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**EAST OF THE TRACKS:
GRASSROOTS ENVIRONMENTALISM IN SOUTH MISSISSIPPI**

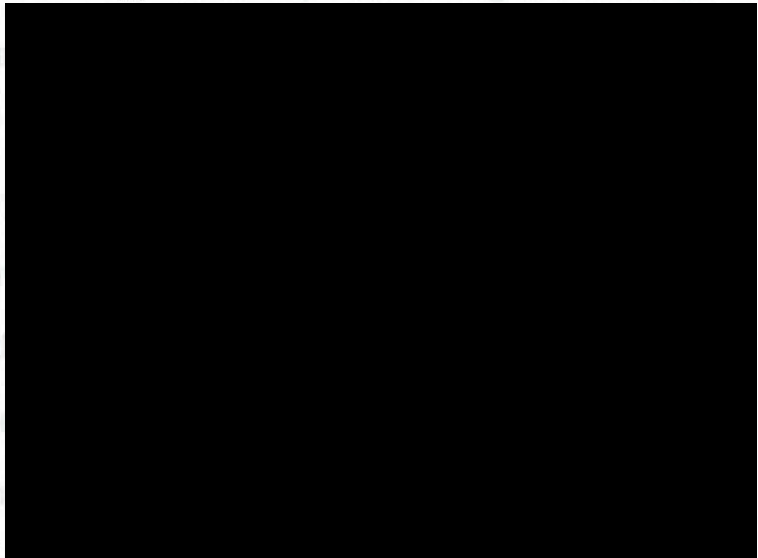
by Heather Sanchez

by

Heather Kay Sanchez

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ABSTRACT

EAST OF THE TRACKS:

GRASSROOTS ENVIRONMENTALISM IN SOUTH MISSISSIPPI

by Heather Sanchez

May 2012

Environmental justice literature challenges the disparity and oppression regarding the quality of life associated with residential environments among communities of color. Recent disasters, such as hurricane Katrina, the Tennessee coal sludge disaster (December 2008), and the BP Oil Spill (2010) have garnered visibility for environmental issues, particularly in the south. Nevertheless, the topic has largely been ignored in Mississippi among academia, many advocacy groups, and at the state level despite the emergence of several community based grassroots environmental groups throughout Mississippi in recent years.

From Columbia, to Crystal Springs, to Hattiesburg, a coalition of environmental groups is forming with Hattiesburg at the center of the emergent movement. The success and longevity of the Forrest County Environmental Support team, in particular, led me to ask the following question: In terms of grassroots environmentalism, what techniques and strategies do community based groups in Hattiesburg use to mobilize and sustain collective action? This thesis provides a qualitative, applied ethnographic study carried out using a multi-theoretical approach informed by political ecology and frame analysis in order to explore grassroots environmentalism in south Mississippi.

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The researcher would like to express appreciation to the thesis director, Dr. Jeffrey Kaufmann, for his many years of mentorship, particularly in showing me the ropes of ethnographic field work. Dr. Kaufmann worked to keep me on task and made me a better writer and anthropologist. I would like to thank the other members of my committee, Dr. James Flanagan and Dr. Amy Miller, for their support and advice throughout my academic career. Dr. Flanagan introduced me to anthropology, and his teaching made me fall in love with the discipline, which I will always be grateful for. I would especially like to thank Dr. Amy Miller for her invaluable feedback and calming demeanor during the writing process, without which this project may never have come to fruition.

Special thanks go to Dr. Mark Miller (Geography, USM) for introducing me to my thesis topic and for the use of his audio-visual equipment and software. Appreciation must also be shown to Dr. Marie Danforth for answering the often last minute questions of a frenzied graduate student, and Mrs. Petra Lamb for putting out numerous fires over the years. Lastly and most importantly, I owe a tremendous debt of gratitude to the members of the Forrest County Environmental Support Team for allowing me entrance into their organization, for making me feel welcome in their homes and community, and for trusting me with their story. I hope I have represented your voices well. It was truly an honor to take this journey with you.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

1. COCEJ – Coalition of Communities for Environmental Justice
2. EPA- Environmental Protection Agency
3. FCEST- Forrest County Environmental Support Team
4. MDEQ- Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality
5. SMO- Social Movement Organization

CHAPTER I

“MOVING ON UP TO THE EAST SIDE?”

Introduction

I have called Mississippi home for my entire life. I grew up in Sharon, a small community on the outskirts of Laurel. Excursions to nearby Hattiesburg were a treat often centered on shopping trips to the mall, and it was not until I moved to the “city” for college that I began to extend my exploration past the boundaries of department stores and deeper into the cultural and historical back roads of a place that has come to frustrate, inspire, and challenge.

My fascination with grassroots environmentalism developed as a matter of chance in 2004 when I took part in a memory workshop for an anthropology course I enrolled in. On a cold Saturday morning in November, my classmates and I interviewed members of the Mobile-Bouie Neighborhood Association at C. E. Roy Community Center. Mobile-Bouie is a historic neighborhood in Hattiesburg comprised of a predominantly African American population. The community was a thriving center of activity throughout the Civil Rights era but met sharp economic decline following integration. Although ongoing revitalization efforts have made some headway, the area still represents one of the largest poverty pockets in the city. The Saturday workshop marked my first memorable encounter with East Hattiesburg. Row after row of concerned citizens sat in metal folding chairs, sipping coffee and talking quietly as they waited for the old heater to begin warming the building. The purpose of the meeting was to address residents’ allegations of contamination in the Mobile-Bouie

neighborhood by chemical company, Hercules Powder Company. The distressed members of the group had developed a significant amount of public momentum early in their campaign and achieved widespread visibility for their topic throughout the community.

On the morning of the memory workshop I was paired with Ms. Evelyn Boone. Most of her narrative revolved around experiences she had with an open Hercules drainage ditch running through the center of her neighborhood. Speaking of the ditch she said, "I'm sure it was contaminated because it was something people talked about all the time and trying to keep the kids out of the ditch..." (personal field notes, 2004). By the end of the morning it became clear to me that other residents had similar experiences, were worried about health risks, and wanted justice. Despite the determination displayed that day, as public interest waned, allegations of contamination slowly died out and disappeared. By 2007, the Mobile-Bouie Neighborhood Association had refocused their efforts on other community issues and the topic of Hercules was all but forgotten for the time.

I, on the other hand, was hooked. I could not shake the things I had heard and seen on that November morning, not just as a young anthropologist, but as a citizen of Hattiesburg. How had I lived in a city for more than six years without knowing about the struggle of an entire community? How could a social justice topic of this magnitude be swept under the rug and forgotten so easily? Why would a group so fired up eventually abandon their cause and was this something specific to Hattiesburg or were there communities in other cities

potentially being exposed to high levels of contaminants on a daily basis? These questions remained with me and became a driving force as I entered graduate school and began exploring potential research topics for a thesis.

I began investigating environmental literature, particularly pouring over Robert D. Bullard's landmark study, *Dumping in Dixie* (1990) and anthropologist Melissa Checker's work, *Polluted Promises* (2005). Both authors suggest environmental injustice in communities of color are widespread and based on a historical pattern that places polluting industries in low-income, minority neighborhoods, thus disproportionately exposing those residents to contaminants. Eager to launch into my new project, I tried to make contact with members of the Mobile-Bouie neighborhood association once again. While responses were friendly, as noted earlier, the group had moved on to other social issues and their resistance to rehash Hercules was palpable. Discouraged, I began to pursue other research interests until a new opportunity practically fell into my lap in January 2008 while taking an economic development course.

Part of the course requirements included creating and producing a fifteen minute DVD addressing different aspects of East Hattiesburg. My professor said if anyone was interested in environmental justice he knew about a group in town that met every other Thursday to discuss environmental problems facing East Hattiesburg and were eager to have help recording a short film for use in getting their story out to the larger public. Excited about the prospect of renewing my research, I made the decision to take on the video project and attend my first meeting with the Forest County Environmental Support Team (FCEST).

I arrived at St. James around 6:45 pm. Originally the church was located on East 7th Street in Hattiesburg. The congregation has long supported social activism going back to 1964 when Reverend W.M. Hudson was pastor and the church served as a mass meeting sight for Freedom Summer. The congregation now resides off of Country Club Road in Hattiesburg, just east of the railroad tracks separating the old Kerr-McGee creosote pond from the neighborhood serving as the primary focus of this study. Upon arriving at the church that first day, I was immediately struck by the amount of cars in the parking lot. The neighborhood association meetings I attended in 2004 rarely had more than fifteen or twenty people in attendance, but the St. James Christian Methodist Episcopal Church parking lot was packed. I took a seat in the back of the church sanctuary with fifty-two members of the FCEST and listened as I was introduced to the plight of a community. Over the next three years I would get to know these individuals, study the movement they began more than a decade prior, and be inspired by both their solidarity and fortitude in the face of enormous obstacles.

My time with the FCEST has resulted in the ensuing qualitative and interdisciplinary ethnographic study. The overarching research question behind this project is as follows: In terms of grassroots environmentalism, what techniques and strategies has the FCEST employed to recruit members, mobilize and sustain collective action, and enact social change? How effective has the group been in meeting each of those challenges, and finally, what does environmental justice mean in this context? Secondly the project has also evolved into a personal inquiry to see if it was possible for me, as an anthropologist, to be both

researcher and advocate, and carry out the study in a way that maintains the integrity of social scientific research while also being accessible to a wide range of people inside and outside academia.

I hope to establish the relevancy of the project on three levels. First, the research of the nature described here will help uncover some of the hidden or partially obscured processes that contribute to the creation of environmental inequality in Mississippi while offering a fresh opportunity to apply political ecological theory within an anthropological context. Second, this academic inquiry will offer insight into the ideologies and mobilization strategies serving as the driving force behind what is quickly becoming a regional movement and in doing so, will also contribute to frame analysis literature within sociology. Last, but certainly not least, the project has an applied component that will hopefully inspire change and create awareness for a topic that stakeholders and advocates consider a pressing human rights issue within Mississippi. I feel the research goals and questions outlined here can be most efficiently addressed by breaking down the investigation into themed chapters driven, by and large, by a chronological narrative.

The remainder of Chapter I will include a literature review and outline the research goals and methodology of the study with special remarks on how the use of a video camera granted me initial access to the group. Also, the literature review will address how a background in anthropology/sociology brings a unique, multi-disciplinary perspective to the project. Chapter II provides a historical context for the project. This chapter will recall the history of the FCEST, providing

an introduction to the environmental issues being addressed by drawing on a wide range of primary sources (newspaper articles, acquired memos, MDEQ and EPA documents, environmental studies, Kerr-McGee legal settlement materials, and minutes from both City Hall and Hattiesburg School Board meetings). The second chapter is significant because it will demonstrate the difficulties in establishing who is responsible for creosote contamination and any potential clean up. Additionally, the historical context of the events that led to the formation of the FCEST have become an important aspect of recruitment and mobilization within the movement, specifically in terms of processing current, real or perceived environmental dangers (a primary subject addressed in Chapter IV).

Chapter III draws on a broad body of political ecological theories and Denis Cosgrove's symbolic landscape work to evaluate the connection between the people of a neighborhood and their "natural" surroundings. This association will be of importance as personal memories of particular Hattiesburg landscapes combine with the environmental history of those landscapes to shape current perceptions of danger and justice for members of the FCEST. The connection between people and the land on which they live is the foundation of the FCEST's movement.

The arguments made in Chapter IV will be supported by social movement/framing literature, distinctively the work of Snow, Benford, and Shriver. Justice is the frame being utilized by the FCEST. I will argue that justice, particularly racial justice, is successful as a frame within the movement on a couple grounds. First, it recalls shared aspects of the Civil Rights Movement and

second because racial justice is specific enough as a frame to be relevant to the environmental goals of the FCEST but vague enough to be altered in order to extend the reach of the movement. Transforming racial justice to the frame of environmental justice has allowed the FCEST to adopt a flexible platform and attract members that may not have been active in prior years.

Critical discourse analysis and Chomsky's research on hegemony will be used to explore the FCEST's management of the media in Chapter V. The FCEST has embraced a wide range of media outlets (video, websites, radio, television, newspapers, and community forums) as an integral component to the movement. Such a stance has proven effective in giving the group increased visibility while providing a certain degree of power in combating hidden political processes, enacting pressure on public figures, and aiding in the establishment of a cooperative network of communities. Conversely I will address how the media campaign approach has arguably hurt the FCEST in some aspects.

Chapter VI will utilize a selection of social movement literature highlighting the connection between spirituality and social activism in African American communities to support the arguments made here. Spirituality is extremely important to members of the FCEST. The meetings themselves are held in a local church, the group begins and ends each meeting with a prayer, and special prayer meetings are conducted outside regular operation. Members credit their Christian ideals and belief in God with any successes the organization achieves. Speakers in all meetings, both elected leadership and members at large, utilize Biblical passages and tones as they share their views or concerns with the rest of

the group. Persistence in the pursuit of organization activities and projects is presented as an enduring test of faith. Charisma by the group's leadership is utilized to mold and encourage spirituality in a way that bolsters the frame of justice.

Chapter VII will begin with a return to my original research question concerning the efficacy of the FCEST's mobilization and recruitment strategies. I will reference theories, literature, and examples from previous chapters to briefly analyze how the FCEST has achieved many of its movement objectives. Particular attention will be given to the way the FCEST has exported successful aspects of their movement and used them to collaborate with the leaders of other grassroots environmental organizations by establishing a growing, regional environmental movement. So far the newly founded Coalition of Communities includes organizations from Hattiesburg, Picayune, Columbia, Crystal Springs, Jackson, Columbus, Meridian, Richton, and scattered communities in Alabama and Florida. A reflective discussion on the issue of engaged anthropology will follow the conclusions chapter and outline some of the contradictions and dilemmas I faced as a researcher during the ethnographic process.

Literature Review

I have chosen to use a wide range of literature to help evaluate different aspects of my research. Such an approach was inspired by reading Herzfeld's *Anthropology: Theoretical Practice in Culture and Society* (2001). In the opening pages of his work, Herzfeld introduces the reader to what he calls the "militant middle ground," defining it as "a space that at once is strongly resistant to closure

and that is truly grounded in an open-ended appreciation of the empirical” (2001, p. x). This perspective makes plurality the rule and accepts the unavoidable “nuances and disagreements” in fieldwork and theory (2001, p. xi).

The world we study has essentially become smaller as the flow of information races across borders, oceans, and cyberspace faster than ever. Modern anthropologists are faced with increasingly complex multiplicities, contradictions and complex inter-weavings while working in the field. As with any research, we must create new approaches or adapt old ones in order to remain relevant. How does one go about finding the best theoretical method of analysis, knowing that no single approach will provide an all-encompassing solution or answer?

Herzfeld’s line of thinking opens a world of possibilities and has prompted me to embrace a holistic, interdisciplinary approach that allows me to draw on the theories that best illuminate the materials I have, both the parts that confound me along with the material that appears to be anthropological “common sense.” I believe collaborative, theoretical research prevents stagnation and provides a fertile soil for new ideas and insights that after all, is why we do what we do.

The theoretical framework behind the proposed project is organized around four bodies of literature. The first body of work reviewed provides a sample of environmental justice/environmental movement literature. Supplying the reader with some of the prevalent concepts upon which the majority of grassroots environmental organizations draw helps set the stage and facilitate a greater understanding of the historical context presented in chapter two.

Coupling environmental justice literature with select environmental movement studies in the social sciences aids in establishing how an atmosphere of environmental inequality has been allowed to emerge in Hattiesburg, Mississippi.

Second, the review will address political ecology and its use within anthropological research. Political ecology and symbolic landscape material as a theoretical framework is extremely important as it will offer insight into the manner in which individuals and communities conceptualize "nature". Based on preliminary findings, I believe conceptualizations or rather a re-conceptualization of the environment as a "moral landscape" by the FCEST serves an essential role in their ability to recruit members and sustain collective action (Cosgrove, 1984; Sletto, 2002, p. 395). The use of political ecology influenced landscape theory can also be helpful in uncovering hidden power processes in between members of the community, polluting industries, and government entities such as the MDEQ and City Council.

The third portion of the review will begin to examine frame theory and its applicability to grassroots environmentalism. Particular focus will be given to the ability of the FCEST to frame justice to their advantage by presenting the fight to secure justice as a civil rights campaign and spiritual quest. The application of frame analysis in such a way will enable me to empirically examine how the FCEST has molded ideologies as a means for recruiting new members and maintaining collective action. Finally, I will review concepts of hegemony and resistance based on the ideas of Gramsci, Chomsky, and Scott within the

1999; Goldfeld, 1967). The carryover of discriminating ideas pervaded housing,

organizational framework of critical discourse analysis to explore the FCEST relationship with media and media outlets.

Individuals living in contaminated communities in Hattiesburg argue they are the victims of negative differential treatment by industrial and governmental agencies. Accordingly, the working dynamics of unequal relationships are the cornerstones of environmental racism. In Robert D. Bullard's landmark study *Dumping In Dixie*, he defines environmental racism as "any policy, practice, or directive that differentially affects or disadvantages (whether intended or unintended) individuals, groups, or communities based on race or color" (1990, p. 42). Bullard goes on to assert that African American communities are subjected to a disproportionate amount of pollution due to the placement of polluting industries in the very center of their neighborhoods, and emphasizes the South's position as a leader in environmental racism.

Historian David Goldfield concurs saying "there is a direct connection between the exploitation of the land and the exploitation of people" in the southern region of the United States (Goldfield, 1987, pp. 211-12). Melissa Checker extends this argument saying these "historical structures, practices, and beliefs [have persisted] into contemporary life" (Checker, 2005, p. 40). To summarize Bullard and Goldfield, the discriminating ideas behind the plantation system were transferred to the sharecropping system that replaced it. The prejudiced ideas fueling the sharecropping system subsequently became transmitted to development policies of the New South during the 1920's (Bullard, 1986; Goldfield, 1987). The carryover of discriminating ideas pervaded housing,

development, and environmental policies and created what Bullard terms a sort of urban apartheid in the South that limited the life choices of African Americans (Bullard, 1986 & 1990).

Adding to this train of thought, Collin, Beatley, and Harris have suggested that the decision of where to locate industries, especially prior to the passage of important environmental legislation in the 60's and 70's, was influenced by assessing which areas would offer the least amount of resistance (Collin, Beatley, & Harris, 1995, p. 368). Mapping out the locations of industries in Hattiesburg one may see that African American communities such as Mobile-Bouie and Palmer's Crossing have harbored and continue to see a high distribution of polluting businesses. Considering the social climate of Hattiesburg just prior to and during the Civil Rights movement (see Dittmer, 1994; see Payne, 1995), it is clear that African Americans were not in an effective bargaining position with city planners, although there is evidence that some residents attempted just that. In 1921 individuals living in Mobile-Bouie unsuccessfully attempted to circulate a petition opposing the construction and placement of Hercules Powder in their neighborhood (Walters, 2004F).

