

2 Slaughterhouse Politics: Struggling for the Future in the Age of Trump

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Introduction

Most evenings in north-central Iowa, between segments on the local news, the familiar face of Laurie Johns fills the screen. A former news broadcaster herself, she introduces the “Iowa Minute,” a short piece of advertorial produced by the Iowa Farm Bureau. In 2017, many viewers heard the story of Eagle Grove, Iowa (population 3,500), and how a new livestock processing facility would help revitalize the region. Like many small towns in the rural Midwest, Eagle Grove has struggled with a stagnant economy since the farm crisis of the 1980s transformed agriculture in the United States (Foley 2015). The announcement that one of the largest pork producers in the country would soon be building a large processing facility was thus welcomed by many in the area. The Eagle Grove residents featured in the “Iowa Minute” reflected a sense of optimism as they described the potential “growth opportunities” that would herald “a really exciting time.” One retailer told viewers that “it’s never been a better time to be a resident of Eagle Grove” and invited all Iowans to come to Eagle Grove, while the mayor described the relationship between locals and livestock as “one big happy family.”

The optimism expressed here obscures a larger story: the story of how one town’s fortunes became bound to the promise of a massive slaughterhouse. Eagle Grove was not the first choice for Prestage Farms, the large agribusiness building the plant. When plans for the plant were first revealed in early 2016, Prestage had selected Mason City (population 28,000), about 60 miles northeast of Eagle Grove, as the site for what they described as a modern and technologically innovative pork processing facility. Initially,

the proposal attracted support across the city and state. Business leaders projected that the plant would bring in 1,000 jobs and have an (unspecified) \$375 million impact. Governor Terry Branstad, now the US ambassador to China, threw the support of the Iowa Economic Development Authority behind the project, and the Mason City Council put together a benefits package to reduce the plant's tax obligations. All the pieces were in place for swift approval of the plant.

However, a developing opposition moved quickly to organize protests, phone calls, letters, and emails to the city council. They packed council meetings and accused state and local officials of fast-tracking a project that would permanently reshape Mason City and the entire landscape of northern Iowa. Their stated primary concern was that the slaughterhouse could increase the number of concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFOs or, colloquially, "factory farms") near Mason City, potentially contaminating waterways already impaired by manure and fertilizer runoff (Pitt 2015). Activists opposing the plant focused on a May 2016 vote on tax abatements for Prestage Farms, and following debate that lasted late into the night, the council deadlocked, rejecting the package on a tie vote.

The fallout was swift and brutal. Prestage Farms dismissed environmental concerns, accused "kooks" of stirring up racial tensions, and claimed that "racism is alive and well in Mason City" (Brownfield Ag News 2016). Prestage Farms's implication here was clear: those protesting the construction of the pork processing plant were motivated not by concerns about factory farming but instead by racist fears of Latino immigrant laborers moving into the city. By summer's end, Prestage announced their plans to relocate to Eagle Grove, but the political and emotional damage caused by the controversy in Mason City endured. Council members publicly accused each other of betraying the public trust, while letters to the *Mason City Globe Gazette* remained hostile, with each side now accusing the other of anti-immigrant bigotry. For 34-year-old councilman Alex Kuhn, who led the vote against the project, the pressure was overwhelming. On June 5, just ten days after Prestage announced they were moving the plant to Eagle Grove, Kuhn killed himself on a country road outside Mason City. Reports following his suicide and statements from his family revealed that he not only suffered from depression, caused in part by the stress of the Prestage vote, but was also intimidated after his vote by the mayor and other members of the city council (Skipper 2016).

The story of the Prestage plant, the controversy surrounding the Mason City vote, and the fallout and subsequent relocation to Eagle Grove reveal the complex political tensions simmering in parts of the rural United States where agriculture and immigration collide. Importantly, these debates in north-central Iowa occurred just after the 2016 presidential caucus in Iowa, as populist movements on both the left and right were shaking established political norms. On the right in particular, a nativist nationalism emerged as a key motivation behind the rise of Donald Trump. That November, this region of Iowa voted overwhelmingly in favor of the eventual president. However, as scholars studying the relationship between intimacy and geopolitics have long demonstrated, presidential votes, electoral politics, and public policy tell a partial story of ordinary political life (Staeheli et al. 2012).

