Introduction

Bienvenidos a Hoosierlandia: Asserting Ethnic Belonging at the “Crossroads of America”

Escucha pueblo
La canción del inmigrante
Y el canto alegré
De que espera la justicia.

Ven pueblo sigue luchando,
Sigue buscando dignidad.
En que los hombres volverán
Hacer hermanos

[Listen everyone
To the song of the immigrant
And the joyous song
That awaits justice

Come everyone, keep on fighting
Keep searching for dignity
Where all men will return
To being brothers]

—Himno al Inmigrante, Indianapolis, April 2006

In April 2006 an estimated 20,000 immigration rights supporters marched onto the streets of Indianapolis. Sung to the melody of Beethoven’s “Ode to Joy,” the “Himno al Inmigrante” [Hymn for the Immigrant] elicited boisterous cries from thousands who traveled, some for hours, to chant, sing, and collectively voice opposition to the national debate against undocumented immigrants. Calling for a return to human brotherhood, marchers pleaded for an imagined community
that was inclusive and flexible. Demonstrators wanted to create awareness of a broken immigration system that gave many no other choice but to enter the United States “illegally”—this action was not criminally malicious but driven from desperation. Marchers peacefully asserted a “dignidad” [dignity] that went otherwise denied in popular rhetoric against immigrants. Their voices reverberated against downtown buildings. The march ended at a public green space called the Mayor’s Action
Center (MAC), where people continued chanting and rallied together even as police looked upon them from atop the Marion County jail just across the street. The marchers gave speeches directly outside the MAC offices—a space designed for citizens of Indianapolis to request city services—as a symbol of formal request to the city and the police watching from the jail across the street that immigrants should not be deemed criminals based on undocumented status.

Immigrants and non-immigrants, Latinos and non-Latinos all gathered on those Indianapolis streets and reflected a spirit of solidarity that traveled much further than those tear-laden streets in the Midwest. All over the nation, Spanish-radio personalities, church leaders, labor organizers, business owners, and individual immigrants coordinated to express their frustration. Indeed, the coordinated events of 2006 reflected a reality of mixed-status families, neighborhoods, and communities implicit in a U.S. Latino experience. These massive demonstrations, many of which shattered historical records of public protests in the United States, called attention to the tentacles of the immigration debate. Reduced to stereotypical lawless tropes, undocumented immigrants and

Youth raising a flag for justice at Indianapolis rally. Photo by author.
their supporters affirmed a different image during those spring marches, one of families, workers, and contributing members of society willing to participate and belong within the national collective imaginary. On the streets of Indianapolis, Latino Hoosiers from Mexico and El Salvador to Puerto Rico and Venezuela, all with various residential statuses, gathered to showcase their right to demonstrate and belong in their nation, their state, and their local communities.

(Re)imagining Indiana

Acres and acres of flat farmland used for feed corn or soybean often embody the familiar images of Indiana and the Midwest in general. Two-lane roads perpendicular to the flat horizon guide my own memories of this region. But this imagined Midwest is far from the reality. Slight river valleys notch out tiny hills and interrupt the monotony of hypnotizing uniformity. Small, barely there bumps alter the landscape and beckon drivers to take a moment and glide, coast the second-long release from gravity, and enjoy the tranquility of watching the corn grow and life take shape. In Indiana, the Wabash River wends its way through the state, carving out a rolling countryside. Beyond the flatness often associated with small midwestern communities, these hills signify a transformation worth noting. The altered landscape, the subtle yet present scenic shifts, reminds us that moments of change actually come to define space. Here, the topography may be an apt metaphor for demography, for like its slight hills and river valleys, a complicated history of settlement challenges the imagined homogeneity in the Heartland and the United States more broadly. Of course, the rural Midwest has long been a site of cultural contact and conflict. Indian communities, French traders, White settlers and African American freedmen, and the Ku Klux Klan all intermingle in the stories of this midwestern landscape. Latinos, too, look onto the rolling fields and call them home. Century-old barrios in Indiana’s northwest and a long history of migrant labor traversing the state’s rural lands established a unique, if often overlooked, Latino presence. Like many before them, these Latino Hoosiers settled, raised children, and established themselves as midwesterners. This book accounts for Latino Hoosiers in the making and marking of twenty-first-century Indiana. It argues that the concept of community has always included various entry-points and
that belonging should not rely on fictitious notions of uniformity. As this book’s title suggests, this volume addresses the politics of belonging and the impact of boundary maintenance on a Latino population that daily redefined what it meant to belong in the United States.

