BLACK EMPLACEMENT IN RURAL NORTH CAROLINA

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ABSTRACT

Darius Scott: Black Emplacement in Rural North Carolina
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This research considers collective black emplacement in rural Piedmont North Carolina.

Two forms of such emplacement are explored: that of "back ways" community members via

narratives (Orange County, NC) and that of imprisoned laborers via work songs (Roxboro, NC).

The research involved archival review and in-depth readings of recorded prison work songs and

oral histories taken from back way communities, or historically black communities oriented

around historic wagon roads. A primary goal of this research is understanding the function and

makeup of collective black emplacement as a matter of black geographic space. This is important

because black geographic thinking supports appreciation of spatial collectivity and community-

building in sites easily considered place-less or ones represented by blank space on state maps.

To this end, black geographies, as an interdisciplinary field, calls for analysis of cultural matters

such as songs or personal narratives to evidence otherwise disregarded productions of space.

However, there is a knowledge gap in regards to how the paradigms of black geographies

provide insight into particular instances of spatial collectivity. This research aims to support

overcoming this issue by offering analysis that details (1) how work songs and oral history, as

cultural matters, provide insight into black geographic place-making; (2) the import of

intergenerationality in black geographic narratives of back ways communities; and (3) how

animation may be a viable means of representing the black geographic space of back ways

communities. Together, these offerings attempt to highlight some specificities of black

geographic space—its makeup, function, and potential for representation.

To my brothers, Chris and Nick, and each person who shared stories.

PREFACE

I grew up on Burnside Road. This stretch of rural Vance County, North Carolina is a simple route between places—the towns of Williamsboro and Stovall. It was also the center of my worldview. Burnside Road forms a right-angle with a short stretch of another road, Stagecoach. On the second stretch, there is an intersection with turns associated with two different aims. A left turn led to a family farm at my great-grandmother's house—a formidable woman whose presence so coolly demanded respect that I still question the supposed inferiority complexes instilled by Jim Crow. This way also led to our church, Antioch United Church of Christ, and the homes of aunts and uncles. At one such home, I would plant tulips and learn to read.

An immediate right at the intersection placed you between two country gas stations facing each other. They seemed qualitatively different despite offering the exact same things. The store on the left set up higher on a hill. It was neater—its floors weren't cracked and evocative of bare ground. Its gas pumps had clean, bright number screens compared to the cloudy dials of the lower set store. The store to the left seemed bigger though to no particularly useful effect. My mother was the only one in my family who preferred the store on the hill. I think she once told me the reason was the way the men acted at the lower one, called "Ashley's," in reference to the owners name. As far as I can remember, the other store was referred to as "not Ashley's" or "the other store." At the store to the left, the owner who most always worked the counter himself called me "Gary" after having once misheard my name. Past the facing stores just to the right of the intersection, you would pass a landfill, cross the Kerr Lake reservoir, and

eventually get into the tiny city of Henderson where we would buy groceries and run errands.

The stores, the intersection, the stretch of road to relatives would be the virtual sum of my world until I started school. Besides the white male store owners, everyone I knew was black and most were related to me. An exception to the familial norm was the people who lived just around our house. The house itself was a resolutely "nice" home by most standards—brick with disarming burgundy shutters, cream external trim, neat hedges, and a large green yard down-sloped to meet the road, connected by a paved driveway. Facing the house, to the right, you would see a pasture with rickety posts and barbed wire. For as long as I can remember, it has contained a big family of black cows whose only purpose, it seems, is to live and eat grass since the farmer next door died in the early nineties leaving them to his animal-loving wife. She and her granddaughters were people I knew. The community had other kids, much older than I was, and friends of my uncle who I grew up with. He was something of a hero who could catch dozens of bees in a single net and wasn't afraid to ride his four-wheeler at full speed. We rode on paths deep in the woods, which seemed to lead nowhere in particular from my view. They were opportunities to mindlessly meander away from the sensible space of home, which is all I imagined one could do away from the defined coordinates of home, commerce, and relatives— that is, unless you were venturing some place far like New York or Washington, D.C. In those places, you could go to Broadway shows and meet the president.

The homes and buildings along the stretch of road extending from the intersection, from my childhood mind, contained people and families who lived only to the extent that they must— eating, sleeping, and playing in their own little particular assortment of ways—frozen behind the walls like idealistic paintings. I never considered how their orientation in space may not have given much credence to the intersection or the assorted stretches of road. It did not occur to me

that they might not orient themselves with roads at all for being mere consequences of getting to the spattering of places they knew.

Indeed, from my view, roads have always maintained a certain kind of place-ness. Also on the short stretch where we lived, another great grandmother lived who we called "Granny" and my great-grandfather, "Papa Vick" who adored my uncle probably more than anyone else. Next door to her was her sister Mattie. A world-stage implicated by familial presence and everyday coming and goings, this stretch was a place that was important. It was connected by otherwise meaningless stretches of road leading to other more meaningful sorts like the one leading to the home of the aunt and uncle where I would learn to read. It was similarly surrounded by a group of family members in their own individual homes. These segmented road places superseded others commonly occupied by the strangers of Vance County. They were abstract though unsettled. Referring to them meant an ever-so-mildly anxious uttering of "down bys" or "over nears" whichever relative's name first came to mind. They could be known through situated and narrated accounts, like my own. However, this should not be taken to mean they are marginal in this way.

I follow Patrice Price (2004) who suggests all places are matters of narratives—the division between them occurs in distinguishing which matter. In asserting its dominance, Western Man musters a painstaking conflation of his most precious artistic representation, mathematical coordinates, and imperial violence (Wynter, 2006). This is to have us believe his form is really the only one worth mentioning. If that wasn't enough, he summons modernity to ensure our livelihoods rely on the minutest navigation of space within the scope of his narrative, or at least the form of his genre (Wynter, 1994). To get to work, school, and socially reproduce we must honor addresses and street names. Modernity's offshoots of rural displacement and

development would have visiting the relatives who once lived with me, on the road, be a matter of dancing his collaged dance. My lauded presence at the University of North Carolina and previously in Atlanta and New Jersey, mark the celebration of such distancing and re-orienting assimilation. Even so, a certain core emplacement remains, which privileges a more localized, familial understanding of space.

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INTRODUCTION

SITUATING THE RESEARCHER

This dissertation project explores the mechanics of culturally-emplaced black collectivity. It focuses on "back ways," or historic wagon roads leading to and from 20th century black-owned farms in Orange County, NC. I consider the oral histories of individuals whose communities formed around the back ways. This project draws from and builds upon the literatures of black geographies and cultural geography. McKittrick and Woods *Black Geographies and the Politics of Place* spurred a subdiscipline that considers the ways such narratives, along with lived experience, are a proper focus for geographical work on black communities. The knowledge imparted by narratives relay the conditions of racially marginalized space beyond their relations to dominant sorts—to include their liveliness and continuity. Relatedly, cultural geographical work uses oral history to draw attention to the knowledges contained in personal narratives and their illumination of localized, inhabited geographical space. The guidance imparted by the two fields will shape the arguments made by this dissertation, which ultimately demand social science attend to racialized, local knowledge.

Often in black and cultural geographies work, as is the case for this project, local knowledge disrupts. Upon being imparted by individuals from within some locality, it reveals the inherent incompability of the lived geographies implicated by their firsthand, everyday experiences with dominant, top-down geographies imposed by state borders and developments

(McKittrick & Woods, 2007; Woods, 2002). To be sure, such incompatibility is not necessarily a matter of concerted subversion on the part of those inhabiting the small-scale geographies. Instead, it often is more a matter of dominant space's supposed wholeness and impartiality being impossible. As Lefebvre states, "the fleshly body is already in revolt" (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 201). In the context of this introduction, what this means is that the fluid ongoings, or "leakages" (Longhurst, 2001), of human life cannot be adequately constrained by the rigidity of state-demarcated space. At the same time, these non-constrained aspects of human life condition and generate collective emplacement.

For historically marginalized peoples, this dissertation holds that the grounds beyond state-demarcated space are of utmost importance. Paying attention to the interstices and forgotten places formed on or around the road may mean uniquely accounting for the continunity of rural black collectivity. Often, these are the places caught between the old and the new—the developed and the rustic. For imprisoned laborers, their songs emerged during their placement on the developing, yet established road to codify the site as a place of turmoil rather than farflung, wooded space for transit. In the rural black communities of this research, unmapped and unpaved wagon roads left behind in historic grand shifts to landscapes of modernized roads are also narratively insisted emplacements between the old and the new. The residents of the rural black communities' steadfast orientation around the roadways goes against their unmarked cartographic space—their occupation of blank space on modern road maps.

To detail how local knowledge imparts particular understandings of the communities considered in this writing, I will make use of the "back way" as a concept, which will later be fleshed out in some detail. As a primer, I will briefly recount how in the first interview I recorded, Tom Magnuson attempted to illuminate for me the idea of "back ways" or "black

roads." Magnuson is a local historian who runs the Trading Path Association, an organization devoted to uncovering Contact-Era Native American trading paths in Piedmont North Carolina. His work has also involved some other historic traveling paths in the area. The "back ways" Magnuson discussed in his interview are supposed to be wagon roads abandoned and appropriated by black communities in rural Orange County. Around them, he surmised from his public history work on transportation, communities flourished, if only precariously so. Taken off government maintenance lists and thus no longer dealt with by the state, these were roads that provided space for undisturbed black community establishment—during and through period of Reconstruction and Jim Crow. His explanation of these roads had been compelling enough for the Southern Oral History Program to hire me as a research assistant with the sole purpose of seeing what the back way phenomenon was all about. It promised to improve understandings of how rural space was navigated by black communities through times of mythically insurmountable racism. How did those who had lived in these areas for seventy years or more "know" the space?

Tom Magnuson was the first of subsequent interviewees who had in some measures experienced back ways firsthand. These included black community elders who remembered traveling on wagons in rural piedmont North Carolina and existing within communities oriented around family farms. The oral histories I have collected since first meeting Tom so clearly interweave the particularity of back way community-building in the scope of something bigger that I feel must be a focal point. Specifically, this is the way that cultural productions like community narratives contain unique, historical spatial information for the black communities of the region. Such information cannot be found in maps or gleaned from official documentation. These narratives are intergenerational and paramount to academic recognition of the

communities and others like them. Indeed, the import of such matters have been broadly recognized in black geographic (McKittrick & Woods, 2007; Nieves, 2007; C. Woods, 2002) and cultural geographic (Riley, 2004; Riley & Harvey, 2007a, 2007b; Rogaly, 2015; Valentine & Sadgrove, 2012) literatures to which this dissertation project aims to contribute.

IN ACADEMIA

When I began working at the Southern Oral History Program, I had completed only one semester at Carolina. Very little of my research was certain. An exception was my aim of collecting personal narratives. The idea I had, and still maintain, is that we should allow ourselves, as researchers, to embrace the whole "story," or the messy non-particulars and embellishments, the stories an interviewee is dying to share despite no clear relevance to what you've agreed to discussed, and childhood life events that provide some comprehensive understanding of who your interviewees are as individuals, however abstract.

I believed that if we allowed, perhaps even *forced,* ourselves to reckon with the complexity of individuals in pursuit of specific answers to highly specific research questions, then we would be more capable of harnessing whatever truth we deem attainable by virtue of our work as social scientists. I occupied this intellectual territory with only the slimmest of knowledge of those who paved the way before me—the Donna Haraways, Clyde Woods', and generations of feminist geographers—who insisted the answers to research questions cannot be severed from the unwieldy subjectivities of the people we interview in the field. They introduced "situated knowledges" and "blue epistemologies" that urged inquiry of multiple localized, people-focused knowledges and resisted the mold of a non-reflexive objective, singular sort still popular in social science research (Haraway, 1988; C. Woods, 1998). An interdisciplinary

introduction to their critical theory would affirm my belief that knowing anything about some peoples' negotiation of space, means first understanding how it is they "know" and organize themselves in space. Such a mandate insists we go beyond our specialized lines of inquiry.

Despite a well-received call to honor the humanity of researched peoples, human geography accommodates the production of fixed and de-humanized spatial information, which often materializes as a map of planet earth subdivided (Massey, 2006; Pickles, 2004). Such is a cold and overdetermined matrix for all human conduct in space. Every so often, we soothe our transgressions by recounting the limitations of this all-encompassing scope and how much it is tethered to Western genres of humanity that feature territory, marginalization, and exclusionary violence (Crang, 2015; Price, 2004; Wood, Fels, & Krygier, 2010). We call on accounts of localized, emplaced peoples to do so (Lorimer, 2003; Riley & Harvey, 2007a; Rogaly, 2015; Valentine & Sadgrove, 2012). However, the occasional nature of these revolutions is amiss. We struggle with determining just how bound we are to cartography; not at the scale of everyday occupancy and navigation of space, but at that which it is all held together, or the constant global factor.

As Sylvia Wynter asserts, the all-encompassing and objective "global" understandings of space reflect the situated-ness of Western Man, as a manifestation of the human (McKittrick, 2006; Weheliye, 2014; Wynter, 1994, 2006). His dance is one of sterility and directness. It seeks to absorb and refute all other styles at once like a post-modern production encompassing jazz, ballet, tap, and modern mixed up in a minstrelsy that cartoons their bare mechanics. Western Man is a trickster with a machine gun. Like Puck, his deceit is bound to fool even the farthest situated outsider, beyond the fourth wall. His repetitive twirls lull the nonbeliever. And if that fails, he shoots to kill. Following the metaphor, the map maintains its predominance for giving

some way of charting his unrestrained combative moves, which are original only in their far-flung strikes and emulations. This movement itself is what implicates the world-stage—the seed of cartographic reasoning.

