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Patterns of immigration to the U.S. have been changing since the 1990s. The geographic dispersion of immigrants away from traditional urban gateways—New York, Los Angeles, Houston, Miami, and Chicago—into smaller communities throughout the country means that millions of native-born Americans lacking any experience with foreigners are now, for the first time in living memory, having direct and sustained contact with unassimilated immigrants. The newcomers settle in small towns as well as large cities, in the middle of the country as well as the coasts. Especially relevant to Great Plains Research readers, the new immigrants have discovered the Middle West, the Plains states, and the South.
New Faces in New Places documents these demographic changes with data from the U.S. Census Bureau and other population surveys, and examines the causes and consequences of these trends, including how native-born Americans are responding to their new neighbors. Part 1 documents “Emerging Patterns of Immigrant Settlement” with chapters on the geographic diversification of American immigration; the structure and dynamics of Mexican migration to new destinations in the U.S.; the emergence of new nonmetropolitan immigrant gateways; the restructuring of the meat-processing and construction industries around Hispanic workers; and the origins of employer demand for immigrants in the volatile Louisiana oil-based economy.

Part 2 focuses on “Community Reaction to New Immigrant Groups”: prejudice toward immigrants in the Midwest; immigration experiences in four rural American settings in the Midwest and South (Minnesota, Iowa, North Carolina and Georgia); intergroup relations in the rural and small-town South between Hispanic immigrants and resident blacks; Latino migration to Nashville; the story of how one small Pennsylvania town, Kennett Square, struggled to find a way to welcome Hispanic immigrants to their community; and a study of how suburban, white-dominated institutions react to increasing ethnic and racial diversity largely driven by immigration.

Charles Hirschman and Douglas S. Massey believe that the frequent problems experienced by immigrants in the U.S. today should not be minimized because immigration is not a smooth process. Long-distance migration often begins with economic dislocation at home and upon arrival in America. Dislocation, adjustment, and adaptation are dry, euphemistic terms that do not capture the painful process of separation and loss the new immigrants feel. And yet they argue that there are positive benefits for the immigrants as well as the communities in which they are settling. Minds are broadened by new experiences and associations. Balancing these losses and gains is a process that will likely continue in the foreseeable future in small towns and large cities. They conclude that “One thing is crystal clear: undocumented status constitutes an unprecedented barrier to immigrant integration. Removing this barrier is an essential first step in giving the new immigrants a fighting chance of realizing the American dream.” John DeFrain, Department of Child, Youth and Family Studies, University of Nebraska–Lincoln.