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"No Tyson in Tongie!":

The Battle to Protect a Rural Way of Life in Kansas[1]

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Abstract

Political mobilizations in small towns have come to play a disproportionate role in today's national politics. This paper examines the conditions giving rise to small-town mobilizations through an in-depth case study of Tonganoxie, Kansas. Residents of this town mounted a massive campaign to block the opening of a Tyson chicken processing plant in 2017. The paper draws on interviews, observations, a newspaper claims database, and extractions from the "No Tyson in Tongie" Facebook group page. The paper maintains that a racialized cultural framework ("rural idyll") among White middle-class residents helped them perceive the plant as an existential threat. Social networks, sustained through social media, enabled the same residents mobilize in a fast and forceful manner. We suggest that in "hybrid" towns (partially rural and suburban), the "rural idyll" is politically decisive. It unites recently settled and established residents in battles to defend a particularly racialized and classed way of life.

Keywords: Rural, mobilization, rural idyll, networks

Introduction

In September 2017, residents of the town of Tonganoxie, Kansas (population 5,326) mounted a massive campaign to block the installation of a Tyson chicken processing plant. Most of the town's residents feared that the plant would unalterably change their "rural way of life" by damaging the natural environment and introducing immigrants to the area. Residents were outraged. They formed a new organization, coordinated actions through a Facebook events page, held massive public events, and packed city council meetings. In a period of two weeks, they organized a series of public demonstrations that drew more than half of the town's population, a remarkable feat for any campaign. Within several weeks of the announcement, residents of Tonganoxie succeeded against one of the largest corporations in the Midwest and the state's Republican political establishment. Tyson withdrew this project from all of Kansas and searched for a suitable alternative in Tennessee. The mobilization was fast (in terms of the time of its beginning to the achievement of the primary goal) and thick (in terms of the proportion of residents involved).

The case is puzzling for several reasons. McAdam and Boudet (2012) show that there are important obstacles to local mobilizations against the siting of new infrastructure and industrial projects. At first glance, many of those same obstacles were present in Tonganoxie. Protesters faced restricted political opportunities because the Tyson project was initiated by a distant and hard-to-pressure state government (McAdam and Boudet 2012). Governor Brownback invested significant political capital in the project, and state officials moved quickly to frame it as a major economic boon to the region. The town was predominantly White, but becoming increasingly heterogeneous with regards to characteristics other than race. There were conservatives and liberals, new commuters and well-established multi-generational residents, and middle and low-

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income residents. This heterogeneity should have weakened local social networks and fragmented perceptions of threat (Dokshin 2016). Lastly, according to interviews, residents had no prior experience with highly contentious mobilizations, and there were no professional nonprofit organizations leading the battle. Thus, political, social, and organizational obstacles made this town an unlikely candidate for a successful mass mobilization against one of the largest corporations in rural America and the state's political establishment. Though there are obstacles that impede local protests of industrial and infrastructure sitings, we argue that certain conditions in rural towns like Tonganoxie allow residents to overcome barriers and launch potent mobilizations.

First, towns in rural America are not all the same. Some towns have suffered from a decline in the agricultural sector, but a growing number have become homes to professional White middle-class commuters (Carr and Kefalas 2010; Lichter 2012; Lichter and Ziliak 2017; Salamon 2003). Tonganoxie's location between Lawrence and Kansas City make it an ideal home for commuters and long-established residents alike. These towns are neither traditionally rural nor unalloyed commuting suburbs; they are *hybrid towns*, with one part of the population consisting of longtime, multigenerational families and another consisting of recently settled suburbanites. The hybrid character of these rural towns serves as a double-edged sword for mobilizations. It introduces heterogeneity (i.e. newcomers versus established, commuters versus locals, liberals and conservatives, and so on), which can fracture mobilizations. Yet, it also increases the numbers of middle-class residents with crucial resources and "civic skills" (Lehman Schlozman et. al. 2018).

Second, the "rural idyll" is a cultural framework that provides the different segments of White residents (e.g. newcomers and the established) with common narratives, themes, and frames that mark a moral boundary between the sacred rural community and threatening outside

forces (cf. Auyero and Swistun 2008; Bell 2006; Cramer 2015; Hubbard 2005; Kramer 2019; Molotch, Freudenburg, and Paulsen 2000; Woods 2003, 2008). Race and class underpin the highly romanticized imaginary of a rural way of life (Bell 2006; Keller et. al. 2015; Mitchell 1996; Schmalzbauer 2014; Williams 1973). In hybrid towns like Tonganoxie, this paper maintains that the rural idyll unites newcomers and established residents around a particularly White and middle-class imaginary of ruralism, fomenting solidarity among some while sharpening boundaries with others. This common cultural framework allows different groups (e.g., newcomers and established residents) to perceive external disturbances to their racialized "rural way of life" as an existential threat.

Third, hybrid towns provide conditions to build strong bonds among established residents and bridges to connect established residents and newcomers. Social spaces (e.g. schools, public rituals, public spaces) facilitate strong-tie relations among more established residents, while social media serves to bridge disconnected groups and fill in relational gaps between newcomers and the established. Bonding and bridging networks enhance the capacities to pool resources and enforce social cohesion and norms.

Activist residents of Tonganoxie therefore faced barriers that should have smothered the mobilization. However, the specific conditions found in Tonganoxie (and similar hybrid towns) allowed residents to overcome obstacles and mount a remarkable campaign that involved more than half the town's residents. A new middle-class, a cross-cutting racialized cultural framework (i.e. rural idyll), and robust organizational capabilities (i.e. bonding and bridging social networks) allowed different segments of local society to enforce unity, circulate information, and mobilize valuable resources. Thus, we suggest that there is a higher likelihood of potent mobilizations in those cases where both racialized cultural frameworks and bonding and bridging

networks are present. These mobilization capacities enable residents to enforce the closure of their social and physical worlds against threatening outside forces.