Western Man's violent plea for acquiescence fails despite the dominance of plantation map logic (Lefebvre, 1991; McKittrick, 2011). Being so mercurial, his mind games are often blown by their inherent discordance, like capitalist production's simultaneous need to appropriate and destroy matters of heterogeneity (Lefebvre, 1991). Even beyond such discordance, the rules demanded by his games are too stringent for the unyielding and *localized* nonrestraint of human anatomy (Longhurst, 2001), movement (Certeau, 2011), and collectivity (Woods, 1998).

SITUATING THE BACK WAY

Before getting into the singularity of the oral history accounts and their descriptions of spatial knowledge, I want to briefly introduce the oral history interviewees themselves. In the audio-recorded interviews, older adults describe the ways they have lived in rural Orange County and surrounding areas. In total, I recorded twelve oral histories during fieldwork. The ages of interviews range from sixty-two to ninety-three at the time of recording. Three of the interviewees are white men who came to the South as transplants from the North or Midwest. Peter and Barry both happened to relocate from suburban New York to attend Duke University. Tom, just mentioned previously, came to the area on the tail-end of a long string of moves and career changes. All three describe their experiences in terms of entering black community space from the outside and varying degrees of pleasant integration experiences.

All black interviewees have lived in the back way communities since their childhoods, with the exception of one who has since moved. Two interviews were collected with mother-and-daughter pairs and contribute some of the most illuminating information. Two of the interviewees have doctoral degrees: one a retired Ivy League-educated research scientist and the other a North Carolina Central University history professor. Two women interviewees have lived on the same plot of land for all of their lives of eighty and ninety-three years. Both describe the changing landscape from the position of their home-space—road paving, the proliferation of cars, and the increased mobility of children post-desegregation. Going to their homes involves traversing some semblance of the past—rocky dirt or gravel paths that once likely blended seamlessly with the main road. Both have grown-up, married, had children that have since left, and remained in the space once owned and farmed by their fathers. A younger interviewee, Regina, intends to live as the two older women have, and she is well on her way to doing just that. Her interview, recorded with her mother, describes the difficulty of staying put due to earnest outside attempts to purchase the land and local government's avid support of such development. Like the two women who have remained on their family land, Regina's mother, Mary, recounts early days on the land with references to farming and vibrant micro-communities of laborers who were also cousins and uncles. Two other interviewees, like the professor and Regina, describe growing up in the community space amid desegregation and the violence that came along with it. Like Regina, they too express passionate concerns for heritage and the future of their community space. Implicated in all the oral history interviews is a spatial knowledge that delineates community space with family histories and personal anecdotes. In the context of this research description, the "back way" situates the narrated accounts in the communities' physical environment as being informative and illuminating of such space.

Interviewees invariably lived on what historically satisfies the back way criteria—wagon roads whose exclusion from state maintenance is shown, in interviews, to have been appreciated for keeping community space from Jim Crow's interracial violence. However, the back way doesn't "end" there. Instead, it creeps up on what now is a driveway or perhaps was once a walking path to church and never traversed by anything on wheels. On review of the interviews, the back way emerges as a condition for the communities' roadways at certain times and in certain stories. To be clear, the term is not one used by any interviewees except for Tom. Instead, its use here and in the context of the Southern Oral History Program refers to the aforementioned conditions. The "back way" concretizes certain recounts of the communities' pasts where farming was central and community space was appreciatively disconnected from the larger area, or "Chapel Hill" as interviewees curiously refer to it. to Characteristically, the seclusion represented by the back way was not one entirely marred by the difficulties associated with contemporary exclusion like underdevelopment.

More compartmentalized understandings of the back way are attractive. They are simple, clear, and make good sense in terms of subversion and overcoming narratives. However, their inability to contain the whole accounts of the phenomenon should not be terribly surprising. The stringent divisions demanded by our original understanding of back ways as "wagon roads" is alone suspect and perhaps ahistorical (Wells, 2006). During the days of truck farming and rural landscapes dominated by unpaved roads, there may have been little reason to differentiate between a wagon road and what was just a long driveway to someone's home. To be sure, in rural areas today such differentiation is still sometimes subjective if not entirely random. Imagine making such divisions in a time when people only traveled outside of their immediate home-space to sell at market and on rare trips to buy canning jars and equipment. Travel to school

could be done by foot and meant going through the woods or whatever was the quickest way. Childbirth occurred at home, food was grown there, and church was often had in the landowning relative's home (Chafe, Gavins, & Korstad, 2001). Interviewees recount drinking water being retrieved from nearby springs. Regina describes her grandfather's farming house transforming into a "store" for the community's children. At its height, such hyper-localized life space may be thought of as pre-back way conditions.

The back way, or back way-ness rather, emerges in the interstices of the old and the new. Narratively, it is cast in the context of a changing political economy that was to come—a time when distinctions would need to be made between what was a wagon road, a wide walking path, or a long single-use driveway. In this way, the back way might be said to recast "back"-wardness as a means of historically maintaining the enjoyed separateness of black communities, so as to almost say, "I don't know what was going on over in Chapel Hill, but we were just fine here with the way things were." Recasting is the condition here because it shows how a prominent feature of the physical landscape, a road, can be maintained via a localized and black ontological spatial setup. Further, the narrative trope is used in describing conditions prior to characteristically harmful state-cum-interracial interaction, or dealing with "Chapel Hill." And as previously stated, it describes a time before such dealings were a necessary evil, or before a wage-focused economy demanded car travel.

While other interviews each refer to separate community spaces within rural Orange County, one road in particular, Rogers Road, is the focus of three interviews and four interviewees. Further, it is discussed briefly in the interview with Barry, a New York transplant who also served on the board of county commissioners, which faced longstanding opposition from the Rogers Road collective. In the narratives, Rogers Road is an old wagon road plotted by

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the eldest community resident's father and his brother, Freeman and Sam Rogers. As the road's namesake, they ground the community's history, which precedes the early 20th century road plotting itself and extends back to slavery. The road became a locus around which the farming community grew and transformed to welcome other black families just after the mid-20th century and on the cusp of school desegregation. The landfill would become an issue for the community during its plotting in the 1970s, which led to the subsequent paving of the road in the 1980s for the sake of garbage truck travel. Prior to this, Rogers Road, like others in the area, is described as a "dirt road" that had been "tearing up cars left and right" by one interviewee illuminating the simultaneous need and cost of state road paving. Even so, in the context of a modern political economy, the rocky state provided by the natural environment is cast in a light more positive than that provided for the local government. While that environment did tear up cars, it also provided a landscape described as pristine and beautiful. Comparatively, the local government came with what is described as broken promises and jeopardized heritage.

Before I had interviewed anyone on Rogers Road, the community's narrated history had already emerged in ongoing contest of the local government's 1970s placement of a landfill. The road's historic status and accounts of the enjoyed autonomy it provided have been mobilized in testimonial instances of advocacy. Resident activists have collaborated and shared the community's story with nearby university researchers and journalism students over the past few decades. They have done this to the effect of having the general public of Chapel Hill and surrounding areas know that "Rogers Road," as they call the community, has a long history and that it has been wronged by particular instances of development (i.e. landfill placement), which disrupted the retrospectively enjoyed characteristic of backway-ness.

Altogether, the oral histories pivot understandings of the back way from being the condition of physical roads to being a "back" way of life. The trope provides a way to navigate the paradoxes of much-needed development/intrusion and what came before. It also contextualizes such a paradox as emerging in the expansion of a shifting political economy that would make suddenly needing transportation oversight necessary for accessing farther away desegregated schools and wage-labor sites of employment. The "back way," as a term, highlights the linkages between shifts from a hyperlocal past and an increasingly interconnected present.

In addition to the "back way," two other terms are used throughout this dissertation and warrant explicit consideration at this point. They are "emplacement" and "blackness." I first began using emplacement in reference to the back way communities after reading the phenomenology work of Edward Casey who uses a variation of the term, "implacement." In *Getting Back into Place* (2009), for instance, Casey says, "to exist at all…is to have a place—to be implaced" (13). I use the term to refer to both the holistic and compulsory nature of the back way communities as particular instances of black collectivity subject to ongoing exclusion. Following transatlantic encounter, black people *existing* in zones of exclusion, or demonic grounds (Wynter 2000), predicates the creation of new ways of codifying place. These comprehensive ontological setups include not just placements, such as, rural black back way communities, but also attendant ways of communicating their existence, such as, through oral history or convict labor songs rather than maps and other state-endorsed means.

"Blackness" is referenced throughout this dissertation to describe the status of those who produce these emplacements. On one hand, these are people descending from transatlantic slaves in North and South America. Additionally, this condition of blackness has come to account for those regularly relegated to the zone of exclusion stemming from transatlantic encounter due to

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their own African diasporic background. That is to say recent immigrants from West Africa are too black here in America. However, this dissertation does not seek to illuminate the condition of blackness, which would implicate a focus on interracial interaction. Instead, it attends to conditions of spatial alterity beyond racialization. The interviewee families and the convict laborers being codified as "black" is merely an epochal moment for ongoing emplaced alterity vis-à-vis the back ways and roadwork sites. I hold that the productions themselves, the emplacements, maintain a most robust alterity that negotiates/recognizes but does not remained confined in Western matrices of racialization in which "blackness" forever remains firmly lodged. Indeed, for this work, the emplacements themselves are the geographies of *those called* black rather than materializations of blackness, itself. At the same time, reckoning with accounts of these emplacements via song and oral history means encountering what it is the interviewees and convict laborers have to say about their experienced negotiation of blackness. What this dissertation offers in regards to illuminating the condition of "blackness," then, is principally empirically founded. For instance, the convict laborers themselves classify the roadwork site as one of racialized labor and the oral history interviewees' call local governments racially antagonistic. These descriptions illuminate the forces that both foreground and continually challenge emplaced spatial alterity.

THINKING WITH BLACK GEOGRAPHIES

My introduction to the growing black geographies canon occurred in the fall of 2013. It was my first semester of graduate school, and I was enrolled in a social geography course on race and American urbanization. The course had already had an invaluable impact on my scholarly trajectory. The instructor's lessons were thoughtful, focused, and vehemently political. On the

latter point, however, his theses were virtually unassailable. The American landscape as we knew it, urban and otherwise, was composed of sedimentary physical elements shaped by the most blatant moments of American racism, and our occupancy of it was ruled by mostly naturalized racial stratification (Lipsitz, 2011; Muhammad, 2010). Before writing the course's final paper, I met with the instructor to discuss my research questions and literature reviews.

Our meeting was brief and mostly nondescript. He mentioned, however, two books that I would find useful: *Who Set You Flowin'* by Farah Jasmine Griffin and *Black Geographies and the Politics of Place* co-edited by Clyde Woods and Katherine McKittrick. I went to the library and checked out both. As my paper was on the Great Migration and I had an interest in personal narratives, I found Griffin's book invaluable. The *Black Geographies* text struck me for being both accessible and on-point. I only worked with the introduction before moving on to another book by Clyde Woods at the insistence of another graduate student, *Development Arrested.* This book and Woods' "blues epistemology" would take center stage in the paper I would compose for the course. As the peer who shared the book with me said, despite being Woods' only solo-authored one at the time, "when you write a book like that, you don't need to write any others." Indeed, Woods offers a compelling argument, which is that the blues, music I had heard and enjoyed on occasion, codified and provided a certain way of knowing Southern landscapes. And rather than refute, this spatial-cum-musical epistemology transcended the Western sorts that deemed black *anything*—never mind black music—incapable of subjective place-making.

Ultimately, I saw Woods' general idea as affirmation for "getting real" about segregated black spaces. At the time of working through Woods' ideas, I was also engaging with Critical Race Theory and other literature that troubled the flat characterization of black life in America (Price, 2010; Wilson, 2000; 2002), even if that characterization was meant to be a positive one—

like the struggling pre-desegregation black communities (Horsford, 2009). I knew, from firsthand accounts if not firsthand experience, that life in black communities has been multifaceted and inclusive of all sensorial and emotive factors that comes with people being people. From a theoretical viewpoint, Woods' idea provided theory for grappling with the means the communities established such elements of subjectivity, collectively. Like the broad American historical imagination, most literature on race and space in this country approached even the most historic matters of race with underdeveloped understandings (Woods, 2002).

One example of such underdeveloped views is school desegregation, which I will only briefly discuss here to illustrate the point. In the aforementioned vein of working through the ideas of Critical Race Theory, I was writing a paper on the impact of school desegregation. This paper was inspired by the personal narrative of my grandfather, who had often told me about his own segregated school experiences. In this context, his reminiscence of youth is a fond one where his neighbors became school teachers, and his school teachers became impromptu real estate agents selling him and my grandmother the land on which they live today. The stories of his past that remain most vivid to me over the years are the ones involving the school teachers who encouraged him to "join the police force or go to college." His teachers were his relatives, and community members, and they were effective leaders to which he proclaims owing a great deal of admiration and respect. They knew his mother and his grandmother personally.