This chapter will use intimate geopolitics as a framework to discuss how political geographies are realized not through actions taken by distant politicians engaging in statecraft through legislation or nation building but through the messy, difficult everyday relationships that shape and are shaped by discourses of the nation-state. In what follows, I will offer a brief overview of recent interventions in feminist geography on immigration and geopolitics and then return to the Prestage plant controversy and offer a discourse analysis of the discussions as they occurred in 2016. My goal is to demonstrate how moments like this render visible the political tensions about race, agriculture, immigration, and the future of the nation that simmer in everyday life. Such an analysis offers a critical intervention into research investigating the intersections of food and immigration politics as well as broader questions surrounding the current rise in US nationalism, drawing attention to the need among scholars, activists, and advocates for a deeper understanding of how race and capitalism define political life.

Intimacy, Race, and Geopolitics

Feminist interventions in geopolitics interrogate how traditional geopolitical analyses maintain the appearance of a naturalized scalar hierarchy where discourses from above dictate the lives of national subjects (Masaro and Williams 2013; Pain 2015). Such interventions demand attention to how the everyday lives of people are not simply “blank surfaces” waiting for geopolitical discourses crafted by distant statesmen but are actually

shaping what it means to be a nation-state through messy, complicated, and personal encounters (Dowler and Sharp 2001, 169; Mountz and Hyndman 2006; Pratt and Rosner 2012). This focus on intimacy raises new questions regarding how states are constantly being produced through aesthetics, emotions, and the movement of bodies (Mountz 2004; Smith 2012; Fluri 2014) and demonstrates that the intimate is as public and political as the global. In fact, the intimate and the global interpenetrate, and it is through this constant interaction that bodies come to be understood as territory and a target site of bordering practices (Smith, Swanson, and Gökarkısel 2016).

In this section, I take such observations about the importance of intimacy in the formation of geopolitical discourse and examine recent geographic scholarship on immigration and agriculture with a particular focus on the rural United States. I want to pose two questions that will guide my exploration of the Mason City/Eagle Grove processing plant in the sections that follow. First, how are geopolitical discourses produced through intimate contestations about the future? And second, how are bodies figured in these tensions as territorial agents?

Gökarkısel and Smith suggest that the nationalist discourses that animated the 2016 US presidential campaign were fueled by a “fascist body politics” that seeks to preserve white male supremacy in the face of perceived demographic threats (Gökarkısel and Smith 2016, 79). This body politics sees “aggression, hardened borders, and violence [as] central to the defense of the nation” and locates threats in the brown bodies present in spaces scripted as white (80). These tropes are certainly not new, and they have been used by politicians for decades to capitalize on anxieties and fears of a changing landscape, but the attacks of September 11, 2001, intensified efforts in the twenty-first century to securitize mobile brown bodies and made the “production of fear” a popular political tactic (Mountz 2010; Hyndman 2012; Silva 2016). Crises are now imagined everywhere, requiring a spectacular response that often means expelling or otherwise walling out the brown bodies that are presumed to be the cause of these (manufactured) crises (Hyndman 2012, 246).

While the US Census Bureau roughly defines a small town as an “urban cluster” with a population between 2,500 and 50,000 (and rural areas as anything below this threshold), Leitner (2012) found in her study of a small town in rural Minnesota that such neat definitions are rarely useful on the ground, where “small town” and “rural” are in fact categories best defined

through whiteness connected to a sense of feeling American. Her findings align with similar research demonstrating that alignment between whiteness and American belonging informs white residents' reactions toward immigrants of color, such that even in the absence of lived experience with immigrants or other people of color, white residents reproduce historically racist discourses (Winant 1994; Kobayashi and Peake 2000; Cramer 2016). When encounters do inevitably occur, they are already shaped by generational attempts to securitize the boundaries of white privilege (Leitner 2012, 841; cf. Ahmed 2004). In small towns and rural spaces, which have been mythically constructed as "white spaces" (Agyeman and Spooner 1997; Lawson, Jarosz, and Bonds 2008; Finney 2014), white residents express new feelings of isolation and vulnerability when they encounter bodies that they feel betray "core white American values"—a Protestant work ethic, speaking English, home ownership, public hygiene, family values, and even clothing and bodily movement (Leitner 2012, 837). While these small towns certainly become spaces of mutual transformation (Nelson and Hiemstra 2008; Price 2012), often such encounters do not change white Americans' opinions of groups as a whole even when they speak positively about individual members of such groups (Leitner 2012, 841).