As with other areas of the Midwest, popular depictions of Indiana frame Hoosiers within a White American experience. In films and music, Indiana has been positioned as static and homogeneous. Most know Indiana through the lyrics of John Mellencamp or popular films of White male athletes, such as Hoosiers (1986) and Rudy (1993). More recently, the popularity of the NBC-TV and ABC-TV, respectively, sitcoms Parks and Recreation and The Middle have provided more fodder to the romantics of Indiana. Indeed, the state prides itself as the quintessential middle of America: the place of “traditional” American dreams where White residents just so happen to prevail. Caught in this warped nostalgia, Indiana’s people of color become simultaneously erased. Thus, as the self-proclaimed core of an American national imaginary, a corrective to the romantics of the Midwest is certainly past due. Privileging White Hoosiers as representative of Indiana conveniently forgets the century-old Mexican neighborhoods in the Indiana Harbor/East Chicago corridor and leaves out the state’s most famous family, the Jackson. Though northwest Indiana complicates the perceived complexion of the state’s population, Hoosiers of color also lived far beyond Chicagoland. Popular and cinematic representations of “Hoosiers” have typically excluded these communities of color from the normative Indiana, or middle-America, experience. But can we imagine an alternative Hoosier experience reflective of these complexities? What if, for instance, instead of famed Notre Dame player Rudy there were Rodolfo, a talented Mexican American athlete whose undocumented status barred him from traveling to the championship game? Perhaps Mellencamp’s famed song of Hoo- sier couple Jack and Diane could include their neighbors José y Adriana “doin’ the best they can” in a renewed moment of immigrant hostility. These personifications of Indiana in Rodolfo, José, and Adriana render a new, more complex sketch of this midwestern space. Instead of viewing these shifts as challenges, what if the Rodolfos and Adrianas of Indiana reflected a more accurate vision of an American experience?

This book accounts for the thorny reality of representation and belonging in a midwestern landscape mistakenly imagined as homoge-
neous, English-speaking, and free of political controversy. As one older resident, Ted, mentioned of his early days at Purdue University, “We never had protests on campus over the war or anything like that. It was like the ’60s never happened here.” Perceived as neutral, calm, and perhaps even above tensions, central Indiana typified a Hoosier-ness that even Latino residents described as “muy tranquilo” [very calm/tranquil]. This tranquility attracted Latino families to settle in Greater Lafayette, where they were economically stable and their children less exposed to violence or drugs. The Lafayette area provided city amenities like Spanish church services, Latino-owned business, and various employment possibilities; but just as important, this exurb of Indianapolis was far from the urban cityscapes of Chicago or Los Angeles that some Latinos had fled. An hour north of Indianapolis and two hours south of Chicago, central Indiana was far enough away that it provided some rural distance and was close enough that one could drive to those cities within a day if need be. Still, Lafayette was not free of conflict. Some residents revealed kernels of discord and race-based harassment throughout their narratives of midwestern tranquility. White, Latino, and Black respondents recognized some unrest operating just beneath the surface of the midwestern-nice illusion. Outright references to the KKK or subtle snubs in public all disrupted the way central Indiana residents actually interacted with one another. These tense exchanges came to a head during the 2006 national immigration debate wherein a figurative border was erected between those who could be considered contributing members of society and those who could be dismissed as criminals, terrorists, or job-taking thieves.

The border, as spatial metaphor, lends a unique perspective to the study of Lafayette during the 2006 immigration debate. The border, or what Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) so vividly termed as “una herrida abierta [an open wound] where the third world grates against the first and bleeds,” specifically references the U.S.–Mexican border but expands to other bordering encounters where people “grate against” one another and “bleed” (3). In addition to the heightened vigilance, unsanctioned crossings, deaths, and anxieties present at that 2,000-mile long corridor, the border also encompasses a multitude of social and cultural exchanges of ideas, identities, families, and community. The physical space of what Renato Rosaldo (1988) notes as the “zone between stable places” has inspired
significant scholarly attention, especially within Latino studies. The attention to border theory comes out of its varied applications as a physical borderland and a metaphorical apparatus that peels away the economic, racial, gendered, and historical borders that created difference, sustained distance, and inspired unique exchanges between peoples. Whereas a border represents the territorial demarcation of one nation vis-à-vis another, border theory and borderland studies recognizes that hegemony is part and parcel of the emotion of nationalism, and the resulting identities are what indeed are being protected by such physical boundaries. As Alejandro Lugo (1997) notes, “the border region and border theory can erode the hegemony of the privileged center by denationalizing and deterritorializing the nation/state and culture theory” (45). While territorial land becomes the discourse used for border protection, “it is not territory per se that is being contested, but instead personal identities, movements of persons, and cultural and political hegemony of peoples” (Kearney 1998: 124). Migrants who traverse these borders, metaphorically and literally, can instantly become the target for this aggression. Perceived as threats, those who defy and complicate the image of a homogeneous nation can be subject to the “wall in our heads” (Berdahl 1999), or that internal bordering that transplants geopolitical borders onto social interrelational obstacles. Using border theory to understand the impact of the 2006 immigration debate in central Indiana “thickens the borderlands” to these nontraditional settling locations and underscores how divisive politics impinge on people’s daily lives across the country (Rosas 2006).