Reading Bullard, Goldfield, and Checkers in light of the development trends and racial history of Hattiesburg, it is tempting to examine the struggle of the FCEST in terms of "victimizer vs. victim" or "White vs. Black," but to lump a host of environmental problems and subsequent community responses into these categories would be a gross oversimplification of the topic. Applying the victim/victimizer dichotomy is exceptionally problematic. While allegations of toxic

exposure on the part of local chemical companies abound, it was those same chemical companies that provided secure jobs for many African Americans in times where other forms of employment were severely limited. One member of the Mobile-Bouie community present at the 2004 workshop spoke to that. "Everybody thought that Hercules was gonna be around for the rest of our lives. The people that worked at Hercules had the finer homes, cars, and life." (personal field notes, 2004)

Bullard has previously stated that communities facing circumstances similar to what can be seen in East Hattiesburg often have a "don't bite the hand that feeds you" mentality (1990, p. 27). He goes on to assert that smoke stacks of polluting industries often symbolize employment during times when jobs are hard to come by (1990, p. 29). Incontrovertibly, numerous factors led to an atmosphere which fostered environmental inequalities in Hattiesburg, not the least of which is socio-economic status.

According to the 2005 EPA Brownsfields Grant Fact Sheet for Hattiesburg, MS and information from the 2000 census, more than 37% of residents in East Hattiesburg live in poverty, a rate almost 10% higher than the average poverty rate for the entire city. Additionally, the infant mortality rate in Hattiesburg (an indicator in accessing the health and socioeconomic stability of an area) is fourteen times the national average (White, personal correspondence, 2008). Former City Councilman, Dr. Eddie Holloway has noted a decline in the quality of the schools and neighborhoods in East Hattiesburg. According to Holloway, schools on the East side are falling apart and community members are finding it

next to impossible to either repair existing homes or successfully sell their property in order to relocate (personal correspondence, 2007). A recent *USA Today* publication placed Earl Travillion Attendance Center in East Hattiesburg in the first national percentile, ranking the school 450 of among 127,809 schools with the worst air (*The Smokestack Effect: Toxic Air and America's Schools*). These statements alone suggest that factors such as education and residential flexibility must also be considered when evaluating environmental justice.

The oppressive effects of bad environmental policies, poor planning decisions, economic hard times, lack of upward mobility, and the arguable presence of environmental racism in south Mississippi has extended into the present day and complicated the journey of East side residents as they attempt to prove that their health has been compromised by polluting industries. Melissa Checker (2005), in her work *Polluted Promises* has pointed out the numerous difficulties involved in linking death and illness rates with a particular chemical, and subsequently linking those chemicals to a particular facility. She goes on to list aspects of environmental toxicology that put alleged victims at a disadvantage. First, environmental toxicology tests are based on animal studies and then extrapolated to humans, using healthy, White males as the standard of comparison. Also, most studies concentrate on immediate responses and ignore the long latency periods of diseases and other effects that may not be evident for years. The EPA admits there are problems with its risk assessment guidelines, particularly the guideline's inability to account for synergism—"an interaction of two or more chemicals that results in an effect greater than the sum of their

separate effects” (www.epa.gov/OCEPAt/terms/). Checker believes this is an especially important point considering that the majority of contaminated communities are exposed to “multiple chemicals, at multiple times in multiple places” (2005, pp. 118-119).

Further exacerbating the situation, communities are placed at an immediate disadvantage in attempting to meet burden of proof requirements associated with toxic exposure because the scientific knowledge that communities rely on to prove contamination are frequently used against them. According to Judith A. Perrolle, test results may be withheld or used against residents, leading to a betrayal of trust in local, governmental, and scientific institutions (Pellow, Weinberg, & Schnaiberg, 2005; Perrolle, 1993, pp. 3-4). Proving Perrolle’s point, residents living in East Hattiesburg have often expressed to me their frustration toward the conflicting manner in which agencies created to protect them operate.

For example, on the national level there is the EPA which has established sampling protocol standards and procedures for testing soil and groundwater for pollutants. However, the environmental experts hired by the city of Hattiesburg failed to choose a lab that followed these standards making quality control comparisons of soil samples impossible and comparisons of groundwater samples extremely difficult (White, personal correspondence, 2008). The aforementioned inconsistencies combined with existing EPA inadequacies and several negative encounters with MDEQ officials on properties in East Hattiesburg have created attitudes of suspicion and outright distrust among local

grassroots activists (Mees, 2007D).

Prior to the 1980's many African American communities believed there was nothing they could do to combat the injustices being leveled in their neighborhoods. However, with the advent and development of the Environmental Justice Movement during the later part of the 20th century, African Americans began to restructure their understanding of the environment as a civil rights issue and expanded their understanding of the environment to include a variety of urban resources (Checker, 2005). As a result, African American communities adopted a holistic approach to the environment including not only what is typically considered nature but also the more structural components of their neighborhoods. Nature came to include not only green spaces but residential homes, local industries, public facilities and other symbols of infrastructure. Our understanding of these changing conceptualizations surrounding the environment can be strengthened with an examination of political ecological theory.

The term, political ecology, was first coined by anthropologist Eric Wolf in 1972 in a paper titled "Ownership and Political Ecology." Initial applications of political ecology by anthropologists recognized the critical importance of analyzing the fundamental "political issues of structural relations of power and domination over environmental resources" in understanding the interplay of social, political, and environmental processes (Scoones, 1999, p. 485). Much of the early work produced partially accepted the assumption that harmonious traditional systems existed in the past, but had since been aggravated and

disrupted by modern change, in particular by the intrusion and expansion of capitalism. Several case studies emerged in the 70's and 80's stressing instances in which events were influenced by the interplay of political and ecological processes (see Blaikie, 1985; see Scoones, 1999).

One of the most controversial aspects of political ecology theory, among practitioners and critics alike, is what exactly is meant by *nature*, particularly in terms of where humans fit into the expression. Scoones suggests recent ethnographic works have accentuated the untenable disposition of our conceptualization of nature in a variety of contexts (1999). Escobar, in a paper titled "After Nature: Steps to an Antiessentialist Political Ecology" makes a similar point, claiming "answers given to 'the question of nature' by modern forms of knowledge...have proved insufficient to the task" (1999, p. 1).

Escobar (1999) uses a Marxist tone to insinuate that the popular ideas of nature as separate from humans are a product of views of "man" brought to the forefront by capitalism and modernity (i.e. modern forms of knowledge). He extends his argument citing Barbara Bender's assertion that people's concepts of both nature and landscapes are based on the social, political, and economic relationships in which they are engaged. Escobar believes "nature is always constructed by our meaning-giving and discursive processes, so that what we perceive as natural is also cultural and social; said differently, nature is simultaneously real, collective, and discursive—fact, power, and discourse—and needs to be naturalized, socialized, and deconstructed accordingly" (Escobar, 1999, p. 2).

Escobar's point of view allows for a variety of natures, existing in the forms of hybrids, and changing in disposition through different places and contexts. He advocates a balanced position that acknowledges nature's construction in both a humanistic and realist sense- seeing nature as a product of culture with a simultaneous independent existence...a biological body. If one accepts this position, then the application of political ecological theory would appear to be extremely useful. However, Escobar would contend there is an enormous gap to bridge in order to produce meaningful research that is relevant to complexities of conducting modern research (Escobar, 1999).

I believe one way to bridge that gap is through a consideration of symbolic landscape theory, a concept that has been primarily relegated within cultural geography. I was introduced to the idea of symbolic and moral landscapes while reading Bjorn Sletto's (2002) work on producing spaces in Trinidad. Sletto's research led me to Denis Cosgrove (1984) pioneering publication, *Social Formation and Symbolic Landscape*.

Cosgrove maintains landscapes serve as "moral barometers" for communities (2006, p. 52). He says they represent "a way in which certain classes of people have signified themselves and their world through their imagined relationship with nature; and through which they have underlined and communicated their own social role and that of others with respect to external nature" (1984, p. 15). Evaluating the conceptualization of local neighborhoods by community members in terms of physical appearance and moral perception by utilizing a political ecology approach supplemented with landscape theory in

Hattiesburg has proven to be helpful in analyzing the various negotiations and disputes of human actors in relation to their environment and in delineating the various factors that contribute to successful mobilization strategies among environmental groups.

Frame Analysis

In 1974, Erving Goffman published *Frame Analysis*, the text that would come to be known as the founding work of frame theory. Goffman was concerned with the manner in which human experience is analyzed and organized, seeking to evaluate the individual's journey to comprehend "what's going on" in the world around them. He writes, "I assume that definitions of a situation are built up in accordance with principles of organization which govern events...and our subjective involvement in them; frame is the word I use to refer to such of these basic elements as I am able to identify" (Goffman, 1974, p. 10). Goffman states that his goal was to attempt to isolate some of the basic frameworks of comprehension existing in society for making sense out of social interactions while also analyzing their vulnerabilities (1974, p.10).

Goffman utilizes frames as tools for uncovering meaning, saying they bring to light "what would otherwise be meaningless aspects of the scene into something that is meaningful" by offering modes of comparison (1974, p. 21). Goffman uses the perspective of the individual as a point of departure to present how social interactions can appear to have multiple readings other than the one first perceived. One example Goffman brings into play to make his argument involves a board game. In checkers, the simple act of making a move can have

a myriad of interpretations for the opposing player varying from the actual physical movement of the player's hand on the checker to the more implied strategy behind making the move (Goffman, 1974, p. 24). Framing provides the rules and points of reference for deciphering the meaning behind the interaction while also informing an individual's subsequent response to the string of activity (Goffman, 1974, p. 247).

In terms of contemporary frame analysis, it appears as if the citation of Goffman is a largely symbolic gesture. Methodological approaches to frame analysis are extremely varied as a result of its adoption across several academic disciplines. Goffman's work is a unifying theoretical connection, but much of current framing theory shares little common ground with *Frame Analysis* other than its emphasis on interpretive topics and a few of Goffman's key terms. I have already described the first borrowed term, primary frameworks.

The second term most utilized by others is Goffman's concept of keying. Goffman gives the term a lengthy definition in *Frame Analysis* but, in essence, keying provides a way for the individual to uncover the interactive meanings necessary to define and redefine events as they relate to the primary framework (1974, p. 45). Here Goffman submits the example of play fighting. According to Goffman, play fighting is not real but it can appear that way because it borrows aspects of real fights. Keying allows the individual to re-examine his/her interpretation of the borrowed elements of real fighting to make sense of those in a new context.

processes of social movements' (2000, p. 37).

David Snow and his colleagues adopted Goffman's work as a point of departure, adapting the concepts of keying and primary frameworks to apply them to social movements in the landmark article "Frame Alignment Processes, Micromobilization, and Movement Participation" (Snow, Rockford, Worden, & Benford, 1986, p. 464). The authors' chief focus centers on "questions concerning the interpretation of grievances and their alignment with social movement organizations' goals and ideologies thus ignored or taken for granted" (Snow et al., 1986, p. 466).

In terms of movement participation, Snow et al. outline four framing processes: frame bridging, frame amplification, frame extension, and frame transformation (1986, p. 467). The authors go on to suggest that each process is associated with a particular type of movement. During my analysis I will demonstrate how the FCEST has utilized aspects of each of the four framing processes in order to successfully present justice as a frame over the more than ten years of the organizations existence.

I believe that the methods and concepts outlined by Snow et al. can go a long way in uncovering the mobilization and recruitment strategies of the FCEST. Nevertheless, there are others who doubt the usefulness of frame analysis. In "What A Good Idea! Frames and Ideologies in Social Movement," Pamela E. Oliver writes, "We've failed to truly link the ideological with the lived experience. We often use frame as a synonym for ideology and in doing so we've created ambiguous categories of analysis that is obstructing more than uncovering processes of social movements" (2000, p. 37).

Snow and Benford disagree with Oliver and make several points worth considering in a response to Oliver's article. First, Snow and Benford suggest that collective action frames are in fact made up of multiple ideologies (2000, p. 9). Second, the authors contend that frames and ideologies are not synonyms but rather, ideologies serve as a cultural tool that bridges the gap between belief and experience (Snow & Benford, 2000, p. 10). Finally, Snow and Benford propose that "Framing, in contrast to ideology, is a more readily empirically observable activity," rooted in social action (2000, p. 11). While I agree that social scientists must be aware of the potential to obscure findings through an oversaturation of frame analysis, I believe it is still one of the best theories available for connecting ideology and action through direct observation and analysis. One specific way the FCEST has successfully used the frame of justice to mobilize the masses is through its interaction with media outlets which I will explore using a modified Critical Discourse Analysis approach.

Joel Sherzer states, "Discourse is the most broadest, comprehensive level of linguistic form, content, and use" (1987, p. 305). Within the social sciences, the study of discourse frequently serves as a central component for bridging the gap between language and culture. Nevertheless, the development of the diagnostically based framework known as critical discourse analysis (CDA) has only emerged in the last two decades.

CDA began being utilized by researchers in the 1980's to evaluate interactions of power and inequality within language. Pioneers in the newly developed school consisted of a number of scholars, including well known

researchers such as Fairclough (1985), Wodak (2007), and Dijk (1993). These intellectuals worked with a convergence of theories in order to create a multifaceted approach of discourse analysis. According to Wodak, the purpose of CDA was to analyze the structured relationships of power, dominance, and control as displayed through language (as cited in Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000).

Blommaert and Bulcaen (2000) maintain Fairclough's (1992) work titled *Discourse and Social Change* arguably provides the most comprehensive methodological guide for conducting discourse analysis. In this groundbreaking work, Fairclough outlines a three-dimensional system for performing CDA. The first dimension concentrates on an analysis of texts, with a particular focus on concrete features of discourse (i.e. metaphors, modalities, schematas, etc.). Fairclough's second dimension is characterized by Blommaert and Bulcaen (2000, p. 448) as a discourse-as-discursive practice approach. Certain aspects of Fairclough's second analytical level provide useful insights for the type of assessments I want to make, particularly his ideas surrounding the ways in which statements are omitted, selected for, and changed (Fairclough, 1992, pp. 3-4; Fairclough & Mauranen, 1998, pp. 89-119).

However, it was in Fairclough's third component of analysis that I found the chief source of inspiration for analysis. Fairclough's third dimension of CDA analysis is "discourse-as-social-practice, i.e. the ideological effects and hegemonic processes in which discourse is a feature" (Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000, p. 449). Approaching discourse analysis by concentrating my investigation on social and cultural practices provides an excellent organizational framework

conducive to the application of theoretical works on hegemony by Marx, Gramsci, and Chomsky (Fairclough & Mauranen, 1998). Utilizing Fairclough's third dimension enabled me to illuminate attempts at resistance to local modes of hegemonic power.

Methods

My research is qualitative, applied ethnography incorporating different methodological strategies to address the range of relevant issues and questions. I organized my thesis work into four phases, each with associated specific tasks, methodologies, and timetables. Phase I included non-participatory observational methods as well as library research. Library research included not only exploring the literature, but conducting extensive archival research in order to track the local media's coverage of environmental issues over the last 10 years. Observation techniques consisted of attending grassroots environmental meetings in Hattiesburg regularly for over two years while making notes on the proceedings.

The second phase of research was characterized by participant observation and informal interviews and overlapped with Phase I over a period of roughly two years. I became a member of the FCEST, paying dues and actively participating in group activities including lobbying trips to the state capital. Along the way, I got to know members of the group and established trust among emerging contacts.

Phase III-IV was undertaken following IRB approval. I carried out Phase III from March-May 2009 with a couple of late exceptions. During this time I

conducted formal interviews with members of the FCEST. The interviews were filmed and/or audio recorded after I obtained the participant's permission. Because of the sensitive nature of my research topic including the potential for litigation by community members, every step was taken to ensure the identity of participants was protected. The names of informants wishing to remain anonymous were changed and voice-recorded rather than videotaped. Others are comfortable having their real names used, as they had already voiced their views to the public through televised interviews or newspapers. In either instance, participants were fully informed of the potential risks associated with the projects before interviews began. Nine interviews of approximately 1 hour to 1½ hours were conducted. Special Presentations to City Council, meetings with state legislators, and organizational meetings of exceptional importance were also videotaped and transcribed. During the final stage of research, recorded interviews were transcribed and analyzed.

The use of the video camera has been mentioned several times in conjunction with fieldwork. As a tool for gaining entry into the FCEST, the camera was essential. In quite a unique fieldwork experience, the subjects of the study sought out an individual who would be willing to do film work and editing for use by the organization. I recognize there is a huge body of anthropological literature addressing the use of audio-visual theory and methodology in field research. However, the camera and its use are not the primary focus of the study. Film, at this time, is more a byproduct of the investigative process than an essential component. As such, an evaluation of its efficacy is outside the scope

of what you will read here, but I hope to return to the topic in subsequent research.

When I learned of the FCEST's goals I approached Sherri Jones asking for permission to film for the group while also conducting research for my thesis. The request was brought before the elected leadership of the organization and approval granted. I initially felt out of place and awkward lugging my equipment to meetings, but Mr. Jones introduced me to the remainder of the group, informed them of what I would be doing, and I began recording with the full support of the FCEST. At the conclusion of the meeting that very night I was approached by several members. The first woman to approach me said, "I want you to take down my name and come to my house with your camera because I have plenty to say. Can you be there this weekend?" (personal field notes, 2009). Several others followed offering names, numbers and addresses without any provocation. Another gentleman stopped me on my way to my car. "We are glad to have you young lady. We been waiting a long time to tell our story and get it out there. People need to know what's happening in their backyard" (personal field notes, 2009).

Occasionally I would get a phone call from Sherri Jones on a weeknight requesting I bring my camera the following day to a City Council meeting, a lobbying trip to Jackson, a meeting with community leaders, or a protest. One evening, following a tense exchange between the City Council and the FCEST, Marie Hibbler looked at me and said, "Did you get that on film honey? Good, cause we about to hold folks responsible for their words" (personal field notes,

2009). In fact, the only problem I encountered with the video camera in the field was running out of tape before everyone said what they wanted to say.

The welcoming attitude of the FCEST throughout the research process drew me in and facilitated the development of friendships between myself and members of the organization. My interactions with the group influenced the way I approached the writing of this thesis and the way I navigated the movement as a researcher. My first extended ethnographic fieldwork experience brought with it a host of methodological and ethical complexities, especially as I began to witness, up close, a community facing serious injustices and discriminatory policies.

