ORGANIC WINES AND LITTLE DEBBIES IN THE NEW COMPANY TOWN:
THE POST-INDUSTRIAL POLITICS OF RURAL REDEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

Rachel Anna Cotterman: Organic Wines and Little Debbies in the New Company Town:
The Post-Industrial Politics of Rural Redevelopment
(Under the direction of Elizabeth Ann Olson)

This qualitative case study examines Saxapahaw—a former textile mill village in central North Carolina that has recently been incorporated into a consumption-based regime of accumulation—as a contested site of rural gentrification, exploring the key insights that the unique social and material landscapes of Piedmont textile mill villages offer the rural gentrification literature, which has by-and-large overlooked the southern United States. I follow Phillips (2002) lead in applying a three-part Lefebvrian approach to unpacking the material, symbolic, and social production of gentrifying rural spaces. By exploring the "sedimentations" (Lefebvre, 1956) left by Saxapahaw's company town period, this project illuminates how the social relations of gentrifying communities have deep roots in previous stages of capitalist production. In Saxapahaw, these enduring legacies include a nostalgic rural lifestyle marketed to new residents and tourists, persistent forms of social inequality, and naturalized structures of power and governance that shape the gentrification process.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

PREFACE

Welcome to Saxapahaw….
        (Excerpted from the author's field notes)

January 17, 2016
Sitting in the café, sunlight streaming in through tall windows. Bicyclists crowd the tables, decked out in spandex. I hear the clicks of their clip-on shoes and the hum of a tour bus parked outside. H walks in and tells us that someone just said to her, "This place is like locally-sourced Deliverance." L, the village's self-proclaimed "quality control," wants to know what all the Corvettes are doing parked down the hill.

February 16, 2015
The wind whips against the side of the truck, swollen clouds loitering just over the next hill. It's called Bass Mountain, he tells me, and they ran all through the woods and fields when they were kids. J hesitates for a moment and then turns down the gravel road. We've just passed his grandparents' homeplace, where the tobacco barn has been swallowed by overgrowth, but the chinaberry tree stands its ground firmly before a small weather-worn house. His grandma made medicine from that tree whenever they were sick, he says. A few moments before, we'd passed his uncle's former home, where we'd shared a long laugh as he recounted how this uncle used to cut everyone's hair too short so he wouldn't be the only bald-headed one around.

We drive a few hundred yards down the gravel road and J puts on the brakes. A deep, slow intake of breath. He barely recognizes this place. It was all open fields the last time he was here. Must have been near 30 years. He drives a bit farther and stops again. Is he wondering what's around the next bend? Unsure he wants to find out? The stop-and-go dance continues down the long drive. I imagine he is wading through layers of time, holding out a cautious question like a lamp: what is this place now? And an even dimmer light: do I belong here?

December 18, 2014
A mist has risen to the inside of the deli case, clouding labels so there are only single words marooned: raw, pecorino, buffalo, cacao.

Loose-leaf teas grown in silty river soil on the other bank, and tiny bags of scent-free kitty litter. Liters of Mountain Dew stare down the kombucha in the opposing cooler, and—as a travel writer so pointedly confessed— Little Debbies and organic wines play strange bedfellows on the wire racks that tower over booths crowded with eaters.

The long line of tables in the middle of the room hearkens back to family style. Elbows rub, and neighbors smile, and some conversations spill over the seams of red wood squares, while others settle into the makeshift privacy of eyes and ears straight ahead.

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CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION & METHODOLOGY

Many newcomers' first experience of Saxapahaw is the general store, a gourmet grill and grocery housed inside a gas station. I have a distinct memory of my own first impression upon entering the building—a smudged, squeaky door opens up to a crowded and colorful array of local produce, crafts, and specialty goods interspersed with standard convenience store fare. Saxapahaw, a former textile mill community in rural central North Carolina, has attracted widespread local and national media attention since the village was redeveloped as a hub for local food, arts, and outdoor recreation in the early 2000s. Many of these articles have been quick to comment on the general store's eclectic offerings. In 2011, a travel writer for the Washington Post summed it up: "Outside, a biodiesel pump stands near the regular unleaded, while inside, local organic wines are up the aisle from the Little Debbies." A quote from a local resident follows, framing the implicitly harmonious nature of this juxtaposition: "We call it the Saxapahaw miracle" (Daniel, 2011).

What underlying social dynamics and processes are implied and obscured by the symbolic proxies of biodiesel and unleaded fuel, a bottle of wine and a packaged snack? Throughout the article, the author profiles Saxapahaw residents and their predilections for the organic, gourmet, artisanal. Yet the simultaneous presence of commercial gas station products hints at the persistence of social variation here, too—reduced, in this story, to consumer preference. The author describes a place where some sort of difference is valued, at least in commodity form: low-cost, processed foods—and their unnamed consumers—are welcome.

Framing this phenomenon as miraculous, however, subtly points to larger forces at play that threaten the precarious balance of organic wines and Little Debbies.

Saxapahaw has been widely celebrated as an example of "rural renaissance done right" (Rivermill Apartments), uplifted as a rare example of a post-industrial mill community reborn both economically and culturally. While this narrative reveals important elements of truth about the village's contemporary moment, it also conceals some of the deeper social transformations taking place. What are the terms of this redevelopment and how are they set? Who benefits and who stands to lose? What are the flows and structures of power that shape this process of economic revitalization?

On the periphery of the Research Triangle, one of the fastest growing metropolitan areas in the country (US Census Bureau, 2015), the rural villages that were once home to a booming Piedmont textile industry have begun to buzz with renewed activity in the early 21st century. In the last decades of the previous century, the economic restructuring of the textile industry drove companies overseas, leaving behind high working-class unemployment rates and a rural landscape dotted with abandoned brick factories and clusters of houses characteristic of the "company town" era. As these villages redevelop and are incorporated into the region's new service and consumption-based economy, they are home to a wide range of encounters across lines of social difference. Long-term residents' claims to space and place collide and intersect with those of new migrants and tourists, and existing social hierarchies shaped by race, class, and gender are renegotiated and reinforced.

The last two decades have seen a proliferation of scholarship on rural gentrification, most recently responding to Loretta Lees' (2011) call for "geographies of gentrification" that explore how places are transformed for more affluent users through processes of economic

restructuring in a diverse range of geographical contexts across the globe. Leading rural gentrification scholar Martin Phillips (1993; 2004; 2010) argues that rural gentrification is both locationally-specific and driven by widespread trends, identifying transformations that are both economic (including the rise of real estate speculation and the shift towards service-oriented accumulation in post-industrial economies) and cultural (such as contemporary middle-class communities' rejection of the suburbs and parallel back-to-the-city and back-to-the-country migration movements). While Phillips acknowledges that rural gentrification is a "chaotic concept," he locates its usefulness in its political character, vital for overcoming rural studies' longstanding aversion to theorizing class (Phillips, 2010: 541). Urban areas are often positioned as the sole site of political struggle in both public and scholarly discourse, but the social reorganization of select rural areas by an influx of capital and middle-class migration has brought renewed scholarly attention to the ways in which the rural sphere is also shaped and re-shaped by systems of power.

The US American South remains a widely under-examined region in rural gentrification scholarship. In this thesis, I explore Saxapahaw as a contested site of rural gentrification, arguing that this theoretical lens offers key insights into the distinctly political nature of the social transformations that lie buried within—and altogether beyond—the depoliticized story of organic wines and Little Debbies. I also examine the limitations of this framework (as it has been widely theorized) in understanding Saxapahaw's social complexity. Saxapahaw's status as a site of gentrification is contested in multiple ways: in the sense that it is associated with experiences of discomfort, disconnection, and struggle; in the sense that it is the locus of debate (my interviews with community members confirm, complicate, and dispute this categorization); and in that sense that it is uneven (as a partial tourist economy, the

transformation of the village's commercial landscape hasn't yet resulted in a significant affordable housing shortage in the area, for example).

Additionally, Saxapahaw's redevelopment is a story of as much continuity as it is of change. Rather than framing Saxapahaw's gentrification process as an exceptional or temporally-isolated phenomenon, I read it as one moment in a much longer arc of capitalist development: a history that has always been marked by pronounced social inequalities that differentially distribute the benefits and consequences of economic change. This history has also consistently included a range of attempts—with varying degrees of success—to mediate and contest forms of social inequality. I argue that Saxapahaw's current period of consumption-based accumulation exhibits many striking similarities with the economic ideologies, political structures, and social dynamics of the previous company town era. This continuity requires a theory of rural gentrification that understands this process as necessarily linked to earlier phases of capitalist accumulation and their enduring structural, social, and symbolic legacies.

At its heart, this project deals with questions of place-making: how the place and space of Saxapahaw have been produced (and reproduced, throughout the various stages of the village's economic development)—as a material landscape, as a cultural imaginary, and as a spatialized set of social relations. This process of place production is intricately linked to the dominant economic forces in the village—historically, the textile industry and today, the service- and consumption-oriented regime of accumulation—but it also transcends these forces; it is manifested, complicated, and contested in the daily practices of the village community. In this thesis, I examine how larger structural forces and local particularities collide to produce a unique landscape of gentrification in a Piedmont textile village.

II. Research Site

     Saxapahaw is located in southeastern Alamance County, in a largely rural region between two rapidly growing metropolitan areas in central North Carolina—the Piedmont Triad (Winston-Salem, Greensboro, Highpoint) and Research Triangle (Raleigh, Durham, Chapel Hill). The village center is nestled along a steeply sloping hill that rises above the Haw River. Since the early 2000s, the two brick mill complexes have been redeveloped into a range of commercial and residential spaces including a pub, brewery, co-working space, butcher shop, charter school, café and performance venue as well as loft apartments and condos. The village center also includes several dozen small, single-family mill houses rented by a real estate company run by one of the families that previously owned and managed the mill. On the other side of the river, another cluster of mill houses that were sold to individual homeowners in the late 1970s are known collectively to many locals as "Free Sax." Many of the current residents commute to nearby cities for employment or work remotely, while others are employed by local businesses or farms.

Figure 1: *Saxapahaw and NC Population Change by Census Track*
Base map: Carolina Demography, UNC Population Center
<http://demography.cpc.unc.edu/resources/nc-neighborhood-change-2000-2010/>

While Saxapahaw was home to just over 1,600 residents in 2010, the amount of activity in the village varies widely due to the large numbers of tourists and visitors who flock there from nearby cities and farther afield. On any given weekday, the village center may be fairly quiet. But on Saturday evenings in the summer, hundreds of cars pack the roadsides (and the makeshift parking lot in a large field) to attend the free music series and farmers market. When the performance venue features a well-known touring act, the village is similarly flooded with visitors. Pleasant weather on a weekend morning brings crowds out to brunch, as well as large group of cyclers out for a country ride.

As an unincorporated rural community, defining the boundaries of Saxapahaw is a slippery act. When I asked one of my interview participants what he would consider Saxapahaw, he laughed and said: "as far as you can see 360 degrees from the general store?" While many members of the community would agree, many others would challenge this geography—and particularly the placement of the redeveloped mill at its center. One of my interview participants—a longtime resident and elder in the black community—did so explicitly, telling me "now *this* is Saxapahaw" when we entered the neighborhood just east of the village center where he spent much of his childhood.
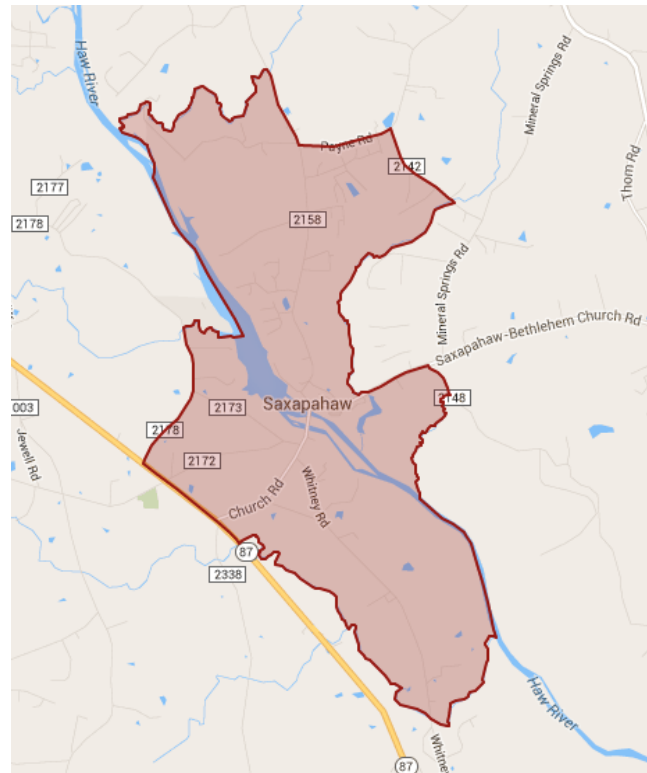
Figure 2: *Saxapahaw CDP Boundary*.
Source: Google Maps.

The demographic and property sale data that I consulted pertains to the Census Designated Place of Saxapahaw (Figure 2), a boundary that excludes this largely black and Latino neighborhood on the east side of town. Beyond this initial exploration of quantitative data, however, the scope of my analysis expands beyond this neat—and necessarily incomplete—boundary to explore much wider and more malleable spatial parameters, including many overlapping and contested articulations of this "place" and the inward and outward flows that constitute it as part of larger geography.

III. Quantitative Indictors of Gentrification

This project embraces the complex nature of gentrification, acknowledging that the defining characteristics of this process remain an area of much debate. Quantitative studies of gentrification include a wide range of metrics including property value, median income, racial composition, educational attainment level, and sectors of employment. Rather than seeking to establish a stable, quantifiable definition of the term and assess Saxapahaw's alignment with this definition, I employ this framework as a theoretical imperative to qualitatively examine the politics and uneven impacts of redevelopment. Nonetheless, in establishing the saliency of Saxapahaw as a site of gentrification, I will briefly examine several quantitative indicators as means of "triangulating" (Denzin, 1978) and complicating the qualitative data that prompted me to employ this analytical framework.

One commonly employed metric of gentrification is property value. I consulted Alamance County tax data to identify the change in median property sale values over five-year periods within the last 20 years. This data confirms that property values are rising disproportionately within Saxapahaw CDP when compared to surrounding areas. Median property sale values remain slightly lower than the Alamance County average (which includes

a number of much more highly-developed urban and industrial areas such as Burlington, Mebane, and Elon), but rose significantly faster than the rest of the county between 1995 and 2009. In the last five years, the initial burst of redevelopment growth in Saxapahaw slowed slightly (while the Alamance median picked up pace) but the upward trend continues.

Median Property Sale Value
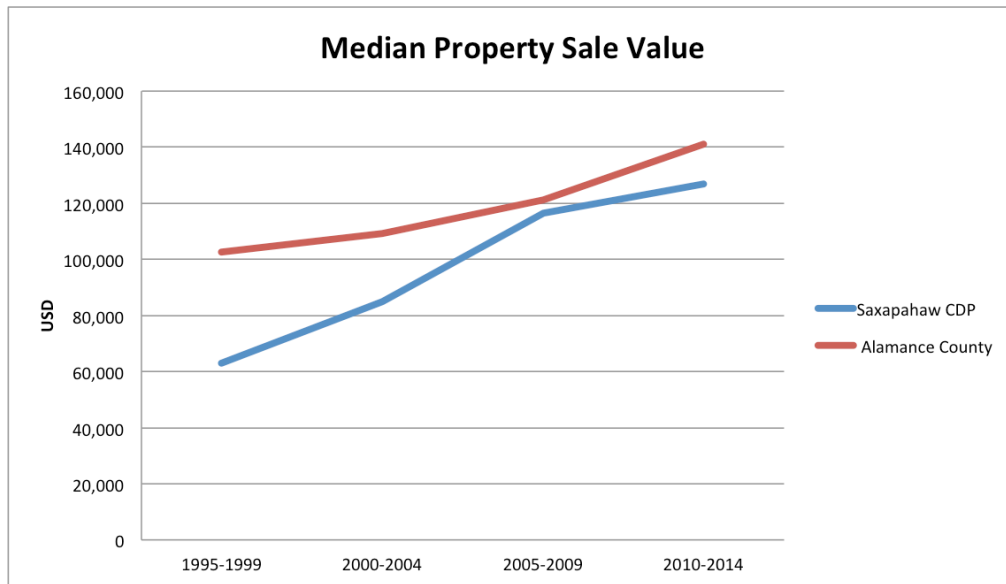
Figure 3*: Change in median property sale values, Sax. & Alamance County, 1995-2014.*
Data source: Alamance County Tax Department; chart by the author

My ability to access demographic data from Saxapahaw was limited by the extremely small size of the CDP, which renders the US Census Bureau's American Community Survey estimates unreliable. I was therefore unable to assess household income or housing statistics for the date ranges relevant for the scope of this project. Additional research is needed to determine whether there has been a significant increase in the median income of Saxapahaw's resident population. More reliable data on racial demographics, however, is available through the decennial census. Between 2000 and 2010, the white, non-Hispanic population of Saxapahaw's CDP declined slightly from 81.2% to 78.7%. This was largely due to an increase in people identifying as "Some Other Race"—many of whom are part of the growing Latino

population, which rose from 6.2% to 13.4%. At the same time, the Black population declined slightly from 13.4% to 11.1%.

Rural sites of gentrification in the southern United States complicate the urban conception of gentrification as a process of demographic whitening. Many of the poor and working-class communities leaving these areas—both due to pre-existing financial strains in the restructured rural economy and because of gentrification-linked displacement—are white. Additionally, in-migrants to redeveloping rural communities may include people of color who have themselves been displaced by urban gentrification (Keene & Padilla, 2010) or who are intentionally reversing Great Migration movements of previous generations (Stack, 1996). Lastly, the massive migration patterns of Latin-American communities to the Southern US (Cravey, 1997) often collides with gentrification processes in rural communities, either as geographically proximate but distinct processes or as linked processes that bring low-wage service workers to new centers of rural amenity migration (Nelson et al, 2010). It is also important to note, however, that while Saxapahaw is not becoming more demographically white, these quantitative measures alone cannot speak to the complexity of the village's racial politics. My qualitative data indicates the village's redevelopment process includes significant forms of racialized disparity and exclusion.

More generally, while many gentrification studies identify the direct displacement of lower-income communities from sites of gentrification, many scholars have emphasized that gentrification can more widely include any process which attempts to transform a space for more affluent users, regardless of whether this is accompanied by direct displacement (Hackworth, 2002; Slater, 2006). While a more extended quantitative study of the changes in Saxapahaw's community composition could certainly provide valuable insights, qualitative

methods help construct a more holistic picture of the types of social struggles which accompany redevelopment. Residents' confirmations of the continued availability of relatively low-cost housing within and immediately surrounding the village indicates that direct displacement due to rising housing costs may not be a primary characteristic of Saxapahaw's current gentrification process—at least for now. But the question remains as to what other impacts the mill redevelopment project—which is primarily driven by higher-cost, niche-market services and consumption-based development—presents for the diverse members of this community, as well as what historic social and economic processes led to this contemporary moment.

IV. Methodology

Researcher Positionality

This project is first and foremost rooted in participant observation in a community in which I have deep personal roots. I grew up in a rural community in neighboring Orange County, and have spent the large majority of my adult life living in rural areas throughout Orange and Alamance. Neither of my parents are native Carolinians, however, and my lack of a significant local accent marks me as an outsider in certain spaces. For most of my life, I have inhabited spaces that are characterized by the co-presence of both inter-regional migrants and long-time Southern communities.

I lived in Saxapahaw from 2012-2014 while I was working at a social justice retreat and training center nearby, and these personal experiences greatly inform my analysis. During this time, I was also occasionally employed by the performance venue and a local daycare center. My interest in this project arose from a growing sense of discomfort about the fact that I more frequently encountered people from New York or California in my daily activities in

the village than I did local residents from Alamance County. While I lived in Saxapahaw, a new set of condos entered the market with starting values of \$300,000. The question of whether Saxapahaw was becoming a site of rural gentrification arose from everyday conversations with a range of village residents. As a feminist geographer, I believe that my personal ties to the community in Saxapahaw enrich my scholarship, providing an intimate knowledge of everyday life and an ethic of care and personal commitment (Lawson, 2009).

Nevertheless, I acknowledge that it is essential to bring critical attention to my own positionality and interrogate and mitigate the personal biases my subject position brings to my research (Rose, 1997). I am a highly educated, politically progressive white woman from a middle-class background—making me more or less the precise demographic target of the redevelopment efforts. My access to long-term residents, particularly working-class communities and communities of color, was limited by my identity as an agent of gentrification. I have worked to bring critical attention to the silences, gaps, and barely-skirted topics that emerged from my interviews, examining how these might relate to my positionality as a researcher.

Additionally, as a critical scholar and organizer for racial and economic justice, my personal politics shape my research questions and analysis. This thesis is not a comprehensive representation of the place of Saxapahaw and the experience of all its inhabitants, but pursues a particular set of questions and highlights a particular type of experiences based on an explicit commitment to working towards greater social equity. I do not see this commitment as a barrier to my scholarship but as a central contribution—one that must nevertheless be acknowledged and accounted for.

Research Questions

My research questions were informed by everyday conversations with village residents, which frequently returned to a sense of bewilderment about the genesis of the contemporary moment: *How did this happen? How did Saxapahaw get to be this way?* Again and again, conversations ended with a shrug and heads shaken in alternatively—or simultaneously—cheerful and uneasy disbelief. Many of my fellow newcomer residents identified the same vaguely disconcerting inkling that brought me to this project: a sense of stepping into a complex social and political landscape of which they had very little understanding—and yet had become active participants. While this project also includes a preliminary exploration of the impacts that this process of redevelopment is having on the daily lives of a diverse range of residents, I have chosen to focus largely on the multiple, overlapping processes that have produced contemporary Saxapahaw. My research questions include:

1. How has Saxapahaw has been produced as a site for redevelopment and gentrification—materially, symbolically, and socially?
2. How did Saxapahaw's early development as a mill village shape the village's socio-spatial structure?
3. How do racially- and socioeconomically-diverse long-time residents and newcomers experience the current process of redevelopment and gentrification?
4. What theoretical insights do Piedmont textile villages offer the wider rural gentrification literature?

Lefebvrian Approach

Responding to the tendency of rural gentrification scholarship to reinforce the division between production- and consumption-side theories of gentrification that has characterized much of the urban gentrification literature (see Chapter 2), I follow Phillips' (2002) lead in applying a Lebfebvrian method of exploring the production of rural gentrified spaces.[1] In *The Production of Space* (1974), critical scholar Henri Lefebvre outlines a three-part process

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[1] The viability of this approach has also been demonstrated in the study of post-productivist rural spaces more generally – see Halfacree (2007).

through which spaces are produced: spatial practices (processes of production and reproduction), representations of space (hegemonic means of conceptualizing space), and representational spaces (the direct, lived experiences of a space's inhabitants). Phillips extends this framework to examine gentrification as:

> "(i) a change in the built fabric of spaces relating to the investment of material resources; (ii) a symbolic creation enacted in the discourses of the popular media, as well as in a range of advertising, specialist building and life-style texts; and (iii) a 'cultural texture'…enacted and performed within gentrified spaces" (Phillips, 2002: 285).

This triad disrupts the binary between production and consumption, enabling an exploration of the complex intersections of production and consumption—capital and culture—that align to create sites of rural gentrification. I organize my own analysis along these lines, exploring the production of contemporary Saxapahaw through a three-part analysis of the economic and political processes that have shaped its social and material landscape (Chapter 3), the dominant representations of its place identity (Chapter 4), and the lived experiences of its inhabitants (Chapter 5).

Historical Approach

Applying a Lefebvrian approach to the case of Saxapahaw illuminates the need for rural gentrification studies that consider a longer temporal range than is frequently employed. The productive forces that have shaped this village did not begin with the most recent phase of its redevelopment, but build on (and rub up against) previously existing forms of economic and political structuration, cultural identity, and social life. The need for a longer-range historical approach is particularly evident in this case study for several reasons.

Firstly, the cycles of investment and disinvestment that have produced sites of rural gentrification in the US American South have been largely unexplored. Urban gentrification

scholars have widely examined how processes of urban renewal, red-lining, and planned

shrinkage produced a disinvested inner-city landscape with profitable opportunities for

reinvestment throughout the United States (Smith, 1996). In the rural context, studies of "post-

productivist" rural landscapes have explored how the decline of agriculture and industry have

increased the viability of rural real estate and consumption-based development, but these

studies have been primarily located within the unique rural policy environment of the UK

(Kneale et al, 1992). In this thesis, I examine some of the equivalent processes in the context

of the post-industrial countryside on the outskirts of the growing metropolitan centers of the

American South, examining how these processes produced the unique social and material

landscape that is being re-valued in Saxapahaw today.

Additionally, Saxapahaw—like many rural communities—has distinctly nostalgic

elements of its cultural identity. Just as they work to transform the village, leaders of the

redevelopment project have also explicitly attempted to preserve and recreate elements of the

village's past. As I will explore in the following chapters, these acts of preservation reinforce

and reanimate elements of the village's historical company town structure—in ways that are

both intended and unintended, explicitly celebrated and implicitly obscured. Understanding

this historic social structure is therefore necessary for understanding the social and political

dynamics of the village's contemporary period. My interviews indicate that there are many

social processes playing out in contemporary Saxapahaw that cannot be explained without this

necessary context—particularly those shaped by historic racial divisions, class relations, and

structures of power and governance.

