, KS, April 1, 2008.

²⁶ Rep. Larry Powell (R—Garden City), House speech on H. Sub. for SB 148, Topeka, KS, April 3, 2008.

²⁷ Rep. Mike Kiegerl (R—Olathe), House speech on H. Sub. for SB 327, Topeka, KS, February 18, 2008.

Patterns of support for the Holcomb bills followed geographical divisions of city and country to a great extent. Qualities of place clearly mattered in this debate. Concerning the identity of Kansas, rurality and pastoralism were still vividly articulated. But the tension between urban and rural Kansas, between modern social and economic realities and the rural image, was also clear. Interpreting the Holcomb debates and votes, the material realities and imaginative discourses these drew on, Kansas is a truly divided state. The rural identity and heritage had power, and many in suburban areas still identify to a great extent with the rural hinterland. That many parts of the suburbs (through the legislators) still voiced a rural perspective points to the strength of the rural/pastoral sense of place in Kansas. The more urbanized parts of the state have a somewhat different perspective, and one which, led by the governor, has hindered the attempts of the rural-looking faction to succeed on the Holcomb question.

“Western” Kansas and “Eastern” Kansas

“The village of Holcomb stands on the high wheat plains of western Kansas, a lonesome area that other Kansans call ‘out there.’” So wrote

Truman Capote in the opening line of *In Cold Blood*.²⁸ The sense of a “western Kansas” was still strong in the Holcomb debate of 2008, a vivid perception of “out there” coming from all sides of the debate. Because of its location and the market it served, the Holcomb power plant and its expansion were identified with western Kansas. And as with the rural connection, the geography of the House leadership assisted the cause: the Speaker, House Minority Leader, Minority Whip and Energy and Utilities Committee Chair were all from what is generally thought of as western Kansas.²⁹

Plenty of overlap existed between the rural and western Kansas associations in the Holcomb debates. Overall you could get the sense that Holcomb was an opportunity for rural Kansas, embodied most strongly in western Kansas, to assert itself. That most of the “eastern” rural legislators aligned themselves with the pro-expansion group that articulated its argument in “western” terms, indicates the conflation of rurality and the idea of western Kansas. Although some legislators tried to avoid it becoming a sectional debate, a clear underlying sense of this being a “western” issue was omnipresent.

Representative Svaty, although he frequently attempted to move the debate from an east-west axis, acknowledged the spatiality of the battle lines

²⁸ Truman Capote, *In Cold Blood* (New York: Random House, 1966), 3.

²⁹ A fuller exploration of the “location” of western Kansas will be conducted in a later section.

as he began a speech on Senate Bill 327 in the House: “I live in central Kansas, but to this body, being west of Highway 81, I’m a western Kansan”³⁰ The same dividing line and acknowledgement of the imaginary and voting geography of the issue was raised by Representative Moxley, a Republican from Council Grove: “We need to get this passed, and to do that we need to bring along people who live east of Highway 81.”³¹

Such consciousness of the geography of the issue became a rallying point in the rhetoric of supporters of the Holcomb bills. Representative Aurand, a senior House member from rural north-central Kansas, aggressively voiced a geographical standpoint in a final debate on Senate Bill 148:

People in western Kansas look at this and think *not* building plants is going to increase rates. The “experts” are in places where it’s not going to affect them, not like it will affect us. Why should people who live in areas that don’t get affected think they know more? . . . When I look at issues in other parts of the state I look closely and try to understand. Why can’t we do this

³⁰ Rep. Joshua Svaty (D—Ellsworth), House speech on H. Sub. for SB 327, Topeka, KS, February 18, 2008.

³¹ Rep. Tom Moxley (R—Council Grove), in James Carlson, “House Committee OKs Energy Legislation,” *Topeka Capital-Journal*, February 13, 2008.

on this one? And remember, we're not bumpkins in western Kansas.³²

He continued his point by arguing for the needs of western Kansas, deepening the notion both of the region's reality and the alliance of the Holcomb plant with that place: "People out there really want it. Western Kansas isn't growing by leaps and mountains anyway; we're needing this. We all have our issues, and this is an important one for our part of the state."³³

A similar perspective could be heard in a speech during the same debate from Representative Hayzlett, a Republican legislator whose district includes Holcomb. He also, perhaps inadvertently, drew on Truman Capote:

My people out there have spoken, more than ninety percent are in favor Western Kansas has continuously voted for things that have supported things in the east, that keep business there, helping support Kansas. There's the horse racing track in Wyandotte County, we supported it in the house (and it's come back three times for money), the Cabela's, all that's expanded

³² Rep. Clay Aurand (R – Courtland), House speech on H. Sub. for SB 148, Topeka, KS, April 1, 2008.

³³ Rep. Clay Aurand, speech, April 1, 2008. Note the reference to people "out there;" Capote's conception has not changed too much. See Hayzlett's reference to "out there" as well.

the tax base. Transportation has helped out in Wichita, with Kellogg, the railroad overpass, that was \$50 million³⁴

A clear picture of regionalism can be seen here. We have helped your part of Kansas, now it is time for you to help ours. One can detect also a poke at urban areas, with the jibe about the race track in Wyandotte County coming back for money. That same sense of “us and them” regionalized between the east and west can be seen in Hutchinson Democratic Representative Paul’s remark at the time that, “if Johnson County is happy, Kansas is happy.”³⁵

Wyandotte County representative Burroughs was eager to explain his position and diffuse any antagonism, but in doing so implicitly acknowledged the regionalization of the debate: “we don’t want to punish western Kansas, but we’re hearing from our constituents,” he commented.³⁶ Western Republican legislators were not so eager to avoid antagonizing Wyandotte County and other eastern cities, however. On March 31 an amendment to a tax bill was introduced that instituted a carbon tax.³⁷

Supported by those fighting for the Holcomb expansion, this measure was

³⁴ Rep. Gary Hayzlett (R – Lakin), speech on H. Sub. for SB 148, Topeka, KS, April 1, 2008.

³⁵ Rep. Jan Pauls (D – Hutchinson), conversation with author, Topeka, KS, March 11, 2008.

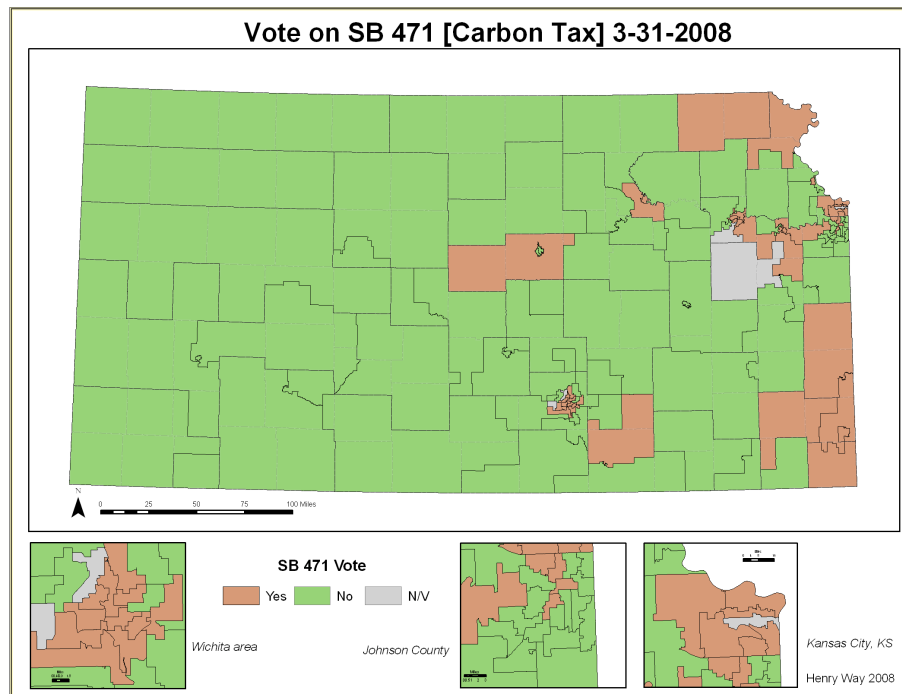
³⁶ Rep. Tom Burroughs (D – Kansas City), conversation with author, Topeka, KS, April 1, 2008.

³⁷ Amendment to Senate Bill 471, House Committee of the Whole, March 31, 2008.

carefully crafted. Ostensibly and publicly it was a “compromise” effort to give some “green” cover to wavering House members. But off the record and politically, it was an attempt to punish Wyandotte County legislators for not supporting the power plant proposal.³⁸

The amendment stipulated that utilities with a generating capacity of over 350 megawatts would be taxed \$37 per ton of carbon dioxide emissions if those emissions were over 110% of the state average. The only unit that would be affected by these conditions was the Board of Public Utilities in Kansas City, Kansas. Many western Kansas legislators who had voted against a carbon tax provision earlier in the session voted for this amendment (see Map 12). In the Holcomb issue, this was regional politics at perhaps its most vindictive. Articulations in support of the west were frequent. Repeated comments were made throughout the session about “standing up” for western Kansas. This is somewhat ironic given the power of the place in the cultural imagination of Kansas seen in these debates. But it does perhaps indicate a divergence between the strength of the cultural-imaginative geography and the economic, demographic and electoral realities.

³⁸ Verified in a number of off-the-record conversations with Republican legislators. There was anger that western Kansas representatives had historically been supportive of economic development in Wyandotte County, and Wyandotte County should reciprocate this generosity.



Map 12: Vote on Carbon Tax Amendment (to SB 471), March 31, 2008.

(Source: Kansas House Journal, 2008).

Another proponent talking-point was the claim that the Jeffrey power plant north of Topeka and the Lawrence Energy Center were especially egregious in their emissions. Western Republicans would frequently remark with glee that the Lawrence plant was “one of the dirtiest in the country.” Speaker Neufeld, in a speech at Tabor College in Hillsboro, argued that the “cleaner “ Holcomb plant should be built, and that the state should “shut

down the seventh dirtiest plant in America – the one at Lawrence.”³⁹

Recognizing the escalating regional fight, Lawrence Representative Ballard attempted to downplay the divide: “I understand the concerns of western Kansas, but I hope this doesn’t become an east Kansas versus west Kansas issue.”⁴⁰ Unfortunately an easy way to rally western Kansas sentiment throughout the debate was to suggest the hypocrisy of some in urban eastern Kansas. Regional shorthand and the combative use of place are useful rhetorical tools.

Through the Holcomb debate, a solid majority in the House supported the “western” position. Does this mean that the western part of the state was viewed as more important or symbolically meaningful than other parts? Perhaps. But it certainly showed that this vague region of “western Kansas” was of some importance to Kansas, and that there was a regional divide in the state. Wherever the actual boundary of western Kansas may have lain, the region was clearly part of the imaginative geography of legislators. This regional understanding, seemingly combined with a sense of rurality, framed the debate within the House, and helped root the campaign for the plant expansion. Having a broad place – western Kansas – to ground the issue gave it a potentially greater power, rhetorically and politically. Western Kansas

³⁹ Speaker Melvin Neufeld, in Scott Rothschild, “Speaker Lashes Out at City,” *Lawrence Journal-World*, December 4, 2007.

⁴⁰ Rep. Barbara Ballard (D – Lawrence), in Scott Rothschild, “Speaker.”

legislators could be rallied to support a regional cause. Of course, the converse could also be true: had the debate been couched less regionally, broader support might have been mustered. The breadth of support for the western Kansas position, regardless of partisan patterns, points to the strength of the idea of “western Kansas.” This vernacular region – this “out there” – has potency in the discourse of Kansas. The way it was used here to mobilize support illustrates the ways place perceptions and regional imaginative geographies can have significant political power. Kansas embodied a regional division, and looked through the lens of the Holcomb debate western Kansas was the most important region in the imaginative cultural geography of Kansas.

Kansas and conceptions of elsewhere

Intrastate regionalism was only a part of the political mobilization of place in the Holcomb debate. Both sides developed perspectives that drew on a relational understanding of Kansas, how it compared or interacted with other states. A sense of scale also existed, both sides drawing on distinctions between, on the one hand, the global setting and the federal government, and on the other, Kansas. Both also affixed their positions to certain visions of Kansas as a whole. These various positions can tell us something about the

differences in the perception of Kansas and its external relations in different parts of the state. Regionalism does not just look inward.

The relationship of Kansas to other states underpinned plenty of the debate on the Holcomb expansion. To impose many “environmental” conditions might restrict economic development and outside investment. Representative Knox, a rural Republican from southeast Kansas, warned that, with the denial of the permit: “We’re first in the nation here in Topeka, we should slow down.”⁴¹ When describing her opposition to the permit denial, Representative Ruff remarked that, “Kansas should not be ahead like this, we’ll suffer economically. We need a level playing field. I don’t want Kansas to be out front on this.”⁴² Added to economic concerns were worries that the state could not reach renewable standards, or implement other environmental measures that were added to the bills. Representative Mast, resisting such an amendment to SB 327, commented in a debate that, “out of 50 states, only two have reached ten percent renewable, only seven have reached five percent. It’s unreasonable to think that we can exceed that.”⁴³

⁴¹ Rep. Forrest Knox (R – Altoona), House speech on H. Sub. for SB 327, Topeka, KS, February 18, 2008.

⁴² Rep. Candy Ruff (D – Leavenworth), conversation with author, Topeka, KS, March 13, 2008.

⁴³ Rep. Peggy Mast (R – Emporia), House speech on H. Sub. for SB 327, Topeka, KS, February 18, 2008.

Supporters of the permit denial, however, saw Kansas's position differently. "We have opportunities here in Kansas that other states don't have," argued Governor Sebelius in a speech in the Statehouse. "Kansas can be a leader!"⁴⁴ The perspective pushed by those advocating a more environmental position was one of a pioneering Kansas, that it was a good thing to be ahead of other states on these issues. But again, among supporters of the power plant, economic interests trumped environmentalism. This competitive geography was used by Representative Kelsey when he saw economic peril for the state if it led the way: "We might as well take every road that comes into Kansas and put up a billboard that says 'closed for business.' . . . Our business climate will dry up like water in the Mojave Desert."⁴⁵ Using California imagery in a different way, Representative Mast counterdistinguished Kansas from a place of apparent environmental depravity in a particularly ideological use of geography: "In Hollywood, the motion picture industry emits 8 million tons of greenhouse gases every year. We don't have to be concerned about Kansas, we should worry about Hollywood. Keep Kansas open for business." Cultural geography was mobilized here for a very non-cultural outcome.

⁴⁴ Gov. Kathleen Sebelius (D), speech, Topeka, KS, March 11, 2008.

⁴⁵ Rep. Dick Kelsey (R – Goddard), House speech on H. Sub. for SB 327, Topeka, KS, February 18, 2008.

Sentiments about keeping a level playing field were parlayed into perspectives envisioning Kansas's relationship with governments at other scales. Most particularly, there were many calls to override the permit and allow the plant because came out of belief that it was the federal government's role to make decisions about these things. Such a position allowed supporters of Holcomb to deny the stance taken by KDHE and promote a common regulatory climate for businesses and utilities across the country. The desire to push the issue up to the federal level would also slow its progress, an important consideration, it was thought, when there was perceived to be a lack of scientific consensus on global warming. "Carbon dioxide is emitted when you open a Coke can. Let's leave the debate to Washington, this is not settled science," argued Representative Knox in the House.⁴⁶ There was a danger for Sunflower and its investment partners in this strategy however. If they were to go forward and build the plant, there would be a risk that a new presidential administration in 2009 would take more action on environmental issues, levying some kind of emissions charge that would make plants such as Holcomb more costly, a point opponents of the expansion made. It was better, they suggested, to turn now to invest in renewable power and stay ahead of federal regulation.

⁴⁶ Rep. Knox, House speech, February 18, 2008.

A more personality-driven meme in the Holcomb debate was the suggestion put forth by those supporting the power plant expansion that the governor had abrogated her responsibilities to her state. A repeated criticism was that Governor Sebelius was acting with her own interests in mind, interests tied to the national scene. Speaker Pro Tem Dahl remarked that, “The governor used to be for this [the Holcomb expansion], until she got *national* aspirations.”⁴⁷ As discussed earlier in this dissertation, transplanting a politician away from the home base and especially to a different scale can be used as an effective political and rhetorical weapon.

Stoking global-scale concerns and the position of Kansas in the world was another approach taken by opponents of the Bremby decision. A regular Republican talking-point was that “China is starting two coal plants a week,” an attempt to put the Kansas case in perspective, and push the need to “keep up” with this growing foreign power. In a more negative, and altogether more bombastic way, advertisements in Kansas newspapers following the permit denial couched the issue in xenophobic and alarmist terms, suggesting that Kansas’s denial might help America’s enemies (see Figure 37):

⁴⁷ Speaker Pro Tem Don Dahl (R – Hillsboro), conversation with author, Topeka, KS, April 1, 2008.



Why are these men smiling?

Because the recent decision by the Sebelius Administration means Kansas will import more natural gas from countries like Russia, Venezuela, and Iran.

Figure 37: Pro-Holcomb ad (Source: Kansans for Affordable Energy, 2007.⁴⁸)

Although pushing association and disassociation at different scales had some effect in the debate, the articulation of Kansas identity itself was also an important strategy. Both opponents and proponents of the power plant expansion would regularly talk of what was “best for Kansas.” “I have a responsibility to look out for the good of Kansas,” said one Holcomb-

⁴⁸ Kansans for Affordable Energy, <http://kansansforaffordableenergy.com/> (accessed January 22, 2008).

supporting House member, for example.⁴⁹ Representative Long, an opponent, asked by contrast, “what’s in it for the state of Kansas? Who’s going to pay for this? Kansas rate-payers are.”⁵⁰ The ranking Democrat on the Energy and Utilities committee, Representative Kuether, attempted to make the opposition to Holcomb the true Kansan position: “Kansans, and we are Kansans, care about this issue.”⁵¹ Upholding the strength of Kansas, from a regulatory standpoint, had biblical connotations for Representative Myers: “Vote for best interests of this state. . . Build energy policy on solid rock, not shifting sands.”⁵²

Minority Leader McKinney was supportive of the Holcomb expansion because, as he explained to me, it was a regional concern for him; with his district in the rural west of the state, he identified with the needs of that area.⁵³ In a speech to the House, he framed his support for the plant in terms of the identity of Kansas. “It is traditional in Kansas,” he argued, “not to avoid challenges. In Kansas our tradition is to invest in research and

⁴⁹ Rep. Dave Crum (R – Augusta), House speech on H. Sub. for SB 148, Topeka, KS, April 1, 2008.

⁵⁰ Rep. Margaret Long (D – Kansas City), House speech on H. Sub. for SB 148, Topeka, KS, April 1, 2008.

⁵¹ Rep. Annie Kuether (D – Topeka), House speech on H. Sub. for SB 327, Topeka, KS, February 18, 2008.

⁵² Rep. Don Myers, explanation of vote, Final Action on H. Sub. for SB 148, April 4, 2008.