Though defended as concerns about unauthorized entry to the United States, the immigration debate inflamed long-established disputes over Latinos as cultural threats. House Resolution 4437, or The Border Protection, Antiterrorism, and Illegal Immigration Control Act of 2005 (H.R. 4437), provoked political speeches, media discourse, and local conversations that positioned Latino residents under suspicion. Notably, the interjection of U.S. Representative Jim Sensenbrenner of Wisconsin as a main sponsor of the bill marked a significant regional political leap and moved the debate away from the more familiar geographical setting of the southwest. With increases in their Latino demographics, midwesterners and southerners directly positioned themselves as victims of the “terrorists, drug smugglers, alien gangs, and violent criminals” described by Sensenbrenner in 2005. Traditionally limited to state-based
legislatures in California and Arizona, anxieties that marked Latinos as possibly “illegal” and therefore a threat grew exponentially across the country. The actual number of undocumented immigrants in these “new” locations may have been minimal, but the racialization of all Latinos as possible “terrorists, drug smugglers, alien gangs, and violent criminals” perpetuated narratives of impending fear and takeover. Rep. Sensenbrenner and others used then-recent demographic increases of Latinos in “new” areas to promote regional angst against anyone phenotypically or linguistically identified as Other.

The word “new” dominates the scholarship of Latinos in nontraditionally recognized destinations, but neither the immigrants themselves nor the towns they inhabited were necessarily new to the migrant stream. Lafayette, for instance, had both historically established Latino families and recently arriving immigrants. Latino families who previously resided in Los Angeles, Chicago, Texas, Mexico, El Salvador, and Puerto Rico intermingled with families present for three generations. This resulted in a much more stable and vocal Latino base willing to advocate on behalf of their collective ethnic belonging. Decades of finessing their place among, or at times in spite of, White Hoosiers came under attack during the highly contentious and very vocal national immigration debate of 2006. Newspaper editorials, sneers at workplaces, and eruptions of vocal hostility on city streets positioned Latinos outside the local imaginary. Boundaries were drawn against anyone visually suspected as an undocumented immigrant. Indeed, physical distances and mental borders kept people from interacting with Latinos, who were perceived as always and already criminal. Thus, Latinos confronted a state of “exceptionality, or the status of living as a person exempt from particular rights” (Rosas 2006: 337). Regardless of citizenship status or Latin American origins, Latinos faced contentious exchanges in schools and workplaces with non-Latino residents who bought into the rhetoric of fear.

Mistakenly perceived as an overnight phenomenon, Latino Hoosiers did not just miraculously appear in Lafayette. Rather, many factors drew a variety of newcomers to this Hoosier setting. While Purdue University attracted international Latin American and Caribbean students and their families to this college town, a larger increase in Latino population resulted from other working-class employment opportunities. Since the 1950s, families from the Mexican states of Jalisco and Zacatecas have worked in
Lafayette as service employees in restaurants and hotels. According to oral histories, in 1956 two Mexican workers, brothers, arrived in Lafayette after un unsuccessfully searching for work in Chicago. On the advice of their parish priest, the two brothers boarded a bus to an unknown town in Indiana. In Lafayette, an old friend of the priest provided them employment in his restaurant. Soon thereafter, their families and intimate friends joined them. The arrival of these two brothers resulted in a network of families spanning four decades in this central Indiana river valley. As Hilda, a Mexican resident who first arrived in Lafayette in 1963, explained, “When people know there are jobs, they tell friends and family ‘Vente, acá ay trabajo. Te ayudo conseguir chamba’” [Come, there’s work here. I’ll help you get a job]. Once relatives and friends were told about the opportunities in central Indiana, many followed in the footsteps of earlier trailblazers.