Theoretical Frameworks

My analysis is grounded in a Marxist critique of political economy, as well as neo-Marxist and other critical scholarship—particularly from feminist and black radical traditions—which draws attention to the ways in which race, gender, and other social categories play central organizing roles in the social relations of capitalist production. Capitalism, for Lefebvre and other Marxist geographers, "secretes" a particular type of space—one defined by abstraction and domination (Lefebvre, 1974), high levels of uneven development (Harvey, 2011; Smith, 1984), and simultaneous movements towards homogenization and fragmentation (Massey, 2005). Capitalist space valorizes certain social relationships and marginalizes others, normalizing particular ideas of order and disorder. It both enables the reproduction of the social relations of production and embodies their contradictions. In the following chapters, I trace how shifts in the modes of production in Saxapahaw have been accompanied by both the renegotiation and re-entrenchment of particular sets of social relations.

Within a classical Marxist framework, class struggle between the industrial proletariat and the bourgeoisie is seen as the primary social contradiction of capitalism (Marx & Engels, 2002, Marx 1967). Capitalist production begins with the expropriation of peasants from the land and the alienation of workers from the means of production, the formative conditions for the wage labor contract. The space of the factory produces new forms of social organization, through which labor realizes its own potential and ultimately works to "expropriate the expropriators," collectively reclaiming the means of production.

The contemporary transition to predominantly post-industrial societies in late capitalist economies has required the re-theorization of this class dynamic. The proletariat class has been

splintered and reconstituted following the decline of working-class industrial jobs and the rise of low-wage service work. More recent Marxist scholarship has brought increased attention to constitutive class dynamics that extend beyond the proletariat/bourgeoisie relationship, including the persistent presence of unemployed surplus populations (McIntyre & Nast, 2011) within capitalist regimes of production. It has also brought attention to the centrality of Marx's "third class" of landed property (Neocosmos, 1986) particularly within the context of the global rise of real estate speculation and urban redevelopment as a primary means of accumulation under late capitalism (Soja, 1980). At the same time, "post-capitalist" scholars such as JK Gibson-Graham (1992; 2000) have emphasized the multiple and overlapping nature of class identities, calling for an end to the theorization of class as a stable structure in favor of a social performance based analysis and theory of overdetermination.

Moving beyond class as their sole analytic, feminist and black radical scholars have brought critical attention to additional social categories like race and gender that are central organizing principles in the relations of production and social reproduction under capitalism. Feminist scholars have highlighted the enclosure of white women to the domestic sphere as a key moment in the formation of the capitalist working-class (Federici, 2004; Mies 1998), as well as bringing attention to the many forms of reproductive and other unwaged labor—often performed by women and people of color, immigrant communities, and other socially-marginalized groups—which remain unrecognized and yet critical to the operation of the capitalist system. The black radical tradition draws attention to the lasting impacts of Marx's "primitive accumulation"—the processes of conquest, domination, and enslavement that generated the initial capital that enabled the industrial revolution and created a fundamental division between black and white, human and nonhuman, value-producing and valueless

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subjects under colonial capitalism. Black radical scholars also emphasize race as a key mechanism of division within the working-class, preventing strategic alliances between lower-class whites and people of color (Du Bois, 1935; Fanon, 1952).

I draw on this literature to theorize the historical process of rural change in Saxapahaw within wider economic, political, and social systems. I also follow the lead of post-structuralist thinkers in conceptualizing social relations not as fixed, immutable structures but as flows of power and relationality that must be maintained, performed, and struggled over. Lastly, I draw on cultural geographic scholarship to explore the symbolic and representational dimensions of place production, bringing a cultural perspective to historical materialism. Lefebvre's triad of space allows for the synthesis of these varied perspectives.

Data Collection Methods

My data collection methods included five primary strategies: 1) participant observation; 2) semi-structured qualitative interviews; 3) primary and secondary source historical research; 4) discourse analysis of print and digital media; 5) analysis of housing and demographic data. The historical material allows me to contextualize Saxapahaw's current gentrification process within its history as a company town, and the process of discourse analysis helps me to understand how these shifts have been narrated and represented. The quantitative data already discussed provides a broad-stroke picture of general trends in the village's demographic composition and real estate market, while the qualitative data from participant observation and interviews enable a textured analysis of the shifting social relations of the town's redevelopment period. While my previous years living in Saxapahaw inform my analysis, I began intentionally collecting field notes from participant observation after I moved away in December 2014 and continued through February 2016. This process included hanging

out in the commercial spaces in the village center, visiting friends and former neighbors, and

occasional volunteer work at a food pantry run by a group of local churches during the early

months of 2016. During the summer of 2015, I conducted 10 in-depth qualitative interviews—

ranging from 1 to 4 hours in length—with members of the Saxapahaw community,[2] as well as

a member of the county planning department and a resident of another nearby redeveloping

mill community. Interview participants included both long-term residents and newer migrants[3]

from a range of socioeconomic class positions and ethnic/racial identities. After receiving

several requests for anonymity from interview participants, I have chosen to withhold the

names and conceal the identities of interviewees due to the sensitive nature of some of the data

and the small size of the community.[4]

V. Chapter Outline

Chapter 2 provides an overview of both urban and rural gentrification scholarship,

examining the primary assertions of the field and the empirical, methodological, and

theoretical gaps my project seeks to address. I turn to an examination of "spatial practices" in

Chapter 3, outlining three major periods of Saxapahaw's capitalist development—the strict

paternalism of the early mill, the welfare capitalism of the mid-20th century, and the

contemporary redevelopment era—and examining how they have produced a distinctive social

and material landscape. Chapter 4 examines "representations of space" through an analysis of

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[2] In this paper, "members of the Saxapahaw community" include people who work in Saxapahaw or have family
ties in the village as well as those who are current residents.

[3] While I will attempt to differentiate between these groups periodically throughout the paper, the distinction is
certainly a blurry one, as significant in-migration to the village has existed since the first mill village houses were
sold and renovated in the late 1970s. I general, I refer to "newcomers" or "new residents" as people who have
moved to the village over the last decade since the mill itself was redeveloped.

[4] With the exception of the Jordans—the last family to own the mill—who are frequent public faces of the
redevelopment project and whose identities would be practically impossible to conceal.

one century of media representations of the village, examining the construction of a cultural imaginary of rural modernity. In Chapter 5, I explore how the everyday experiences of village residents confront, challenge, and complicate both the processes of structuration and the representations of place outlined in the previous two chapters. Chapter 6 closes the paper with an analysis of what insights this Lefebvrian approach to examining Saxapahaw's process of economic and social change has to offer the wider rural gentrification literature.

CHAPTER 2 - LITERATURE REVIEW

Gentrification and the Politics of Rural Redevelopment

In *The New Urban Frontier*, Neil Smith interrogates the persistence of frontier logic in the contemporary urban imaginary: privileged and "cultured" communities returning to the city to breathe new life into what is often perceived as a barren landscape. Since the publication of Smith's landmark text in 1996, a renewed wave of scholarship on gentrification has identified the near-ubiquitous prevalence of this phenomenon in the revitalizing urban centers of highly-developed, post-industrial countries—and, increasingly, across the mega-cities of the developing world as well. Smith's examination of the pioneer mentality as an organizing logic of gentrification, however, hints at its interconnection with rural processes as well. What does the pioneer mentality tell us about the symbolic imbrication of pristine rural nature and urban wilderness? How has the rural countryside itself been re-produced as a frontier for migration and capital investment in the late 20th and early 21st centuries?

The emerging literature on rural gentrification has begun to fill in this gap, pointing to larger cultural and economic transformations that shape both urban and rural spheres in post-industrial societies, while also illuminating the specificities of gentrification processes as they occur in the countryside. In this chapter, I provide a brief overview of the urban gentrification literature and then turn to the growing body of scholarship that examines this process as it occurs in rural settings. Finally, I identify some of the empirical, methodological, and theoretical gaps in the literature that my project seeks to address.

I. Urban Gentrification: Production, Consumption, and Class Struggle

Ruth Glass first coined the term gentrification in her 1964 study on the influx of

affluent in-migrants to working-class residential areas of inner-city London, examining how

this process led to the eventual displacement of former residents and sweeping changes in the

social character of these neighborhoods (Glass 1964). In the subsequent decades, gentrification

has gained an increasingly strong foothold in popular consciousness and remained an issue of

concern for wide-ranging academic disciplines including sociology, urban planning, and

geography. Primarily focused on back-to-the-city migration movements and inner-city

economic revitalization processes in post-industrial countries, the literature coalesced around

an impasse that developed between production- and consumption-side theories in the 1980s

and 90s (Lees, 2000).

Production-side theories of gentrification emphasize the role of economic and political

forces like financial institutions and development policy in driving migration patterns. Neil

Smith's rent-gap theory (1979) has been central to this interpretation. Smith locates the

primary cause of gentrification in the disparity between actual and potential rent levels in

urban centers caused by cycles of capital depreciation and revaluation. Gentrification occurs

when investors, developers, and political leaders align forces in the interest of capitalizing on

this disparity and attracting higher-income populations to newly re-valued spaces.

Directly challenging the emergence of alternate theories of gentrification as a primarily

cultural phenomenon driven by a back-to-the-city movement of more affluent classes, Smith

points to findings from his study of Philadelphia's gentrifying neighborhood of Society Hill

that suggest the majority of gentrifiers move to the city center from other parts of the same

metropolitan area, not from the suburbs or rural areas. Smith doesn't entirely eliminate a

causal role for culture in this process, however, acknowledging that the relationship between production and consumption is symbiotic. He nevertheless maintains that, "it is a symbiosis in which production dominates" (1979: 540).

Smith's rent-gap theory positions gentrification as a predictable outcome of the high levels of uneven development that are inherent to capitalist economies. In a system based on private property ownership, perpetual market growth, and the mechanism of competition, capital must constantly relocate to new frontiers of investment in a search for ever-higher profit margins, a process that geographer David Harvey (2001) calls the "spatial fix" of capitalism. Harvey teases out the multiple meanings of the term, examining how the "fixing" of capital through investment in the built environment is necessary for accumulation, but leads the system into a bind or "fix" by creating a barrier to growth. The only "fix" that can resolve this bind is the constant relocation of capital and the re-working of the built environment to generate new arenas of accumulation.

The systematic, state-driven disinvestment from the residential communities in the city centers of many post-industrial countries during the mid 20th century—defined by policies of red-lining, urban renewal, and planned shrinkage in the U.S.—produced a landscape ripe for the possibility of profitable reinvestment in the subsequent decades (Smith, 2006). By examining these historical legacies, production-side theories of urban gentrification have helped to situate gentrification as one phase within a much larger arc of economic and social transformation, not a unique or isolated phenomenon.

Adversely, consumption-side theories privilege the role of migration and the shifting consumer demands of middle- and upper-class populations that have reversed white flight and suburbanization trends. Growing in prevalence since the "cultural turn," many of the scholars

who have contributed to this theorization continue to engage (at least marginally) with an analysis of productive forces, but draw greater attention to the impact of user preferences. David Ley's (1996) work on the cultural and political leanings of gentrifiers and their impacts on the housing market, commercial zones, and public space in cities has been central to this turn Scholars who focus on consumption often highlight lifestyle changes among the middle-class, such as Gregory Lipton's argument that the rising rate of couples that marry later in life, have fewer children, and more readily divorce has been a major driving factor in the re-urbanization of the middle-class (Lipton, 1977).

Consumption-side theories have made important contributions to the field, particularly by examining the diversity of gentrifying classes, challenging the notion that gentrifiers are a homogenous group. Scholars have examined the complex, intersectional identities that emerge along lines of race (Taylor, 1992), class (Ley, 1994), sexuality (Lauria, 1995), and gender (Bondi, 1991) within these populations. Many of these studies illuminate how initial migration patterns to gentrifying neighborhoods are often linked to cultural or economic displacement occurring in other places, as many communities that become gentrifying agents upon moving to new neighborhoods are fleeing some form of marginalization in their previous social landscape.

Scholars from the cultural turn have also clarified important distinctions between the different stages of gentrification as it commonly occurs in cities (Rose, 1984). First-stage gentrification is often characterized by less affluent and more socially marginal populations (including artists and LGBTQ and immigrant communities) moving into inner-city neighborhoods and investing sweat equity into renovating low-cost residential properties as "owner-occupier developers." Middle and later stages often entail the increasing

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financialization of the real estate market, as investors identify the potential profitability of purchasing and reselling houses in gentrifying neighborhoods. This leads to progressively wealthier populations of in-migrants, declining levels of long-term homeownership as earlier waves of gentrifiers are displaced, increased cultural homogeneity, and the direct and indirect displacement of working-class communities and communities of color through repressive policing, cultural alienation, and declining availability of affordable housing and services (Lees et al, 2013).

Much of the urban gentrification literature since the cultural turn has been limited by a one-sided preoccupation with the cultural practices and identities of gentrifying classes themselves, neglecting a nuanced examination of the diverse identities and experiences of long-term residents. Tom Slater reflects:

> My purpose here is not to criticize research…that seeks to understand the urban experiences of more advantaged social groups, and certainly not to demonize gentrifiers, whose identities are multiple and whose ambivalent politics often contradict assumptions of a group intent…but rather to point out that there is next to nothing published on the experiences of non-gentrifying groups living in the neighbourhoods into which the much-researched cosmopolitan middle classes are arriving en masse" (Slater, 2006: 743).

Caitlin Cahill's (2007) work is a notable exception to this trend. Using a Participatory Action Research model, Cahill collaborates with youth co-investigators of color in gentrifying neighborhoods in New York City, working to articulate an embodied geopolitics that bears witness to the impacts of global economic restructuring on existing residents' everyday experiences Cahill—and her young working-class women of color co-investigators from the Lower East Side—document the sense of loss these women experience as their neighborhood history and culture are both commodified and erased. They analyze the tension between performing the "grit" and the "glamor" of their geographic identities as their neighborhoods change.

While the cultural turn has contributed to a more nuanced understanding of the diversity of gentrifying classes and the cultural drivers and stages of gentrification, it has also led to increased polarization around the social impacts of this process. Slater (2006) identifies an attempted "eviction" of critical perspectives from the gentrification literature beginning in the late 1980s. Slater laments the divergence from earlier gentrification literature which critically examined the role of both private and public institutions in driving the displacement of working-class residents and people of color, identifying clear patterns that enabled a political response. He argues that the increased focus on cultural trends in more recent scholarship has diluted the political relevance of gentrification studies and contributed to a growing ambivalence toward its damaging impacts.

Sociologist Jon Caulfield's work was central to the rise of the ambivalence that Slater identifies. Caulfield's 1989 study of gentrification in Toronto argued against the limitations of Marxist, production-side critiques and found that revitalization policies could offer valuable opportunities for diverse community formation, arguing that "old city places offer difference and freedom, privacy and fantasy…the city is 'the place of our meeting with the other'" (Caulfield, 1989: 625). Caulfield finds that the cultural mixing that occurs in gentrifying neighborhoods can actually subvert the dominance of hegemonic culture and provide opportunities for new ways of living together across lines of difference (Lees 2000). This "emancipatory" discourse of gentrification has also been heavily influenced by the writing of urban studies theorist Richard Florida. In his seminal work, *The Rise of the Creative Class* (2002), Florida heralds the positive trickle-down effects of urban revitalization for all city residents.

Since the mid 1990s, a resurgence of critical literature has emerged in response to this

trend, catalyzed by Neil Smith's publication of *The new urban frontier: gentrification and the revanchist city* in 1996. Condemning Caulfield's notion of emancipatory social practice as 'Foucault run amok' (Smith, 1996: 43), Smith's "revanchist city" theory denounces gentrification as a violent recolonization of urban spaces by affluent classes, leading to combat zones of social struggle and the displacement of the working-class. Urban planner Peter Marcuse has also made key contributions to this critical resurgence, theorizing gentrification as a socially-corrupt product of neoliberal development and emphasizing the close linkages between abandonment, reinvestment, and displacement processes (Marcuse, 1986).

Many of these more recent critical studies complicate the earlier literature's overreliance on class as the sole form of social stratification in gentrifying spaces, identifying the distinctly racialized processes of disinvestment and devaluation that have produced many inner-city neighborhoods as frontiers for profitable reinvestment. Sociologist Loic Wacquant analyses the process of ghettoization and the racialized forms of territorial stigmatization that have marked physical spaces inhabited by working-class communities of color with enduring stains of poverty and subaltern ethnicity (Wacquant 2007). Urban geographer Elvin Wyly has written extensively on the racial meanings of housing in the contemporary U.S. (2004; 2012), connecting the dots between the "exclusionary" racism of red-lining and the "inclusionary" discrimination of predatory subprime mortgage lending. Wyly examines how these historic forms of racial housing discrimination have effectively restricted homeownership as a means of wealth creation to white communities, contributing to the unequal impacts of contemporary gentrification.

Despite the apparent intractability between production- and consumption-side theories of gentrification, Eric Clark argues that "the divisions between [the seminal works of David

Ley and Neil Smith] became, in the hands of other writers, the most overdrawn contest in the history of urban studies…with the serious effect of making gentrification a subject where many researchers ended up taking sides and 'throwing rocks from behind barricades'" (Clark, 1992: 359). In the last decade, gentrification scholars have increasingly worked to complicate and transcend this binary in order to uncover the complex and interwoven economic and cultural processes that produce this phenomenon.

Much of the more recent gentrification literature has also responded to Loretta Lees' call for "geographies of gentrification" (Lees, 2000) that highlight the differential landscapes of gentrification that occur in diverse locations. A rising awareness of the gentrification processes occurring in cities in the Global South was central to provoking this call for more geographically-specific analysis. In her 2000 article, Lees identifies a growing need for comparative urbanisms, citing Andrew Harris' study of London and Mumbai as a promising example (Harris, 2008). Lees (2012) finds fertile ground in the connections and divergences between state-led campaigns of "mega-gentrification" and explicit mass displacement occurring in cities in the Global South and the neoliberal gentrification processes occurring in the Global North that are often masked by narratives of mixed-income development.

Many contemporary scholars are responding to this call for comparative geographies of gentrification. The authors of *Whose Urban Renaissance?* explore the patterns of spatial restructuring in disinvested urban neighborhoods experiencing reinvestment across the globe, with a focus on the varied forms of state action (Porter, 2009). *Uprooting Urban America* brings multi-disciplinary perspectives to the impacts of gentrification on housing, health, education, and community-organizing through comparative case studies of cities across the United States (Hall, 2014). The Dutch *Journal of Economic and Social Geography's* special

issue on contemporary gentrification in March 2014 situates the unique, geographically-specific processes occurring in the Netherlands within a global context (Doucet, 2014). All of these authors have contributed to an understanding of gentrification that is both comparative and situated, linked to global processes and shaped by local particularities.

II. Rural Gentrification: Exclusive Consumption of the Countryside

The recent turn toward geographies of gentrification has been accompanied by a growing interest in the changing cultures and economies of rural areas and their connection to larger patterns of development, investment, and migration. The origin of the concept of "rural gentrification" is often traced to geographer Martin Phillips' (1993) application of the term in a study of class colonization in rural villages in Gower. In this study, Phillips identifies a strong case for the presence of a rural rent-gap in Britain, while also cautioning against viewing gentrification as a purely economically-driven process, highlighting the diversity of motives among gentrifying classes. Phillips remains a leading voice in the field, and his work has been central to integrating production- and consumption-side theories within the rural context. Nonetheless, the division has persisted in rural studies, as has the predominance of cultural analyses that focus on shifting middle-class consumer preferences.

The task of examining rural gentrification has been taken up most prominently in the U.K., where the historical legacies of a landed gentry, pastoral national identity, and post-War development policies have contributed to a unique geography of gentrification. The authors of the 2011 Interface section, "Exclusive Countrysides?" in *Planning, Theory, and Practice* explore the prevalence of migration to exclusive rural housing markets in the U.K (Scott et al, 2011). Their studies reveal that rural gentrification is a multi-stage and geographically-specific process involving gentrifiers from a diversity of class positions, from traditional aristocracy to

more marginal gentrifiers who may have previously been displaced from urban areas by rising housing costs (Scott et all 2011, 601).

Similarly, Aileen Stockdale's (2010) study of gentrification in rural Scotland emphasizes that in-migration is not necessarily synonymous with gentrification, and that even where rural gentrification does occur it gives rise to very differing impacts across locations. Her study examines the wide range of demographic and socio-economic trends that shape migration decisions. Some of the defining variations that Stockdale identifies are the diverse class backgrounds of the migrants, the unique characteristics of local housing markets, a variety of motivating factors including employment, housing, and perceived quality of life, and the distinction between displacement (out-migration caused by in-migration) and replacement (in-migration following out-migration).

Despite this variation, authors in the U.K. have identified large-scale trends that verify the need to explore social inequalities associated with rural in-migration through the analytical framework of rural gentrification. In his 2009 assessment of the state of the literature, Phillips finds that rural gentrification still lacks sufficient discursive space as a concept because it has been infrequently used and often inadequately defined. Counter-urbanization, on the other hand, has attracted a far greater number of studies. Phillips concludes that both counter-urbanization and rural gentrification are simultaneously useful and "chaotic" concepts, but he locates the value of gentrification in its political character. Gentrification is never a unified process with fixed actors. However, it can be a useful lens for examining the economic and social changes occurring in some rural areas precisely because it can help to re-politicize spaces that have often been cast as stagnant and apolitical in contrast to the dynamic and contested city. For Phillips, the term can help to overcome rural studies' traditional avoidance

of class politics (Phillips, 2009: 541).

The vast majority of this renewed interest in class in studies of rural redevelopment, however, has been restricted to a focus on the class-formation practices of gentrifiers themselves. Many of these studies rely heavily on Peter Bourdieu's notion of *habitus* (Hines, 2010; Scott et al, 2011; Stockdale, 2010) to analyze the distinct complex of social norms, habits, and beliefs that constitute the place-based cultural identity of these communities. Darren Smith and Debbie Phillips (2001) propose an alternate term, "greentrification," signaling the increasing desirability and consumer demand among the middle-class for residential spaces that are perceived as green, sustainable, and natural. According to Smith and Phillips, the spatial differentiation that produces rural areas as highly valued spaces is often inextricable from the exclusion of undesirable "others." This is mirrored in Mark Shucksmith's description of Northumberland residents who celebrate when their villages are officially labeled "unsustainable" communities:

> Why would anyone wish their community to be labeled unsustainable?...Because no further development would now be permitted, so ensuring that these villages become ever more socially exclusive, enhancing property values and extending their social distance from poorer groups in society…Perhaps this is the "dark side" of sustainability? (Scott et al 2001: 605)

The scholarship on rural gentrification in the U.S. has been less extensive but points to similar trends, particularly the commodification of rural areas for middle-class consumption. J Dwight Hines (2010) explores the class formation practices of middle-class newcomers in his ethnographic study of a rapidly changing community in south-central Montana. Hines distinguishes them as a post-industrial middle-class, for whom experiences' have begun to supplant commodities as the principal markers of class status. For rural middle-class newcomers, key class status markers include outdoor activities with an emphasis on personal progress, community engagement defined by an ideal of authentic small town intimacy, and

civic enfranchisement through participation in local politics. Hines finds that class-formation was primarily achieved through the collective narration of these experiences as observed in a local coffee shop.

Several similar studies have explored U.S. rural landscapes as theaters of consumption. Peter Walker and Louise Fortman's 2003 study of Nevada County, CA chronicles the attempts of the an environmentalist-dominated county government to incorporate aesthetic and environmental principles into county planning in response to the consumptive demands of in-migrants. Rina Ghose (2004) explores the cultural change spurred by middle-class migrants' search for a relaxed, outdoor recreation-based "Rocky Mountain lifestyle."

Notably absent from both these studies, however, is an in-depth analysis of the range of impacts experienced by previously existing populations in these rural areas. Ghose does survey some long-time residents and concludes they are concerned by the changes taking place in their communities, but she admits that all of the long-term residents included in her study were middle-class homeowners and therefore represented limited perspectives. While rural gentrification studies have explored the specific characteristics of gentrifying classes, more nuanced analyses of the complex ways in which class, race, gender, sexuality, religion, political affiliation, and culture also shape the experiences of long-time residents are still needed in order to understand the full social and political implications of this process.

Japonica Brown-Saracino's work (2009; 2013) addresses this gap by including the perspectives of non-gentrifying groups in her comparative studies on urban gentrification in Chicago and rural gentrification in New England. She finds a range of opinions on the process; many long-time residents identify gentrification as a positive form of redevelopment in an otherwise disinvested rural landscape, while others express strong concerns about

displacement and community change. Brown-Saracino's work has also brought attention to the range of political orientations and attitudes that rural gentrifiers hold towards the continued presence of long-term residents. She identifies a unique class of "social preservationist" in-migrants—particularly common to rural areas—that share many socio-economic characteristics with other gentrifiers but who perceive "original" residents as desirable markers of authentic community and therefore seek to maintain their presence. While Brown-Saracino finds that this impulse can sometimes lead to genuine commitments and actions for social inclusion, affordable housing protections, and cultural preservation, her work also highlights how this impulse often laced with a desire to selectively control *which* histories, cultures, and people are preserved. She finds that this weakens the possibility of true solidarity, democratic participation, and equitable community formation and development.