Such observations complicate the "contact hypothesis" advanced by Allport (1954), which suggests that increased contact among different groups reduces prejudice. This hypothesis has enjoyed renewed popularity in a divisive political climate after demonstrating accuracy under controlled settings (Pettigrew and Tropp 2006). However, these settings are often unable to recreate conditions in everyday life, where encounters are less clearly positive or negative (McKeown and Dixon 2017). Furthermore, as the geographers discussed here have demonstrated, racialized social hierarchies persist in these communities through normalizing spatial practices. In the examples that follow, I discuss specifically how this spatial organization has defined encounters that occur when immigrants, primarily from Latin America, move to predominantly white small towns in the midwestern United States.

The Politics of the Slaughterhouse

When the kosher Agriprocessors packing plant began recruiting Guatemalan immigrants 20 years ago, the town of Postville, Iowa, was very similar to nearby Eagle Grove now: predominantly white, with a population of around

3,000. In less than a decade, the Guatemalan population grew from 50 residents to more than 800, and Postville came to symbolize in popular media discourses the dramatic economic, social, and cultural transformations brought on by the vertical integration of livestock agriculture at the end of the twentieth century (Olivos and Sandoval 2015). Meat processing in the United States had shifted from urban, unionized labor toward a reliance on a “global reserve army of labor” composed of farm laborers from Latin America who were expelled from the labor markets in their home countries because of the rise of global agribusiness (Huffman and Miranowski 1997). Olivos and Sandoval found that in communities like Postville, immigrants were scripted into a homogenized “Latino identity” and that, despite the necessity of their labor, they were often considered disposable by their white bosses and neighbors (Olivos and Sandoval 2015, 198).

In 2008, Agriprocessors learned just how indispensable their immigrant labor force was. Early in May, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) descended on Postville and arrested 389 workers, detaining them in a nearby cattle exhibition center. This would later be found to be just more than half the undocumented workforce, and, following the raid, others either fled or went into hiding (Camayd-Freixas 2009). Postville itself appeared nearly abandoned, and Agriprocessors was unable to staff its plants and eventually filed for bankruptcy before closing altogether. Shalom Rubashkin, who oversaw Agriprocessors’s operations in Postville on behalf of his family, was charged with several crimes—including over 9,000 child labor violations—before being convicted on financial fraud charges. He was sentenced to 27 years in prison, but his term was commuted by President Trump after serving just eight—the second use of the president’s clemency powers following his pardon of former Arizona sheriff Joe Arpaio (Hawkins 2017).

Unlike the Arpaio pardon, however, the commutation of Rubashkin’s sentence was encouraged and welcomed by a bipartisan group of lawyers and legislators who had argued that the sentence was too harsh. Still, it is telling that the earliest commutations issued by President Trump were both for men with close ties to immigration abuses but that the sentence of Rubashkin, who oversaw a slaughterhouse rather than a law enforcement agency, was commuted with comparatively little controversy. To those advocating for commutation, Rubashkin’s sentence seemed disproportionate precisely because of how normalized and naturalized his activities were, even as workers in Agriprocessors had long been compelled to work extended

shifts in unsafe conditions (Camayd-Freixas 2009; Olivos and Sandoval 2015).

These conditions are not unique to Agriprocessors or Postville, Iowa, of course. The “work of killing” in our modern, industrialized agricultural economy is made invisible to consumers through the production of confinement, separation, and distance—and depends on the enforcement of racialized sociospatial hierarchies to secure that border between life and death (Pachirat 2011, 9). However, Latino immigrant laborers arrive in these new towns not only to perform a job but also to thrive and live full lives, even under extremely difficult conditions. It becomes difficult to make them invisible, even as their “social integration” remains constrained by discourses equating whiteness with belonging (Vega 2012, 206), as the space of cities and towns is organized to keep them spatially marginalized, and as a discourse of “illegality” comes to represent all immigrants as criminal (Nelson and Hiemstra 2008, 327; see chapter 1 of this volume for Kimberley Curtis’s analysis of the criminalization of immigrant farm laborers).