⁵³ Minority Leader Dennis McKinney, interview with author, Topeka, KS, April 1, 2008.

technology and address problems.”⁵⁴ A fidelity to the identity of Kansas, and the implantation of a particular stance on the Holcomb question into that identity was an effective rhetorical strategy used by opponents as well. Lieutenant Governor Parkinson pushed hard in the Holcomb issue against the expansion of the power plant. His principal public speech at the State Capitol was striking in its association of the environmentalist perspective with the broader “meaning” of Kansas:

I’m proud to be a Kansan, I’ve lived here all my life. I think that Kansas is the most misunderstood state in the country. We have a proud and rich history in this state . . . we made the decision to enter as a free state. It was a hard thing to do, but the right thing. That is our history, we are progressive. Like civil rights, we’ve got to be on the right side of the issue Out of state, they say we’re hicks: we’re not, we have a progressive history. We’re not hicks, we’re educated, we’ve got a great public school system, our founders made sure of that. Another thing those out of state have got wrong: we’re not a dumping ground for carbon.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Minority Leader Dennis McKinney, House speech on H. Sub. for SB 327, Topeka, KS, February 18, 2008.

⁵⁵ Lt. Gov. Mark Parkinson, speech, Topeka, KS, April 4, 2008.

His words demonstrate the rhetorical and political use of place perception in an issue not immediately integral to state identity. Stoking pride as well as tapping into a historical understanding of the state, he advocated energy policy through cultural geography. He also added some more pragmatic thoughts to the issue: "Why should we buy coal from Wyoming, and make electricity that we sell to Colorado and Texas? Why not sell them Kansas wind, that benefits Kansas farmers?" All such examples of the mobilization of Kansas identity and native needs provide another case study of the rooting and bolstering of political positions with place and the rhetorical and political power of geography.

In a dialectical way, the Holcomb debate places operate to shape and frame the process, driving the discourse and driving the voting. This case study illustrates another way that cultural geography and place perception have a fundamental role in representative politics. The progress of the Holcomb question could not be fully understood without examining the key role of geography. We can draw some insights about Kansas from this perspective. Most obviously, the debate would never have taken the form it did, or opposition so vigorously asserted, without the rallying power of rural identity in Kansas. The muddled policy outcomes and legislative deadlock

point to the corresponding power of metropolitan Kansas. The unstoppable force of urbanization met the unmovable object of pastoralism.

The regional conception of a “western Kansas” has an important organizing function in the imaginative cultural geography of the state. Through the Holcomb debate there was as sense, however, of a defensiveness deployed simultaneously with an acknowledgement of the iconic position of the region. Like its rural attachment, much of suburban Kansas embraced the idea of the west. The prominent status of western Kansas – given its declining demographic, electoral and economic position – is dependent on this cooption by the suburbs. Without suburban support, the Holcomb question would have been resolved much more emphatically in the governor’s favor. This bifurcated suburban perspective of material reality and imaginative conception underpinned the progress of the debate. The synthesis of both the urban – rural contention and the suburban schizophrenia (where that contention was brought together) could be seen in the policy outcomes. Bills embodied a procoal, proexpansion position *and* antiemissions, prorenewable demands.

The spatialized dialectics of urban and rural, west and east, and Kansas and elsewhere all constitute the dynamic of the space of Kansas. Together, they produce the place of Kansas, revealed in the 2008 session to be an ongoing construction that revolves around a persistence of rurality and

pastoralism as central to meaning, and western Kansas being a special repository of those values. The process of “othering” places external to Kansas is another way the identity of Kansas is sustained. As indicated by this analysis, this dialectic is guided in its current form by the outlook of the suburbs. In the future, assuming the suburbs develop a more metropolitan perspective, what then for western Kansas, and what then for the idea of a rural, pastoral state? I suggest for certain that this will be a transition struggled over in the Statehouse and one that will make for an interesting and geographically based process.

Chapter 9

Pursuing the Places

The preceding chapters have identified and explored the role geography plays in Kansas politics. First, through the election campaigns, one can see candidates' vivid understanding and articulation of local knowledge and place perception to help frame themselves, their opponents, and the debate. This case study of the 2006 election season itemized these major discourses and dynamics, including, for example, the primacy of rural imagery to the construction of state identity.

Case studies from the Statehouse build on these insights and point toward deeper dynamics at play. Across a range of issues, the policy-making process reveals a dialectical relationship between competing ideas. These ideas are typically wrought in place. Representatives from one set of places have one vision for the state; those from another assert a different viewpoint. Representative politics is, after all, a territorial art. Through various case studies I have revealed the geographical coalitions that are built, as well as spatial rhetoric and appeals to sense of place that are articulated in the Legislature. Spatial variation – cultural and economic geography in particular – is central to the workings of representative government,

something that most political analysis seems to overlook. To better understand politics, a better understanding of its geographical context and framework seems appropriate.

If, in the words of President John Adams, we look at the House of Representatives as “an exact portrait in miniature of the people at large,” the spatial character of its discourse and activities should also give us some insight into the geography of Kansas.¹ First and most obviously, perhaps, is that the geography of Kansas is varied and the identity of the state contested. If one adopts a dialectical understanding of the spatial-political processes in the House, the ongoing “outcome” of policy-making is a set of state laws that embody a tension or dynamic between differing viewpoints. Kansas itself, therefore, can be seen as the embodiment of different places with people holding different viewpoints, at different scales, coming together as a state. Just as in the legislature, with its many laws and challenges, many different dialectics underlie that politics. And it has been interesting to note which “side” seems to be preeminent, and how important image and perception are, vis-à-vis material reality. The identity and “meaning” of Kansas is, in short, not a stable, given thing. It is a constructed, dynamic conception built upon

¹ John Adams, quoted in Hanna Fenichel Pitkin, *The Concept of Representation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967): 60.

regional differentiation within its bounds. State politics validates, illustrates, and extrapolates this insight.

From this initial understanding and the evidence presented by the Statehouse debates, we can identify further features of the geography of Kansas. Certain regions figure prominently in the dynamics of place. “Western” Kansas exercises an important role, however flexibly that place might be defined. Southeastern Kansas is a distinct region as well. Rural northeast and central Kansas, in contrast, have relatively little identity in the state political discourse. Johnson County, and sometimes Kansas City, produce vivid echoes on the Kansas regional radar. Wichita seems to be something of a void. Middle-sized cities – Salina, Emporia, Garden City, in particular – have a distinct place as venues grappling with both rural and urban change. Of note also is the competitiveness that can be seen between rural and urban areas, and urban and suburban places.

Particular issues are also manifested in ways that suggests they are intrinsic to the construction of place. Education, especially K-12 schools, and school districting loom especially large in the legislature. The significant proportion of the state budget that is consumed by education can partly explain this, but the vigor by which school issues are fought points toward their important role in place-making and place maintenance. This pervasiveness of education debates deserves further research. Questions

about immigration, and more broadly, ethnicity and race, form another clear dimension to the understanding of place and how places are changing. The tension between cultural and economic factors in the perceptual and material geography of Kansas is a dynamic that overarches many of the issues faced in the Statehouse. Religion and morality appear to be issues near the center of this tension.

Underlying many of the recurring issues, and helping configure the culture-versus-economy dynamic, is the sense of Kansas as a rural place. A pastoral identity is not merely some connotation of the past, or of academics, or possessed only by those living in the Kansas countryside. Instead, the discourse of rurality continues to shape nearly every political debate in the state government. A majority of individuals in the legislature articulate and vote upon their sense of a rural Kansas. As such, that meaning is writ material. These case studies show clearly that the humanistic concern of sense of place can be transposed to a discursive context and thereby to have more general economic and cultural implications.

Intrigued by the patterns and pointers my fieldwork was revealing, I next decided to reverse my lens. Instead of using geography to better understand politics, I would use my subjects' sense of place to better understand Kansas geography. For this, I interviewed state representatives,

with the goal of letting the places – through their representatives – speak for themselves. With as little initial bias as possible, I wanted to ask questions that broadly got at what was “making” these places and regions that figure so vividly in the politics. As explained earlier, talking to state representatives about their places has a number of benefits, including a more holistic picture – away from an academic approach that might ask about one particular issue, perhaps, prefigured in the research plan to be important – and one that is contemporary and well-founded.

My interviews with seventy-five state representatives were enlightening and helped build a more nuanced and deeper understanding of contemporary Kansas geography. This was a geography that integrated both the perceptual and physical in the development of place and regional distinctiveness. Some initial findings and conclusions will be briefly presented here, the more fuller exploration coming in the succeeding two chapters.

In both rural and metropolitan districts, or specifically in one or the other, recurrent elements to the construction of places emerged. Physical geography – in rural areas especially – was seen as quite important, especially in terms of how challenges presented by the land were overcome. History and local heritage also figured prominently in most understandings of specific places, broader regions, and the state as a whole. Of course these

were not neutral understandings, but rather a set of perspectives on the meaning of particular histories. The contemporary geography is certainly colored by the past.

Representatives from rural areas indicated the importance of agricultural trends to matters beyond the immediate local economy. There was a spirit to agricultural work that seemed to seep into all understanding. Away from small-town Kansas, race and ethnicity were shown to be an important and dynamic part of the construction of place identity, and figured prominently in discussions about changing places – especially in suburban and smaller cities. Senses of place were, interestingly, often conveyed in discussions about the local economy, businesses, and housing opportunities. These material concerns often play a secondary role in cultural geographies, but in many ways this research has revealed that they cannot be unlinked from questions of identity and meaning. Conversely, religion, with a few notable exceptions, figured only marginally – and often only with prompting – in many of my interviews. I had been expecting Kansas to be deeply shaped by the religious geography of the state; rather, religion seems to play a more oblique, though occasionally important, role. It is not at the immediate forefront of the majority of the constructions of place revealed in this research.

Transportation issues – railroads, and especially limited-access highways – formed another significant part of the distinction and understandings of the development of places. “Four-lanes” were seen as integral to the past and future success of particular places. In the more human realm, I began to build a sense of the importance of networks – social, political, and professional – to the communication and support of local identities. It often emerged that a small number of individuals were critical to the “public” maintenance of local image and meaning, through their role in local government, fundraising for local institutions, or other activities on the public stage. As indicated earlier, schools were also fundamental to the perceptions and constructions of place identity. These interviews made clear the wide range of ways education plays this constitutive role.

Aside from the more “solid” elements to place such as those identified above, a distinct set of narratives also emerged within the meaning of places. This set can be broadly conceived as a sense of competition. In interview after interview and on issue after issue, regional identities were constructed by how one place differed from another. The city, county, and regional geography of Kansas is a vivid and competitive one. Representatives often spoke of such rivalries – sometimes historical, sometimes waged on the high school sports field, sometimes informing administrative or economic decisions. There was a pervading sense of “us” versus “them,” of insider and

outsider, and what those divisions meant. Schools, economic development, local government, all played an important role in the perceptions of place-by-place difference. But the clear message was that in the imaginative construction of places, other places matter. Without trying to confuse the matter too much: places are where they are not.

The next two chapters investigate the contemporary geography and place-making dynamics of rural and metropolitan Kansas. The priority is to demonstrate and discuss how representatives themselves presented their places. While informed by previous scholarship, the aim here is to draw a conceptual map of Kansas as it is understood by individuals today.

Chapter 10

Regionalism in Rural Kansas

“Rural Kansas” was both an idea and a place in the discourses at the Statehouse. Using material from in-depth interviews with state representatives in nonmetropolitan districts, this chapter will explore in more detail this concept and location.¹ Based on the information and views expressed by these individuals, a picture of contemporary rural Kansas can begin to be drawn, illustrating some of its features, but more particularly what those facts mean and how rural places are defined in the perception. The coherence and identity of certain broad regions of the state will first be analyzed. Then I give attention to key factors that seem to mobilize the identities and distinctiveness of rural places, and finally consider the dynamics of “middle-sized” cities. I attempt here to put forward the various perceptions as they were presented to me in the course of interviews; I select particular quotes, but they all reflect a recurring or important feature of place

¹ I define “nonmetropolitan” districts here as those outside of Sedgwick (Wichita), Shawnee (Topeka), Douglas (Lawrence), Wyandotte (Kansas City), and Johnson Counties.

perception. Additionally, all facts put forth in this, and the following chapter are from the interviews I conducted.

Searching for a shorthand for rural interests, issues, or identities, representatives in the legislature frequently settled for “western Kansas.” Presented as a homogenous concept and territorial unit, this phrase served to embody the most “authentic” traditional, rural Kansas. As an idea, it clearly had strength. But pressed further in interviews, representatives were less sure about its general characteristics beyond rurality and remoteness. Politically it was seen as “generally more conservative,” and resistant to government, both things that made it distinct, it was argued from other rural regions.² Socially, it was seen as perhaps “resistant to outsiders.”³ Or rather in Kansas, “the further west you go, the friendlier it is!”⁴ Agriculture was the most frequent economic association.

More confusion lay over its exact boundary. U.S. Highway 81 was the typical boundary set by politicians between east and west. This split Salina, for example, in two; but that city looks, however, “east rather than west.”⁵ Ellsworth and Saline Counties, mostly west of 81, were seen as being in

² Rep. Tom Hawk (D—Manhattan), interview by author, Topeka, KS, February 8, 2008.

³ Rep. Eber Phelps (D—Hays), interview by author, Hays, KS, October 7, 2007.

⁴ Rep. Virginia Beamer (R—Oakley), interview by author, Oakley, KS, October 6, 2007.

⁵ Rep. Deena Horst (R—Salina), interview by author, Topeka, KS, February 12, 2008.

central rather than western Kansas by their representative.⁶ Rooks County, seemingly far beyond the regional boundary, was likewise felt to be outside, more appropriately placed in “north-central” Kansas.⁷ To the south, the district including Kiowa, Pratt, and Kingman Counties was thought to be in western Kansas, indicating, perhaps, that the perceptual boundary might form an oblique rather than vertical line across the state.

Talking with those representing districts in the western part of the state, it was clear that “western” Kansas was more varied than stereotypically presented. In many ways, western Kansas does not even really exist from the perspectives presented by those within its supposed bounds. A better understanding is built around two quite distinct subregions: in southwest and northwest. These each have clearer boundaries – between each, and to the east – and a stronger sense of regional coherence in history and perception.

Dust in the Sinuses: Southwest Kansas

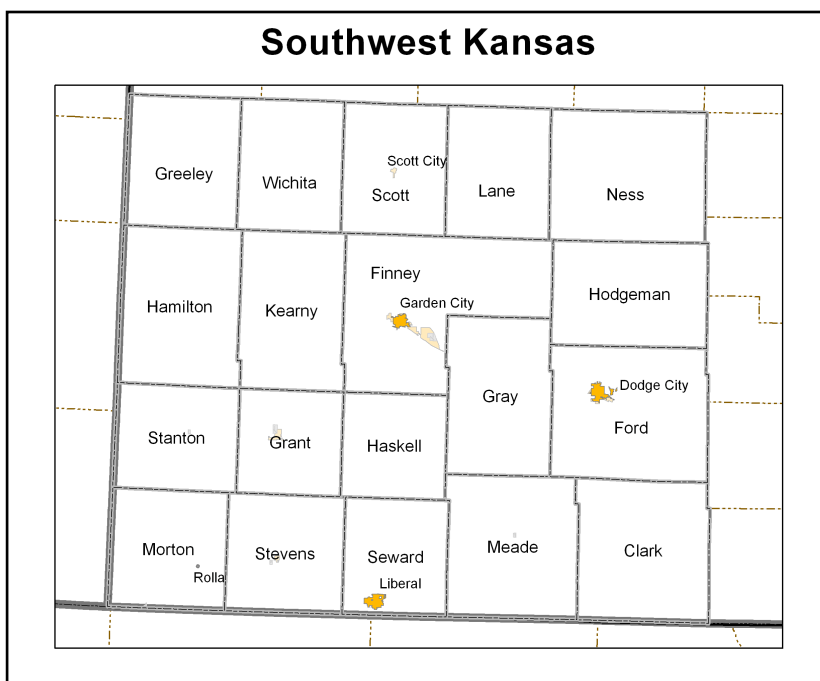
⁶ Rep. Joshua Svaty (D – Ellsworth), interview by author, Ellsworth, KS, March 17, 2007.

⁷ Rep. Dan Johnson (R – Hays), interview by author, Hays, KS, October 7, 2007.

“You will never talk about southwest Kansas without talking about the weather,” remarked former Garden City representative, Ward Loyd. “That drives everything. The Dust Bowl was a big thing around here.”⁸ The physical environment, especially climate, was emphasized as central to the development and culture of the region. “The environment in southwest Kansas is not very hospitable,” began Speaker Melvin Neufeld. “Because of that, people think a little differently, they have a different mindset.”⁹ He continued to explain that the great blizzard of 1886 wiped out the big cattle herds of the open-range days, so the people who stayed had to adapt to change and be resilient. Again, after World War I, the farming economy collapsed, and the ones who could not adapt “moved to California. Those that could adapt to change stayed.” Through the challenges of the past, “the ones who couldn’t make it, left,” and those left today have a culture of accepting change faster, accepting risk, and being entrepreneurial. “That’s why we were willing to change to feedlots in the 1950s, and why the Dodge City – Liberal – Garden City area is called the ‘Golden Triangle’” (see Map 13).

⁸ Ward Loyd, interview by author, Garden City, KS, November 3, 2007.

⁹ Speaker Melvin Neufeld, interview by author, Topeka, KS, January 8, 2008.



Map 13: Southwest Kansas

A similar claim was made by Bill Light, a farmer and representative from Morton County. He repeatedly referred to the “Dirty Thirties” in our interview, and drew on the history of local families surviving the Dust Bowl, “which was centered on Morton County.”¹⁰ “I figured that if my grandfather could make it through the Dirty Thirties, then I could survive dry-land farming today,” he commented, emphasizing that the pioneer spirit and sense of survival was still alive in the present day. “This is the best part of Kansas!” Light explained. “Knowing that we survived the Dust Bowl makes us feel a

¹⁰ Rep. Bill Light (R—Rolla), interview by author, Rolla, KS, November 3, 2007.

little less reliant on the state.” “We have a ‘let’s just get it done,’ kind of attitude here,” confirmed Loyd later.¹¹

This can-do, independent spirit underlies the southwest Kansas secession attempts that happen “every ten or fifteen years.”¹² The last was in 1992, from anger that the state was taking away local control of schools.¹³ “We feel we fit in better with southeast Colorado and the Texas and Oklahoma panhandles, than the rest of the state,” suggested Light, though he voted against secession. He described the proposed new state that was made up of those areas – jokingly referred to by many as “Kotex” – with “Amarillo as our state capital. That’s where we go for our flights, shopping and things. Topeka is 360 miles away.”¹⁴

The upbeat spirit of survival and adaptation, and the sense of distinction from much of the rest of the state, was helped by good fortune beneath the region’s dusty soils. “The strength of southwest Kansas was built on oil and natural gas and water,” Ward Loyd explained. Oil, and especially natural gas, continues to bring in valuable royalties for farmers, without

¹¹ Ward Loyd, interview by author, Garden City, KS, November 3, 2007.