As long as jobs were plentiful, many Mexican families in Lafayette encouraged their family members to join them in central Indiana. As Hilda continued, “Ya ven que les va bien, y se traen sus familiares” [Once they see that they are doing well, they bring their families]. Partly this cooperation worked as a way to assist fellow immigrants in their fiscal needs as well as encourage some sense of familiarity in a predominately White town. By the 1990s, factory jobs enticed more Latino residents from California, Texas, and Florida as well as from Puerto Rico and different regions of Mexico. The recession and the North American Free Trade Act served to increase the profit shares of major transnational companies, but they left working-class and rural families on both sides of the border devastated. As jobs were lost and inflation rate skyrocketed in other regions of the United States, “Lafayette typically showed better employment numbers than the state or the nation” (Kriebel et al. 2000: 116). By the 1980s, three major companies invested in Lafayette and provided a dramatic increase in employment. Caterpillar, Wabash National, and Subaru of Indiana all opened facilities in Lafayette and joined the likes of Alcoa, Fairfield, Tate and Lyle, and Eli Lilly.

These trends in economic growth occurred as a result of relocation initiatives that moved manufacturing facilities from larger older cities with stronger union influences to smaller towns that offered tax and non-union labor initiatives (McConnell 2004). Historically affected by rural flight, small towns and rural areas, like those in central Indiana, welcomed the prospect of more jobs. Too often, these small areas had
insufficient residents to meet the new labor demands. Additionally, those workers who initially embraced the arrival of these jobs rejected the positions associated with “less-than-desirable jobs” in meatpacking and night shifts (Kandel and Parrado 2004: 257). As a result, these companies recruited individuals from other regions to fill the demand. Companies like Caterpillar, Subaru, and Wabash National recruited workers from throughout the nation. Additionally, the area’s service industry also expanded to meet the varied needs of the rising population. With every stage of economic expansion, Lafayette grew in physical size and population density. In the 1990s, Latino and non-Latino residents shaped the area into a very different image than it once was. My neighbor’s family came from Wisconsin, and I knew other White residents who had arrived via Chicago, Michigan, and Ohio, but it was the Latino arrivals who attracted the most attention. Similar to their non-Latino counterparts, Latino workers came from other cities in the United States that lacked substantial economic stability. Some did arrive directly from Mexico or other Latin American nations, but a majority (89 percent) of those I spoke with had resided in another part of the United States prior to stumbling upon Lafayette. Additionally, other co-ethnics like Puerto Ricans and El Salvadorans also made Lafayette home. Thus, central Indiana became well known among a small circuit of Latino migrants in search of a quieter, more financially stable place to raise a family.

In 2006, the region was rife with newly built shopping centers, redeveloped condos, and housing subdivisions where once corn and soy had grown. With an overall unemployment rate far below that of the national average, Greater Lafayette reaped the benefits of economic growth. As the community expanded, established Lafayette residents worked alongside, went to school with, and lived in the same neighborhoods as newly arrived individuals. Rather than being spatially or socially segregated, Latino Hoosiers interacted daily with their non-Latino neighbors. In theory, the opportunity to meet, welcome, and relate to newly arrived residents was possible; however, in practice the public spaces, residential areas, schools, and workplaces reflected a different mode of interaction. Prior to the 1990s, exposure to Latino populations throughout the state was limited to seasonal migrant labor. The 40 percent growth from 1990 to 2000 in Lafayette’s Latino population resulted in noticeable changes in entrepreneurship, places of employment, classrooms, and neighbor-
hoods. Lafayette’s already established Mexican families delighted in the growth of Latino neighbors in the 1990s. The substantial increase brought a rise in Spanish church services, grocery stores, and other ethnic businesses. This was especially appreciated by women who no longer had to make homemade *tortillas* or covertly meet in one another’s homes for Spanish prayers to the Virgin Mary. However, while Mexican residents rejoiced at the arrival of other Mexicans and Latino co-ethnics, some non-Latinos noted the changes with trepidation.

