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Review of *Hollowing Out the Middle: The Rural Brain Drain and What It Means for America*. By Patrick J. Carr and Maria J. Kefalas.

Peter F. Korsching

Iowa State University, pkorsch@iastate.edu

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Hollowing Out the Middle: The Rural Brain Drain and What It Means for America. By Patrick J. Carr and Maria J. Kefalas. Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2009. xiv + 239 pp. Map, notes, references, index. \$26.95 cloth, \$16.00 paper.

“Hollowing out the middle” refers to the loss of the well-educated young adults in rural communities of America’s Heartland—the Corn Belt and Great Plains. Declining rural communities invest their meager resources to educate their brightest youth, thereby providing them opportunities for rewarding careers in distant cities. This further contributes to the communities’ woes because it guarantees not only population loss, but also loss of expertise and leadership that could help them solve their problems.

Carr and Kefalas’s contribution to understanding the dilemma of rural communities promoting and supporting the loss of the best and brightest is through an in-depth analysis of young adults’ decisions regarding their futures and the role of local institutions and organizations, especially schools, in developing and reinforcing those decisions. They conducted a case study of Ellis, Iowa (a pseudonym), population 2,014, examining the decisions and actions of young adults who graduated from high school in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Their research identified four paths or types: achievers, stayers, seekers, and returners.

Achievers are identified early in school and receive special treatment in terms of opportunities, encouragement, and support to reach their potential and go on to college with no expectations of returning to the community. Stayers receive little encouragement or support, do not go to college, marry early, and end up in blue collar, low-paying jobs. Seekers also do not receive encouragement or support, but they see little future for themselves in their community. Lacking good grades and financial support to attend a major college, they often see military service as their pathway out.

Returners can be subdivided into high fliers and boomerangs. High fliers are achievers who become disillusioned with big city ambiance and long for simpler small-town life with close friend and family ties. Local and state policy makers actively seek to attract high fliers. Boomerangs, who have much in common with the stayers, are more likely to return, often after a military hitch or community college experience, ready to get on with life. Many ultimately end up on welfare roles. Ellis’s educators and leaders were fully aware that their support of achievers was detrimental to the town’s long-term

viability, but believed it was their responsibility. Carr and Kefalas suggest it is unconscionable not to provide opportunities and support for stayers. Realistically, stayers are the hope for the future of many rural communities.

This volume is ideal for undergraduate and graduate courses on community, community development, rural development, and rural life to help students understand the problems rural communities face. More importantly, it should be read by all Great Plains school board members

and principals, community leaders, and state policy makers. Great Plains states and communities need to implement creative development strategies that explicitly include enhancing stayers' human capital. Without a major paradigm shift in relation to those most likely to stay in the community, the fictional "buffalo commons" may become "surreal" for much of the rural Great Plains. **Peter F. Korsching**, *Department of Sociology, Iowa State University*.