¹² Ward Loyd, interview by author, Garden City, KS, November 3, 2007.

¹³ For a discussion of this, see Peter J. McCormick, “The 1992 secession movement in southwest Kansas,” *Great Plains Quarterly* 15, no. 4 (1995): 247-258.

¹⁴ Rep. Bill Light (R–Rolla), interview by author, Rolla, KS, November 3, 2007.

which many would have “gone broke.”¹⁵ Water was critical to the southwest. The Ogallala Aquifer had been used on a large scale for irrigation since the 1950s. Flooding was early technique but, now ninety percent of irrigation in southwest Kansas is center-pivot, with deep wells down to the aquifer.¹⁶ Being able to grow corn and other animal feeds on a large scale, and with a generally mild climate, vast feedlots followed.¹⁷ Ulysses today boasts the world’s largest feedlot, with over 100,000 head of cattle, according to Light. Drawing on the feedlots, meatpacking plants followed, and from the 1970s have formed a significant part of the regional economy.¹⁸ “It’s all stemmed from good water,” acknowledged Light; this abundant use of water and the subsequent development united the economies of southwestern counties.¹⁹

This blessed southwest region, with its resources and survivalist spirit, was seen to certainly encompass the nine counties in the corner of the state,

¹⁵ Rep. Bill Light (R—Rolla), interview by author, Rolla, KS, November 3, 2007.

¹⁶ Rep. Bill Light (R—Rolla), interview by author, Rolla, KS, November 3, 2007.

¹⁷ For a more detailed account of the meatpacking industry in Kansas (and elsewhere), see Donald Stull, Michael J. Broadway and David Griffith, eds., *Any Way You Cut It: Meat Processing and Small-Town America* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1995).

¹⁸ Ward Loyd, interview by author, Garden City, KS, November 3, 2007.

¹⁹ William Ashworth, *Ogallala Blue: Water and Life on the High Plains* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2006), offers a good take on the water issue in the west.

and maybe extend as far as “ten miles east of Dodge.”²⁰ Pushing a little further, Dennis McKinney felt that the western part of his district might be considered as part of the southwest: “We wear cowboy hats and boots there; we have dust in our sinuses, like west Texas.”²¹ To the north, Scott City was firmly established as the gatehouse by all interviewees. “North of Scott City is a different world. They’re more traditional thinkers rather than risk takers,” commented Neufeld.²²

Not Good Enough for a Dairy Queen: Northwest Kansas

Distinct differences are evident between southwest and northwest Kansas. Northwestern counties are similarly wedded to agriculture, but largely without irrigation. Wheat is a more common crop, with an especially good harvest in 2007,²³ having a significant impact on nearby towns by helping commercial enterprises and banks.²⁴ This points to a feature common across most of the regions and places this chapter covers. Rural regional

²⁰ Rep. Bill Light (R–Rolla), interview by author, Rolla, KS, November 3, 2007.

²¹ Minority Leader Dennis McKinney (D–Greensburg), interview by author, Lawrence, KS, October 3, 2007.

²² Speaker Melvin Neufeld, interview by author, Topeka, KS, January 8, 2008.

²³ Rep. Virginia Beamer (R–Oakley), interview by author, Oakley, KS, October 6, 2007.

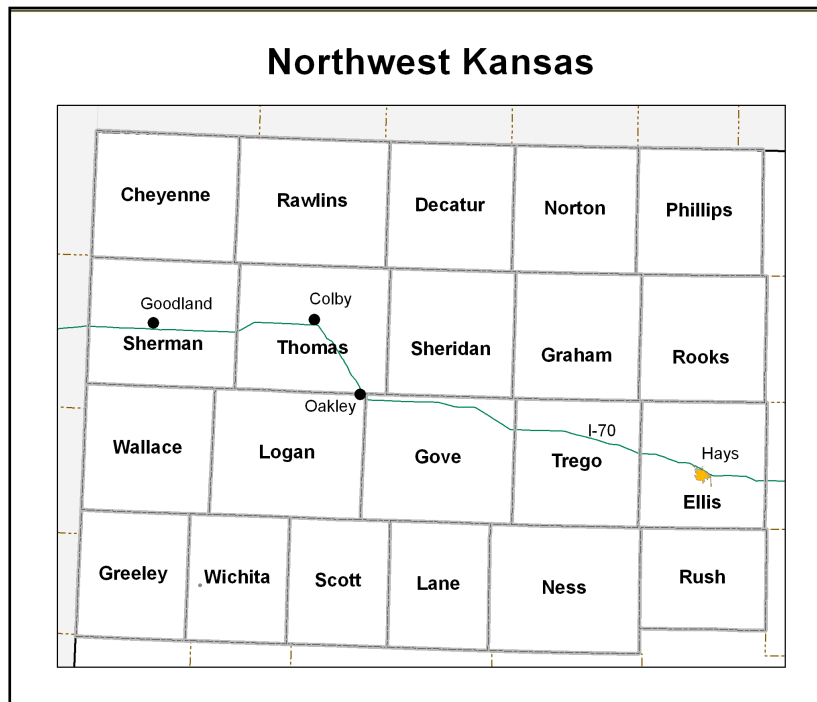
²⁴ Rep. Jim Morrison (R–Colby), interview by author, Topeka, KS, February 19, 2008.

cultures and characteristics include the towns. Even larger cities such as Emporia and Hays were presented as highly influenced by agricultural trends.

Though enjoying a “banner year” for the economy, on the back of the “best crop in twenty years,” in the words of Colby representative Jim Morrison, interviewees presented a much more pessimistic general outlook than their colleagues to the south. “We’ve had a good year, but there’s always the risk of drought,” explained Morrison. “In the next five years, the number of farmers will go down by twenty percent, and there will be plenty of outmigration because there’s no business.” “Times can be tough,” acknowledged Representative Faber.²⁵ On a tour of the depleted downtown of Oakley (see Map 14), Representative Beamer pointed out that the town had two clothing stores, “though I don’t know how long that will last,” she remarked. Revealing the lack of dynamism in the place, she indicated the high school: “we call it the ‘new’ high school, but it was built in 1956.” Passing a “Dairy King” ice cream restaurant, she commented that, “we weren’t big enough, or good enough, for a Dairy Queen!”²⁶ Things were bad, apparently, when a town could not entice even that franchise.

²⁵ Rep. John Faber (R – Brewster), interview by author, Topeka, KS, February 12, 2008.

²⁶ Rep. Virginia Beamer (R – Oakley), interview by author, Oakley, KS, October 6, 2007.



Map 14: Northwest Kansas

This sense of decline, and a certain resignation to it, moved toward a more negative level in the alarming prognosis of Representative Morrison. Again, seeing the downside of the profitable harvest, the high incomes enjoyed by farm owners in the region and the low wages still paid to laborers presaged social strife:

There's a big difference between rich and poor and there's a danger when you've got that contrast. Anarchy is not far off; we've got guns, remember. In twenty years, I wouldn't want to travel down I-70. We've already had shootings at rest stops.

People are getting desperate They're going to band together and go after rich farmers.²⁷

Such an outlaw mindset, reiterated by Morrison's talk of the "Posse Comitatus" militant group in Wallace County, suggested a more negative, and extreme, version of the independent spirit found in the southwest.²⁸ In the northwest, it was born of failure rather than success.

"Prohibition My Ass!": Southeast Kansas

Southeast Kansas was a widely recognized region that most politicians agreed encompassed the nine counties in that part of the state. Outsiders described it as different, in particular, from western Kansas because of its higher poverty levels, blue-collar economy, and more Democratic politics. To representatives from the southeast, the regional economy was indeed important. "A lot of small towns struggle to make it," lamented Representative Williams. "Southeast Kansas is a low-income, higher poverty area."²⁹ "This is a poorer part of the state," repeated Representative Otto.³⁰

²⁷ Rep. Jim Morrison (R—Colby), interview by author, Topeka, KS, February 19, 2008.

²⁸ See also James Corcoran, *Bitter Harvest* (London: Penguin, 1991).

²⁹ Rep. Jerry Williams (D—Chanute), interview by author, Chanute, KS, October 24, 2007.

Such socio-economic conditions, and the blue collar basis of much of the employment, had driven the development of unions and a “strong working class” in the region.³¹ As part of this political economy, socialism was identified with the area. “The socialist press for the country,” explained former Speaker and Baxter Springs native Tim Shallenburger, “was printed out of Girard.”³²

The principal motivation for the union movement had been the conditions faced by miners. Interviewees associated mining very particularly with this region. A detailed knowledge of the history and characteristics of the mines was relayed by a number of representatives in the southeast; the remnant landscape – sometimes toxic – of disused pits and quarries was pointed out by many.³³ Mining having now been abandoned in the southeast,

³⁰ Rep. Bill Otto (R – Le Roy), interview by author, Le Roy, KS, October 11, 2007.

³¹ Rep. Julie Menghini (D – Pittsburg), interview by author, Pittsburg, KS, October 24, 2007.

³² Rep. Tim Shallenburger, interview by author, Baxter Springs, KS, October 23, 2007. According to Rep. Bob Grant, this was also why the post office was so large in Girard: the popular “Little Blue Books,” socialist-inspired texts and affordable reprints of literature published by Emmanuel Haldeman-Julius between for much of the twentieth century, were mailed from there.

³³ The mining history of the region has been studied by scholars: see, for example, Arrell M. Gibson, *Wilderness Bonanza: The Tri-state District of Missouri, Kansas and Oklahoma* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1972); William E. Powell, “Coal and Pioneer Settlement of Southeasternmost Kansas,” *Ecumene* 9 (April, 1977): 6-16.

the present-day economy was “largely contingent on Missouri.”³⁴ For counties in the far southeast, the economy was driven by what went on in Joplin. In a situation with echoes of that in southwest Kansas, much of the southeast fell in the Joplin television market, so “down here people know more about what’s going on in Jeff[erson] City than Topeka.”³⁵ This media connection reflected a physical regionalization held by many that associated southeast Kansas with the wider Ozark region in Missouri and Arkansas. It also points, perhaps, to the wider role media markets may play in shaping an individual’s regional conception.

Though the mines have closed, and the economy looks beyond the state boundaries as much as within, economic history still appears to play an important role in the contemporary outlook and identity of those in southeast Kansas. One legacy of the mining history is the ancestral diversity of the region. Individual communities – explored in more detail later – remain ethnically distinct, the mining area characterized by a patchwork of European settlements still acknowledged and sometimes celebrated today. A case could be made, based on ethnic and religious characteristics, for Anderson County in the north to be included in the core southeastern region (see Map 15). It

³⁴ Rep. Tim Shallenburger, interview by author, Baxter Springs, KS, October 23, 2007.

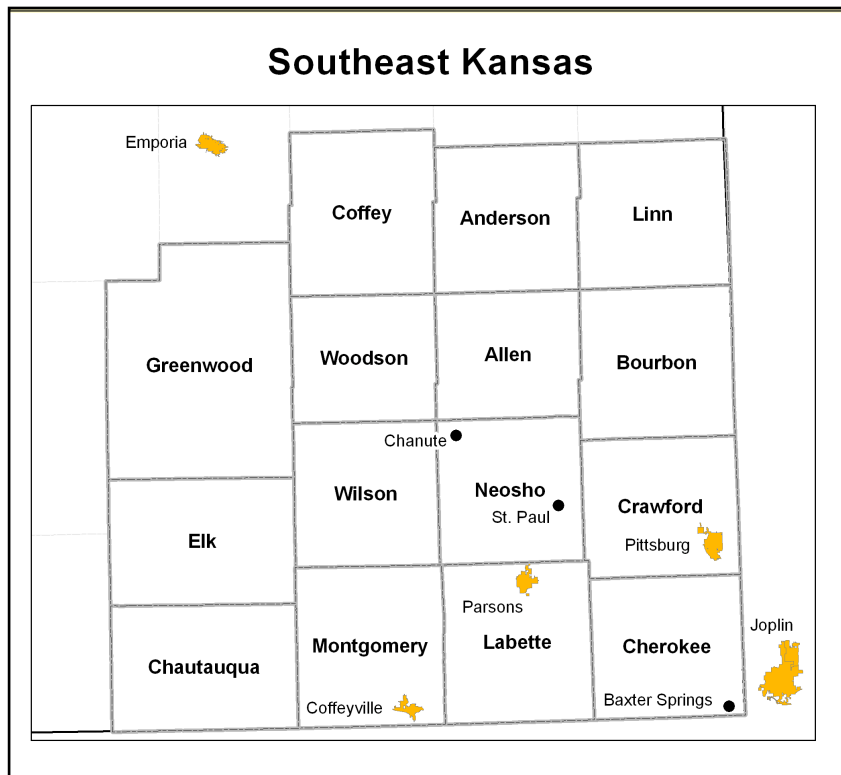
³⁵ Rep. Tim Shallenburger, interview by author, Baxter Springs, KS, October 23, 2007.

boasts a diverse European settlement history, the local representative explained as he showed me around.³⁶ This sense of diversity faded to the west, however, into Neosho and Wilson Counties, for example.³⁷ Cherokee and Crawford counties, in the southeast corner, are seen by everybody as the core of the “Little Balkans,” but the region as a whole is different than other parts of the state “because of the European mixture.”³⁸

³⁶ Rep. Bill Otto (R – Le Roy), interview by author, Le Roy, KS, October 11, 2007.

³⁷ Rep. Jerry Williams (D – Chanute), interview by author, Chanute, KS, October 24, 2007. Rep. Forrest Knox (R – Altoona), interview by author, Altoona, KS, October 12, 2007.

³⁸ Rep. Julie Menghini (D – Pittsburg), interview by author, Pittsburg, KS, October 24, 2007. For more on this, see the work of William Powell, including, “The Little Balkans of Kansas: A Geographical View,” *The Little Balkans Review* 3, no. 2 (1982): 78-84.



Map 15: Southeast Kansas

As important as the facts of the mining and immigration it brought were the culture and attitudes they propagated. It was perhaps the perceived culture of the southeast that really set the region apart. The “Balkan” immigrant history of the region, especially the far southeast, engendered a tendency to “fight among ourselves, much like the Balkans!”³⁹ There were fifty-seven unsolved murders in the hard Italian community of Chicopee, Representative Grant reported. A boisterous lawlessness and belligerence

³⁹ Rep. Bob Grant (D – Cherokee), interview by author, Cherokee, KS, October 23, 2007.

could also be found in the bootlegging history of the region. The fight against prohibition was raised by almost all as a defining episode and culturally revealing moment in the southeast.⁴⁰ Much alcohol during the prohibition period was made in that part of Kansas, by out-of-work miners, making use of unused mineshafts. “Deep Shaft Whiskey” was a famous liquor of the 1920s, and Frontenac whiskey was apparently popular in Chicago.⁴¹

Representatives conveyed distinct pride in the subversive history of southeast Kansas; “prohibition my ass!” exclaimed Pittsburg representative Julie Menghini, reflecting the commonly held attitude.⁴² Considering the archetypal temperance to be famously found in many other parts of Kansas, this deviance certainly sets the region apart. The belligerent attitude it reflected is echoed today in other matters. Frequently I found a sense of indignation, pugnacity, stubbornness, mixed with a sense of inferiority, in the words and stories conveyed to me by southeasters. There was a fighting spirit I did not see to the same degree anywhere else. Drawing again on present and past economic conditions, a combative attitude toward wealth and power united Republicans and Democrats. From Le Roy Republican Bill Otto talking

⁴⁰ For deeper discussions of prohibition in Kansas, see Robert S. Bader, *Prohibition in Kansas: A History* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1986), for example.

⁴¹ Rep. Bob Grant (D – Cherokee), interview by author, Cherokee, KS, October 23, 2007.

⁴² Rep. Julie Menghini (D – Pittsburg), interview by author, Pittsburg, KS, October 24, 2007.

about how he encouraged poorer flooded homeowners in south Iola to sue the “snobby” city government to Julie Menghini commenting on the “richie rich” part of Pittsburg as we drove through, there was a pervasive sense of economic combat.⁴³

We’re Not That Different: Other Rural Regions

While the southeast was vividly characterized by a fighting spirit born of its distinctive economic and immigrant history, and the southwest and northwest formed equally identifiable regions, most other parts of the state were regionally unrecognized at least by outsiders. Sometimes even their inhabitants struggled to decide upon a firm regional identity. Representatives in a broad “north-central” region, roughly from Hays in the west to McPherson in the south and Manhattan in the east, distinguished themselves from western Kansas because of their relative lack of aquifer water. Cities in this “region” were not considered fully part of western Kansas. Aside from that, except for ethnic or economic distinctions on a county-by-county level,

⁴³ Otto was angry that the city wanted to condemn the 140 homes flooded in June 2007. He saw it as an attack by the government and the wealthy in town against the poorer population south of downtown. He also had some words for the “rich bitch” section of Iola.

little was conveyed that made the area notably different from, say, counties south of Wichita, or in the northeast.

Many of the counties surrounding Wichita did appear to be drawn into the metropolitan orbit. Both El Dorado and Derby, for instance, were described as “bedroom communities.”⁴⁴ Intercity dynamics were at play in the region south of Wichita (explored in the next section), but I could find little to cohere the broad south-central area together aside from an acknowledgement of Wichita as the regional market center. The Flint Hills were noted as a distinct physical environment, and characterized by ranching and range burning, but the population density is perhaps too low to have developed an important regional identity in Kansas apart from these features. The same is true for northeastern Kansas. “I don’t know that it’s that different from other places,” remarked Atchison representative Jerry Henry.⁴⁵ The Roman Catholic church was deemed to be stronger in this area than in many other places, but again, the region elicited little firm recognition by outsiders and, apart from particular local histories, little notable regional sense from insiders. This is not to say, however, that significant spatial differences could be found across these areas of rural Kansas. Profound senses of difference

⁴⁴ Rep. Don Myers (R–Derby), interview by author, Topeka, KS, February 12, 2008; Rep. John Grange (R–El Dorado), interview by author, El Dorado, KS, November 16, 2007.

⁴⁵ Rep. Jerry Henry (D–Atchison), interview by author, Atchison, KS, November 6, 2007.

and distinction at a subregional scale could be seen, within these more anonymous areas, and within the distinct regions explored above.

Rivalry and Difference: Essences of Identity

Listening to how they described their places, I noticed representatives very often would use difference to convey their understanding. They presented what was distinct about a place, compared to other places, and frequently defined a community, city or county against somewhere else. Important to their sense of place was what – or rather where – that place was not. Moreover, as I learnt more about what makes places in Kansas, it became clear that intertown rivalry formed an important dynamic in the construction of identity. Typically historically rooted, in some cases this had contemporary economic effects. In others it was merely part of local cultural identity, often energetically worked out on the football field.