There has also been a notable scarcity of production-side studies of rural gentrification in the years since Martin Phillips initial examination of the rural rent-gap. One exception is Eliza Darling's 2005 study of rising property values in New York State's Adirondack Park. Following Phillips' lead in applying rent-gap theory, Darling explores the geographically-specific role of land management policies in wilderness lands. She argues that zoning policies that promote concentrated population density in hamlet zones within tracks of conservation land have lead to a crisis of affordable housing, particularly for the local service workforce that plays many key roles in the operations of the park (Darling, 2004). Through this analysis, she demonstrates both the usefulness of the concept of the rent-gap for rural gentrification studies as well the need to rework this concept when it is transferred to new locations. Darling finds:

> The disparity springs from the *mechanism* which draws capital toward one location as opposed to another in each of these landscapes…What gets produced in the process of urban gentrification is *residential space*. What gets produced in the process of wilderness gentrification is *recreational nature*. (Darling, 2004: 1022).

Darling's study thus begins to bridge the gap with more cultural- and consumption-oriented studies, while including a detailed analysis of the economic and structural context within which individual consumer choices and class-based cultural trends are embedded. According to her analysis, individual and collective desires are deeply revealing of and consequential for larger systems, not isolated or apolitical. The emerging field of rural gentrification studies in the U.S. could benefit from taking Darling's lead in integrating production- and consumption-side theories, bridging a critical analysis of the structural forces behind gentrification with the rich specificity of cultural study.

Lise and Peter Nelson's work on the "linked migration" of rural amenity migrants and Latino service workers across the U.S. (2010) also begins to complicate the consumption and production binary by examining the interplay between structural and cultural forces that drive these interwoven migration streams. As urban professional classes have become the primary beneficiaries of globalized capital accumulation—and much of their labor de-territorialized through communications technology—moving to amenity rich rural locations becomes an increasingly viable and culturally attractive option for these communities. Nelson and Nelson's study also challenges the conception of gentrification as a process of ubiquitous racial whitening and income elevation, arguing that the arrival of amenity migrants to rural spaces often drives an accompanying influx of low-wage Latino service workers.

The existing rural gentrification literature illustrates how the rural application of this concept provides unique empirical data and theoretical insights that can enrich the paralyzed debate in gentrification studies as a whole. Firstly, rural areas display high levels of variation in the roles played by public policy and the state. While urban centers are generally managed (and engineered, planned, and developed) by a municipal governing body, the role of

government in rural areas ranges from highly deregulated county administrations to carefully managed conservation areas like the Adirondacks. This variation can help to complicate and enrich an understanding of the diverse ways public policy drives gentrification. Secondly, the sheer abundance of developable land in many rural areas (through certainly not in all areas as Darling's study highlights) frequently leads to a less direct relationship between in- and out-migration. Economically-driven physical displacement caused by crises of housing availability and affordability may not be a defining quality of gentrification in all rural areas (Brown-Saracino, 2009; Stockdale, 2010). This may help to spur the expansion of the term beyond its strictly displacement-dependent definitions. Tom Slater argues that this evolution is long overdue, citing Jason Hackworth's conclusion that we must consider any process that transforms a space for my more affluent users a form of gentrification, even if the relationship with displacement is not direct or immediate (Slater, 2006: 744).

The rural gentrification literature continues to be vexed by the question of how broadly this term can be applied to different forms of development and in-migration while retaining its conceptual integrity (Phillips, 2010). How is rural gentrification inclusive of or distinct from suburbanization, urban expansion, amenity migration, or tourism-based development in rural spaces? If, however, we follow Phillips' lead in embracing the chaotic nature of the term and mobilizing it for its politicizing effect, the most pressing questions become less about what "counts" as rural gentrification and more about what this lens can illuminate about the social inequalities associated with various forms of economic restructuring and redevelopment in previously disinvested rural areas.

Given that the existing research has focused on identifying, defining, and quantifying the process of rural gentrification, more studies are now needed that seek to understand the

interwoven social and structural forces that drive this process, transcending the consumption/production binary and connecting large-scale patterns with local particularities. Also needed are in-depth examinations of the complex *consequences* of this process as they are experienced by both in-migrants and long-time residents in rural communities. Additionally, the existing literature can be enriched by an expanded empirical scope that incorporates regions that have thus far been largely overlooked, including the American South.

III. Examining Rural Gentrification in the American South

As one of the fastest growing regions in the country (Mackum, 2011), the U.S. American South is a key location for the study of rural gentrification. Many counties on the rural periphery of the South's larger cities are experiencing high rates of population growth in the first decades of the 21st century (Johnson, 2006), along with growing national media attention (Auletta, 2014; Webster, 2011) and renewed waves of capital investment (Kotkin, 2013). A small number of studies have begun to point to the key insights offered by studying this region, but it is has remained largely underexplored.

Brandon Scott Saunders' unpublished thesis (2010) points to the Appalachian mountain region as a promising site for the study of rural gentrification. Using domestic colony theory to understand the systematic underdevelopment and resource extraction that has characterized this region and driven its production as a site of profitable reinvestment, Saunders integrates qualitative and quantitative data from two rapidly developing counties in Western North Carolina to examine the range of cultural, economic, and demographic impacts on these communities as they gentrify. Several studies have also identified in-migration and development patterns occurring in rural coastal areas of the Carolinas (Boucquey et al, 2012; Johnson et al, 2009), with brief references to their potential relevance to the rural gentrification

literature but little analysis of the theoretical viability or political implications of this interpretive lens.

Closest to my own site, Rachel Fleming's exploration of rural gentrification and arts-based economic development in Pittsboro, NC (2009) illuminates how long-standing social divisions and hierarchies often prevent rhetorical commitments to inclusion and accessibility from manifesting as realities. She finds that while the arts have been an effective driver of economic development in Pittsboro, the benefits of this development are primarily distributed to white, middle-class communities despite local arts organizations' professed diversity efforts. Fleming makes a strong case for the rural communities on the periphery of the growing Research Triangle area as sites of rapid gentrification, citing high population growth rates, rising housing costs, and growing white and Latino populations alongside shrinking African-American communities.

Studying rural gentrification in the American South can complicate and challenge many of the assumptions of the existing literature. The presumed racial, ethnic, and cultural homogeneity of long-term residents in rural communities that has gained prominence through studies situated in New England, the Western US, and the U.K. is unsettled by the long-standing presence of large black communities (in addition to growing numbers of Latino immigrants) in rural spaces across the American South. Histories of racial segregation from the Jim Crow area continue to shape the social landscapes of these communities and challenge any simplistic conception of class theorized without an accompanying analysis of race.

In the Piedmont region in particular, the strong historic presence of a once booming textile industry has left a post-industrial landscape that is now a prime target for profitable redevelopment. The redevelopment of this unique landscape is perhaps more closely linked to

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urban gentrification processes—frequently characterized by renovation and refurbishment of existing structures—than rural gentrification studies that focus on new-build development. The post-industrial Piedmont textile belt also expands the literature beyond the post-productivist agricultural landscape or the amenity-rich wilderness.

This study contributes to the closure of these empirical gaps, while also addressing some of the theoretical binds and methodological weak points of the existing rural gentrification literature. By taking a long view of Saxapahaw's history leading up to its most recent phase of redevelopment, I move beyond the production and consumption binary, untangling the interwoven cultural and structural forces that have produced Saxapahaw as a site for gentrification. After examining these causal drivers, I turn to the qualitative data I have gathered on the lived experiences of both long-term residents and newcomers, investigating the differential consequences of economic restructuring and examining how members of these diverse communities negotiate the politics and practices of redevelopment. I take seriously the call for geographies of gentrification while remaining grounded in an analysis of wider trends, exploring how Saxapahaw's gentrification process has been shaped by both local particularities and global forces.

CHAPTER 3 – SPATIAL PRACTICES

Social Capitalism in a Company Town

In this chapter, I outline some of the "spatial practices" (Lefebvre 1991)—constitutive processes linked to regimes of production and social reproduction—that have shaped Saxapahaw since its early industrialization as a mill village. In doing so, I work to address the gap in production-side theories of gentrification in the context of post-industrial rural landscapes in the American South, drawing attention to the ways in which market, state, and more local social forces aligned to produce a particular kind of disinvested space and then generated specific opportunities for viable and profitable reinvestment. I take a multi-scalar approach to this examination of productive forces, reading global, national, and regional processes alongside the micro-economic and micro-political landscape of this Piedmont textile mill village. While this chapter focuses primarily on processes of structuration as opposed to their intimate impacts, it is impossible to separate these impacts altogether. The productive forces examined here are neither abstract nor impersonal, but are closely interrelated with the representations of place and daily experiences of village life that I will explore in the following two chapters.

By examining these spatial practices, I bring attention to the ways in which shifts in regimes of production, consumption, and social reproduction have produced not only the material landscape of Saxapahaw but have also shaped a distinct social landscape. I highlight how different stages of the village's economic development produced particular sets of social

relations along lines of race, class, and gender. These relationships are closely linked to regimes of capital accumulation, but they are also negotiated through human agency and moments of collective encounter and social struggle.

The historical context in this chapter is necessary for understanding the political implications of the current phase of redevelopment, because it illuminates the historical foundations of the social relations, divisions, and disparities of the contemporary period. Saxapahaw's previous development as a company town continues to shape its social and political landscape in significant ways. In response to wider patterns of uneven development that resulted in a systematically under-resourced rural Piedmont in the 19th century, an emerging industrial capitalist class aligned with state forces to develop a widespread network of textile production. The new textile villages were envisioned as a mechanism for white economic uplift in the wake of the Civil War, and characterized by an emphasis on small-scale, "social" capitalism characterized by paternalist labor management, a blurring of productive and reproductive spheres, and the private provision of welfare and basic services. While this initial structure was forced to evolve by labor organizing, the rise of the welfare state, and the eventual decline of the industry over the course of the 20th century, many of its influences can still be found in Saxapahaw today. The new form of socially-conscious capitalism practiced and promoted by the real estate developers and business owners leading the town's redevelopment project is strikingly reminiscent of the company town model.

This chapter is divided into three periods of Saxapahaw's capitalist development—the strict paternalism of the 19th- and early 20th-century mill, the welfare capitalism of the mid-20th century, and the transition to an entrepreneurial, consumption-based economy at the turn of the 21st century. Each of these periods are defined by distinctive sets of social relations and

associated economic shifts, and each were catalyzed by emerging crises that threatened to render the previous social and economic order untenable. Despite the significant changes that characterized the transition between each period, considerable continuities also remained. One of the recurring patterns found throughout Saxapahaw's development is an ongoing experimentation with forms of "social" capitalism—attempts to mitigate negative social consequences associated with capitalist development while simultaneously stabilizing and concealing mechanisms that promote entrenched social inequalities.

I. Paternalism in the Early Mill Village - 1840s-1920s

In 1844, John Newlin – a wealthy Quaker landowner of Irish decent – initiated the construction of the first cotton mill in Saxapahaw. While the small village was already home to smaller-scale industries like ice-cutting and grain-milling (Bulla, 1949)—in addition to both commodity and subsistence agriculture—the establishment of the cotton mill marked a significant turning point in the village's incorporation into a wider system of industrial production. As the material landscape of the predominantly rural North Carolina Piedmont was rapidly transformed by the arrival of the textile industry in the decades preceding and following the Civil War, a distinctive set of social relations emerged in mill communities that mediated between the interests of an emerging white working-class and a new class of industrial capitalist owners, both reshaping and re-entrenching existing dynamics of race, class, and gender.

Early Industrialization, Civil War, and Reconstruction

At the point of the first European presence in Saxapahaw in 1701, the land was home to the Sissipahaw people of the Saponi Nation. While it is unfortunately beyond the scope of

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this project to repair this vital gap in the historical narrative, it is necessary to acknowledge the presence of large and vibrant indigenous communities on this land for millennia before the arrival of European occupiers. Like all contemporary US American communities, the formation of the village was part of a larger settler-colonial project of indigenous land theft and genocide.

By the 1840s, the North Carolina Piedmont had developed into a predominantly "yeoman" society of white, small-scale subsistence farmers who periodically grew commodity crops for exchange on local markets. Large-scale plantation agriculture was primarily limited to the Eastern part of the state,[5] where wealthy landowners held much of the political power in the state legislature—and had little interest in the development of publicly-funded transportation infrastructure that would enable a competitive plantation economy in the rural Piedmont. Nevertheless, many white Piedmont farmers owned one or two black slaves, and "slavery was generally accepted by whites here as it was thorough the colonies" (Beatty, 1999: 3).

John Newlin's mill in Saxapahaw was one of the earliest constructed in the extensive series of mills that drew on the formidable source of waterpower provided by the Haw River. In 1837, Edwin M. Holt established Alamance County's first mill several miles upriver. Holt was one of the county's largest landholders and slave owners. While the Holts' holdings paled in comparison to the large cotton plantations of South Carolina and Virginia, as well as those in the eastern part of NC, the forcible extraction of the labor of enslaved people of African descent provided much of the surplus capital that enabled many early industrialists to enter the textile industry.

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[5] With several notable exceptions, including the Stagville Plantation near Durham.

As an abolitionist Quaker, John Newlin's decision not to own slaves is often celebrated by as a distinguishing characteristic of the newly industrialized village of Saxapahaw. Rural Alamance and neighboring Chatham counties have a long history of localized progressive activism, linked to sizeable Quaker settlements, establishing a meaningful cultural precedent for many of Saxapahaw's newer residents today. Newlin's abolitionist politics may have indeed had significant impacts on the racial dynamics of the early village, but the first mill owner was nonetheless deeply embedded in a wider economy based on forced labor. The story most commonly highlighted as an example of Newlin's progressive racial politics alludes to this reality. When a local landowner decided to free the 42 slaves she owned, she enlisted Newlin to ferry them to freedom. In the interim, while Newlin had the slaves in his possession, however, he used their labor to the dig the millrace that would provide waterpower for the early mill (Troxler, 1999). While Newlin did eventually assist them in travelling north to Ohio to freedom, his use of their labor in building the essential physical infrastructure for the mill attests to the distinctly racialized foundations of this new economic venture. During this same period, Thomas Sellers Jr.—the maternal great-grandfather of one of the mill's later owners, B Everett Jordan—owned 100 slaves along with large tracts of property in Alamance County (Brawley), and this capital went on to support the family's Burlington-based chain of department stores that enabled their entrance into the textile industry.

The start-up capital for the early Piedmont mills was also closely linked to a developing merchant class that gained economic and political power as the Piedmont's small urban market centers grew. The younger sons of wealthy landowners frequently pursued this career path, despite the fact that deep suspicions towards urban commerce remained among the planter class. The role of creditor that had been so frequently filled by landowners—and

served to maintain paternalist relationships that kept subordinate social classes indebted to landed elites—began to be rapidly replaced by merchants (Downey, 2006).

In the years leading up to the Civil War, a more marked division between urban and rural spheres emerged in the Piedmont, accompanied by extensive political struggles over the diversion of state funds away from the priorities of agriculture and towards new industries and the infrastructural development they required. The planter class often resisted these new state investments in urban areas, condemning the fact that the new towns became the "beneficiary of unprecedented largesse from the state" (Downey, 2006: 66). Delfino and Gillespie (2005) argue that this type of inter-elite conflict—as well as the transition of power from planters to the new capitalist and merchant classes—has been frequently over-emphasized, however, noting that large planters often invested in manufacturing ventures or sent their sons to work in factories.

When the Saxapahaw mill opened its doors in 1848, its production was limited to spinning cotton yarn to be sold directly to household consumers. A decade later, the mill facility was expanded, with new equipment that enabled the production and dying of cotton cloth (Bulla, 1949). Until the Civil War, millwork primarily remained a means of subsidizing agricultural pursuits for both owners and workers, and cloth and yarn were primarily sold on local markets. With the construction of the railroad through Alamance County in 1849, however, momentum began to grow towards larger-scale production.

The Piedmont textile industry boomed during the Civil War. Most mill owners were initially opposed to the secession of the Southern states since it required them to cut business ties with Northern industrialists, who provided them with extensive technical knowledge and equipment. As momentum grew for secession, however, Southern mill owners identified that

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regional independence would create significant new opportunities for profit, giving them privileged access to both Southern cotton suppliers and consumer markets (Beatty, 1999). Textile prices soared during the Civil War, and Confederate governments in many states, including North Carolina, imposed stringent regulations on the industry in the attempt to break the spree of profiteering. The frequent exemption of mill management from military conscription, however, was indicative of the growing political power that industrialists had begun to amass. The Saxapahaw mill benefitted from the increased profits and production demands of the war, as Governor Z.B. Vance ordered cotton stored in Graham to be delivered to Newlin's mill and manufactured into cloth for Confederate Army uniforms (Bulla, 1949).

Scholars of economic and political history in the American South have vigorously debated the extent to which the social hierarchies of the antebellum period remained intact after the Civil War. Theorists of the "New South" highlight the emergence of a new bourgeois class, which seized novel opportunities for wealth accumulation during the economic turmoil following the demise of the slave labor economy (Wright, 1986). Conversely, others have emphasized the significant consistencies in the power structures in the burgeoning industrial economy, as plantation owners often shifted directly into commerce and industry. For the purposes of this analysis, both these theories are relevant to understanding the burgeoning Piedmont textile industry: the end of the Civil War marked *both* a significant shift in Southern class structures and initiated a period in which the wealthy elites of the plantation economy attempted, often quite successfully, to reclaim positions of power within a transformed economic and political landscape.

Similarly, the Civil War has been extensively examined as a transitional point between feudal and capitalist economies in the South. The dominant discourses among economic

historians in the 20th century positioned the plantation economy as a pre-capitalist social

structure based on labor repression and sluggish profit margins linked to the fixed asset of

landownership. These scholars compared the allegedly pre-capitalist antebellum South to the

"classically" capitalist path of the Northern states, characterized by a competitive labor market

and reinvestment of surplus profit in technical advancements to increase productive efficiency

(Weiner, 1979). This theory has since been disrupted by more recent scholarship that examines

the slave ship (Rediker, 2008) and plantation (Baptise, 2004) as proto-industrialist precursors

to the factory. Rather than requiring a strict division between these two structures, Saxapahaw

and other early Piedmont textile communities can be understood as sites of intersection for

both pre-capitalist and capitalist systems—a type of layered sedimentation that continues to

this day.

John Newlin died in 1867, leaving the mill to his two sons. In 1873, they sold the mill

to the county's most prominent industrialist, Edwin H. Holt, who eventually transferred it to

the White-Williamson Company, led by his sons-in-law. In his 1949 history of Saxapahaw,

mill supervisor Ben Bulla cites the economic pressures caused by the Reconstruction era's

"carpet bag administration" as the primary motivating factor in the Newlins' decision. While

this narrative of local autonomy compromised by outside influence remains strong in Southern

historiography, the Reconstruction era was characterized by a complex and wide-ranging

series of political struggles, as the region grappled with a devastated economy and radically

transformed social order.

These struggles were deeply racialized, as the political enfranchisement of freed black

men led to the emergence of "fusion" governments that united newly-elected black leaders and

white populists. The white supremacist backlash to this rapid political change was particularly

visible and violent in Alamance County. In 1868, about 10 percent of the county's white male population were registered members of Ku Klux Klan, including the sheriff and all of his deputies (Troxler, 1999). Committed to punishing perceived trespasses against racial purity and white interests through vigilante force, the Klan also turned to destabilizing the new political power of both black and white Republicans and Northern "carpetbaggers" accused of bringing outside interests into the county.

During a period of intensification in the escalating violence in 1870, members of the Klan lynched Wyatt Outlaw, a black Republican town councilman, in front on the county courthouse in Graham (Troxler, 1999). In response to this murder, Republican Governor William Holden declared Alamance County in a state of insurrection and implemented martial law, leading to mass arrests of Klan members throughout the county. This period of restriction on Klan activity was short-lived, however, as the conservative majority in the state legislature impeached Holden and ended his attempts at intervention later that year. Federal Reconstruction ended in 1877, plunging the entire South into the "nadir" of racial violence, ending the brief enfranchisement of black men and re-entrenching racial hierarchies through extensive discriminatory Jim Crow policies.

The full takeoff of the Piedmont textile industry occurred in this context of a Southern economy and social order thoroughly destabilized by the Civil War. In his unparalleled account of the era, *Black Reconstruction,* W.E.B Du Bois argues that the proletariat class that emerged after the Civil War was not the united front that Marx envisioned but a class fundamentally splintered into four sets of people: "the freed Negro, the Southern poor white, and the Northern skilled and common laborer. These groups never came to see their common interests, and the financiers and capitalists easily kept the upper hand" (Du Bois, 1935: 216).

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Leaders across political boundaries throughout the South increasingly turned to regional

industrial development as a means of re-securing white economic power, placating white inter-

class conflict, and breaking from dependence on Northern states. The sharecropping system

that emerged from the ashes of the plantation economy brought a mass of freed blacks and

landless whites into a debt-locked cycle of tenancy, joining the existing white yeoman class in

struggling to meet ends meet in an increasingly hostile environment for small-scale

subsistence agriculture. The crop lien—the form of agricultural credit that provided the basis

of the sharecropping system—expanded the power of merchants and compelled small farmers

to rely on the production of tobacco, cotton, and other commodity crops to pay back debts.

Simultaneously, new fence laws that required livestock to be contained solidified private

property regimes and placed restrictions on small landholders' access to former commons.

These constraints, along with higher taxes levied to rebuild and expand infrastructure that

would enable industrial development, added up to a "virtual assault on Piedmont yeoman

society" (Hall, 1987: 6). The sharecropping system helped accelerate the transition to

industrial wage labor, generating a surplus labor force of precarious farmers.

While increasingly powerful industrial and commercial interests in the state legislature

directly contributed to the expropriation of these small-scale farmers from the land through the

establishment of these policies, they also positioned themselves as the solution to the growing

crisis in the agricultural system. During the widespread "Cotton Mill Campaigns" in the 1880s,

mill construction "became synonymous with town building and served as an index for

community prosperity," taking on the "fervor of a social movement" (Hall, 1987: 24). These

campaigns crystallized around a narrative of uplift for the white lower classes, capitalizing on

fears of competition with newly freed blacks. As populations skyrocketed in commercial urban

areas in the Piedmont like Greensboro and Winston—shifting state political power away from the east—Saxapahaw became embedded in an increasingly competitive network of Piedmont textile production.

RAILROADS AND TEXTILE MILLS
IN NORTH CAROLINA, 1896
Source: State Board of Agriculture, *North Carolina and Its Resources* (Raleigh, 1896), 192–201.
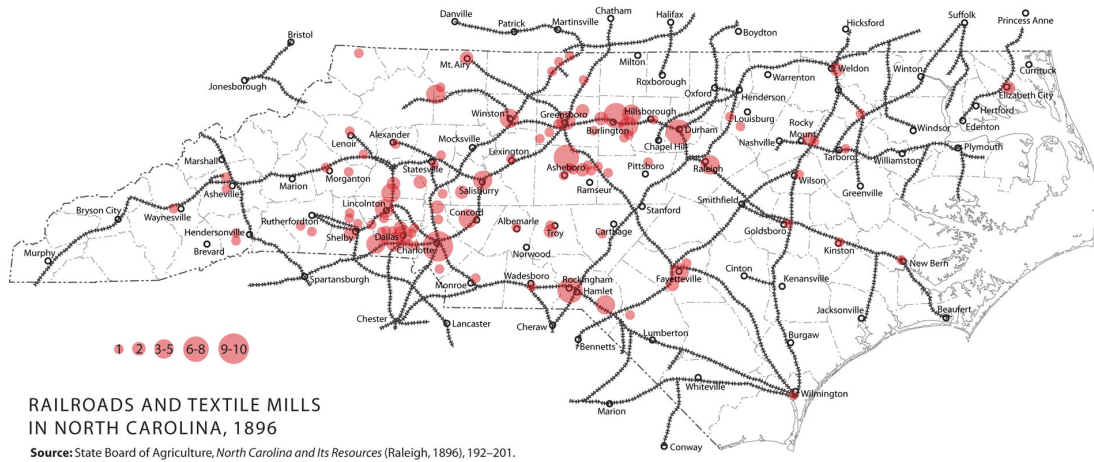
Figure 4: *Railroads and Textile Mills in NC, 1896.*
Source: Learn NC. <http://www.learnnc.org/lp/editions/nchist-newsouth/4745>

Hall et al (1987) identify two primary waves of migration of farming communities off the land and into the mills. In the 1870s and 80s, the majority of millworkers came from female-headed households. Mill building campaigns emphasized the role of the new mills in providing a safe and morally-upstanding environment for unmarried young white women as well as widows and their children, social groups with few other opportunities for economic advancement in a patriarchal society where the ideal of domesticity was largely unavailable for poor women and widows often became legal wards of the state (Freeze, 1991). While these women and children continued to be the public face of the mills for many decades, by the late 1880s and early 1890s, the migrants to mill villages were predominantly families that included adult men, as plummeting crop prices made wage labor more attractive across agricultural society. In the family labor system that emerged, mills often set quotas for the number of

family members that employees were required to provide to secure their contract (Hall, 1987).