Though we focus on one mobilization in one location, the case of Tonganoxie is not an isolated occurrence. Since 2016, there has been a wave of mobilizations against meatpacking plants in Powell Gardens, Missouri, Mason City, Iowa, Fremont City, Nebraska, and Jefferson County, West Virginia, among others. Many of these mobilizations have scaled up into statewide and multi-state campaigns. These fierce struggles reflect a rural America torn in conflicting directions (Ashwood 2020). As manufacturers and Republican officials have sought to expand industrial spaces employed by immigrant laborers, certain residents have reacted and struggled to produce a decidedly White, middle-class space enshrined in the racialized identity of the rural idyll. Importantly, these mobilizations have flourished under many of the same seemingly adverse conditions as the Tonganoxie case. The theoretical lessons derived from Tonganoxie therefore can contribute to broader understandings of mobilizations in rural America by providing a unique window into the conditions that shape such mobilizations (Becker 1992; Ragin 1992; Walton 1992).

This paper is organized as follows. First, we summarize the literature on rural mobilizations, introduce our core theoretical arguments, and outline our methods and data. Second, we present the substantive findings on the class make-up of rural mobilizations, rural imaginaries, and social networks. Third, we examine how these factors coalesced in Tonganoxie to bolster local mobilization capacities. We conclude by discussing the broader implications of the case for rural mobilizations.

Mobilizations in Rural America

Recent scholarship on rural politics has largely focused on a distinctive rural political culture and its role in shaping the political grievances of residents (Hochschild 2014; Cramer 2015; Wuthnow 2018). Such studies, however, say little about the conditions that drive contentious political mobilizations in rural contexts. The social movement literature, by contrast, has begun to pay close attention to local-level, NIMBY-like mobilizations in suburbs as well as rural towns (Dokshin 2015; Jerolmack and Walker 2018; McAdam and Boudet 2012; Wright and Boudet 2012). McAdam and Boudet have shown that whether disturbances (e.g. industrial and infrastructure sitings) give rise to contentious mobilizations depends on context-specific configurations of political opportunity, cultural frames, and organizational capabilities. More political opportunity (allies, political pressure points) can encourage mobilizations by providing activists a viable path to victory. A common cultural framework makes it more likely for residents to perceive a disturbance as a threat that needs containment through collective action (Dokshin 2015; Wright and Boudet 2012). Lastly, organizational capabilities (e.g. networks, organizations) propel mobilizations because they enforce norms, circulate information, and pool crucial resources.

Hybrid Towns: Established Residents and Newcomers

Broad social forces have made small towns in rural American into complex and hybrid settlements, a process that Vidich and Bensman (1958) first documented six decades ago. They observed how the integration of rural towns into "mass society" gave rise to a heterogenous socioeconomic structure, with professionals, "aristocrats", farmers, and industrial workers all living alongside one another (Vidich and Bensman 1958). Changes in industry and metropolitan growth have reinforced and accelerated these trends. Economic decline, the mechanization of agriculture, consolidation of farms, and fewer job opportunities in agriculture have pushed young

residents to find employment in larger cities (Carr and Kefalas 2010; Cramer 2015; Lichter 2012; Lichter and Ziliak 2017; Wuthnow 2018). As younger rural residents move to cities, some are replaced by new (professionals) arrivals and economic activities (Salamon 2003). A number of towns have become bedroom communities for commuters in nearby cities who are attracted to the idea of living and raising their families in a rural setting. For instance, 54% of rural residents live within metropolitan areas, and many of those residents are commuters (Lichter and Ziliak 2017: 9). Many rural areas also have become dependent on tourists and retirees settling permanently or on a seasonal basis (Cramer 2015). Lastly, the growing use of migrant labor in agriculture and meat processing industries has contributed to the ruralization of immigration (Keller 2019).

Alongside recently settled residents, there are generations of established residents who have been raised within key local institutions like schools, scouts, sport clubs, and religious organizations (Cramer 2015; Vidich and Bensman 1958; Wuthrow 2018). They are likely to have intimate and strong-tie relations made up of families, school friends, fellow congregants, and neighbors. The combination of new arrivals and well-established multi-generational residents has resulted in complex and heterogeneous local social structures characterized by newcomers (commuters, tourists, immigrants among others) with weak ties to the locality and longtime established residents with strong-tie relations to one another.

The hybrid structure of many small towns can hurt and help mobilization capacities. On the one hand, it introduces social divides between long established and new residents. While established residents may have close ties to other established residents, they are likely to have no or weak ties to newcomers (commuters, immigrants, and tourists), or, in certain cases, simply detest them. High levels of social fragmentation can hinder the recruitment, retention, and resource-capturing capacities of mobilizations. On the other hand, the hybrid social structure,

especially when middle-class professionals move in, can expand the more civically-engaged population that possesses resources and skills to enhance the quality of their engagement (Jacobs and Skocpol 2005; Verba et. al. 1995). According to Lehman Schlozman and her colleagues (2018: 56), middle-class jobs endow people with important "civic skills" such as communication and organizational skills, which increase the likelihood of joining and contributing to civic and political activities, including social movements (Lehman Schlozman et. al. 2018: 56-57).

Thus, the hybrid character of small towns in rural America can hurt local mobilization capacities, but the growing prominence of middle-class residents can provide campaigns with leadership, volunteers, and resources. Racialized cultural frameworks (i.e., rural idyll) and organizational capabilities (i.e., social networks), we argue in the next sections, can potentially bridge social divides between newcomers and the established.

Racialized Cultural Framework: The Rural Idyll

Scholars of rural politics have long argued that rural residents share a common cultural identity that can bridge social divides (Cramer 2015; Hochschild 2014; Woods 2003, 2008; Wuthnow 2018). Such an identity has been referred to as rural consciousness, ruralism, and the rural idyll, among others.

This identity rests on a binary between the rural resident and the urban other, with the rural conceived as a minority threatened by the city and what it represents (Cramer 2015; Hubbard 2005; Woods 2003). Cramer adds that this particular identity generates a "sense that rural areas do not get their fair share of power, respect, or resources and that rural folks prefer life-styles that differ fundamentally from those of city people" (Cramer 2015: 89). The rural-urban binary structures the identity and motivates rural residents to engage in contentious mobilizations (Hubbard 2005; Woods 2003, 2008). Though this generic identity precipitates

mobilizations, it also varies by the social and ideological positions of residents. Many embrace a reactionary variant of this identity, but some may fashion progressive (e.g. France's José Bové) or aspirational (e.g. associated the new rural middle class) rural identities (Woods 2003).