Over time I became a part of the movement I was studying. The tension between my role as researcher and advocate prompted a line of questioning that went something like this. What are my motivations here? Can I be content with remaining only an observer and if I engage, to what degree? What are my biases? Am I becoming too emotionally connected to the organization and the movement? Where do my obligations and responsibilities as researcher end and my duty as a human being begin?

The debate surrounding anthropology, advocacy, and activism is an important one that strikes at the very heart of how we conduct research. I know some within the discipline argue against engaged, activist anthropology on the grounds that such an approach produces unviable research. However, Seta M. Low and Sally Engle Merry maintain this is an assertion guided by the "expectation that anthropological work be scientific, objective, and neutral rather

than humanistic and personal" (2010, p. 213). I do not believe it has to be one or the other. I believe we can achieve both in a way that allows room for everyone at the table while simultaneously preserving the integrity of anthropology. Furthermore, I support the argument that research of the nature described has always been a part of our discipline's history.

According to Barbara Johnston, "the call for a socially relevant action anthropology echoes across the generations" (2010, p. 245). American anthropology has a strong tradition of advocacy concerning critical social issues exemplified in the classic research of Franz Boas, Ruth Benedict, and Margaret Mead (Low and Merry, 2010, p. 204). Those anthropologists were followed by Laura Nader, Eric Wolf, and Dell Hymes who all called for a reinvention of anthropology in the wake of Vietnam. Even Roy Rappaport joined the debate in 1986 when he shared a new vision for the American Anthropological Association that would promote an organizational agenda aimed at creating "socially proactive forces with social problem-oriented task forces" (Johnston, 2010, p. 245). The question for modern anthropologists is how we answer the historical challenge of our colleagues. "To work in the public interest is an honor, a duty, and at times an intensely problematic burden that demands explicit attention to the social terms and potential ramifications of engagement" (Johnston, 2010, p. 235). Shannon Speed (2006) maintains that there will always be tensions between our methods of analysis and our ethical commitments but an engaged, activist anthropology centered on collaboration necessitates those tensions be

produced (Little, 2011). Furthermore, by visibly addressing biases and

dealt with up front and included as a productive and analytically beneficial component of the research process.

It is important we also acknowledge the shared responsibility between the researcher and the subjects of our research. When I committed to make a short video for the FCEST's use in activist campaigns, I aligned my solidarity with the group, with their goals, and with their desire to have a direct role in defining narratives. That does not mean the empirical value of the research produced became diminished. On the contrary, "an activist engagement with research subjects, at minimum, demonstrates a shared desire to see their rights respected, a promise to involve them in decisions about the research, and a commitment to contribute something to their struggle through one's research and analysis" (Speed, 2006, p. 71). The four-field approach when paired with engaged, participatory and collaborative research of interdisciplinary proportion promotes an anthropology that "has the potential to move beyond documentation and toward the recognition of culpability, reparation, and ideally, the experience of a meaningful remedy" (Johnston, 2010, p. 244).

There will always be contradictions. We are imperfect humans studying other imperfectly nuanced humans who live in increasingly complex and interconnecting systems. Our research will never be purely objective, but "moving across disciplinary space can, and commonly does, result in meaningful exposure to new epistemologies and practices, new angles of understanding, and even new conceptions of the boundaries" of knowledge and how it is produced (Little, 2011). Furthermore, by visibly addressing biases and

contradictions from the start we move closer and closer to the science we seek while all the while embracing the ethical responsibility we have as members of the human race.

I obviously cannot determine the direction of anthropology, but I can decide what path I will take as an anthropologist. I chose to embrace the role of an engaged, activist researcher and that is reflected in my writing. I approached this thesis inspired by one of the most well known activist anthropologists in our discipline's history, Margaret Mead. Mead made the reading of anthropological research accessible and desirable to the general public and as a result helped facilitate and inform discussions on social justice issues in mainstream society.

Mead famously said, "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed, citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has." Contributing to a positive change in the world is why I decided to go into anthropology to begin with. Following Mead's example, my goal as a writer was to present a collaborative piece of research that appeals to both anthropologists and those outside the discipline. Setha M. Low suggests writing in this manner is within the realm of possibility, but warns it is no easy task. "To be persuasive to the general public, narratives need to be straight forward and emotionally engaging. To be persuasive to an academic audience, they require nuance and intricacy" (Low and Merry, 2010, p. 213). I hope I have achieved some of both here.

CHAPTER II

TROUBLED WATERS: THE FCEST

Ms. Loreen Myers never missed a Wednesday. In fact, on many occasions during those first few months of attending FCEST meetings we sat right next to each other. She was a tiny, frail lady who remained quiet week after week save for the occasional nod of the head as she sat in the pew with her arms crossed. I was surprised when she approached me one week at St. James. She heard I was conducting interviews with members of the FCEST and wanted to know if I would drive out to her house to speak with her.

The following Saturday I pulled up to her home at the end of a narrow, dead end street and made my way to the front door of a structure that looked as if it might fold in on itself at any moment. I noted the irony of the dilapidated home juxtaposed with a well manicured lawn and colorful flower bed. Ms. Myers invited me in and made small talk as I began setting up my equipment. A giant gust of winter wind blew through the gaping hole in the front door and gave me a chill. Loreen sat down on an old, cloth draped couch covered with stuffed animals and turned down the gospel music streaming from a small, hand-held radio.

"We was just normal people then, but we didn't know what was going on with all this stuff...We didn't know that the stuff that was there was harmful to people". Myers had raised her children on Eastside Avenue, an area where in recent years, the Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ) has removed more than 13,000 tons of contaminated soil. Despite assurances from MDEQ that the area no longer poses a threat, Ms. Myers is convinced the

damage has already been done. Loreen joined the FCEST at its founding more than ten years ago and continues going to meetings faithfully but one can see that her hope is waning. "Time is passing and it ain't waiting on nobody. And people are sick. A lot of people is leaving here...A lot of them sick from that. Like I say, all us living there now, we done got older".

In the weeks and months to come, member after member of the FCEST would echo Ms. Myers sentiments. As a group they believed they were getting sick and dying as a result of exposure to creosote contamination in their soil and groundwater. After more than ten years of fighting, the FCEST wanted results. However, before we get to that part of the story let us examine the circumstances that have brought the group to its current position.

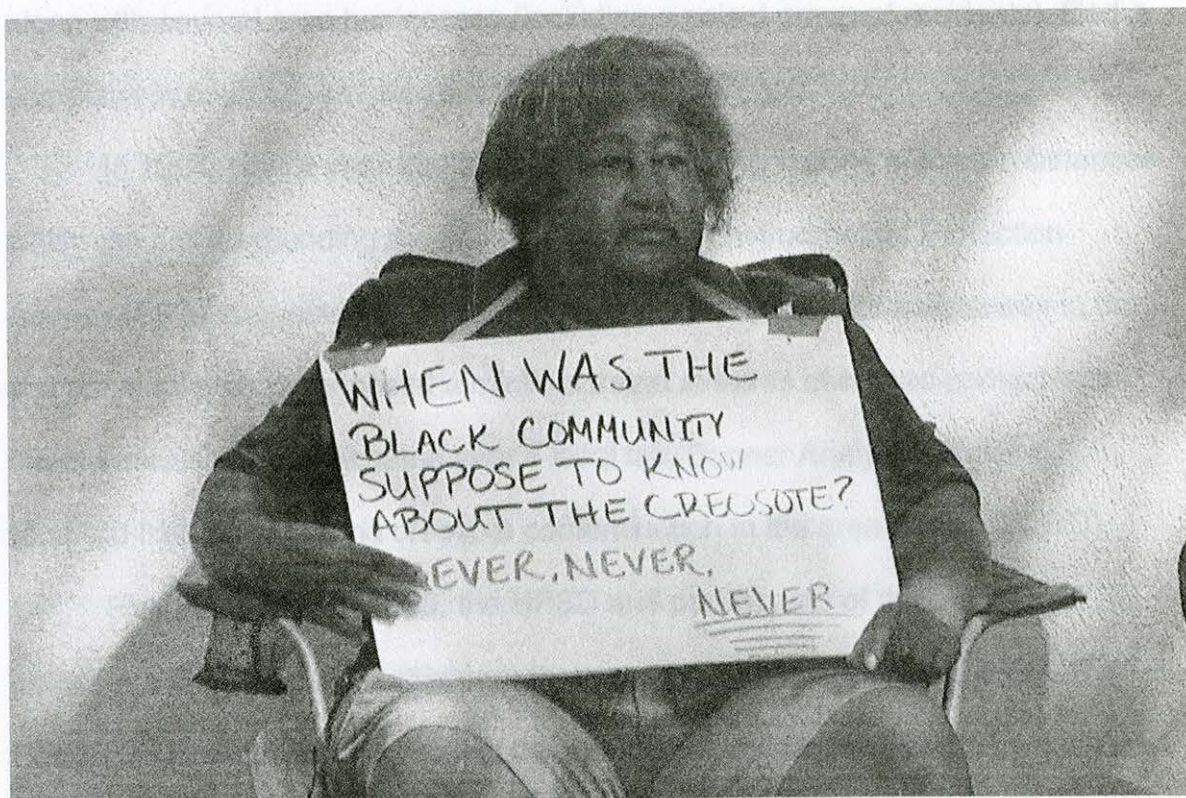


Figure 1. FCEST Member Protesting Toxic Contamination in East Hattiesburg

In April of 1965, after 30 years in operation (under a few names), the chemical company Kerr-McGee purchased American Creosoting and continued with ongoing operations. By 1978 the Hattiesburg Public School District (HPSD) had taken over management of the 16 section land where the company had been operating. In 1989, a group of Army Corps Engineers discovered creosote from the old Gulf States plant (at the time known as Kerr-McGee) along Gordon's Creek and near the Courtesy Ford site but tests of the soil were not conducted at the time (Mees, 2007C). Three years later, the Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ) informed the HPSD that flood control work should be conducted on the land. With knowledge of the presence of creosote and growing concern over potential liability issues, the Hattiesburg School District, along with several area businesses (including a select group of residents), filed a complaint in court against Kerr-McGee (Mees, 2007A).

In 1994, over a year and a half later, conflicting reports of toxic substances within the soil surrounding the site emerged. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) suggested there were some potentially harmful substances in the soil but in all probability posed a minimal threat in terms of human contact with the chemicals. Later that same year a local lab, Bonner Analytical Testing, reported that there was no creosote contamination in the area (Mees, 2007D).

Five years later in 1999, the HPSD and participants of the original creosote suit agreed to a settlement that would not be finalized until 2003. The FCEST was created in the wake of the settlement and began work to investigate potential litigation as well as explore the possibility that their neighborhood had

been exposed for years to toxic chemicals. Activity waned over the next two years until 2001 when two lawyers attempted to cut deals with select residents on the East side (area to the East of the railroad tracks running through the center of the old creosote production site). According to residents living on the East side, one of the lawyers offered members of the community \$240 to settle with Kerr-McGee. Several individuals took the checks but many others did not. I spoke to at least two residents who accepted the checks and both relayed similar stories to me. Each resident said they were going through difficult financial times and Christmas was drawing near. A lawyer approached the two respective community members offering each the \$240 but framing the discussion in a way that convinced both individuals that the checks were actually more of a down payment on what would end up being a larger pay-out following litigation against Kerr-McGee. In 2002 a group of residents from East Hattiesburg attempted to enter the lawsuit with HPSD against Kerr-McGee but were denied their request (Mees, 2007C).

In January 2003 individuals who were participants in the original suit against Kerr-McGee divided money from the seventeen million dollar settlement. It is worth noting that the amount of the settlement was not disclosed by Kerr-McGee until 2007. The dispersal of settlement funds marked a significant moment as many African American residents came to realize they were virtually ignored as stakeholders. Furthermore, beneficiaries of the settlement were predominantly White. For members of the FCEST the case proved to be yet

another example of race based discrimination. FCEST member Ruth Lockett said,

This is my point of view. I talked to one White lady one day. She heard me talking about the creosote. This White lady come up to me and told me. She said, "Well they done paid all of us on the other side of the railroad track over there." She said, "I wonder how come they ain't paying ya'll on that side?" I looked at her and I said, "I'm the wrong color". That's just what I told her. I said, "Baby we been fighting all our lives and we ain't got nowhere yet. We still fighting." (personal field notes, 2009)

Ms. Lockett's frustration is echoed by the FCEST on their website. "Whites not only received a payday but a tax relief as White leaseholders received reduced taxes" (*Coalition of Communities for Environmental Justice*, 2011). Conversely, African American leaseholders living in the affected area had to face property restrictions as a result of the contamination. The racial tensions displayed here will go on to figure prominently in the framing of the social movement born in the wake of the settlement.

From 2003-2007 the FCEST focused their efforts on collecting legal documents, getting word out into the community about what was happening, writing letters to state legislators, appearing at City Council meetings, and protesting select gatherings of city officials. Sherri Jones, one of the founding members, stated the group's complaint time and time again. "The citizens aren't asking for anything White citizens didn't get and nothing they don't deserve" (personal field notes, 2007; Mees, 2007B). After four years, some people

actually began listening, particularly when Tronox (formerly Kerr-McGee) publically disclosed how much money was doled out to the Hattiesburg Public School District, several businesses, and some residents during the 2003 settlement.

Around the same time Tronox settlement figures were being released to the public, MDEQ was busy moving more than 13,000 tons of creosote contaminated soil from the neighborhood off Eastside Avenue in East Hattiesburg. Questions surrounding the methodology utilized by MDEQ to carry out the clean up prompted city officials to step in and promise residents a new round of testing would be carried out in order to ensure public safety (Mees, 2007E, 2007F). By the end of 2007, the City of Hattiesburg entered into a \$60,000 contract with Apex Environmental Consultants in order to make good on its promise to residents.

On May 19, 2008 Apex representative Bryan Jones presented his findings to the Mayor and City Council. Jones asserted that the presence of creosote in East Hattiesburg soil was minimal and posed no threat to residents. However, environmental expert, Tennie White, strongly disagreed with Apex's conclusion. Ms. White spent her career as an environmental consultant and is currently president of Troubleshooters, Inc. based in Jackson, MS. She was introduced to the FCEST through a colleague, Isaac Edwards, who originally placed a bid with the City of Hattiesburg for the contract awarded to Apex. Members of the FCEST did not trust Apex and voiced their concerns to Edwards who in turn suggested they consult with White. Soon after, White was hired by the FCEST as a quality

control measure aimed at keeping Apex and the City of Hattiesburg accountable. Following the release of Apex's findings, White made a presentation of her own to City Council on June 2, 2008 (Jones, 2008A, 2008B).

During the presentation she charged that Apex failed to follow EPA standard protocol, watered down samples, and mislead the City Council. "It's the elephant in the room. There's creosote in Hattiesburg and everybody knows it" (White, personal field notes, 2008). White concluded her presentation with the following criticism: "The people that should have protected and informed the at-risk citizens at best were criminally ignorant of their responsibilities or at worst were criminally negligent. So simply, because these people were poor and Black, it's all right that they live surrounded by environmental contamination and in harm's way?" (White, personal field notes, 2008). White's comments led to a fiery exchange between council members and the FCEST.

However, by mid June 2008, city officials changed their tone. Mayor Johnny Dupree publicly stated that East Hattiesburg residents had not been fairly compensated by Tronox. In a letter to Tronox CEO Tom Adams, Dupree writes, "The City of Hattiesburg and the FCEST's goal is the same and that is to determine if the properties still inhabited by Hattiesburg residents are safe" (Jones, 2008A, 2008B). The FCEST continued to receive increased support in September of 2008 when Councilman Dave Ware and Henry Naylor asked that Bryan Jones of Apex be recalled to City Hall to explain potential conflicts and contradictions in his support. Repeated attempts to reach Apex eventually led the

(Jones, 2009A). Two months later in November of 2008, the EPA admitted that

company to release a statement saying Bryan Jones no longer worked for the lab (personal field notes, 2008; Jones, 2008B).

In the wake of the Apex debacle, the FCEST made contact with Touro Law School in New York. A group of law students led by instructor and lawyer Tracy McGaugh, reviewed all documentation associated with Tronox and advised the FCEST on their viable legal options. McGaugh unfortunately had to break the news to residents that they would never be able to get any portion of the original \$17,000,000 Kerr-McGee settlement. Instead she advised the group, to collect stories of grievances, have White continue to review toxicology reports, explore hiring a lawyer for a new class action lawsuit, and pursue legislative change with regards to state environmental policies. She closed her presentation with these words of hope for the FCEST: "Light comes in the morning. There will be light for this community before this is over. You need only stand steady, stand with each other. Stand in what you know. Stand in who you know and do what you know is right. We have joined this fight with you. We will stay with you and we will do what we can" (personal field notes, 2008).

The FCEST took advantage of the Touro Report and spent the next ten months reorganizing their efforts and developing a plan of action based on McGaugh's suggestions. Nevertheless, by September of 2009 the group was once again making headlines after they reported the suspected presence of creosote seeping from a monitoring well off of Pine Street. City and county officials refused to confirm if the residue found by the FCEST was creosote (Jones, 2009A). Two months later in November of 2009, the EPA admitted that

the 2007 creosote tests performed by Bryan Jones of Apex were mishandled. Steve Irving, Louisiana environmental lawyer and consultant for the FCEST) believes the problem runs deeper than the lab conducting the tests. He said, "The APEX effort was a joke at best...I don't think the problem is at the lab, however as they did what they were told to do. The problem is with the testing itself and the instructions that the lab was given. This was an effort to not find anything" (Jones, 2009B).

Just when momentum appeared to be swinging in favor of the FCEST, the tide began to turn again. In January of 2010 the EPA insisted there was no public health threat due to contamination in East Hattiesburg. At the same time, the federal organization said could not confirm or deny the presence of creosote in the monitoring well along Gordon's Creek saying an analysis of the residue found there would be needed (Jones, 2009A). A second blow came to the FCEST the following month when MDEQ confirmed that the residue was in fact creosote but vehemently denied that it posed any risk to residents whatsoever (Jones, 2010B, 2010C).

The FCEST once again had to take a step back and reorganize. The group spent the remainder of 2010 strengthening ties with sister groups in cities all over Mississippi facing similar environmental battles. On the local front the organization engaged in various acts of community service. The FCEST even facilitated the creation of the Pine Belt Minority Worker Training Program which trained twenty-two men from the community in construction, demolition,

ahead. "You know I never thought I would get into environmental justice work,

hazardous material cleanup and weatherization through a grant they were awarded by the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences.