The reason my grandfather's school narrative is so vivid in my memory is because of the contrastingly dark view of segregated schools in the South held by the America's historical imagination (Clark, 1983). His stories contrast starkly with the dilapidated turmoil we have come to associate with segregated communities (Lipsitz, 2011). The passage of *Brown v. Board of Education* is a most celebrated moment. We are all able to draw forth mental images of black

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children dressed in their Sunday's best walking through crowds of angry white faces into yet segregated schools. These children emerge from nowhere in particular, and their struggle to merely walk through the white school doors is accepted as wholly good and worth it by virtue, perhaps, of being so disputed by crowding racists. How could such a narrative make sense? The ease with which we implicate segregated black space as being so undesirable that young children should be subject to such violence and hullabaloo is telling. My grandfather graduated from high school in 1969. I wonder what it would mean if the child in the picture were him. Where would we have lived? How would his childhood narrative change?

It is notable that none of the black interviewees I sat with spoke fondly of school desegregation. While the draw of it was simple—access to better funded education—the costs were high. For older interviewees who were parents at the time, the move meant violence in its purist form—fist fights and other attacks on the bodies of their children. For those who were students, it meant witnessing such attacks or, at best, some measure of hostility and occupancy of starkly contested space. To be sure, I do not mean to suggest in a couple paragraphs that America's celebration of desegregation attempts is ill-founded. Rather, I seek to premise the idea that our understandings of black space have been woefully one-sided. In such light, black geographies offers space for considering how, despite the very real conditions of Jim Crow undergirding such one-sided thinking, black life occurs in contexts of ongoing discrimination. My personal background was the position from which I found the canon so compelling.

In the spring of my first year at Carolina, I would find myself again engaging with *Black Geographies and the Politics of Place*. This time, I was given the personal copy of another graduate student, which I would hold onto for quite some time. I had made a habit of reading on the bus to campus each morning. Most days, I would thumb through a text before putting it down

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and moving onto another. This had me exposed to a number of different books that I would return to, I supposed, when grappling with some particular research issue. When I engaged with *Black Geographies* in the context, however, I kept reading. There was no part of it with which I was not eager to engage. The "gist" was all too compelling to set aside for later—it was a book that would potentially *change* what I considered a research topic altogether.

Each essay illuminated the points Woods and McKittrick were making. Via a strange interplay of the mundane and the fantastic, the American landscape, which here notably includes more than the United States, "real," lived geographies and spoken of geographies existed for black people. The essays set about pinpointing particular instances of such, and they were not shy about identifying their discreteness or their emotiveness (by virtue of being produced through music, art, and personal histories). Angel David Nieves, for instance, spoke about how the personally recounted family narratives of Africville were the remaining "bricks and mortar" of the long-razed, historically Afro-Canadian community and should thus be attended to in historic preservation measures. *Black Geographies* established a broad scope within which one could set about empirically tending to a wealth of localized and historic productions of space. Rather than stopping at how black people "survived" in America, it premised questioning how black people *lived* in geographies materialized by their collective senses of place.

FOUR DISSERTATION ARTICLES

This dissertation contains four separate articles that are united for focusing on the black collectivity delineated in cultural expressions, like songs and oral histories, and for having a black geographies theoretical foundation.

Since my early engagements with *Development Arrested* and *Black Geographies¸* I have

joined a growing, multidisciplinary number of scholars who find primary theoretical foundation

in the subfield's core ideas (Bledsoe, 2017; Bledsoe, Eaves, & Williams, 2017; Cuder-

Domínguez, 2014; Ramírez, 2015). As I hope is illustrated by the four articles, these ideas have

helped me engage with somewhat disparate themes pertaining to the back way communities.

The first article considers how the Rogers Road community's position via dominant state

maps has been in a "nowhere at all" anticipated by the spatial disorientation of enslavement's

transatlantic movement. It identifies the historically unmapped back way communities as being a

site of dominant unmaking in which black senses of places were established. Given the *Black*

Geographies call for research with narrative and lived experience, this paper questions the

viability of oral history as narrative in this context. This article has been published in *Social and*

Cultural Geography under the title, "Oral history and emplacement in 'nowhere at all:' the role

of personal and family narratives in rural black community-building." I consult two of the oral

histories from residents of the Rogers Road community—one with David Caldwell and another

joint oral history with Gertrude Nunn and her daughter Judy Nunn Snipes. Analysis of their

accounts suggests the Rogers Road community sense of place via narrative highlights rurality

and family as the fabric of its collectivity.

The second article considers how the passed-down family narratives demand

consideration of intergenerationality. It looks into what of narrative and lived experience has it

be so productive of black senses of place in maligned or dominantly place-less sites like the

Progressive road or "nowhere at all." If black geographies has us believe that "narrative"

produces geographic space, how are they deployed to do so and what of narratives, specifically?

I argue that discrete emplaced collectivity materializes through intergenerationally recounted

genealogies and family anecdotes like those narrated during oral history interviews. Two of the interviews I recorded were with mother-daughter pairs. Gertrude and Judy's discussed the historic Rogers Road community space. Mary and Regina's covered theirs. Both spaces are historically agricultural and originally owned by family patriarchs. In addition, both of the farm spaces were historically co-owned or labored by extended family members who collectively would make up the bulk of the back way community space. Such space constitutes family-based communities, which accommodated commerce, worship, and kinship all for the sole use of those living in them. The variegated, historical communities are actualized in the narratives against the norms of contemporary life. In this way, narratives of intergenerational social life are important for the inhabitable existence of the communities themselves.

The third article weighs the methodological demands of black geographies work in light of the opportunities offered by the digital—if the maps have failed and antagonized black space, what other means of representation may we work with? The article considers the "regularity" of black geographic space. In part, it builds on the Black Geographies notion that narrative and lived experience produce real, inhabitable geographies that are both reliable and matters of alterity. They must have regular features called by multiple generations of community members. Further, the various back ways communities in Orange County exhibit similar means of passing on narratively-generated space suggesting the underlying aspects and mechanics that suggest the disparate generations may be abstracted and represented somehow if not by traditional cartography. This paper presents animation as one viable alternative for representing the black geographic space of the back ways communities. Three animation clips produced with a professional animator are presented alongside textual analysis.

The fourth article situates roads as cultural matters in a broader sense. It looks at how the Progressive Era "Good Roads" advocates discursively transformed the road from a site of personal and community attachment to a technology of science and expertise. The primary aim of this article is establishing cultural views of dominantly place-less or emptied out sites. I consult a report written by Bayard Rustin, which provides ethnographic reflections on his stay on roadwork prison camp. Analysis of his recount suggests the convict laborers—imprisoned and forced to construct the roads in the vision of Progressive science and expertise, or roads-as-technologies—fostered senses of place via work songs.

A FINAL INTRODUCTORY NOTE

The stories of the back way, like my own spatial narratives, have purchase. They are deployed by residents in certain ways to have certain effects. Community activists from Rogers Road made a point of sharing the neighborhood's rich history to journalist and scholars. They did so in a way that would have the landfill come into view as an intrusion. It was harmful to something larger than any one house or family. It was an affront to an entire historical community. Indeed, this is how all spatial narratives work. For instance, the United States' home of the brave construct anticipates the self-sacrifice of soldiers. To know this place means knowing such a story, which interpolates all who live here. The back way story calls geography's bluff. It forces one to reckon with that which makes all places meaningful—personal experiences and relations.

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ORAL HISTORY AND EMPLACEMENT IN 'NOWHERE AT ALL:' THE ROLE OF PERSONAL AND FAMILY NARRATIVES IN RURAL BLACK COMMUNITY-BUILDING[1]

INTRODUCTION

Since encountering the West via slavery, black people have—in various moments across time and space—experienced captivity in nowhere at all-ness. Hortense Spillers analyzes the capture and transatlantic movement of enslaved persons as the chief instance of this:

> '[R]emoved from the indigenous land and culture, and not-yet "American" either, these captive persons, without names that their captors would recognize, were in movement across the Atlantic, but they were also nowhere at all. Inasmuch as, on any given day, we might imagine, the captive personality did not know where s/he was, we could say that they were the culturally 'unmade,' thrown in the midst of a figurative darkness that "exposed" their destinies to an unknown course.' (Spillers, 1987, p. 72)

Spillers' theoretical 'nowhere at all' characterizes a condition that would be experienced by those African persons and their descendants thereafter. From Reconstruction to the Prison Industrial Complex, the destinies of black people have meant wrestling with a violently imposed spatial precarity.

The volatile site of the plantation was the destination of 'unmade' African persons. Its violent material conditions overlay those of inaugural black identity-'making.' As McKittrick

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describes, the site 'naturalized a plantation logic that anticipated' contemporary racial violence coeval to the production of black geographies (McKittrick, 2011, p. 951). Indeed, while the plantation was the grounds of quotidian terror, it was also where enslaved Africans established collectivity through creative practices like song and dance. Under the guises of unsubstantial fancy, such creative practices established black senses of place and 'restored the disrupted affiliations of the socially dead' (Hartman, 1997, p. 51). However, future disruption was ensured as social death was important to the plantation's economic function, which relied on black captives being held as verifiable sub-humans with no capacity for collective reasoning or emplacement.

Living someplace wrought by a black sense of place means residing in what is codified as uninhabitable. As plantation logic ensures, 'to live in the unlivable condemns the geographies of marginalized to death over and over again' (Mckittrick, 2013, p. 7). Following Encounter, the black identity remained culturally unmade, cast in figurative darkness, and ready to virtually transition from one economically serendipitous trope to another—from enthusiastic slave to undisciplined convict in need of reform (Baker, 1998; Lichtenstein, 1993). The iterative exploitation of black people's figurative place in darkness consigned their actual spatial productions, evidenced by maroon maps and other sorts 'produced outside the official tenets of cartography,' to the indistinguishability of nowhere at all (McKittrick, 2011, p. 949).

Nowhere at all fails to bar black subjectivity during interracial encounter. The Oxford English Dictionary defines emplace as 'put[ting] in a certain place or position; fix[ing] in place' (Oxford English Dictionary, 2016). This means that for black people, emplacement may be thought of as what follows encountering transatlantic 'movement.' It counters their forced embodiment of a potentially fluctuating racialized and arrested identity—'exposed' as they were

to an 'unknown course' at the whim of outside, characteristically non-black determinations. As the prefix 'em-' denotes, it means creating the conditions in which such stabilizing is possible (Oxford English Dictionary, 2016). Emplacement in nowhere at all does not necessarily involve troubling top-down characterization of black spaces as being virtually meaningless. However, it may provide space for unchecked collectivity. Guided by 'black geographic' principles, this paper argues that family and personal narratives inscribe meaningful histories of community emplacement in nowhere at all, or around the 'uncharted' span of a road in the case to be considered.

My insights begin with some reflections on the opportunities for exploring racialized alterity that are afforded by black geographies and oral history literature. I then focus on the case of a two square mile historically African-American community in rural North Carolina. Two oral history interviews with long-term residents contain family and community histories that themselves demarcate the named 'Rogers Road community,' locally noted for its agricultural history and environmental justice fight with county government, which revolved around a landfill. The oral histories suggest the community's place in nowhere at all predicates particular hardship and alterity. They are drawn from a growing collection with the Southern Oral History Program, *Back Ways*.

HUMANISTIC PERSPECTIVES: BLACK GEOGRAPHIC PARADIGMS AND

OPPORTUNITIES

Black geographies

Recognizing alterity in nowhere at all

In the *Black Geographies and the Politics of Place* (2007) collection of essays, 'black

geographies' emerge as the eponymous subjects of a new subfield (McKittrick & Woods, 2007).

The name references particular spatial productions of the African diaspora that take form via

narrative and lived experience. It is important to note that black geographies literature is a subset

of wide-ranging geographic scholarship on anti-black racism. Black geographies is, as

McKittrick and Woods work shows (1998; 2006; 2007) an interdisciplinary project that does not

reside simply in the discipline of human geography. It uses a range of materials about space and

place (such as music, fiction, and poetry) to critique the ways racial capitalism affects the

production of space.

Within the discipline of human geography, questions of race and place feature in work on

how the tensions of Jim Crow racism have shaped the naming and experiences of the built

environment (Alderman & Inwood, 2013; Inwood & Yarbrough, 2009) and how infrastructure

and policy matters, like development and the functions of prison, are matters of institutional

racism (Domosh, 2015; Gilmore, 2007; Harrison, 2015; Pulido, 1996). Some study considers

America's enslaving past and its relationship to contemporary propertied and industrial

landscapes (Delaney, 1998; B. Wilson, 2000). The broad intent of these works has been to make

geography more antiracist and inclusive (Mahtani, 2014; Price, 2010), and there is evidence of

some measures of progress (Price, 2010). However, little remains resolved as to where the focus

of our empirical work as social scientists might need to shift once geography's historic

complicity with racism is considered. Black geographies is unique for taking on the nowhere at all and there seeking to identify and interrogate the presence of alterity (McKittrick, 2006; Woods, 2002).