Paternalism in the early mills

By the end of the 19th century, textile mills were firmly established as the primary economic force in the Piedmont. In 1895, a study reported that almost two-thirds of Alamance County's white residents were directly involved in the industry (Beatty, 1999: 177). While they were closely linked to patterns of urban growth by networks of capital, textile mills continued to be constructed in largely rural areas near large rivers until the end of the 19th century, when the spread of steam power technology enabled their construction in urban centers with greater access to railroads. The rural setting of mills like Saxapahaw required mill owners to invest in housing and other basic services for their workers, building village residential communities alongside industrial spaces. These isolated villages were characterized by a distinctive set of social relations, where an intimate sense of community was often interlaced with paternalist forms of labor and social control. The paternalism of the early mill villages marked the beginning of the "social" capitalist practices that have characterized much of Saxapahaw's development—mediating inter-class conflict and improving standards of living for many village residents, while also normalizing and obscuring persistent social inequalities.

In establishing "company towns" across the country, early American industrialists responded to fears about the harmful effects of England's industrial transition, where textile manufacturing had resulted in crowded and chaotic cities with workers living in wretched conditions (Crawford, 1995). The attempt to avert these perceived negative social consequences of capitalist development did not fully take root until the labor reform movements of the early 20th century, but the owners of early Piedmont mill villages

nonetheless worked to maintain certain valued elements of pre-industrial lifestyles, modeling villages after rural hamlets. The family labor system also required a different spatial organization than Northeastern textile communities, many of which were structured around boarding houses for single women and children, like the iconic facility in Lowell, MA. Most Piedmont textile communities were designed as clusters of simple, single-family homes next to a church, company store, and a range of additional basic services.

Many mill villages included collective spaces for edible crop cultivation or large yards for individual gardens, as mill management recruited workers with the promise of at least partially maintaining their former agricultural lifestyles. Providing these opportunities as a supplemental form of subsistence also served as justification for extremely low wages. Particularly in small mill communities like Saxapahaw, some workers maintained tracts of private property outside the village, which provided them with more flexibility and bargaining leverage as they dipped in and out of seasonal wage labor at the mill (Beatty, 1999).

Work in the early mills was carried out under grueling conditions. At the end of the 19th century, a typical millworker labored for six twelve-hour days. Factories had poor air quality and millworkers became known derogatorily as "lint-heads" for the fibers that covered their hair. The division of labor was strictly gendered, with women primarily employed in the spinning rooms and men in roles that were more physically demanding, like carding, as well as in management and machine-fixing positions that required what were considered gendered forms of technical expertise (Hall, 1987).

Particularly in rural mills like Saxapahaw, however, work also remained relatively flexible in the early period. Managers were faced with a workforce unaccustomed to the formality and temporal rigidity of wage labor. Former mill superintendent John Jordan says

that during this period, women frequently left their posts throughout the day to nurse babies at home, and the "doffers" that changed the bobbins would go fishing in the river between servicing spindles. Profit maximization techniques and the doctrine of efficiency had yet to fully take hold, and workers found ways to maintain a sense of freedom and leisure.

Mill management in this period was envisioned as a form of paternal authority. Casting themselves as benevolent caretakers, mill owners took a personal, interventionist stance towards workers. Freeze reminds us, however, that, "paternalism was not an invention of the mill owners but rather a transferal of the traditional relations of patriarchy to a new setting" (Freeze, 1991: 33). This model shared many commonalities with both plantation and sharecropping systems. Maintaining this traditional structure was often seen as a mediating factor against the potential social ills of industrial development, and mill owners promoted the factory as a place where society's most afflicted could find asylum. A Northern industrialist touring the Alamance Factory in the 1840s applauded the owners for giving "employment and comfort to many poor girls who might otherwise be wretched" (Freeze, 1991: 27). While some mill owners undoubtedly felt a genuine moral calling to this task, employing these social groups also had a prime economic advantage: at the end of the 19th century, women's wages were 60% of men's and children's were even lower (Hall, 1987).

The same ideal of paternal authority that was originally targeted towards vulnerable young women was soon quickly extended to poor men as well under the family labor system. Mill builders avidly took up the charge of "transforming what had been a backward, immoral, poverty-stricken part of the state into a prosperous, moral, and most importantly, contented population" (Downey, 2006: 143). As most villages sat beyond the boundaries of municipal incorporation, mill owners established the rules of public life and the villages were

characterized by a "distinct absence of self-government" (Hall, 1987: 121). Workers were paid in company store credit or a combination of credit and cash, and mill houses were provided at extremely low or no cost—while workers were often subject to eviction upon the termination of their contract.

The spatial structure of many mill villages mirrored the hierarchical division of labor, with owners and managers situated most closely to the village center and families clustered according to their positions within the factory (Digital Loray). In Saxapahaw, management lived on the hill while the lower-paid workers were across the river. Factories themselves were also constructed to maintain relations of power—the open layout facilitated worker surveillance, and factory toilets were often designed without doors to make it easier for managers to detect loitering workers (Herod, 2011).

While these economic and spatial practices established clear disciplinary power hierarchies between workers and managers, the degree of more openly coercive social control in the early villages varied widely. In some communities, mill owners required workers to attend church services at their favored denomination and forbid them from attending others (Freeze, 1991). In other villages, including Saxapahaw, denominational plurality prevailed, but moral codes were strictly enforced through practices like restrictions on alcohol consumption, as mill owners worked to inculcate behaviors intended to both ease community life and increase productivity (Downey, 2006).

In some mill communities, the paternalist model was successful in creating a strong, familial bond between workers and owners, as well as between workers themselves. Hall et al's (1987) extensive oral history collection attests to many workers' personal relationships and sense of affiliation with mill management, who frequently supported struggling families in

times of need. These oral histories often describe the mill villages as spaces of mutual aid, cooperation, and intimate community. Don Mitchell emphasizes the mutual dependency found in company towns, under a model that bound company to worker just as it bound worker to company (Mitchell, 1993). Nonetheless, class struggles and conflict existed alongside these personal relationships, and Hall et al maintain that, "there is abundant evidence that early southern mill workers displayed as much hostility as docility" (Hall, 1987: 66).

Figure 5: *Saxapahaw Textile Workers, 1848*.
Source: http://www.textilehistory.org

 The intentional cultivation of familial solidarity in the almost exclusively white mill communities was inextricably situated within the context of heightened racial tension. Black workers were largely excluded from employment in the mills until the 1960s, with the exception of a small number of menial jobs loading and unloading raw materials and finished

goods in the yard outside the mill. The pervasiveness of near-complete segregation in textiles—in contrast with other industries like steel production and logging where there was more prevalent racial mixing—was fueled in part by fears of miscegenation and the taboo of bringing black men to work alongside white women (Hall, 1987). But industrial labor throughout the South remained largely white even in gender-segregated sectors, as white supremacist ideologies were mobilized to maintain a sense of racial solidarity that placated inter-class conflicts between owning and working-class whites. Acting out of a well-founded fear of populist uprisings in the wake of the Civil War, industrial and political elites found "no better way to remedy the problem than by providing poor whites with remunerative, steady, and disciplined industrial employment" (Downey, 2006: 142). The "organic" bond of racial solidarity implied by the paternalist structure largely naturalized and obscured the more explicitly racialized foundations of the mill villages, but at times mill owners also employed more direct racial blackmail, threatening to replace unruly workers with black labor (Wood, 1991).

Early accounts that romanticized mill villages as worker paradises were rapidly replaced by biting critiques of the strict control of the paternalist model. Scholars increasingly contrasted the coercive structure of the Southern mill villages with an ideal of "free labor" in other parts of the country. While these critiques generated valuable openings for the study of power and mill village life, they often overlooked the fact that both coercive power and worker agency were present in both Northern and Southern systems of industrial labor. Piedmont mill villages were not the worker utopia that mill propaganda would suggest, but neither were they uniquely exploitative when compared to other sites of production. Rather than romanticizing or demonizing the textile industry itself, a more fruitful line of inquiry lies in examining the

shifting networks of production and power that spurred the formation the distinct socio-spatial structure of the Piedmont textile village—in the interest of understanding how the afterlife of this initial structuration continues today.

II. Mid-Century Welfare Capitalism and the Decline of the Industry - 1920s-1990s

While the paternalist structure of the early Piedmont textile villages provided a number of real benefits to workers and kept some of the harshest forms of exploitation at bay, escalating discontent among workers spurred the reconfiguration of this model within an emerging modern welfare capitalist system. The discourse of capitalist benevolence that had remained largely a public relations campaign in the 19th century took on new meanings as worker resistance and shifting national politics prompted the adoption of progressive welfare policies and labor protections in the 20th century. The informal, relationship-based paternal structure of the mill villages did not disappear, however, but was renegotiated and re-embedded within the social relations of the new system. Widespread suppression of union organizing following the General Strike of 1934 solidified a Southern industrial landscape characterized by the deinstitutionalization of labor politics and the reification of neo-paternalist forms of labor control.

A growing labor movement

The overwhelming demand for new workers generated by the post-Civil War expansion in the Southern textile industry led to a significant labor shortage, creating favorable conditions for workers to demand new forms of collective power and negotiation. Growing populist and "fusion" movements in the Carolinas steadily increased pressure for labor reform during the last few decades of the 19th century, and labor unions already well-established in the

Northern states began to make organizing forays into the South.

Child labor was one of the first targets of labor reform in the Southern textile industry. Widespread propaganda campaigns launched the issue to the national stage, mobilizing Lewis Hines' striking photography of young mill workers. Both local and national reformers gradually chipped away at the practice, and although many mills circumvented or outright ignored new regulations initially, child labor had declined to 6 percent of the total workforce in the Carolinas by World War I (Hall, 1987: 60). Child labor was an area of frequent early concessions by the owning class, as some mill owners supported the establishment of compulsory schooling as a means of attracting public investment to the mill villages and cultivating a trained workforce (Beatty, 1999). Meanwhile, some millworkers advocated for child labor regulations in the hopes of reducing low-wage competition, while others fought against them, often relying on their children's meager contributions to the family income. Restricting children's participation in the workforce had devastating impacts for these families, which ultimately increased the urgency of the demand for higher adult wages.

In Alamance County, the first union activity was coordinated by the Knights of Labor. Initially, mill owners attempted to control rather than suppress the Knights, but they quickly turned to intimidation tactics as the union demanded pay increases and a significant reduction in the hours of the workweek. When a labor leader from Alamance was elected to congress in 1886, industrialists who had previously settled into a comfortable control of the Democratic Party launched an aggressive anti-labor campaign that "revealed the power of an appeal to racism as a tactic to defeat reform" (Beatty, 1999: 203). By linking the Knights to black political power, the Democrats successfully stifled their local organizing campaign.

A decade later, however, momentum towards worker organizing rose again as the

National Union of Textile Workers (NUTW) entered the Piedmont mills. After a period of clandestine organizing, the NUTW established locals throughout Alamance County. In the fall of 1900, a strike broke out in three of the Holts' mills, after the union demanded the removal of a weaving supervisor who they claimed had a history of brutality and mistreatment of women and children. T.M. Holt responded by pledging to fire all union members and evict them immediately from company housing. Workers continued to strike, writing letters to the local paper decrying the mill owner's attempt to deny their collective bargaining rights and emphasizing that the owning class exercised their own right to organize by regularly meeting to fix prices and regulate wages The union vowed to provide tents for workers evicted from their homes, but with winter approaching, support began to dwindle and many workers left the union and returned to their positions. Faced with the reality of limited resources with which to provide for large numbers of displaced workers, the NUTW withdrew its support and the strike came to an end (Beatty, 1999).

World War I marked a significant turning point in the Piedmont textile industry, as a period of over-expansion in the industry spurred by wartime demand culminated in a post-War depression. Simultaneously, white workers found renewed power as demand for their labor rose yet again, due to this second major expansion of the industry as well as the shortage of agricultural labor spurred by the Great Migration of black workers out of the Jim Crow states. When mill owners scrambled to regain profit growth by increasing efficiency, some workers fought back—while others fled the textile industry for newly available agricultural positions.

Nationally, Progressive Era reformists had begun to build momentum for labor regulation. President's Wilson affirmed workers' right to organize with the establishment of the National War Labor Board in 1918. During the War, Southern textile workers had made

significant wage gains as the industry thrived. Now they struggled to maintain and extend these gains as mill owners reckoned with the consequences of overexpansion, a crisis exacerbated by the spread of the boll weevil which drove cotton prices steeply up. The depression following World War I marked the end of four decades of relatively steady growth in the Southern textile industry (Hall, 1987).

Mill owners responded to slowing growth by attempting to increase productivity and efficiency through a series of processes known collectively as the "stretch out." They began running the mills around the clock in the effort to more efficiently distribute overhead costs. Some mills turned to mechanization to reduce labor costs, and others implemented production quotas that workers had to meet before they would receive the minimum wage. The 1920s marked an acceleration of the increasingly scientific management and standardization of labor that would become codified in the Fordist system in coming decades. By breaking production tasks into smaller components, a larger number of tasks could be performed by low-paid, low-skilled labor. In response to these increased pressures and aware of their bargaining power in a period of labor shortage, workers began walking out on the job in mass in the early 1920s. Union organizing still had a much stronger hold in the Northern industry, however, and Northern industrialists repeatedly closed down factories and invested the capital into Southern mills where labor conflict had yet to reach a fevered pitch (Hall, 1987).

The Great Depression provided the major catalyst needed to bring unionization to the forefront of Southern labor politics. In the light of near total economic collapse, the Federal government no longer dismissed the South's chronically low wages and relative underdevelopment as local concerns, but increasingly positioned them as threats to the entire nation's economic progress and stability. The South came under Roosevelt's scrutiny as the

nation's "number one economic problem" (Shulman, 1994). The New Deal government's first major attempt to regulate "wayward" industries came in the form of the National Recovery Administration (NRA)'s industry codes. The new Textile Code outlawed child labor and set the industry's minimum weekly wage at 12 dollars, while reducing the workweek to 40 hours. While the vocal presence of labor demands was central in spurring these changes, the Code Authority excluded union representation, and the Code was therefore entirely developed by private industry interests. The Code included concessions to workers, but its central agenda was to create self-regulated agreements between mill owners to restrict output, mitigate fierce competition, and drive up profits (Hall, 1987).

Despite the outpouring of enthusiastic support for self-regulation when the Code was first adopted, mill owners faced by the short-term consequences of decreased production and increased labor costs often turned to "code chiseling," finding ways to escape labor regulations by doubling employees workloads or encouraging the longstanding tradition of children informally "helping" their parents without pay. This ultimately deepened the stretch-out process, despite fleeting hopes among both workers and owners that the NIRA policies would alleviate the growing crisis of the previous decade. Worker pay rose significantly across the South, where the new minimum wage doubled women's wages while men's wages rose by 70 percent (Hall, 1987: 298). But earnings remained far below a living wage, and the increasingly strict and strenuous working conditions escalated worker discontent.

Hall et al emphasize that the industry's pleas of desperate economic constraints were largely exaggerated, as the profits of Southern mills ranged from 6.42% to 12.44% during this period—"impressive profits for a 'sick industry' in the midst of the Great Depression" (Hall, 1987: 319). Many millworkers were similarly unconvinced that the economic downturn was

reasonable justification for continued attacks on their workplace conditions and standard of living. Tired of futile attempts to register complaints through the existing formal channels, workers yet again turned to unionization, this time primarily under the leadership of the United Textile Workers (UTW).

In Saxapahaw during the Depression years, the union found little sympathy with the mill's new management. In 1924, The White-Williamson Company was forced into receivership and shut down the mill. Many workers left the village to seek employment at nearby mills. In 1927, Charles and Annie Sellars, a Burlington family who ran a chain of drug dry goods stores, bought the Saxapahaw mill out of receivership. They founded Sellars Manufacturing Company and enlisted their nephew, B Everett Jordan, to be a partial owner and the superintendent of the mill. At the time, Jordan was a superintendent at Myrtle Textile Mill in Gastonia, and he recruited a number of workers to come with him from Gastonia to Saxapahaw. At the point when Sellers purchased the mill, it had grown to 7,944 spindles, which remained a relatively small operation in comparison to other nearby mills in what had become one of the South's major textile counties (Bulla, 1992).

B Everett Jordan was known for his staunch anti-unionism, having risen through the ranks of a mill community with a particularly fraught history of unionization. Two years after Sellers re-opened the mill in Saxapahaw, the Loray Mill in Gastonia was home to one of the most violent and politically-charged strikes in Southern textile history. Three people were killed, including a police officer and renowned organizer and folk singer, Ella Mae Wiggins, during the massive strike lead by the communist-affiliated National Textile Workers Union (NTWU).

The General Strike of 1934 was the apex of the Southern textile industry's labor unrest.

A series of strikes spread across the Southern states during the summer, with women taking particularly active roles in many unions. By September, the UTW had taken to the radio waves and was sending "flying squadrons" of cars and trucks to speed though the countryside organizing mill communities. Like many mill owners, B Everett Jordan responded by resolving to "fight fire with fire" (Bulla, 1992: 201). Calling in the National Guard, Jordan greeted the flying squadron that reached Saxapahaw with machine gunmen on the roof of the mill. The organizers turned around, and the Saxapahaw mill was never unionized.

The mill owners' forceful response to the outburst of Southern unionization was often supported by the federal government in the form of the National Guard, which deployed over 14,000 troops to the Carolinas during the strike. In Georgia, protestors were confined to a barbed wire "concentration camp" after a mill owner declared martial law, but the level of outright violence and intimidation differed widely from mill to mill. Many owners employed a "divide and conquer" strategy, persuading a group of loyal workers to sign cards committing to refuse participation in the union and then calling for troops to protect these workers "right to work" (Hall, 1987).

These suppression tactics, combined with a new surplus of out-of-work labor willing to fill the positions left by strikers (driven in part by a second exodus of small-scale farmers from the land under another New Deal institution, the Agricultural Adjustment Administration), brought the General Strike to an end twenty-two days after it began. The UTW claimed a victory in the creation of a new national Textile Labor Relations Board to provide a neutral body to assess worker complaints, but the industry leaders succeeded in largely dismantling institutionalized forms of worker organization.

Welfare capitalism in the mill village

While the end of the General Strike marked a devastating blow to unions—which remain heavily restricted in the "right to work" Southern states to this day—white textile workers nonetheless emerged from the Great Depression with significantly higher wages as well as access to new federally-funded social welfare programs. The strict forms of paternalist labor management found in the early mills were on the decline, gradually subsumed into a modern welfare capitalism system that retained many paternalist tendencies while allowing for improved standards of living. The "new" company town was a direct product of worker resistance, but it continued to police and control labor through integration of the domestic, reproductive sphere with the space of production.

Mill owners faced with increasingly competitive textile markets turned to mechanization and higher value products. Sellars Manufacturing expanded the mill facilities several times in the years following the purchase, building a new wing in 1930 and then replacing all of the original buildings in 1937. Throughout the subsequent decades, the company acquired additional equipment that allowed them to produce a wider range of cotton, silk, and synthetic blended textiles. In 1951 they constructed a separate dye house and founded Sellars Dyeing Company. The mill had soon abandoned its original model of cotton gingham production and instead produced fine-combed yarns for the rapidly expanding hosiery industry centered in Alamance County (National Register).

Throughout the mid 20th-century, B Everett Jordan invested heavily in the village's infrastructure. Oral histories from former employees in the Saxapahaw mill in the Southern Oral History Program's archive attest to the significant changes this period brought to the village, as running water and electricity were installed in mill houses, the local high schools

were consolidated, and roads formerly covered by "red slick mud" (Williams, 1981) were

paved. When the local filling station was demolished by a huge flood in 1945, the company

built the Buddy Collins Community Center in its place. Jordan established his role as a village

patriarch, teaching Sunday school at the Methodist church and funding the local Boy Scout

troop. Sellers, like many mills of the era, sponsored a company baseball team in the local

textile league.

Figure 7: *B Everett Jordan throws the first pitch at a company team baseball game.*
Source: Wallace, H.L. (2009) *Saxapahaw (Images of America)*. Arcadia Publishing.

In the Jordans' mill village, worker loyalty was carefully cultivated and incentivized.

An "Old Timers' Club" celebrated employees who had worked for more than 25 years. B

Everett's wife, Katherine, was also highly involved in the life of the village, leading

beautification projects like planting redbud trees and perennial flowers along the roadsides.

Through this increased attention to aesthetics, mill owners worked to recast the gritty and destitute image popularized by early representations of the mill village that fueled pressure for labor reform during the Depression era.

As the years passed, workers sought out consumer goods farther afield, travelling to local urban centers like Burlington. During the Depression, commerce continued to be heavily restricted in the mill village, as workers were often paid in a pasteboard currency called the "Saxapahaw Ducat" accepted at the company-owned store. But rising wages and declining costs of automobiles, along with gradually improving transportation infrastructure throughout the county, allowed mill workers to travel beyond the space of the village to purchase goods and seek out entertainment and social activities—and, increasingly, to find housing away from the all-encompassing sphere of the mill. FHA-backed loans—one of many race-based "affirmative action" programs for the white working-class to emerge out of the New Deal (Katznelson, 2005)—made homeownership a viable possibility for millworkers who had previously relied on mill village rental housing. While some workers chose to stay, others jumped at the opportunity to leave a lifestyle they perceived as claustrophobic and monotonous. In the words of former millworker Bill Blair, "Saxapahaw is all right if you're not interested in anything but eating, working and sleeping" (Blair, 1986). By the 1950s, the tight correlation between the industrial and domestic space of the mill village had entered a long period of decline.

Despite this impending shift in the composition of the mill community, mill owners still vehemently resisted unionization and held close to many of the paternalist tendencies of their forbearers, continuing to channel private investment into the village as a way of minimizing class conflict and averting formalized negotiation with workers. Worker oral

histories indicate that in smaller villages like Saxapahaw, flexibility and a leisurely pace of work continued to draw workers despite lower wages than neighboring mills. Former millworker Doyle Neale says:

> "At Sellers they might not have paid as much as some of the other mills….but they didn't work you to death here at Sellers. When the job was running good we'd go outside and sit on the grass. Sometimes Mr. Jordan would come by and he would say, 'When I see you sitting down I know the work is running good" (Neale, 1986).

In 1950, the Royal Cotton Mill Company of Wake Forest (where B Everett Jordan was also a manager) voted in favor of organizing a chapter of the Textile Workers Union of America (TWUA) and went on strike. Jordan refused to meet with the union and the strike was eventually broken. The next year, when organizers approached the mill in Saxapahaw, Jordan wrote a letter to employees painting the union as profit-seeking outside agitators, emphasizing the generous benefits the company provided—an argument that was ultimately successful as the workers voted down the proposal to unionize. Jordan wrote:

> "When it comes to such things as vacations and vacation pay, holidays, Christmas bonuses, and the like – you have all these, without paying union dues to obtain them…As for your working conditions, we are, as you know, continually taking steps to modernize this Plant in every way possible and to provide cleanliness, good lighting and up-to-date machinery and equipment…After all, who do you believe is really more interested in your welfare – we who live and work here with your, or these organizers who come from somewhere else…?" (Bulla, 1992: 342-343).

While mill owners worked to minimize the role of formal political institutions in their own communities, they were deeply involved in larger political landscapes, maintaining close ties with regulatory bodies and advocating for industry interests. In the case of Saxapahaw, this extended all the way to a national office. In 1958, Jordan was appointed as the replacement for a deceased United States senator and then subsequently re-elected twice. In his 1992 biography of Jordan, his close friend and former mill management colleague, Ben Bulla, writes about Jordan's rise to considerable power within the senate: "As chairman of the Senate

Rules Commission…his control of office assignments and other amenities provided special opportunities for contact and interaction with fellow senators" (Bulla, 1992: 240). One of Jordan's central achievements during his term in office was the elimination of the two-price cotton system: "to make American cotton more competitive world-wide, the US government adopted a policy of subsidizing exports of raw cotton…this made it possible for a foreign mill to buy cotton grown in the US much cheaper than a mill here" (Bulla, 1992: 241). Jordan was one of many mill owners who recognized the growing threat of imports from foreign textile markets and built powerful political coalitions to fight this trend. He was also closely involved in securing funding for several infrastructural projects that would bring economic development to his home state, including the construction of several dams under the Public Works Appropriation Bill of 1971, well as a federal program to make water and sewer treatment plants available for small rural communities (Bulla, 1992). Despite Saxapahaw's relative isolation, Jordan's political participation was a clear marker of the village's embeddedness within larger national and global processes.

