

*To Call It Home: The New Immigrants of Southwestern Minnesota.* By Joseph A. Amato with John Meyer, John Radzilowski, Donata DeBruyckere, and Anthony Amato. 1996. Marshall, Minn.: Crossings Press, 120 pages, Paper.

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MARS/Social Thought & Research, 1997, Vol. 20, No. 1-2

Over the last three decades, stockyards and meatpacking plants in Chicago, Fort Worth, Kansas City, Omaha, and other urban centers have been abandoned and torn down, or transformed into tony shopping districts. Names that meant meat in the days of our youth are gone-- Armour, Cudahy, Rath, Swift, Wilson--bought out or driven out by the "new packers"--IBP, ConAgra, Excel. Poultry has moved from the barnyard and the hen house to factory farms, getting ever cheaper but looking and tasting less and less like the fryers our mothers and grandmothers used to serve for Sunday dinner. Meatpacking and poultry processing have reorganized and relocated. They fled union wages and outmoded factories in the cities for reduced transportation costs and tax abatements from rural communities desperate for new jobs--any jobs. New plants, kept afloat in a marginally profitable industry by depressed wages and economies of scale, have indeed transformed the economies of small towns across America, from Gainesville, Georgia, the "Poultry Capital of the World," to Garden City, Kansas, the "trophy buckle on the beef belt."

Like much of rural America, southwestern Minnesota suffered economic decline in the 1980s. And as elsewhere in the Midwest and Southeast, its communities are building their economic hopes for the 1990s and beyond on meat and poultry processing. *To Call It Home* examines the changes meatpacking and poultry processing have brought to the towns and hamlets of southwestern Minnesota. Written originally for community leaders and elected officials, and the basic document for a 1996 conference at Southwest State University, Marshall, Minnesota, this book chronicles a work in progress--the communities it describes.

This little book shows the importance--too often ignored--of regional studies to an understanding of larger social, economic, political, and theoretical issues. It reveals both the common outcomes of common forces and the variation that comes from unique circumstances and individual actors in specific communities. In the pages of *To Call It Home* we learn how the so-called new immigration is transforming

southwestern Minnesota. As a result, this volume can contribute to our national dialogue on immigration, legal and otherwise, and what it means to the people who live it--newcomers and hosts alike.

As elsewhere in the rural South, Midwest, and Great Plains, new immigrants began showing up in southwestern Minnesota in the late 1980s and early 1990s, lured by jobs in meatpacking and poultry processing. And, as in so many other packing towns, much of the demographic and accompanying social changes did not show up in the 1990 Census.

*To Call It Home* begins by framing the dilemmas and fears of both the region's new immigrants and established residents in their historical and demographic context. The book is "intended to furnish leaders of [area] towns with basic descriptions of the newcomers and to describe their cities' responses to them. [It] also sought to furnish officials and leaders with basic numbers, essential definitions, practical language, and primary distinctions for shaping and explaining common city, county, and regional policies regarding the newcomers" (p.9).

A brief but candid chapter on methodology is followed by thumbnail sketches of the origins of southwestern Minnesota's new immigrants, how and when they came to the region. Separate chapters then present the recent demographic changes and projections for the five-county study area; an overview of the meat and poultry industries; housing availability and costs; and what Alejandro Portes and Jozsef Borocz have called the "contexts of reception" and "modes of incorporation" for the new immigrants ("Contemporary Immigration: Theoretical Perspectives on its Determinants and Modes of Incorporation," *International Migration Review* 23, pp.606-630).

The second half of the book profiles nine communities--Marshall, Tracy, Lynd, Worthington, St. James and Mountain Lake, Montevideo and Willmar--focusing on crime, housing, and education. The challenges these towns are confronting, their varied strategies and successes, are reminiscent of packing towns across rural America--a fact I find disturbing and heartening at the same time.

The book concludes with recommendations to community leaders. Amato sounds a moral tone while remaining pragmatic, and this chapter should be required reading for community leaders and concerned citizens in every community with a food processing plant. Business and civic leaders in communities looking to food processing for economic development should think long and hard on what is said in these pages--as should industry executives.

*To Call It Home* is a quick read at 120 pages; it is also a worthwhile one. It is not without its flaws, however. The map at the beginning is necessary but not sufficient. Counties are frequently mentioned but not identified on the map, unfortunate since tables and population projections are done by county. The bibliography is skimpy and ignores key works, while referencing obscure ones. This problem is perhaps a function of the short six months Joseph Amato and his colleagues were given to research and write this volume, as well as their initial unfamiliarity with the meat and poultry industries. The community profiles are too brief and suffer from too many undigested numbers.

I must also take exception with the book's assumption that newcomers "have a common goal: to find a place to call home, where they can live the good life" (p.14). Maybe, maybe not, but where is the evidence for this--not in the present volume.

*To Call It Home* makes an essential contribution to the history of southwestern Minnesota, a literature that owes much to Joe Amato. It demonstrates the salience of such writings, not only for the region itself but for anyone interested in the microlevel consequences of macrolevel processes.