Distinction

Identity was for many places constructed out of an implied sense of difference. So, for example, a variegated impression of southeast Kansas emerged. Representative Menghini described the particular Italian

settlements of the Pittsburg area. Capaldo, north of Pittsburg, is known as “Little Italy,” still believed to be “ninety-five percent Italian.” Frontenac has a “Fiesta Italiana, when there are Italian flags on every porch” and during prohibition the popular “Dago Red” was produced in the city. “I couldn’t get elected if I didn’t have a vowel at the end of my name,” she remarked.⁴⁶ Mining camps and neighborhoods in towns were settled not only by immigrants from particular countries in Europe, but also by people from similar regions within those countries. Menghini talked about the northern Italian camps, and “streets where everyone was Piedmontese.”⁴⁷ Elsewhere in the region, for example, a little further west, Elsmore and Savonburg in Allen County were Swedish settlements, still known as such today.⁴⁸ The immigrant history of each town was well known and seemed to form an important part of local identity, as well as that of the broader conception of the region. Pittsburg celebrated this diverse immigrant history with an “Immigrant Park” public space and memorial; Menghini also pointed out the former “Europa Hotel” in downtown, another sign of the European heritage of which she, and others, seemed proud.

⁴⁶ Rep. Julie Menghini (D – Pittsburg), interview by author, Pittsburg, KS, October 24, 2007.

⁴⁷ Referring to a region in northwest Italy.

⁴⁸ Rep. Bill Otto (R – Le Roy), interview by author, Le Roy, KS, October 11, 2007.

Southwest Kansas, although sharing much culturally and economically, was likewise not a completely homogenous region. Representative Light explained the differences between Morton, Stevens and Grant counties, in the southwest corner of the state. In the early 1990s, Seaboard Food wanted to buy up some land in the area and spend \$400 million to build and develop hog feeders. “There was an uprising in Stevens County,” he said, “they didn’t want it, or the Hispanics it might bring.” The county passed local laws specifically against hog feeders. Morton County, on the other hand, welcomed, and needed, the investment, and the hog feeder was constructed. After that welcome, Seaboard elected to build their regional headquarters – bringing with it eighty new jobs – in Rolla, Morton County, rather than Hugoton in Stevens County, following their previous hostility. That was something Stevens County now regretted, but they had grown complacent with their gas money, Light speculated. Grant County, to the north, also rejected the hog feeder, saying that they were “cattlemen, we don’t want any hogs!”⁴⁹

Representative Aurand, a farmer from Republic County in the north-central part of the state, talked to me on his combine while he harvested corn. During this day-long experience – literally in the field – he explained at some

⁴⁹ Rep. Bill Light (R – Rolla), interview by author, Rolla, KS, November 3, 2007.

length the reality of rural life. I got a sense of how rural Kansas embodied a particular way of life, one not found in larger cities, as Aurand described it. “There is a genuine community and generosity here,” he commented. “That’s probably the most impressive thing.”⁵⁰ His stories and perspectives could sometimes be seen as worryingly provincial to the metropolitan ear – unashamedly so, he emphasized: “If it’s got a Walmart, it’s a city!” And small-town life could be claustrophobic and introverted: “It’s cliquy, it’s like they haven’t left high school.” But the generous, neighborly spirit was something positive that Aurand and many others emphasized as a fundamental part of the rural culture, and something, I confirmed, was still in practice: “We had a birthday party for Megan, just down the road. We all came in from the fields early. She has Downs Syndrome, and it was a way for her family to say ‘thank you’ for all the help everyone had given. There were over two hundred people there.”⁵¹

Counterdistinction

⁵⁰ Rep. Clay Aurand (R – Courtland), interview by author, Courtland, KS, October 29, 2007.

⁵¹ Rep. Clay Aurand (R – Courtland), interview by author, Courtland, KS, October 29, 2007.

Rural life was seen as a distinct culture, implicitly – as above – different from that in the cities. Representatives also made a more explicit counterdistinction with urban life. Indeed, rural identity was frequently channeled in this oppositional way, suggesting a degree of defensiveness and a sense, perhaps, that this way of life was challenged. Broadly, rural culture was counterdistinguished from urban life in both positive and negative terms. Aurand lamented the population decline in his area, commenting that you have to “work hard” to encourage families to move there. “We can’t get to the Lied Center and watch ‘Cats’ or something!”⁵² But more often rural life was held up as superior to that of the larger cities.

“I never take the keys out of my car,” commented Representative Grange as he was describing life in El Dorado. “Those urban representatives won’t do that. I can leave my tool boxes on my truck and leave them open and go to work. You couldn’t do that in Wichita.” “People know each other here,” he concluded, adding, “but it’s changing.”⁵³ “We’re not sure we want too much more of the Johnson County suburbanization here,” explained Louisburg representative Jene Vickrey, describing a similar strength of Miami

⁵² Rep. Clay Aurand (R–Courtland), interview by author, Courtland, KS, October 29, 2007.

⁵³ Rep. John Grange (R–El Dorado), interview by author, El Dorado, KS, November 16, 2007.

County.⁵⁴ Representative Morrison saw rural values as a counterbalance to the depravity of cities. People who were unsuccessful in the country, “go to the dark side, go to the city.” He worried that cities could not cope if they were cut off: “If isolated, we could survive, but Topeka would be a war zone, they’re dependent people, they look for hand-outs.” Morrison went on to explain that rural culture had an important role. “In urban areas, the value system is breaking down. These rural values I believe are the balance to the metro areas, it has stopped them getting carried away. If we lose rural values, we’re done for.”

There was a fair unanimity among rural legislators to the notion that country people were honest, resourceful and harder working. Cutting across parties and regions, this idea – supported by numerous eagerly told stories of such virtues – drew together the disparate strands of the state’s rural cultures. By the end of my interviews I began to wonder if there were some rural talking points shared by the legislators, so coherent was the expression. Actually, it taps into a wider discourse of understanding that elevates rural above urban culture. The coherence and unity of the message must contribute to its strength in the state conception of identity, exchanged in the Statehouse and elsewhere. There is certainly no common urban culture that exists

⁵⁴ Rep. Jene Vickrey (R–Louisburg), interview by author, Stilwell, KS, October 11, 2007.

perceptually that metropolitan legislators could draw upon. It also, taken at face value, suggests that urban and rural ways of life *are* manifestly different; that if you go around Kansas you can find most places in the countryside with a generous, hardworking, honest population. The way of life, the type of people, was very much integral to the identity of the place. The vigorous, often defensive, assertion of rural culture bespeaks, perhaps, to the decline of the rural population and economy. You could detect in the othering of urban areas an economic envy, “at least we’ve still got good people,” was the implicit cry.⁵⁵ This will be explored more later, but Morrison was perhaps touching on something important with the important cultural role of the country to the construction of a broader Kansan identity.

Religion played a role in the perception of rural-urban difference. Referring to a town parade where people depicted scenes from the Bible, Representative Otto remarked, “we have the ‘Biblista Parade’ in Humboldt, but I don’t know for how long. People from the city or the ACLU probably want to stop it.”⁵⁶ “I go to Lawrence and people think I have horns in my head when I go with six kids,” explained Eudora representative Anthony

⁵⁵ And the rural economy was misunderstood, it was believed, by urban people. “\$10 an hour jobs are what we need here,” was a sentiment heard more than once, for example. Interviewees also had an uncertain opinion about “outsider” city money coming into rural areas: across Kansas, it seems, richer city folk were buying up land for hunting.

⁵⁶ Rep. Bill Otto (R – Le Roy), interview by author, Le Roy, KS, October 11, 2007.

Brown. "In Eudora there are lots like us, we're a Catholic town."⁵⁷ Religion also underlies differences between rural places. There was no Roman Catholic church in De Soto, according to Brown, "because there's a religious difference between them and Eudora. There are rumors; they can't start a church there, there's a dark past." He could not be pressed further on this question.

Representatives often presented their districts in terms of the differences between places. Representative Dahl spoke of contrasting reactions to flooding. When it was flooded eight years ago, "Cottonwood Falls, the people there, helped themselves; they didn't wait for the government. Now Augusta, richer, in the south, they were flooded at the same time, and they demanded that they should get help."⁵⁸ Note here the hint of an economic explanation for the difference. Again, a resort to cultural factors to counter-balance, perhaps, the economic progress found in more urbanized areas. Representative Morrison, a Colby native, presented a pride in his hometown, for "pulling people off the interstate better than anyone else." Different towns and counties in his long district possessed different characteristics, he felt, some being more successful in the present economy.

⁵⁷ Rep. Anthony Brown (R – Eudora), interview by author, Topeka, KS, February 7, 2007.

⁵⁸ Rep. Don Dahl (R – Hillsboro), interview by author, Topeka, KS, March 7, 2006.

Colby is successful in all they're doing, but Goodland is resigned They say "we've tried that" and won't go any further. Sheridan County's attitude is "to hell with it," they've given up, there's nothing innovative there. So Hill City is taking people away from there with their healthcare things Oakley, though, is one or two widows away from being a ghost town!⁵⁹

The sense of difference here was one of the more vividly expressed of my interviews, but points to a broader tendency to see difference as a key part of a sense of place and the broader construction of place and regional meaning; this is a dynamic, I think, that warrants further study in academic geography.

Rivalry

Nonmetropolitan Kansas is a battlefield of competing towns. A striking message from my interviews was that town rivalry mattered to identity, and in some cases to local economies. Rivalry, coupled with a sense of allegiance or difference, sometimes created subregional economic, political, and cultural units made up of the dynamics of two, three, or more towns.

⁵⁹ Rep. Jim Morrison (R–Colby), interview by author, Topeka, KS, February 19, 2008.

These intertown rivalries, usually historically rooted, could be found across the state, and just a few examples will be given here.

In Wilson County in southeast Kansas, Fredonia sees itself as more white collar than Neodesha, prompting a sense of difference between the cities.⁶⁰ Winfield was seen by itself and by people in Wellington and Arkansas City as the more professional, more intellectual, and perhaps a little stuck-up of a trio of cities that shared a competitive relationship. Arkansas City is seen by both Wellington and Winfield as an inferior, economically-decrepit place.⁶¹ Wellington residents, in fact, hold an outright hostility toward Arkansas City. “We’re bitter rivals,” remarked Wellington representative Vince Wetta. “In football, you remember your first game, last game and the Ark City game!” High school football was the battlefield where many of the rivalries between small towns across Kansas were fostered and worked out. Town identities were built around this sporting opposition.

Some rivalries spilled into the economic realm. Garden City, Liberal and Dodge City were economic competitors. “There has always been a rivalry,” Ward Loyd explained, “an underlying, unspoken anxiety that one

⁶⁰ Rep. Forrest Knox (R – Altoona), interview by author, Altoona, KS, October 12, 2007.

⁶¹ Rep. Ed Trimmer (D – Winfield), interview by author, Winfield, KS, October 17, 2007; Rep. Vince Wetta (D – Wellington), interview by author, Wellington, KS, October 17, 2007. Part of the distinct attitude of Winfield, Trimmer felt, came from its more “European” city government: the city owned all the utilities in town, a legacy, he said, of Swedish influence.

would become more prominent than the others. We compete over businesses. But it's friendly."⁶² Rivalry was less friendly between some towns in southeastern Kansas. Those in Neosho and Labette counties seemed especially prone to fighting. "My gosh there's always been a fight between Parsons and Altamont. Some people in Altamont won't come to Parsons to shop," commented Representative Proehl.⁶³ Similarly in Neosho County, hostility abounded. Erie and Chanute were against each other because Erie stole the county seat in the 1870s. "Late at night, in horse and buggies, they stole the seal from Chanute and took the county seat. There's a divide, it comes up on certain issues, it sure does," explained Representative Williams. In the same county, Thayer resents Chanute, and there is "an invisible divide" that sends residents of that city to Parsons: "they won't spend a nickel in Chanute!" Williams said.⁶⁴ The same divisions had a part to play in school redistricting in recent years.

You can't Kill a Mascot: Schools and School Districts

⁶² Ward Loyd, interview by author, Garden City, KS, November 3, 2007.

⁶³ Rep. Richard Proehl (R—Parsons), interview by author, Parsons, KS, October 24, 2007.

⁶⁴ Rep. Jerry Williams (D—Chanute), interview by author, Chanute, KS, October 24, 2007.

Rivalry is often enacted and sustained through high school sports. “Everyone here is proud of the Crusaders,” remarked Representative Wetta of Wellington, for example. “We all follow the games.”⁶⁵ Most representatives asserted the importance of schools and school sports to rural social life, and all were resistant to consolidation because of that. Unlike metropolitan areas, where school quality was of prime importance, in rural areas it was principally their existence that was key.⁶⁶ Consolidation was seen as a death knell for towns. “Toronto’s school shut down in the 1960s,” said Representative Knox, “and it’s been really hard for them.”⁶⁷ Schools were seen not only as social centers, but also important for jobs, the economy, and population retention. “Schools are the community epicenter,” suggested Representative Aurand. They also brought jobs: “Every farmer’s wife has an elementary degree, they all work in the schools,” a perspective shared by

⁶⁵ Rep. Vince Wetta (D—Wellington), interview by author, Wellington, KS, October 17, 2007. He was keen to note that Wellington High School had a “Duke and Duchess” rather than a “King and Queen,” due to the British aristocrat of the same name.

⁶⁶ Rural schools, were, however still viewed as superior, with smaller class sizes and a higher graduation rate. “If someone drops out,” explained Representative Beamer, “then everyone in town gets to hear about it.” The quality of schools in rural communities was linked to the broader qualities of those places. [Rep. Virginia Beamer (R—Oakley), interview by author, October 6, 2007.]

⁶⁷ Rep. Forrest Knox (R—Altoona), interview by author, Altoona, KS, October 12, 2007.

many representatives.⁶⁸ Representative Feuerborn spoke of the recruiting power of schools, and the image they can project: “this CEO was going to move to Garnett, but his wife drove past the schools and said she didn’t want to send the kids there. So they moved instead to Paola.”⁶⁹ The power of schools was perhaps best encapsulated by Representative Aurand when he talked of a “regressing frontier,” as new teachers become reluctant to move west, preferring to move to districts nearer the urban east. This association of schools with civilization seems a fundamental understanding.

Resistance to school consolidation was universal. “You can’t kill a mascot,” argued Salina representative Deena Horst, on the demands to retain the two schools in that city.⁷⁰ In the light of the previous discussion, the importance of distinction and often outright rivalry to the identity of places suggests a deeper reason for the resistance to mascot slaying. Consolidation removes not only a social and economic center from small, demographically precarious, towns, it also takes away a critical part of the identity of that place – the sense of distinction and rivalry channeled through high school

⁶⁸ Rep. Clay Aurand (R – Courtland), interview by author, Courtland, KS, October 29, 2007.

⁶⁹ Rep. Bill Feuerborn (D – Garnett), interview by author, Garnett, KS, November 21, 2007.

⁷⁰ Rep. Deena Horst (R – Salina), interview by author, Topeka, KS, February 12, 2007. The two mascots are the Mustang in the north, and the Cougar in the south.

competition, on the sports fields and elsewhere. Consolidation undermines rural identities.

On the Jet-Way: Transportation and Rural Development

Common to many of my interviews with rural representatives was a sense of the importance of transportation infrastructure to the success – and survival – of their towns. Railroads were frequently cited as important bases for the development of places. Representative Henry could not conceive of Atchison without the railroad and the company that bears the town’s name.⁷¹ Parsons was also heavily influenced by the railroad, so much so that it remains part of the town’s identity to the present day with its annual “Katy Days” celebrations.⁷² The railroad heritage was essential to the town’s image there, as well as to Wellington, where the railroad provided many jobs for the

⁷¹ Rep. Jerry Henry (D – Atchison), interview by author, Atchison, KS, November 6, 2007.

⁷² Rep. Richard Proehl (R – Parsons), interview by author, Parsons, KS, October 24, 2007.

city.⁷³ On the other side, Representative Knox showed me towns in obvious decline, “hurt when the railroad doesn’t stop anymore.”⁷⁴

In the twentieth century, interstate highways brought a similar economic stimulus to towns and cities. “The interstate has kept the northwest alive,” remarked Ward Loyd, a perspective echoed by local representative Jim Morrison.⁷⁵ I-70, according to Morrison, “was the only thing that has kept Sherman and Thomas counties afloat. Sheridan and Graham [counties] are dying because the interstate turns south. Colby is the ideal distance from Denver, it’s an ideal watering-hole. These counties are on the jet-way!”⁷⁶ This frank acknowledgement of the power of the interstate was supported by Emporia representative Don Hill. The routes of the Kansas Turnpike and Interstate 35 have been “huge for Emporia,” he explained.

There was an alternative route for [I-]35 to the east that went down to Parsons. Back then, both places were the same size; now, with it built via Emporia, we’re two and a half times as big. The meatpacking and the manufacturing, and recently

⁷³ Rep. Vince Wetta (D – Wellington), interview by author, Wellington, KS, October 17, 2007.

⁷⁴ Rep. Forrest Knox (R – Altoona), interview by author, Altoona, KS, October 12, 2007.

⁷⁵ Ward Loyd, interview by author, Garden City, KS, November 3, 2007.

⁷⁶ Rep. Jim Morrison (R – Colby), interview by author, Topeka, KS, February 19, 2008.

Hill's Pet Food all came here because of the transport connections.⁷⁷

In supporting the economy of these places, interstate highways also sustain jobs, schools and, by effect, identity. Many other representatives noted the positive effects of such roads and hoped for faster highways in their areas. I was surprised how many people mentioned either the construction or absence of a "four-lane" in their interviews, and how prominently they expressed the issue in their discussion. The improvement of U.S. Highway 69 south to Pittsburg was long overdue for Representative Menghini. "It's great. Huge. We want it done yesterday. Do you know our university [Pittsburg State University] is the only Regent's university with no access to a four-lane?"⁷⁸ The sense was that the state had ignored the southeast by not building it until now. The lack of fast highway shamed the town. "Without the four-lane, a lot of opportunity slipped by this area," lamented Representative Grant.⁷⁹

The expansion of roads and extensions of "four-lanes" was deemed to be paramount to future success, and part of the ongoing struggle between

⁷⁷ Rep. Don Hill (R—Emporia), interview by author, Emporia, KS, October 31, 2007.

⁷⁸ Rep. Julie Menghini (D—Pittsburg), interview by author, Pittsburg, KS, October 24, 2007.

⁷⁹ Rep. Bob Grant (D—Cherokee), interview by author, Cherokee, KS, October 23, 2007.

places in rural Kansas to survive. “A four lane would be huge to southwest Kansas,” said Ward Loyd. “I’m always pounding the drum.” “It would be great to turn [Kansas Highway] 61 into a four-lane,” suggested Hutchinson representative Jan Pauls. “That would be big for Hutchinson. Salina has really benefitted from the interstate: it’s bigger than us now.”⁸⁰ “[U.S.] Highway 400 is really needed for the economy down here,” commented Representative Knox about the benefits to his southeast Kansas district brought by the road.⁸¹ In Atchison, the new bridge across the Missouri “will be a shot in the arm” for the town.⁸²

In terms of literally “making” places, highways and railroads were shown to be of central importance and raised by representatives accordingly. Like schools, they can provide economic opportunity and a means to encourage new residents. Better roads were another element of the struggle between places and the competition for resources in the apparently marginal economy across much of rural Kansas. They were also part, then, of the development and sustenance of cultural identities and the competitiveness found in that dimension to the construction of place.