Racial integration

While the textile mills were promoted and designed as a vehicle for white economic uplift, a small number of black workers were present in most mill villages from their inception. Black workers often lived on the outskirts of villages and travelled to the mill for menial labor positions or to work as domestic help for higher-paid millworkers and management (Hall, 1987). The racial composition of textile workers changed dramatically, however, over a period of fifteen years in the 1960s and 70s, driven by numerous class action racial discrimination lawsuits filed under the Civil Rights Act and enforced through this new federal legislation. Deeply rooted racial divisions could not be eliminated by the integration of the industry,

however, and black workers continued to be largely restricted to the lowest-paid positions.

In his comprehensive study of the racial integration of the textile industry, Timothy Minchin (1999) emphasizes that while mid-century labor shortages may have played a secondary factor in compelling mill owners to integrate their factories, this motivation has been largely overemphasized in previous studies. Minchin points instead to the central role of federal intervention, realized through a coordinated and tireless stream of civil lawsuits filed by black workers. A group of black women (*Lea v. Cone Mills,* 1969) in nearby Hillsborough brought the first lawsuit under Title VII in which denied applicants for employment, rather than employees, were the primary plaintiffs, establishing an important precedent for future employment discrimination law. The largest and most influential case, *Sledge v J.P. Stevens,* forced the integration of an NC textile company that employed over 49,000 workers at eighty-five plants in 1970. Over the next five years, the company's main facility in Roanoke Rapids expanded its black workforce from 19.4% to 37.1%, a rate proportional to the local black population (Minchin, 1999: 3).

In resisting integration, mill owners frequently argued that they were "being held hostage by white workers' racism" (Minchin, 1999: 19) who refused to labor alongside black workers. While this claim may have often been grounded in reality, it ignored the mill owners' (and their predecessors') own active roles in cultivating this racist climate. Ultimately, however, mill owners began to see the benefits of integration, as it gave them access to a larger workforce, assuaging the competition for labor that drove up wages and allowing for more selective hiring of skilled workers. As the movement towards integration took hold, mill management turned instead to more subtle, internal forms of discrimination that would retain the subordinate status of black workers, such as increasing the workload on particular jobs as

African-Americans were hired for the position, "thus making it less desirable and converting it into a 'black' job" (Minchin, 1999: 63). In the subsequent decades, the flood of civil rights lawsuits continued, attesting to the perpetuation of surreptitious forms of discrimination.

When I interviewed John Jordan (B Everett's son and the superintendent at the mill when it integrated), he indicated that the process was relatively peaceful in Saxapahaw. His narration of the event, however, nonetheless hints at the continued presence of racial tensions in the village:

> "All textile mills in NC were closed July 4 for one week…I wrote a letter to all employees: 'I hope you enjoy your vacation, when you come back, the mills will all be integrated.' You had men, women, and colored bathrooms…So I just said, ok, we're going to eliminate the colored bathrooms. The women's bathrooms already had stalls, but the men's didn't. So I said, ok, I do not want anyone to know who's next to them, black or white…So I put stalls in all of the bathrooms. And bought these little…smelly things that go *drip drip* in men's urinals. All the bathrooms, I had them painted so they were spic and span. So they came back to a cleaner, more private bathroom then when they left."

While this story was clearly intended as proof of the relative ease with which integration proceeded in Saxapahaw, it also contains within it a coded racial logic, whereby increased privacy and sanitation helped placate white workers' fear of the contamination of black bodies. Minchin's text also testifies that bathrooms were often used as a key symbolic gesture of integration, a clear sign that could be easily replaced to demonstrate compliance even when many vestiges of segregation remained in the unequal racial composition of higher paid weaving and management positions. Clearly, Saxapahaw's story of racial division and inequality did not come to such a squeaky clean end through a simple toilet renovation. But the entrance of larger numbers of black workers into the mill marked a significant disruption of the mill village as a "lily-white" space.

The decline of the Piedmont textile industry

As a primarily low-skill industry, textiles were one of the first US American manufacturing industries to contract under the pressures of globalization. The industry had already experienced a domestic, interregional form of this process as mill owners closed down factories in the Northeast and headed to the Southern states seeking lower labor costs at the turn of the 20th century. Now in the second half of the 20th century, the once prosperous Piedmont textile landscape was rapidly hollowed out as the industry shifted towards Asia and Latin America. This process did not unfold organically, however, but was negotiated through fierce political struggle between new alliances of workers and industry leaders attempting to restrict the influx of imports and a growing neoliberal political majority promoting free trade policies.

Through the 1970s, the industry's powerful federal lobbying groups won a series of protectionist agreements that set quotas on textile and apparel imports, most significantly the Multi-Fiber Agreement (MFA). With the election of Ronald Reagan and the rise of neoliberal free trade policies, however, the industry began to lose its long battle against imports. In the context of these dire straights, manufacturers and workers unions aligned to form the Fiber, Fabric, and Apparel Coalition for Trade (FFACT) which supported consumer "Buy American" campaigns and lobbied congress for trade restrictions. FFACT attempted to pass three separate textile bills in the 1980s and 1990s, all of which gained significant public support and were approved by congress only to be vetoed by presidents Reagan and Bush (Minchin, 2013).

The passage of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1994 and the gradual phase-out of the MFA over the subsequent decade provided the fatal blow to the ailing industry. Textile companies closed across the country, leading to massive job loss and out-

migration from textile communities. In 1973, there were more than 2.4 million textile jobs in the U.S.—by early 2012 the number had fallen to just 383,600 (Michin, 2013: 1). In his study of industry's collapse, Timothy Minchin (2013) argues that textile and apparel companies are often overlooked in studies of US American deindustrialization because the industry was relatively decentralized as compared to other parts of the manufacturing sector, with smaller factories that attracted less national attention when they closed. But the decentralized nature of the industry often meant a uniquely devastating form of restructuring for textile communities—in small rural villages like Saxapahaw, the factory and the lived space of the village were so closely linked that the decline of the industry marked the end of an entire way of life.

In Saxapahaw, this transition was somewhat meditated by a gradual period of restructuring and decline—as opposed to nearby factories like Glencoe Mills which closed earlier and therefore had a much more abrupt exodus of millworkers—but it nevertheless had a profound impact on the community. In 1974, B Everett Jordan had died in his home in Saxapahaw, leaving his estate to his three children, Ben Jr., John, and Rose Ann. After running the manufacturing company for several years, the siblings were discouraged by the constraints of the declining industry and decided to sell the factory in 1978 to Dixie Yarns, a larger company out of Chattanooga, TN that managed 27 mills throughout North Carolina.

The new mill owners had no interest in managing rental worker housing, however, which was now considered an outdated relic. John Jordan decided to purchase the 66 mill houses back from Dixie Yarns. He established Jordan Properties, selling the houses on the far west side of the river and investing the capital into renovating the ones closer to the mill on the east side, with a focus on improving energy efficiency. The un-renovated houses sold for three

prices based on size: $9,975, $14,975 and $19,975.

When I interviewed Jordan, he indicated that his interest in this new business venture was sparked by an awareness of the growing number of middle-class public employees in state government in Raleigh and in the UNC university system and associated medical facilities. He and his family members investigated other local mill villages and concluded that Saxapahaw was uniquely positioned for redevelopment based on its ability to attract commuter residents from the nearby Triangle. They marketed the homes to graduate students, beginning a cycle of owner-occupier development:

> "When we started selling that side of the river…the typical buyer was a graduate student who was working on his or her PhD or would be an assistant professor…they'd be at Chapel Hill for 3 or 4 years…they'd buy the house at $10,000 and spend $5,000 renovating it and then they'd graduate and move to Oregon or whatever, so they'd resell the house to another graduate student. They were happy, they'd live there for free, sell the house for more than they'd paid for it. And the new student is happy because they've still got a good deal."

Figure 7: *Renovated mill houses in Saxapahaw.* Source: Google Maps.

Some remaining millworkers also initially bought homes, but many of them had already moved outside of the village to purchase larger plots of land or commute from nearby urban centers with greater access to services and amenities. Additionally, the lowest paid millworkers (as well as those who had neglected to save money because of the legacy of

paternalist financial dependency) likely remained unable to purchase houses even at these low prices, as Cynthia Anderson (2000) describes in her study of the dismantling of the mill village in Kannanpolis, NC. Some millworkers who had the financial means and remained personally attached to the village did stay, however—either in mill houses they now owned or on larger plots of land outside of the village. But the sale and renovation of the mill housing marked the beginning of the wave of in-migration that continues to reshape the social landscape of the village today.

III. Socially-Conscious Capitalism and a "Rural Renaissance" – 1995-present

The Piedmont entered the 21st century defined by stark contrasts and enduring contradictions. At the same time as the Southern textile industry (and many other American manufacturing sectors) shifted overseas, leaving massive unemployed working-class unemployed populations behind, many of the urban centers of the South entered a period of unprecedented growth. The rise of Southern financial institutions and biotech and pharmaceutical research fueled growing professional and service-class sectors. In this new economy, disinvested post-industrial spaces within both urban centers and their rural peripheries have become prime targets for renewed investment.

In the context of geographically-isolated rural mill villages like Saxapahaw, this renewed investment is often channeled through existing social structures that emerged during the historical company town period. The presence of historical continuity in Saxapahaw is particularly pronounced, as the same owning-class family transitioned directly from industrial production to a new form of value production—real estate—maintaining a position of both social and economic power in the town. But the history of the company town era shapes the contemporary moment in many subtler ways as well: in the legacies of race and class divisions,

the close integration of productive and reproductive spheres, and the continuation of a largely privatized rural space with minimal state investment and few formal political institutions.

A new knowledge, service, and consumption-based economy

In his 1994 text, *From Cotton Belt to Sunbelt*, economic historian Bruce Shulman argues that during the decades that followed the identification of this "problem" region during the Great Depression, federal investment in Southern economic development was by-and-large focused on expanding infrastructure that would support the growth of private firms: in short, policies designed to prioritize "place over people" (Shulman, 1994: xii). Rather than focusing on wealth redistribution and alleviating intra-regional uneven development (with the exception of several targeted poverty alleviation programs), the paradoxical "growth Keynesianism" of the mid-20th century aimed to uplift the entire South through a trickle-down approach that set the stage for the rise of neoliberal policies at the end of the century.

While federal programs like the Trade Adjustment Assistance program brought temporary relief to some deindustrializing working-class communities, extending unemployment benefits was a woefully inadequate stopgap to this growing form of socioeconomic inequality. In the post-industrial era, both federal and local economic development policy has continued to focus on bringing growth to region, regardless of its distributive impacts. In the North Carolina Piedmont at the turn of the 20th century, the expanding knowledge economy was one of the central drivers of growth. Constructed in the late 1950s, the Research Triangle Park (RTP) is a 7,000 acre science and high-tech research complex that sought to stop the exodus of highly-educated professionals from the area's three major universities and boost the economy of a state still dominated by low-wage industrial sectors. Havlich & Kirsch (2004) argue that the rise of science parks like RTP has created a

new spatial division of labor where professional elites are isolated in efficient, clustered hubs of knowledge production but embedded in a persistently unequal two-tier labor market with a growing low-wage service sector.

Alongside the growth of white-collar jobs in central North Carolina, urban gentrification processes have transformed the inner cities of Durham, Raleigh, Winston-Salem, and Greensboro through an influx of capital reinvestment and middle and upper class migrants. In the last two decades, this process has begun to spill out into the small towns of the rural periphery of these cities as well. While the formation of Jordan properties marked the beginning of this process in Saxapahaw, it did not fully take off until after the mill closed in 1994. After the roof of the mill was torn off by a tornado, Dixie Yarns decided not to reopen in midst of a contracting industry. The previous year, B Everett's grandson—John Jordan's son, Mac—had graduated from Duke University and then entered NC State to pursue a Masters degree in architecture. After writing his thesis on the promise of mill village revitalization (see Figure 10), he convinced his family to purchase the damaged mill back from Dixie Yarns for $385,000 in 1995.

The mill lay vacant for many years as the Jordans worked to secure capital for redevelopment, while the residential community remained a diverse mixture of former millworkers and other Alamance County locals, graduate students, and in-migrants attracted by the village's natural beauty and growing counter-cultural place identity associated with sustainability, the arts, and small-scale community. In our interview, Mac shared that after studying the slash-and-burn urban renewal policies of the mid-20th century in graduate school, he became interested in revitalization projects that renovate existing structures and maintain valued elements of existing place identity. In the context of a post-industrial community with a

large quantity of undercapitalized real estate, this was also an opportunity to save the family business:

> "I love the community aspect of it…people cared for each other, they helped each other, played together in a relatively safe and open way…I just felt like that was valuable. It seemed like our society was fast moving away from that model. From a business standpoint that made sense…this is a product that will appeal to a certain niche market…it's a product that offers a better quality of life, and hopefully a more enjoyable place."

In 1998, the lower mill was placed on the National Register of Historic Places, qualifying it for a wide range of historic preservation tax credits. The first opportunity for renovation, however, came for the upper mill, which did not qualify for the Register. After securing an anchor contract with local charter school that wanted to relocate, the Jordans received a private loan to renovate the east wing of the building for the school, which was soon accompanied by a convenience store and a salon. A HUD loan—combined with historic preservation tax credits—enabled them to begin renovation on the lower mill in 2004. In 2005, Jordan Properties began renting the 175 new loft-style apartments constructed in the mill. Within 10 months, the apartments were full.

After averting a number of potential pitfalls including a large fire in 2005, the Saxapahaw "renaissance" began to attract the attention of other investors and small business owners. By 2008 three additional families were meeting regularly with the Jordans to discuss expanding the redevelopment project: Claire Haslan and Doug Jones (the owner of the nearby Burlington Steel plant, one of the local manufacturing firms that has successfully weathered the region's deindustrialization process), Heather and Tom LaGarde (a fundraising and marketing executive and former professional basketball player, both with North Carolina ties but newly-relocated from New York City), and Jeff Barney and Cameron Ratliff (food entrepreneurs and chefs). They transformed the convenience store into a gourmet grill and

general store with organic and locally-sourced groceries in 2008, and completed the renovation on the upper mill in 2010, opening a pub, coffee shop, and performance venue in the former dye house. Since 2010, the businesses in the upper mill have also grown to include a co-working space, butcher shop, and brewery. The redevelopment process has also been accompanied by a small amount of new-build development, most significantly a new suburban-style neighborhood of middle-income single-family homes.
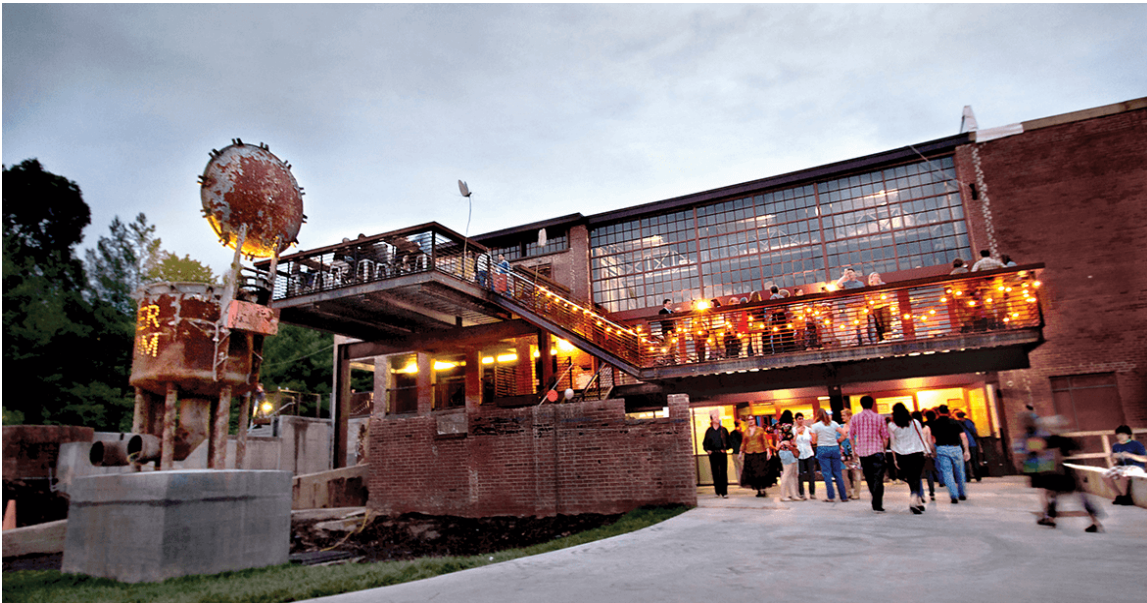
Figure 9: *The renovated dye house.* Source: Our State Magazine.

Saxapahaw today has fully transitioned to a service and consumption-based economy, catering to both tourists and commuter residents from the Triangle and Triad metro areas who attend concerts, rent kayaks from the local outdoor excursion company, and flock to the restaurants and free outdoor summer music series and farmer's market. It remains a multi-class community, however, with former millworkers and other rural working-class communities living close by to a gentrifying village center. In 2015, a new group of loft condos constructed in the back of the upper mill entered the market with starting values of $300,000—but the project struggled to secure funding for its final stages of construction in a post-Recession

financial landscape, and the units have sold more slowly than the developers hoped.

It remains to be seen to how this transformation of Saxapahaw will proceed, and to what extent it will cater to increasingly more affluent social groups. Saxapahaw's gentrification remains a contested process, as I will explore the in the final chapter. But as I will also explore in the following chapters, this "rural renaissance" is a distinctly political process that is differentially experienced by the wide range of communities that lay claims to the space of Saxapahaw. The social politics of race, class, and gender that emerged during the industrial period are being both renegotiated and reinforced as new migrants and tourists enter the village, and many legacies of the company town model have been both consciously and unwittingly reanimated.

A new kind of company town?

In Mac Jordan's master's thesis (1989; see Figure 9), he outlines the history of Piedmont mill villages, acknowledging the imperfections of this model while identifying favored characteristics of "community, individuality, and beauty" that redevelopers can seek to preserve. This explicit, intentional act of conservation of a social and cultural world has fostered a distinctive place identity in Saxapahaw. My research finds that this continuity is not only as a cultural phenomenon, however, but also includes forms of structuration in the economic and political landscape of the village that largely extend beyond the scope of the cultural conservationist imaginary of Jordan's thesis.

The resilience of company town structures in former single-industry communities has been documented in case studies of employment-contingent public housing provision (Mitchell, 1993), anti-pollution protest movements (Solecki, 1996), and historic preservation projects (Abbott, 2007) among others. The authors of these studies find that the paternalism of

previous industries often continues to shape class relations and the terms of political

engagement in former company towns after the decline of the industry. In Saxapahaw, this

legacy can be seen in several key structural features: 1) informal political structures; 2)

concentration of landownership; 3) privatization of services; 4) persistent racialized and class-

based forms of exclusion; and 5) processes of capital accumulation that rely on the production

of a distinctive modern rural lifestyle.

Preface

The following study examines the unique history and legacy of the most significant type of architecture and land development found in the Piedmont region of the South--the rural cotton mill village. It has been said that textile mills built the "New South." To think that a single institution transformed an entire region and created a vast community of people distinct in their culture and way-of-life is reason enough for attention. But having reached the end of its life cycle, the mill hill awaits destruction or renewal. This brief presentation illustrates what makes these places unique first by examining the history of the textile movement--its people and its impact on the culture and architecture of the South. Secondly, it focuses on the relevence these places have for present and future ways of living. Like all of Man's creations, the mill village (with its self-proclaimed attempt at creating a worker utopia) is imperfect. As one having grown up and worked in a cotton mill village, I sought an understanding of what made my hometown of Saxapahaw so unique, so special. Why did mill folkes, while living in such simple if not meager surroundings, seem to really love each other and their village? A student of architecture and land planning should know how environments positively and negatively effect people's lives. This is why it is important to understand and perhaps capture the qualities of community, individuality, and beauty so characteristic of these vanishing reminents of the "old 'New' South". Everything and every place has its own value, its own essence. Wastefully discarding our environmental and cultural heritage erases the record of human progress. How can society in its quest for human perfection learn from its own experience without a physical memory of its past? Not necessarily by preserving environments as museum pieces, but by utilizing positive aspects of a place to meet the needs of an ever changing world. It is in this conservationist spirit that "Images of the Rural Mill Hill" raises the awareness in, the possibilities for, and the beauty of this special, "isolated" architectural legacy known as the mill hill.

Mac Jordan
1989

Figure 9: *Preface to Mac Jordan's thesis, "Of the Rural Mill Hill."*

Firstly, the company town era contributed to the de-formalization of politics and the

direct alignment of economic and political power in Saxapahaw. As I will explore more

extensively in the following chapters, the village remains an unincorporated municipality with no formal governance structures. Village development policy and planning—as well as most other forms of local decision-making—are primarily conducted by the small group of business owners who have coalesced around the redevelopment project.

Similarly, Saxapahaw's company town era resulted in a continued concentration of land ownership in the hands of a small number of powerful interests. This concentration is particularly relevant for understanding the gentrification process because it has facilitated (and likely accelerated) the large-scale, coordinated renovation of residential and commercial spaces. Rather than relying solely on the gradual influx of owner-occupier developers, the Jordan family and their collaborators were able to widely transform both the former mill complexes and mill village. When I interviewed a member of the Alamance County planning department, she confirmed that Saxapahaw has been unique in the scope and speed of its redevelopment project in relation to other rural communities in the county. This is undoubtedly due in part to the Jordan family's sustained and central role in the local real estate market.

Another persistent characteristic of Saxapahaw's company town era is the privatization of basic services and minimal presence of state social service provision. The legacy of private investment as the central driver of local infrastructural development has continued in Alamance County, where a staunch free-market political majority has kept property taxes significantly lower than neighboring counties. Rural residents have no trash or recycling pickup and haul their own waste to a facility that charges fees based on quantity. When it snows in Saxapahaw, there are no plows in sight—until community members with tractors come out to clear the roads. While low taxes are enjoyed by both long-term residents and in-

migrants, the resulting dearth of public services have differential outcomes. In response to underfunded public schools, wealthier families often turn to organizing local charter schools or commuting to private schools in nearby urban areas. The lack of public transportation and access to medical care and public recreational spaces has widely-varied impacts on residents, depending on whether they can afford private alternatives or travel beyond the village to access public services farther afield. Many of the local businesses have intentionally worked to fill some these gaps by providing free activities and services—continuing the company town era model of benevolent private investment—but the leaders in the business community who I spoke to remain by-and-large opposed to municipal incorporation or raised property taxes for publicly-funded services.

The production of Saxapahaw as a dominantly white space during the company town era also continues to impact the social relations of the current village. However, as I will explore in the final chapter, this racialized social structure has been reworked along class and cultural lines to include some non-white newcomers while maintaining barriers against the village's long-time black residents—and increasingly, racialized white poor and working-class residents. Class also continues to be a major line of social differentiation in Saxapahaw, although it is now primarily articulated in conflicts over space rather than labor struggle.

Lastly, the gentrification-era model of consumption-based development follows the company town model in blurring the lines between processes of production and social reproduction. Capital accumulation in Saxapahaw, throughout its history, has been reliant on the production of specific kind of livelihood. Whereas the all-inclusive sphere of mill village life was a direct form of labor management and control in the company town era, the production of a consumable "modern rural" village lifestyle (Chapter 4) continues to mediate

and naturalize racialized and classed relations of power and difference (Chapter 5).

While these characteristics are clearly connected to locally-specific conditions shaped by the legacy of the textile industry, they are also linked to wider neoliberal restructuring processes that are transforming communities across the world. In the introduction to the Antipode special edition, *Life's Work* (2004), feminist geographers Katherine Mitchell, Sallie Marston, and Cindi Katz conclude that while the analytical separation between production and social reproduction has always been problematic (as these two arenas necessarily interpenetrate), this division is "particularly unwieldy in the contemporary period of capitalist transformation" (Mitchell et al, 2004: 2). In the neoliberal era, the "lifeworld" of social reproduction has been even more deeply penetrated by the market than in previous eras. In post-industrial service-oriented economies, lifeworlds themselves have become the primary output of production. The company town model thus creates particularly favorable conditions for incorporation into the neoliberal era, and the gentrification process builds on many of the strategies of accumulation developed in mill villages by the previous industry.

CHAPTER 4 – REPRESENTATIONS OF SPACE

The Middle of Somewhere: Imaginaries of Rural Modernity

"When its cotton mill closed in 1994, the town of Saxapahaw — a name that begs to be pronounced (sax-ah-puh-HAW) with an exaggerated Southern drawl — began to fade as well. After all, this tiny rural town on the banks of the Haw River is barely a blip on the map (and as far as my confused GPS was concerned, as easy to locate as Faulkner's fictional Yoknapatawpha County)" (Williamson, 2012).

"'You know, all roads lead to Saxapahaw,' people will tell you" (Our State, 2010: 36).

In January 2012, the New York Times travel section featured Saxapahaw in a adjective-drenched segment that highlights a quote from General Store owner Jeff Barney: "When we first came, people thought we were kind of nuts, because it seems like it's in the middle of nowhere" (Williamson 2012). Turning the phrase, the author crafts a headline that both inverts and echoes this sentiment: "Saxapahaw, NC, Middle of Somewhere, Becomes a Draw." The lurid descriptions of "plump pan-seared diver scallops," and the "cozy, wood-beamed pub" that follow situate the village as a tourist destination rich with allure and meaning. But one of these meanings—and perhaps the most prominent one in this particular representation—remains its partial status as an almost mythical outpost of "nowhere:" a place beyond the map.