This discourse matters because in the absence of any real encounter caused by spatial segregation, white American ideas about racial others are formed through such stories and narratives, which eventually circulate in everyday life. Santa Ana writes that news stories about Latino immigrants follow narrative patterns that either cast immigrants as figures in a Western genre, with Border Patrol agents standing in as the defenders of an “allegorical nation” (Santa Ana 2016, 104), or as tragic figures in a state of “permanent liminality” (108). These mythic formations resonate because they are familiar and reassuring, and they circulate as a sort of “public dream” for white Americans about how immigration functions in their communities (102). Perhaps most importantly, these discourses function to withhold subjectivity from nonwhite residents in small-town communities and shore up the boundaries of whiteness by keeping Latino immigrants scripted into stories either about conflict between demographic groups or about individual hopeless tragedies.

In the following sections, I return to the Mason City/Eagle Grove slaughterhouse with this framework in mind to better understand if and how these discourses about immigration appeared in the ensuing controversy and to examine what they can tell us about the changes occurring in the predominantly white small towns that dot the midwestern US countryside. The Postville slaughterhouse raid, as the largest ICE action at the time—and certainly

the most significant immigration enforcement activity ever in Iowa history—must be understood as casting a long shadow over these debates, though obviously much has changed in the 10 years since Postville. How have the views of Iowans regarding slaughterhouses and the immigrant labor that will inevitably staff them changed? How are discourses about race and agriculture interwoven with the fears and anxieties people feel over their town's (and, indeed, their nation's) future? Finally, what might this case be able to tell us about the broader implications of intimate everyday politics?

Borderlands beyond the Border

The research conducted for this chapter consists of a discourse analysis of various media, including original footage of the Mason City Council debates; radio, print, and television news, op-eds, and letters to the editor circulating in Mason City and Eagle Grove; and paid content produced by supporters and opponents of the plant. This material was supplemented by additional informal interviews and my own observations while conducting research in the area from May 2015 to August 2017. As the previous section demonstrated, racism and the desire to securitize the boundaries of whiteness are always present in these “borderlands” far beyond the physical US border. Thus, I want to examine how immigration and immigrants were discussed during these debates about the future of agriculture in Iowa, dwelling on those moments where the lives of the potential workers were or were not made visible. For the most part, nonwhite voices were excluded from these debates, despite the significant presence of Latino communities throughout the cities and towns of north-central Iowa. Thus, these discussions about immigrants and immigration, when they occurred, reflect the attitudes of white residents in these regions that would go on to vote overwhelmingly for Donald Trump in the 2016 election. While Trump and his populist rhetoric did not necessarily influence the politics surrounding this slaughterhouse, these events offer an insight into how such a nationalist discourse dependent on fanciful misrepresentations of demographic shifts (Gökanksel, Neubert, and Smith 2019) generates fear among white residents in these rural, agricultural communities on a very intimate level.

Rumors that a major agribusiness was seeking to gain a foothold in Mason City had been circulating for months before the official March 20, 2016, announcement that Prestage Farms was planning to build a

multimillion-dollar hog processing plant. Attended by Iowa governor Terry Branstad, Ron Prestage, and several dozen city leaders and hog industry supporters, the announcement had the air of a celebration. Details had been carefully crafted prior to the announcement, with the city and state both offering tax incentives. Three required public hearings had been scheduled for the Mason City incentive package: on April 5, April 21, and May 3, when the final vote would occur. Ron Prestage spoke with pride about how his facilities operated in the “most ethical and moral way possible,” while Branstad praised the “farm family” values of Prestage and the “state-of-the-art facility” he was preparing to build. Other than subtle hints in the vague promises of up to 2,000 jobs that Prestage “wouldn’t discriminate,” and that the plant would “follow all the laws,” immigration did not come up at this announcement. The event concluded with loud applause, big smiles, and the governor telling Prestage that he had done “a good job.” There seemed to be no concern that the path would not be clear for Prestage and his company to begin construction in seven short weeks.