⁸⁰ Rep. Jan Pauls (D – Hutchinson), interview by author, Hutchinson, KS, October 31, 2007.

⁸¹ Rep. Forrest Knox (R – Altoona), interview by author, Altoona, KS, October 12, 2007.

⁸² Rep. Jerry Henry (D – Atchison), interview by author, Atchison, KS, November 6, 2007.

Not Urban, Not Rural: Middle-Sized Cities

As might be expected, “middle-sized” cities, places with populations above around 20,000 people, were distinct entities in nonmetropolitan Kansas.⁸³ Oppositional senses of place and perception of difference in the construction of place identity are key parts of understanding in these cities. Junction City and Manhattan, for example, are defined to some extent by their different roles and rivalry, according to their representatives. Manhattan is more elitist than Junction City, its representative worried. “We think our school district is better, we’re more of a college town, and we’ve always been the officers’ choice,” he summarized.⁸⁴ With the proximity of Fort Riley, the Army “defined” Junction City, but more because of enlisted troops than officers. Representative Craft spoke at length about the historical benefits and problems the army brought to the town, indicating how it was different from Manhattan, and the way the army’s relationship with the town has changed.

⁸³ By this measure, using figures from the 2000 U. S. Census, these cities would be, by increasing population: Junction City, Pittsburg, Liberal, Hays, Dodge City, Emporia, Garden City, Leavenworth, Hutchinson, Manhattan, and Salina; the last with a population of around 45,000 in 2000. Places with a population above this are found in the metropolitan areas of the state.

⁸⁴ Rep. Tom Hawk (D – Manhattan), interview by author, Topeka, KS, February 8, 2008. He also said that he went down and had a look at the Junction City school district and believed it as good as his.

We used to be more suspicious of the troops. When I grew up there were a lot of single soldiers on the streets. High school girls dated them, and parents were concerned. East Ninth Street used to be a world all of its own, with bars and things and loads of army people. It was wild on pay days. Now there are more married soldiers, and there's a quieter, more family-based life.⁸⁵

A sense of difference in the perception of places is particularly strong in terms of the internal geography of cities. A prevailing feature, when I asked interviewees to describe their cities, was division within. Such clefs formed an important dynamic in their understanding of the cities. They all spoke about differences between wealthier and poorer parts. Salina was divided, for example, between east and west. The richer part of town in the east was on the higher ground, above the area at risk from flooding. "We still say 'up on the hill' for people in that part," reported Representative Horst.⁸⁶ That part of town remains politically more moderate, and tends to "look east" more than other parts of Salina. In Hutchinson, Representative Paul's understanding of the town was organized a sense of the "wrong side of the tracks," again, an area nearer downtown that was prone to flooding, and the

⁸⁵ Rep. Barbara Craft (R—Junction City), interview by author, Junction City, KS, October 29, 2007.

⁸⁶ Rep. Deena Horst (R—Salina), interview by author, Topeka, KS, February 12, 2008.

wealthy area, Hyde Park, north of Seventeenth Street. The divide in neighborhoods reflects the socio-economics of the town, she felt. “We’ve got a robust upper class, a large lower class, and not much of a middle,” the town’s geography reflecting this.⁸⁷ Pittsburg, in southeast Kansas, was also characterized by a divide between more wealthy and poorer parts, to the west and the east respectively. Development and governance in the town, as well as school reputations, followed this divide and its dynamics, according to Representative Menghini.⁸⁸

A broader conceptual divide also exists in midsized cities.

Representatives were uncertain about whether their cities were urban or rural. While agriculture was still important to the economy of many of these places, there was also a sense that they were somehow distinct from the rural economy. Culturally, these places looked both ways. Manhattan representative Tom Hawk struggled with the question. Presenting east and west Kansas as synonymous with urban and rural Kansas, he remarked that Manhattan was a “split city. We’re both east and west Kansas; if we’re east, we’re the most connected to the west. We’re muddled. We’re a college town,

⁸⁷ Rep. Jan Pauls (D–Hutchinson), interview by author, Hutchinson, KS, October 31, 2007. Part of the wealth had a local history. Many had invested in Dillons, the grocery store founded by a family in the city, and when it was sold to Kroger, it “created a lot of instant millionaires in town.” The company had left its imprint on the city in a number of ways.

⁸⁸ Rep. Julie Menghini (D–Pittsburg), interview by author, Pittsburg, KS, October 24, 2007.

but we're not flaky." He repeatedly used the word "schizophrenic" to describe the identity of the place, concluding: "We're sophisticated country and western!"⁸⁹ Emporia representative Don Hill reiterated this confusion. "Middle-ness" was a defining feature of the city, he felt, reflected in its location, political outlook, and the combination of rural and urban influences. "We're in the middle," he explained, "we're not really rural, but we have a strong rural influence. We're not urban, but we have the amenities and challenges of urban areas."⁹⁰ This ambiguous identity was seen in the Statehouse debates, with representatives from these places following a typically centrist path.

Part of the reason for uncertain identity is that the perception of economies and demographics of these places is quite distinct from that found in many more rural areas. Middle-sized cities were presented, for the most part, as places of growth, economic progress and vitality. In city after city I received the distinct impression that the spirit was proud and the outlook optimistic. The economic dynamism of the city was a key element of its identity and the understanding of those living there. In a defining moment for the city, Salina did not "lay down and die" when a military base closed

⁸⁹ Rep. Tom Hawk (D – Manhattan), interview by author, Topeka, KS, February 8, 2008.

⁹⁰ Rep. Don Hill (R – Emporia), interview by author, Emporia, KS, October 31, 2007.

south of town. No, they invested and rehabilitated the buildings, brought in Kansas State University and it has been a great success, the representative reported.⁹¹ The growth of Hays had been remarkable, and contributed to the sense of pride and distinction in the city, according to Representative Phelps. “We got a wake-up call in the mid-1980s, with companies leaving, and the drought,” he explained. “So we saw the need to diversify, we set up an economic development coalition, recruited companies, like Exide Batteries, the computer call center, and Fort Hays [State University] expanded.” “It’s been amazing,” he concluded.⁹² Junction City, especially following the expansion of Fort Riley in recent years, was witnessing perhaps the most significant growth today in the state. “It’s very different from lots of other parts of Kansas,” said Representative Craft, “I almost feel guilty sometimes!”⁹³

The growth and economic development of Garden City had also been profound, and it has likewise affected the identities and attitudes found there. The city was seen as more progressive than either Dodge City or Liberal. While Dodge City had an older economy and more entrenched population

⁹¹ Rep. Deena Horst (R—Salina), interview by author, Topeka, KS, February 12, 2008.

⁹² Rep. Eber Phelps (D—Hays), interview by author, Hays, KS, October 7, 2007.

⁹³ Rep. Barbara Craft (R—Junction City), interview by author, Junction City, KS, October 29, 2007.

based on its history as a railroad hub for the cattle trade, Garden City had to be innovative in the 1960s and 1970s to support its economy. The city embraced meatpacking, Ward Loyd explained, and dealt earlier and better with the changing population because of the booming local economy.⁹⁴

The ethnic change Loyd refers to was another issue mid-sized cities were dealing with that distinguished them not only from more rural areas, but also many parts of metropolitan Kansas, where there had been a longer history of ethnic and racial diversity. “We’re just a Midwestern city,” said Loyd, explaining some of the “growing pains” associated with the diverse population growth. Other mid-sized cities had more struggles than Garden City. “We’ve always been somewhat of a mixed city with the railroad,” explained Salina representative Deena Horst. “But we’ve had some bigger problems recently with wannabe gangs, Hispanics coming in from Los Angeles, fighting with the black community.” As a teacher, she had insight into the problems in the schools with languages and the integration of larger numbers of minority students.⁹⁵

Conflict between ethnic groups has been a problem in Emporia also. “We’re now a very diverse city,” Representative Hill commented. “We have Somali refugees, there’s been conflict and worries about them, we’ve had to

⁹⁴ Ward Loyd, interview by author, Garden City, KS, November 3, 2007.

⁹⁵ Rep. Deena Horst (R–Salina), interview by author, Topeka, KS, February 12, 2008.

stamp down on rumors. And there's tension between old and new Hispanics." He was philosophical about these problems. There had been some xenophobia from the Anglo community, "but a fear of difference is somehow innate." He was pleased to see the city trying to integrate all the new communities, however, and commented that the ethnic change had really affected schools the most. "That's where the new culture grows," he insightfully remarked.⁹⁶ It was in schools that again the changes in cities were being felt the most. Many representatives spoke about the new diversity of their schools, and commenting that it was changing the outlook of younger generations. Once again, schools were critical to the development of local identities, and they appeared to have a key role in shaping the response to change in these mid-sized cities.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored nonmetropolitan Kansas as it was presented to me by its representatives. A variegated and regionalized picture emerged, belying the unitary shorthand deployed by many in their references to the Kansas countryside. Especially important to the development of identity in

⁹⁶ Rep. Don Hill (R—Emporia), interview by author, Emporia, KS, October 31, 2007.

rural Kansas was a sense of difference. Places were so often defined by their distinction from other places or actual rivalry. Othering is a process not limited to the postcolonial world for it is a central dynamic to place-making in rural middle America. Important also to the understanding of places are schools and transportation, features that should be investigated in more depth as we try to build a balanced and full picture of the totality of rural culture today. Rural culture was presented as something essential, partly, it seemed, to counteract the economic decline brought about, many argued, by the absence of schools and good roads.

Chapter 11

Spatial Dynamics in Metropolitan Kansas

This chapter focuses on the construction of place in the Kansas City and Wichita metropolitan areas.¹ After interviews with representatives from these two largest urban areas in Kansas, I developed a good sense of the important and diverse subcommunities that constitute these places, and, as in rural areas, an insight into the perceptual and material dynamics that lie behind the place-making process. My exploration will begin in Wyandotte County and then move south (as it seems so many residents did) to Johnson County. I will then focus on Wichita, before drawing some broader conclusions from the overall analysis. Once again, the conceptual and material map produced here is drawn only from the insights and presentation of the representatives I interviewed. As with the exploration of rural Kansas, this is an opportunity to build a grounded, holistic geography of places

¹ The Kansas City metropolitan area includes both Wyandotte and Johnson counties in this analysis. According to the 2000 U. S. Census, Wichita was the largest city in Kansas, with around 350,000 people; Overland Park, in Johnson County, was next with just under 150,000; Kansas City, Kansas, followed with a similar population. This chapter, in the interests of concision, will not discuss Lawrence and Topeka; interviews from those two cities did, however, reveal similar processes as presented here.

today, focusing on the things that inhabitants themselves present as important to their understanding of place.²

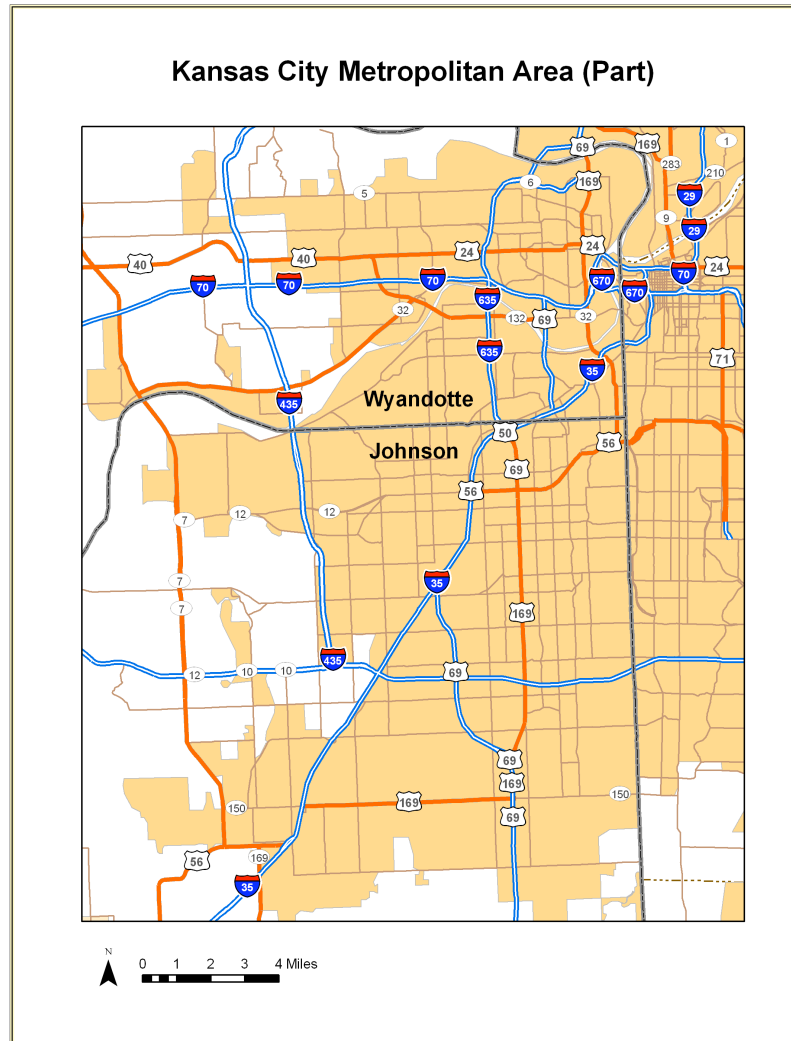
The Spirit of the “Dotte”: Kansas City

An overarching message I took away from most of my interviews with Kansas City legislators was that Kansas City is a state of mind as much as a physical place (see Maps 16 and 17). “Once a Dotte, always a Dotte,” argued Representative Tom Burroughs, referring to the moniker proudly used, he said, by long-time Wyandotte County residents.³ Being a “Dotte” means “being a fighter,” Burroughs explained, “having pride in our community, no matter what others say,” and “embracing our blue-collar roots.” This Dotte sentiment is obviously a defensive one. “We were born with a plastic spoon in our mouths,” remarked Representative Stan Frownfelter. “But we’re as

² For a full – and fully contextualized – historical geography of urban Kansas, see James R. Shortridge, *Cities on the Plains: The Evolution of Urban Kansas* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2004).

³ Rep. Tom Burroughs (D – Kansas City), interview by author, Kansas City, KS, November 12, 2007.

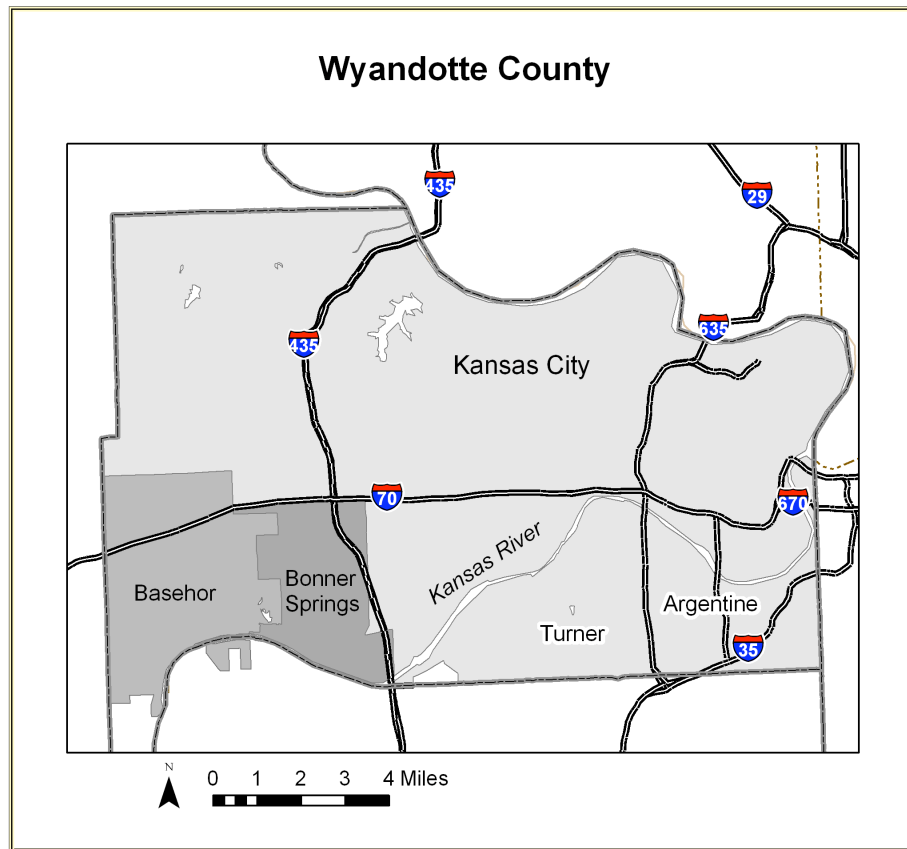
good as anyone else.”⁴ “We’re the Dotte, we’re not the yuppy crowd, like Johnson County,” suggested Representative Margaret Long.⁵



Map 16: Central part of the Kansas side of Kansas City Metropolitan Area.

⁴ Rep. Stan Frownfelter (D–Kansas City), interview by author, Kansas City, KS, December 3, 2007.

⁵ Rep. Margaret Long (D–Kansas City), interview by author, Kansas City, KS, October 25, 2007.



Map 17: Wyandotte County

Local identity here stems at least in part from the attitudes of outsiders: “When I was at Emporia [State University] people thought that I was from the ‘hood. They wondered where my black leather jacket was.”⁶ It also has emerged from actual experience: “It’s difficult to duplicate. It has a historical basis, communities have gone through trials and tribulations,

⁶ Rep. Stan Frownfelter (D–Kansas City), interview by author, Kansas City, KS, December 3, 2007.

through disaster and despair.”⁷ These travails – economic pressure, floods, population decline – tested Wyandotte County, Burroughs, and others, explained. “We have a stronger and more important attachment to our place than in Johnson County because of the history, the sense of heritage.”⁸ Moreover, the sense of place among those living in Kansas City now “is so strong,” in the words of former representative Bonnie Sharp, because they “choose to live here. And believe me, there were many reasons not to.”⁹ Representative Burroughs reiterated the same point: “We’ve got solidarity, we’re proud, we know what it’s like, because we chose to stay here. Even though people have looked down their noses at us, we kept our heads held high.”¹⁰ The reiteration of the notion that it was a “choice” to stay – as if the natural course of things would be to leave – reinforces this idea of a defensive, insecure sense of place.

This firmly felt Wyandotte sense of place has been co-opted by official governmental and commercial interests. “The Dotte is here!” went one ad promoting commercial and retail opportunities in Kansas City, according to

⁷ Rep. Tom Burroughs (D – Kansas City), interview by author, Kansas City, KS, November 12, 2007.