Many scholars have emphasized the centrality of a middle-class, White culture in shaping most variants of this identity (Cosgrove 1998; Heley 2010; Hubbard 2005; Keller et. al. 2015; Mitchell 1996; Schmalzbauer 2014; Williams 1973). The "rural idyll", as Keller (2019), Bell (2006) and others refer to it, reflects a romanticized representation of a rural way of life imbued with racialized and middle-class norms. Hubbard maintains that ruralism "denies the presence of ethnic minorities," an absence that "serves to consolidate a stereotyped image of ethnicised Others as entirely urban…" (Hubbard 2005: 12). As more middle-class people move to rural areas, they embrace ruralism, deploying it as a way to assert authenticity and mark class and moral distinctions (Heley 2010). Consequently, the rural idyll can serve as a basis of common identity for the White middle-class, but it does so by brightening the boundary between the "good" rural and "bad" others. Bell concludes that "it should be no surprise to find that the rural idyll is actually an exclusive and exclusionary place…the exclusions are, moreover, symbolic as well as material" (2006:151).

In keeping with Hubbard (2005), we suggest that the rural idyll serves as a cultural framework that provides different groups (newcomers and established) of residents with a common way to value their way of life and to assess threat. Divided by duration of residence, newcomers and established residents are united by their embrace of a particularly racialized and classed vision of rural life. The rural idyll consists of a repertoire of classed and racialized symbols, narratives, frames, and values that mark a moral boundary between a presumably sacred rural community and threatening outside forces. This common cultural framework functions as a cognitive and affective bridge between groups, permitting different residents to

perceive a disturbance (e.g. siting of a new industrial plant) as a singular existential threat. This perception of threat becomes a powerful motivator for contentious collective action (Almeida 2003).

Organizational Capabilities: Bonding and Bridging Networks

In addition to possessing a common cultural framework, towns like Tonganoxie also contain bonding and bridging networks. Bonding networks facilitate the mobilization of resources and the enforcement of a unified front, while bridging networks connect people across various social divides (Granovetter 1973; Diani 2015).

Established residents have interacted in common institutional spaces over many years (Vidich and Bensman 1958). They have attended the same schools, shopped at the same markets, participated in the same sports, attended the same handful of churches, and engaged in the same political institutions. Repeated interactions in common institutions increase the density and cohesiveness of networks (Granovetter 1973; Coleman 1988; Knoke 1990). This form of social closure "is important not only for the existence of effective norms but also for another form of social capital: the trustworthiness of social structures that allows the proliferation of obligations and expectations" (Coleman 1988: 107). People are more likely to join when they know and trust other activists and to stick to a campaign, and less likely to free ride or dissent when they feel a strong sense of obligation to the group (Coleman 1988; Diani 2015; Knoke 1990; McAdam 1986; McCarthy 1996). Lastly, strong social relations serve as a mechanism for capturing local resources (money, infrastructure, skills) and deploying them into a campaign (McCarthy 1996). Strong-tie relations among longtime residents are therefore particularly useful for self-organized mobilizations with little to no formal organizational support.

The influx of new residents to hybrid towns like Tonganoxie can introduce a relational gap or hole between newcomers and established residents (Knoke 1990; MacGregor 2010; Salamon 2013), which can weaken a community's capacities to achieve unity and mobilize large numbers. Traditional institutions, such as schools and churches, help create connections between new and established residents, but they are often insufficient. In such contexts, social media can bridge the relational gap between different groups of residents outraged by a disturbance to their rural way of life (Bennett and Segerberg 2013; Stern and Adams 2010; Tufekçi 2017).

Rural residents' use of social media is slightly lower compared with suburban or urban residents (58 % vs 64 % of urban residents and 68 % of suburban residents) (Perrin 2015:9), but rural residents, particularly the middle class and those participating in local events, use the Internet to learn and engage with local groups and political events (Stern and Adams 2010:1408). Social media technologies enhance, build, and maintain bridging and bonding social networks (Tiwari, Lane, and Alam 2019), facilitating the creation of collective movements (Lundgren and Johansson 2017). The sharing of cultural frames across social and spatial divides through social media platforms further enables the expansion of mobilizations (Bennett and Segerberg 2013). Moreover, both rural and urban residents use social media to connect with others at roughly the same rate (Gilbert, Karahalios, and Sandvig 2010). Lastly, successful movements must capture the attention of media outlets (Andrews and Caren 2010), which presents a challenge for rural residents who often feel the media ignores rural issues (Grieco 2019). With social media, communication about protests in rural areas can sidestep traditional media outlets (Reed 2008:213).

Through social media, individuals' views circulate beyond their personal and strong-tie networks, allowing people to create connections not possible in their everyday lives. When confronted with a disturbance like the siting of a chicken processing plant, social media permit

previously unconnected people to connect with one another and share information and rumors about the disturbance, deliberate over possible responses, and coordinate collective responses. Social media can therefore play an important role in bridging the relational divide between established residents and newcomers in these small towns, especially when there is a common denominator of a cultural framework (e.g. racialized rural idyll).

To summarize, towns in rural America are increasingly heterogenous, but they also possess a new, resource-rich middle class. New social divides may certainly undermine a town's mobilization capacities, but racialized cultural frameworks (i.e. a rural idyll) and organizational capabilities (i.e. bonding and bridging networks) lower the barriers to contentious collective action. Racialized cultural frameworks allow for different residents to perceive a disturbance as an existential threat and motivate many to mobilize. Bonding and bridging networks provide outraged residents with a powerful vehicle to mobilize their claims and demands in the political arena. The availability of motive and capability allowed activists in Tonganoxie to enforce unity, circulate information, and mobilize valuable resources to their campaign.

Methods

Rather than making sweeping generalizations on the basis of Tonganoxie, we intend to use this case to examine how certain attributes (rural idyll and bonding and bridging networks) contribute to enhanced mobilization capacities in certain rural towns. By identifying such factors in our case, we can comparatively analyze other cases through what Burawoy (1998: 19) has called, "inductive generalization."

We draw on four different data sources: ethnographic observations at public events in Tonganoxie, informal and semi-structured interviews, news accounts, and social media. The ethnographic research began abductively (Tavory and Timmermans 2013) by observing a surprising event which became the impetus to gather additional data. Thus, we capitalized on the

surprising and rapid rise of the "No Tyson in Tongie" movement as well as the speed at which residents accomplished their goal, as anomaly in the context of the extant literature because the conditions for a successful movement were not obviously present.