The first obvious sign of trouble for Prestage came just nine days later, at the March 29 meeting of the Cerro Gordo County Board of Supervisors. After the meeting had concluded, two of the three supervisors held an informal discussion with local activists, which was recorded and made publicly available by *North Iowa Today*. Throughout the hour-long recording, both the supervisors and the activists expressed concerns that the proposed plant would negatively impact the rest of the county. The supervisors first focused on the potential for pollution caused by a dramatically increased hog population. Since Prestage Farms is a vertically integrated hog producer—meaning that they own the hogs and control production from birth through death to distribution—the supervisors worried that Prestage would build new hog confinements throughout the area. The fear of pollution produced by these CAFOs was acute for the supervisors, since three nearby counties had recently been sued by the downstream city of Des Moines, Iowa, over the significant costs of removing hog fecal waste from their drinking water. They also discussed their frustration at the apparent lack of any partnership between Mason City and the county, with one supervisor saying the city was pursuing a “lone ranger deal” without any transparency.

For the most part, the conversation focused on agriculture and fears about pollution, until about 40 minutes into the 60-minute meeting, when

one supervisor told a story about a friend from nearby Storm Lake, Iowa, where Tyson Foods operates several processing facilities. The supervisor relayed his friend's view that since the plants were built, the town had "deteriorated" to the point where "stink and crime" were prevalent and the low-wage workers were reduced to "stealing all the time." Later in the conversation, Storm Lake reappeared as an example of a place where budgets for jails, courts, human services, and schools had been stretched thin since their plants were built. One supervisor suggested that the increased tax revenue would not be enough for the school district to pay for special education and bilingual teachers. As the meeting concluded, one activist declared, "We know what's going on," and claimed that Cerro Gordo County would be getting all "the scraps" from the proposed plant, while places like "Communist China" reap all the rewards. The rest of the group agreed, and in one final remark yet another activist reported that when his comments appear in the *Mason City Globe Gazette* he will be "beaten into the ground as a racist." The group laughed.

While no one in this group specifically cited Latinos or Latino immigration, the invocation of Storm Lake here is, I argue, a key discursive code acting as shorthand for a community that has seen a spike in population because of immigrant labor working in a slaughterhouse. And just as Leitner (2012) found, conversations about immigrant populations in these small towns are rarely based on any actual encounters but instead on hearsay and rumor that is accepted as widely known truth. What is interesting in this case is that in a conversation that these public officials may or may not have known was being recorded (the recording, of course, is in the public record), they still use coded language to refer to immigrants. This is a theme that was repeated across media during the Mason City debates.

Days after the supervisors' meeting, on April 2, the *Globe Gazette* published an article discussing the changes in Storm Lake and Marshalltown (another nearby Iowa city with a recent surge in immigration) and acknowledged that both school districts were now majority nonwhite districts that struggled to provide "English language learner" classes for nonnative speakers (Colias 2016). Still, the reporter never spoke to any immigrant families, whose lives and stories continued to be inaccessible to the *Globe Gazette's* readership. The next day, the *Globe Gazette* published a letter to the editor whose author wrote that he had left Storm Lake 15 years earlier, when he "no longer felt safe there." Claiming that he had spoken with "many

people in the area," the author further reported that an increase in crime and expensive bilingual teachers have had "detrimental" consequences for Storm Lake residents.

On April 5, the day of the first public city council hearing on the plant proposal, nearly 200 people crowded into the council chambers. At least 50 were given the opportunity to speak during the five-hour meeting, with most opposing the plant. Many expressed concerns about the possibility of air and water pollution from the hogs, but others raised concerns about possible stress to the school district and "cultural clashes," even though the district superintendent had previously expressed her support for the proposal. The council voted unanimously to advance the proposal to the second round of voting.

As the second public hearing approached, letters to the *Globe Gazette* became increasingly contentious, sarcastic, and even mocking. One letter writer offered that "those opposed to a hog slaughtering plant are all vegans" and suggested that a reporter "ask a trucker" about what it is like to work for a large hog plant. In fact, a trucker did write in, and claimed that residents of Mason City should prepare for truck washes that would flush hog waste into the local sewage system and produce constant foul odors. The letters published varied between opposition and support, with supporters cheering the potential for growth and jobs, and opponents raising concerns about pollution, odor, and the stress to social services an underpaid labor force might cause. These last concerns continued to use coded language, innuendo, and rumor to talk about Latino immigrants, and one writer claimed that her friends in Storm Lake and Marshalltown told her "social ills and stress on the schools" changed the "entire dynamic" of those communities. She encouraged her readers to "talk to your friends in communities with slaughterhouses.... I'm not hearing good things." Regular news reports, however, continued to contradict these statements, with officials in both Storm Lake and Marshalltown observing that they had seen no unreasonable increase in crime.