Since its founding only ten years ago today, black geographies continually evokes the opening chant of Sun Ra's 1974 afro-futurist *Space is the Place* film: 'It's after the end of the world. Don't you know that yet?!' (Sun Ra et al, 1974). Reflecting Woods' call (2002) for black geographic work on 'life after death,' the sub-discipline offers practices for thinking through certain realities or proofs that highlight long-inhabited alterities to, albeit ones contingent on, displacement by Western spatial configurations like the plantation (McKittrick, 2006; Wynter, 2000). For interdisciplinary black geography scholarship, such displacement epochs black exodus to and ongoing life in nowhere at all.

Consulting Humanistic data

The interdisciplinary work of black geographies centers Humanistic objects, or the histories, stories, and music, which are the focus of traditional Humanities scholarship. Such data is meant to illuminate spatial orientations and developments of black people beyond Western abstractions of space. The Humanistic objects inscribe and codify narrative and lived experience in nowhere at all, or literally in what may be represented as blank space on a map (McKittrick & Woods, 2007). Geography at-large has included such scholarship to explore historic, non-elite subjectivities, which are sparsely represented in dominant archives (Riley & Harvey, 2007b).

Humanistic work in black geographies provides space for recognizing what Woods calls 'the reestablishment of collective sensibility' (Woods, 1998, p. 30). Woods argues that this reestablishment manifests via a 'blues epistemology,' in which the genre's folk music implicates

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how black occupants of the Mississippi Delta's codify their 'own theories of social change…of class and ethnic depravity' (Woods, 1998, p. 103). From the blues to hip hop, the epistemology carries on across periods of racially uneven development.

In the *Black Geographies* anthology, Angel David Nieves considers how historic preservation must be more attentive to the unique histories of black community spaces that have been razed in processes like urban renewal (Nieves, 2007). Nieves argues that historic preservation efforts attend to the narrated ties minority groups maintain to these razed spaces, like the Africville community space in Halifax, Nova Scotia. This troubles the preservationist's standard 'methodological "tool box,"' which features architectural styles and physical integrity over narrative (Nieves, 2007, p. 82). Other black geographies research considers how food-based community development organizations must consider 'collective histories' of urban black communities to understand failures to engage them in community farming projects. The collective histories may map unassuming northern neighborhoods as hard-earned refuges away from racialized southern traditions like farm labor (a la sharecropping), once escaped via the Great Migration (Ramírez, 2015). The collective histories, like Nieves' family narratives, challenge assumptions about past and present racially salient community spaces.

To the black geographies canon, I aim to contribute meditation on how seemingly inert space, projected by (though not equal to) transatlantic enslavement's nowhere at all, relates to particular contemporary black geographies like Rogers Road's relationship to cartographic blank space. From an empirical standpoint, I aim to contribute to the sub-discipline one means of using Humanistic data to investigate black geographies. Across the data sources focused on in prior studies—music, community histories, and the memory work of fictional novels—a focus on cultural history takes center stage. These sources challenge assumptions about racially salient

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places like rural black neighborhoods. Perhaps less considered is the potential for other methodological approaches in recovering black alterity, and I now consider oral history with this possibility in mind.

Oral history

Black geography texts reinforce Woods' call for a 'historically grounded multidisciplinary approach' to addressing racism in and from geography (Woods, 2002, p. 64). I would like to consider oral history as another particular and broader sort of Humanistic datum. While 'collective histories' and those discussed by Nieves are compelling, oral history presents itself as a means of entering and disrupting the ongoing geographic work that employs it or of 'inserting black geographies into our worldview' as social and cultural geographers (McKittrick & Woods, 2007, p. 5). In comparison to the histories characterized by Nieves and Ramírez, oral history asserts a disciplinary specificity for being a method and object of study with its own lineage in geography. It stands to be an appropriated construct of which geographers have long considered the merits and urged more transformative use (Riley & Harvey, 2007b).

Geographers have made use of personal narratives like oral history for disrupting some dominant narratives and for attempting to transform the way they acknowledge their own social contexts as disciplined researchers (Lorimer, 2003; Rogaly, 2015; Valentine & Sadgrove, 2012). In regards to the former use, oral history as method has provided a means of privileging the particular and personal voices of those excluded from official archival records (Riley & Harvey, 2007b, 2007a). In the 1960s, early academic engagement with oral histories focused on privileging the voices of farmers (Evans, 1965; Riley, 2004). This work predates Riley and Harvey's more recent work on oral history and farmland management practices (Riley & Harvey,

2007a, 2007b). Over time, 'oral history has moved from its previous position as representing a rather heroic process of reclaiming "the voice of the past," to now being seen as a more complex and politicized endeavor, whereby the historian plays an active role in the (re)constitution of the past, narrating histories and. . . literally 'writing culture' (Riley & Harvey, 2007b, p. 345). Though robust engagement with oral history is limited, it has been a noted part of rural historical geography work where black geographies research on enslavement and farming stands to contribute (Riley & Harvey, 2007a; M. Woods, 2010).

Highlighting the use of oral history as method, literature on rural geographies considers how these histories have the power to reveal the localized production of particular farming landscapes (Riley & Harvey, 2007a; M. Woods, 2010). Riley and Harvey highlight 'genealogical knowledge' as that which extends past their farming interviewees' own, to reveal deep, local oral traditions (Riley & Harvey, 2007a, p. 402). As Lorimer suggests (2003), though these personal narratives may not topple the grander narratives of something like Riley and Harvey's confronted state land management, they do prove useful in making a case for their own undervalued importance. They show that investigations of particular spaces or localities benefit from comparatively localized knowledges that are not provided by more impersonal, generalized narratives. Perhaps critical for geographers is how oral histories collected in the field prompt interviewees to challenge their position in the grander narratives and academic assumptions about them: '[W]e see these oral histories as allowing space to be opened up for alternative, humanized and populated narratives of the countryside and its managements' (Riley & Harvey, 2007a, p. 408).

In addition to disrupting dominant narratives, oral history and historic personal narrative engagements have the potential to expose the historic formation of geographic knowledge itself.

Lorimer considers the formation of academic geography knowledge via an exploration of 'small stories,' or subjective, grounded accounts of the discipline taking shape (Lorimer, 2003). He looks at how such knowledge is produced and dealt with in the context of a 1950s field school for youth, which constitutes a 'particular episode' in the solidification of disciplinary geography (Lorimer, 2003, p. 214). Similarly, Matless, Oldfield, and Swain (2007) consider how oral histories with academics trace the informal yet critical aspects of geographic knowledge formation (Matless, Oldfield, & Swain, 2007). They look at the now defunct Soviet Geographies sub-discipline as one case whereby 'unofficial encounters' amongst academics played a formative role (Matless et al., 2007, pp. 363–64). The work of Trevor Barnes constitutes a prolific exploration of geography's status as a science, which values oral history for 'unsettl[ing] orthodox accounts of the progress of spatial science' (Barnes, 2001; Matless et al., 2007, p. 354). Oral history provides a means of accounting for the historical and social contexts of the seemingly disembodied production of quantitative spatial science. As engagements with oral history probe the formation of disciplinary geographic knowledge itself, my work delves into the formation and 'disciplining' of a particular black geography in nowhere at all, along a wagon road and in the precarious blank space of the map. Such knowledges and the geographies they enliven have been important to black life. We must take the time to describe them as we have the 'official' sorts produced by the academy.

BACKGROUND: CONTEXTUALIZING THE BACK WAY

Back Ways is a nascent oral history project with the Southern Oral History Program for which the oral histories were collected (Southern Historical Collection, 2017; Southern Oral

History Program, 2017).[2] It explores the history of race and segregation in rural parts of Orange County, North Carolina. The project's name refers to old wagon roads in rural, historically African-American communities. Some significant moments of the interviews describe how the development of such roadways accompanied and facilitated processes of unwanted land development. The fate of the roads would become swept up in a modern historical narrative with origins in the Progressive Era. Prior to this period, the South's road were the labor of locals and subject to the whims of weather. Few people saw any problem with this before Progressive 'Good Road' advocacy, but by 1880, a rapidly growing constituency of concerned U.S. citizens began to demand more reliable roadways. This group was first composed mainly of recreational bicyclists eager to have more trail to cover on their weekend rides. An elite class of motorists would shortly join their ranks. Much to the chagrin of this group, agrarian elites would be some of the last individuals converted by the 'gospel' of good roads. With their stronghold over the Southern region, the agrarian set would make all the difference when it came to inaugural federal legislation focused on improving roads (Ingram, 2014; Wells, 2006).

By 1917, $25 million federal road policy marked the changing sentiment of Southern congress members who had been obstructing such legislation. Progressive activists and their political allies secured this federal funding for state governments to seize and pave existing wagon roads (Weingroff, 1996; Wells, 2006). A vision of Good Roads activists was a nation of roads maintained by state experts rather than local laymen. It was a stipulation of the federal funding that new, expert agencies survey the existing wagon roads and make proposals for which ones could and should be subject to development. A primary task of these agencies was parsing

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[2]The *Back Ways* blog and project page may be reached at www.sohp.org/backways. The full collection of *Back Ways* oral histories is publicly accessible through the University of North Carolina Library's *Southern Historical Collection* and its online database at http://dc.lib.unc.edu/cdm/search/collection/sohp/searchterm/x.2./.

through the nowhere at all-ness separating cities and other places. In the void littered with roads

beyond repair, too far-flung, or long ago abandoned, they had to decide which roads were

officially present. In effect, they had to construct comprehensive representations of a United

States full of roads in need of repair. This was undoubtedly a messy and imperfect process.

Further complicating the problem and with limited funds, the planners had to begin making good

on Progressive promises to benefit agrarian elite who had been suspicious of road modernization

or any sort that might disrupt a social system built on racial hierarchy. Accommodating this

group may have further exacerbated and institutionalized Jim Crow tensions (Ingram, 2014).

In the story of road building, blind embrace of Progressive narratives have obscured the

experiences, perspectives, and landscapes of African-American communities changed by the still

tense process of road development (Attoh, 2014; Ingram, 2014). Opponents of the 1916 Act

feared the funding would be beneficial at the expense of others and that it would go towards

rewarding political supporters (Weingroff, 1996; Wells, 2006). If there was any truth to this

concern, one can only imagine what this meant for African-Americans. We know mostly black

convict labor would be a critical aspect of road construction in the South (Lichtenstein, 1993).

And many black communities would be excluded from development to some dire long-term

effects. During the new process of surveillance and evaluation, cartographic erasure or the

metonymic use of 'expert' judgments like 'unsuited for development' may have been precursors

to 'blighted' in terms of normalizing and justifying environmental racism for these communities

(Oliver & Shapiro, 2006; Taylor, 2014). For example, in Chapel Hill, a 1918 Soil Survey

includes a representation of Rogers Road, which runs through the historically African-American

community of focus (North Carolina. Dept. of Agriculture, 1918). A 1930 Road Survey map

completed at the very same scale includes no representation of the road despite including some

of a similar 'unimproved' grade (North Carolina State Highway Commission, 1930). By the 1960s, when the road would shortly thereafter be paved in concert with the landfill project, it appeared again on official surveys (North Carolina State Highway Commission, 1963). By this time, expert transportation development was headed towards moving undesirable development outside of areas that had long benefitted from road development for the purposes of increased economic opportunity and greater personal mobility (Chang, Parvathinathan, & Breeden, 2008; Siddiqui, Everett, & Vieux, 1996).

There is reason to question the process by which a road like Rogers Road was left off early official surveys mandated explicitly by the 1916 Road Act—relegated to nowhere at all despite the historic community building of those living on it. Regardless of intentionality, such historic erasure may have shaped contemporary issues involving black communities and state roadwork. This issue is especially interesting given the long-standing 'natural' perception and lax treatment of roads constructed prior to the empowered state oversight and availability of federal funds. Being left to relatively natural, unmapped sites is how racial minorities are erased from dominant spatial views (Price, 2004). As the pre-1916 national road situation was hardly the result of scientific, efficient, or comprehensive measures, it is likely that determining the criteria for distinguishing and locating public roads was fraught with inconsistencies making such erasure of racial difference more than likely. Following the Act, leaders already outwardly sympathetic to racial hierarchy were pressed to deal with having more roads to develop than funds permitted (Ingram, 2014). Planners then were tasked with imposing order on a characteristically fraught and messy situation. This may be considered the conditions from which back ways emerge.

ANALYSIS: NARRATING COMMUNITY AROUND THE BACK WAY

The narrated history of the Rogers Road community dates the black community back to the seventeen hundreds. Residents' family histories touch on Emancipation, Reconstruction, and the Civil Rights Movement. The community's history begins prior to the Road itself with what would be adjacent land inherited by freed slaves and the mother of one wealthy enslaver's mixed-race children. US Census records corroborate this story told by descendants of the union. The road represents an achievement of racial self-sustenance that followed Reconstruction. Rogers Road is hardly alone as such a long-standing black community in the South (Petty, 2013). Like other such communities in Orange County and North Carolina, by the early 1900s, Rogers Road had become an enclave to a handful of black-owned and operated truck farms. Following a 1972 landfill placement and 1980 road paving, the community experienced a boom in population density. Even so, 46% of residents report having a family member who has lived in the community for over forty years. 27% reported ties to one of the eight families that first settled the historic black farmland (Marian Cheek Jackson Center, 2014, p. 8).