One of the authors first attended the large "No Tyson" community protest in September 2017, in which local elected officials heard from concerned citizens. This surprising event was recorded, photographed, the speeches were transcribed, and notes were taken immediately following the event. Additionally, handouts and other materials produced by the movement were collected. Following the methodological approach of other one-time protest events (see Hondagneu-Sotelo, et. al. 2004), one of the authors also conducted 10 convenience sample interviews with event attendees asking their motivations for attending the rally. Following these interactions, we jotted down observations and interviews into fieldnotes which we then analyzed using a grounded theory, open coding approach (Corbin and Strauss 2015). Through this analytical process, we determined the phenomenon of interest and returned to the field where we conducted systematic semi-structured interviews with six of the movement leaders.[2] These interviews purposively focused on tracing the history and development of the movement, the strategies deployed, and the framing used. These initial interviews were transcribed and coded by hand collaboratively by the research team using axial coding techniques to achieve best fit (Saldaña 2016:245). Rather than calculating an intercoder reliability score, we ensured intercoder agreement through shared familiarity of the case as well as ongoing meetings to discuss interpretation of results as these relate to the pertinent sociological literature. After repeated rounds of coding and analysis several themes related to community threat and mobilization emerged inductively.

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[2]We identify the name of the town but use pseudonyms for the individuals we interviewed.

Concurrently with interviews with leaders of the movement, we also conducted ethnographic participant observations from September 2017 through May 2018, as well as 25 interviews with Tonganoxie residents in the following strategic spaces: public library, grocery store, two restaurants, the local bar, trailer parks, barber shops, and church-run thrift shop. All these spaces, except for the trailer parks, are important gathering points for town residents and provided access to a cross-section of the local population. The aim of these observations and interviews was to gain greater understanding of the mobilization to stop the factory by focusing on how residents perceived the proposed Tyson factory and how it related to the movement. Observations were recorded in field notes and interviews were either audio recorded or details were jotted down immediately following a conversation. Transcripts and notes were coded and analyzed and emerging themes were tested in subsequent ethnographic encounters. We repeated this process until we reached a point of saturation.

To complement interviews and participant observation, we constructed a newspaper database by performing a LexisNexis search using the keyword "Tonganoxie." We excluded all articles that did not address the conflict over Tyson. This yielded 84 separate news accounts from September 5 to November 18, 2017. From these articles, we extracted 693 distinctive claims and statements made by the various stakeholders (public officials, residents, observers, and commentators). This database provided us with key insights into central grievances, the principal actors, and the basic political process.

Lastly, we constructed a social media database by extracting data from the "No Tyson in Tongie" Facebook group page for the period of September 5 to November 22, 2017.[3] The data

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[3] Online environments can provide researchers a window into "naturally occurring behaviors, such as communal discussion" (Kozinets 2010:56). This was the case with the No Tyson Facebook group. While online observations are often done covertly, we asked for permission.

extraction yielded 2,731 status updates and 32,237 comments on status updates. In our interviews, the movement leaders attributed the social media component significant credit in making the movement possible, we thought this was a key space to analyze. Following Caliandro's observation that "the main task for the ethnographer moving across social media environments is no longer that of identifying an online community to immerse into or follow but to map the practices through which users and devices construct social formations around an object on the move" (2018:570), we mapped and examined how people talked about Tyson, how they connected to one another, and how they employed social media to pool key resources and information for the campaign. Thus, by drawing from the group's online presence, we extended our inquiry into digital space, blending traditional ethnography with "digital" ethnography (Murthy 2008).

The Threat

On September 5, 2017 Kansas Governor Sam Brownback, local political dignitaries, and the Vice President of Tyson Foods assembled in the center of Tonganoxie to announce the opening of a new $320 million plant immediately south of town. The 300-acre chicken processing plant would process approximately 1.2 million chickens per week and employ 1,600 people with starting wages between $13 and $15 an hour. The Leavenworth County Commission[4] committed $500 million in industrial revenue bonds to cover 80 % tax abatements for 10 years. The town of Tonganoxie committed to extending the sewer line to the plant at a cost of $1.3 million. Governor Brownback and Tyson officials claimed that the small town was a perfect site for the project because it was located at an important transportation juncture and well

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We introduced ourselves as researchers and the moderators granted us access to the (restricted and closed) FB group.

[4] Tonganoxie is located in Leavenworth County, Kansas.

connected to both suppliers and consumer markets. The town and the production complex would become a strategic hub in Tyson's global production and distribution networks. The investment, Tyson officials and Governor Brownback maintained, would not only bring hundreds of jobs to the region but it would generate millions of dollars in revenue and bolster northeastern Kansas's declining economic fortunes.

The immediate response from many in the mostly conservative town was befuddlement, which quickly turned into moral outrage (Jasper 1997). There was little knowledge of the project before September 5 because of a nondisclosure agreement that elected officials had signed. One person remarked, "Why wouldn't you tell somebody this is what you want to do, before it is a done deal. They might as well {…} it down my throat and grab my heart and pull it out" (Michael, The Kansas City Star, September 5, 2017). On September 5, the same day of the announcement, residents set up a "No Tyson in Tongie" Facebook events page that drew in thousands of people. Tonganoxie residents quickly created a new organization and mobilized thousands to stop the Tyson project.[5]

On August 31, 2017, the Leavenworth County Commission voted 3-0 to support a bond resolution for Binswager Advisory Services, a pseudonym for Tyson (before September 5). Several weeks later, the county commissioners voted 2-1 to rescind the resolution and the Tonganoxie city council voted 4-1 to block its support for the project. Within weeks, the once heralded project had become one of the most politically toxic issues in northeastern Kansas. Tyson backed off and began a search for another town, eventually selecting to build their new plant in Tennessee. Kansas's political establishment was left speechless, trying to spin the stinging defeat into a favorable story.

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[5] The major rally of the movement was held September 15, 2017 at a park in town, with state senators and representatives in attendance.