Discursively, Saxapahaw lies in a paradoxical space between "nowhere" and "somewhere." In one moment, the village is positioned deep in the imagined "backwater" of the largely rural southern half of Alamance County; in the next it is refigured as a buzzing hub of cultural activity characteristic of the urban fringe. How has this place imaginary both

enabled and been produced by the shifting relations of production chronicled in the previous chapter? What are its social and political consequences?

In this chapter, I examine the production of rural modernity in Saxapahaw, analyzing some of the "representations of space" that have shaped its dominant cultural imaginary. I draw on public-facing representations of Saxapahaw throughout the last century its history—primarily from print media, as well as from online publicity materials from more recent years—in order to track how a dominant narrative of place has been constructed through the various stages of the village's development. I position these narratives as "dominant" for multiple reasons: because of their prevalence, recurring in multiple sources throughout time; because of their ability to travel beyond the spatial scale of the village, entering national and global conversations; and because of their embeddedness in systems of social and economic power that shape the village materially. Nonetheless, I understand their dominance as necessarily contingent, contested, and frequently unstable.

The forms of representation examined in this chapter are all inexorably linked to attempts to market the village to a range of audiences that have propelled its economic development: workers, investors, residents and, more recently, tourists. They include both external views looking *in* on the village from regional and national media, as well as self-representations projected *out*. I distinguish these intentional forms of public image creation from lived experiences of place, which I will engage through the qualitative interviews and ethnographic research highlighted in the final chapter.

While public discourses of place interpenetrate with lived experience, dominant representations do not encompass with the full complexity of everyday life. In the final chapter, I will bring particular attention to the limitations of this public-facing narrative in

adequately engaging with relations of power and social difference. The attempts to construct a unified story of place in this chapter are ultimately unsettled by the lived realities that don't entirely yield to this story's embrace.

Saxapahaw's ideal of rural modernity is defined by a series of paradoxes: a nostalgic preservation of traditional ways of life and a vision of progress and modernity; a deep attachment to rural identity and a vision of humane urbanism; a sense of both separation from and interconnection with surrounding regions; a move towards cultural homogeneity and an acknowledgement of social difference. I explore the ways in which these paradoxes are negotiated and mediated in the attempt to stabilize a coherent and marketable place identity. Additionally, I examine the "work" this public story of place does as it travels outwards, exploring how it contributes to the production of Saxapahaw as a site for rural gentrification today. I argue that the ideal of rural modernity has been central to both industrial and post-industrial regimes of accumulation in Saxapahaw—first as a means of labor management and control and now as the means of accumulation and the output of production itself.

By exploring a broad historical scope of these public representations of place over approximately one century, I continue to draw out the linkages between the current moment of gentrification and previous phases of capitalist development. Despite the presence of many divergences as well, I also find significant consistencies between different phases of place representation across this town's history. The redevelopment project mobilizes many discourses from the past as building blocks for a vision of the village's future. In the last chapter, I highlighted some of the structural continuities between industrial and post-industrial eras; in this chapter, I examine some of the symbolic ones.

Nostalgia and the Production of Place Imaginaries

How does space become a place? Since the post-modern turn, cultural geographers have largely rejected static conceptions of place as a stable or self-evident truth, something "out there" to be discovered. Instead, they have examined how every sense of place is both socially constructed and grounded in material realities. In my analysis of representations of Saxapahaw, I draw on these definitions of place as a dialectically cultural/material construct that must be continually envisioned, enacted, and struggled over.

Tuan (1977) theorizes place as having more substance than space or location. Place is a space imbued with human meanings (Cresswell, 2013). These meanings may be established and reworked through everyday interactions, public monuments and symbols, and forms of storytelling and representation like those examined in this chapter. While representations of place are forms of abstraction, they do not exist in a vacuum; they are linked to concrete practices and to the material landscape itself. Representations carry not only descriptive power—bearing witness to lived experiences—but are also a creative force. Places (as they are culturally conceived) create social realities in turn by shaping actions, decisions, and priorities (Little & Austin, 1996).

Representations of place are therefore inherently political, embedded in systems of power. The political nature of place is apparent in the word's usage as a signifier of a proper position within a social structure: to "put someone in their place" (Cresswell, 2013). Place is not a neutral concept but is laden with normative judgments about who belongs where and why. When linked to social power, a sense of place can carry real weight and consequences that shape people's lives.

Sense of place is often linked to memory and particular renderings of a collective past.

Many of the representations that I examine in this chapter are suffused with a sense of nostalgia. Tracking the dominant discourse of Saxapahaw as it travels and changes through time, discursive acts of preservation and remembering create a leapfrog effect of continual self-reference. The 1910s print media's attempt to reassert the rapidly industrializing region's agricultural lifestyle returns in full force a century later in the language of the local food movement. A recurring commitment to the intimacy and informality of rural social life throughout this century of representation is continually positioned as a cherished relic of the past. Even the discourses of modernity and progress the appear in this narrative become self-referentially nostalgic, as business owners' work to position Saxapahaw at the forefront of current regional economic changes echoes similar claims from previous eras, and stories of a slave-emancipating Quaker from the distant past are used to buttress the village's contemporary progressive political identity.

How can we understand the social functions and political impacts of this kind of nostalgia? In *For Space,* Doreen Massey acknowledges that a sense of nostalgia fulfills certain affective needs and helps establish our care and commitment to a place. However, she cautions against nostalgia when it "articulates space and time in such a way that it robs others of their histories," building theory from her own experience of returning home and resenting the changes she encounters (Massey, 2005: 124). While a nostalgic sense of place transmits certain truths, it restricts others; while it provides an important sense of affective attachment for some, it erases the stories of others whose experiences don't fit into its narrative. For Massey, this paradox charges us with the task of constant reflection about what "power geometries" shape the articulation of nostalgic narratives and distribute their consequences of erasure.

Massey also challenges us to move beyond nostalgia as the sole mechanism for cultivating a sense of place. For her, "what is special about a place is not some romance of a pre-given collective identity or of the eternity of the hills. Rather, what is special about place is precisely the throwntogetherness, the unavoidable challenge of negotiating a here-and-now" (2005: 140). While the nostalgic ideals of Saxapahaw's dominant story of place serve a meaningful discursive function—generating a rich sense of place-based identity—I also examine the limitations of the narrative scope of this paradigm. In the next chapter, I move towards constructing a more "throwntogether" narrative of place through ethnographic observations and interviews that highlight the everyday experiences of diverse community members in redeveloping Saxapahaw.

I. Producing a Modern Rural Space

Saxapahaw as Rural Refuge

"Cut off itself in a beautiful piece of God's kingdom, Saxapahaw stands with all of its natural beauty today, populated by people who love its hills and dells and are leading clean, wholesome and useful lives" (Charlotte News, 1917).

"This community well off of interstate 40, with no stoplight, is a place where new merges with old, organically creating a community all its own" (Rowe, 2010: 36).

The headline for the Charlotte Observer's 1919 Textile Progress Edition[6] segment on Saxapahaw unequivocally celebrates the village as a locus of authentic rurality: "The Saxapahaw Cotton Mills Are Located in a Rural Section Abounding in Fish and Game of

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[6] In the early 20th century, the Charlotte Observer (originally the Charlotte News) published a series of "Textile Progress Editions," a special supplement that highlighted the state's manufacturing communities. The editors emphasized the "huge volume" that were printed and delivered, not only to the regular list of subscribers but also to "every big textile house in America." The supplement was thus explicitly positioned as a tool for economic advancement, a "high-grade sort of publicity that will be worth hundreds of dollars…to the numerous cotton manufacturing towns in the Piedmont and in the South" (Charlotte News, 1917: 3). As they worked to counter growing claims about dismal working conditions in the Southern mills that had begun to appear in national media, the Textile Progress Editions assured both Northern investors and local labor recruits that the mill communities were idyllic spaces for both employment and domestic life.

Many Sorts." It goes on to describe the peacefully reclining millworkers that the authors encountered upon their Election Day arrival: "every other fellow" with a "string of fish or bag of rabbits." The authors pair a palpable sense of leisure and ease with the abundance of natural resources and the implicitly humane policies of the mill, closed down for the holiday. This article references several of the key characteristics of Saxapahaw's rural identity: the preservation of an aestheticized and productive nature and the relaxed informality of village social life.

The preservation of "natural" landscapes is often central to discourses of the rural (Woods, 2011). The rural imaginary is home to a highly mediated form of nature, however: nature mobilized for the interests of human civilization. In many rural discourses, flora, fauna, and geology are all figured as consumable resources that provide tangible services for human communities. After a brief reference to the historic presence of indigenous communities, mill account Ben Bulla opens his 1949 history of Saxapahaw in the Burlington Times News by recounting the 18th century arrival of British naturalist John Lawson to the future location of the village. The pristine natural environment first encountered by European eyes was defined by an "extraordinary fertility" (Bulla, 1949: 157) that could support massive settlements. According the Bulla, Lawson "foresaw the potential water power" of the Haw River and the surrounding streams, positioning the area's natural landscapes as resources ready to be tapped by human ingenuity for productive ends. Likewise, the fish and game of the 1919 article only reach their discursive *telos* on the end of a line or the bottom of a bag.

In addition to being celebrated for is materially-productive capacities, rural nature is often distinctly aestheticized—a landscape defined by its pleasing visuality (Woods, 2011). Bullah's article features the mythic echo of Lawson's dedication of the future village as the

"Flower of Carolina." This statement repeatedly reappears through later news articles and the publicity materials of present-day businesses. This aesthetic sensibility encompasses the aural as well; a 1902 edition of the Raleigh Christian Advocate highlights the villages soundscape as an additional sensual offering: "The little village has quite a romantic situation as it nestles among the frowning hills, and listens day and night to music of dashing water" (Kilgo, 1902: 1).

In this narrative, pleasing aesthetics exude from the natural landscape and influence the built environment (Cronon, 2009). The 1917 Textile Progress Edition lauds the Saxapahaw millworkers for their "lively interest in the general appearance of their homes." This emphasis on beautification was a key element of the labor management practices of the mill towns. It was also gendered, often the purview of mill owner's wives. A 1976 article praises the "flower boxes" and "attractive brick entranceway" installed by B. Everett Jordan's widow (White, 1976: 30). In rural discourse, the wildness of nature is often mediated and contained by the civilizing force of aesthetics.

This vision of nature as a pleasing visual backdrop to social life has remained consistent in public representations throughout the village's history. In more recent years, however, the natural landscape has been refigured to serve an additional purpose beyond material production and the aesthetic enjoyment of residents: nature is now tapped for its productive capacity as one of the central drivers of the new economy, the consumption of experiences in the form of ecotourism. Images of brightly colored kayaks skimming sapphire waves on the village's lake grace the websites of many of the local businesses, and many recent news articles herald the proximity of extensive opportunities for outdoor recreation as a central tourist draw (Daniel, 2011; Rowe, 2010; Williamson, 2012).

Systems of agricultural production also sit at the discursive intersection of nature and culture in rural discourse (Woods, 2011). As examined in the previous chapter, the preservation of agricultural ways of life was central to the recruitment of workers for the early textile industry. Mill builders assured workers they could preserve the most cherished elements of their previous ways of life while enjoying an increased standard of living through wage labor. The design of early mill villages thus reflected a commitment to maintaining at least some vestigial semblance of agricultural community. Public representations of Saxapahaw at the beginning of the 20th century attested that the village had "ample space for gardens, plenty of land for all families desiring to produce a part of their household needs" (Charlotte News, 1917). These representations positioned the continuation of farming practices as a means of retaining self-sufficiency and independence from the mill by lowering living costs.

As subsequent generations of workers entered the mill however, this connection to agricultural heritage began to fade. These laborers had been born in mill communities or in the larger towns that had begun to consolidate nearby. Mill owners began to conceptualize worker's farming practices as a strain on efficiency rather than a necessary recruitment and retention tool. Communal agricultural spaces became host to mill building expansions or new recreation centers, churches, and schools (Hall, 1987).

In the most recent phase of redevelopment, the celebration of agricultural heritage has returned in full force. Many news articles highlight the network of small, organic, and family-owned farms in the surrounding area as a draw to "foodie" residents and tourists (Daniel, 2011; Wallace, 2015; Williamson 2012). The general store and pub both emphasize their incorporation of local produce and animal products on their menus and publicity materials.

As the 1919 article at the opening of this chapter highlights, a leisurely pace of life and

ample free time is also central to the discourse of rurality in Saxapahaw. Rather than documenting the long hours worked by laborers in the mill, this Textile Progress Edition focuses their representation of Saxapahaw on a moment of holiday recreation: the workers enjoying the ample hunting and fishing opportunities of their rural setting. More than fifty years later, the Bicentennial Edition of the Burlington Daily Times-News (1976) reaffirms this association of rurality with leisure by highlighting a distinctly small-town phenomenon found in Saxapahaw and neighboring Swepsonville: "propping," or taking "lingering, contemplative breaks" while leaning up against a doorframe or drink cooler (30). Explicitly framing this rural practice against the fast pace and spatial regulation of urban spaces, the author laments that "propping in the city is a rare site nowadays, where the pastime in many cases been renamed loitering." This sense of spontaneous and convivial languor is positively framed as a manifestation of personal freedom: "Nobody will ever ask them what they're doing. They have time."

Scholars of the rural imaginary emphasize that it can never be fully separated its negative image; rurality is always dialectically constructed with urbanity (Woods, 2011). Looking historically at discourses of the rural reveals that heightened concerns about the intentional preservation of rural identity are often connected to increased pressures from nearby urbanization (Frouws, 1998). A sense of the encroaching threat of the urban surfaces repeatedly throughout Saxapahaw's public-facing representations. In the first half of the 20th century, the rural nature of the village was explicitly positioned as a kind of moral shield against the corrupting influences of more populated centers. Mill villages constructed after the advent of steam power were increasingly located in urban centers for more convenient distribution through the growing system of railway. In this transitional period, the older mill

villages like Saxapahaw were positioned as wholesome relics of the rural past: "The mill being a distance from the railway, is protected from the floating and sometimes shiftless element which sometimes drifts into mill communities" (Charlotte News, 1917).

This anxiety about the influence of the urban resurfaced as the future of the mill villages was thrown into uncertainty during the industry's decline in the region beginning in the late 1970s. The 1976 Burlington Times article reassures readers that "the recent trend for people to move from the country to the city may keep the villages much the same as they are now and have been for years," and that "if growth ever eased into the southern part of the county…the people who move there need not fear a loss of isolation and rural life." This reassertion of the resilient value of the rural is again couched in moral terms. The authors cite two local residents who assert that 'people are just better' in the rural village, and determine that Saxapahaw is a community of "independent, proud, and discriminating people." Nonetheless, there is a palpable sense of loss present for the bygone days of a more thoroughly devout rural past, when the village had an "even better grade of people: "church-goers," and people who "stayed-put" as opposed to travelling in and out from the surrounding communities (White, 1976).

More recently, the threat of the urban has taken on a milder guise. With a large influx of new residents from urban areas and an emerging discourse that positions Saxapahaw as an outpost of humane urbanity, the city is seen as space of taxing, frenetic energy but not as a degrading or immoral influence. The 2011 Washington Post article quotes local farmer and former Capitol Hill reporter Suzanne Nelson: "'There are a lot of recovering urbanites around here,' Nelson said between bites of her deep yellow-yolked eggs. 'You have to be able to leave part of that behind to enjoy this'" (Daniel, 2011).

The rural imaginary is often associated with a sense of harmony and simplicity of social life, a more authentic and traditional form of community where "lives are more real" (Little & Austin, 1996: 102). Positioned against the threat of the urban, the reassertion of traditional rural community in public representations of Saxapahaw aligns with theories of nostalgia as a cultural mechanism for responding to a sense of loss, a means of restoring legitimacy to a local way of life that is perceived as under attack in wider society (Maly, 2013). The explicit articulation of Saxapahaw as a locus of a traditional form of social life emerges in the second half of the 20th century, once the outside threat to this kind of sociality is perceived. The 1976 Burlington Times-News article highlights a sense of intimacy between the millworkers, who shout hello as they pass one another during the shift change. The author paints of picture of organic interdependence and mutual aid, noting that, "solidarity is important in Saxapahaw today and has a lot to do with the community's longevity and sense of community" (White, 1976: 30).

This sense of authentic community life is central to the dominant story of Saxapahaw as it has been constructed in the most recent period of redevelopment. Many recent representations combine references to Saxapahaw's traditionalism—"it's like a little place time sort of forgot" (Rowe 2010, 38)—with a sense of awe for the informal and everyday relationships that characterize small town life. A 2010 profile of the village in Our State magazine quotes a resident who relocated from Philadelphia:

> "I'm desperately trying to learn patience because it is a way of life here. You see it in how everyone hugs you and greets you. They look you in the eye, say hello, and it's like, 'let's start talking. There are some good people here. Their family values are still intact" (Rowe, 2010: 39).

This conception of "family values" takes on a new light when considered in the context of the paternalist structures of the company town era. These paternalist structures reinforce and

are supported by an element of the rural imaginary that geographer Graham Gardener (2004) calls the ideal of "organic community." In this discourse, rural social relations are defined by "emotive, affective, and non-rational bonds" and a "more or less organized totality of common sentiments and belief" (Gardener, 2004: 58). Power is analytically restricted to formal political decision-making and largely relegated to external institutional bodies that exercise power *over* rural communities, rather than circulate it within them. Representations of Saxapahaw advance this notion of the rural village as a place beyond politics, where decision-making is carried out by intimate, relationship-derived consensus and collective goodwill.

Saxapahaw as a Space of Modernity and (Humane) Urbanism

"They came from the surrounding territory and have stayed there steadily, for they found good schools, good homes in which to live, good neighbors, and good wages—better opportunities than they had ever enjoyed back in the woods" (Charlotte News, 1919).

Saxapahaw's rural discourse is interwoven with a narrative of modernity and humane urbanism. While its rural location is positioned as a check on the negative social consequences of modern capitalism, capitalist growth and progress are celebrated as drivers of increased standards of living and means of connecting the village to a wider world, situating it as a "somewhere" linked to centers of power, innovation, and progress. The discourse of modernity highlighted different elements during the company town era than it does during the contemporary redevelopment period, but it played a similar function of attracting workers, residents, and investors.

In the mill's earlier days, a prominent signifier in this discourse of modernity was the security promised by wage labor. The mills often provided the first formal employment for farming families, and the industry promoted this new lifestyle by contrasting it to the precarity and uncertainty of subsistence agriculture. The Textile Progress Editions emphasized the long-

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term employment status of many workers in Saxapahaw, establishing the mill's commitment to providing opportunities for economic advancement and stability. The 1917 edition profiles one worker in particular and maintains that, "the mill has a place for Aunt Mildred as long as she lives," while the 1919 edition claims that among workers in Saxapahaw, "few die and none ever resign."

Public representations of Saxapahaw in the first half of the 20th century also emphasized the modern infrastructure and amenities available in the village, implicitly contrasted against an underdeveloped surrounding rural region. News media in the first two decades reported that the "roads were excellent" (Charlotte News, 1917) and noted the good water, electricity, and health of the residents in spite of widespread influenza epidemics (Charlotte Observer, 1919). As the years passed and these basic services became more widely distributed throughout the county, the narrative turned instead to the availability of quality schools, medical clinics, and recreational opportunities as markers of the village's advancement (Burlington Times-News, 1949; 1976).

Figure 10: *Textile Progress Edition Headline, 1917.* Source: Newspapers.com

The representation of modern services is also interwoven with nostalgic notions of the

rural, however. In contrast to the protracted bureaucratic process of service provision in urban

areas, the basic necessities of a modern life are presented as more organically arising in

Saxapahaw, outside the realm of bureaucratic state planning and politics. As the 1976

Burlington Times article claims, "planning a tomorrow in Saxapahaw or Swepsonville is

different from planning a tomorrow in most areas of Alamance County. Problems of

transportation, parking space, crime, and water supply are rather remote to the two villages."
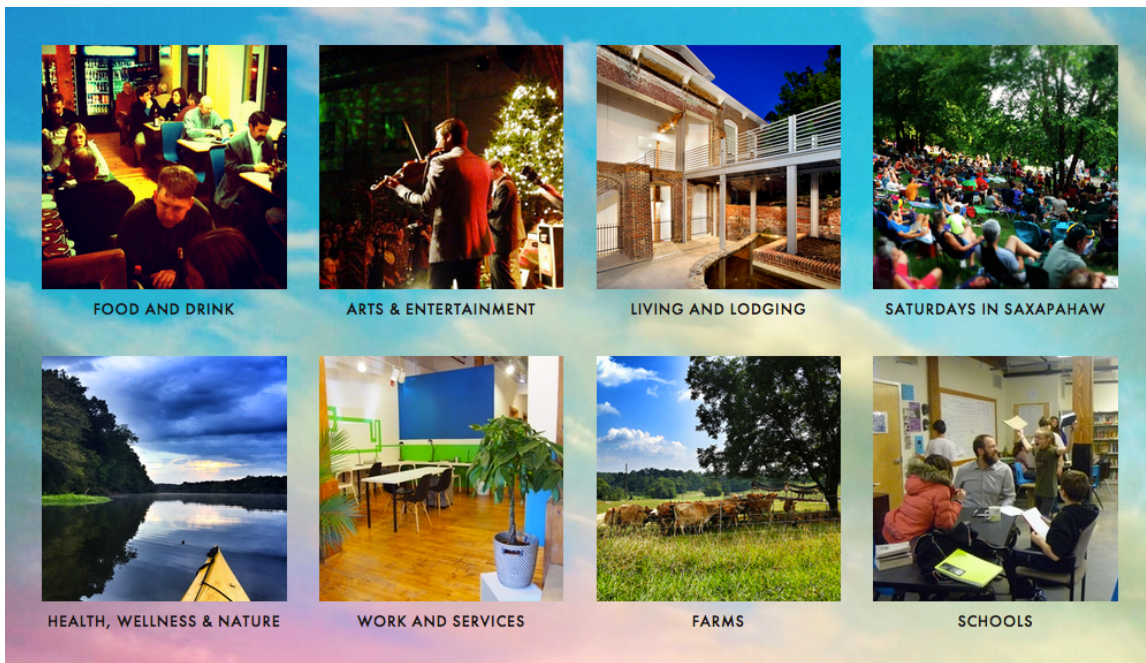
Figure 11: *Amenities highlighted on the village's website.*
Source: www.saxapahawnc.com

In the most recent phase of redevelopment, public-facing representations have sought

to maintain Saxapahaw's urban identity alongside its rural imaginary. The website for the loft

apartment complex promotes riverside trails and small-town community in the same breathe as

world-class arts and culinary offerings, noting that the village "offers a unique blend of

history, community, sustainability, locavore culture and nature while providing for every

modern necessity" (Rivermill Apartments). Saxapahaw's "somewhere" status is continually

reasserted as a distinctly urban space that is uniquely and desirably located in a rural area.

"Saxapahaw has all kinds of names now: 'west Chapel Hill' and 'mini-Asheville'" (Our State 2010, 36).

After a period of severe economic decline and the abandonment of the mill facility, the new development is positioned as a phoenix rising from the ashes, reestablishing the village on its diverted path of progress and modernization. A 2012 article in Duke Magazine focuses in on a long-time resident's sense of awe at this progress:

> "I'm telling you, they made it a city now over there," says Wilma Phillips, who at eighty years old still lives two miles outside of Saxapahaw. John Jordan recently gave her ladies' church group a tour of the ballroom and the lower-mill condos. She was amazed to see the old flooring she had stood on for decades reused in the lofts. She says she enjoys seeing the patio at The Eddy full of people on Saturday nights. "You go by and it's lit up, it's so pretty. I never did dream it would be looking like this" (M.P.P. 2012).

Narratives of progress in Saxapahaw's dominant representations of place often focus on its growing interconnection with urban centers. While earlier representations focused more on the wholesome benefits of Saxapahaw's seclusion as a protection against degrading outside influence, more recent narratives have attempted to preserve this nostalgic sense of remoteness while also highlighting its urban proximity. A 1965 advertisement for the Sellers Manufacturing Company in the Burlington Daily Times-News (Figure 12) unequivocally heralds Saxapahaw's participation in a modern and interconnected world. Acknowledging that the village was "once considered a long ways from nearby cities," the advertisement celebrates that "there are no distant points anymore…as our community and industry grows and grows" (Sellers, 1965). This representation explicitly positions the mill as a progressive and rapidly modernizing industry that is an active and influential participant in state and national markets. It also emphasizes the village's allegiance to a wider regional identity: "Let us in Saxapahaw, then, express to all of Alamance County our appreciation not only in being a part of what has been done but in sharing, it too." The advertisement celebrates how "each area has grown

There Are

No Distant Points

Anymore . . . As Our Community
And Industry Grows And Grows!

It has been said that Alamance County no longer has its "distant" points. Each area has come closer to the other, and the county, in turn, has grown stronger through it.

It hasn't always been that way. Saxapahaw, for instance, once was considered a "long ways" from Graham, Burlington and Mebane. It was a place that was almost by itself.