The introduction of H.R. 4437 in 2005 and the resulting debates on immigration in 2006 sparked hostility and resentment toward the region’s increased Latino population. More recently, state-based legislative acts in places like Arizona, Alabama, Georgia, Utah, South Carolina, and even Indiana have continued to mark undocumented immigrants, and particularly Latino residents, as *personae non grata*. The persistent politics of immigration situates undocumented immigrants, and Latinos assumed with that label, as deficient and unworthy of acceptance. This book illustrates how Latino residents positioned themselves as legitimately belonging to or “owning” the right to reside in Lafayette. Latino families of Lafayette faced daily reminders of their difference in this Hoosier space. Climate patterns, the pervasiveness of spoken and written English, and introverted cultural patterns made this midwestern space quite unlike those in Latin America or even more traditional settling locations in urban and southwestern cities. Yet, since 1956, Latinos settled in Tippecanoe County, raised families, and (re)constructed the meaning of “home” to include this Hoosier landscape. Through their bordered negotiations, Latino families claimed their own social and physical space in Lafayette.

**Intersecting the “Crossroads of America”**

Fittingly, the state motto of Indiana, “The Crossroads of America,” provides an important entry point for exploring how Latinos and non-Latinos interacted in this American landscape. As a metaphor for coming together and departing, the crossroads presents a way to examine how people converged or diverged in a community. The crossroads can also reveal how interstitial space provided an opportunity for accord and co-existence. Indiana has certainly faced these crossroads before. The experiences embedded in this book build upon a long history of cultural
contact and conflict in the region. Homes once inhabited by German immigrants now housed Mexican families. Streets traversed by horse and buggy now lead to truck dealerships where “Se Habla Español.” Centuries-old conflicts over settlement and encroachment became relived in the discursive battles over home, belonging, and community. This book illustrates these complex and historic intersections in the Midwest.

The crossroads metaphor also played a critical role in the lives of Mexican communities. Crossroads, or bordered experiences, can be thought of as the meeting space where multiple stimuli influence identity formation. Gloria Anzaldúa described this interstitial crossroads between national and cultural identities as a space of survival: “To survive the Borderlands / you must live sin fronteras / be a crossroads.” Thus, Anzaldúa advocated on behalf of a crossroads as bridge. Latino Hoosiers built bridges and lived metaphorically sin fronteras [without borders] by situating their lives both within Indiana and beyond national borders. Confronting real socioeconomic limitations and legal restrictions on their lives, Latinos in Indiana attempted to circumnavigate these “Crossroads of America” and created their own ethnic definitions of belonging in Hoosierlandia. But much like the façades of Disneyland, the simulacra implicit in such notions of the “American dream” are not without flaws. Examining the “internal boundaries permeating everyday life” in these nontraditional settling communities calls for heightened attention to both overt and subtle ways of bordering- and distance-making at the crossroads (Lugo 2000).

Latinos experienced figurative border inspections and border crossings nearly 1,500 miles away from the geopolitical U.S./Mexico border. Their inclusion in the local and national imaginary was limited by false assumptions of criminality and exclusion from narratives of rightful belonging that discounted the contributions Latino Hoosiers had made historically and in present-day Indiana. Notably, battling denied belonging was not specific to small towns or urban settings; it was not a Republican or Democratic issue; it was not a midwestern, southern, or western problem. Twenty-first-century immigration politics exposed a contentious environment prevalent throughout all corners of the nation as people defined who had a right to claim belonging and who could be denied basic human consideration. A “possessive investment in Whiteness” justified why some residents, those rendered as White and privileged, had earned their rightful place in a national racial and ethnic hierar-
This hierarchy depended on certain “ideological assumptions” engrained in the popular American psyche that conditioned certain unequivocal “truths” about Othered peoples (Santa Ana 2002). These stereotypical “truths” were repeated often enough that they took on the aura of fact. False binaries based on raced, ethnic, classed, and gendered negative associations confined belonging and marked undocumented immigrants with abject status. For some residents of Greater Lafayette, the definition of resident, citizen, neighbor, or community member shifted to exclude anyone identified as Mexican or Latino and therefore plausibly undocumented. Undocumented immigrants were imagined as impatient, dishonest, and disrespectful of American laws and sovereignty. Given these “truths” about undocumented immigrants, the general American public deemed them, and any Latino suspected of being undocumented, to be outside the parameters of belonging. Evidence of this Othering and reliance on these dubious “truths” emerged periodically during 2006. Printed election materials, newspaper opinion pages, and spoken utterances related how presumed criminality, language, and ethnicity implied “exceptionality, or the status of living as a person exempt from particular rights” (Rosas 2006: 337).