⁸ Rep. Stan Frownfelter (D – Kansas City), interview by author, Kansas City, KS, December 3, 2007. Note here, as elsewhere, the counterdistinction with Johnson County, a theme developed further later in this chapter.

⁹ Bonnie Sharp, interview by author, Kansas City, KS, December 3, 2007.

¹⁰ Rep. Tom Burroughs (D – Kansas City), interview by author, Kansas City, KS, November 12, 2007.

Representative Valdenia Winn.¹¹ Not everybody shared identification as a “Dotte,” and the meanings it implied, however. Representative Winn, an African American with a district north of the downtown, felt that it was not an identity embraced by her ethnic group. “We’ve never felt defensive about being from Wyandotte County,” she said. “It’s the Europeans who are more defensive, who call themselves the ‘Dotte.’ I had to have the term explained to me much later.”¹² In ethnically mixed Kansas City, identification as a “Dotte” is not necessarily a badge of whiteness, but beyond all the defensiveness and spirit of place suggested earlier, it definitely hints that society demands an explanation and cultural justification, perhaps, for why someone of European descent would choose to remain in the city.

Many African Americans, Winn explained, traditionally drew a sense of place and identity from Sumner High School, an historically black school near the center of the city.¹³ It was a generational thing, she suggested,

¹¹ Rep. Valdenia Winn (D—Kansas City), interview by author, Topeka, KS, January 30, 2008.

¹² Rep. Valdenia Winn (D—Kansas City), interview by author, Topeka, KS, January 30, 2008.

¹³ The school is now called Sumner Academy, has academic standards for entry, and since 1978 has been racially mixed following a desegregation order.

“parents and grandparents went there. It was at the center of the community.”¹⁴

Another school also has helped to build local sense of place: Bishop Ward High School. Here the connection is with Kansas City’s leadership: “City Hall and Ward High School have a tight-knit bond . . . it’s part of the Catholic power force,” remarked Representative Frownfelter.¹⁵ Power was seen to flow, in Kansas City, from Strawberry Hill outward. This neighborhood, historically Croatian and Catholic, dominated city polity in the eyes of my interviewees. “We’ve always had a Catholic mayor; those Croatians are powerful, they’ve maintained their presence and power to the present,” commented Representative Winn.¹⁶ This persistence was to the chagrin of both those in the south of the city (as I will explore later), and the African American community, who, Winn suggested, were subject to overt racism: “Where do all the new services, the new investment go? Out west, where people think it is white. There has been an intentional disregard for this [eastern, African American] part of town.”

¹⁴ Rep. Valdenia Winn (D – Kansas City), interview by author, Topeka, KS, January 30, 2008.

¹⁵ Rep. Stan Frownfelter (D – Kansas City), interview by author, Kansas City, KS, December 3, 2007.

¹⁶ Rep. Valdenia Winn (D – Kansas City), interview by author, Topeka, KS, January 30, 2008.

Interstate highway 635 marks a dividing line in Wyandotte County. West of this highway is where most of that “new investment” is seen to go, the east side suffering from neglect. Representative Winn saw this as reinforcing existing patterns: “635 is a major divide; you know, there are different insurance rates on the east side of it.”¹⁷ People were seen to move westward, crossing I-635 as they became wealthier. New investment on that side of the highway only entrenched the disparity. But to others, the investment was more welcome. Representative Margaret Long, whose western district includes an area of “amazing new development,” centered on a new speedway, shopping and entertainment district, and prospective new casino, welcomed the influx of money and people. “We never had any visitors,” she remarked, exhibiting the sense of “Dotte” inferiority, “but now they come from all over!”¹⁸ Most important, to this interviewee, those visitors included people from Johnson County. “Now we don’t have to spend our money south of the county line like we used to, it’s giving us a place to spend

¹⁷ Rep. Valdenia Winn (D—Kansas City), interview by author, Topeka, KS, January 30, 2008. Interstate 635 was also seen to be an important divide south of the river, especially between the Latino population in Argentine and the Anglos to the west in Turner.

¹⁸ Rep. Margaret Long (D—Kansas City), interview by author, Kansas City, KS, October 25, 2007. The new amenities at “Village West” include the Kansas Speedway, the “Legends” shopping mall, and a Schlitterbahn Waterpark, all opened or in development in the past ten years near to the intersection of I-435 and I-70.

our money in our community,” confirmed Representative Burroughs, pointing again to a sense of division between the counties.¹⁹

All Kansas City representatives saw the new developments in the west of the city as an enormous boost to the economy, intracity divisions notwithstanding. In the course of my interviews, the facts and prospects of this investment were repeatedly conveyed. Furthermore, representatives gave the impression that the development was also important to sense of place. It was an emotional development as well as an economic one. With this new sense of opportunity after not having “a grocery store built in Kansas City, Kansas in thirty years,” this was a boost to the psyche and a vindication of the faith of “those who stayed and worked through the tough times: You can see now that others are starting to see what we’ve known all along.”²⁰ People in the county could now “put our chests out,” remarked Representative Long.²¹ To Representative Winn, the development signified that “Wyandotte County

¹⁹ Rep. Tom Burroughs (D – Kansas City), interview by author, Kansas City, KS, November 12, 2007.

²⁰ Rep. Tom Burroughs (D – Kansas City), interview by author, Kansas City, KS, November 12, 2007.

²¹ Rep. Margaret Long (D – Kansas City), interview by author, Kansas City, KS, October 25, 2007.

is going places.”²² “We’ve made it, we kept the faith, and we’ve done it,” said Representative Frownfelter.²³

The new retail and entertainment developments to the west were presented to me as a profound boost to the “Dotte” spirit and mentality. There came across a clear pride in the city, and the whole issue pointed toward the importance of economic factors in the construction of place meaning in Wyandotte County. It was the struggling economy that shaped the Dotte identity, at least for whites. Contemporary perceptions of economic success have not dampened that spirit, but validate it, vindicating the tenacity of those who made the “choice” to stay.²⁴ To be a Dotte meant that one survived the hard economic times, and that one had a foundational share in the new developments of the present. Economy and identity are deeply intertwined in Kansas City.

Another important imaginative and material divide split Wyandotte County. The Kansas River was a major barrier, splitting the “north” from the “southside.” Southsiders were especially vocal of this division, and acutely conscious of their spatial position and what it meant.

²² Rep. Valdenia Winn (D—Kansas City), interview by author, Topeka, KS, January 30, 2008.

²³ Rep. Stan Frownfelter (D—Kansas City), interview by author, Kansas City, KS, December 3, 2007.

²⁴ Again, the implication being that it would have been more rational to leave.

“Even though we’re Wyandotte County,” explained Representative Burroughs pointing out the distinction, “we’re on the south side of the river.”²⁵ Some areas on the south side of the river were not incorporated into the city until the 1960s, and still appear to possess a distinct identity, and certainly a sense of difference from the north. “There’s a very strong consciousness of the river,” asserted former representative Bonnie Sharp.²⁶ South of the river remains more strongly “blue collar, with working people,” suggested Representative Frownfelter.²⁷ But the north mistook the southside as being “just industrial; we have Armourdale, we used to have Proctor and Gamble, who were there to be close to the tallow from meatpacking, and we’ve got the hump yard, but there’s a lot more down here, there are communities,” said Burroughs.²⁸ He offered the former independent town of Morris as an example of one of southside’s “hidden secrets.” It used to be more rural, Burroughs explained; when younger he would spend summers cleaning the hog sheds. As we toured the hilly backstreets of the more rural parts of the this area, I could see in the landscape his sense of distinction from

²⁵ Rep. Tom Burroughs (D – Kansas City), interview by author, Kansas City, KS, November 12, 2007.

²⁶ Bonnie Sharp, interview by author, Kansas City, KS, December 3, 2007.

²⁷ Rep. Stan Frownfelter (D – Kansas City), interview by author, Kansas City, KS, December 3, 2007.

²⁸ Rep. Tom Burroughs (D – Kansas City), interview by author, Kansas City, KS, November 12, 2007.

other parts of Kansas City. “We’ve got pockets of communities here in this terrain, people don’t know about it.”²⁹

A strong sense of difference from the city north of the river was reinforced by a perception of mistreatment by the northern city government. “We didn’t get our fair share of money,” argued Representative Frownfelter about the city-county consolidation. “We went into the city, but they haven’t lived up to their promises. We could live better without the city.”³⁰ “Where are the paved roads they promised? Where are the curbs? We’ve paid the higher taxes, but got nothing in return,” complained Representative Burroughs.³¹ Frownfelter also suggested that busing from the 1970s onwards, bringing people from the north into schools on the south, undermined and challenged the local sense of place. Against this, and the predations of the city government, those in the south had long been vigorous in their defense of their identity.

Despite the reality of having a city-county “Unified Government,” Kansas City has major divides, east and west, north and south. Even south of the river, division exists. The difference between Argentine and Turner was—

²⁹ Rep. Tom Burroughs (D—Kansas City), interview by author, Kansas City, KS, November 12, 2007.

³⁰ Rep. Stan Frownfelter (D—Kansas City), interview by author, Kansas City, KS, December 3, 2007.

³¹ Rep. Tom Burroughs (D—Kansas City), interview by author, Kansas City, KS, November 12, 2007.

and is – an important one. “There’s a huge rivalry between the two,” remarked Representative Frownfelter. “Turner versus Argentine goes back a hundred years.”³² Turner was seen by my interviewees as more “upscale” than Argentine. “Turner is richer, better,” conceded Frownfelter. Argentine is poorer, now much more Latino, and damaged, in the eyes of Bonnie Sharp, damaged by misguided urban renewal and Section Eight housing, with a consequent depletion in the sense of community. My interviewees perceived the division to be even greater today than in the past. Frownfelter commented that “Turner people used to come over to use [Argentine] stuff. Now, not a lot come over to Argentine.”³³ As Latino immigration into Argentine had increased in the last two decades, many Anglos moved to Turner, further entrenching the differences. Additionally, as the county had imposed a residency requirement on county employment, Turner, as an apparently more desirable part of the city, had benefitted from an influx of relatively well-paid workers.

Deepening the sense of distinction, and, in the eyes of my southside informants, increasing Turner’s comparative prestige, was an independent Turner school district. Unlike Argentine and other places south of the river

³² Rep. Stan Frownfelter (D – Kansas City), interview by author, Kansas City, KS, December 3, 2007.

³³ Rep. Stan Frownfelter (D – Kansas City), interview by author, Kansas City, KS, December 3, 2007.

whose schools have been incorporated into the Kansas City school district, Turner remains independent. Representative Burroughs was keen to show off the new high school buildings to me. “We paid for this with our bond issue. We’re very proud to have a separate school district,” he said. “It’s big to be separate from KCK [Kansas City, Kansas].”³⁴ The school, it was clear, contributes to the distinctiveness of Turner from Argentine, and is a symbol of the independent spirit of the southside against the north. It also illustrates the potential role schools can have in urban areas—just as important, it seems, as I wrote about previously in rural Kansas.

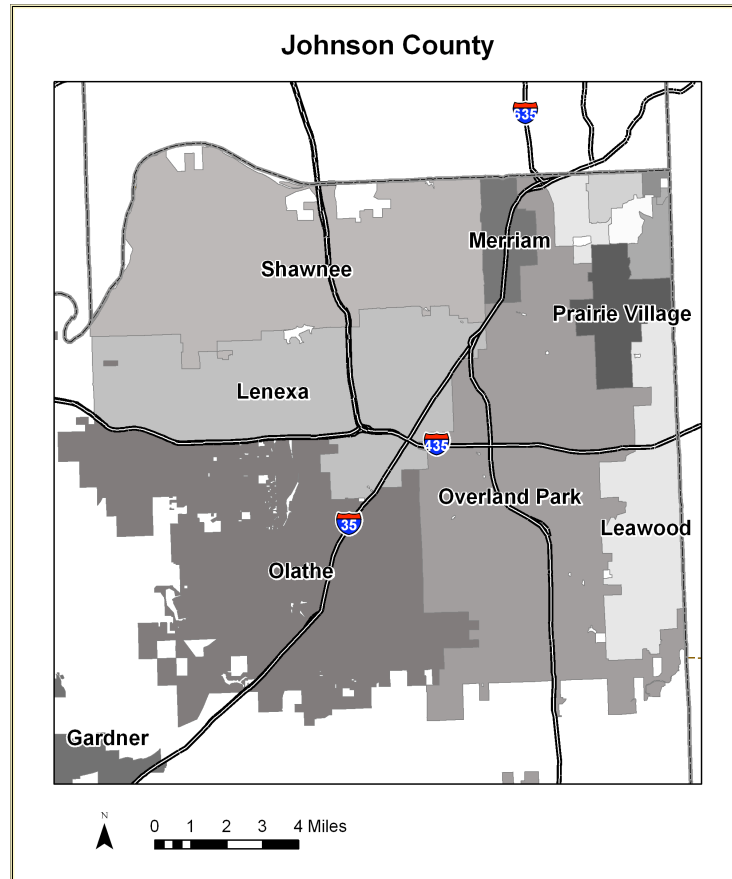
“Primo Schools”: Johnson County

Perceptually, the county line between Wyandotte and Johnson Counties was important to all the people I interviewed (see Map 18). From the perspective of Wyandotte County, it demarcated a socio-economic boundary between blue collar and white collar, “the serfs and the landowners,” in the words of Representative Frownfelter.³⁵ Frownfelter conjured a vivid image of this frontier, as “the line where we [Wyandotte]

³⁴ Rep. Tom Burroughs (D—Kansas City), interview by author, Kansas City, KS, November 12, 2007.

³⁵ Rep. Stan Frownfelter (D—Kansas City), interview by author, Kansas City, KS, December 3, 2007.

stand and throw grenades over!” Kansas City representatives felt a clear sense of difference from Johnson County, but to Representative Burroughs the sense of distinction was more important “to Johnson County people: They were trying to escape from *here*, you see.”³⁶



Map 18: Northern Johnson County

³⁶ Rep. Tom Burroughs (D—Kansas City), interview by author, Kansas City, KS, November 12, 2007. I asked every representative I interviewed to suggest which other district in the state was most alike and most dissimilar from theirs; of my 75 interviewees, 51—including rural and urban legislators—identified a district in Johnson County for the latter category.

This perception of difference was shared by Johnson County interviewees. Echoing Frownfelter's sentiments, Phill Kline, a former state representative from Shawnee, and at the time of my interview, Johnson County District Attorney, suggested that "Wyandotte is front porches, Johnson County is decks and privacy. Johnson County has its feet ten feet off the ground!"³⁷ There is a "snooty, self-important" attitude to be found in Johnson County, remarked Shawnee representative Judy Morrison. And differences could be found in the politics, she argued:

Wyandotte County is a crooked county, they've got dishonest politicians. It's a badly run machine. Johnson County is more elite, it's a well-oiled machine, it's more "under the table." They're more sophisticated here; they get caught in Wyandotte County; here, they're lawyers.³⁸

Kline articulated a similar sentiment, tying in what he saw as the basis for the growth of the county: "Johnson County was partly founded as a corporate settlement. It has a power structure that comes from the top down rather than

³⁷ Phill Kline, interview by author, Olathe, KS, December 19, 2007.

³⁸ Rep. Judy Morrison (R—Shawnee), interview by author, Shawnee, KS, November 19, 2007. Another political difference could be seen between the two counties: Wyandotte was almost completely Democratic in its state representation and Johnson, Republican, reflecting, on the surface, the socio-economic differences suggested above.

bottom up.”³⁹ The “interlocking boards” of business, community, educational, and recreational organizations he went on to describe figured prominently in a number of my interviews. Johnson County was seen to be a more white-collar county in spirit as well as in economics.

I gleaned a distinct sense of superiority from many Johnson County legislators. These were founded, sometimes, on particular differences, (“Wyandotte County is the sickest county in the state”⁴⁰) or a more general perception: “There’s a feeling that Johnson County is better than Wyandotte County.”⁴¹ Some felt this was because Johnson County is the “economic engine of Kansas.” “There are ten thousand people moving to this county every year, so there’s bound to be an anti-Johnson County sentiment, a jealousy, or a defensiveness of their ways,” suggested the same representative.⁴²

Almost all Johnson County legislators cited education as the principal strength of their county. This sentiment was firmly held and frequently asserted. “Schools: That’s what we have!” remarked Overland Park

³⁹ Phill Kline, interview by author, Olathe, KS, December 19, 2007.

⁴⁰ Rep. Cindy Neighbor (D—Shawnee), interview by author, Topeka, KS, March 5, 2008. Neighbor went on to explain the healthcare needs found in Wyandotte County.

⁴¹ Rep. Terrie Huntington (R—Fairway), interview by author, Fairway, KS, November 8, 2007.

⁴² Rep. Pat Colloton (R—Leawood), interview by author, Leawood, KS, November 5, 2007.

representative, Sue Storm.⁴³ “We have a primo school system,” confirmed Representative Pat Colloton. “It’s a gangbuster education system!”⁴⁴ Quality schools were seen to be what set Johnson County apart, but education was also deemed to be part of the basis for the significant growth in the county population in later decades of the twentieth century. “It was white flight to our schools, big time,” commented Representative Morrison.⁴⁵ And without an explicit racial rationale, simply “people move here because of the schools.”⁴⁶

Johnson County schools were set in distinction from those in Wyandotte County (a major source of population for the county, many suggested). “I doubt many would want to move from here to Wyandotte County: We’ve got the better schools.”⁴⁷ And Johnson County was also boosted by the perceived disparity between its education system and schools in Missouri. “The Kansas City, Missouri, school district is a nightmare,” remarked former Overland Park representative Jim Yonally. “Education is a

⁴³ Rep. Sue Storm (D – Overland Park), interview by author, Overland Park, KS, November 12, 2007.

⁴⁴ Rep. Pat Colloton (R – Leawood), interview by author, Leawood, KS, November 5, 2007.

⁴⁵ Rep. Judy Morrison (R – Shawnee), interview by author, Shawnee, KS, November 19, 2007.

⁴⁶ Rep. Cindy Neighbor (D – Shawnee), interview by author, Topeka, KS, March 5, 2008.

⁴⁷ Rep. Cindy Neighbor (D – Shawnee), interview by author, Topeka, KS, March 5, 2008.

number one concern here because that's what brought most people here from Missouri and other places."⁴⁸ "There's a huge difference between us and Missouri with our schools. That's a big thing," confirmed Representative Tim Owens.⁴⁹

Schools were seen to serve a purpose beyond simply providing an education. A number of Johnson County representatives saw having successful school districts as a weapon for economic competitiveness. "Education is the number one economic driver," explained Representative Terrie Huntington. "Businesses see that if we have a well-educated workforce, it will attract more business."⁵⁰ "We believe we are able to make ourselves very attractive economically by having a fine education system," asserted Leawood representative Colloton.⁵¹ Businesses were certainly enticed to locate in the county because of the schools. Colloton also felt that having good schools encouraged workers and business leaders to live there. Schools are a source of prestige that brings dollars and people to the county.

⁴⁸ Jim Yonally, interview by author, Topeka, KS, October 26, 2007.