As 2011 reached a midpoint, members of the FCEST were once again hard at work. Their efforts then involved a corporation mentioned at the beginning of this study: Hercules, Inc. In May 2011, the EPA ordered testing and clean ups on the property of this former chemical giant. The call for testing by the EPA has also helped repair strained relations between the FCEST and the Mobile-Bouie Neighborhood Association as the two groups began working together once again.

The FCEST has certainly seen its share of ups and downs over the last decade, but it appears as if things are once again looking up for the group. The organization was recently presented a signed proclamation by State Representative Greg Holloway for their dedication to environmental issues. The proclamation “promotes the establishment of a citizen’s environmental commission to protect Mississippi communities from exposure to environmental hazards created by industry” and establishes the relevancy of environmental justice as a human rights issue (Bass, 2011). At the time of writing, members were enjoying their most immediate successes but were quick to note that their work is far from done. When I asked about the future plans of the group Marie Hibbler stated, “The message hasn’t changed because nothing has changed, and until it does...well, we’ll still be here fighting” (personal correspondence, 2011). Environmental analyst Tennie White also acknowledges the tough road ahead: “You know I never thought I would get into environmental justice work,

but it's looking as if it will probably become my life's work. [laughing] Someone, will write a book one day on the volumes of letters I have written to MDEQ" (personal field notes, 2008).

Direct County Environmental Support Team I have had the pleasure of getting to know is Ms. Bobie Denard. For Ms. Bobie the industrial drainage ditches in East Hattiesburg were a part of her everyday existence. She remembers playing in the ditches surrounding her childhood home at Roberson Place and next to her grandparents home on Ruby Ave. She also recalls playing in the ditches around Mary Bethune Elementary where she attended school, and even recollects their presence later on at her first adult home near the Dixie Pine Plant. The ditches had always been there, a part of her neighborhood, her landscape, but she was unaware of the potential danger to chemical exposure until recent years.

Sitting with me in her den, she confesses that the memory of those ditches weigh heavily on her now. "It causes stress to me because I'm sick a lot. That keeps me under a lot of stress and I don't know what's making me sick like that. If the doctors can't tell you why you getting all this happening to you every year, you know... it's got to be something." Ms. Denard suffered from rashes, headaches, and severe stomach problems throughout her childhood. She is a breast cancer survivor, and still has significant health issues as an adult. While she admits that she cannot prove exposure to creosote from the ditches and groundwater are responsible, she believes they are the root of her ailments.

She sets down her coffee cup to speak. "We need to live in a safe environment. Maybe this will cut down on some of this sickness and rashes

CHAPTER III

"NOT IN MY BACKYARD": CONCEPTUALIZING ENVIRONMENT

One member of the Forrest County Environmental Support Team I have had the pleasure of getting to know is Ms. Bobie Denard. For Ms. Bobie the industrial drainage ditches in East Hattiesburg were a part of her everyday existence. She remembers playing in the ditches surrounding her childhood home at Robertson Place and next to her grandparents home on Ruby Ave. She also recalls playing in the ditches around Mary Bethune Elementary where she attended school, and even recollects their presence later on at her first adult home near the Dixie Pine Plant. The ditches had always been there, a part of her neighborhood, her landscape, but she was unaware of the potential danger to chemical exposure until recent years.

Sitting with me in her den, she confesses that the memory of those ditches weigh heavily on her now. "It causes stress to me because I'm sick a lots. That keeps me under a lot of stress and I don't know what's making me sick like that. If the doctors can't tell you why you getting all this happening to you every year, you know...it's got to be something." Ms. Denard suffered from rashes, headaches, and severe stomach problems throughout her childhood. She is a breast cancer survivor, and still has significant health issues as an adult. While she admits that she cannot prove exposure to creosote from the ditches and groundwater are responsible, she believes they are the root of her ailments.

She sets down her coffee cup to speak: "We need to live in a safe environment. Maybe this will cut down on some of this sickness and rashes

people is having around here. I don't know if there is creosote here on this property or not but it's pure, black soil here on my land. Pure black. So if I had the opportunity to move out of this environment, sure I would be more than happy to." Ms. Denard is not alone. Like other members of the FCEST she has made a connection between the memories of her environment, the degradation of her neighborhood, and perceptions of personal health risk associated with chemical exposure. Understanding the relationship of these components is essential to understanding how the FCEST operates, recruits and mobilizes. Utilizing symbolic landscape theory within a political ecological mold provides a useful framework for evaluating the conceptualization of the East Hattiesburg environment by FCEST members.



Figure 2. East Hattiesburg Home in Community Where Creosote is Present

In 1990 Eric Wolf, previously known for coining the term, political ecology, called for anthropologists to be more cumulative in their research by drawing on the “work of our predecessors to raise new questions” concerning culture (p. 224). Within our sub-disciplines we have made tremendous headway in fulfilling Wolf’s challenge. However, in the process we have often become engaged “in a private life centered about nothing but itself” while all the while paying lip service to holistic methodologies, but if we are to be truly holistic than we must reach further than the four fields of anthropology and engage in truly collaborative research. Neglecting to do will result in a sub-disciplinary (as well as interdisciplinary) chasm that must be bridged if we are to maximize the possibility of contributing to a body of knowledge that will provide feasible solutions to problems rather than being merely descriptive. Anthropologist Arturo Escobar (1999) echoed Wolf’s sentiments nine years later, positing that political ecological research methods have proven to be insufficient in addressing questions of nature. Nevertheless, some interesting trends developing in political ecology in recent years aimed at improving its ability to do just that. The boundaries and approaches of political ecology have been expanded in both its traditional context within “developing” nations and most recently in its application to ethnographic studies within the United States (McCarthy 2002; Walker, 2003).

McCarthy (2005) points out that nearly all political ecology work has been focused on small scale producers in rural “developing” countries. “Predominant themes in such research have included the causal relationships between social and environmental degradation in smallholder agriculture, conflicts over the

creation and maintenance of protected 'natural' areas, and the influence of often specious beliefs and narratives concerning environmental conditions and changes" (McCarthy, 2005, p. 953). McCarthy goes on to call for a First World political ecology arguing that the broad themes above are not unique to the developing world and maintaining that environmental studies in the U.S. could benefit from and contribute to political ecology. He continues, pointing out the value of its use within the realm of social movements, specifically environmental justice movement studies, as they both have overlapping interests (McCarthy, 2005, 2002).

Both traditional political ecological research and environmental justice research focus on the "intersections of multiple forms of marginality and vulnerability" and are "critical of the undue narrowness of many mainstream environmentalist discourses and agendas" (McCarthy, 2005 p. 953).

Environmental injustice is often buried among ideas about the social construction of nature, the effects of neoliberal, capitalist processes, and inequality. In regards to grassroots environmentalism in Hattiesburg, political economic processes (via corporate polluters, the bureaucracy in city administration and environmental regulatory agencies) have produced disproportionate socio-economic inequalities through an accumulation of toxic pollution in predominantly low-income African American communities leading to environmental injustice. As such, the application of a political ecological framework informs discussions of environmental justice from a broader socio-economic and socio-political perspective.

Peter Walker (2003) agrees that a political ecological framework can offer valuable contributions to environmental studies in the United States for some of the same reasons mentioned above. Despite the similarities between studies of developing and industrialized cases, he maintains a re-evaluation of some of the problems and assertions inherent in expanding the theory must be addressed. As we extend the reach of political ecology Walker insists we must continue to evaluate how its various analytical approaches can be re-assessed to be most applicable in an industrialized capitalist setting as a means to answer context specific questions surrounding topics like the formation of moral economies, "the manipulation of mass media culture (e.g. environmentalists and anti-environmentalists who use 'guerilla theater' to attract media to convey strategic discourses)," and the "production of strategic discourses" (Walker, 2003, p. 11).

Also, political ecology has always emphasized local knowledge (McCarthy, 2005). However, in places like Hattiesburg, Mississippi, locals are "for the most part, fully integrated into capitalist modes of production *unlike* many African, Asian or Latin American" groups only partially "integrated into global capitalism and tied to place by histories of sustained practices" (Walker, 2003, p. 21). In order to move forward political ecology researchers will have to consider ways to revise our understandings of local-ness to reflect those differences.

A second concern when widening the scope of political ecology speaks to an internal contradiction contained in current political ecological research trends. McCarthy advocates a First World political ecology. However, the distinction itself is challenging in that it inevitably produces a binary between First and Third

worlds. Walker believes a regional emphasis to the application of political ecological theory in the United States “can retain the greatest strengths of recent political ecology in revealing the importance of local-scale dynamics while situating these dynamics within the broader scales of regional (and global) processes- providing greater coherence while avoiding such problematic frames as the ‘first’ and ‘third’ world” (Walker, 2003, p. 7).

In addition to the difficulties of overcoming disquieting binaries, Walker presents one final internal problem intrinsic in political ecology. For all its positive points “political ecology is also threatened by its own success: as it has thrived, it has expanded in so many directions simultaneously that its coherence as a field of study- on shaky ground from the start- has been called again into question” (Walker, 2003, p. 11). Indeed, some argue that in seeking to extend its reach political ecology has almost dissipated itself over the last fifteen years (Walker, 2003).

Utilizing political ecology in its current, “incoherent state” does not take away from its strengths but rather dictates that it be informed by other theoretical frames (Walker, 2003, p. 22). Drawing from McCarthy and Walker’s insights, I intend to apply political ecology situated in a Southern United States historical perspective to the study of the FCEST’s environmental justice work. A successful argument for utilizing political ecology as the central theory of this thesis can be made. However, because I am working with political ecology in a relatively new context I chose to employ it as part of an analytical tool kit and a supplement to a multi-theoretical approach rather than making it the dominant

theoretical force present. Landscape theory, social movement theory, and discourse analysis represent the other components of the tool kit. Political ecology provides the structural undertone for my research, but in its current incarnation it benefits from a pairing with other theories. While the other theories utilized in this study are informed by political ecology, I argue that the strong points of political ecological theory can simultaneously be illuminated when integrated with an interdisciplinary purpose in mind.

The result of a multi-theoretical approach admittedly removes some of the depth that each theory independently could have produced if utilized in isolation. At the same time a multi-faceted style of research draws on the power of each respective theory by shedding light on the intricacies of ethnographic examples from the environmental justice movement in Hattiesburg, Mississippi. I believe the approach I am advocating strengthens my ability to broadly analyze the role of race, political economy, culture, discourse, local knowledge, and the concept of landscape in relation to the FCEST.

Culture. Nature. Landscape. What do the debates have in common? All three are centered on terms that have held a host of meanings in academic literature and popular usage. Taken together they are expressions employed for explaining and organizing the intangible impressions of a tangible world. They assign humans and human activity a certain degree of boundedness congruent to social scientific analysis and discourse. Just as society is made up of individuals while individuals encompass society, so the circular thought behind humans and the environment in which we live.

The concept of culture and the discipline of anthropology developed alongside one another. As a result, one need not look far to find research and theory dedicated to unlocking and defining its characteristics. In 1952 Alfred Kroeber and Clyde Kluckhohn published their ground-breaking work, *Culture: A Critical Review of Concepts and Definitions*. Here, Kroeber and Kluckhohn amassed nearly two hundred definitions of the word. A little more than two decades later L. L. Langness (1974) provided a historical review of culture and its development alongside American anthropology in his introductory text, *The Study of Culture*.

The late 20th century saw the arrival of Adam Kuper's (1999) seminal study on the subject, *Culture: The Anthropologists' Account*, where the author traces the concept from its German Romanticist roots on to its acceptance as a focus of American social scientific inquiry via Talcott Parsons. Kuper's insistence that politics, economics, and biological processes be considered when analyzing culture, is evidence of just how far the discipline has come from the traditional definitions of culture laid out by early anthropologists such as E.B. Tylor (1871). Tylor famously defined culture as, "that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society" (Tylor, 1871, p. 1). However, anthropologists today realize the subject of our inquiry, is as nuanced as the approaches we utilize to answer our questions.

Some of the same difficulties in defining and studying culture apply to nature. As discussed above, early academic treatments of nature in political

ecology were centered on questions of its existence outside the realm of human and historical interaction. Whether or not there has ever been a pristine environment in East Hattiesburg is irrelevant because, even if it did exist, it no longer does. Biomass has combined with commercial industry producing a world forged in rivers and runoffs, mud and metal, biological adaptation and man-made chemical compounds. Nature is essentially a product of culture with a simultaneous biological existence (as championed by Escobar). As such, nature is defined as an environmental stage for social activity, shaped by, yet mutually influencing humans (see Pollan, 2001).

Landscape will be used in much the same way as nature with one added component. Within this ethnographic study, landscape *is* nature in the instance it is observed and conceptualized by humans. For “Landscapes have an unquestionably material presence, yet they come into being only at the moment of their apprehension by an external observer, and thus have a complex poetics and politics” (Cosgrove, 2006, p. 50). Cosgrove suggests that as a point of inquiry for geographers, the term landscape was attempted to be situated as a scientific term, but the implied subjective meaning of the name tied to human interaction became largely unavoidable (Cosgrove, 1984, p. 17).

Anthropologists by necessity, work in units of analysis, striving for the highest level of scientific objectivity while acknowledging the potentially subjective underpinnings of our work. The ethnographic perspective was born out of a natural history legacy that early anthropologists used to place groups in neat, bounded packages for the purpose inquiry. However, over time we have

come to realize that we must approach culture in more fluid terms. The goal of scientific objectivity must be maintained while limiting the influence of our own biases thereby dictating a more nuanced approach to modern research within a structured continuum. Anthropological investigation often uncovers aspects of society such as processes of power and politics that have fallen through the cracks altogether. In order to provide the most completely accurate snapshot of a society in a given moment in time we must be open to numerous layers of interpretation and embrace multi-faceted approaches to our work.

In the case of East Hattiesburg environmentalism, I believe landscape theory informed by political ecology can provide the necessary structure for a precise evaluation without being too rigid. The symbolic and cultural dimensions of landscape theory posited by Cosgrove and others like him can be of particular use to anthropologists tackling flexible environmental questions. Whereas people and cultures do not exist in neat and tidy packages, neither do the nuances of the land where they reside (Lowenthal, 1962, pp. 19-23).

The idea of landscape is at once malleable and fixed, fluid and bound (Cosgrove, 1985, pp. 45-47). It lends itself to social inquiry by allowing prudent questions of human/environmental interaction to be examined as the issues uncovered by it "point to the heart of social and historical theory: issues of individual and collective action, of objective and subjective knowing, of idealist and materialist explanation" (Cosgrove, 1984, p. 38).

Cosgrove goes to great lengths to describe artists' depiction and translation or understanding of landscape over time (1984, pp. 20-27). I would

argue that much like an artist, individuals living in East Hattiesburg communities paint pictures of landscapes come and gone in historically situated and contextualized memories. Memory is a particularly strong agent here as historical floods have literally erased many physical photos of earlier landscapes. Collectively constructed conceptualizations of neighborhood landscapes thus become living histories. In the words of J. Berger (1976, pp. 13, 15): "Sometimes a landscape seems to be less a setting for the life of its inhabitants than a curtain behind which their struggles, achievements, and accidents take place. For those who, with the inhabitants, are behind the curtains, landmarks are no longer geographic but also biographical and personal" (1976, pp. 13, 15). The same holds true for the FCEST. Active members' recollections of landmarks combine to help form a collective memory or snapshot of their neighborhood, where it has been, and where it should be going.

In interviewing members of the FCEST I uncovered four commonly shared themes surrounding recalled memories of community landscapes. The first regular theme to emerge is an awareness of the invasive presence of the ditches despite recreational activities in and around the channels. A second theme to materialize dealt with the odor coming from the ditches. The third topic provided evidence for the physical embodiment of environmental contamination in the form of rashes when exposed to soil either directly in the ditch or soil that had at some point been saturated by water from the ditch. The final subject surrounded a series of positive reminiscences of individual and community gardens that have

residents. The most frequent health issues recalled in relationship to the ditches

been transformed to negative memories upon learning of the potential of exposure to creosote in recent years.

As for the ditches, resident after resident spoke with displeasure about how close the ditches were to their homes. Several interviewees told me the pipes and trenches ran right through their yards, flooding gardens and children's play areas each time it rained. One woman brought to mind, "Everybody ate crawfish, out them ditches. All that stuff, hooked up there together. From the top, it goes to the bottom, spreads out. We don't know where those ditches had went" (personal field notes, 2009). Another inhabitant said, "There was a clothesline in the back of the house and that BIG OL' ditch was there, right in the backyard! My children used to play in that ditch" (personal field notes, 2009).

While members of the FCEST expressed anger at the proximity of industrial drainage ditches to their living quarters, memories of the odors associated with the chemical conduits were more abundant than anything. Resident Carly Wilson said, "Sometime the smell would get in the air, especially with the rain. You could smell some of it and they'd say its something in the air. That's all they'd tell you" (personal field notes, 2009). The noxious fumes made many sick. Ms. Loreen Myers was among them. "I would always have a headache and oh, Lord you could smell that [creosote] everywhere. Early in the morning sometime it'd be smelling so terrible outside" (personal field notes, 2009).

Headaches were just one of many ailments reported by East Hattiesburg residents. The most frequent health issues recalled in relationship to the ditches

were rashes. One hundred percent of interviewees living in affected areas reported persistent rash outbreaks personally or on children and spouses. Multiple members of Bobie Denard's family were afflicted. Remembering her childhood she said, "When I was little I used to break out all the time with rashes and things and my brother did the same thing and my grandmother, you know. I still break out sometime in a rash. I been going to the doctors. The doctors don't know what's causing it. What's causing me to break out like that?" (personal field notes, 2009). Another resident recounted her suspicions in a similar story about her son: "Yeah he had big heavy dark stains all up on his arms. The doctor say he was allergic to the grass. That's what he said...don't let him play in the grass, but the grass was coming out of that ground! [gesturing to the area near the ditch in her backyard]" (personal field notes, 2009).

Rashes, odors, and the aesthetic of the ditches themselves all garnered disapproval, hurt, and anger by FCEST members, but these memories were negative even before the news of creosote became public knowledge. What surprised residents and elicited the most notable outrage was the possibility of decades of creosote exposure through polluted groundwater and soil, particularly the ingestion of vegetables grown in contaminated earth around East Side Avenue. "You know we drank the water from there. All that over there. We didn't know that the soil was contaminated because they had beautiful gardens out there every year...I couldn't believe that when they was telling us about the soil being contaminated with that creosote because we had done eat too much out of there," exclaimed one elderly member of the FCEST (personal field notes, 2009).