At job sites non-Latino co-workers shifted and sneered at the presence of Latino Hoosiers, even if they were full-fledged citizens. Latino youth reported being accosted at schools and public spaces. Mixed-status families cautiously stepped out of their homes in fear of being separated as a result of rumors of deportation raids. This meant that young children with birthright citizenship lived with the constant fear that their parents or siblings could be taken away. Mothers faced paralyzing fears at the thought of being separated from their children or returning to a place of hunger and desperation from which they had escaped. The rhetoric also took inspiration from past arguments that depicted Mexican women as poor, irresponsible, and the source of overpopulation. Gendered demarcations of Latino men as threats and Latinas as “baby-makers” operated in racialized narratives that bifurcated who could be deemed acceptable to community. If a woman looked “Mexican” and was out talking to her children in Spanish, she was automatically assumed to be undocumented and her children a strain on social services. Latino men, on the other hand, were conscious of how the dominant population viewed their presence as economic threats and
violent criminals. At times, non-Latinos avoided being in proximity to Latino men, avoided their gaze, and grimaced at the sounds of Spanish. Undeterred by the way they were perceived, Spanish-speaking residents kept on living and working in central Indiana.

Latinos sought ways to assert their “right to be different and [to] belong in a participatory democratic sense.”\(^{24}\) Ethnic belonging, as represented in this book, expands Renato Rosaldo’s notion of cultural citizenship to more daily efforts to participate and belong as recognized members of local, regional, national, and transnational communities.\(^{25}\) Instead of looking to typical avenues of citizenship, this volume accounts for the way participatory belonging was rebranded through cultural and lived contributions to community. Latino Hoosiers navigated their right to belong by refusing to give in to a rhetoric that narrowly defined the parameters of their acceptance. Latino cultural citizenship was evident in the immigration rallies across the nation; however, there were other, seemingly banal maneuvers of belonging that also demonstrated how Latinos constructed meaning and home in U.S. spaces. Individuals, families, and communities made use of public and private spaces where they could openly practice their transnational ethnic identity without compromising their local belonging. Fashioning their own sense of belonging through female comadrazgo [social networks], family, church, and entrepreneurial networks, Latino Hoosiers enacted their own feelings of home that challenged politicized exclusion. Openly speaking Spanish, scheduling quinceañera portraits in public areas of downtown Lafayette, and participating in ethno-religious processions on city streets all asserted their rights to belong. Though not purposefully planned to contest the politics of immigration, these organic displays of ethnic belonging still subverted the narratives that protested their presence.

Ethnic Belonging at the Crossroads

Ethnic belonging provides a way to acknowledge the simultaneous exchange of being Latino and feeling at home in Indiana. Ethnicity, nationalism, transnationalism, and local belonging are concepts traditionally placed in opposition to one another, as if emphasis in one denotes challenges to the others. Critically, the drive to be transnational—that is, to be able to navigate freely across borders without fear of deportation,
criminalization, or being denied reentry—actually inspired immigrant arrivals to claim local legitimacy in the United States. Instead of being oppositional, ethnic belonging fuses ethnicity, nationalism, transnationalism, and local belonging. Developing ties to Indiana did not lessen transnational commitments to hometowns or families elsewhere. Similarly, strong ethnic ties to places like Mexico did not interrupt attempts to feel affinity toward Hoosier communities.

Ethnic belonging allowed for degrees of global flows in correlation with national belonging and accounted for the way Latino Hoosiers actually lived out their daily negotiations between both. For instance, marchers along the Indianapolis immigration rally held up signs that read “We ♥ Indiana” while loudly proclaiming in Spanish: “Aquí estamos, no nos vamos, si nos echan regresamos” [We are here, we aren’t leaving, and if you throw us out we’ll return]. A middle-aged Latino male might have shed a tear at the sight of his son playing American football in the high school game and yet still sang the Mexican national anthem during another sporting event. Children participated in Virgin of Guadalupe
processions as well as represented their school in the annual downtown Christmas parade. Adults voted in November elections while preparing for their holiday trip to see family in central Mexico.

In daily examples, individuals straddled that border between transnational ethnic identity and local belonging to Indiana. These daily encounters built ethnic ties and fortified a collective identity needed for moments of public protest. To understand the activism which resulted in the pro-immigration rallies that challenged H.R. 4437, we must first explore the daily practices of ethnic belonging that inspired and sustained eventual participatory citizenship. Here, we may adopt and adapt the feminist adage that the “personal is political” in exploring the politics of everyday life. Personal interaction in the workplace, family celebrations, educational strategies in the classroom, and even attendance at sporting events lay the foundational consciousness and organizing networks for coordinated political expressions. Fashioning ethnic belonging provided families with the emotional commitment to assert themselves as legitimate members of local, regional, and national communities.