⁴⁹ Rep. Tim Owens (R—Overland Park), interview by author, Overland Park, KS, November 13, 2007.

⁵⁰ Rep. Terrie Huntington (R—Fairway), interview by author, Fairway, KS, November 8, 2007.

⁵¹ Rep. Pat Colloton (R—Leawood), interview by author, Leawood, KS, November 5, 2007.

And the right kind of people, too: “The higher the school district, the higher the property values.”⁵²

Away from simply economic matters, schools were considered central to social life in the county. The social networks, are “all through school events,” suggested Representative Jeff Colyer.⁵³ “Kids drive so much of life here,” commented Olathe representative Lance Kinzer.⁵⁴ Schools, as will be seen in the more detailed examination of Johnson County places later, have many important community functions in this suburban county.

One can begin to see from the perception of the importance of schools to the identity and economic success of the county shown above why the Johnson County delegation was so eager to assert its vision of state school funding in the Legislative policy-making process of 2005 and 2006.

Differences were perceived, however, between the school districts in the county. This sense of the qualities of different districts formed part of a wider sense of community distinctiveness within Johnson County. One of the most striking impressions I received during my interviews with these

⁵² Rep. Terrie Huntington (R – Fairway), interview by author, Fairway, KS, November 8, 2007.

⁵³ Rep. Jeff Colyer (R – Overland Park), interview by author, Overland Park, KS, November 26, 2007.

⁵⁴ Rep. Lance Kinzer (R – Olathe), interview by author, Olathe, KS, November 20, 2007.

legislators, in fact, was a sense of the internal dynamics and differences within these stereotypically monolithic suburbs. Perceptions of spatial variation formed an important part of the process of identity formation in the county, in turn helping consolidate material and demographic patterns.⁵⁵

According to the area's representatives, the northern reaches of Johnson County constitute a mixed geography. It is a geography, moreover, that both challenges and reinforced the cultural integrity of the all-important county line. Representative Frownfelter of southern Kansas City mentioned that the southern boundary of Wyandotte County should really be 75th Street, following the northern limits of Lenexa. Interviews with local Johnson County representatives seemed to validate this idea. Phill Kline, for instance, saw Shawnee, especially the eastern part of that city, as the "stepchild of Johnson County. It's beer and pick-ups; the rest of the county is wine and SUVs."⁵⁶ "We are probably not the trendy part of the county," acknowledged Representative Cindy Neighbor of her Shawnee district, "but we're affordable."⁵⁷ Shawnee, Merriam, and parts of northern Overland Park, Mission, and Roeland Park were placed in this category of places that were

⁵⁵ For a survey of the history of Johnson County, see Mindi C. Love, *Johnson County, Kansas: A Pictorial History, 1825-2005* (Shawnee, KS: Johnson County Museum of History, 2006).

⁵⁶ Phill Kline, interview by author, Olathe, KS, December 19, 2007.

⁵⁷ Rep. Cindy Neighbor (D—Shawnee), interview by author, Topeka, KS, March 5, 2008.

distinct from other parts of Johnson County and in many regards had plenty in common with Wyandotte County.

Representative Morrison was perhaps most explicit with this perception. The area of eastern Shawnee and the Merriam core of her district is “Wyandotte County South,” in her eyes. “My God, it’s totally different from the rest of the county. I feel a lot closer to Wyandotte County people than Johnson County people. I think most of us up here, or our families, come from Wyandotte County originally.”⁵⁸ The socio-economic characteristics of these communities are “blue collar, union heavy,” she believed. The population here had left Kansas City, of course, perhaps as part of a white flight. But certainly it was also “because of the schools, and because we wanted to better ourselves,” Morrison explained. For herself, something of the spirit of Wyandotte County was still in her: “You can take the girl out of the Dotte, but you can’t take the Dotte out of the girl,” a sentiment, she believed, that was typical of many in her district.⁵⁹

In the characteristics and identity of many people in this far northern Johnson County, some continuity exists from the other side of the county line.

⁵⁸ Rep. Judy Morrison (R–Shawnee), interview by author, Shawnee, KS, November 19, 2007.

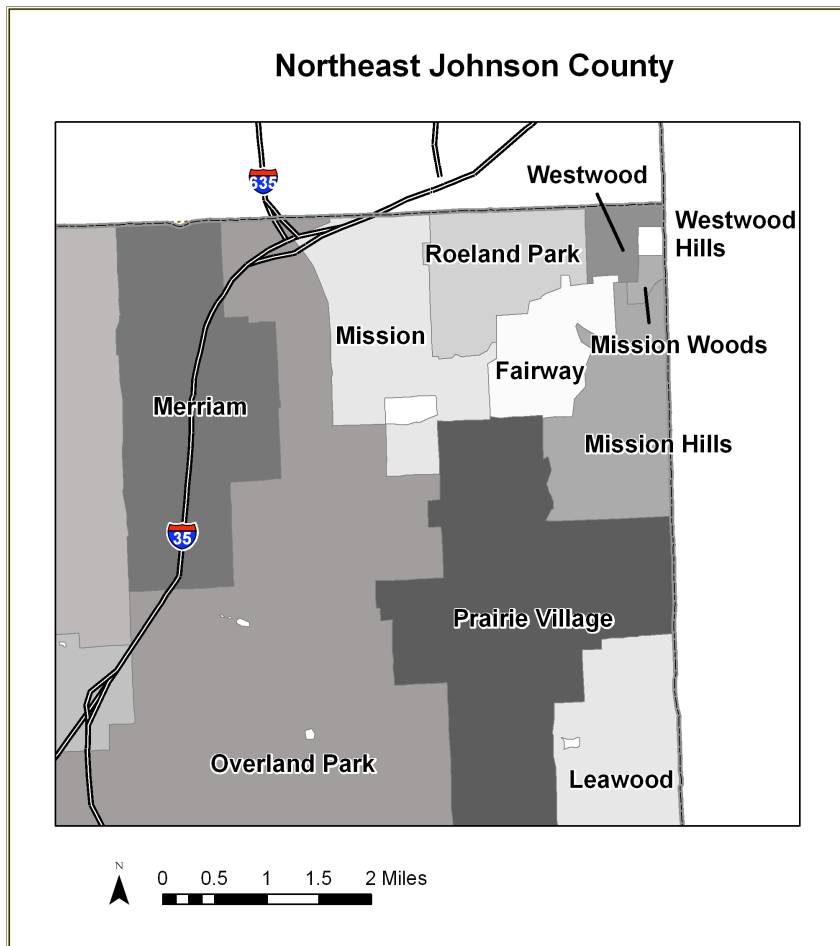
⁵⁹ Lenexa, incidentally, did mark a southern boundary: Ron Worley, a Lenexa representative, described that city as populated by “middle management. Before they get to Mission Hills or Leawood [very wealthy cities], they live here.” [Rep. Ron Worley (R–Lenexa), interview by author, Lenexa, KS, November 8, 2007.]

Moreover, they hold quite strongly a sense of distinction from the rest of Johnson County. But representatives from the area also were quick to assert that people in Shawnee, Merriam, and elsewhere had purposefully left Wyandotte County. Though they might share the spirit, they were following a different social and economic path. This northern part of the county indicates a perforated county line, but also a suburban region caught between two identities.

The northern county line had a solid integrity in its eastern segment, however. Roeland Park (populated by “newlyweds and nearly deads,” as summarized by one local representative), was seen as the last part of Shawnee-Merriam-Mission cluster of cities. But Westwood, Westwood Hills, Fairway, Prairie Village and Mission Hills are another beast (see Map 19). A representative of this northeastern corner, Terrie Huntington, took me on a tour of the communities, and the differences from the west and the north in the built environment were striking. Large, well-maintained homes (including some “tear-downs”) typified by those along the exclusive meandering Mission Hills streets, projected the affluence of the area. “I only have one apartment complex in my district,” said Representative Huntington,

almost as a badge of pride.⁶⁰ I explored the social networks of the area with her in two interviews, and developed a picture of a well-connected community of business executives, professionals, and individuals active in country clubs in the area, on charitable boards, and neighborhood groups. Residents of these cities primarily looked east, toward the amenities and businesses of Kansas City, Missouri. But roads, politics, and schools made this leafy refuge on the Kansas side of the state line home.

⁶⁰ Rep. Terrie Huntington (R—Fairway), interview by author, Fairway, KS, November 8, 2007.



Map 19: Cities in northeast Johnson County

A sense of place for residents of these northeastern cities came to a great extent from participating in organizations where a recognizable and socio-economically selective membership could be found. This networked membership was – by dint of its exclusivity – spatially distinct: It was only those with a certain affluence who could join – or be invited to join – and those with that level of affluence were concentrated in these expensive

northeastern cities. Those who you met in the course of social interactions were very likely to live in the same or a nearby neighborhood, and so a sense of the identity of the area developed and persisted. Elite identities are channeled through the landscape – very clearly here, as a short voyage north of the county line makes clear.⁶¹ But these identities and senses of place are also channeled socially, through the interaction with others in certain (pseudo-)social institutions who necessarily live in a similar place. Whole neighborhood and street events did take place, but the more networked understanding of place was striking in this case.⁶²

A surprising localism persisted to some identities, including those in the neighboring small cities of Westwood and Westwood Hills, for example. The latter fought having to share a city hall with the former, and eventually found a tiny alternative site in a former gas station within its bounds. A keen sense of city pride is felt by residents in all these small, affluent northeastern

⁶¹ For a good interpretation of the importance of the cultural landscape to elite identities see James Duncan and Nancy Duncan, *Landscapes of Privilege: The Politics of the Aesthetic in an American Suburb* (London: Routledge, 2003).

⁶² This is not to say, of course, that social networks and institutions do not have an important role to play in the sense of place of the less affluent. They certainly do. Witness, for example, the cohesive role of schools in rural areas. Elite networks are particularly spatially sorted, however, because of the scarcity – exclusivity – of the places where these individuals live.

cities, according to Representative Huntington: “People are very proud of their own city.”⁶³

Despite the divergent interests and identities between the northeast and the rest of the northern tier of Johnson County cities, intercity rivalry was a shared characteristic. Most identifiable, as presented by local representatives, was the distinctiveness of Shawnee, and the antagonism between that city and Merriam. Representatives reported that Shawnee had a particularly large Roman Catholic population, and could, perhaps in connection to this, boast the “second largest St. Patrick’s Day parade in the metro area.”⁶⁴ Belgian families were still important in the city. Early farmers in the area had immigrated from Belgium, and their ancestors still live – and are prominent – in the city today. “West Flanders Park” in Shawnee denotes this heritage. In all, Shawnee was seen to have an independent and distinctive spirit, something envied, apparently, in Merriam.

“Merriam is real jealous of Shawnee,” asserted Representative Morrison. Morrison herself had been criticized by the mayor of Merriam for living four houses into Shawnee (though still, of course, within her district). Merriam is perhaps a coarser place than Shawnee, and has suffered from

⁶³ Rep. Terrie Huntington (R – Fairway), interview by author, Fairway, KS, November 8, 2007.

⁶⁴ Rep. Cindy Neighbor (D – Shawnee), interview by author, Topeka, KS, March 5, 2008.

more political in-fighting. “There’s always a big fight,” Morrison lamented. Merriam has a bad image in Johnson County, something blamed, in part, on Interstate 35. This roadway bisects the city, and its sense of shared identity has consequently suffered.⁶⁵ Merriam is constantly comparing itself to Shawnee, and struggling to assert itself. Many of Merriam’s residents felt resentment, according to Morrison, toward its overbearing neighbor.

Turning a little further south, Overland Park lies at the center of suburban Johnson County, and, in many ways, at the core of a suburban identity. Middling, white-collar, and protective of schools, its claim to stereotype challenged only because it lacks a firm city identity. It is a “tale of two cities,” in the words of Overland Park representative Tim Owens.⁶⁶ On the one hand, in the north, the city is seen to be somewhat stagnant. A northern representative railed against “Precious Village,” (a nickname for the wealthier Prairie Village) in a sign, perhaps, of the relative discontent there.⁶⁷ Like other northern Johnson County cities, northern Overland Park is

⁶⁵ Rep. Judy Morrison (R–Shawnee), interview by author, Shawnee, KS, November 19, 2007. One benefit, perhaps, of the highway had been money from the car dealerships at the interstate off-ramps: Fully half the Merriam city budget came from car sales, according to Morrison.

⁶⁶ Rep. Tim Owens (R–Overland Park), interview by author, Overland Park, KS, November 13, 2007.

⁶⁷ Rep. Sue Storm (D–Overland Park), interview by author, Overland Park, KS, November 12, 2007.

becoming more diverse, with an increasing Latino population. This has precipitated something of another “white” flight, as Anglos left the area, concerned especially about the changing schools.⁶⁸

As people moved south, Overland Park itself expanded significantly (and controversially) south of Interstate 435. It was part of a general trend, just as people from Kansas City, with its declining economy and desegregated schools, had earlier moved to northern parts of Johnson County, they once again moved south to seek new homes, better – as they saw it – communities, and a new school district. Overland Park is now divided between the declining-enrollment Shawnee-Mission district in the north and the wealthy, expanding Blue Valley district in the south. As has always been the basis of Johnson County growth and identity, schools once again play a role in directing families’ choices.

Representative Owens explained three things that hindered the development of a distinct Overland Park identity: The split between north and south, the “tale of two cities,” roughly divided by I-435 was one important factor. Related to this, and indicating the importance of simple territorial geography to questions of identity, the shape of the city had an impact. Overland Park’s elongated shape, he said, precluded a centralized,

⁶⁸ Rep. Sue Storm (D – Overland Park), interview by author, Overland Park, KS, November 12, 2007.

coherent identity, as residents along its length could find closer commercial or cultural centers in adjacent cities. This shape exaggerated, he felt, the differences found within the city. Finally, Overland Park had historically been made up of the land that was “left over” in Johnson County, and the city had always been a “space-filler” rather than a centralized unit. Added to its large population, these issues precluded a coherent, unified city identity.

Leawood exhibits a similar north-south differentiation, with an older north concerned to protect its existing cultural landscape and a more exuberant south. This city, however, manages to have a more distinct identity, and certainly a clearer sense of direction. Leawood is a wealthy city and is anxious to protect that affluent status.⁶⁹ Commercial and retail growth are vigorously controlled. “We don’t want any more of that ticky-tacky development,” commented Representative Colloton. Aligned with this was a desire for the city to distinguish itself from its neighbors: “We certainly don’t want to be Overland Park,” said Colloton, talking about the strict controls on new development.⁷⁰ An effort exists, it seems, to sustain a sense of community and city through high standards – fighting, in effect, what has happened in other parts of Johnson County where growth, had run

⁶⁹ Representative Colloton pointed out a Catholic church as we were driving around which locals had jokingly renamed “Our Lady of Mercedes,” in recognition of the wealth of the worshippers.

⁷⁰ Rep. Pat Colloton (R – Leawood), interview by author, Leawood, KS, November 5, 2007.

unchecked and the bust had inevitably set it. In this, the city closely followed the attitude of the wealthy cities of the northeast. “We’re a wannabe Mission Hills,” acknowledged Representative Colloton. Trying to escape Overland Park and pursue Mission Hills, the city of Leawood has managed to carve a quite successful sense of direction. Of course, its wealth and the ever-present intrinsic value of not being on the Missouri side of the line helps its cause.

Much of the recent growth in Johnson County has taken place west and south of the Interstate 435 loop. Colloton, Owens and others argued that this was why many of these areas boasted a distinctive political stance. I explored at length why, for instance, southern Overland Park was more conservative than the north. Economics came into it, of course, but of similar importance seems to be the newness of the subdivisions, meaning an established traditional (moderate) Republican network had yet to grow, giving opportunity to success at the precinct level for issue-focused conservatives. It could also be speculated that in the absence of an established neighborhood-based community, large churches can step in to serve that role. Megachurches in southern Johnson County offer a range of services to their congregations, an attraction in the unknown and socially undeveloped world of new suburbs. This could boost the relative role of the religious in the politics.

Immigration from rural Kansas was also speculated by representatives to play a part in the outer suburbs' political conservatism. People coming from small towns wanted to preserve something of what they perceived as the culture of the country, something the conservative viewpoint apparently offered, especially as these people saw the more liberal tendencies of the inner suburban and urban core – areas notably dissimilar to their rural background. Rural people make up a sizeable proportion of the growing population south and west of I-435. Representative Colyer grew up in Hays, for example, before moving as an adult to southern Overland Park and his present district: "There were seventy-seven in my graduating class, half of them are in southern Johnson County now."⁷¹

All these traits of new suburbs came together, I found, in Olathe, a city with a distinctly conservative identity and especially conservative political representation. Olathe was the city most commonly identified by others in Johnson County as being different. The factors introduced above have a part to play in this, but other things also appear to be at work.

Yes, Olathe is "well churched," in the words of Representative Lance Kinzer, but it is the particular strength of the Nazarene religion, through

⁷¹ Rep. Jeff Colyer (R – Overland Park), interview by author, Overland Park, KS, November 26, 2007.

churches and its college, that entrench a more conservative path.⁷² The Nazarene Church is a “very big influence” on the city, suggested Representative Arlen Siegfroid.⁷³

Also important to the distinct identity of Olathe is its historical independence. For much of its past it has been completely separated from the rest of the more densely populated part of Johnson County. “Olathe was a day trip from Shawnee in the nineteenth century,” explained Phill Kline.⁷⁴ In 1958, 95th Street was a gravel road, commented Jim Yonally. “Olathe for a long time felt – and I think still does some today – that it is the poor country cousin in Johnson County.”⁷⁵ “Even in 1980,” suggested Olathe representative Lance Kinzer, “there was agricultural land between Olathe and the rest.”⁷⁶ This historical physical separation is accompanied by an imaginative separation that stems to some extent from a sense of threat. With northeastern Johnson County growing so fast, Olathe people were fearful they would lose their status as county seat. A branch courthouse was constructed in the northeast, according to Yonally, in an attempt to avoid any cooption by the

⁷² Rep. Lance Kinzer (R–Olathe), interview by author, Olathe, KS, November 20, 2007.

⁷³ Rep. Arlen Siegfroid (R–Olathe), interview by author, Olathe, KS, November 20, 2007.

⁷⁴ Phill Kline, interview by author, Olathe, KS, December 19, 2007.

⁷⁵ Jim Yonally, interview by author, Topeka, KS, October 26, 2007.