According to area residents, a handful of people cultivated huge gardens off of East Side Avenue and most everyone living nearby either bought vegetables or were given vegetables from the garden as a supplement to their own groceries. Ms. Loreen Myers often ate produce from the large plots. "Oh yes, there were huge gardens with some of the best peas you ever had. Other stuff too. Greens, okra, butterbeans, and plums. We ate all that for years. Except we didn't know we was also poisoning ourselves" (personal field notes, 2009). MDEQ later removed contaminated soil from the area where the garden stood and even shut down a restaurant called Down Home Cooking in the direct vicinity. MDEQ documents support the fact that the area alongside East Side Ave at the very least was contaminated, and at most, continues to be. While anecdotal evidence from community members is strong, unequivocal proof tying contamination to other ditches has yet to be obtained at the time of writing. Nevertheless the substantiated proof supporting contamination on East Side Avenue appears to be enough to affect the collective memory of FCEST members and transform the way in which residents conceptualize their environment both past and present.

Tim Ingold maintains a "place owes its character to the experiences it affords to those who spend time there- to the sights, sounds and indeed smells that constitute its specific ambience" (2009, p. 62). East Hattiesburg inhabitants in the affected areas have been afforded the experience of pollution and industrial encroachment and as a result have assigned a state of disarray to their neighborhood. As such, perceptions and memories of the environment have

been given a moral element by members of the FCEST who seek to reclaim the structured state of how things "should be" (prior to contamination) (Cosgrove, 1984, p. 104). The lingering presence of toxic industries and their legacy is seen as the root of community turmoil and thus immoral. Any person or agency hindering the re-establishment of order is viewed in a corrupt light thereby fostering an atmosphere of fear and authoritative distrust among residents who are left demanding action and justice as evidenced by the following comments from FCEST member Marie Hibbler.

How can people say it's [contamination] only on one side? See and that's another thing. The man said only one side of the track was tested, but over there by the school there is a house that used to be there that is no longer there because they found creosote in it. Now you mean to tell me that the creosote that was on one side of the track jumped alllllllllll the way over and landed on that one spot? Hmmm, how did that creosote from across the railroad track get to Townsend Street and nowhere else? Hmmm, makes you wonder. Creosote has got to be intelligent. It can go where it want to go. Creosote can think that way? Or, do we supposed to be ignorant enough to believe that creosote can be held back by a train track that says, "Don't come over on the other side"! (personal field notes, 2009).

after interviewing Ms. Hibbler, I accompanied her and a handful of FCEST members on a trip to the state capital in Jackson. There, as we walked around the inside of the elaborately decorated building, she told me why she continues on with the group. Pointing to a crack in the wall I had not noticed

CHAPTER IV

"CRACKS IN THE WALL": FRAMING JUSTICE

Marie Hibbler was one of the first individuals I got to know upon becoming active with the FCEST. She invited me over to her house to film one weekend. I was nervous about how the interview would go but Marie immediately put my nerves at ease when she answered the door with a tiny dog named Godzilla in one hand and a smile on her face. "Come on in. I'm so glad you could make it" she said. Ms. Hibbler sat down on a love seat positioned against a backdrop of family photos and spoke: "I'm used to having a hard life. I've been struggling all my life."

Marie said she suffered from a multitude of health problems ranging from trouble breathing to persistent headaches, to emotional trauma. She attributed all to the toxic chemicals she believed she had been exposed to for years. "Just recently a friend of mine passed. She lived over there in a house and you can still see all the pipes that came from those ditches and brought that mess into her backyard. I haven't been able to bring myself to drive by there because it was just too hard...too many memories [crying] but I finally drove by the other day and I just thought to myself that I hoped her death wasn't for nothing. I hope I see justice before I die."

Shortly after interviewing Ms. Hibbler, I accompanied her and a handful of FCEST members on a trip to the state capital in Jackson. There, as we walked around the inside of the elaborately decorated building, she told me why she continues on with the group. Pointing to a crack in the wall I had not noticed

before she said, "You see, I look around here and see all these lovely flowers and columns and decorations...not a speck of dust anywhere, but right there in the middle of it all...a crack in the wall." She went on to explain to me how justice was like that crack in the wall. Ms. Hibbler told me that you can dress things up all you want, but when it is time for justice, no amount of decorating can hide it. I stood there beside her in silence appreciating the weight of her words. Marie believed the FCEST would usher in justice and her membership in the group empowered her. She believed change would come in her lifetime. She continues to come to meetings and lobby for the group to ensure the death of her friend would not be futile.



Figure 3. The FCEST Lobbying at an EPA Meeting in Atlanta, GA

Environmental sociologists Shriver and Kennedy (2005) have said that contention within an environmental movement is often centered on "the ambiguity

variations in community attachment" (p.491). According to Shriver and Kennedy (2005) disagreement is further exacerbated by "the invisibility of environmental hazards" and the inability or unwillingness of regulating agencies to effectively communicate with community residents (pp. 493, 504). In Chapter III, I hinted at the difficulty of assessing environmental dangers within East Hattiesburg communities. The myriad of anecdotal stories that came out in meetings and interviews by individuals living in the affected areas brought to light the shared experiences of residents. Once people were able to link specific ailments with the associated dangers and symptoms of exposure they sought answers from the chemical company, city and state officials, and even governmental agencies. In the process, hope quickly gave way to frustration.

Ruth Luckett voiced her displeasure with city officials to me. "It's something wrong somewhere. Somebody ain't doing they job downtown" (personal field notes, 2009). Ms. Luckett was not the only person displeased with the city of Hattiesburg's administration. One community member said, "I ain't seen no improvements, just talk. You know what I'm saying? Propaganda...feeding people games to get into office until they get what they want. Then once they get into office it's a bunch of bull" (personal field notes, 2009).

Another member directed his anger to the chemical giant. "Tronox the creosote plant said we over here in this Black community. They ain't going to say nothing. They were right because we were looking for jobs. And they said we going to give you some jobs. They didn't tell us they were going to kill us too"

(personal field notes, 2009). Still others insinuated a crooked link between the companies and the agencies charged with regulating them. Sherri Jones said, "All over this country now we have issues with old creosote plants, but the problem is that the people that operated the plants, guess what? They are your powerful businesses, your corporations. They got a lot of money therefore they got a lot of what? *Influence*" (personal field notes, Nov. 2009).

What happens when faced with a situation where the burden of proof lies with victims and the people charged with protecting those individuals fail to do so? Where does the discontent go? How is it transformed? From the beginning, the FCEST has reached out to lawyers, city officials, state legislators, community leaders, and regulatory agencies. Despite some initial successes they have been overwhelmingly let down again and again by personalities providing inconsistent action or no action at all. According to Kennedy and Shriver, such patterns are common in polluted communities because "local, state, and company officials, along with regulating agents often exacerbate the ambiguity by either withholding relevant information or by sending contradicting messages" (2005, p. 504).

In light of these obstacles, how does a community move forward when the choices are succumbing to the idea that you cannot win or finding a new way to fight the battle? Reaching this point is pivotal as it is the moment where a movement changes or falters. When the FCEST realized constituents would be denied any part of the Kerr-McGee settlement they had to embrace new strategies in order to move forward. An exploration of social movement literature, particularly the notion of framing and framing alignment processes, can

provide insight into how the FCEST restructured their approach and adapted to the challenges facing the organization.

The Chicago school of sociologists developed a unique approach to the study of social movements, particularly collective behavior, which developed into its own field thanks to the likes of Harold Blumer and Robert Park. Chicago theorists initially emphasized the structure of collective behavior rather than culture and ideology because the necessary analytical tools for that level of evaluation were absent or rudimentary at best (Zald, 1996, pp. 262-3). Conversely the work of anthropologists like Clifford Geertz and his "thick descriptions" of Bali gave depth to cultural analysis while social psychological perspectives led to similar transformations in the way sociologists study collective behavior (Geertz, 1973; Zald, 1996, p. 264).

In 1974, Erving Goffman introduced the idea of framing and became influential in explaining why "subtle analyses of how changes in social-physical context, often minute, reshaped the possibilities for behavior" (Zald, 1996, p. 265). As noted in Chapter I, in his seminal work *Frame Analysis*, Goffman focused on the ways in which individuals could render otherwise meaningless aspects of social activity meaningful by framing interactions in a way that would "provide background understanding for events that incorporate the will, aim, and controlling efforts" of human beings (1974, pp. 22-23). While Goffman hinted that frame analysis held implications for exploring mobilization he never really extended those ideas to apply to the study of social movements. However, Robert Benford, David Snow and later Doug McAdam saw the potential of the

theory and adapted Goffman's original ideas to show the contribution of both ideology and symbolism within social movements (Zald, 1996, p. 265; McAdam, McCarthy, & Zald, 1996, pp. 3-5).

As a result, framing and a comprehension of framing processes "have come to be regarded, alongside resource mobilization and political opportunity processes, as a central dynamic in understanding the character and course of social movements" (Benford and Snow, 2000, p. 612). Framing in its most modern application has come to be defined as "conscious strategic efforts by groups of people to fashion shared understandings of the world and themselves that legitimate and motivate collective action" (McAdam et al., 1996, p. 6).

More than simply defining frames, social movement theorists have noted characteristics of collective frames within social movement organizations (SMOs). In order to institute a successful frame, the frame must effectively redefine events and actions once thought to be unfortunate, yet acceptable, as immoral and unjust (Benford and Snow, 1997, p. 459). Frames should "draw upon the larger societal definitions of relationships, of rights, and of responsibilities to highlight what is wrong with the current social order" (Zald, 1996, p. 267). Similarly, frames ought to be diagnostic and prognostic in nature (Benford and Snow, 1997, p. 459). A frame cannot be successful if it fails to effectively convey who or what is at fault while also crystallizing "opinion on moral and political matters that had been dormant or ambiguous" (Zald, 1996, p. 268). Members need to believe in the rightness of a frame otherwise they will fail to act on it.

As far as the FCEST is concerned, news of a Kerr-McGee settlement in which Black citizens were denied entrance while White constituents were given substantial payments brought to light certain cultural contradictions. Mississippi has more African American elected officials than any other state in the nation and African Americans make up 37% of the state's population, facts that leave the FCEST wondering why there is still such inequity in the treatment of Hattiesburg residents (Associated Press, 2011). Although unequal treatment can be attributed to a variety of things including socioeconomic status, the initial perception by community members that the actions were racially motivated were enough to transform and energize the movement around the master frame of justice, specifically racial justice.

The leadership of the FCEST was able to establish justice as a frame in part by utilizing a recollection of the notion as employed during the Civil Rights Movement. Consider that the majority of the FCEST is made up of individuals who either directly participated in or grew up during Hattiesburg's 1964 Freedom Summer and as a result, had previously been exposed to accomplished mobilization and organizational strategies (Dittmer, 1994, pp. 182-83; Payne, 1995, pp. 245-47). In fact the most successful Freedom Schools in Mississippi were in Hattiesburg (Watson, 2010, p. 139). The summer's program ran off the work of more than 90 volunteers and over 3,000 local participants (Civil Rights Audio Tour Intro).

The experiences, ideas, and legacies that came from that summer were not lost on the individuals who lived through it. Former Freedom Summer

volunteer Dr. Sandra Adickes has said, "The people of Hattiesburg who were in the forefront of the struggle in 1964 are the city's wise elders now and remain ready to speak..." (Adickes, 2005, p. 167). Adickes spent her time in the Palmer's Crossing community where the Civil Rights Movement in Hattiesburg began. Little did she know that in the same community, more than thirty years later, a group of wise elders would begin another movement to end inequality.

However, keep in mind that the efforts of the FCEST have now spanned more than a decade. Over the course of the years, justice has remained the primary frame but not necessarily in its original form. In order for movement participants to adhere or align with a frame, that frame must be able to adapt to the ever changing needs and obstacles facing an organization and its members. "The underlying premise is that frame alignment, of one variety or another, is a necessary condition for movement participation, whatever its nature or intensity, and that it is typically an interactional accomplishment (Snow et al., 1997, p. 238). David Snow and his colleagues have managed to identify four types of frame alignment processes and I will spend the remainder of the chapter demonstrating how the FCEST has employed aspects of all four processes in order to mobilize, recruit, and act effectively as a movement. The processes are as follows: frame bridging, frame amplification, frame extension, and frame transformation (Snow et al., 1997, p. 238).

A movement grows when it can efficiently reach out to active members, previously active members, and potential members for the purpose of mobilization. Frame bridging is one way to extend a SMO's adherent base and is

defined as “the linkage of two or more ideologically congruent but structurally unconnected frames regarding a particular issue or problem” (Snow et al., 1997, p. 238). The idea is to utilize bridging mechanisms to appeal to “sentiment pools” otherwise known as “aggregates of individuals who share common grievances and attributional orientations, but who lack the organizational base for expressing their discontents and for acting in pursuit of their interests” (Snow et al., 1997, p. 238).

A female resident who later became involved with the movement spoke to me one afternoon. “No, I don’t think the residents on the East side are visible. I think they are non-visible.” She went on to tell me that if the situation were reversed the City of Hattiesburg would move heaven and earth to make sure all the problems plaguing her community (including contamination) were promptly eradicated (personal field notes, 2009). The FCEST has very successfully identified sentiment pools within their community and worked hard to reach out to potential members like this individual who has felt largely ignored and degraded.

Community concerns shared by members but not necessarily directly related to environmentalism are still addressed by guest speakers at bi-weekly meetings. Speakers attract not only members but also non-members who then become an active audience for the group’s primary message. For example, during election season a guest speaker was brought in at the beginning of a meeting to educate individuals on the most current voting laws and requirements. Afterward, the latest information regarding the group’s environmental campaign is delivered.

Likewise, in preparation for the 2010 census time was set aside at the start of a meeting to inform residents of local census job opportunities, update individuals on the details of the census process, and tell members and non-members alike of the various benefits that can come from accurate census reporting. The FCEST stressed the importance of community employment and bringing much needed funds into the area for development and possible environmental projects. Sherri Jones, the group's organizer stated, "We are going to put our community to work because we want our folks to be part of the process" (personal field notes, 2009). As in the past, the special interest talk served as a draw for an audience who was then made aware of the current activities and goals of the FCEST in a way that presented potential activists with even more ways in which they could directly engage in the betterment of their own neighborhoods.

Comparable talks were given through the years on topics such as living wills, ongoing litigation relevant to Black farmers, and making sure elderly members of the community had access to local news in the nationwide crossover to digital television programming. During the course of all meetings, a sign-up sheet is passed around to get the contact information of attendees. That information is then consolidated and added to the group's contact list which is utilized to personally notify former attendees of upcoming meetings, activities, and campaigns. Facebook, Twitter, and radio broadcasts are all additional bridging mechanisms the group is currently employing to appeal to prospective members.

A second frame alignment process that has become part of the FCEST's mobilization and recruitment strategy is frame amplification. According to David Snow and his colleagues, frame amplification is the "clarification and invigoration of an interpretive frame that bears on a particular issue, problem, or set of events" (Snow et al., 1997, p. 239). Oftentimes to sustain support of a SMO's activities in the long run, a refreshing or rejuvenation of frames is essential and can be achieved through the amplification of values and beliefs. In terms of the FCEST, I will focus on value amplification defined as "the identification, idealization, and elevation of one or more values presumed basic to prospective constituents but which have not inspired collective action for any number of reasons" (Snow et al., 1997, p. 240).

When I first began getting to know the various leaders making up the FCEST I heard one word; justice. "I want justice for my family, for my community, for myself!" I heard it time and time again, the impassioned pleas of a community in the form of a word that took to the wind like a battle cry. It served as a call to arms, as a testimony of wrongs past and present, and as a motivator, but how would justice be achieved? I attended my first FCEST meeting in February of 2008, long after the initial inception of the group and years after struggling against Kerr-McGee had begun to take a toll. People were still fired up, but they were also tired. The movement had reached a point in which it needed a rebirth, and that is when I heard Sherri Jones say, "People, information is power. Applied knowledge is more power" (personal field notes, 2008).

meeting new documents were copied, distributed to the audience, and read out

From there the thirty people in attendance said three words in unison: "Education. Information. Salvation". Over the next couple years I would hear those three words repeated in meetings over and over. Yes, the group's primary focus was still justice, but the values of education, information, and salvation provided a means to achieve it. Consider the following exchange that took place when the FCEST spoke to a group of students at the University of Southern Mississippi in 2009:

Sherri Jones: Okay, in our community they got a saying. If you want to hide something from the African American community where do you put it?

FCEST in unison: The library!

Sherri Jones: The library because they said, normally we don't like to read. Well this case has proven them to be wrong because every document that they hid from this community in the last decade, we have researched it, we have pulled it out, and we have placed it into a book.

(personal field notes, 2009).

The organization's claim was no exaggeration. From the moment I started going to meetings I was exposed to document after document gathered by the community. Elder members of the group learned to use computers and created email accounts. Others went to the public library and copied hundreds of documents. Still others furiously filled out Freedom of Information requests. All papers and correspondence were made available to members and at each meeting new documents were copied, distributed to the audience, and read out

loud. Each time a new piece of information was read the words served as a lightning rod to the group. For the FCEST, the content of those papers had power because they confirmed for members of the group that the community had been wronged and blatant injustices committed. Emphasizing the values of education, information, and salvation bolstered the master frame of the group, strengthened and energized the resolve of members to achieve it, and necessitated an increase in group participation that would lead to deliverance.

Frame amplification proved to be an extremely advantageous strategy for the FCEST. However, the group has also utilized frame extension to appeal to new members and widen its influence. In order to maximize recruitment capabilities a SMO sometimes has to "extend the boundaries of its primary framework so as to encompass interests or points of view that are incidental to its primary objectives but of considerable salience to potential adherents" (Snow et al, 1997, p. 243). Justice has always been the primary frame for the FCEST and in the beginning the objectives of the organization were threefold. Founders of the FCEST originally sought the clean-up of creosote connected to the Kerr-McGee site, entrance into the lawsuit against the company, and prosecution of any individuals found guilty of criminal activities relating to the case.

It is important to note here that while the court case was environmental the nature of allegations by East Hattiesburg residents was racially based. Carly Wilson, a former resident of the affected area shared her views on racial justice with me in her home one Saturday.

Please, it ain't nothing new to me. You grow up Black in Hattiesburg, Mississippi and you get used to stuff like this. This been going on all our lives, but I'm telling you, the White folks started moving out and we didn't know why. I found out from another White guy who sold his house, he and his mama. They were going to move to Florida. They knew what was going on. I believe somebody could have give them money but we don't know. I know none of us Black families living in those chemicals were given money that's for sure. (personal field notes, 2009)

As time passed and the movement grew, it became evident that the door was closing fast with regard to the legal case against Kerr-McGee. Those suspicions were confirmed in late 2008 when lawyer Tracy McGough had to tell the FCEST they were dead in the water, particularly in their approach to the case from a racial perspective. Her comments are lengthy but worth repeating in their entirety.