Instead of absorbing into the mainstream, Latino Hoosiers reconfigured what it meant to belong in this region. Latino residents of Greater Lafayette, regardless of immigration status, engaged their own position as civil partners in central Indiana and in that manner provided a more nuanced form of imagining themselves as legitimate citizen-actors of community. Latino Hoosiers continually pointed to their entrepreneurial spirit, home mortgages, and sweat equity as evidence of a commitment to this national landscape. Longtime Lafayette resident Hilda was brought to Lafayette as a baby; she was raised here, and though she lived in Mexico for some time, she returned eventually because, as she expressed: “aquí es mi tierra, mis primeros recuerdos son de Lafayette” [this is my homeland. My first memories are of Lafayette]. For many Latino Hoosiers their family, their job, their church, and, in other words, their life was located primarily in central Indiana. Even as Latino Hoosiers wove themselves into these landscapes, they did so without separating their Latino lives from their U.S. surroundings. The art of carefully balancing themselves as both Latino and Hoosier was written in their own narratives of success, a success that did not necessitate assimilation into the mainstream.
Organization of the Book

Chapter 1, “Recuerdos de Lafayette: The Making and Forgetting of the Past in Central Indiana,” situates this book within a history of past encounters with belonging. Tracing the manner in which residents from this midwestern city historically positioned themselves in relation to Native Americans, Black freedmen, and earlier European immigrants exposes parallels of denied acceptance that would resurface in 2006. This chapter examines how the area’s earlier generations perceived immigrants and people of color and how these marginalized communities negotiated their place within central Indiana. Exploring the palimpsest of history written, rewritten, or forgotten in the local imaginary, the chapter mines the way knowledges (plural) of the past influenced contemporary definitions of belonging. The presence of the past became critical in the anti-immigrant discourse of 2006 that channeled generational precedence against recently arriving Latinos to Indiana. In addition, this chapter explores how and why Mexican residents began settling in Lafayette, with a particular interest in recounting what life was like for Mexican “pioneers” in Lafayette during those earlier settlement stages in the 1960s.

Chapter 2, “Kneading Home: Creating Community While Navigating Borders,” appreciates the complicated ways in which Latinos created community. This chapter includes discussion of the myriad ways in which Latinos sacralized their presence in this midwestern space. Whether through religious practices or familial networks, Spanish-speaking families needed community to provide a sense of home. Locating familiarity and comfort in central Indiana was difficult at times, especially when others, including those who shared the same religious faith, put up mental walls or shut real and metaphorical doors on Latino families. Illustrating an incredible resiliency, the Latino community created their own avenues of belonging. Publicly and privately, they sustained opportunities where their faith practices and ethnic lived realities could be affirmed.

Chapter 3, “Written Otherings: Policing Community at the ‘Crossroads of America,’” places non-Latino interviews in dialogue with local print media to account for the ways by which an anti-immigrant sentiment infiltrated locally. Highlighting the impact of words and images
on people’s perception of Latino residents, this chapter describes how race, gender, and class saturated the politics of belonging. Specifically, it places respondents’ voices, letters to the editor, campaign flyers, and media representations to consider not just the discourse itself but also its impact on people’s perceptions. Through an analysis of written, spoken, and embodied communicative acts, the chapter explores critical moments of enacted discourse.

In other words, someone who spoke of “illegals” and ascribed undocumented status to perceived visual markers of Mexican identity projected racialized, gendered, and classed assumptions that were then used against Latinos. Thus, the language surrounding immigration and “legality” altered the way people interacted with their Latino neighbors. Moreover, because these conversations remained shielded by the cloak of legality, sovereignty, and terrorism, the actual racialized undertones that infiltrated the daily lexicon went virtually ignored. By eliciting a discursive analysis of how belonging was talked about, this chapter performs the necessary task of placing public discourse in context with respondents’ voices to see how the national debate on immigration shaped personal perspectives and altered embodied distance.