But that isn't true today. We, in Saxapahaw, are proud of the way residents have helped build the community to its cleanliness, its beauty, its size, and its spirit of today.

We are proud, too, of the way these people have joined in helping build Sellers Manufacturing Company, Inc., to its place in the coun-

ty's industrial field and it's part, too, in the state and national markets.

It seems to go beyond question that Saxapahaw has its pride. It centers on what has come through united effort in many and varied interests involving residents. It centers, too, in Alamance County and what all areas have done not only in 1964 but in the many past years that are a part of a progressive record and established history.

Let us in Saxapahaw, then, express to all of Alamance County our appreciation not only in being a part of what has been done but in sharing it, too.

We are proud to have contributed to this record in the opportunities we found in 1964.

SELLERS

MANUFACTURING CO., INC.

SAXAPAHAW, N. C.

Figure 12: *Sellers Advertisement, 1965.*
Source: Burlington Times-News.

closer to the other, and the county, in turn, has grown stronger through it."

This discursive embrace of a broader geography has been linked to parallel social changes. As mill workers began to leave the village and purchase homes in the surrounding areas in the middle of the 20th century, the dominant place imaginary worked to incorporate this change in community composition. The 1976 Burlington Times-News article alludes to a unfavorable influx of outsiders caused by this transition: "a number of homes have been sold to…people who did not maintain the homes properly, according to Saxapahaw standards" (White, 1976). To mediate this resistance to the threat of outside influence, however, the author cites a villager who maintains that the "residents welcome newcomers who care about their homes and the well being and appearance of the village as a whole." This tension is negotiated so that the village is both discursively bounded (regulated for a specific set of values and aesthetics) and open to flows of people, money, and ideas from beyond its borders.

Throughout Saxapahaw's history, the benevolent capitalist has been a central figure in the discourse of progress: the community-minded business owner who takes responsibility for

the wider development of the village. Originally occupied by a single family of mill owners during the company town era, this role has more recently been filled by the group of business owners who have spearheaded the redevelopment projects. During the tenure of the White-Williamson Company, the mill was positioned in the Textile Progress Editions as a "high-class organization" that cared for its employees by providing cottages for rent at "such a small sum that the company little more than realizes enough on rentals to keep the houses in repair" (Charlotte News, 1917). The provision of basic necessities in the company store was articulated as a generous community service, "operated mainly for the convenience of the employees and not with a view for profit-making" (Charlotte Observer, 1919). Any claims to an unfair monopoly or system of despotic rule were readily rebuked, as authors reassure the reader that "there are two independent stores in the village and the mill stores have effected the keenest competition. Mill workers buy goods wherever they choose" (Charlotte News, 1917).

After the Sellers Manufacturing Company took over the running of the mill, the Jordan family assumed an even more prominent role in the public image of the village as "instrumental in the development of the Saxapahaw community as a whole" (Bullah, 1949). Bullah's 1949 history denies earlier attempts to uplift the mill's previous owner's generous investments in a high standard of living for the village, casting a more favorable light on the new developments led by the Jordans in contrast: "In 1927 there was nothing here but dirt roads and a small frame school house, which are a far cry from the paved roads and modern brick school house that the village boasts today."

Heather Leigh Wallace's 2009 *Images of America* book[7] on Saxapahaw echoes this highly complementary portrayal of the Jordans' instrumental role in the development of the

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[7] Arcadia Publishing's *Images of America* series chronicles the history of small towns across the U.S. with text and images compiled by local authors. The books frequently appear in museums, gift shops, and other tourist destinations.

village. Wallace highlights the family's homegrown local authenticity and their commitment to the community: "in the South, there is a saying that you always want to leave the wood pile higher than you found it." To Wallace, the contemporary example of this principle is John Jordan, the village's "benevolent visionary benefactor" (Wallace, 2009: 8). She highlights his commitment to funding and organizing poverty relief through local churches, trash pickup, road maintenance, and most recently, his involvement in the renovation of the mill.

Modern Saxapahaw has been widely constructed as a space in which the state has little role or responsibility in rural development – this is the realm of charitable leaders in private industry. To this day, business owners continue to be represented in public discourse as practioners of socially-responsible capitalism, and Saxapahaw's "urban" development as a modern village is positioned as a more humane alternative to both impersonal, corporate capitalism and bureaucratic state intervention. As I will explore in the following chapter, many residents confirm and positively experience this economic model. Nevertheless, romanticized representations of the benevolent capitalist serve to naturalize continued paternalist social relations and leave little room for an analysis of power.

II. Limits of Power and Social Difference in the Imaginary of Rural Modernity

"Although they didn't agree on everything— the Jordans are registered Republicans and church-going Methodists; the LaGardes, Democrats whose main gospel is organic food—the families had a mutual appreciation for small-town values and a simpler life. And in a way, their ability to connect across cultural differences is emblematic of the come-as-you-are openness that seems to make Saxapahaw work" (M.P.P., 2012).

The contemporary place imaginary of Saxapahaw primarily engages with questions of social difference through a discourse of cultural diversity. This marks a significant shift from previous eras, in which the village's residents were primarily represented and narrated as a cohesive and unified community in the dominant story of place. In the early representations

surveyed, I identified only a few trace references to social difference. In the first half to the 20th century, difference was primarily referenced as religious variance, the harmonious coexistence of Quakers, Presbyterians, Methodists, and other protestant communities. Brief references to "Negro" members of the community touch on the presence of racial difference but without any discussion of race's political significance. The mill village was therefore implicitly constructed as a dominantly white space with the civil—if tentative—inclusion of racial others.

In representations of the current redevelopment project, the presence of social difference in the village is much more actively engaged. However, it almost exclusively takes the form of two types of social diversity: political and cultural. As the quote at the beginning of this section suggests, the division between Republicans (implicitly represented by long-term residents from the town's industrial and agricultural eras) and Democrats (new migrants) becomes the prominent analytical framework for narrating potential conflict and its resolution. Political conservatives and democrats exist peacefully alongside one another, bound together by a set of mutual values.

The Duke Magazine article points to a related (but not entirely synonymous) cultural binary associated with this political division: "'We're a mixed breed out here,' says Mac Jordan. 'I like to joke we're a bunch of rednecks and hippies all mixed together'" (M.P.P. 2012). By referencing two cultural groups that are both dominantly figured as white, this statement implicitly situates Saxapahaw as a racially homogenous space, while the class differences associated with these stereotypes go unexamined. The author also goes on to assure readers that the villages "small-town atmosphere helps soothe whatever differences exist."

As forms of place marketing, it is unsurprising that these representations neglect to investigate further into the complexity of social life in Saxapahaw. But this demands the question as to what deeper social antagonisms might in fact exist, and how they are linked to the cultural and political differences envisioned by these public-facing representations. When the Washington Post article (Daniel, 2011) reduces social difference to the symbolic proxies of paired consumer preferences—biodiesel or unleaded, a bottle of wine or a processed snack—it briefly suggests and then quickly resolves a much more complex politics of class, race, and regional identity. The consistent exclusion of these deeper dynamics from public representations of place has real consequences, because it neutralizes difference as an innocuous, consumable curiosity rather than questioning how it is linked to systems of power and social hierarchy.

Lastly, many recent representations further obscure the presence of internal differentiation by focusing on the cultural idiosyncrasies of the village's residents and way of life as a whole. Social difference makes an appearance here as a distinguishing force between the village community and a perception of dominant U.S. American culture. The author of the Washington Post article opens with a description of being "beckoned by a man sitting on the patio, donning thick goggles and what looked to be a liturgical stole over casual attire" (Daniel, 2011) and returns to document other equally quirky characters. While there are elements of this representation and others that seem at least playfully derisive, the cultural uniqueness of Saxaphaw is generally portrayed in a highly favorable light.

National news media celebrate the town's "impressively nonconformist rebirth" and "unpretentious blend of community and cool," (Daniel, 2011), pronouncing it an example of "rural renewal done right" (Williamson, 2012). This alternative strategy of preserving and

reviving a small town is implicitly positioned against environmentally-degrading forms of new-build construction and purely profit-driven development. Duke Magazine features a quote from Haw River Ballroom co-owner Heather LaGarde, assuring readers that recent development projects have been "about community and not gentrification, and about families having lives there and not just selling things" (M.P.P., 2012).

As the following chapter will explore, this progressive politics of redevelopment is confirmed and positively experienced by many members of Saxapahaw's community. Highlighting it here is not intended to question the elements of truth this narrative conveys, but to examine how the exceptionalistic rhetoric of Saxapahaw as a uniquely community-oriented and non profit-driven space obscures as much as it reveals. Firstly, positioning Saxapahaw as an entire village of "others" (as defined by their cultural differences from mainstream society) largely overshadows any engagement with the presence of local "others" (as defined by their relation to the village's dominant culture and power structure). Secondly, the blanket assessment of Saxpahaw's model of redevelopment as rural renewal "done right" precludes an analysis of *by whom* this rightness is defined and experienced, leaving out any dissenting perspectives that might find "wrongs" with this particular vision of renewal.

III. Beyond Nostalgia & Progress: Towards a Rural Analysis of Power and Difference

Discourses of place are important because they create, just as much as they reflect, lived experience. Little and Austin suggest that "it is the very sustainability of the images' and 'myths' of rural life that ensure their importance not simply as a reflection of people's views and beliefs about rurality but also as a force in the re-creation of 'place'" (Little & Austin, 1996: 102). The discourse of rural modernity I outlined in this chapter have been central to

producing and marketing Saxapahaw as a site for redevelopment and gentrification, and they shape the terrain on which social relations of power are negotiated.

Many of the discursive paradoxes explored here are spatial: divisions between inside and outside, sameness and difference, rural and urban. Also present and interlinked is the temporal push and pull between ideals of progress and attachment to nostalgic impressions of the past. The conscious attempts of business leaders to both preserve the cherished elements of the past and to generate new identities and material landscapes for the village has created a unique blend of past and present that many residents and tourists alike find extremely appealing, as has been well-documented and celebrated in the dominant story of place. It is important to note that both long-time residents and newcomers express a genuine appreciation for this intentional balance of rural and urban, past and present. The everyday experiences of place highlighted in the final chapter do not refute the statement that, "today, when mill workers tour their old workplace, they say things like 'Do you remember? or, 'Those beams are beautiful!' Or they simply say nothing and hold hands to stop themselves from crying over what they see" (Our State: 2010, 40). They do, however, indicate that these tears have a much more complex set of origins—and likely express a much larger range of emotions—than this nostalgic representation allows.

The frequently mythologized story I recounted in the first chapter—in which John Newlin frees the slaves who dug the millrace—can help us begin to identify the breaking point in the nostalgic, progressive paradigm of rural modernity. Claims to the town's celebrated progressivism are often bolstered by reference to this heroic act. A 1956 Burlington Daily Times-News "In Years Gone By" segment recounts the early history of the mill more than a century earlier. When the author reaches this particular episode, he acknowledges that modern

readers might wonder why Newlin chose to use slave labor given his abolitionist leanings. But rather than examining the social and economic structures that might have compelled this choice, the author goes on to construct a quick apologetic, postulating that it was "quite possible the slaves were paid the prevailing wages for common labor" (Hughes, 1965: 21).

Neither a pleasantly nostalgic nor a resolutely progressive vision of Saxapahaw help explain what compelled John Newlin to bend his beliefs in order to employ slave labor. Nor does this discourse help us to understand the experiences of these enslaved people or how they conceptualized the place of Saxapahaw. Most importantly, this paradigm does give us the tools to question the ways in which systems of oppression based on race and other forms of social difference might still persist in the village after the storied freeing of the slaves, nor to examine whether the current redevelopment projects might deepen or reconfigure these forms of inequality.

Rather than rejecting narratives of nostalgia and progress as inaccurate or claiming that they produce purely negative consequences, by drawing attention to the production of a particular kind of modern rural space in Saxapahaw I intend to highlight the ways in which it is—like all forms of representation—necessarily incomplete. In the following chapter, I will further explore how the everyday experiences of village's residents can help repair the gaps in the dominant place imaginary where it fails to engage with the distinctly political nature of the village's history and current economic transformation.

CHAPTER 5 – REPRESENTATIONAL SPACES

Contested Claims to Place: Everyday Experiences of Power and Difference

December 18, 2014: *It's lunch break during the rehearsal period for a one-act theater piece I am performing with some friends. We've made the short trek up to the general store, climbing the narrow shoulder of the steeply curved road from the puppet studio by the river. All white 20somethings in yoga pants and a smattering of asymmetrical haircuts, we wander over to the counter to order sandwiches, half lost in conversation or feverishly reconvening with iPhones.*

My peripheral vision begins to peel back. A mist has risen to the inside of the deli case, clouding labels so there are only single words marooned: raw, pecorino, buffalo, cacao. Wire racks hold loose-leaf teas grown in silty river soil and tiny bags of scent-free kitty litter. Liters of Mountain Dew stare down the kombucha in a nearby cooler. The long line of tables in the middle of the room hearkens back to family style. Elbows rub, and neighbors smile, and some conversations spill over the seams of red wood squares, while others settle into the makeshift privacy of eyes and ears straight ahead.

From the corner of my eye, I see a young Latino man approach the counter. In the corner of my mind, I read his canvas pants and worn shirt as signs of a construction job or other manual labor. He orders the "Rico Suave" burger, a grass-fed patty laden with avocado and a loose interpretation on a chile-based sauce. Behind the counter, a middle-aged white guy wearing a T-shirt takes his card and swipes it.

I lose the scene to conversation - someone is recounting the lonesome stampede of the New York dating scene and I am laughing out of the corner of my mouth. I glance back at a raised voice from behind the counter. Your card has been denied. It won't work. You need to pay some other way. *The cashier is getting agitated, sliding quickly toward that age-old temptress: the belief that language barriers can somehow be overcome by sheer volume. The customer's voice is either so low I can't hear it, or the words just won't come. He gestures to try again.*

Still denied. You need to pay. *The line is getting longer and I see the sweat beading on the cashier's brow. The customer slides the burger across the counter, stuffs his wallet in his pocket, and walks out. There's a leaning forward in me but I stay seated. A tiny gap of breathless air and then chairs squeaking, bubble of fry oil resumes.*

One of the women at my table jolts up and I know she's been watching. She's out the door and back again 30 seconds later, the customer behind her. She is all wide smiles and nervous laughter. A card is passed and she pays his tab. His eyes are downcast. A quick reach across the counter. The door swings wide as he rushes out.

My memory of this encounter is defined by a collision of spatial paradigms—an uneasy intersection of competing visions of a place and the people who are scripted into its story. Rico Suave: the appropriation of a Latin-American phrase signaling easy consumption of cultural diversity. Inflections of machismo and spice. But what happens when the social difference it represents shows up in human form? In this moment, there is a breach—the card is maxed out and the customer cannot perform his scripted role. Discomfort spills loose—brows sweating, agitation, nobody knows that to do. The door slams, leaving a hollow space. A quick attempt to fill the gap by paying the bill—but somehow everyone knows that the rending is already complete.

The everyday spatial politics of Saxapahaw are embedded in a web of uneasy intersections: open access and exclusion, homogeneity and difference, connection and division. This chapter draws on in-depth qualitative interviews and participant observation to explore the "representational spaces" that diverse members of the Saxapahaw community navigate in the contemporary moment of redevelopment and gentrification. I aim to capture a few partial snapshots of the complexities and contradictions of everyday life in Saxapahaw, with particularly attention to experiences of power, spatial regulation, and social difference. By revealing how people in Saxapahaw encounter, explain, and challenge the transformations taking place, these everyday experiences create important openings for a critical understanding of this place and its contested gentrification process, revealing some of the intimate impacts of the larger productive forces examined in the first chapter and addressing some of the gaps in the simplified narrative of place outlined in the second.

I. Lived Spaces of Social Difference

Access and exclusions

Many of my interviews and conversations touched on dynamics of spatial regulation and the shifting forms of access and exclusion diverse members of the community as the village center redevelops. Because Saxapahaw is not an incorporated municipality, there are few formalized "public" spaces, but many of the private business owners are consciously oriented towards promoting forms of flexible access and use of their commercial spaces. Access to space is always mediated, however, by informal networks of relationality and difference that define boundaries of inclusion and belonging. Many of the community members I spoke to were acutely aware of the ways in which power regulates the spaces of Saxapahaw.

The general store, pub, and coffee shop/performance venue are all actively utilized and promoted as community spaces that welcome non-commercial activities. Many of the business owners I spoke to placed a strong emphasis on creating flexible boundaries around the spaces they own and manage. The coffee shop/performance venue hosts a regular self-organized "Crochet and Complain" group as well as author readings, ping-pong nights, and hula hoop gatherings. Interviewees frequently cited this venue as one of the commercial spaces with less restrictive access. They noted that while the owners rent the space at market value to sustain their business, they have also chosen to make the space available for free or reduced charge for children's birthday parties, charter school events, and local art and performance activities. Because this space is also regulated by a private property regime, however, this type of public access remains at the owners' digression. One interviewee emphasized the ways in

which access to local commercial spaces can be taken away if owners' expectations are not upheld, including commercial exchange or the adequate demonstration of appreciation.

Public access to the private spaces of Saxapahaw is primarily mediated through personal relationships, but these relationships are themselves shaped by wider social structures that foster connection or division. The gym beneath the loft apartments charges a fee for non-apartment-residents, yet I was frequently told by newer village residents that "everyone has a key" to the gym, even if they don't pay. This seemingly free-floating network of keys has limits however; "everyone" is boundaried and defined by (implicitly racialized, classed, and cultured) forms of social capital and insider knowledge. The type of flexible boundaries that exist around the private space of the gym increase mobility and access for certain social groups while remaining closed-off for others.

Racial and economic barriers

Many community members across racial lines noted the limited presence of Saxapahaw's non-white residents in the village center. Census data indicates that 34.6% of the village's population was non-white in 2010, although this number also excludes many nearby black and Latino residents who live just outside the boundaries of the CDP. While I was unable to verify this quantitatively, my qualitative data suggests that the residential racial segregation of the village's company town era has significant lasting impacts. Black communities have historically lived on the north and east outskirts of town, rather than in the mill village itself. Many white newcomers I spoke to expressed surprise and embarrassment upon learning about the existence of these longstanding black communities, one commenting on the "invisibility" of the town's non-white populations from their perspective living near the village center.

The black residents I interviewed cited legacies of racial violence as central factors in restricting the black community's mobility and sense of belonging in the village center. One interviewee described the bridge across the river as a particular site of insecurity in the 1950s and 60s:

> "You couldn't walk across the bridge after dark, not no black person…Back when I was coming up, it was really rough, you would get robbed if you went down through there…Then things kinda cooled down some, cause you know, we knew…don't go through that way if you ain't gotta go over there."

It is significant to note that the interviewee linked the decline in violence not to a progression in white racial consciousness but to the black community reducing its mobility and access to the space of the bridge. Another interviewee described a similar dynamic of black residents from nearby communities avoiding Saxapahaw altogether because of prevalent Ku Klux Klan activity in the 1980s:

> "My grandmother told my brother and I as young children that we didn't need to hang out down here. Because there were people that didn't like us. She specifically talked about the KKK being down here…that was just the word on the street, to be careful."

While both of these interviewees referenced memories of aggravated racial tensions from the past, they both confirmed that these memories continue to shape and confine the black geography of Saxapahaw today. Interviewees noted that while there is some racial diversity among both the employees and customers of the new businesses, the people of color in these spaces are predominantly commuters or tourists from nearby towns, whereas the local long-term black residents rarely visit the village center. One black community member explained:

> "When you go somewhere and you're the only black person, you really start to wonder, like where did I…? Where did I park my car at? What is this? There are plenty of times here when I can go all day and not see a black person. Yeah, it's a big deal. And the ones I do see, they don't live around here. They're the ones that come [to visit], they're not the people that live here. Not at all."'

The same interviewee also repeatedly emphasized that the community of business owners and residents in the village center have created an intentionally open and welcoming space, saying that "the people that love this town and are here all the time, they don't see color, they don't see gender, they don't see sexual orientation." She concluded, however, that while this inclusive attitude has made significant, positive impacts on her and her family's experience, long-standing racial barriers exist that cannot be overcome by an open invitation alone.

While I unfortunately did not interview any Latino residents due to my limited timeframe, Spanish language proficiency, and social contacts, I spoke to several white volunteers at the food pantry who suggested that Latino residents—particularly undocumented immigrants and people with undocumented family members— largely avoid many public spaces in Saxapahaw as well. One food pantry volunteer I spoke to cited several recent immigration raids at local social services in nearby Burlington as the primary reason that so few Latino families visit the pantry. The Alamance County Sherriff's department was sued by the U.S. Department of Justice in 2012 for racial profiling, and while this lawsuit was ultimately unsuccessful, the impact of state-sponsored racial intimidation is highly visible in throughout the county. One white interviewee noted that she has witnessed several Latino people arrested for fishing under the bridge, while white people frequently fish in the same location unimpeded. Another white resident mentioned that she had spoken with several of her Latino neighbors and discovered they didn't attend any of the free events and activities in the village center because of a perception of high fees, concluding, "immigrants have been primarily left out of the new Saxapahaw."

One of the white residents I interviewed (who has lived in Saxapahaw for about five years) emphasized that contemporary Saxapahaw is not a community where overt racism is socially acceptable, but expressed concerns about paternalistic attitudes and unconscious perpetuation of racial divisions among longer-term residents in the white community:

> "From the white perspective, [black people] are all ok and we love them…but they are still *they*. They are our friends, and they are always welcome, but they are still *they*…I don't think that old-timers here realize that that's still very discriminatory. From their perspective, they have embraced each other and they're fine."

By and large, interview participants explained racism as a problem endemic to politically-conservative, long-term white residents. While they rarely explicitly mentioned class status, the residents they referred to are primarily local farmers, families of former millworkers, and other working-class communities. The perception reflections dominant political discourses and cultural representations that position working-class white communities in the South as the primary vestige of "antiquated" racial biases. While this perception is grounded in documented realities of high rates of personal forms of prejudice and discrimination in these communities, it overlooks the historical foundations of this trend in racialized labor and social control strategies, such as those discussed in the context of the local textile industry in Chapter 3. This perception also obscures the ways in which middle- and upper-class white communities (across the political spectrum) also perpetuate structural racism, regardless of conscious discriminatory intent—and often assume much more powerful positions within the systems and institutions that drive racial disparities. Interviewees pointed to this complexity by emphasizing how racial exclusion is now primarily enforced along class lines in Saxapahaw, as longstanding structural barriers to non-white communities' economic security make them less likely to participate in the higher-cost amenities entering the village center. This form of exclusion requires no conscious racial prejudice on the part of newcomer

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residents. One interviewee made explicit links between racial and economic forms of exclusion:

> "We go from back in the day, when I couldn't come down here because of the KKK or racial issues, to now, when we have the issue of…the 'haves' and the 'have-nots.' And so the 'haves' will be here and the 'have-nots' won't, and it will be another exclusive town like it was back in the day. So we've come full circle here. Everyone can come, everyone's welcome, we're not going to judge you because of the way you look or where you come from…but you can't live here."

The perception of working-class white communities as uniquely racist also overlooks the ways in which these communities are themselves targets of racialized and classed forms of exclusion. Whiteness studies scholars have extensively analyzed how the socially-constructed category of whiteness has expanded and contracted throughout history to accommodate the needs of hegemonic power hierarchies (Frankenberg, 1997). In the context of gentrifying Saxapahaw, working-class rural white communities have themselves become a racialized other. Newcomers and tourists I spoke to primarily articulated their perception of long-time rural white communities in Saxapahaw along lines of cultural and political difference, but this perception was implicitly linked to a classed racial identity as well. During my time working at the performance venue, concert attendees from urban communities in the Triangle or Triad made frequent reference to an unnerving sensation that they had "stepped into Deliverance" or other horror movies in rural settings. The image of the primitive, bigoted hillbilly or redneck lurks at the edge of Saxapahaw's cultural imaginary in the forms of casual jokes and nervous laughs. This stereotype emerged from a long racial history through which working-class whites became figured as not-quite-white. Within this context, the redneck is rendered as a racial trope (Winders, 2003).

Race and class are structurally and culturally imbricated in complex and dynamic ways. In the case of Saxapahaw, they also collide with political orientation and cultural

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identity in shaping the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion. Many of the long-term residents—across racial lines—that I interviewed indicated that they rarely patronize the new businesses, some directly referencing prohibitive costs while others speaking to a sense of cultural alienation. Most expressed some degree of ambivalence towards the new development, shrugging off my questions and saying they were glad something is happening downtown but that it is "not really my thing." One interviewee explicitly positioned the new businesses as economically exclusive, saying: "If you ain't got no money, you can't step in here."

While there was a general agreement that Saxapahaw's new businesses are comparatively costly for rural Alamance County (and prohibitively so for many lower-income residents), other interviewees emphasized the business owners' intentional attempts to provide more affordable options, as well as their creation of local jobs in an otherwise depressed economy. One interviewee also challenged the perception that in-migrants are generally wealthier than long-time residents, citing the many entry-level service jobs that have been created at the new businesses: "If you look at employees at the Eddy and General Store, those are a lot of people who are moving to the area, and they're making minimum wage. So I wouldn't call them gentrifying." This resident argued that Saxapahaw's redevelopment process could be better characterized as tourism-based development than gentrification.