When you say race in the South, that is a battle cry. So, I am going to warn you against making that the central issue here. Is it the central issue here? Absolutely. Do I think if you were a community of White citizens that they would have let this happen to you? No I do not. Nevertheless it is White laws you are seeking to enforce. It is White judges you are asking for enforcement. It is White lawyers who will be on the other side of the table. So, if you are going to win playing their game with their rules, there are some things you are going to have to be sensitive to, and that is that

race has got to be a secondary issue if it is an issue at all. (personal field notes, 2008)

With McGough's words fresh on their mind the FCEST began to realize that Kerr-McGee was the symptom to a much larger racial justice problem facing not only Black communities in Hattiesburg but communities of color all over the nation. The realization dictated an extension of the FCEST's primary frame to address environmental problems and social issues within the city and eventually the state and region. Sherri Jones, addressing the group at a meeting in 2008 said, "We ain't asking for a Kerr-McGee check anymore. We are talking about these chemicals that are killing us!" (personal field notes, 2008). What began as a campaign against one corporation's prejudice developed into an issue of community wellness aimed at creating a healthy living environment for future generations. "We fight this fight for our health. We fight this fight for our children!" proclaimed an individual at a meeting in November of 2008 to the sound of thundering applause and "Amens" from the audience in attendance (personal field notes, 2008).

A second notable example of frame extension within the FCEST occurred in the summer of 2008. I arrived at St. James on 5 June and noted a particularly full parking lot. Inside I found a large group of Hattiesburg's sanitation workers seated on the front row of the church with friends and supporters. A spokesman for the workers was given time at the beginning of the meeting to inform members of the FCEST of their ongoing struggle with city officials to obtain better wages and working conditions. After the spokesman's presentation the FCEST

agreed to support the workers and even committed to a joint picket outside City Hall the following week. While the plight of the sanitation workers was not directly related to the FCEST's environmental objectives, both groups felt as if they were fighting injustice at City Hall. As a consequence of that meeting both parties successfully collaborated and mobilized a picket benefiting all involved. The sanitation workers found strength in numbers and the FCEST obtained new allies, thereby widening their base of supporters.

According to Snow et al., there is a fine line between the extension of a frame and the final process, that of frame transformation (Snow et al., 1997, pp. 245-6). Frame transformation comes in two forms, but for the purposes of this ethnographic study I will be evaluating the transformation of "domain-specific interpretive frames." By that I mean the "fairly self contained but substantial changes in the way a particular domain of life is framed, such that a domain previously taken for granted is reframed as problematic and in need of repair, or a domain seen as normative or acceptable is reframed as an injustice that warrants change" (Snow et al., 1997, p. 246). When the FCEST extended their primary framework to include more than just Kerr-McGee they were really beginning the process of a frame transformation.

"Domain-specific transformations frequently appear to be a necessary condition for participation in movements that seek dramatic changes in the status, treatment, or activity of a category of people," and that is exactly what we see with the FCEST (Snow et al., 1997, p. 246). Once the FCEST understood Kerr-McGee represented a historical pattern of discrimination and

disenfranchisement rather than an isolated incident, the idea of justice became completely altered. Supporters recognized they were seeking justice, not simply because they had been exposed to a long history of injustices, not because of existing racial/socioeconomic inequalities, not because their individual health was at stake, but because it was necessary to the very survival of their community. What was once unjust and unfortunate now became inexcusable. The group moved from addressing a single, tragic event to seeking changes that would fix the entire broken system.

CHAPTER V

MANAGING THE MEDIA: A DOUBLE-EDGED SWORD



Figure 4. Environmental Expert Tennie White Speaks with a Local Reporter

I have already covered a brief history of the development of critical discourse analysis in social scientific research in the literature review contained in chapter one, but I will repeat a couple of the key concepts that are especially relevant. As I have mentioned, the purpose of employing CDA here was to explore “opaque as well as transparent structural relationships of dominance, discrimination, power, and control as manifest in language” (Blommaert and Bulcaen, 2000, p. 24). I will begin by borrowing from Fairclough to utilize the structure of CDA in an evaluation of the media coverage of environmental issues surrounding Hercules Inc. in 2004 by the *Hattiesburg American* newspaper. I will then review the concepts of hegemony and resistance in light of that coverage to demonstrate the case’s arguable influence on the Mobile-Bouie Neighborhood Association and FCEST’s approaches to managing the media.

Now that an outline of the analytical framework to be employed has been given, a brief discussion of the theoretical assertions and concepts contained within that framework is necessary. The logic used to delineate my argument contains several points of departure which I hope to validate with the supplementation of established anthropological theories. The first point of departure is that big corporations such as Hercules and Kerr-McGee are representatives of the elite both within Hattiesburg and on a national level. Their position of power influences how media coverage of their activities is presented (directly by ownership or indirectly through commercial persuasion). The second assertion is that mainstream media is used as a vehicle for shaping popular opinion in a way that often reflects and bolsters the existing elite power structure. Third, the hegemonic processes of the elite can be combated in a guerilla fashion to undercut omissions and selections levied by commercial interests. Fourth, while the FCEST and the Mobile-Bouie Neighborhood Association have shared goals, those goals are informed with contrasting interpretations of environmental events and differing opinions on potential solutions. The actions of both grassroots organizations have garnered environmental "micro-victories" but arguably delay environmental justice on a wider scale due to the amplification of tensions between the two groups.

Marx and Engels famously wrote, "The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas; i.e., the class which is the ruling material forces of

society is at the same time its ruling intellectual force" (Marx & Engels, 1947, p. 64). They suggest that a society's ruling class is made up by the individuals in control of the "material force" of that particular social order (Marx & Engels, 1947, p.39). Noam Chomsky builds on Marx and Engels' concept in the 2004 work *Language and Politics*. Chomsky suggests that the corporate world is the domestic power within our society and that "media tend to present and interpret social reality within a framework that is very largely set by domestic power" (Chomsky, 2004, p. 423). Chomsky goes even further by pointing out that the media are corporations themselves and that the individuals who own the media "belong to the same narrow elite of owners and managers who control private economy and who control the state..." (Chomsky, 2004, p. 553). If the dominant class of society is, as Chomsky suggests, made up of the corporate world and corporations have primary ownership of media outlets then the media can function to bolster and enable those in power. These ideas form a theoretical springboard for the second point in my argument.

The production of a collective will and the manufacture of consent are integral components of the hegemonic processes set in motion by the media at the hands of the ruling class. An understanding of these processes, by necessity, requires a more complete understanding of what is meant by the notion of hegemony. The process of hegemony as defined by Antonio Gramsci refers to "the dominance of a certain way of life and thought and to the way in

which the dominant concept of reality is diffused throughout public as well as private dimensions of social life" (Gramsci as cited in Altheide, 1984, p. 477). In other words, the dominant or ruling class uses privileged access to the ideological institutions of society (i.e. the media) to promote the proliferation of principles that reinforce the validity of the ruling structure.

Within the environmentalism debate, corporate hegemony is essentially safeguarded by a regulatory framework that effectively mutes or altogether silences the victims of a broken system. In Hattiesburg, corporate responsibility has been avoided as environmental justice gets get tangled up in the bureaucratic red tape of the Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality, the EPA, and City Hall. As a result the ability of the victims to engage in the discourse is limited and sometimes eliminated.

The aforementioned parameters established by hegemony are achieved largely by creating a collective will and by manufacturing consent. Kate Crehan, in discussing Gramsci's ideas surrounding the creation of a collective will states, "The raw material of class experience has to be molded into a convincing and coherent political narrative in which individuals can recognize their own situation" and be motivated to act collectively (Crehan, 2002, p. 155). In order for the establishment of a collective will to work in a hegemonic sense, the ideologies and aspirations of the ruling class must be presented as representative of all. A consciousness based on economically biased values must be created with the

desired result being the manufacture of consent (Altheide, 1984, p. 477).

According to Noam Chomsky, the manufacture of consent includes efforts “of the mass media in the United States to mobilize public support for the special interests that dominate the government and the private sector” (2004, p. 361). Chomsky has said that the manufacture of consent is an extremely daunting task, particularly in societies where violence is not an acceptable means for obtaining obedience (Chomsky, 2004, p. 361). This is where the media comes into play. For instance, in societies like the United States the media has historically served as an important means for creating the symbols and beliefs found in everyday life while secondarily functioning to break down divisions connecting the private and local spheres in which most citizens live. Perhaps this is why journalists find themselves in a uniquely strategic position for creating “the system of beliefs which will ensure the effective engineering of consent” (Chomsky, 2004, p. 553).

In the 1990 work titled *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*, James C. Scott defines public transcripts as a “self portrait of dominant elites as they would have themselves seen” (p. 18). Public transcripts have as one of their primary functions the creation of an unanimity and the appearance of consent, albeit through lopsided discourse (Scott, 1990, p. 55). Scott speaks of public transcripts more in terms of actual public interactions but I suggest that we can think of media outlets like newspapers, local television,

radio, and social media as types of public transcript. At the very least I propose thinking of them as records of public transcripts shaped by those in power.

According to Scott, public transcripts embody superiority and inferiority assumptions and influence two distinct social categories (the subordinate group and the dominant group). The influence on the subordinate group, as I have already mentioned, comes from molding the collective ideology of non-elites in order to generate consent. However, public transcripts also have a persuasive effect on members of the dominant class. Scott says, "public transcripts act as a kind of self-hypnosis within ruling groups to buck up their courage, improve their cohesion, display their power, and convince themselves of their high moral purpose" (1990, p. 67).

With regards to the environmental movement in Hattiesburg, we see two types of public transcripts on display. First, there are the public transcripts produced by members of the elite power structure. For example, Hercules, Kerr-McGee, and other polluting industries produce transcripts favoring their interests by creating press releases, producing informational pamphlets, and participating in public information sessions. The Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality and the EPA facilitate the distribution of corporate transcripts through collaborative efforts between the industries via their offices of community engagement. While the two regulatory agencies also meet with concerned citizen groups it is to a much lesser degree. The interactions between the

Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality and corporations, Hercules in particular, are then used to justify the argument that a good faith effort is being made to maintain healthy environmental conditions. City Hall can then use the collaborations between regulatory agent and commercial representative to assure concerned residents that the matter of contamination is being taken care of thereby maintaining and legitimizing the power of the elite.

Local media outlets create the second type of public transcripts on the environment in Hattiesburg by providing a platform for discussion. In turn, the published discussions become part of the transcripts themselves. While public media can offer victims and polluters alike a voice in the debate, the odds fall overwhelming in favor of the elite. Even when the opposing point of view is considered, it is riddled with omissions and muting mechanisms as I will demonstrate using a case study from the *Hattiesburg American* newspaper.

Nevertheless, subordinate groups are not without a means of challenging the claims of public transcripts. A protective apparatus is available to lessen the impact of false consciousness. Hidden transcripts are the defensive weapon providing non-ruling elites with a mode of resistance. Scott describes hidden transcripts as the "critique of power spoken behind the back of the dominant" (1990, p. 74). The Mobile-Bouie Neighborhood Association has primarily engaged in hidden transcripts to counter hegemonic processes. Members of the FCEST have made use of hidden transcripts, but meeting their organizational

objectives required a more vocal mode of resistance than what they had observed in other community groups. As I have alluded to, Kerr-McGee was not the first corporation to come under fire as a polluter in Hattiesburg, nor was the FCEST the first African American community based group to bring environmental issues to the media and city administration. A brief consideration of the *Hattiesburg American's* coverage of Hercules, provides the historical context in which the media strategies of the Mobilie-Bouie Neighborhood Association and FCEST were adopted but also offers clues into the growing tensions between the two organizations.

The city of Hattiesburg was founded in 1882 by Captain William H. Hardy, a lumber man and civil engineer. With the completion of the Southern Railway System in 1884, the Hattiesburg Chamber of Commerce started to capitalize on the area's most abundant natural resource, virgin pine trees. However, by the early 1900's Hattiesburg's virgin pine source began to dwindle and more sustainable forms of revenue were considered. By January of 1920, the Hattiesburg Chamber of Commerce had launched an aggressive campaign to attract new industries (Dyer & Sicilia, 1990).

Hercules Powder Company became one of the first targets of this new campaign. Several members of the Chamber of Commerce personally met with Hercules representatives and on 4 May 1920, the company purchased land in Hattiesburg for the construction of a chemical plant (Dyer & Sicilia, 1990). The company began operation in 1923 with around 300 employees. The number of

people employed at the plant continued to rise between the years of 1930-1965 and by 1974 the company had over 1,400 employees. Throughout the mid 1960's to late 1970's, Hercules was the main employer of African Americans in Hattiesburg (Dyer & Sicilia, 1990).

One Mobile-Bouie resident discussing the plant in a 2004 memory workshop said, "My earliest memory of them talking about Hercules is the good pay...everybody wanted to work for Hercules" (Kaufmann, 2004). The same resident went on to say, "Everybody thought that Hercules was gonna be around for the rest of our lives...The people that worked at Hercules had the finer homes, cars, and life" (Kaufmann, 2004). Former Hattiesburg mayor Jolly Matthews III claimed Hercules was the "backbone of the city" during its heyday. In addition to being a stable source of employment and financial security within the Mobile-Bouie community, Hercules provided food, clothing, shelter, and recreation for its employees. The company had its own basketball team, commissary, barbershop, bowling alley, credit union, blood bank and employee newspaper (Dyer & Sicilia, 1990; Walters, 2004D, 2004G).

The company also had its share of environmental problems throughout the 1970's and 1980's. Two large fish kills in the early 1970's were attributed to Hercules. Ironically, the corporation was also awarded the Sport's Foundation's National Gold Medal Award in 1973 for their environmental stewardship at the Hattiesburg plant. Five years later the company was fined \$82,593 by the state because they failed to renew their emissions permits in a timely manner. In 1984, state inspector Joe Captain investigated an undocumented waste stream

in Hattiesburg that was eventually traced back to a five million gallon chemical tank at Hercules. Captain said the flow valve of the tank had been adjusted to avoid detection of the illegal disposal in a conscious effort to minimize citizen complaints. All of the aforementioned events reflect decades of environmental infractions and unlawful activity.

Eight years ago, in 2004, Hercules became the target of publicity and disagreement. In the late 1990's (approximately 1998) residents of the Mobile-Bouie neighborhood began searching for a location to build a playground in their community. At some point during the search, a plot of land was donated to the community for the purposes of constructing the playground. However, upon unveiling the location of the potential site, several residents expressed their misgivings. The uneasy residents feared the site had been contaminated in the past by Hercules Inc. These apprehensions opened dialogue and within the community, residents began voicing concerns that had lay buried for years. Despite longstanding apprehensions within Mobile-Bouie, it was not until 8 January 2004 that the local newspaper began to even remotely address questions surrounding the chemical company.

An article titled "Leaky Seal Blamed For Spill at Hercules Plant" appeared in the *Hattiesburg American* on 8 January 2004. According to Walters, an agitator seal on a tank at Hercules Inc. sprung a significant leak resulting in 50 gallons of industrial grade cleaner to be dumped into the Bouie River. Despite immediate reports from the *Hattiesburg American* stating that "there should be no human health threat from this incident" the episode became the source of increased civic

discontent (Walters, 2004E, p.1A). Amidst the public disgruntlement and trepidation that followed, Kevin Walters, a local journalist, embarked on a two day special report series examining Hercules Inc.

The first installment of the series appeared on 11 April 2004 with an article titled "What's Buried At Hercules?" The article included statements by local residents complaining of the foul smell that had emanated from the plant for years in addition to comments made by company officials asserting there was "no evidence toxic chemicals pose a health threat" (Walters, 2004J, p.1A). The 11 April issue of the *Hattiesburg American* included two supplementary articles pertaining to the corporate giant.

The first article titled, "Once A Powerhouse, Hercules' Business Has Faltered Over Years" documented the rise and fall in productivity at the plant over nearly three decades. Following this economic snap-shot of the company was an article with the heading "Resident Say Plant Cause of Sickness." The article featured interviews with residents living on West Eighth Street who believed exposure to the foul smells stemming from the plant had caused adverse health effects. However, the article ended with the following quote from Eight Street resident Earl Graves (in reference to a conversation he had with a former employee of Hercules). "He said, 'I'm going to tell you what (the scent) means to me. It means my bread and butter.' He said, 'What would we be without Hercules?' What I'm sayin, it was bread and butter to many people" (Walters, 2004G, p. 9A). Mr. Graves's statement places a positive spin on what would otherwise have been a negative piece on Hercules. Ending the article in

such a manner could arguably be an attempt by the newspaper to “euphemize the dirty linen” of the dominant elite by “beautifying the aspects of power that cannot be denied” (Scott, 1990, pp.18, 52).

In light of the abovementioned article, one could argue that Hercules, a representative of the corporate elite, was attempting to cover up their negative actions and conduct damage control through local media whether directly or indirectly. A quick look at subsequent news articles provides other noteworthy examples. On 12 April 2004 Kevin Walters wrote a piece appearing on the front page of the *Hattiesburg American* titled “Despite Bad Smell, Community Bonded With Its Chemical Plant” (Walters, 2004A, p.1A). The article was a glowing account of a chemical plant that at one time “meant everything to Hattiesburg and vice versa” in spite of the obstacles it faced (Walters, 2004A, p.6A).

The complimentary portrayal of Hercules by the *Hattiesburg American* continued with a piece labeled “Hercules Complaints Dwindle.” The article from the 16 April 2004 issue of the paper is unique in that it features commentary by two Hattiesburg city officials (including the mayor) claiming it had been “quite some time” since either individual had received specific complaints in regards to Hercules. A second interesting feature of this particular piece is the inclusion of an openly disparaging comment by one member of the Mobile-Bouie community about Hercules and the manner in which the mayor had handled the controversy. The statement represented one of only two remarks I could find by a resident of the Mobile-Bouie neighborhood throughout the series of articles I read. Nearly a week after the previous article appeared the *Hattiesburg American* printed an

editorial by Langhans, the manager of the chemical plant, under the heading "Hercules Stories Lacked 'Fairness'." The businessman claimed Kevin Walters' articles were "filled with sensational headlines and misleading information- clearly designed to alarm and frighten the public" (Langhans, 2004, p. 1D). Langhans maintained that the company had always strived be a "good corporate citizen" and went on to say; "Buried deep in the story about possible environmental contamination were the reasoned comments of the officials from the Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality. Their comments focused on facts and investigation findings- not rumor and speculation" (Langhans, 2004, p. 1D).