Chapter 4, “Clashes at the Crossroads: The Impact of Microaggressions and Other Otherings in Daily Life,” advances the previous discourse analysis by probing the lived moments of conflict and confrontation. Verbal and felt distances at work, on the street, at stores, and in schools illustrate the social borders and boundaries set up throughout the town. Responses from Latinas and Latinos addressed gendered differences that manifested in multiple microaggressions. From their perspective, Latino residents described an immense disappointment with the negative social climate molded by false assumptions. Moreover, the chapter integrates the experiences of second-generation Latinos who were also targeted with slurs, negative interactions, and traumatic moments of denied belonging.

Chapter 5, “‘United We Are Stronger’: Clarifying Everyday Encounters with Belonging,” records the importance of daily lived experiences as a marker on community dynamics. Beginning with an examination of the seemingly innocuous assumptions held by non-Latinos, the chapter exposes how even the most well-intentioned person could accede to dangerously oversimplified views. Unlike other respondents, letter writers, or
politicians, these residents felt themselves more open-minded to immigration and the Latino presence in general. Still, they often reverted to the dominant narratives prevalent in the politics of immigration that unfairly portrayed Latinos as monolingual or criminal lawbreakers. For Latinos, they enacted and embodied their own counter-narratives to these debates in their lived daily experience. In addition to forming critical community organizations or individually inserting a more complicated picture of the immigration debate, Latinos’ interactions in the classroom and sporting events also lay the foundational consciousness for asserting a “right to belong.” This ethnic belonging in seemingly banal activities built comfort, a positive self-image, and ties to their version of a Lafayette community. The political activism displayed in 2006 did not simply materialize overnight; layers upon layers of lived ethnic consciousness built solidarity, social networks, and the committed enthusiasm to march for social justice. At times, these more personal impromptu moments may have meant more to Latino Hoosiers than overtly demonstrated acts of protest.

The book’s Conclusion, “The Politics of Belonging Wages On: How State-Based Legislation Affects Community in Indiana,” relates how rigid definitions of community continued to undermine state and local notions of belonging. Widening the concept of community strengthens how people relate to one another as a collective and see value in one another’s presence, but the resolve of certain politicians to continue to build their careers on anti-immigration legislation speaks to the importance of this book. In 2011, Indiana politicians followed the lead of other legislators in states like Arizona who continued to mark Latino residents with suspicion and worthy of policing. If unchecked, these local state-based actions dangerously maintain divisive rhetoric in the popular imaginary and block any opportunity to move forward together. The Conclusion provides a space to delve into ways in which individuals and local groups could reimagine community as an inclusionary concept. The narratives in this chapter provide significant lessons for other towns currently facing their own challenges. As the politics of race and divergent notions of belonging continues to afflict states like Arizona, Alabama, Georgia, Oklahoma, and even Indiana with draconian state-based bills on immigration, this Conclusion reminds readers of the case of central Indiana and what this community confronted. Appreciating the resiliency of Latino residents in the face of direct and indirect ani-
mosity can inform other areas of the country that are facing their own politics of belonging.

Whether in traditional Latino-settling destinations like Arizona or in southern states experiencing a rise in Muslim immigrants, the ethnic belonging developed by marginalized groups remains significant for combating otherwise inhospitable environments. I have no doubt that thriving counter-responses exist in all these spaces, but the question remains: What do we search for when looking for agency, activism, and oppositional politics? For Latino Hoosiers, their asserted agency materialized in daily refusals to give in to the rhetoric of exclusion. Many faced constant material and structural threats to their belonging and encountered negative borderings with fellow non-Latino residents, but they met these daily oppressive moments with equally persistent claims to ethnically belong. Living in Indiana meant confronting an imagined sense of community rife with tensions that presumed White residents as the norm. Layers upon layers of past conceptualizations of belonging riddled the contemporary landscape: the Ku Klux Klan control of state politics and anti-immigrant hysteria, the realities of settler colonialism, and the romantics of earlier European immigrants informed the construction of a twenty-first-century Hoosier identity. Yet these Latino Hoosiers continue to alter the changing face of the Midwest. Their lives and daily affirmations to ethnic belonging illustrate how change is made daily, tenaciously, and perhaps even subconsciously by those unwilling to consent to national and local manifestations of injustice. Regrettably, politicians still refuse to budge on comprehensive immigration reform while families continue to live in fear. Anxieties over deportation, separation from U.S.-born children, and evident reminders of their liminal, exceptional status persist. Still, these individuals and families remain. Daily they live out their lives, compartmentalize the fears, and find avenues to celebrate their humanity amid other Latinos who together make neighborhoods, towns, and regions slightly more bearable. This book celebrates their resolute spirit and acknowledges the pains undergirding their strength.