For this analysis, two oral history interviews are used to reveal Rogers Road as central to the surrounding community's emplacement. Both were collected in the summer of 2014 with residents who have called the community home for more than forty years. The first interview is with mother and daughter Gertrude Nunn and Judy Nunn Snipes, respectively. Gertrude, now in her nineties, grew up on the road and lives there today. As such, Judy was also raised along the road. The joint oral history was recorded in their family home there in the community. It covered stories of Gertrude's father plotting the road along with the difficulties of later living near the landfill. The second interview was with David Caldwell who moved to the community during his youth. He now leads the community advocacy group and runs the neighborhood community

center. His interview covers the economic achievement symbolized by moving into the community's rural space and the transformation that followed the landfill's placement along with his efforts to lead the community through difficulties. It was recorded on his screened-in deck. Collectively, the voices recorded suggest that Rogers Road is central to the historical community, which was mobilized to challenge the harmful effects of the landfill and political underrepresentation that otherwise individually encumbered those living in the area.

Gertrude Nunn and Judy Nunn Snipes

The founding story of the back way comes at the beginning of an oral history recording with Gertrude Nunn who, in her nineties, is likely its oldest member. She was joined by her daughter, Judy Nunn Snipes, for the interview. Mrs. Nunn's father 'started' what today is known as Rogers Road after acquiring the surrounding land not long after the turn of the twentieth century:

> GN: And my father originated from Durham County. They came to Chapel Hill and started Rogers Road. That's why it was named Rogers Road.
> JS: Um-hmm.
> GN: He was named Freeman Hollis Stone Walter Jackson Rogers.
> JS: [Speaking together with GN] Walter Jackson Rogers. [Laughs]

Mr. Rogers 'starting' the road reflects ongoing African American efforts to create havens for black life. Post-emancipation and through the early twentieth century, blacks still had their humanity and fitness for existence in the Americas questioned (Baker, 1998). As Spillers (1987) writes, there remained an 'American grammar' imposing a derogatory racial order. This 'symbolic order' fundamentally disparages black people during interracial encounter so that they foil Western ideals (Spillers, 1987, pp. 68, 71). The American grammar characterized the black identity as a subhuman, delinquent one and thus supported black people being unlawfully

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detained, murdered, and put to work on deadly chain gangs during the period of Rogers Road's beginnings (Blackmon, 2008).

Black farmers like the Rogers managed to create spaces relieved of immediate dehumanization and interracial tension via the ownership of land, a heralded ideal for all Americans (Petty, 2013). The acquiring and working of the land nurtured opportunities *to just be* in landscapes marked by the threat of unchecked violence. The conditions of 'family' and 'home' would be fixed within this farm space for decades while they were only tenuously accessible elsewhere in a willfully violent, displacing America for black people. In the recorded oral history of Nunn and Snipes, the term 'family' is said over fifty times in reference to its most conventional Western form, which is a network of blood relatives.

When asked about home, Snipes designates the 'family home' in which the interview was recorded where she and her brothers were reared and where Gertrude currently lives. The conventional deployment of these contested categories suggest the area in which they occur, Rogers Road, is a space of quiet self-determination. Via its nuclear family-focused origin story, the Rogers Road recounted here is subject to its own normativity, which partially twins that of domineering American space by virtue of being contingent on epochal exclusion from it. The traditional Western structure of Nunn and Snipes' family is a meeting ground for Western and black geographic spaces, which suggests departure from the former is possible.

The designation of 'family' and 'home' in conventionally Western ways signifies that Rogers Road's relationship to the surrounding area is one of division rather than destruction or modification. The alterity of Rogers Road is thus implicated as one that can accommodate collectivity and meaningful inhabitation as they are designated via Western codes (i.e. the definitions of 'family' and 'home'). David Caldwell's subsequently discussed narrative describes

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the remote, rural conditions of the community as 'home' space. The Rogers settling farmland around the road fostered a space for black families and homes beyond their own. Such emplacement was also a matter of economic sensibility.

As a black truck farmer and landowner, he made what was likely an abandoned pathway into a wagon road that would allow him to travel from his newly plotted farm to the market of a neighboring county. This means that it was likely his primary responsibility to keep the 'dirt' path clear and passable, which would have been difficult given the whims of weather turning such paths into muddy impasses. Such a responsibility was a major one during this time as there was no 'official' oversight or aid. The road would not be recognized by any government transportation agency until around the 1960s, just a few years before it would be needed to make the landfill placement viable. This historical narrative of Rogers Road is recounted by both Gertrude and Judy who are able to recite some portions in synchronization:

> GN: The Nunns [whom Gertrude would marry into] and the Rogers.
> JS: Yeah.
> GN: The community.
> JS: They were, as she said, blended families, because of the distance. They were close. And my mother's family started Rogers Road. Therefore, again, they had this relationship.

With a sense of pride and sustained achievement, the shape of the Rogers Road community was depicted through such recited maxims and anecdotes. These recitations reflect familial relationships contingent on long-term residency around the road. While the Rogers brothers plotted the physical road, it is such narrative work that maintains it as a community locus. The narratives link the Rogers' experiences to other families like the Nunns, which highlight the formation of community around the Road. Gertrude's narrative in particular involves the shape and history of the space with her mother insisting on her marriage to Mr. Nunn. This was urged

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not least of all to foster a bond between the two families' land, which collectively now account for a great part of the Rogers Road community:

> GN: My mom—see, it was two combined communities: Rogers Road, and the Nunn family lived over here [on Eubanks]—she loved the Nunns! And so, come to find out, she—my mother loved the Nunns so well, and I said—now, I didn't know you could connect without loving. So, she wanted me to marry my husband, Gene Nunn, and I did.

Indeed, Gertrude Nunn tells the story of how the community came to be a unified one. Her personal narrative maps it via family history; it demarcates annexes through stories of love and marriage. Her experiences and subsequent stories actualize the community to be one that may take-on the local city government as a collective. Such work is not merely implicated by her life narrative—it's a direct part of the story: '*They came to Chapel Hill and started Rogers Road. That's why it was named Rogers Road.*' Nunn's oral history illuminates how familial narratives may be important for community emplacement.

The joint oral history evidences the importance of the Rogers Road community via attitudes regarding its environmental health. Though the primary development project occurred nearly half a century ago, both lament a time when the community's environment was comparatively pristine:

> JS: So, in other words, the beautiful—we had the most pristine, fresh water, because we basically got our water from springs before we got wells. The land was so pretty out here and untouched. And then, when that came, it pretty much—.
>
> GN: Contaminated.

Polluting the creek and drawing vultures, the landfill placement is told as violence against the community, which is materialized through an afflicted physical environment and bound by the

central site of the road. The landfill siting enters the narrative of the community writ large. It is

then possible for the story of its impact to be passed along orally. The encompassing narrative,

however, is not limited to articulating such offense. What remains true across the expanse of it,

as relayed by the mother and daughter interviewees, is a familial theme.

A Rogers Road narrative like Nunn's means knowing where state violence 'hits home.'

This is evidenced by their recount of the community's long-standing struggle with the local

government:

> JS: [The mayor] was trying to convince us, 'Oh, they're going to promise you parks, and
> the neighborhood is going to be kept up,' and all those promises, promises, which
> didn't—. So, that was in the mid to late seventies. And so, we ended up with the first
> [landfill], which was unlined. The community actually became very, very active, and we
> remain that way.

Grounding this physical-cum-communal space, the road is central to the community's story and

existence. First, it is founded by Nunn's father. Later on, she marries into the Nunns who owned

the bulk of land over on adjacent Eubanks Road. The darker moment of the landfill being

introduced, which called for the paving of the road, harmed the whole of the Rogers Road

collective. The offense, affirming McKittrick's argument (2011), shows how even this difficult

encounter provokes 'anti-colonial' opportunities (McKittrick, 2011, p. 950). This is because the

event enters the narrative and reaffirms the constitution of the community—*the landfill was an*

affront Rogers Road as a whole:

> JS: So, because of the strength of the community, and we've fought and battled and gone
> to meetings, marched, protested, and I think that it was the strength of the people. I
> consider Rogers Road to be probably one of the strongest black neighborhoods, and right
> now, I'd say, stronger because—.
> GN: They found out—.
> JS: Everybody kept themselves as a neighborhood and everybody has worked together.

This grim reaffirmation relies on the historical constitution of the community, which countered

core aspects of post-Encounter displacement. The articulation of collectivity, 'the strength of *the*

people,' rebukes calling the landfill site near Rogers Road a 'meager' one as it was by a County Commissioner just before its designation. Further, the reaffirmation of the community troubles the inclination of mainstream geography to merely account for the landfill placement as offense. The landfill encounter sets off a doubling down on the very constitution of the 'black geography,' a place for fostering 'collective sensibility.' In addition, this doubling down permits a communal articulation of racialized experiences that happen anyway like the government 'scooping up' the properties of recently deceased black people:

> JS: So, to add to what we just talked about, not only the intrusions around us—and, you know, we know with time there's growth and there's change—but as most of the older black people died off, Chapel Hill was buying up the property, just scooping it up, and probably they didn't pay the people very much money.

The community narrative's attunement to race resists essentializing land grabbing or the landfill siting as particular or unique. Instead, they fit a long historic narrative that constitutes a collective critique of dominant place-making and a lack of opportunity for healthy interracial interactions with the modernizing state. Rogers Road has necessarily been a 'black community'—its strength as such is relative to its adversity. The means and product of the resultant alternative space production, however, is self-determined. The road is creatively cast as an anchor through generations of story-telling about bygone times and family members. Rogers Road grounds a narratively 'mapped' black space where such collective criticism and alterity may flourish if only precariously.

The collective work of the Rogers Road community in response to the landfill takes place in what is indeed a grim context. The effects of the landfill included loss, pollution, along with decades-long frustration and anxiety:

> GN: We worked so hard, fought so long, hosting a landfill, and you don't know what it's like to live with a landfill in your backdoor. The vultures would come and sit on top of my house.

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JS: And they would roost on those towers and they were hawking around. [Laughs]
GN: And the odor!
JS: We had rats, wild dogs. We went through all that.
GN: And so, we had to start fighting and fighting and fighting.

The landfill encounter story is an account of discrimination. It is predicated on a uniting community narrative woven into the family-focused history of someone like Gertrude Nunn, passed along to her daughter, Judy Nunn Snipes and the community at-large. The narrative is filled with decades of well-known stories that collectively actualize the community's history around the road. The landfill placement instigates a repertoire of narrative rememberings and stories that contextualize the experience in a long history of such transgressions. Though many of these narrated, community-binding anecdotes have a pleasant air, to decontextualize and look at them as cause for celebration is to do what Saidiya Hartman describes as '[an] attempt to make the narrative of defeat into an opportunity for celebration, the desire to look at the ravages and the brutality of the last few centuries, but to still find a way to feel good about ourselves' (Hartman & Wilderson, 2003). Instead, the narratives of the Rogers Road community account for a perspective of how and why state interactions with black communities continue to be so contentious—even when it comes to seemingly neutral matters like road paving.

Ultimately, the recounts betray how the community manifested in the first instance—in a context of little opportunity and the spirit of marrying inheritance with work and ownership for black people: '[a Nunn elder] felt those who loved the land and worked the land will get it.' The social life for the community around Rogers Road is characterized in the narratives of self-determination. Such self-determination is the premise for the prosaic constitution of the community. Rogers Road, and the opportunity for family and autonomy it affords, exists in the unwavering context of historical and evolving discrimination.

<u>David Caldwell</u>

Fitting the family-focused narrative of Rogers Road, David Caldwell's oral history focuses on how his moved to the community during his elementary school years. They had already been long-time residents of the larger Chapel Hill area. By Caldwell's account, his family's history in the small city dates as far back as 1796, when Wilson Caldwell was a personal servant to the University's first president. Moving into the neighborhood was a pivotal point as it meant living a more rural life and owning property. The moment is one he narrates in the context of a wider narrative uniting African-American families like his own along Rogers Road.

When asked why they moved to a house on Rogers Road, Caldwell replies: 'Like most of the people out here, we had the opportunity to buy a home' (Interview with David Caldwell). Caldwell charts the layout of the community via the locations of various families: 'Up on that section, you have the Nunns on the eastern section of Eubanks. You have the Cradles on the western section.' Caldwell's own family has remained in the area since first moving there. The moment and impetus for Caldwell's life in the community primed him to take seriously the role of preserving its heritage and protecting it from harmful influence. His oral history highlights what the back way community has made possible for more autonomous black life in the context of a racialized rural South. This is home and landownership in predominately black space.

Considering Caldwell's narrative, to say that Rogers Road is merely lodged within the boundaries of Orange County is not quite right. In particular, his description of 'home' and where it is in relationship to town reflects a division between the county and Rogers Road. The black community is situated 'out' of the seemingly encompassing town. McKittrick notes in *Demonic Grounds* that for Canada¸ 'the displacement of black subjects and histories is achieved

by attaching categories such as race, ethnicity, nation, and home to the United States and the Caribbean' (McKittrick, 2006, p. 99). What seems to hold true across the diaspora in the West is the condition of displacement itself. For black people, displacement implicates the sites of 'home' as spaces that are marginalized, unmade, and nowhere at all. With the case of Rogers Road, the conditions of the unmapped rural space as the site of 'home' become critical for some positive designation of the community space as a *particular* site in the nowhere-at-all site, 'out [t]here' on the otherwise undifferentiated road. Caldwell's narrative employs tropes of the rural as being remote, wooded, and uncultivated.