Hybrid Town and Middle-Class Insurgents

Tonganoxie is a hybrid town. It is located within Kansas City metropolitan area (32 miles from Kansas City), but it is an area of northeastern Kansas that has been characterized as "pure rural" by CityLab's Congressional Density Index (Montgomery 2018). The town's population grew rapidly from 2,728 in 2000 to 5,326 in 2016, largely due to the influx of new residents who commuted to Lawrence and Kansas City. This resulted in a town that is partially longtime, multi-generational residents and partially newcomers. According to the Census's Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics, in 2002 86 % of workers in Tonganoxie were employed outside of the town, but by 2016 this had grown to 92.8 %. There are few employment opportunities in Tonganoxie (or small towns in general), which results in high numbers of residents commuting to work.

The influx of newcomers bolstered the town's middle class while doing little to change its homogenous racial and ethnic composition. According to the American Community Survey, non-Latino White residents accounted for 92% of the population in 2018 (84% for Kansas), Latino residents for 5%, (12% for Kansas), and Black residents for 1.7% (6% for Kansas). Foreign born residents of Tonganoxie accounted for 3.5% of the population (7.2% for Kansas). Median home values exceeded the state and median household income, slightly above (2010) and below (2016) the state's average. By 2016, nearly 30 % of the town's population had attained a bachelor's degree or above. Tonganoxie was a decidedly White middle-class town; this was reflected in the composition of the leadership, active participants and membership of the mobilization. Almost immediately after the Tyson announcement, a handful of residents formed Citizens Against Project Sunset (CAPS). "Project Sunset" was a code name that elected officials used to discuss the project prior to the September 5 announcement.

"The Day Tonganoxie Died": The Rural Idyll as a Racialized Cultural Framework

Tonganoxie was conceived as, according to one of the leaders, a thriving middle-class community. "Tonganoxie is a bedroom community to Kansas City; we're between Kansas City and Lawrence. There are people who commute to Topeka. We have a lot of economic development. The median income is $63,000" (Charles, News Bites - Private Companies, September 19, 2017). The town's middle-class residents, the leading activists argued, did not need the manufacturing and distribution jobs provided by a chicken processing factory. The Tyson project gave them strong motive to mobilize.

Both new and established residents drew upon the racialized cultural framework of the rural idyll to frame Tyson as an existential threat. Both appropriated rural narratives, tropes, and symbols to construct a bucolic landscape undisturbed by polluting industry and problematic people. Many evoked a uniquely White and middle-class imagery of rurality that centered on descriptions of pristine lands, Kansas heritage, two acres of land, and so on. "Everybody," according to Joyce, "just wants their little two-and-a-half acres and they want to be in a small town but yet, close to everything" (personal interview). More established residents often stressed their deep historical roots in the town as a way to legitimate their claims to the place. One resident noted, "Lots of people are third and fourth generations and their farms are passed down from 75-100 years" (Teresa, University News: University of Missouri, September 19, 2017). Another stressed the historical centrality of rural small towns in the state. "Kansas' heritage is small towns and without them, Kansas will lose its identity" (Kathleen, University News: University of Missouri, September 19, 2017).

Residents drew upon clichéd tropes to construct an ideal rural setting. Charles, a longtime resident and one of the leaders, posted a treatise to Facebook on the beauty of the area and the imminent threat facing it. "We get to live in an emerald paradise most of the year, the people are friendly, and still help the neighbors or anyone they don't even know if needed. It has been a

great place to raise our family" (Charles, Facebook, September 5, 2017). He addressed the natural environment ("emerald paradise") while celebrating stereotypical small-town values ("still help the neighbors"). Having set the scene, Charles then referenced White cultural touchstones to buttress his rural vision:

> Norman Rockwell, Andy and Opey goin' fishin' on a summer day [Andy and Opey refer to characters in a popular 1950s about small town life]. Cool. Awesome. I'm right there with ya'! Within the last week I began learning that the rumor of "The Company" [Tyson] actually had legs…Then... Poof! Andy and Opey find out that Norman Rockwell has been knocked off, and the future of Tonganoxie as the sleepy rural town just far enough away from the big city problems, is going to be the Chicken Capital of the State of Kansas! … With this one, singular, poorly considered project, Tonganoxie and Leavenworth County will be hit by a tidal wave that it cannot even imagine except in a disaster movie (ibid.)

He finished the post with, "I can hear the folk songs that will be written now... 'Bye Bye Miss American Pie, the day Tonganoxie died'" (ibid.). Thus, Charles evoked a racially distinctive representation of ruralism that was now threatened by Tyson.

For many residents, Tyson's primary threat was that it would attract 1,600 new workers to the town, mostly immigrants. Tyson would introduce a new and socially polluting population of immigrants to their town, thereby destroying their middle-class, White rural idyll. Many residents posted articles to the Facebook page with such titles as, "Somali refugees change face of southwest Mo. Town" and "Somalis arrive in Emporia with tuberculosis."[6] Carol, a rather vocal activist on the Facebook page, recounted her purported experience in the town of Emporia:

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[6] This is in reference to the Somali refugees working at a meatpacking plant in Emporia (about a 1.5 hour-drive from Tonganoxie); one of whom contracted TB.

I was going to school in Emporia when Tyson brought in a bunch of Somalian refugees to work at the plant. You had to be careful because they would just walk in your apartment if it wasn't locked and make themselves at home. A few girls were raped because women are property to them. It was a horrible situation but plants like this bring in immigrant labor. This could be devastating to our community (Facebook, September 5, 2017).

With each telling of this and other rumors, locals kept the stories alive, which helped reinforce apocalyptic narratives of White victimhood.

The leadership was cognizant that nativist and racist language could undercut their legitimacy. A month earlier, "Unite the Right," the White supremacist rally in Charlottesville, captured the attention of the media. In this heightened political context, the "No Tyson" activists had to police their language in order to not discredit the movement. As one of the movement's leaders explained, "you've got to stay away from even giving the appearance of having some type of a racist attitude." The leadership carefully considered language and arguments, especially in media interviews. The same movement leader explained,

Every media interview I did… that was always part of it, was what do you think about the immigrant labor force that they would bring in. And I said, 'That's not an issue.' And it really isn't because- We talked about it at the group. We have other arguments to make, so we don't have to go there. Number one, we don't want to go there; don't let them pull you into that to make it to where they can turn that and make you look like a racist. Because when they do that, you're done. It don't matter what you say after that or what you said before, that's going to be the quote that appears in the newspaper. It just is, (Jennifer, personal interview).

Leaders were therefore aware that their movement could be discredited by appearing to be racially motivated. Consequently, they attempted to elevate more legitimate arguments and control for overt racism.