On April 21, after seven more hours of public testimony in another completely full city council chamber, the council voted again to advance the project, but this time the vote was 5–1. Alex Kuhn, then a second-term councilman, cast the lone vote against the project, citing concerns that the incentive package was too high a price to pay considering the likely burden to taxpayers.

A day later, KIMT, the local CBS affiliate and the only television station based in Mason City, aired a lengthy report about the proposed plant and spent more than half the six-minute piece focusing on the potential consequences of an increase in immigrant labor. Through interviews with city officials in Storm Lake and Marshalltown, the reporter makes clear that there is a consensus that crime has not been a significant problem in these communities. In fact, the police official in Storm Lake acknowledged that some forms of violent crime had decreased. The rest of the piece focused on concerns about teaching English to immigrant students in local schools.

Throughout the piece, the reporter made several rhetorical choices to avoid naming the specific populations he was talking about. In six minutes, he never spoke the words “Latino,” “immigrant,” “immigration,” or even “Spanish,” and only once acknowledged that some students are “Hispanic.” Instead, he vaguely uses some form of the words “ethnic” (five times), “diversity” (twice), “culture” (twice), “minority” (twice), or “new neighbors/arrivals” (twice). Perhaps of most concern, the report claimed, without any evidence, is that many of these workers came from “cultures where the police aren’t trusted” and that “those same cultures have trouble with authority members in school.” One of his interview subjects, a schoolteacher in Marshalltown, added the additional claim that some students had “backgrounds where school isn’t that important.” The piece concluded with the Storm Lake official offering that, despite some tension and conflict, immigration has made Storm Lake a place where residents have “experienced what the world’s really like.” In his final remarks, the reporter suggested that despite the piece KIMT had just aired, most concerns expressed at the previous night’s city council meeting were about odor and pollution.

The language employed by the KIMT reporter—referring to nonspecific “ethnic groups” and “cultures”—is common among many of the letters, articles, and statements made by those who were uncomfortable with the idea of new people moving into Mason City. This language performs a specific purpose: to maintain the invisibility of immigrants of color by creating a distance through language, thus avoiding “precise descriptions of repugnant things, inventing instead less dangerous names and phrases for them” (Pachirat 2011, 9). Acknowledging the presence of such language in the Mason City debates demands an acknowledgment that, for some, the idea of immigrant bodies crossing the borders of their town was repugnant. Similarly, Prestage’s promotional documents constantly refer to their

planned facility as “modern,” “clean,” “high tech,” and “state-of-the-art,” all to conceal that the plant remains, essentially, a place of death and dismemberment meted out by workers who are exploited and underpaid. Moreover, there is an assumption in these publications that “the locals” and “the citizens” refer specifically to white Iowa residents, despite the fact that about 10% of the population of Mason City identified as “Hispanic” in the 2010 census. The voices of Iowa’s immigrants—in Mason City, Storm Lake, Marshalltown, and elsewhere—were completely removed in these discourses about their communities’ futures.

City Hall was packed again on May 3, 2016, for the third and final vote on the incentive package. Again, both supporters and opponents of the plant delivered comments late into the night. On the 10:00 p.m. newscast, KIMT reported that a decision had yet to be reached, and it was not until around midnight that the final vote was called and the shocking result—a 3–3 tie—was reached. Since city rules require that tax incentive packages receive a clear majority of votes, the tie meant the package was dead. Opponents were jubilant, while Ron Prestage and his supporters vowed that the fight was not over.