When asked about the character of the community space prior to the landfill, he evokes a bucolic scene: 'This was a dirt road, red, dusty, clay. All of this was cornfields, like I said, and a few houses, things, mostly a farming community.' The stories recounting this site do the 'maintenance' work of keeping the community intact, knowable, and inhabitable despite its exclusion and situation outside of town. A critical aspect of this maintenance is how his story describes entry into the Rogers Road community space. It highlights the discreteness of the place:

> DC: There was only about thirteen houses out here when we moved out here, and now there's gotten close to a thousand. But most of the people out here, when you ask why they moved out here, it was that opportunity to own something.
> DS: Right.
> DC: And we had our chance, and my parents jumped on it.

Caldwell is direct in sharing his understanding of the community's location as being 'on the road:' '[W]hen we moved out here…There were maybe thirteen kids out here at the time *on the entire road*.' Entrance into this narratively bound community 'on the road' is a passage into economic stability that too accounts for the Rogers when they first settled there. The road then was a 'farm-to-market' one that would give needed access to the Durham farmer's market. This

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condition of ownership and economic self-sufficiency connected the black residents of Rogers Road and thus features in the narratives of Nunn and Snipes and Caldwell as a primer for its existence.

   The introduction of the landfill marks trouble for the community's legacy. This is a primary issue of the landfill's long-term effects. David's oral history reflects a deep concern for the loss of 'heritage' and what the pollution has done to making the properties of Rogers Road attractive to those who would inherit the once rural lots. The familial nature of the community's narrative accommodates expressed concerns for the future:

> DC: Most of the kids have left, because the history of the landfill and the promises made and not fulfilled. And how do you tell your kid—people have heard me say this a thousand times—how do you tell your kid, 'Stick around. One day all of this is going to be yours?' And they say, 'What? Polluted water. Busted septic tanks. Vultures. Vermin running around, coming from the landfill. Smells. Can't go outside.' So, a lot of the kids, when they got the chance to go, whether through the military or school and education, they got out of here.

Further, it counters the pre-landfill conditions he recounts with his own youth, which were ripe for day-long outdoor explorations. David goes on to say, 'we'd walk the woods until six o'clock at night, seeing all types of animals, and streams, and swimming, and all these things. I mean, it was a great life. It was really good.' The development of the area and the conditions by which it would become more dominantly emplaced (via increased population and state recognition), jeopardizes its purchase. It was otherwise undifferentiated space made meaningful via the historic emplacement of David's family and Rogers Road at-large. David's concern with the community's jeopardized future extends beyond the issue of the landfill as does his community advocacy.

David is a Rogers Road leader in multiple official ways. He manages the community center and directs the Rogers-Eubanks Neighborhood Association (RENA), which hosts

recreational programs and a well-attended summer day-camp. This work is motivated by what he saw as a 'need' that is separate from his work with the landfill:

> DC: RENA was established in the—[19]74, [19]75. We've been around for about that long.
> DS: Okay. And was it in response at all to the landfill?
> DC: No, it was a need. We saw a need that our kids needed help. It's like our Back-to-School Bash. Our first Bash was the kids got—we gave out eight brown paper bags. It had a pack of notebook paper, a pencil, an ink pen, and an eraser…

Caldwell's work and understanding of it—helping 'our' kids—highlights the familial cohesion of the community. The kids David refers to are the descendants of the families like his who bought property to 'live on the road.' In this way, the families along Rogers Road make up a collective. David's recount of the RENA organization starting ensures that their collectivity extends beyond victimization and the landfill placement. The leadership work of David like the 'Back to School Bash' characterizes the community's struggle as including more mundane, systemic issues like a lack of educational resources rather than the public spectacle of the landfill. Further, his narrative shows that the community has historically provided treasured space for their collective presence dating back to the 1700s and regardless of any official recognition.

CONCLUSION

In this article, I discuss black emplacement in nowhere at all. I explain how this 'nowhere at all-ness' was, in an American context, inaugurated during transatlantic movement and enslavement. Initial emplacement reflects the unmatched trauma of being uprooted and put into captivity as well as what occurs thereafter. This would be 'reestablishing collective sensibility' and dealing with the imposed fluctuation historically characteristic of blackness (Woods, 1998, p. 30). From black geographies literature we learn that such emplacement is grounded in

narrative and lived experience and that it may be explored through Humanistic study as illustrated by Nieves' narratives for historic preservation in Africville as well as Ramírez's community narratives regarding black food geographies revealing Northern black communities as historical refuges from oppressive sharecropping labor (Nieves, 2007; Ramírez, 2015). Ultimately, black geographies literature moves us to take 'historically grounded multidisciplinary approach[es]' to geographical research concerning race (Woods, 2002).

My aim has been to consider how oral history collection and analysis might suit such an approach. Responding to social and cultural geography's longstanding engagement with oral histories, I consider two collected with residents of the Rogers Road community (Orange County, NC) via the Southern Oral History Program's *Back Ways* project. I put forward that oral histories are powerful because they offer new perspectives of black geographies formed in 'nowhere at all-ness' and challenge what McKittrick has called a 'plantation logic' with roots in transatlantic enslavement (McKittrick, 2011). This logic and the ontological 'genre' of Western Man which encompasses it, contributes to the destruction of black senses of place. As McKittrick writes, the plantation 'not only housed and normalized (vis-a`-vis enforced placelessness) racial violence in the Americas but also naturalized a plantation logic that anticipated (but did not twin) the empirical decay and death of a very complex black sense of place' (McKittrick 2011, p.951; Wynter 1994; 2006). In contrast, oral histories reveal stories of place, like that of Gertrude Nunn's father plotting the road, which re-inscribe historic, self-determined place-making. Moreover, the narrative relays 'life after death' and frees analysis from being the mere work of 'academic coroners' fixated on empirical demise of black communities and black life (Woods, 2002, p. 63).

In the Rogers Road community, my inquiry could have been limited to the monumental placement of the landfill, which rocked the community and fits dominant academic narratives of environmental racism and racialized governmental neglect. Indeed, the landfill project wreaked much havoc beyond what might have been expected—the unlined dump site contaminated drinking water and was initiated alongside long unfulfilled promises to the community (Campbell, Caldwell, Hopkins, & Heaney, 2013). I believe that such work on environmental racism has been and will continue to be central in anti-racist scholarship. The important contributions of Pulido (2000; 1996) or Bullard et al (2007) reveal how race makes certain communities susceptible to environmental degradation. Oral histories complement such analysis by shifting attention toward the community's origin story, its resistance, and its continuity. This wider scope is also important in union with analysis of specific transgressions.

Gertrude Nunn, Judy Nunn Snipes, and David Caldwell force us to uncomfortably acknowledge the generative *lived* experience following the landfill placement. Judy Nunn Snipes says: 'I consider Rogers Road to be probably one of the strongest black neighborhoods, and right now, I'd say, stronger because—[e]verybody kept themselves as a neighborhood and everybody has worked together.' (Judy Nunn Snipes Interview). While an argument could be made that the landfill case's prominence has garnered political clout, that does not explain the momentum behind the 'reestablishment of collectivity' making this possible (Woods, 1998, p. 30). I am inclined to believe such origins are community members' renewed interest in sharing its story. And in this story, I believe, all of the affective, ephemeral, and perhaps even spiritual, components accorded to narrative are in play.

The narratives offered through these oral histories were anticipated by blackness born out of a splintered emplacement—one side being terrestrial, or 'across the Atlantic,' while the other

takes the shape of something else entirely: '[T[hese captive persons, without names that their captors would recognize, were in movement across the Atlantic, but they were also nowhere at all' (Spillers, 1987, p. 72). Humanistic data like Woods' Delta Blues suggest the archetypal 'nowhere at all' was hardly inert space (Woods, 1998). We might look then at how the transatlantic inauguration of nowhere at all as a site of black emplacement precedes place-making via subjective expressions (i.e. music and narrative) 'after the end of the world,' or beyond a world known through oppressive logics (Sun Ra et al, 1974). This article thus also stands as an argument against *solely* tracing the planetary predicaments of blackness following its inception—through sharecropping, ghettoization, and imprisonment. Such a focus on its own fails to account for what is at stake in the first place when black communities are subject to hyper-surveillance or erasure. While we have long been able to rally for the lives of black individuals, what means do we have of acknowledging the particular lives of characteristically black *communities*? Are we able to look beyond blight to see the uncharted and unique emplacements it continually jeopardizes? The time has come to look back across history and chart development from the other side, in nowhere at all.

BACK WAYS AND THE FUTURE OF SOCIAL AND CULTURAL GEOGRAPHY

Back ways exemplify the purchase of black geographies' call for narrative. The oral histories implicate the limitations of dominant spatial views via exploration of what the views hold as disembodied infrastructure—transportation ways (Attoh, 2014). We are able to see how these supposed feats of scientific innovation are 'constructed' in other ways. In a literal sense, Rogers Road was intimately paved by way of familial self-determination. Since the Rogers brothers first plotting the road, its family and community emplacing has been maintained through

narrative despite unsteady moments of state recognition. These include a time when the road was nowhere at all on official road surveys. Rather than modify or subvert dominant spatial views, its story imparts more holistic alterity. Rogers Road as a back way *is* a black geography. Black geographies as a sub-discipline calls for appreciation of such sites.

Instead of bolstering transformative political work in the discipline at-large, black geographies means humbling disciplinary expertise to appreciate the alterity of narratively bound spatial productions like Rogers Road. We should avoid exploiting them as 'subversive' lived geographies ripe for the creation of transformative scholarship. Black geographies implore more thorough appreciation. They expose dominant spatial configurations—down to their biased ontological agents—as particular alternatives themselves. Indeed, Rogers Road is more transportive than transgressive. Spotty official surveys offer less reliable representations of Rogers Road, as a community-mobilizing infrastructure, when compared to the collective life stories of those who have lived around it.

If black geographies are to be consulted for transformative guidance, we might be led to question the boundaries of our empirical work. More than identifying various Cartesian sites, even while minding some embodied alternative perspectives, black geographies potentiate the identification of localized yet robust, *disciplined* ways of knowing space different from our own as Western academics. These localized sorts are morphed via their inauguration occurring distinctly outside of, and thus contingent on, the limitations of dominant Western space. Their alterity-forming matter, what takes them beyond said limitations, is found in narrative and creative expression.

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MOTHERS AND DAUGHTERS: INTERGENERATIONALITY, FAMILY NARRATIVES,
AND BLACK GEOGRAPHIC SPACE

INTRODUCTION

*"Everybody called [my parents] Mom and Dad. This man came out there one day. [Laughs] He
was a white man. He came out, and everybody's saying. "Dad! I want to go to the store! Dad!
Dad!" And he said, "Jessie, is all of these your children?" Daddy said, "Yeah." Daddy just kept
walking. [Laughs]."*
                                        -Mary Cole

The "black family" is a contested concept in North America. In fact, black people have

been historically maligned in evocation of what family is *not*. Black people in transatlantic

slavery were misnamed and branded anti-familial (Spillers 1987), which eased enslaved black

families' treatment as modular commodities. Mothers and children were routinely sold and

bought separately without reprieve. Following emancipation, black people went through lengths

to find separated relatives. Scores of classified ads in black press reflect the bemoaned fervor

precipitated by the destruction of formerly enslaved families. Many of these ads were fruitless

(Williams 2012). The denigration-cum-destruction of black family reverberates throughout

modern history. North Carolina, where the empirical focus of this article lies, enacted forced

sterilization in the 20th century, which disproportionately targeted black women and thus

hindered the existence of black kinship (G. N. Price and Darity 2010; Begos et al. 2012). The

state-endorsed destruction of black families carries on. Across the nation, black collectivity at-

large currently contests with disruptive incarceration (McKittrick 2011).

Alongside the destabilization of their families, black communities have asserted their

existence in ways that sometimes problematize traditionally hereditary delineations (Stack 1975).

The black family thus highlights intergenerational bonds noted for love and care, if not always through blood relations. The oral history of Mary Cole, referenced at the start of this introduction, includes the account of a perplexed white neighbor questioning why her father was called "dad" by his community's children. Indeed, such assertions of family have been critical to the contested self-determination of black collectivity. These black claims to family rename the conditions and landscapes of black people in direct contrast to the grammars and systems of classification, suggesting that blackness negates kinship, community, and humanity, itself. The communities described in oral histories, like the one just referenced, are regarded as being composed of families and in no indirect terms. And while the interviewee voices propelling this work typically refer to family in nuclear terms, what stands out about their "family" stories is the intergenerational meaning that they attribute to the landscape. Putting families in place serves as a grounding for not just their own families but the black communities they represent at-large. Such "reestablishment of collective sensibility" are recounted in interdisciplinary black geographies literature (C. Woods, 1998, p. 30).

