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LIVES OF THE LIVESTOCK INDUSTRY: IMMIGRATION IN KANSAS CITY'S RAILROAD AND MEATPACKING INDUSTRY

Roland Vaca

Mentors: Margaret Garb and Douglas Flowe

Following the conclusion of the Civil War, investors in Kansas City and from the east coast and Midwest developed Kansas City into one of the nation's leading livestock centers. The industry drew immigrants from Europe and migrants from the American south and southwest to Kansas City. This thesis investigates the work experiences and living conditions of German, Irish, Croatian, Mexican, and African American populations that migrated to Kansas City to seek employment on railroads and in packinghouses. My research tracks the growth of ethnic communities created by the immigrant workforce and explores the rise of religious and cultural institutions. The thesis analyzes the relationships between immigrant groups and their employers, and among the immigrant laborers, as successive waves of immigrants replaced previous groups residentially and in employment. This thesis argues that employment in the livestock industry attracted immigrants to Kansas City, the workers' relationship to the industry affected the establishment of ethnic communities, and most significantly, that although cross-cultural relations within packing plants were initially tumultuous, meatpacking eventually served as an interracial unifier.