Days later, Prestage took his message to the airwaves. Clearly irritated with the outcome of the vote, he argued that “kooks” and “racists” had hijacked the democratic process in Mason City, spreading “misinformation and unjustified fears” (Brownfield Ag News 2016). While the environmental activists who marched, organized their neighbors, and showed up at city council meetings strongly denied and rejected such claims, the analysis presented here demonstrates that there is some truth to the claim that a “thinly-veiled racism,” in Prestage’s words, motivated the actions of the overwhelmingly white opposition.

Conclusions

Throughout my examination of the discourses employed during the debates in Mason City, three observations became clear. First, these debates about the future of the community completely excluded nonwhite voices. Second, attempts to securitize whiteness were often made through subtle language that worked to make the actual immigrant workers invisible. Finally, fear and anxiety regarding the possibility that the boundaries of whiteness might collapse become intimately tied to the success or failure of the agricultural

economy in these communities. Certainly, there are contradictions in these conclusions. White residents are deeply concerned about the future success of agriculture and worry that immigration will somehow displace them, yet immigration remains central to the production of food that is at the heart of cultural, economic, and social life in these rural regions. Ultimately, these contestations about the future of agriculture, and what constitutes success, are struggles over multiple meanings of success: increasing profits by maximizing food production and hiring precarious labor, securitizing an idealized space and way of life, or raising crops and livestock in an environmentally sustainable way. The analysis in this chapter demonstrates that any discussion of the future of food and agriculture must also consider the intertwined social and spatial practices that have structured the everyday lives and landscapes of those people most intimately associated with food production.

It is important to remember that these communities, while small and occasionally isolated, are still complex global spaces where people encounter each other, engage in tension or struggle, and participate in mutually transformative and beneficial processes. The point of this chapter is not to indict the activists who fought the Prestage plant in Mason City but rather to acknowledge how attempts to securitize whiteness in communities scripted as white for generations will persist in discussions about the future of food and agriculture. It is imperative that activism and scholarship working toward a just food system address this reality. In the Mason City case, while the organized opposition did not openly align with anti-immigration sentiments—at times condemning such statements—neither did they actively seek to challenge the underlying assumptions linking race to capitalist food production, which limited the discussion of this processing plant before its construction was even announced.

While some would undoubtedly argue that the short timeframe through which the plant was being pushed necessitated a quick response, I would counter that the messy entanglements of race, food justice, and agricultural politics mean we absolutely *should* demand more from such activism, especially when most of the activists are white and the bodies of racialized others are removed from the conversation even as their labor is central to this economy. Further research must also proactively prioritize nonwhite voices from these landscapes, certainly a shortcoming even in this chapter, and this will require collaboration and engagement that incorporates

participatory methodologies beyond the scope of what I have presented here. Given that rural US communities are so often scripted as white, regular attempts must be made to disrupt these narratives, and scholars and activists must ask who is being included in the agricultural future that these political debates are often contesting and what it means when protecting the environment also does the work of securitizing whiteness. There can be no sustainable food system brought forth through environmental justice that does not also confront the racial hierarchies embedded in the economy (Pulido 2017). The fallout from the Mason City proposal demonstrates the consequences of such an attempt.

As the Prestage plant moves forward in Eagle Grove, many of these contradictions have yet to be resolved. With rapid approval of various tax incentives, construction on the slaughterhouse began in Eagle Grove just months after Mason City rejected Prestage. Despite the mayor's claim on the "Iowa Minute" that they are all part of "one big happy family," tensions are rising. Two local sports broadcasters were fired from their positions at the end of 2017 for openly mocking the Spanish-sounding names on the Eagle Grove High School basketball team, and on my most recent visit I witnessed a truck driving through downtown with a large confederate flag prominently hung from the tailgate. If Prestage or the community has any plans to address these tensions, they have yet to discuss them publicly. Considering how rarely immigrants were actually acknowledged as such during the Mason City debate, this is perhaps not surprising. Unfortunately, it appears that the lesson Eagle Grove's elected officials learned from the Mason City proposal was to discuss the plant as little as possible and move even faster through the approval process. Nevertheless, as Prestage opens in 2019, and as the Trump administration continues to curtail immigration with support from a base much like the white residents of Eagle Grove, these inevitable encounters will transform this community and ultimately offer key insights into how visions of the future of agriculture are contributing to political efforts to securitize space for whiteness.

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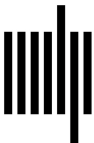
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