Black Geographies (2007) spawned an interdisciplinary subfield that aims to appreciate African diasporic productions of space. Such productions are noted for being self-determined and predicated by, though not mere products of, ongoing discrimination. With a genealogy inclusive of literary, geographical, feminist, and African-American studies, the subfield interrogates the material and metaphorical conditions of emic black spatial productions in North and South America. It champions drawing inaugural attention to social experiences of space, which consider both discrimination and self-sustenance as coeval factors rather than lamenting defeat or celebrating subversion. This work is akin to feminist geographic study like that of Rose

(1993), which weighs paradoxical space, or that which principally manifests via tensions between oppression and livelihood rather than in spite of the former. As the often dominantly-imposed material conditions of black life fail to betray such geographies, narrative and lived experience are heralded as ins to their existence, contours, and functions. If we take seriously McKittrick and Woods (2007) assertion that working with the sub-discipline means regarding both narrative and lived experience, the intergenerational continuities of such particular narratives and lived experiences may provide insight into how black geographies, in all their characteristic flux and precarity, maintain continuity within their sites of emergence. Minding intergenerationality draws attention to the collectivity and struggle that extends beyond a single generation and that minds the future for ongoing black productions of space

This paper aims to be a meditation on familial intergenerationality. This article analyzes via close reading two joint mother-daughter oral history interviews from the Southern Oral History Program's *Back Ways* project. These oral histories inscribe the intimate, material landscapes of North Carolina with family histories that reach across centuries. One of them suggests black geographic space has provided room for worship. The other reveals how black geographic space facilitates firsthand experiences with pristine natural environments. Through these oral histories, I argue that the familial intergenerationality of black geographic narratives is critical to their emplacing qualities. The intergenerational ties binding mothers and daughters or grandfathers and grandchildren have made possible the continuity of inherited black land, which then provides space for farming, religious worship, and other components of community. Such intergenerational ties are longstanding. Interviewees describe the spatial situations of enslaved ancestors that occurred just steps away from the homes in which interviews were recorded. The ties predicate the conditions of contemporary life. Present-day church congregations, to which

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the interviewees belong, are recounted through family history. One interviewee recalls moving furniture in her childhood home, also mere steps away from the interview location, to accommodate weekly worship services. Gertrude, in her nineties, narrates a markedly different Rogers Road community than her daughter Judy, in her sixties. However, a unified story of their family's history emerges from their different generational perspectives when told together. One thread of this story is an account of their community's natural environment being degraded by a negligent local government. Such decades-spanning threads of the community's story may do the work of making the space knowable and inhabitable for past, present, and future community members. They imbue it with narrative arc and meaning. The interviews inform how important the intergenerational familial conduits may be to ongoing collectivity.

APPROACHES TO INTERGENERATIONALITY

Social scientific work on intergenerationality in black communities tends to weigh whether relationships across age groups are marred by pathological dysfunction. Such work questions how sites of black spatial collectivity, particularly low-income urban neighborhoods, may be products of deficient intergenerational relationships. The infamous Moynihan Report reflects this trend (Moynihan, 1965). In 1965, Moynihan published *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action*, which suggested slavery left the black family ill-prepared to negotiate the challenges of urban living thus justifying the dysfunction of urban ghettos. Following Moynihan, there was an upsurge of work arguing for or against the idea of a failing black family characterized by women-headed households and an over-dependency on welfare (Allen, 1978; Darity, Myers, & Jr., 1984; Furstenberg, Hershberg, Modell, & Modell, 1975). Other work departing from pathology but still focused on finding problems with black intergenerationality,

too centers the responsibility of families for manifestations of inherited inequality. Such work purports that altered black family behaviors may quell the firsthand-experienced effects of structural racism. For instance, Clark's (1983) popular study considers how the inner-workings of individual black families are tied to their children's success in school. More recent work argues that black kin networks fail to support black children's educational achievement (Mandara, Varner, Greene, & Richman, 2009) and young mothers due to the likes of "urban 'underclass' culture" (McDonald & Armstrong, 2001). Like Moynihan's report, this scholarship fails to mind how the American state itself remains unable to do without a racial economy, black disenfranchisement, and the very maligning of black identity such research itself advances (Baker, 1998; Muhammad, 2010; Spillers, 1987). Ultimately, it largely considers the state of intergenerationality and familial networks in black communities as being producers (or not) of inequality, rather than critical aspects of their particular, everyday negotiation of racialization, for better or worse.

Together, geography work on intergenerational narratives and feminist geographies of "home" and "community" guide analysis here. For its part, feminist geography literature concerned with "home" guides interrogation of what sorts of spaces manifest via the intergenerationality considered in this paper. In regards to intergenerational narrative literature, this paper considers what such a narrative might elucidate about black geographic space abstractly speaking. Indeed, intergenerational narratives have been implicated in the previous black geographies work. Nieves (2007) considers the way family narrative demarcate the ancestral community space of Africville. Ramirez (2015) considers how contemporary personal narratives betray motivations for Great Migration movement, which were in part leaving behind sharecropping, and related aversions to urban farming projects. There is a need to investigate the

intergenerationality inherent in such narratives and to more closely consider *what of* black

geographies' central tenet, to focus 'lived experience and narrative' (McKittrick and Woods

2007), provides entrée into black geographic knowledge, itself. Indeed, intergenerationality may

be one critical aspect of the tenet's merit. In the following two sections, I more closely discuss

the literature of intergenerational narratives and feminist geographic analysis of home and

community.

Intergenerational narratives

Geographers have noted how personal narratives like oral history elicits dynamic,

understudied accounts of the landscapes and ones reflective of its inherent tensions (Riley and

Harvey 2007a; Riley 2004). Part of this dynamism is a matter of how these histories are wound

up in intergenerational, familial narratives. For the European farmers considered by Riley and

Harvey (2007), such 'generational knowledge' contains localized, idiomatic sayings, which

evoke ancestral farming practices that contemporarily steer day-to-day work practices (405).

Being able to account for such knowledge is a benefit of oral history research (Riley and Harvey

2007b). The practice involves interviewees recounting the span of their lives to-date, which may

allow them to "disrupt" preconceived narratives held by the researcher (Rogaly 2015). Further,

their relatively full narratives may be able to provide more emplaced accounts, which implicate

fundamental knowledge about their communities typically elided in research (Lorimer 2003).

Minding such narratively mobilized knowledge is critical to understanding the processes and

experiences of individuals in the marginalized positions of spatial difference (Valentine and

Sadgrove 2012; McKittrick and Woods 2007). Analysis that addresses this knowledge creates a

hedge between recognizing the liveliness of marginalized spatial difference and lurching in the enumerated death of those in such a position (Woods 2002).

Geographers approaching intergenerational geographies are mindful of the knowledge that passes across ages, the information it contains, and how such knowledge is in jeopardy with increasing intergenerational segregation (Vanderbeck 2007; Hopkins and Pain 2007). Further, geographical research has urged moving beyond a focus on ageing when engaging with the oral histories of elderly people to appreciating how their narratives provide insight into bygone and ongoing places (Andrews et al. 2006). Katz also noted the jeopardy of intergenerational knowledge in the context of social reproduction and the disruption of such knowledge at the hand of capitalism (Katz 2001). Indeed, there are multiple contexts in which intergenerational knowledge—in the form of narrative and otherwise—are both important to, and in jeopardy within, localized, emplaced collectives or communities. It stands to reason that such knowledge is also important for geographic research of these collectives or communities.

Feminist geography is notable for illustrating the purchase of localized intergenerational narratives in understanding collective, and sometimes tense, social emplacements. Richardson (2015) uses "biographical narratives" to consider how the wide-ranging performances of masculinity and family position manifest via varied embodiments of intergenerationality amongst Irish men in Tyneside. Luhrs (2016) considers the personal reflections of farming daughters to highlight how their farming aspirations come up against the normalization of intergenerational farm succession as being patrilineal. Wimark (2016) asked open-ended interview questions to explore how individual intergenerational ties to family shape the migratory decision of gay and lesbian Turkish people. Like Valentine and Sadgrove (2012), such

narrative-focused geographic work out of feminist geography and elsewhere treats intergenerationality as a matter of social differentiation.

By recording narratives of the mother-daughter interviewees, I learned that their knowledge of black geographic space might be interwoven with familial, intergenerational information. Such information focuses on very particular aspects of community history, like the development of religious worship accommodations, which implicate longstanding, ongoing social collectivity within the black geographic space of their communities. The narratives and their intergenerationality are important insofar as they clearly deepen the claims to space for the interviewees of this research. They show how the community members' ongoing ties to the physical environment are matters of history and well-established familial networks. This is why we must attend to the topic of familial intergenerationality in black geographic research. This literature review section makes a case for attending to such in the context of work with personal narratives.

Home and community

In feminist geography, narratives of home and community have been prominent (Johnson 2008; Marston 2000; Katz 2001; Domosh 1996). Such research suits what McDowell (1997) recognized as being demanded by feminist geographers. That is "qualitative, detailed, small-scale and in depth case study work" (McDowell, 1997, p. 388). Marston (2000) made a case for multi-scalar analysis inclusive of the site of home. Such analysis was not meant to supplant investigations of nations and supply-chains, prominent in geography at large. Rather, she called for work that would highlight the centrality of home and the interconnectedness of varying scales.

Feminist geographers have acknowledged the import of inter-scalar analysis. What occurs in the home interdepends on the functions of community, national, and global levels. This interdependence is not purely hierarchical. As Marston (2000) notes, "consequences are inscribed in, and are the outcome of, both everyday life and macro-level social structures" (p. 221). Such a point seems to be supported by the narratives to be explored in this paper. The interviewees recount their experiences within the home and intimate family spaces as having direct implications on their respective communities' attainment of collective self-determination. As black feminists have noted, conventional claims to home and community have been historically contested for black people (Spillers 1987). Such contestation relates to Western denials of black humanity, altogether (Weheliye 2014; Wynter 1994). To recount home and community as matters of communal collectivity, then, is a subversive act for the black women interviewees. However, it is not one that is geared towards mere subversion of Western racial stratification. The mundane categories of "home" and "community" are the slates on which the women interviewees inscribe historic black geographical space via family narratives.

"Home" and "community" are evoked explicitly multiple times throughout the course of many the *Back Ways* interviews, including the two recounted in this paper. The terms mobilize intergenerational narratives of family to the effect of relaying critical information about the survival of the communities themselves across generations. For instance, one *Back Ways* interviewee says: "[Y]ou had a lot of jack-of-all-trades in this community, and it wasn't a selfish community. If your neighbor needed a shed built, you would take a holiday, and all the males in the community would come to that one site, and they built that shed. That's the way that was…So, I think that's why some communities stayed." Such narratives describe community mores and conditions in firsthand accounts of everyday life. Recounts designate particular

instances of conventional family life, such as, preparing food, within the "home" and the larger "community." By centering analysis of such concepts as they are deployed in interviews, this paper aims to simply explore how familial intergenerational narratives demarcate the black geographic space of rural Orange County (NC). This demarcation sites self-sustenance and long histories of black place-making.

Black place-making has involved citing home in otherwise unlikely spaces through every day discursive practices like sharing meals around the welcome table (McCutcheon 2015). Such is the spirit through which interviewees chart home and community in the expansive space of the natural environment. Gertrude and Judy, in particular, recount their historic home and community of Rogers Road as being amongst "pristine" wilderness and natural resourcefulness. Such claims are akin to that of Finney in *Black Faces, White Spaces* asserting American black people have a particular, under-recognized historic relationship to the outdoors (Finney 2014) and recent black geographic work calling for an evaluation of the "maroon ethics" of black American communities (Bledsoe 2017). These are ethics reverberating from the self-determined thinking undergirding free, black antebellum communities in typically remote, unmarked spatial circumstances. Indeed, the natural environment is a central matter of black geographic space. For the interviewees of my research, it is recounted as being within their rural home and community spaces and critically so.

The centrality of the natural environment for historically black communities makes sense. Across America's history, black productions of space in the dominant form—permanent construction and infrastructure development—have been limited. Indeed, exclusion and figurative spatial relegation to the wild (Price 2004) and out of sight (Mitchell 1996) from such dominant means of space production has been the fate of many marginalized American

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communities. The internal lives and subjectivities of black people have persisted in earnest despite such a situation with subversive re-mappings, or black geographies, configuring their emplacements and siting their collective humanity in the realm of uncharted space whether it be the vast natural environment or unnoticed spaces within dominant sorts, such as, the "subaltern mobilities," delineated by informal cabs in New York City Caribbean enclaves (Best 2016). The "garret" offers one view of how black subjectivity persists in intergenerationally-occupied "homes" excluded from dominant manifestations of place, big and small. In *Demonic Grounds* (2006), McKittrick draws from the day-to-day experiences of Harriet Jacobs that are detailed in her slave narrative. In order to avoid corporeal punishment at the hands of a slave master but remain near her children, Jacobs hides out for seven years in a small garret of her grandmother's home, which was in the vicinity of the plantation in Edenton, NC about 150 miles east of Orange County. McKittrick engages with Jacobs' narrative to suggest the importance of Jacobs' small closet for understanding how African American survival involves seeing home in inconspicuous or dysfunctional geographic space. Indeed, as Wynter implores, we must engage with these dismissed "demonic grounds" by minding the necessarily real experiences of those inhabiting them (Wynter 2000).

The garret construct guides my empirical meditation on the conditions of black community space outside of dominant configurations but within "homes" and "communities," such as, in the forested rural landscape of Orange County, NC. In theoretically excavating the confounding experiences that occur in "garreted" spaces from the slave narrative, McKittrick acknowledges that the "legal validation" of slavery and expendable Black bodies "does not mean that Brent is simply a victim, but rather that her story and her actions blend Black female oppression and captivity with glimpses of individual control and agency" (McKittrick 2006, 39).