⁷⁶ Rep. Lance Kinzer (R–Olathe), interview by author, Olathe, KS, November 20, 2007.

new growing cities. Representative Siegfroid explained the conservative outlook in Olathe as resulting partly from a continued desire to have its own identity, to retain some of that rural, more traditionalist culture.⁷⁷ Other parts of the county look upon Olathe with suspicion, suggested Kinzer, but the people of the city “are proud of their independent history and don’t mind going a different way from the rest of them.”⁷⁸

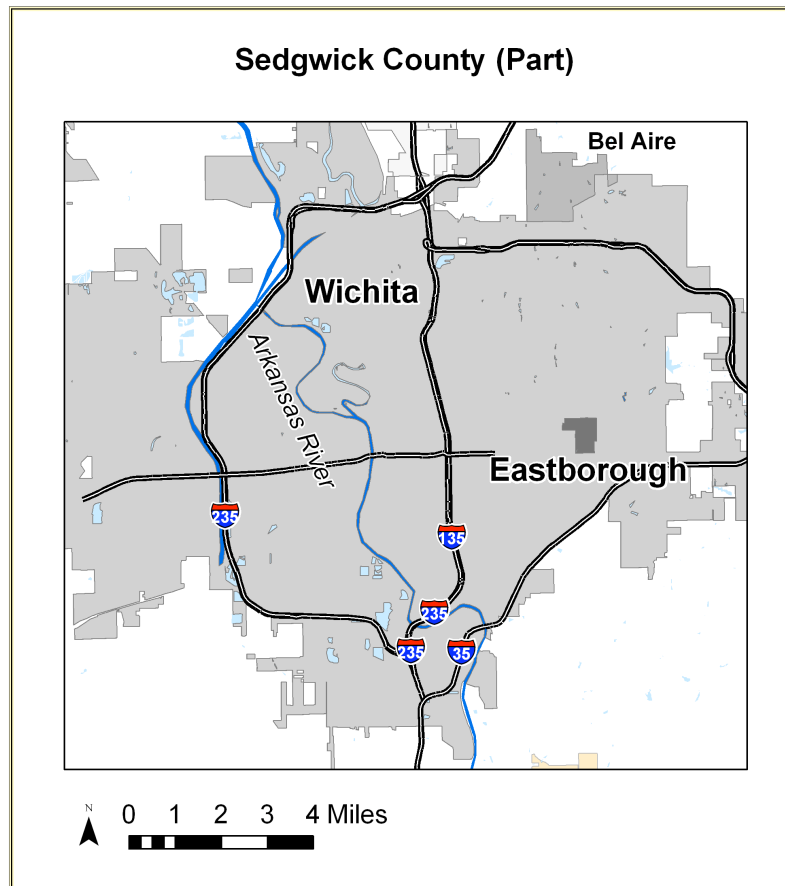
The Divided City: Wichita

My exploration of the Kansas City metropolitan area with its representatives revealed an urban core and suburban environs that are notably internally varied, and that the numerous constructions of place depend upon that variety. In contrast, the case of Wichita illustrates just how deep city division can be, and the profound effect that division can have on identity formation (see Map 20).⁷⁹

⁷⁷ Rep. Arlen Siegfroid (R—Olathe), interview by author, Olathe, KS, November 20, 2007.

⁷⁸ Rep. Lance Kinzer (R—Olathe), interview by author, Olathe, KS, November 20, 2007.

⁷⁹ For some comprehensive histories of Wichita, see Craig Miner, *Wichita: The early years, 1865-80* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1982); *Wichita, the magic city* (Wichita: Wichita-Sedgwick County Historical Museum Association, 1988).



Map 20: Wichita

Wichita suffers from the straightforward urban – suburban division characteristic of many large cities in America. Wealthier, whiter suburbs, have driven the spatial and economic growth of the city, while an inner, diverse core struggles with poverty, crime, and neglect. But, as is the case in the Kansas City area, nuances and dynamics exist within this broad pattern. Both insiders and outsiders see neighborhoods in the southern inner suburbs as much poorer than those elsewhere, for example. That area felt unfairly

treated by the city. Representative Flaharty voiced opposition to the city government, which, she believed, had directed development dollars to the northeast and northwest. "There's a great deal of resentment in the south," she explained. "All we get is sewage sent here! Real estate developers controlled the city government, and planning commissioners followed the money."⁸⁰ This grievance felt by the south against the north was noted elsewhere. A northern representative, Brenda Landwehr, acknowledged that those parts had been well served, and that "the northwest and the northeast are wealthier."⁸¹

Interstate highways in the south posed another hindrance to community development. "The interstate is like a big fence," argued Representative Flaharty. "It's damaged the community around here, splitting it up. My district is not a community as such, it's more of a random bunch of people who live in close proximity to one another."⁸²

When I asked a west-side suburban representative which district was most dissimilar to his, he replied promptly: "Delia Garcia's," a district in the

⁸⁰ Rep. Geraldine Flaharty (D – Wichita), interview by author, Wichita, KS, October 17, 2007.

⁸¹ Rep. Brenda Landwehr (R – Wichita), interview by author, Topeka, KS, March 4, 2008.

⁸² Rep. Geraldine Flaharty (D – Wichita), interview by author, Wichita, KS, October 17, 2007.

inner city of Wichita.⁸³ This was a striking acknowledgement of the profound perception of division in the city. Such division also has a basis in reality. Melody McCray-Miller represents a district with a high African American population on the north side of the inner city. To her, population movement out to the suburbs was not merely a spatial act, but an entrenchment of a racial separation that subsequently permitted policies that were damaging to minorities: “It’s easier to ignore problems when you’re isolated out there, literally removed from the problems. The result is that racist legislation can pass. Once you’re physically removed, you’re also emotionally removed.”⁸⁴ McCray-Miller felt that such action had permitted a racialized sense of place to emerge whereby the inner parts of the city are seen as “minority,” and the suburbs “white.” The perception in turn has both hastened white flight from the core and reduced the attention given to inner city problems. “My district has been forgotten about,” commented Oletha Faust-Goudeau, a representative of a predominantly black urban district.⁸⁵ Representative

⁸³ Rep. Mario Goico (R – Wichita), interview by author, Wichita, KS, October 31, 2007.

⁸⁴ Rep. Melody McCray-Miller (D – Wichita), interview by author, Topeka, KS, March 4, 2008.

⁸⁵ Rep. Oletha Faust-Goudeau (D – Wichita), interview by author, Wichita, KS, October 31, 2007.

Garcia wanted more Latinos to stay in her inner-city district “after they’d made it,” to support and inspire other local development.⁸⁶

My interviews with inner city representatives explored how division was not simply found between the suburbs and the core, but was also an important part of social processes within the inner city. Whereas the division between African Americans and whites was inscribed in the broad suburban-urban map, tension between Latinos and African Americans was organized within the inner city. In the area north of downtown, Interstate 135 was seen by Representative Garcia as the divide between mostly black neighborhoods to the east and Latino neighborhoods to the west. Little interaction occurs between the groups (though gang rivalry was a problem), and few successful attempts to come together for common minority concerns. Fundamentally, the two groups are “fighting for the same piece of the pie,” as Representative Garcia put it.⁸⁷ She saw a further antagonism between the two groups: “Some of the older African Americans have this idea, ‘our struggle was worse than yours;’ that doesn’t really help.” A further division was seen between the large Vietnamese population north of downtown and the Latino community.

⁸⁶ Rep. Delia Garcia (D – Wichita), interview by author, Wichita, KS, October 15, 2007.

⁸⁷ Rep. Delia Garcia (D – Wichita), interview by author, Wichita, KS, October 15, 2007.

The complexity of ethnicity and race in inner-city Wichita continues within the Latino community. Historically, divisions within that group have followed national origins. A substantial number of local Latinos – perhaps sixty to seventy percent, Garcia thought – were of Mexican origin, but there were large numbers of Puerto Ricans and Hondurans in addition. Today, Garcia reported the principal tension to be between older Latino residents, whose families – such as Garcia’s – had been in Wichita at least two generations, and newer, often undocumented, immigrants.

Atop this divided base, minority – especially Latino – interests have been weakened by a lack of trust. Many Latinos are skeptical of community action or government involvement, Garcia reported, because of their experience and knowledge of such processes in Mexico. That many Latinos have erected satellite dishes and receive their news mainly from Mexico confounds the problem. “We have a lot of pride, but we don’t know how to direct it,” concluded Garcia.⁸⁸ This distrust toward government, authority, and Anglos in particular (but also Latino community action) serves figuratively to separate the Latino population from Wichita. Their internal inability to engage in meaningful action effectively displaces Latinos from the

⁸⁸ Rep. Delia Garcia (D – Wichita), interview by author, Wichita, KS, October 15, 2007.

local political dynamics, and renders their part of town unimportant in the eyes of the suburban and Anglo leaders.

One final, and frequently cited, divide in Wichita deserves mention. Most interviewees had a strong perception of an east versus west distinction. The Arkansas River forms this boundary between the two sides of the city. "It's not necessarily economic," commented Garcia; "it's a cultural divide too."⁸⁹ Representative Landwehr explained one of its historical bases: "At one time there was a bridge that separated east from west, and easterners would charge westerners to go to downtown. That created a lot of animosity."⁹⁰ In Representative Sawyer's district, "people still call themselves 'westsiders.' There's a distrust of the other side. When I first ran, it was a question I was asked all the time, 'are you a westsider?'"⁹¹ The west side is perhaps more blue collar than the east, Sawyer explained, and "even further west, is still blue collar done well." The east side is viewed as "snooty" by those in the west. Today, each side still avoids travel to the other for shops or services, "so in Wichita, there are two of everything!" Sawyer remarked.

⁸⁹ Rep. Delia Garcia (D – Wichita), interview by author, Wichita, KS, October 15, 2007.

⁹⁰ Rep. Brenda Landwehr (R – Wichita), interview by author, Topeka, KS, March 4, 2008.

⁹¹ Rep. Tom Sawyer (D – Wichita), interview by author, Wichita, KS, November 16, 2007.

This east-west division was echoed on the east side. Representative Jo Ann Pottorff, whose district includes the wealthy independent enclave of Eastborough (“where the aviation executives live”), agreed that the east side of town has always been more upscale than the west. “People in the east don’t drive to the west side,” she said. She made cultural connotations quite clearly: “The joke used to be that there’s no bookstore on the west side of town!”⁹²

On the west side, the “Big Ditch,” a large drainage canal that roughly follows the line of Interstate 235, was seen as another barrier. “It’s also a very important divide,” said Sawyer. There are not that many places to cross, and with much of the new suburban growth on the west side of that line, a new socio-economic split seems to be opening up in Wichita.

Wichita, in manifold ways, is a city characterized by division. From the inability of the minority section of the population to form a coherent unit in the inner city to the broader divisions between east and west, the city’s fragmentation hinders social and economic development. Wichita representatives often lamented that their city did not have as strong a voice or identity as it should have. “There’s not a warm feeling in the rest of the state

⁹² Rep. Jo Ann Pottorff (R – Wichita), interview by author, Topeka, KS, March 5, 2008.

for Wichita,” remarked Representative Sawyer.⁹³ “Everything goes to Kansas City and the Kansas City area,” complained Representative Garcia. “We don’t get treated like we’re the biggest city in Kansas.”⁹⁴ The same image came through in the Statehouse. Whereas politicians frequently mobilized their rhetoric with arguments about Kansas City, or, even more frequently, Johnson County, Wichita remained a void in the imaginative geography. The only common idea politicians could reach for when I pressed them about Wichita was its aviation industry.

Part of Wichita’s anonymity must be a result of the confused identity projected by its divisions. No dominant narrative of the place exists, unlike the inner-city blue-collar urbanity of Kansas City or the overarching white-collar suburban identity of Johnson County. The matter is worsened by a profoundly divided legislative delegation, with mostly conservative Republicans from the suburbs and more liberal Democrats from the inner core. “We don’t work together,” regretted Representative Flaharty.⁹⁵

⁹³ Rep. Tom Sawyer (D – Wichita), interview by author, Wichita, KS, November 16, 2007.

⁹⁴ Rep. Delia Garcia (D – Wichita), interview by author, Wichita, KS, October 15, 2007.

⁹⁵ Rep. Geraldine Flaharty (D – Wichita), interview by author, Wichita, KS, October 17, 2007.

Division definitely does not help Wichita in the policy-making process on the state level, especially in terms of the interests of the inner city.⁹⁶ Usually cities are encouraged to operate in an integrated manner, including both the suburbs and inner city in the planning process. This works well in theory – and perhaps in other places – but the reality of urban Kansas is different. Johnson County, and now Wyandotte County, have both carved out distinct identities and pursued economic development focused to their needs, both with broad success. Wichita’s problem may be the fact that it is a singular large city, unified in one county. Its message, inclusive of all the different human geographies to be found therein, is perhaps thereby inevitably confused.

Conclusion

This chapter exploring metropolitan Kansas today reveals a diverse and dynamic geography. Cities, unsurprisingly, are shown to be complex systems. But the distinctions and changes found in the state’s suburbs are, I believe, worthy of more detailed analysis. The overall picture drawn shows geography to be fundamental to urban dynamics – in terms of perceptions and material conditions alike. Repeated senses of difference, of rivalry, of

⁹⁶ Topeka, I found from my interviews, suffers a similar problem.

division, of distinction that are integral to the construction of place are of particular interest. Given the importance of internal division or external oppositional perceptions to the construction of these cities and their neighborhoods, future research should explore further these issues as part of what might be conceived as the “dialectical city.”

Chapter 12

Conclusion

I have pursued two lines of research in this dissertation. On the one hand, I explored the role geography plays in state politics – on the stump and in the policy-making process in Topeka. On the other, I tested the idea that politicians can inform us about the qualities and meanings of places, given their representative role. From both approaches, but more explicitly from the latter, I have presented an interpretation of Kansas geography. My interpretation has drawn attention to features of place that politicians present as important, some of which have played little role in the cultural geographical literature to date. It has also provided a fresh perspective on the geographical diversity found in metropolitan and rural Kansas today, simultaneously reiterating some of the patterns found in the past and illustrating the contemporary relevance of the uniqueness of place. Moreover, my interpretation has cast new light on the *way* place identity is formed and articulated.

Presenting a picture of place perception based upon othering and oppositional relationships, I have suggested a dynamic of identity that can be considered dialectical in form. The characteristics of one place are set against

those of another, with the interplay producing the sense of place held by groups of individuals. This dialectical understanding was (and is) mobilized in different ways and at different scales—from broad policy debates in the Statehouse to neighborhood conceptions in the suburbs. But in all cases, a sense of difference rooted in place was central.

A dialectical construction of place offers a bridge between a number of schools in academic geography. Foremost, I emphasize that sense of place is not incidental or confined to the personal. It has material implications, and is, furthermore, part of—informing and informed by—wider discourses of place. So, what might be called the “heroics” of place presented in this dissertation (this tendency to understand and articulate one’s place in terms of other places) signifies a rapprochement between humanistic geography and a cultural geography informed by postmodernism and critical geopolitics. The politician’s holistic understanding of place has also demanded I attend to things usually considered the domain of economic geography. In all this, I have sought to illuminate not only the heterogeneity of Kansas, but, critically, what that heterogeneity means. The result is a picture of the state that reveals the spatially dialectical processes behind the geographical patterns we can identify. In sum, this analysis has examined the “uneven cultural geography” found in Kansas, exploring the way places, and by effect, the cultures

associated with those places, interact. The processes bringing forth the “chimera” of Kansas have been exposed through this investigation.

Has my approach, in the final review, been a success? Has the use of the politician’s eye in the pursuit of spatial understanding been useful? I believe on the whole that it has. The main limitations have been methodological rather than substantive. Access to a few representatives was difficult. Some interviewees were less forthcoming, others were guarded because of electoral concerns. It was also imperative to be alert to subjects’ political biases and the purely partisan perspectives they could bring. These challenges notwithstanding, I feel my approach was methodologically careful and reliable.

I hope through this dissertation I have demonstrated that the perspectives of those in government are not only relevant to cultural geography and enlightening, but also broaden the scope of this discipline. I have attended to what these representatives of places conveyed as being of importance. As such, schools, transportation, business development and so forth have been included in the matrix of what makes places distinct. The approach thereby has avoided the narrowing, topically biased tendencies of many cultural geographies. Looking through the eyes of well-informed politicians, I have developed an on-the-ground insight that brings a relatively full understanding of places in the present day.

I think it would have been difficult to build such a broad picture of Kansas today without the ready-made and representative sample offered by elected officials who necessarily possess such a profound knowledge and sense of their places. It has permitted me to gain insights as varied as differences between seemingly similar counties in southwest Kansas, and the internal dynamics of the Johnson County suburbs. It has also helped me to integrate these things into a broader understanding of Kansas. Because politics is an art as well as a means of government, it emphasizes perception and the conveyance of meaning as well as a strong grasp of the factual. Engaging with politicians represents a rare opportunity to explore in meaningful ways the qualities *and* the identities of places.

Many conclusions about the geography of Kansas have been offered through the course of this dissertation, but one important question deserves final review here. In the light of the perspectives on place-making I have developed, what can be said about the overarching and persistent importance given to rurality in contemporary Kansas? In economic and demographic reality, Kansas is an urban state, and yet its culture continues to be constructed around a set of ideals connected to a traditionalistic pastoralism. Even urban legislators say that Kansas is a rural state. It represents perhaps the clearest example of uneven cultural geography. I posit that this

perspective can be understood partly as another example of the role of competition in the construction of place identity.

In one way, the strength of ruralism can be seen as an effort by those in the country to retain relevance in a contemporary Kansas materially dominated by metropolitan economic engines. Their culture, in this sense, acts as a counterbalance, one that is asserted more strongly as their relative economic and demographic status declines. It is one of the few things, apart from its vast spatial extent, that the country can offer to the place of Kansas.

People in the suburbs, critically, support this pastoral identity. Partly this stance is a result of the strong roots and connections many in these areas still have with the countryside. Partly, too – perhaps mainly by those who originate in the inner city and seek to escape it – people want to distinguish suburban zones as different from the iniquitous urban core.

But the primacy of pastoralism also points toward the way Kansans seek to make sense of their place on a larger scale. I suggest that the hegemonic rural identity in Kansas reveals an insecurity and an inadequacy in the face of more economically and demographically dynamic parts of the United States. This identity of Kansas, which has its imaginative and material roots in a period prior to the 1960s, represents a failure to develop an alternate – new – identity on the back of economic progress. In the absence of anything else, Kansas can only present an image of domesticity and rural

traditionalism, roles reinforced by a national need for a “home” place and a conservative – conserved – heartland.¹ So the question comes to this: What else has Kansas to offer? So far, no-one has an answer. Without any meaningful alternative to a gingham-clad, blissful, pastoral image, the identity of Kansas constructed by outsiders and insiders persists, the latter actively nurturing it within. This conservative understanding of place is reinforced by spatial insecurity in Kansas as the coasts of the U. S. develop as vibrant economies. “At least we’ve got our culture,” goes the refrain from Kansas, and the dominant political and media narrative-makers on the coasts willingly oblige, seeking, as we all do as individuals, a place to call home. “There’s no place like home,” concluded Dorothy.² “We couldn’t agree more,” proclaim Kansans and Americans alike.

¹ By contrast, the image of Kansas, and the Midwest, was very different in the first years of the twentieth century when the region *did* have demographic and economic momentum. See Shortridge, *The Middle West*, 1989.

² L. Frank Baum, *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (Chicago: Charles M. Hill, 1900).

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