Reflecting this concern, many activists used proxy language to express concerns about immigration. Rather than suggest that immigrants would ruin their town, they expressed concerns about the stress that the new population would place on public services. Without mentioning immigrants, one woman told us she was concerned that the plant workers' kids would need ESL classes, which she thought would drain schools' resources. Another resident noted, "What's it gonna do to our school? How many employees did you say it was, 1,600? Some of those people are gonna have families. Are they all gonna move here? So, are all those kids gonna go to our schools? It was just, I would say the concerns that people had at that point were very, just fundamental" (Patricia, personal interview). Another resident expressed her concerns about overcrowding, "My first thought was, 'Oh my god, we're going to have to go back to the days when we used to have house trailers.' The big double wide mobile homes to accommodate extra children, because the school wasn't big enough" (Dianne, personal interview).

In addition to encouraging the use of proxy language to talk about the impact of new workers to the town, movement leaders attempted to elevate environmental concerns and downplay racist and nativist language. In spite of these continual efforts, residents' concerns about immigrants readily seeped into discussions of environmental threat. One resident shared a link to Tyson's Wikipedia page, stating, "Just the simplest search concerning Tyson Companies violations of the EPA standards jumps up on their Wiki page with a whole list of violations with EPA, ICE, Animal Abuse, Employee Abuse, Undisclosed use of antibiotics and Price manipulation. ARE THESE THE TYPE OF NEIGHBORS WE WANT IN OUR COMMUNITY?" (Ronald, Facebook, September 5, 2017). Another resident posted, "One thing

you can do is just start googling Tyson- fined 'Tyson- illegal immigrants' 'Tyson-environmental'. It's shocking" (Laura, Facebook, September 15, 2017). One resident commented that, "I have been to many Tyson plants for work and they have ruined every community they are in. *You will not be able to escape the smell and type of people these plants bring with them. It will ruin the city you all love, guaranteed*!" (Larry, Facebook, September 5, 2017, emphasis added). The avalanche of negative comments created an epistemic bubble, which made it difficult to consider alternative or positive (or even neutral) aspects of the Tyson project. The Facebook events page turbocharged anxieties. Facts and reports were juxtaposed to sensational articles, rumors and lies. For those embedded in this discursive space, the boundaries between fact and fiction, real and fake news blurred into an avalanche of fear.

"No Tyson" activists were thus able to draw upon a shared conception of rurality to push back against a perceived threat to their way of life. For some, an imminent "flood" of immigrants motivated their participation in the movement, which speaks to the Whiteness inherent in the conception of the rural idyll. Dark skinned migrant workers had no place in an imagined world anchored by Opey, Norman Rockwell, and Don McLean's American Pie. Though movement leaders struggled to elevate legitimate environmental claims over illegitimate racist ones, nativist and racist language continually leached into discussions and the public sphere.

"I knew everybody": Networks as Organizational Capability

Strong Ties among Established Residents

The state of Kansas and the town of Tonganoxie have long been a place with fairly strong social ties. The state ranked 16th in terms of social capital according to Putnam's classical study, *Bowling Alone.*[7] According to a study comparing state to national averages, more people in

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[7] Bowling Alone website, http://bowlingalone.com/?page_id=7

Kansas join charity organizations (39.9% vs. 33.9%), youth organizations (28.6% vs. 24.1%), sport clubs (26.1% vs. 21.2%) and political groups (14.4% vs. 9.8%) than the national average (Easterling et. al. 2007). There are also higher levels of church membership (62.8% vs. 54.6%) and weekly service attendance (49% vs. 41%).[8] In Tonganoxie, a town of about 5,000 people, there are approximately 11 Christian churches (no synagogues, mosques, or temples), a ratio higher than the state's per capita average of one church per 8,935 (2010).[9]

Like small towns across rural America, the school system functions as a central social hub, for children and parents alike, and an important source of collective identity (Cramer 2015). Children in Tonganoxie attend the same elementary, middle, and high schools. Most longtime residents graduated from the same high school and football games continue to serve as an important part of collective life. There are also several important community rituals that stimulate solidarity-inducing symbolic interactions (Collins 2004): Tonganoxie Days, St. Pat's Parade, County Fair and Parade, Spooktacular (Halloween), and the Mayor's Christmas Parade. Lastly, the town center has one street, several restaurants and shops, and a church-sponsored second-hand store.

Such strong ties were particularly prevalent among well-established residents. Two local leaders of the campaign, Patricia and Diane, were longtime residents with strong relations to other long-term residents. Patricia's roots dated back to 1862 while Diane was born and raised in the town. Both maintained strong ties with friends from their respective high school cohorts, extended family, and neighbors. Thus, associations, institutions, rituals, and social spaces

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[8] Pew Research Center, Fact Tank: How religious is your state?
http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/02/29/how-religious-is-your-state/?state=alabama
[9] https://www.namb.net/Population_Church_Ratios

facilitated repeated contact among longer-term residents, helping to create cohesive social networks (Coleman 1988).

Longstanding relations, however, did not connect everybody. Some of the new residents connected to others through schools, organizations, and public events (c.f. Small, Jacobs and Massengill 2008), but many remained outsiders. They did not have family members in the town and had not developed friendship bonds during their school years. Patricia, a longtime resident, described the changing social relations: "When I was growing up here, like when I was in high school, which I'm getting ready to turn 43 in a couple weeks, go down Main Street, I knew everybody. If I didn't know him, I'm like, 'That's so-and-so's grandma or so-and-so's uncle.' Now, I probably don't know half the people in this town" (personal interview).

One of the campaign's leaders, Teresa, was a newcomer and unknown to many established residents. In a conversation, Patricia and Diane discussed Teresa's relations to other town residents:

Diane: Hasn't Teresa just lived here like four years?

Patricia: Four, yeah.

Diane: It's really a short period of time.

Patricia: Four years. … She's not really involved in a lot of stuff in town. Like she stays home, and has the kids, and they're little. [She] only had one mutual friend with me on Facebook. *To live in Tonganoxie and only have one mutual friend is really odd* (emphasis added). My husband's like, "Who is this chick?" I'm like, "I don't know who it is." I'm like, "Well, she is friends with Chloe," which I mean was in his class…. (Diane and Patricia, joint interview).