Because early-stage gentrifiers are often economically-marginal themselves, the existence of lower income in-migrants doesn't disqualify Saxapahaw as a site of gentrification, but the interviewee's observation points to complexity of the processes taking place. The redevelopment project has lead to an uneven series of transformations, some of which privilege the participation of wealthier in-migrants, while others benefit wider segments of the

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community. For example, both long-time residents and newcomers I spoke to viewed rising property values as a generally positive trend in the context of an otherwise depressed rural real estate market. The ongoing availability of nearby affordable housing hasn't elevated this to an issue of widespread concern—or at least not yet.

Many long-time residents are concerned, however, about the transformation of spaces they used to more freely access. The most frequently cited example was the Buddy Collins Community Center, which is now the workshop of a local puppet troupe. Some long-term residents mourn the loss of public-access recreational spaces in the redeveloped village— spaces that many newcomers (and certain long-term residents) are able to access more freely through networks of social capital. For some, the sense of loss also includes the empty mill itself, which was used as a basketball court for several years. This particular case is a striking example of how seemingly "abandoned" spaces continue to be sites of adaptive use, cultural meaning, and personal attachment (Mah, 2012). The sense of loss these residents experience reminds us that certain elements of the past in Saxapahaw are being lost just as others are preserved—and that the normative parameters of preservation are shaped by systems of power.

Social preservationism

As discussed in the previous chapter, the dominant story of place in Saxapahaw is distinctly nostalgic, actively working to preserve valued characteristics of the company town era. In contrast to the theorization of gentrifying subjects as "pioneers" who seek to settle a barren landscape (Smith, 1996), many of the new residents and leaders in the redevelopment efforts exhibit strong "social preservationist" (Brown-Saracino, 2009) tendencies, valuing the continued presence of long-time residents in the town. This is a result, in part, of the Jordans central role in both the industrial and post-industrial eras, as the family's close personal

connections to members of the former mill community have steered the redevelopment efforts towards greater inclusion of long-time residents. Mac Jordan says:

> "You look at urban renewal where neighborhoods were destroyed and projects replaced…you lose all of the culture that was there, it was replaced with another culture. Having a combination of both rental space and homeownership, it makes the community more diverse…you're not just all one thing, not just all one type of people…we didn't want to be a retirement community, and we didn't want to be a high-end development…with everyone all the same."

In her comparative study of four gentrifiying communities (both rural and urban), sociologist Japnonica Brown-Saracino identifies social preservationists as a distinct group in gentrifying spaces that identifies the continued presence of long-time residents as a desirable marker of authentic place identity. She outlines the wide range of strategies employed by these groups, from the romanticized commodification of historic cultures to active efforts to combat displacement and promote social inclusion. The full range of these strategies can be seen in Saxapahaw. While many of the efforts fall on the romanticized side of the spectrum, some of the redevelopment leaders and new business owners are intentionally working to support the presence of mixed-income communities through relatively affordable residential and commercial options, and many celebrate the cultural mixing created by long-time and new residents from diverse geographical origins coming together. The Jordan family has been working to open a "cultural history museum" that features a former mill house with exhibits on textile history, a scout cabin detailing the history of the local troupe, and a former black schoolhouse intended to curate the history of the village's African-American community.

These social preservationist efforts have real impacts on the possibility of maintaining a more diverse community, yet we must also understand how they are distinctly political and embedded in systems of power. The planned museum illustrates this reality. Tessa L Cierny's unpublished masters thesis on the making of the Saxapahaw cultural history museum notes

that the museum is funded almost entirely by Jordan Properties, citing an interview with John Jordan in which he indicated that "financial donations are not yet encouraged to advance the opening of the museum, as Jordan feels that requesting donations from the public would make the museum beholden to the community" (Cierny, 2011: 25). The preservation of history—just like the preservation of social diversity—is always influenced by the interests of powerful agents and institutions who seek to control the parameters of preservation. Similarly, one of my interview participant cited a conversation he had with Jordan in which he referenced the future cultural history museum as a type of "chamber of commerce" for the village. There is a genuine impulse in Saxapahaw to preserve both the stories and embodied presence of the former textile community, yet these acts of preservation are often articulated within the logic of the consumption-driven capitalist development fueling the village's revitalization process— a regime of accumulation that has differential impacts, including social exclusion.

Liberatory encounters with difference?

Many residents also spoke to moments of encounter across lines of social difference that broadened their experiences of community, connection, and belonging in addition to those that served to divide and exclude. A young newcomer couple that lives in one of the renovated mill houses spoke about the friendly and mutually-supportive rapport they have developed with their gun-toting, libertarian neighbors—who would otherwise fall outside their social circle if not for their geographic proximity. Residents frequently commented on the relatively peaceful coexistence of politically liberal and conservative communities in Saxapahaw. The food ministry has been a particular site of collaboration across lines of political affiliation, class, and culture. Run by a coalition of churches from a wide range of Christian denominations (as well as additional unaffiliated volunteers), the food distribution center is

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often referenced as a site of unity and reconciliation. Several of the new businesses host regular fundraisers for the pantry, and this was the most frequently cited example I encountered of how "old" and "new" Saxapahaw have come together.

The redevelopment of Saxapahaw and influx of new migrants has undeniably created new opportunities for encounters across lines of the difference. These encounters are varied, wide-ranging, and differentially experienced; they complicate any simplistic notion of gentrification as exclusively a driver of social division and strife and include the possibility of transformation towards greater integration and even equity. All these encounters, however, are necessarily embedded in systems of power. Taking this reality seriously in Saxapahaw means overcoming the association of rural life with the romanticized and depoliticized ideal of "organic community" discussed in the previous chapter and identifying the overlapping and contested structures of power that operate in the contemporary village.

II. Lived Structures of Power

The everyday experiences of village residents provide the building blocks for a more critical analysis of both power and social difference. Graham Gardener (2004) calls for rural studies that reposition power by rejecting the ideal of organic community and analyze the historically contingent and spatially and temporally specific manifestations of political society in rural areas. By examining residents' complex and contradictory experiences of the dominant economic and political structures of gentrifying Saxapahaw, I work to identify some of the core assumptions, tensions, and underlying patterns of the village's political society.

Social capitalism in the "feudal" rural

Community members I interviewed identified conflicted relationships with the economic practices and ideologies that drive the village's redevelopment process, while also frequently expressing a sense of inevitability about the type of development they see unfolding. Many of them perceived an internal tension in the village's economic system between seemingly coexistent feudal, capitalist, and anti-capitalist practices. As examined the previous chapters, many of the leaders in the business community have explicitly positioned themselves against large-scale commercial development, promoting a form of rural capitalism that is small-scale, sustainable, and community-orientated. One of the key players in the redevelopment project described this philosophy in explicitly counter-cultural terms, uplifting the power of small business to fight back against the social shortcomings of capitalism:

> "We're questioning and pushing that envelope and re-thinking what has occurred over the past…in my generation. My generation is seeing that, hey, maybe it's not all that it was cracked up to be. We need better food, we need more time with friends and family…so we're going against the grain here."

Figure 13: *Give-away bins, Saxapahaw.*

For some community members, however, this faith in the power of social capitalism sits alongside a sense of discomfort and frustration with the ways in which capitalist

development restricts social goals. Many appreciated business owners' genuine efforts to invest in the general wellbeing of the community, while some questioned how this intention exists in tension with the "bottom line." I interviewed a teacher at the charter school who spoke about the pressures that even non-profit structures like the school face to scale up and operate according to a business model. The school recently hired a new director, the former building manager of the largest school district in Ohio. The teacher expressed concern with the new director's orientation towards growth and maximizing efficiency:

> "He says – 'You guys don't understand. You have to run it like a business. Would you rather educate 80 kids really well and then shut down in two years, or that we grow and educate more kids?' It gives you this false choice, as if those were the only two options."

According to the teacher, the charter school started out serving primarily court-appointed youth, as "an alternative school for kids with very few options." Gradually, as the school began to grow, administrators "got rid of all of those 'problem kids' deliberately." The teacher linked this change in part to the financial constraints of a state-wide school voucher system in which charter schools are compensated for students based on the funding of their home public school districts. The teacher identified "an explicit drive to decrease Alamance County numbers and increase Durham and Chapel Hill numbers." Attracting families from these better-funded districts also meant investing money in the kinds of arts, technology, and other enrichment activities these families expect, while expelling 'problem' students with behavioral challenges and raising the initially low student-to-teacher ratio that previously allowed the school to provide individualized attention for students struggling academically, further pushing out students from underfunded school districts.

This progression is a striking example of the larger economic and political systems that incentive a type of redevelopment in Saxapahaw that is geared towards middle- and upper-

class urban populations rather than lower-income communities and local residents of rural Alamance county—even when this directly conflicts with local value systems. The teacher expressed a sense of deep frustration and powerlessness against these external pressures, remembering fondly the fleeting moment during the period after he first arrived at the school when a diverse mix of students came together from different counties: "rather than there being segregation, there was a really nice blend of trading things back and forth." He appreciated the unique arts and environmental education offerings at the school and the non-traditional learning environment it provides, identifying the paradoxical reality that charter schools are able to exercise some forms of greater flexibility and creativity than public schools while simultaneously being more constrained by market pressures.

This alternatively celebratory and fraught relationship with capitalism coexists with the persistence of seemingly "pre-"capitalist structures in Saxapahaw as well. One interviewee emphasized the feudal structure of the town, describing how landownership remains concentrated in the hands of a few families near the village center. The interviewee expressed concern about the power dynamics this structure creates, while also reading it as a safeguard against more corporate-driven development:

> "With lots of property in the hands of a very few people…in some ways it's super problematic and creates all sorts of kind feudal political relationships - and at the same time, it really prevents this ultra market-oriented kind of development."

In the movement away from a perceived capitalist cultural mainstream, Saxapahaw's redevelopers have turned instead to a long-standing model of rural development and governance – a structure based on familial relations, limited competition, and small-scale private investment. This interviewee points to the ways in which both these structures present challenges and possibilities for Saxapahaw's future. I had few conversations, however, about

what alternatives might exist outside of this feudalist/capitalist binary – the vast majority of people I spoke to expressed a sense of inevitability (hopeful or not) about the course Saxapahaw has taken, accepting its imperfections given a lack of imaginable alternatives. With profuse examples of economically devastated post-industrial rural communities nearby, it is extremely understandable that Saxapahaw's model is generally uplifted as a rare success. Nevertheless, there remains an uneasy awareness among both long-time residents and newcomers about the socially-exclusive consequences of what they percieve as both capitalist and feudalist structures.

Governance, community, and political society

Many of my conversations touched on the question of governance, and the village's widely-known—but not formally recognized—system of decision-making, which is centered around the small group of local business owners. Similarly to the conflicting feelings interview participants expressed about the village's semi-feudalist/social capitalist economic system, most of people I spoke to expressed some concerns with the limitations of this governance system while also positioning it as an inevitable outcome of a rural social landscape traditionally dominated by informal political structures—without many easily-identifiable alternatives.

While residents are accurately aware of the political dynamics of the village, many of the leaders of the redevelopment project have attempted to reinforce the ideal of organic community:

> "I think I can speak for most of the folks who have chosen to be here…our preference is to do things in a community way, versus a political way. It might be messy, it might be harder to do that way…but we haven't really felt led to incorporate. I think our size and our scale still allows us to operate as a community, as a village, versus having to be a town."

This statement positions Saxapahaw as a place beyond politics, citing the fact that it is unincorporated and has no formal government. But what other forms of governance do exist? A de facto governmental role is played by the association of local business owners (which also includes several non-profit leaders) who meet regularly to, "talk about how can we market each other and help each other… visioning, planning, brainstorming" as one association member describes. Another member I interviewed spoke of a striking moment in which an external advisor came to their organization's board meeting and explicitly asked about the town's governing body:

> "We're like, there is no governing body of Saxapahaw. So he's like, ok, what is the closest thing you have to some sort of village council? And somebody went…well…its pretty much in this room…That was the first time I'd heard anyone say to someone who asked a direct question - it doesn't exist, but in effect, it's us."

In addition to the business association, a vocal and active local citizen periodically convenes a small village council. This group operates a facebook page that features alerts for community events and calls for action on development issues that impact Saxapahaw. Many of these efforts could be categorized as NIMBYism, as they work to resist development projects that would bring perceived harms into the community. Several years ago, a proposed multi-county SWAT team training facility inspired a surge of participation with the village council. One interviewee described the dynamic between this group and the business association as not necessarily oppositional, but with minimal overlap. As it was described to me, personal allegiances and personality clashes largely determine who feels aligns with which group—neither claims to represent the entire public, and both contain a mixture of longer-term and newer residents. Yet there is a widespread consensus that the business association holds much

more material influence on the daily life of the community, and few people I spoke to placed much faith in the council as a viable alternative.

One interviewee expressed a tension between a discomfort with and general acceptance of the practical purposes of the concentrated power structure of the business association:

> "A lot of people involved have a dual sense of care for the village, which relates to the desire to hold onto power, and then also the awareness of that being problematic and so searching for avenues through which they can release that power and give it over and disperse it to others. But they're still doing that cautiously in a way that fits with their vision of what they want the village to be."

This resident argues that many members of the business association do consider their own role critically, yet maintain this structure of power because of a desire to positively shape the future of the village, restricting more destructive forms of development. These intentions and their consequences are the site of much debate. Several interviewees described situations in which new businesses or organizations have attempted to enter Saxapahaw but have been stopped by the carefully coordinated efforts of the business association. These efforts to curate and steer the village's identity were portrayed in a strikingly ambivalent range of negative and positive lights by different residents. Regardless of these value judgments, however, residents understood the association as a distinctly political structure that exercises considerable power—a structure that several interview participants felt should be publicly acknowledged to a much further extent than the dominant narrative of place allows.

III. Alternate Claims to Place

Structures of economic and political power within and beyond Saxapahaw are shaping the boundaries of this place and who will participate in its future. This hegemonic place identity is not totalizing, however, but coexists with competing claims to the place of Saxapahaw and its surrounding areas. Some residents' claims to space and place are nested

close by to the geographic sphere of the redeveloping village, but are not associated with "Saxapahaw" itself. Only two miles down Highway 87, the community of Eli Whitney has not (yet) experienced significant redevelopment, remaining a small rural crossroads marked by a gas station, country store, tienda, Dollar General, and car repair shop. Some of the long-term residents who live just outside the village center of Saxapahaw identify more fully with Eli Whitney, while others identify with Graham (the nearest city and postal address of many rural residents)—and others profess no municipal identity at all. One community member spoke to this complexity:

> "I think there's a whole vibrant community of people who don't necessarily identify with Saxapahaw…One way to think about it is…to what extent does Saxapahaw even matter? Why should they fit into Saxapahaw?…Maybe we should fit into their world."

This important perspective helps to challenge the ways in which my own analysis reifies Saxapahaw's central position in its rural surroundings, even as I have sought to critically examine the historical production of that position. Nevertheless, other long-time residents do make claims to Saxapahaw itself—some of which don't fit within the scope of the dominant place-making practices, as evidenced by the resident quoted in the introduction who told me, "now *this* is Saxapahaw" upon entering one of the neighborhoods from his youth that falls outside the CDP. During a long drive we took together, this resident narrated our passage through many of the rural neighborhoods on Saxapahaw's periphery, exploring a landscape of older homes, churches, farms, and closed-down small business laden with memory and cultural meaning for him and his community. I began to conceptualize our driving tour together as a means of constructing an insurgent "oral geography," which, like the longstanding tradition of oral history (Portelli, 2010; Thompson, 2000), productively unsettles core assumptions and adds vital texture to dominant narratives.

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The Saxapahaw that this long-time resident and black elder showed me was one that remains largely illegible to many newcomers and tourists: the long drive through "the middle of nowhere" that precedes the arrival in the "somewhere" of Saxpahaw. He showed me the old ball field where he and other millworker families used to play baseball on weekends, chuckling as he remembered the fish sandwiches, cold beer, and fist fights between rowdy youth that often followed—and observing that these days, the primary users of the field are Mexican families playing soccer. We travelled over to his grandparents' "homeplace," where he proudly recounted stories of collective work and mutual aid—and mobilized his own sense of nostalgia to remember an era when, "everybody raised tobacco pretty much in a circle like. They helped out one another. When it was time to pull or put in, everybody would pitch in…that was a good thing cause everybody helped everybody, not too much pressure on anybody." He also indicated that he has never felt particularly at home in the village center, largely avoiding it during his years as a young man working in the mill in favor of the small businesses and bars that have since closed on the edge of town. His memories of racial intimidation—now combined with the high prices of the new businesses—continue to steer the scope of his daily movements away from the center of town.

This resident's oral geography demonstrates how marginalized communities carve out spaces for survival, belonging, pleasure, and home even within spatial paradigms that work to exclude them. Black geographies literature points precisely to this tension. Katherine McKittrick and Clyde Woods argue that black geographies "need to be taken seriously because they reconfigure classificatory spatial practices" (McKittrick & Woods, 2007: 5). For McKittrick and Woods, the production of space and place in the post-conquest world has been predicated on anti-Blackness—erasing, marginalizing, and disappearing the geographic

knowledge and experiences of black people. Yet within this dominant paradigm, black geographies persist and resist.

In *Demonic Grounds* (2006), McKittrick explores how black spaces are both firmly situated within systems of power and yet never fully dominated by them. She recounts how Harriet Jacobs/Linda Brent fled enslavement and confined herself in a small space under the eaves in her grandmother's attic for seven years until she was eventually able to escape to the North. McKittrick mobilizes the metaphor of the garret as a term that speaks beyond the attic about the "ways in which the subaltern self attends to and creates workable material and imaginary geographies" (McKittrick, 2006: 56).

Just as the "the garret makes available a place for Brent to articulate her lived experiences and emancipatory desires, without losing sight of the dehumanizing forces of slavery" (McKittrick, 2006: 41), the spaces of fellowship, enjoyment, and mutual aid that this long-time resident described are thoroughly embedded in the racialized spatial regime of their time. Inhabitants of garretted spaces stake real and meaningful claims to place *and* remain acutely aware of the realities of regulation, domination, and enclosure. Many garretted spaces remain within Saxapahaw, and many more may be created if the village proceeds towards later stages of gentrification. Within these spaces, alternate claims to the place of Saxapahaw will persist—whether or not they are registered or consciously engaged by the newer residents of the village community or the prevailing power structure.

CHAPTER 6 - CONCLUSIONS

The Challenge of Difficult Interrelatedness

Henri Lefebvre's lesser-known early scholarship was rooted in rural sociology, where he wrote extensively about land reform and ground rent, rejecting critics who claimed that studying land ownership wasn't an appropriate career for a Marxist (Elden & Morton, 2015). Decades later, it has become clear that issues of land, space, and the extraction of value from real estate have, in fact, become key sites of class struggle under late capitalism. Lefebvre also argued that rural spaces are much more complex than mainstream cultural imaginaries suggest, home to multiple, interwoven structures that trace their origins to different historical epochs. Focusing on the central role of the landowner, Lefebvre explored the ways in which feudalist and other pre-capitalist modes of social organization have been subsumed and incorporated into capitalism (Lefebvre, 2015).

Mill villages like Saxapahaw demand this kind of analysis of the complexity and continuity of rural economies and cultures. They also confirm Lefebvre's assertion that "the sociologist"—or geographer—"who wants to understand…has to double as a historian" (2015: 2). In taking a longer-range historical approach to studying rural gentrification than has been conventionally employed, I have attempted to uncover how some of the "sedimentations" (Lefebvre, 2015: 2) left by previous epochs in Saxapahaw's development have had lasting impacts on this community—structurally, symbolically, and socially.

Drawing on Lefebvre's later work in the *Production of Space* (1991), I have also worked to overcome the division between consumption- and production-side theories of rural gentrification, employing his three-part analysis to explore how the contemporary space of Saxapahaw has been co-produced by economic practices, cultural symbols, and the everyday interactions and experiences of village residents. Each of these perspectives provides key insights into the socio-spatial politics of this redeveloping village, but each alone is incomplete.

My case study of Saxapahaw confirms the need for "geographies of gentrification" (Lees, 2000), demonstrating how local historical and geographic characteristics shape unique processes of gentrification in different places. Bringing a historical and Lefebvrian approach to an under-examined landscape of gentrification—the post-industrial, rural American South— provides important insights for the wider rural gentrification scholarship. Firstly, this region is home to unique historical social relations, requiring a theorization of the complex and shifting intersections of race, class, and gender in rural areas. Secondly, these social relations emerged through an industrialization process centered on a company town model—a model that has produced enduring social, cultural, economic, and political legacies that shape (and sometimes facilitate) the gentrification process. Taken together, these insights make the case for a study of gentrification that moves past the description and measurement of a seemingly unique and temporally-isolated phenomenon and towards a theory that positions it as one moment in a broader arc of uneven capitalist development.

At the same time as Saxapahaw demonstrates the need for geographic specificity, it also illuminates how these local processes are always embedded in wider systems and structures that limit and promote different types of economic development and community

change. In the context of a global capitalist system with increasingly stagnant rates of growth, the gentrification project—the extraction of surplus value from undercapitalized real estate and consumption-based development geared primarily towards increasingly more affluent classes—is the most readily available and viable model of economic development in many rural communities, particularly those on the periphery of growing urban centers.

Despite these larger economic pressures, redevelopment remains a contested and complicated process in Saxapahaw. While property values are rising, intentional efforts to limit residential growth and focus on tourist-based development have thus far prevented an affordable housing crisis and any widespread form of direct displacement. The exodus of millworkers from the village during the last few decades of the mill's operation also created many residential vacancies, so some of the recent in-migration can be viewed instead as a form of replacement. The redevelopment project has many impacts that are positively experienced across lines of social difference, and many business owners' emphasis on free services and open access to commercial spaces creates a very different social and cultural landscape than would emerge from a purely profit-driven model. Many of the developers and new residents value the presence of long-time residents and seek to integrate old and new Saxapahaw, which creates meaningful opportunities for cross-class and cross-cultural connection. Yet this type of social preservationism often relies on nostalgic ideals of the past that do not fully account for the continued legacies of historic social inequalities, and it also fails to question how long-time residents may still experience forms of indirect displacement as their community is transformed around them. Similarly to the company town era, forms of benevolent private investment serve the dual function of increasing standards of living for many village residents and maintaining naturalized structures of power and social hierarchy.

The gentrification framework is a valuable analytical tool, but only if it remains flexible enough to incorporate these contradictions and complexities. By utilizing a Lefebvrian approach, I have attempted to synthesize a more nuanced and multi-faceted analysis of the production of place in Saxapahaw, while maintaining the political imperative to examine class and other structures of social power. In doing so, I move towards constructing a history and geography of what Katherine McKittrick (2011) calls "collective encounter" and the "difficult interrelatedness" of human life.

One of the first people I interviewed for this project was a resident of a different redeveloping mill village, Glencoe Mills, a rural community located just outside the city of Burlington in northern Alamance County. This resident was one of the earliest newcomers in the wave of owner-occupier developers that have renovated Glencoe's mill houses over the last decade. I was struck by both the degree of optimism she expressed about the possibility of reviving the community structure of the mill town, as well as her tangible sense of disappointment at how this process had ultimately unfolded. On her freshly-painted front stoop hung a porch swing, inscribed with an excerpt from *Like a Family* (Hall et al 1987). It begins: "If you need it and we got it, its yours." The passage goes on to describe the spirit of mutual aid and collective work that the mill communities fostered. When I first noticed the porch swing, the interview participant was in the midst of describing how many of the houses in the village were purchased as second homes and frequently lie vacant, while the permanent residents that do live in the village have become locked in seemingly endless conflicts over historic preservation regulations and neighborhood association policies. As we stood on the steps together, she exclaimed as her neighbor across the street pulled out of his driveway with a full pickup truck, lamenting his junk-hoarding tendencies—which she felt compromised the

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village aesthetic. She had recently decided to sell her house, and while she expressed some continued fondness for the village—as well as satisfaction in the profitability of her investment—the reality of mill village life clearly remained a far leap away from the imagined world of her porch swing.

I take this longing for an imagined communal past seriously, for I am deeply familiar with it on a personal level. A similar yearning has repeatedly drawn me to live in small rural communities throughout my life, where the possibility of a more intimate and collaborative way of life somehow seems closer at hand. But that moment on the porch in Glencoe reminded me that living in community entails daily confrontations with difficult interrelatedness—with conflict, with difference, and with power—just as much as it entails collective identity and solidarity. One of the challenges facing redeveloping mill villages is to envision *new* forms of rural community and identity without resorting to romanticized ideals of the past, to honestly confront the social hierarchies and divisions that defined historic community structures alongside the valued characteristics that we seek to preserve. Envisioning a redeveloped mill village with expanded, rather than diminished, forms of social equity also requires continually returning to the question of who constitutes the "we" in question—how spaces of belonging are constructed, and how these parameters are shaped by geometries of power and difficult histories of collective encounter.

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