One final article appearing in the 1 August 2004 issue of the paper warrants mention. The title of the article written by Kevin Walters reads "Scant Evidence Found of Hercules Contamination." Walters' piece reported that "environmental tests both on and off the property of Hattiesburg's 81-year-old Hercules Inc. chemical plant continue[d] to turn up scant evidence of contamination" (Walters, 2004I, p.1C). The article painted a picture of community/corporate cooperation by briefly mentioning a meeting between the Mobile-Bouie Neighborhood Association and Hercules representatives brokered by the Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality. The news account implied that some form of agreement and closure had been ascertained between the disputing parties.

What happens to the voice of the oppressed when the media promotes the values of local administration and big business while silencing or muting alternative viewpoints? In the matter of the Mobile-Bouie Neighborhood

Association and Hercules, community members have chosen to remove themselves from the debate and give deference to the Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality thereby granting legitimacy to the agency's authority. Like the FCEST, the Mobile-Bouie Neighborhood Association say they hope to secure the toxic cleanup of their neighborhood but they have chosen to collaborate with the existing power structure to achieve it. Initially individual members critiqued the elite with the production of hidden transcripts (i.e., the 2004 Memory Workshop). However as a collective, the groups presents a united front and insist they are satisfied with the progress being made. In a letter to the EPA, Mobile-Bouie Neighborhood Association president Melvin Williams writes, "The Mobile-Bouie Community has experienced success working with MDEQ in addressing community concerns and foresees a continued amiable working relationship...As a citizen of Hattiesburg, MS I am very much in favor of MDEQ continuing to provide our organization with information and allowing us to be a part of the environmental business process." (personal correspondence, 2011)

In stark contrast, the position of the FCEST is that Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality is a large part of the problem. Members believe the regulating agency has the interests of the corporation in mind over those of the community. As such the FCEST rejects the legitimacy of Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality as an authoritative power. What is more, the group also rejects any reports on Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality in media outlets suggesting an environmental problem does not exist in Hattiesburg.

The Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality was the entity responsible for having tests conducted at Hercules in 2004 when the *Hattiesburg American* reported that scant evidence of contamination existed. Now flash forward to May 2011 and what do we see? The EPA issues an order for testing to be carried out at Hercules and its surrounding area as a result of evidence of a contamination (Jones, 2011). The FCEST often expresses concerns that Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality is misleading residents concerning an alleged remediation project on East Side Ave and the public health threat associated with creosote levels found in soil and groundwater examples there.

Rather than giving in to the hegemony of the elite by accepting Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality's findings as reported in the news and backed by city and company representatives, the FCEST has instead adopted a unique approach to the management of media. As a SMO the FCEST has taken ownership and authorship of their own story and found ways to present it without the filters imposed by the dominant class. Believing the ruling elite's position is over represented, the group has embraced new technological strategies to ensure their collective voice is heard.

Saying the FCEST wants a camera presence is an understatement. The video camera was an ever-present force in the years I spent with the group. Film was rolling any time the organization made a lobbying trip, attended a community meeting, met with chemical company representatives, or conducted quality control testing. Members have developed a website where individuals can now

go to read about their story from first-hand accounts while watching informational videos pertaining to the group's action campaigns.

While I filmed many meetings and lobbying trips for the group, members were utilizing video recordings on their own long before I came along, at times employing a "guerilla" approach with the camera when Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality officials were in town. Any time the FCEST received word that the agency was conducting tests in their neighborhood they would drive out to the site, hop out of their vehicles and press record. A gentleman active in the FCEST spoke to me about one such incident. "Now you want to see some people get nervous, start filming them at work. We knew they were being dishonest and we knew the only way to hold them to it was to stick a camera in their face. There they were with all their heavy equipment digging up the neighborhood and giving us angry looks for being there. We weren't breaking any laws though" (personal field notes, 2008).

In addition to videos, the organization's website contains blogs, interviews, files of important documents, and links to other communities allied with the FCEST. In late 2011 the FCEST began broadcasting a weekly radio show on a local gospel station (and online) in order to share information "vital to the survival of our community in this 21st century" (FCEST, [radio broadcast], 2012). Along with the radio show and website, the FCEST has created and continues to maintain a Twitter account and Facebook page.

Members of the group still make comments to local media outlets but level the playing field by offering commentary of the encounters online or on air. In

some instances the FCEST even appeals directly to journalists as was the case in 2011 when the organization took issue with the protocol city workers employed (or failed to employ) during the demolition of some commercial properties. Once again, the FCEST utilized video on their website to offer commentary and critique of the city's actions.

The aforementioned examples illustrate how the FCEST has managed the media to combat hegemonic processes in Hattiesburg with interesting results. First, members participating in the authorship of their own struggle are empowered and that in and of itself sustains movement participation. Second, the FCEST's media approach has increased the organization's visibility while also providing a certain degree of power as regulating agencies, chemical companies, politicians, and City Hall are forced to acknowledge the group and address their claims. Third, the FCEST's sometimes combative use of the camera has uncovered hidden political processes as evidenced by tensions between the group and the Mayor's office and a renewal of markedly hostile tensions between the FCEST and the leadership of the Mobile-Bouie Neighborhood Association as 2012 begins. Nevertheless it appears that for every critic the FCEST draws they recruit just as many new allies. Previously mentioned recruitment and mobilization strategies alongside the FCEST's effective use of media have allowed the group to reach supports from all over the country, leading to the establishment of a cooperative network of communities who firmly believe God is on their side.

CHAPTER VI

"WE SHALL OVERCOME": CHARISMA AND SPIRITUALITY

I pulled my car into the now familiar parking lot of St. James church in the early afternoon hours of one of the first Saturdays of Spring and killed the engine. I sat for a moment, with windows rolled down and breathed in the cool breeze before rummaging through the contents of the oversized camera bag on the seat beside me. I had been working with the FCEST for a few months now and had spent the first part of my day filming interviews for a short video I agreed to make for the group when I began attending meetings. I thought a quick stop at the church to record some exterior establishing shots would be the perfect way to end my day.

I started unloading equipment but stopped when I noticed a couple cars driving up to the side of the church. I closed the trunk and was happy to look up and see Barbara Jones approaching the building. Ms. Barbara wrote the minutes for each FCEST meeting, circulated attendance sheets, and made phone calls to inform members of upcoming meetings. "Well hello Ms. Heather" she said with her signature smile as she motioned me over to the sanctuary door where Sherri Jones, Deacon Walmon and several others were gathering. A few members of the organization had decided to meet up for an impromptu prayer meeting and invited me to join.

I followed the group in and found a seat alongside everyone else on the first pew facing the church altar. As we settled, the members filled me in on some of the good things that had happened within the organization during the

past week. Sherri told me that as a group, the FCEST knew the importance of giving God credit for involvement in their struggle and that they were committed to prayer because it was not only something that every member could do, but it was also the most powerful thing they could do. The other members confirmed this with solemn head nods and amens. I listened as everyone present began calling out prayer requests. Some asked for strength in the face of coming obstacles. Other requests were reminders of the importance of sticking together, both in the faith and in the movement. Still others offered up the names of members facing sickness and hard times. The group continued on for several minutes in this manner until a silence fell over the sanctuary. The person on either side of me took my hand and together we bowed our heads.



Figure 5. St. James Church Where the FCEST Holds Meetings

There is a longstanding connection between African American churches in the south and effective mobilization efforts for the purpose of social activism, particularly during the 1960's and beyond (McClerking and McDaniel, 2005, p. 722). Mary Patillo-McCoy has said, "the social agenda of the Black church is most apparent in the activities of the Civil Rights movement which exemplified simultaneous attention to religious, political, economic, and social concerns" (1998, p. 771). Notable orators drew upon the religious culture of the African American community to mobilize action through the use of prayer, Christian imagery, and other commonly held beliefs and values and in doing so, successfully laid the foundation for the eventual end to segregation in the United States (Harris, 1994, pp.45, 50; Patillo-McCoy, 1998, p. 771). Even Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. once wrote, "I am grateful to God that, through the influence of the Negro church, the way of nonviolence became an integral part of our struggle" (Letter From a Birmingham Jail, n. page, n.d.).

Religiosity within the FCEST has served a functional purpose on many levels. The influence of religion has mobilized members of the movement to act in support of shared political goals (Harris, 1994, pp. 45, 49). Second, it has fostered psychological/emotional support for the group's mission (Harris, 1994, p. 42). Third, it has promoted collective identity and consciousness (Patillo-McCoy, 1998, pp. 768, 770). Religiosity provides moral motivation for action by promoting the biblical idea of strength in numbers i.e. "Where two or more are gathered in my name..."(Matthew 18:20, New International Version). Fifthly it provides the cultural tools and organizational stage for action (Harris, 1994, p.

47; Patillo-McCoy, 1998, pp. 767-8). Finally, religiosity functions as a socioeconomic neutralizer and equalizer. "That equality is in part due to Blacks' inability to participate fully in the economic, social, and political life of the majority society" (Patillo-McCoy, 1998, p. 781).

Prior to now I have limited my analysis of FCEST strategies to a discussion of mobilization as it relates to framing. However, it is important to recognize the influence of religious culture to the movement, especially in thinking about how religion provides a resonating frame for members of the FCEST which help individuals stay committed to the cause. In a 1994 study, Frederick Harris found that African Americans actively involved in church were more likely to participate in secular organizations than those who did not (57). Furthermore he discovered religiosity served as a powerful source for facilitating group action (1994, p. 45). Harris goes on to cover three resource themes for mobilizing that are supported and strengthened by religion (1994, pp. 47-49).

The first religiously based resource theme is motivation. Religious beliefs encourage psychological resources for participation which directly impact communal and individual action (Harris, 1994, p. 52). Beliefs and values central to Black spirituality call to mind shared commitments and strengthen faith in group efficacy (Harris, 1994, pp. 48-9). "Particular theological foundations of Black Christianity- especially its collective ethos and the notion of God as active in earthly affairs- support the content of secular activism" (Patillo-McCoy, 1998, p. 767).

Members of the FCEST often referenced a popular Biblical passage that illustrates the aforementioned points. In meetings and interviews I heard the paraphrased words of the apostle Paul time and again: "If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all-how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?" (Romans 8:31). The repeated use of this passage reflects the group's confidence in the divine support of their mission while also serving as a cooperative call to sustained action by assuring members God would provide for their needs in the process.

A second mobilizing source falls under the theme of social interaction. According to Harris, African American religiosity nurtures the development of civic skills (1994, p. 47). Mary Patillo-McCoy goes even further suggesting "the Black church provides directions on how to interact, what rituals are appropriate, and what symbols may be invoked to inspire participants for social action" (1998, p. 771). As members of a larger community, the FCEST has benefited from a collective religious culture with pre-existing ties to social activism and established values concerning civic duty via the legacy of Freedom Summer. In turn, those spiritually infused lessons now serve as a blueprint for current campaigns and are built on by a third mobilizing source.

The final religiously inspired source posited by Harris can be filed under the theme of organization. Church rituals serve as powerful organizational tools for the facilitation and staging of activism (Harris, 1994, p. 42; Patillo-McCoy, 1998, pp. 767-68). "These tools, primarily prayer, call-and-response, and

Christian imagery, invoke the collective orientation of Black Christianity and draw strength from the belief in a direct, beneficial relationship to God" (Patillo-McCoy, 1998, p. 768). A cultural tool kit of the nature described supplies fertile ground for carrying out the collective goals expressed in social activism (Patillo-McCoy, 1998, p. 770).

As far as the FCEST goes, the influence of spiritual values, beliefs, and rituals have both indirect and direct manifestations. Indirectly, the organizational framework of bi-weekly meetings are bolstered and stimulated in what could be viewed as a symbolic resemblance to the literal structure of a church service. For example, FCEST assemblies take place in the sanctuary of a local church, setting the aesthetic stage for activities. The members attending the gatherings form a "congregation" of sorts in that they comprise a body of supporters who have chosen to come together united by a common cause.

A regular component of Christian church services in the south include time set aside to recognize visitors in order to give members a chance to mingle and welcome newcomers. Similarly, the FCEST takes time out of each meeting to have fresh faces introduce themselves so they can be acknowledged and potentially drawn into the fold. After the new guests are introduced any documents relevant to the FCEST current campaigns are passed out and a member is asked to read the contents of the papers. One could argue this portion of the meeting is akin to the reading of the Word in a typical church service. Once documents are read, the speaker for the week moves to the front of the room to deliver a "sermon" to the activists. Like sermons in traditional

African American churches, the message to the FCEST is frequently filled with Christian imagery and call-and-response which require participation on the part of the entire congregation.

Another aspect of religious ritual emulated in meetings is that of the church offering. The familiar experience of passing the plate on Sunday mornings is extended to the organizational frame of FCEST assemblies. Sometimes an actual offering is collected by members to give to St. James as their pastor allows the FCEST use of the building. Paying membership dues at each meeting mirror the Christian principle of tithing. While the amount of dues are established, everyone is encouraged to give only what they can, and no individual is denied membership if they cannot pay. On another level, a second type of offering takes place at meetings in the form of the members offering their time, talents, and efforts to the movement. In a sense, the act demonstrates affiliates are good stewards of what they believe God has given them.

An additional component of conventional church services in African American communities is the portion of the service set aside for testimonials when specific members of the congregation are given the opportunity to share what God has laid on their heart to relay to parishioners. Correspondingly, attendees of FCEST meetings are given the opportunity to stand and share messages of encouragement, personal testimonies or anecdotes, and calls to maintain unity and perseverance in the face of obstacles. The testimonials are often spiritually infused as is evidenced by the following comments a visitor shared. "Light comes in the morning. There will be light for this community

before this is over. You need only stand steady. Stand in what you know. Stand in WHO you know and do what you know is right." (personal field notes, 2009)

While these aspects are all indirect ways one can see the influence of religious beliefs and practices relative to the FCEST, there is more direct evidence of the link between the two. Members frequently call on God directly. At an exceptionally trying time during the movement Sherri Jones stood up and addressed fellow members: "Every time it appears that the door is closed and the light is getting dim, then God still let's you know He is God alright? I'm not that impressive. I'm going to be honest with you, it's the fact that I believe I'm carrying the spirit of God with me based on what has happened to my people in my community" (personal field notes, 2008). Echoing Mr. Jones's sentiment one FCEST supporter said the following during a meeting, "God has taken us this far and he will continue to lead us into the next year and the year after that. The troubles we are facing are a testament to God's involvement in what we are doing here." (personal, field notes, 2009). Another proclaimed, "Don't trust me. Don't trust what I say. Trust God and examine my actions and my deeds" (personal field notes, 2009). Both statements were met with thunderous applause, the waving of hands/handkerchiefs, and impassioned amens.

The FCEST has found a way to infuse religiosity into the very backbone of their struggle to obtain victory over an injustice that has left residents feeling like second class citizens. Prominently featured on the group's website are the written words of a man who was extremely successfully in meshing spiritual and civic responsibility: Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. The FCEST posted his "Letter from

Birmingham Jail” to motivate and encourage and I believe reviewing three selected excerpts from the document can convey the overall tone I have observed within the movement.

In the letter Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. compares the call for modern day activism with the Biblical story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. He writes that civil disobedience “was practiced superbly by the early Christians, who were willing to face hungry lions and the excruciating pain of chopping blocks rather than submit to certain unjust laws of the Roman Empire” (Letter from Birmingham Jail, n.d, n. page). This particular passage conveys that rough times are inevitable but facing the fire is necessary if justice is to be obtained. Considering justice is the primary frame of the FCEST, the anecdote reflects the goals of the organization.

Later on in the letter, Martin Luther King Jr. says “Human progress never rolls in on wheels of inevitability; it comes through the tireless efforts of men willing to be coworkers with God, and without this hard work, time itself becomes an ally of the forces of social stagnation” (Letter from Birmingham Jail, n.d., n.page). Whereas the first passage demands action, the second passage warns that justice cannot be achieved without it and that activism must be a cooperative effort with God in order to succeed. The excerpt offers encouragement to members of the FCEST who after a decade of campaigning may need an occasional reminder of why they should stay the course.

The final quote I have selected is from the end of the letter and predicts a hard road ahead. However I believe it speaks to current objectives of the FCEST

in a way the rest of the letter does not. Martin Luther King Jr. writes, "There was a time when the church was very powerful- in the time when the early Christians rejoiced at being deemed worthy to suffer for what they believed. In those days the church was not merely a thermometer that recorded the ideas and principles of popular opinion; it was a thermostat that transformed the mores of society" (Letter from Birmingham Jail, n.d., n. page). Having faith that your actions will make a difference is a critical component to a movement's success.

The possibility of a small community winning in a fight against giant corporations in a legal system that places the advantage on big business can seem daunting, almost impossible. Nevertheless, the members of the FCEST have collectively chosen to keep the faith and be participants in their own version of David and Goliath in an effort to transform their community and eventually their society. The question is how far have they come in achieving their goals, and what form are their resistance efforts currently taking?

CHAPTER VII
A COALITION OF COMMUNITIES: FOUNDATIONS FOR A REGIONAL
MOVEMENT



Figure 6. Picketing Outside City Hall

When I think back to my first encounters with the FCEST, it amazes me how a community with all the odds stacked against them managed to found a movement that has genuinely taken on a life of its own. Week after week and year after year, the group has persevered, demanding to be heard by the very entities that have silenced them for so long. I would now like to return to my original research question. In terms of grassroots environmentalism, what techniques and strategies have the FCEST used to mobilize and sustain collective action? How successful or unsuccessful have they been in their endeavors?

I have outlined throughout this thesis various strategies and techniques adopted by the FCEST, and their approach has been successful in some regards. At the start of the movement, the FCEST came to see their environment as more than just a setting where life, work, and play take place. Through the process of organizing around the Kerr-McGee case and founding the FCEST, members re-conceptualized the ideological parameters of their civil rights to apply to the landscape of their community. In particular they embraced the idea that everyone has a right to live in a clean and healthy environment free of toxic exposure, and in doing so, what commenced as a movement of individuals started to become something more collective in nature.

For inflowing members of the FCEST, seeing their environment in a new light led to the establishment of environmental justice as a master frame. Emphasizing justice as a driving force of the movement, members were able to place their struggle in the context of human rights. What began as a legal issue became transformed into a moral one, albeit one still initially centered on Kerr-McGee. The framing of their purpose in such a way drew on the community's collective history of organizing for activism and became a huge source of recruitment and mobilization.