Thus, many newcomers like Teresa failed to connect to established residents' networks and fell through a relational gap.

Connecting Newcomers and Established Residents with Social Media

Facebook served as the primary vehicle for filling the relational gap between established residents and newcomers. On the day of the Tyson announcement, Teresa, the newcomer, created a Facebook events page. Her first post at 9:34 a.m. on September 5, 2017 stated, "Tyson is trying to put a plant in Tonganoxie" (Teresa, Facebook, September 5). On that day, there were 149 status posts, 887 comment responses to status posts, and 1,871 likes of status posts and comments. Over the next three weeks, the Facebook page exploded with activity; the number of members (6,559) outstripped the number of residents in the town (see, Figures 1 below).

Insert Figures 1 here

Social media played a decisive role especially in connecting previously unconnected people. Teresa suddenly became acquainted with hundreds of others living in the town and county. "We came together," Teresa remembered. "It was sort of like I had messages and I was having hundreds of Facebook messages every day" (personal interview). While the Facebook events page placed her in immediate contact with many local residents, new connections were brokered through other members of the Facebook page. Teresa recounted,

> I would spend my unwind time before I went to bed at night looking at my tablet, at my 99 Facebook messages for the day, and a lot of them were, 'Hey, you need to talk to this guy. You and James… need to get together. He manages the Tailgate Ranch. They own 80% of the land surrounding this proposed site. He really knows his stuff. You need to talk to him.' We got in contact very quickly (personal interview).

Activists on Facebook urged one another to reach out and their neighbors, friends, and even strangers. One of the leaders, Linda, repeatedly urged Facebook members to, "Pick up the phone and call your friends and neighbors who don't have social media or internet access" (Linda, Facebook September 8, 2017). One activist stressed:

> Please talk to everyone! I was at Walmart today.[10] I asked the Cashier what she
> thought. She said she was undecided. She liked the jobs coming but wasn't thrilled with
> the air quality going down. I filled her in on the job quality and water situation. She is on
> our side now. You never know when you can help someone understand the
> dangers!! (She lives in Tongie!) (Brooke, Facebook, September 11, 2017).

Although activists encouraged reaching out to as many friends, neighbors, and strangers, these contacts were all within a racially homogeneous space.

Social media therefore amplified the residents' abilities to recruit more people to their cause. "Facebook was," according to one of the leaders, "really the engine behind it ... It was the channel that we were able to really tie everything together" (James, personal interview).

High Mobilization Capacities in the Fight to Protect a Rural Way of Life

Political conditions did not favor these activists as they faced off against Kansas's political establishment (e.g. governor, senator, state political machine). However, an aggrieved middle class, a racialized cultural framework (i.e. rural idyll), and organizational capabilities (i.e. bonding and bridging networks) compensated for limited political opportunities. The racialized cultural framework and organizational capabilities were particularly important for the

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[10] Tonganoxie itself does not have a Walmart, but there are several Walmarts located in nearby, and larger, towns and cities. This exemplifies the commuter status of many of the town residents.

achievement of three key mobilization functions: enforcing unity, sharing information, and pooling resources.

Enforcing Unity

A rural idyll helped shape a unified identity structured around the symbolic opposition between the pristine (White) rural and a (demographically and environmentally) polluting factory. Networks helped enforce this emergent identity, which glued the newcomers and established residents but also suppressed dissent (Coleman 1988; Knoke 1990).

Enforcement resulted in enormous social pressure on wavering members of the community, both newcomers and established residents. Such pressure can be construed as bullying. One journalist observing the campaign noted, "And there is also kind of a dark side to it in that it brought out a lot of good in people and people were really getting to know each other, but at the same time there was some ugliness in people calling names and threats..." (David Frese, Kansas City Star, September 20, 2017). In one instance, a family agreed to lease a part of their land to Tyson without knowing its identity because of the confidential nature of the project. A family member recounted the community's response:

> I've received text messages and some phone calls that 'It's your fault, you need to back out of this, it's your fault that my grandkids are going to move.' They said 'You're stupid. Your family is stupid. You should never have signed documents selling your property when you didn't know who you were selling to.' (Victoria, Kansas City Star, November 13, 2017)

The enormous pressure placed on supporters and ambivalent residents alike made it difficult for them to express themselves in public debate. One reporter commented in his podcast, "There is a whole [slather] of people who are in favor of this project, that are afraid to speak out" (David

Frese, Kansas City Star, September 20, 2017). On different occasions, activists felt compelled to respond to charges of bullying. One prominent activist, Robert, declared that, "We are not bullies. We are Tonganoxie" (Robert, Lawrence Journal-World, September 12, 2017). Despite these concerns, creating a unified front required the harsh enforcement of political norms.

Information Sharing

The Facebook page helped activists collect and share important information about meetings, strategic political targets, and tactical options. One resident discovered procedures to stop the Tyson project by halting the rezoning of the designated area from agricultural to industrial. "I just spoke with the Leavenworth county planning and zoning department - that is who Tyson or anyone who wants to request land be rezoned would have to submit an application to…But once an application is received (next deadline is 22 Sept), landowners within 1000 feet will receive a letter notifying them of the request and their ability to sign a protest petition" (Molly, Facebook, September 8, 2017). Activists therefore used social media to disseminate information and identify key political pressure points to stop the project.

Activists also targeted important public spaces with high concentrations of people. The park in downtown Tonganoxie was an important space where parents and children socialized. "We took our little petitions, and we would sit down at the park as the mommas came to bring their kids to play. It's the social life in this town revolves around the kids. We're just old-fashioned in that manner" (Diane, personal interview). Activists provided parents with information, petitions, and flyers about the threats posed to their families' way of life. Others passed out flyers at the elementary school during pickup time. The Friday night football game was another important space. Diane recounts, "Everybody goes to the football game on Friday night…We would have petitions out there, and t-shirt sales, and sign sales, because you just

know that everybody in Tonganoxie is going to come to the football game" (personal interview). Thus, activists targeted the most important social spaces in town, using their local social capital to easily connect and share information.

