Preface

The shifting demographic profile of the United States and a growing recognition of the developmental implications of race, social class, historical experiences, and ethnicity have led to increased interest in studies of children from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds. To date, most research on racial and ethnic minorities has been conducted in metropolitan areas. However, nearly 20% of the US population lives in rural areas, and many rural residents are from racial and ethnic minority groups. For some groups, especially Latino/as, population numbers are increasing rapidly both nationally and in rural areas. Indeed, minorities were responsible for three-quarters of the population growth in rural areas between 2000 and 2010. Despite the changing demographics of rural areas and the presence of substantial minority populations, the intersection of rural location and ethnic minority status has received scant attention in the developmental literature. This book was undertaken to illuminate the experiences of racial and ethnic minority youth and families in the rural United States and to explore the challenges of conducting research with these populations.

Living in rural settings brings distinct challenges such as low-wage, labor-intensive jobs, lack of public transportation, and limited access to services. In recent decades, many rural areas have experienced economic declines, population loss, and out-migration, although others have shown increased prosperity and population gains. Child poverty rates are higher in rural than in urban areas, and educational levels tend to be lower. These challenges may interact with and exacerbate the challenges associated with racial and ethnic minority status. For example, rural Latino/a residents may have less access to bilingual services and resources than those in urban areas and may lack the social support provided by a well-established Latino community. Children from minority groups also face a complex set of issues beyond those related to rural location, including challenges related to acculturation, enculturation, prejudice, and discrimination. These complexities result in potentially unique profiles of physical, psychosocial, and educational risk for rural minority youth.
Each racial and ethnic minority group in the United States has a distinct history and cultural heritage. The African American history of slavery and segregation and the American Indian experience of land loss, forced migration, and cultural dismantlement contrast with the experience of groups such as Latinos and Asian Americans who typically migrated to the United States on a voluntary basis, fleeing sociopolitical upheavals in their home countries or seeking economic opportunities. Apart from distinct cultural traditions and world views, these latter groups initially spoke languages other than English, creating additional barriers to acculturation. The unique cultural traditions and histories of racial and ethnic minority groups may interact with the features of rural settings in distinct and diverse ways; thus, it is critical to consider the experiences of each ethnic minority group. For groups such as Latino/as and Asian Americans, it is also important to recognize that these groups include multiple subgroups with distinct national origins and migration histories. Likewise, American Indians encompass myriad tribes with distinct experiences, beliefs, and cultural traditions.

The intersection of rural location and ethnic minority status also creates unique challenges for researchers seeking to conduct developmental research to improve our understanding of these children and their families. Some challenges relate to the geographic isolation of many communities which creates logistical challenges related to participant recruitment and data collection. There is also the challenge of building collaborative relationships with communities to create viable research sites. There may be a distrust of outsiders, especially researchers, as well as stigma associated with participating in some kinds of research. These issues are compounded by the challenges associated with conducting research with ethnic minority groups who may be unfamiliar with and wary of university research, who often have different cultural frames of reference than the researchers, and who may speak different languages.

The seeds of this volume were planted a number of years ago as part of a larger initiative started by a group of scholars at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln that focused on understanding issues surrounding Latino/a populations. The group spent countless hours discussing research ideas and findings and writing manuscripts and grant proposals and, eventually, obtained a National Science Foundation grant that supported our continuing work. As we began work on the funded project, we encountered several challenges that we thought might be somewhat unique to conducting research on rural minority populations. Therefore, we proposed a roundtable discussion at the Society for Research in Child Development conference in 2013 in which invited panelists Velma McBride Murry, Les Whitbeck, Marcela Raffaelli, and Lynne Vernon-Feagans discussed their challenges, strategies, and experiences in conducting research with particular minority groups in rural locations. The roundtable discussion proved to be stimulating and productive and provided the impetus to pursue a volume dedicated to extending those discussions to research on other rural minority populations. This volume evolved out of those experiences.
The coeditors of this book would like to thank the many colleagues and students who offered their support, ideas, and encouragement to pursue this project. We greatly appreciate the support of Roger Levesque and Judy Jones from Springer for their interest and investment in this volume. The team from Springer provided invaluable support, especially Michelle Tam. We owe special thanks to Chelsie Temmen of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln for her editorial assistance. We are also grateful for ongoing research support from the National Science Foundation. And, of course, this book benefits tremendously from the many contributors to the volume. Their wisdom, insights, and experiences enrich this volume so that future researchers and scholars working with rural populations will benefit. Each chapter serves to illuminate the experiences of racial/ethnic minority youth and families in the rural United States. Moreover, several of the contributors describe practical considerations and strategies for future researchers who seek to conduct studies with these populations. We hope that the conceptual and practical information provided in the volume will focus attention on rural settings as unique developmental contexts for youth and spur further research on rural minority populations.

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Rural Ethnic Minority Youth and Families in the United States
Theory, Research, and Applications
Crockett, L.J.; Carlo, G. (Eds.)
2016, XV, 297 p., Hardcover
ISBN: 978-3-319-20975-3