Extending the frame of justice years into the movement was a successful way to breathe new life into a movement that was running out of steam. Incorporating fresh social issues into bi-weekly meetings brought a new wave of faces to the table from previously unutilized sentiment pools. Broadening the primary frame of the movement allowed recruitment of new members.

Individuals living in the community, but with no direct ties to the Kerr-McGee case began attending FCEST meetings along with individual university students, student based organizations, and other non-profits interested in human rights issues and racial justice.

The widening of the SMO's primary frame required a revisiting of the original objectives of the movement and necessitated altering the frame of racial justice to address not just a single example of corporate pollution, but also the system perpetrating this widespread pattern of environmental discrimination. Undergoing these changes was not seamless. Some of the most trying times I observed within the group occurred during this period in late 2008. As I previously mentioned, in October of 2008 Touro Law School in New York sent a group of lawyers and law students to Hattiesburg to review the documentation the FCEST had gathered over the years. Their findings confronted the group with some harsh realities. Consider the following remarks made to members of the FCEST by the leading lawyer on the team Tracy McGaugh:

You weren't treated fairly, you weren't treated justly. You weren't told what your houses were on. You weren't told what your gardens were growing in and there's nothing to be done about that...One thing I want to tell you is going to be difficult to let go of, but the litigation where the Hattiesburg Public School District joined with five business owners and sued Kerr-McGee and entered into a settlement that private residents were denied the ability to join into, that's over now. There's nothing to investigate. There's nothing to attack in court. There is no argument to be

made. That is simply over. The good news is, in focusing all of your energy on that case you didn't realize there was a lot more you could do about the situation. (personal field notes, 2008)

The message was a tough pill to swallow for the members who had been toiling day after day for years only to realize they would never see justice in terms of the original Kerr-McGee case, but that meeting marked the beginning of a new approach for the FCEST- one that would open new doors of opportunity further down the road.

The FCEST movement always had a moral undertone, adopting a new approach and extending its adherent base simultaneously amplified existing moral values and the day-to-day business of the organization became infused with spirituality. Incorporating a spiritual aspect to their struggle encouraged mobilization based on the historical connection between religion and activism in the African American community. Additionally it functioned to promote collective cohesion among members, provided a code of ethics for the movement, and instituted a familiar organizational framework from which to conduct meetings. While it is difficult to quantify, spirituality also appeared to evoke strong personal emotions that when coupled with resonating frames from earlier civil rights struggles, encouraged individual participation in the movement.

Recruitment and mobilization strategies resulted in large turnouts for FCEST activities which in turn helped to achieve many of the group's organizational goals. As a result of the FCEST's ability to mobilize for City Hall meetings, public campaigns, and lobbying trips, the group has been able to

markedly increase their visibility through the years on a local, state, and regional level. The group has been granted audiences with environmental specialists, local city administrators, a variety of media outlets, special interest groups, non-profits, and state and national environmental agencies.

The visibility of the FCEST not only drew the interest of non-profits and the EPA, but also from other communities facing similar circumstances. In 2004 members of the FCEST began working with Rev. Steve Jamison of Columbus, Mississippi. Jamison and his congregation had also been battling Kerr-McGee for years after creosote was found on the church property during an extension project. By 2008 both groups connected with a third community organization based out of Crystal Springs Mississippi. The group Concerned Citizens Against Pollution, later called Jesus People Against Pollution, were seeking environmental justice for their community regarding claims of contamination by Kuhlman Electric.

Guest speaking at a FCEST meeting in late 2008 Rev. Jamison said, "I think what we have now is a Coalition of Communities who have come together and said that we are tired of this..and listen..don't get angry. Get motivated and get serious about this!" (personal field notes, 2008). From that night on, what would officially become known as the Coalition of Communities for Environmental Justice (COCEJ) grew in strength and in numbers. At the time of writing the coalition included grassroots organizations from nine cities all over the state, two communities in Alabama, two communities in Tennessee, and even a SMO from Florida.

The COCEJ has developed a website where the particular plight of each community represented can be distributed to the public. Members of the organization say they are committed to working together until every community represented sees justice. Since its inception the COCEJ has witnessed major victories in Columbus and renewed attention to Hattiesburg along with several ongoing campaigns throughout the region. In addition to offering support in local activist endeavors, the organization is dedicated to lobbying for legislation that will transform the way environmental justice cases are currently evaluated and pursued. One could argue that the success of the FCEST's mobilization and recruitment strategies is most aptly displayed in the founding and successes of the Coalition of Communities for Environmental Justice. However, that is not to say the organization is without critics.

In a study published in 2005, Shriver and Kennedy noted that "a common feature of contaminated communities is the emergence of competing factions" (492). He goes on to say, "In some communities citizen groups emerge to challenge the local power structure, while in other cases the community groups are pitted against one another" (Shriver and Kennedy, 2005, p. 492). While the continued actions of the FCEST through the Coalition of Communities for Environmental Justice brought the Environmental Protection Agency's attention to Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality's treatment of contamination complaints in Hattiesburg, it also drew the criticism of Melvin William, president of the Mobile-Bouie Neighborhood Association. In a letter written to the EPA's Regional Administrator in September 2011 and obtained in January 2012 via a

Freedom of Information request, Mr. Williams said, "The Mobile Bouie Community has experienced success working with MDEQ in addressing community concerns and foresees a continued amiable working relationship." He goes on to write:

I am appalled they (the FCEST) feel we need their assistance when our members are educated, scientifically sound, and environmentally conscious in every aspect of the way...We are preparing to challenge them and the EPA in every way possible to keep our focus on the entire community. The Coalition/FCEST talked of MDEQ causing a division; if they would only look in the mirror, division would stare them back in the face. (personal correspondence, 2011)

The correspondence, read in its entirety, represents a scathing criticism of the FCEST going so far as to question the integrity of the group's motivation for involvement regarding an Environmental Protection Agency sanctioned environmental cleanup at Hercules Inc. For their part, the FCEST has published the letter on their website and question if personal relationships between members of the Mobile-Bouie Neighborhood Association and Community Outreach officials at MDEQ are coloring the debate. While additional research emphasizing the organizational complexities of the COCEJ and an examination of renewed tensions between the Mobile-Bouie Neighborhood Association and the FCEST could offer valuable insights into a long term analysis of the success of the FCEST's movement, such is beyond the scope of current research, but it offers fertile soil for future research.

With that being said, what does all this mean? What does it say about the nature of social movements? Perhaps Sylvia Noble Tesh had it right when she

said, "In the end, movements are what they are. What they are, of course, can never be entirely apparent" (Tesh as quoted in Little, 2011, p. 3). On an academic level the case study of the FCEST is an example of how one grassroots organization managed to successfully navigate an environmental hazard through the implementation of effective mobilization and recruitment strategies aimed at fostering collective action while simultaneously calling attention to the power structures enabling that system of environmental inequality and disenfranchisement to exist in the first place.

As such, I hope the work can contribute, in some small way, to the understanding of social movements in general, i.e. what are their common elements? What elements are unique? Can we predict the success of a SMO based on the techniques and strategies they employ? The completion of this ethnographic project also provides the FCEST with an additional avenue through which to express their story and fulfills the promise of one anthropologist to relay that community narrative as best and as balanced as she can.

APPENDIX A

TIMELINE OF ENVIRONMENTAL EVENTS

1882- City of Hattiesburg founded by William H. Hardy

1884- Southern Railway System completed. Explosion of timber industry in .Hattiesburg.

1920- Members of the Hattiesburg Chamber of Commerce meet with Hercules representatives

1920- 3 May, Hercules signs a contract with Newman Lumber to remove pine stumps of the Lumber company's land. Hercules wanted to extract rosin from the stumps for use in their products

1920- Hercules Powder Company purchased land in Hattiesburg.

1921- A petition is circulated opposing the Hercules' location.

1923- Hercules begins operation

1941- 500 employees at Hercules plant

1951- On-site housing for Hercules employees torn down

1953- 900 employees at Hercules plant

1961- Major flood in the Mobile-Bouie neighborhood

1962- production of creosote halted at Gulf State Creosote

circa 1963/64- one resident of the Mobile-Bouie claims to have found a large pit full of drums leaking a greenish, yellow liquid along with other equipment that seemed to have been in a fire

1965- April, Kerr-McGee purchases American Creosoting, formerly Gulf State Creosote

1970- Five University of Southern Mississippi chemistry graduate students write the MDEQ stating they “can no longer tolerate such blatant abuse of our environment” by Hercules

1970- \$110, 000 worth of fish killed. Investigators believe a chemical spill from the Hercules chemical plant was the cause.

1971- 20 to 50 pounds of fish killed. Also attributed to Hercules

1973- Hercules Inc. Public Relations Department releases a film titled, *Our Priceless Heritage* showing before and after footage of the cleanup of several facilities.

1973- Hercules wins the Sports Foundation’s National Gold Medal Award for “outstanding achievement in the fight against water pollution” at their Hattiesburg plant.

1974- Hercules employs 1,400 employees

1974- Major flood in the Mobile-Bouie neighborhood

***Note-** based on ethnographic information, it appears that the open drainage ditch running through the Mobile-Bouie neighborhood was covered sometime in the late 70’s to early 80’s. A more precise date was unavailable at the composition of this timeline.

1978- Although a specific date could not be found by 78' Hattiesburg Public School District had taken over management of the 16 section land where Kerr-McGee had been operating.

1978- Hercules is fined \$82,593 by the state because they “did not act in good faith” in renewing emissions permits

1982- hundreds of Hercules employees are laid off

1983- Laid off employees are rehired

1984- Joe Captain, a state inspector investigates "an unknown waste stream".

Captain followed the stream to a 5 million gallon tank at Hercules. Captain said a valve was set to "proportion the illegal flow", thereby minimizing citizen complaints

1985- Steven Spengler of the MDEQ's industrial wastewater control section notified Hercules that its discharges of Delnav over the last year violated environmental guidelines

1985- Chemical line ruptures causing a fire at the plant

1989- The Army Corps of Engineers discover creosote from the old Gulf State (Kerr-McGee) plant along Gordon's Creek and near the Courtesy Ford site.

1993- MDEQ informs the Hattiesburg Public School District that flood control work should be conducted on the 16 section land.

1994- Conflicting reports emerge concerning the presence of toxic substances in the soil around Courtesy Ford

1995- employees at the plant down to 156

1996- Arthur Ashford discovers a "strange fog" in his backyard along with Hercules employees. Hercules employees apologize, ask Ashford to remain inside his home, and offer to pay his medical bills, but never contact him again.

1999- reports of "numerous dead fish" had been found where the Hercules drainage ditch meets the Bouie River along with "a smell that would take away

your breath”.

1999- MDEQ tests first confirm the presence of creosote East of the tracks alongside Courtesy Ford.

2000- Census data shows that while the overall population of Hattiesburg had increased by more than 4,000 in the last ten years, there were 1,800 fewer residents in East Hattiesburg.

2002- Lawsuit filed by several Hattiesburg residents living near Hercules. Accused the company of refusing to clean up pollution and contributing to the health problems of those living nearby

2002- circa June, residents of East Hattiesburg attempt to join the Hattiesburg Public School District in the lawsuit against Kerr-McGee. Access to join the lawsuit is denied.

2003- Kerr-McGee lawsuit is settled for an undisclosed amount

2004- “Leaky seal” at the Hercules plant responsible for dumping approximately 50 gallons of industrial-grade cleaner into a ditch that empties into the Bouie River.

2004- Members of the Mobile-Bouie Neighborhood Association begin applying for Brownsfield Grants

2004- MDEQ facilitates a meeting between Hercules representatives and members of the Mobile-Bouie Neighborhood Association at the C.E. Roy Community Center. The Coalition of Communities is loosely formed when Rev. Jamison and Sherri Jones begin collaborating.

2005- Hattiesburg awarded \$160, 750 in Brownsfield Grants to conduct

evaluations for hazardous substances in the Mobile-Bouie Neighborhood.

2006- Hercules currently has 40 employees

2007- Tronox (formerly Kerr-McGee) announce they paid \$17 million in the Kerr-McGee lawsuit. Environmental experts, Apex hired to test for creosote in East Hattiesburg. The company was paid \$60,000.

2008- May, members of the FCEST discover that a drainage and ditch project in their neighborhood was actually a creosote remediation project. Also, Bryan Jones of Apex reports that while there were trace amounts of creosote detected in groundwater samples, they pose no threat to residents.

2008- June, environmental expert Tennie White makes a presentation to the City Council refuting the Apex findings. She asserts that not only are there large amounts of creosote in Hattiesburg, but also contends that they pose a serious health threat to residents.

2008- June 9, Hattiesburg Mayor Johnny Dupree writes a letter to Tronox CEO Tom Adams inviting the company to contact the City in order to address "fair" compensation of residents from the creosote company

2008- July 1, CEO of Tronox, Tom Adams writes a letter to Mayor Johnny Dupree informing the mayor that residents will receive no compensation from the company

2008- September, the City Council encourages Apex to return to the next council meeting to re-evaluate their findings concerning the presence and threat of creosote in Hattiesburg.

2008- October, Touro Law school out of New York sends a team to Hattiesburg to evaluate allegations of contamination and advise the FCEST.

2008- River Network, a non-profit organization begins assisting the FCEST by offering web training aimed at helping the group identify and understand the health impacts of contaminants.

2009- Tronox files for chapter 11 bankruptcy

2009- Reports by members of the FCEST of creosote found along Gordon's Creek.

2009- November, The EPA confirms allegations by the FCEST that Apex Environmental Consultants (a firm hired by the City) did not follow EPA standards and protocols and handled creosote testing poorly.

2010- January, The EPA backtracks maintaining that while Apex testing raised concerns, it did not offer definitive proof that community members were at risk.

2010- February, MDEQ confirmed the residue reported by members of the FCEST along Gordon's Creek was in fact creosote but did not pose a threat to the health of the public.

2010- August, Hattiesburg City Council comes under fire over their handling of the impact of USA Yeast with regards to the city's wastewater lagoons and a pervasive odor permeating through downtown Hattiesburg.

2011- May, The EPA orders Hercules Inc. to perform off-site and on-site environmental testing after a multitude of harmful contaminants were discovered at the facility. In the same month the FCEST receives a House proclamation in honor for their environmental work. On May 12, representatives from Hercules

Inc., MDEQ, and EPA hold a community engagement meeting sponsored by the Mobile-Bouie Neighborhood association to address concerns over the Hercules testing.

2011- Sept. 20, Melvin Williams, president of the Mobile-Bouie Neighborhood Association, writes EPA Regional Administrator Gwen Keyes Flemings voicing support for MDEQ and their efforts and disassociating the Mobile-Bouie Association from the FCEST.

2011- Sept. 28, the Mobile-Bouie Neighborhood Association in association with the North Main Historic Neighborhood Association invite representatives from the EPA, Hercules Inc., City of Hattiesburg, Forrest County Supervisors, and MDEQ to a public listening session to “encourage a dialogue with the community to identify strengths, challenges, and opportunities for future communication” (field notes 2011). Melvin Williams threatens to have Sherri Jones and Tennie White forcibly removed from the meeting by Hattiesburg police officers for refusing to stop taping and broadcasting the meeting on a laptop.

APPENDIX B

IRB APPROVALS



THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN MISSISSIPPI

Institutional Review Board

118 College Drive #5147
 Hattiesburg, MS 39406-0001
 Tel: 601.266.6820
 Fax: 601.266.5509
 www.usm.edu/irb

**HUMAN SUBJECTS PROTECTION REVIEW COMMITTEE
 NOTICE OF COMMITTEE ACTION**

The project has been reviewed by The University of Southern Mississippi Human Subjects Protection Review Committee in accordance with Federal Drug Administration regulations (21 CFR 26, 111), Department of Health and Human Services (45 CFR Part 46), and university guidelines to ensure adherence to the following criteria:

- The risks to subjects are minimized.
- The risks to subjects are reasonable in relation to the anticipated benefits.
- The selection of subjects is equitable.
- Informed consent is adequate and appropriately documented.
- Where appropriate, the research plan makes adequate provisions for monitoring the data collected to ensure the safety of the subjects.
- Where appropriate, there are adequate provisions to protect the privacy of subjects and to maintain the confidentiality of all data.
- Appropriate additional safeguards have been included to protect vulnerable subjects.
- Any unanticipated, serious, or continuing problems encountered regarding risks to subjects must be reported immediately, but not later than 10 days following the event. This should be reported to the IRB Office via the "Adverse Effect Report Form".
- If approved, the maximum period of approval is limited to twelve months. Projects that exceed this period must submit an application for renewal or continuation.

PROTOCOL NUMBER: 27100805

PROJECT TITLE: Labor Practices and Gender Relations of Ebenezer Church on the Da Goula Community of Hattiesburg, Mississippi

PROPOSED PROJECT DATES: 10/01/07 to 01/01/08

PROJECT TYPE: New Project

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATORS: Heather Sanchez

COLLEGE/DIVISION: College of Arts & Letters

DEPARTMENT: Anthropology/Sociology

FUNDING AGENCY: N/A

HSPRC COMMITTEE ACTION: Expedited Review Approval

PERIOD OF APPROVAL: 11/05/07 to 11/04/08

Lawrence A. Hosman

 Lawrence A. Hosman, Ph.D.
 HSPRC Chair

11-06-07

 Date



THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN MISSISSIPPI

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- Where appropriate, the research plan makes adequate provisions for monitoring the data collected to ensure the safety of the subjects.
- Where appropriate, there are adequate provisions to protect the privacy of subjects and to maintain the confidentiality of all data.
- Appropriate additional safeguards have been included to protect vulnerable subjects.
- Any unanticipated, serious, or continuing problems encountered regarding risks to subjects must be reported immediately, but not later than 10 days following the event. This should be reported to the IRB Office via the "Adverse Effect Report Form".
- If approved, the maximum period of approval is limited to twelve months. Projects that exceed this period must submit an application for renewal or continuation.

PROTOCOL NUMBER: 29010802

PROJECT TITLE: **Political Ecology and Grass Roots Environmentalism
 in East Hattiesburg Mississippi**

PROPOSED PROJECT DATES: 01/12/09 to 08/01/09

PROJECT TYPE: **Dissertation or Thesis**

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATORS: **Heather Sanchez**

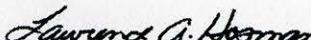
COLLEGE/DIVISION: **College of Arts & Letters**

DEPARTMENT: **Anthropology/Scociology**

FUNDING AGENCY: **N/A**

HSPRC COMMITTEE ACTION: **Expedited Review Approval**

PERIOD OF APPROVAL: **03/30/09 to 03/29/10**



 Lawrence A. Hosman, Ph.D.
 HSPRC Chair

4-3-09

 Date

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