Pooling Resources

The middle-class residents making up the leadership of the Citizens Against Project Sunset (CAPS) possessed "civic skills" (Schmalzbauer et. al. 2014) that allowed them to perform critical leadership functions. Teresa assumed responsibility for managing the Facebook page, curating information, policing the use of language, and reaching out to people who could be helpful to the cause. Diane was a retired registered nurse and worked on educating the public about the environmental risks the plant posed to the town. "I took on education and the children. So important to me, because they have no voice, and then added in the elderly people" (personal interview). Linda, a business owner, used her business acumen to solidify the emergent organization and her business networks to expand support. Emily, a freelance business journalist, assisted with press releases, writing up talking points, and managing media requests. Charles was a high-profile rancher, put to use his extensive experience in talking to the media and engaging with farmers, ranchers, conservatives, and Republican politicians. He remembers, "So, I was able to kind of be the lone ranger out here working some of the politics and the media" (personal interview).

In addition to capturing the civic skills of middle-class leaders, activists made open calls for different resources on the Facebook page. The day after the Tyson announcement, one resident posted a call for lawn signs. "Is there anyone in this group that knows someone or has any connections to a company that can have yard signs printed saying-- This family does not support Tyson. It would make quite a statement…" (Heidi, Facebook, September 6). Linda, a

leading activist, replied to this post, "working on it!" To which the original poster responded, "I figured someone had thought of it. You're my small town rockstar Linda ---- !!!" Teresa, on the other hand, requested laptop computers for sign-ins at one of the first large meetings: "REQUEST: We need laptops for folks to sign up on our web form. If you have a laptop that we can use, please send an email to C--- …. at info@s---.com" (Teresa, Facebook, September 9). Calls were also made for basic equipment and people responded by contributing whatever they had including chairs, tables and sound systems.

Despite the heavy reliance on social media, strong personal relations played a critical role in the acquisition of material resources. One of the activists, Nathan, had a friend with a print shop and was able to ask him a favor. Diane recounts, "Nathan said he pulled in some favors... and got us signs at cost" (personal interview). Teresa added, "We paid for the actual materials and they [the printer] donated everything else plus the time to print them and they took time out of their actual business schedule to get 600 of them printed for our first meeting. That was just the most they could do in a week," (Teresa, personal interview). Another business made a similar arrangement with t-shirts. "A lot of the shirts," James recounted, "were made locally by a person who has a business... It's a freaking big commercial machine in there, so they sold us those at cost" (personal interview). All large contributions (signs, shirts, banners, office space, money) were mediated through personal relations among established residents.

Tonganoxie activists, therefore, faced formidable barriers upon their entry into this political battle. But, a middle class provided resources and civic skills, a racialized cultural framework provided unity and motive, and social networks served as the organizational vehicle to connect residents and mount a robust mobilization to keep their town "rural." In particular, cultural frameworks and networks facilitated their abilities to enforce unity, circulate information, and mobilize civic skills and valuable resources to sustain an unspoiled (and White)

rural way of life against an environmentally and racially polluting industry. The battle was not simply about this concrete place but over the idea of rural America.

Discussion and Conclusion

On September 5, 2017, residents of Tonganoxie, Kansas exploded onto the political scene. Many locals firmly believed that a Tyson chicken processing plant would destroy their rural way of life. The ubiquity of a racialized rural idyll among middle-class residents, newcomers and established alike, provided a common frame to assess the likely impact of Tyson. The movement's major rally, held on September 15, 2017, came to symbolize both the movement and rural idyll. This scene, of a whole town coming together against an outside threat, has been etched onto the collective memory and culture of the town, exemplified by a mural of the rally painted on the wall of a popular local bar. Despite differences in political opinion and length of residency, a common "repertoire of interpretation" (Mooney and Hunt 1996) facilitated activists' work in convincing their fellow residents that the proposed Tyson plant would wreak environmental and demographic havoc on their beloved town. Additionally, a combination of bonding and bridging networks enabled activists to circulate information, spread terrifying rumors, mobilize the masses, and pool and allocate resources to the campaign. A classed, racialized rural idyll therefore combined with an interconnected network to generate a potent mobilization that secured a victory in the face of important political barriers. Their heightened mobilization capacities enabled residents of Tonganoxie to enforce social and spatial closure, effectively protecting a particular rural way of life.

Our intent was to bring various literatures into conversation to explain certain local mobilizations in rural America through the case of Tonganoxie. While these mobilizations can stay local, some can also drive political movements (e.g. Tea Party) as well as electoral campaigns (Skocpol and Williamson 2012). The heightened mobilization capacities found in

rural areas combine with a rigged political geography (e.g. gerrymandering, electoral college, Senate maps) to produce extraordinary political advantages for rural areas. Considering the importance of rural mobilizations, our work is an attempt to decipher the factors that make these mobilizations work. Our explanation stresses that rural mobilizations are fueled by processes (a racialized cultural framework and organizational capabilities) that bolster a politically vocal middle class. These factors coalesced in Tonganoxie, but we would expect them to play contributing roles in mobilizations across rural America.

Our study emphasizes the factors that enabled certain activists to achieve their impressive goal. An alternative explanation could be that small rural communities present challengers with more political opportunities because of the proximity between elected officials and their constituents, especially when constituent challengers are White and middle class. In a town like Tonganoxie, elected officials live in close proximity to their constituents and can face enormous social pressures outside city council meetings. Constituents can confront elected officials while shopping, worshiping at church, picking up their children form school, and frequenting restaurants or bars. Not addressing municipal and count level political opportunities in rural communities is one limitation of the paper. However, we would suggest that the proximity between local elected officials and constituents provided more opportunities, but such opportunities would have come to naught without the high mobilization capacities of residents. High mobilization capacities were made possible, we argue, by the availability of a robust cultural framework in the form of the rural idyll and social networks.

Lastly, there is also an important diffusion story here. Social media helped other communities imitate what Tonganoxie residents achieved. After Tonganoxie officially rejected the plant, Tyson considered other locations across Kansas, such as sites near Concordia, Wichita, and Coffeyville. In each location, groups drew upon similar racialized cultural frameworks and

social networks to protest these plans. They reached out to the "No Tyson in Tongie" movement leaders to learn what had worked and what hadn't. The proliferation of these battles reflects a political desire of some residents to protect rural areas from the polluting forces, environmentally and racially, of industrial capitalism. Many in these fights believed that they were engaged in an existential fight to save a White and middle-class rural way of life.

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Figure 1: No Tyson in Tongie Facebook page activities.