Announcer:

The Missouri State Journal, a weekly program keeping you in touch with Missouri State University.

Emily Yeap:

Earlier this year, the State Historical Society of Missouri awarded Center for Missouri Studies 2022 fellowships to several scholars. One of the recipients was [Craig Amason](https://search.missouristate.edu/people/camason) from the Missouri State University [Libraries](https://libraries.missouristate.edu/).

He received the award for his study, “The Impact of Immigration in McDonald County in the Twenty-First Century.” Located in southwest Missouri, McDonald County has become home to immigrant and refugee populations from several different countries. Many of them work at poultry processing facilities in the multi-state Ozarks region. I’m Emily Yeap.

Amason, who serves as associate director of the Ozarks Folklife Festival, joins me today to talk about his project.

Craig Amason:

This study for the State Historical Society of Missouri will culminate in an article that I’ll write that will be submitted to the Missouri Historical Review, which is the official publication of the society. The reason this particular study came to my attention is because of my position here at Missouri State University; I’m serving as an assistant director to the Smithsonian Folklife Festival. Missouri State is sort of the lead organization for a program that’s going to be featuring the Ozarks at the Smithsonian Institution’s Folklife Festival in Washington D.C. in the summer of 2023. And so, we’re studying all aspects of the Ozarks, especially unusual aspects of the Ozarks. Well, McDonald County is unusual.

The reason it’s unusual is, just to give you an example, immigrants comprise about 4% of the total population in Missouri, and yet, almost 8% of McDonald County’s residents is foreign-born. That makes them very unusual for the Ozarks. I want to study the impact of those immigrants on that county and that serves almost like a microstudy of what’s going on as far as immigration is concerned in the Ozarks in general.

The immigrant and refugee population in Missouri is largely made up of people from south of the American border, but also from Somalia, Sudan, Micronesia, Myanmar, and they have come to McDonald County largely, almost exclusively, because of Tyson Foods poultry plant there. So, they are laborers. Many of those newcomers work at that poultry processing facility. This study will examine the impact of those groups on the economy, politics, social and religious fabric of McDonald County in hopes of enlightening us about the same types of impact felt throughout the Ozarks where immigrant populations have increased over the last 20 or 30 years.

Emily Yeap:

How will Amason be conducting his study?

Craig Amason:

I will be using oral history interviews, along with data from the Census Bureau and other government documents, and of course secondary sources too, to create this six-to-eight-thousand-word essay. Specifically, oral history interviews are designed to get as much information from the subject without interjecting too much questions, so you get the interviewee to talk and to tell their story. So, it’s a lot about storytelling, but out of that storytelling, you get to some pretty deep truths about what’s going on. That's what I'm hoping that we accomplish with conducting these oral history interviews.

The article itself will give an overview of national and state immigration and refugee laws and policies in the late 20th century and early 21st century, and a brief overview of the history of that county. But largely it’s going to concentrate on the experience of people, not just immigrants, but the people of McDonald County who were there before the immigrants came and how it impacted their life. From the introduction of the plant in that community to the economic impact of the workforce there that speaks to tax revenue, corporate property income, state tax, employment rates, housing, retail, the service industry. You take into account the political factors, internal and external, that are influencing life for and with the immigrants. local and state government relations with the poultry industry, with the immigrants, immigration laws, voting patterns, citizenship, language barriers, cultural differences, education of both adults and children, social services, health care, and then there’s the whole aspect of religious institutions in the life of immigrant families. So, there’s just so many different dynamics to address there.

Emily Yeap:

Through this study, Amason hopes to better understand how the introduction of different ethnic groups changes a well-established community.

Craig Amason:

In a greater sense, how that looks throughout the Ozarks, and that will help us when we’re planning for this festival in the summer of 2023 because it will give us yet another aspect or facet, of the Ozarks to present on the National Mall.

Emily Yeap:

That was Craig Amason from MSU Libraries. I’m Emily Yeap for the Missouri State Journal.

Announcer:

For more information, contact the Office of Strategic Communication at 417-836-6397. The Missouri State Journal is available online at ksmu.org.