In terms of the black collectivities considered in this paper: while in one respect they may have provided opportunities for the African American people to maintain self-sustenance without immediate discrimination, they simultaneously could be dysfunctional and unsustainable with increased needs for state-led modernization in a changing political economy. They were also markedly rustic and deeply embedded in the natural environment. Interviewees recount relying on springs for water and not having automobiles well into the twentieth century. The narratives show how the characterization of their black geographic spaces as "home" and "community" does not preclude the difficulty of historic rural life. Through the lens of the garret, as a theoretical construct, this point becomes even clearer. In the spirit of the garret, a focus on home and community provides one model for engaging with both the challenging materiality of rural black communities and the ongoing narrated experiences of the people intently residing in them. This could in turn help geographic analyses of racially salient communities resist naturalizing and over-simplifying the material characteristics of African American communities. Such research obscures the historical processes and political relationships that led to these features along with the complicated relationships residents maintain to them (Nieves 2008; Woods 2006; Woods 2007). With a focus on oral history, this work answers the black geographies call to designate the discrete material conditions of black emplacements evidenced by narrative and lived experience.

BACKGROUND: SPEAKING TO MOTHERS AND DAUGHTERS

My discussion considers two mother-daughter oral history interviews. The interviews were collected amongst a growing collection of the Southern Oral History Program (SOHP) (University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill) entitled *Back Ways.* The collection focuses on the

social experiences of rural segregation in the United States South. Most of the interviews feature

a single interviewee with the two analyzed here being the only ones with multiple interviewees.

Most of the collection's interviewees are black and lifelong residents of rural piedmont North

Carolina. Their ages range from sixties to mid-nineties. The oral histories prompted close-

readings of their full contents, which is typical of the methodology. Often, oral historians focus

on the analytical purchase of a single oral history rather than the partial accounts of several

(Riley & Harvey, 2007b). The interviews analyzed in this article were chosen after analysis over

several from the *Back Ways* collection. They were chosen for having a common structure and

thematic focus (i.e. being mother-daughter joint interviews and considering community history).

The full interview transcripts were analyzed in two ways: (1) coding with MAXQDA qualitative

research software and (2) close, annotative top-to-bottom readings of the transcripts. In the

software-assisted method, the two interviews were coded along with eight others from the SOHP

collection. The coding categories included topics related to life stage (i.e. schooling) and

interviewee identity (i.e. desegregation, religious practice, and farming memories). The coded

transcripts were exported as an Excel spreadsheet that listed the coded clips for each transcript.

Reading through the clips of all ten interviews per code proved to be a useful exercise for

identifying trends across the collection, and for selecting the two transcripts considered in this

paper for further consideration. Closely reading the two transcripts proved to be most useful for

this paper's research findings.

INTERGENERATIONALITY AND PLACE

<u>Judy and Gertrude</u>

Judy (daughter) and Gertrude (mother) participated in an oral history that was recorded

in their family home on October 10, 2014. They described the area surrounding the home's

history from the early 20th century to now, and they recount this history with both passion and concern. The stories of the home and the people who lived and visited there were referenced in anecdotes that were often recited by the women in sync. The theme that dominated their oral history was that of the natural environment as an evolving aspect of community space, later degraded by the local government via the siting of waste facilities. Their inclusion and focus on the natural environment gave insight into what I came to regard as the collective emplacement of the community and its relationship to the local government. The women's focus on the natural environment altered the bucolic, "nowhere-at-all-ness" of the historically agricultural community to being a site of emplacement amongst what had been pristine forest.

The community itself, Rogers Road, is a wooded, roughly two-square mile one located in rural Orange County, North Carolina. It is a historically African-American community that currently has a more diverse population. In the early 20th century, the community accommodated black-owned produce farms along with a sawmill. Many current residents are able to tell the story of the community's history and have some relation to the original families that settled the area. After the placement of the landfill in the 1970s, the community would become known for banding together and fighting against the landfill's placement as a matter of environmental justice. In kind, much of the community's story involves narration of its rural natural environment and the ways it has it changed over the years. Indeed, Judy and Gretrude's oral histories are especially effective in relaying what the material and social space of the Rogers Road community had been like "before" the imposition of the landfills, and the creation of the community space itself via the central road's namesake, Gertrude's father, who planned and plotted it. The intergenerational attest of the Rogers Road community as a site of natural, enjoyed beauty reveal what black geographic space may make possible along with what it may

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stand to lose in interactions with the state, and the centrality of intergenerational claims to place in articulating that loss.

At the onset of their joint interview, Judy and Gertrude describe how their relatives once lived around their present-day family home. The land that bound them together in both proximity and material resources included a small truck farm, the sawmill, and what Gertrude says her elders called "slave houses." The natural environment is denoted in some detail to include woods and a freshwater spring, which Judy and Gertrude both use to reference the social space of the community. This natural environment is much of the setting for their family and community's specific day-to-day experiences as they remember them, or as they were told about them. In the community's early days, farm work dominated the use of the land, while today they include sport hunting and viewing the landscape. Reverence for this land has existed as a prominent aspect of life in the Rogers Road community. They make clear that a love of the land is synonymous with claiming ownership of it in their historically landowning family. Such a regard for the land suggests their family has maintained a historical reverence for the natural environment, and a love of the land became an important measure for deciding how it would be maintained in the family and who would inherit it:

> JS: So, my great-grandfather, Sam—.
> GN: Sam Nunn.
> JS: Felt, for those who loved the land and worked the land will get it, so he did not will his children the property except for Annabelle.

The relationship between owning the land and having a strong emotional connection to it extends beyond the issue of inheritance. It is also connected to the way the land, as a historical site of familial emplacement, is remembered by both Judy and Gertrude. The family has maintained a personal relationship to the otherwise nondescript forested swath, even after it ceased to be necessary for productive purposes. The rurality of the space is pinpointed as being a critical

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aspect of the physical community. It is the characteristic that has been affected by changing times and haphazard outside influence. Indeed, the rural nature of Rogers Road becomes most palpable when the intrusion of the local government-sited landfill is recounted:

> JS: We had the most pristine, fresh water, because we basically got our water from springs before we got wells. The land was so pretty out here and untouched. And then, when that came, it pretty much—.
> GN: Contaminated.

The contamination referenced by Gertrude is caused by the siting of two unlined landfills near the historic black family community. Local university studies suggest the landfill leaked toxic waste into the Rogers Road community's water wells (Campbell et al. 2013). The landfills also changed how the emplacing natural environment is experienced by community members on a day-to-day basis. Per the account of Gertrude and Judy, the pollution emitted from the landfill has sullied the views and smells of the once naturally resourceful landscape. In addition, they recount vultures and wild dogs roaming the space. However, rather than limiting their narrative with recounts of dilapidation, they return to descriptions of how things were before it came along. Gertrude recounts not only gathering drinking water from the nearest spring but also using it to help her mother dress an uncle's wound:

> GN: We had cows and we had to take them out and graze them. And he went to do that. And it was down under here. He had the ax on his shoulder. And coming up the hill, the ax went down and split his leg open.
> GN: And my mom, back in the day, [we had] no doctors. She said, "Go get me some clear water and some—."
> JS: From the spring.
> GN: From the spring. [And] she cleaned it.
> JS: She packed it with mud.
> GN: Packed it with mud.
> JS: Mud and—?
> GN: It was a—.
> JS: Felt hat.
> GN: Yeah, felt.
> JS: A felt hat—wool, that's wool.
> GN: And put it into that open wound.

JS: Sealed it.
GN: And she closed it up and wrapped it.
JS: He never had any infection.

With the landfill, the community's freshwater became a source of infection rather than one of

purification (Campbell et al. 2013). While "folk medicine" practices and the resourcefulness of

the spring and surrounding woods are described jovially, they are accompanied by less pleasant

discomforts of country life prior to the landfill siting:

JS: Well, tell him about the beds. She was talking about their beds one night, the beds.
GN: Oh, my Lord. You wouldn't believe it! We had wheat thrashings. And the men would—it was a cotton gin, and they would thrash this stuff and leave the—what do you call it? We called it haystack stalks. It was put into—.
JS: Ticks? Did you say ticks?
GN: Mama made ticks to put all of that stuff in. We had to sleep on those straw ticks.
JS: Straw ticks.
GN: And have you ever heard of—?
JS: And she said they had some bedbugs. [Laughs]
GN: Have you ever heard of a chinch?
JS: Chinch? They called them chinches.
GN: Chinches.
DS: Um-um.
JS: Bedbugs.
GN: Well, let me tell you, you don't want to know about them.
DS: [Laughs]
JS: [Laughs] As I say, "Don't let the bedbugs bite!"
GN: Yeah!
JS: I always wondered about that saying. Now I know what it was about.
GN: And they did exist in that day. And they tell me now they are still in certain places now. They would suck your blood, bite. And I had an uncle—no, he was a neighbor, who went to church, and they saw one crawling down his neck in the church. And he was just a'scratching!
JS: [Laughs]
DS: [Laughs]
GN: They would make you scratch and they'd suck the blood. And it's called a chinch.
DS: A chinch?
GN: I hope they don't come back.

Judy and Gertrude's inclusion of such discomforts is important to note because it suggests their

account is not a neglectful nostalgia—they acknowledge the historic difficulties of 20th century

rural life while lamenting the degradation of the land. Such accounts evoke the "garreted" conditions of historic black life in rural North Carolina. On one hand, the land Gertrude's elders settled is revered for offering familial stability and room for self-determined existence beyond everyday discrimination. On the other hand, the physical conditions were not entirely accommodating. Farm life was difficult while the changing political economy that would usher in mattresses and modern life would come at a cost. This cost would be what Gertrude and Judy characterize as the relatively "pristine" quality of the land. The landfill and increased population density and changed the landscape. Even so, the family maintains an appreciation of the land today for its remaining remote, pastoral beauty:

> JS: But we love our home. And it's peaceful and it's still—the rest of our property goes that way. And my brother was out there today, because he deer hunts, and he said, "Judy, it's still the most beautiful piece of property." I said, "That's why Daddy picked this one. It was away from everybody else."

Discounting Gertrude and Judy's reverent account of the natural environment as mere nostalgia would miss the point, because their oral history also integrates less favorable aspects of historic rural life. This means analysis of their oral history should attend to how its variegated nature matters. We must account for how their narrative enlivens an intergenerational account that stretches across the past century to emplace a holistic community with historic experiences— good and bad. While Gertrude Nunn and Judy Nunn Snipes did not witness the same history, they spoke collaboratively and with equal authority in narrating the family-focused history of the Rogers Road community. Such intergenerational recounting makes the community real and predicates its collective, decades-long fight against the local government's landfill siting. Like relationships with the natural environment, land ownership also predicates the establishment of intergenerationally-grounded black community space. The next oral history to be discussed will

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demonstrate how one family's privately owned land provided space for communal religious worship.

<u>Regina and Mary</u>

The audio-recorded oral history of Regina Merritt and Mary Cole covers food, religion, and historic landownership. The cadence and format of the recording evokes a call-and-response air with Regina corroborating and coloring the more matter-of-fact accounts of her mother. With their dedicated commitment to maintaining ownership of the family property, the whole interview maintains a clear spatial focus.

Regina and Mary detail how the family property has been a historic site of community. The scale of their description is the historic farm property where Regina currently lives and a similar property their family once lived on six miles away. Both of these community spaces described by Regina and Mary are similar to the Rogers Road community—rural, wooded, and the historical site of black farms. Like Gertrude, Mary recalls drawing water from a natural spring and life before the relative ubiquitous paving of roads. Multiple family members had homes within the space of the single swath of property where Regina remains. As relayed by Judy and Gertrude's Rogers Road account, Regina and Mary's community and family were blended in work and fellowship.

Their present family property, where the interview was recorded, accommodated collectivity for not just their blood relatives but nearby community members, as well. Home kitchens produced food for the whole community, a family living room was once the dedicated space for communal church service, and the property once sited a general store for the local children. Below is a description of their home accommodating church worship services:

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MC: My father had prayer meeting in his home, church in his home. He started church before we moved here. We used to live over off of Rollingwood, which is about six miles from here, Ann, do you think?

RM: Hickory Grove?

MC: Yeah.

RM: No, it's probably three miles.

MC: Maybe three miles. So, we had prayer meeting in our home. And my mother's brother, he lived with us part-time. And [sighs] let me see. They built a very small church here, right up there, almost where the church is where you turn in at.

While this particular service did not begin on the historic family property Regina lives on today, it set the tone for the family's prominence as providers of space for religious worship. The service moved to their current home land from the Rollingwood part of town, which reflects the collective mobility of the congregation. Mary Cole's elders were able to retrofit their family home on-the-fly to accommodate and thus sustain the church community that persists today. The current family land would be the site of a dedicated church built by the brother of Mary's father. This reflects the historical importance of these narrated spaces in regards to present-day social relations:

MC: Right. Well, we would have prayer meeting on Wednesday nights and Sunday. And different preachers would come and preach. And that's when we was in Rollingwood, over off of Bethel-Hickory Grove Church Road. But those were the times that we'd have prayer meeting. We'd have to take all the furniture out of the living room. I'd tell my children, I said, "Lord have mercy! If I ever get a house, I am not taking my furniture out of the living room every day!"

RM: [Laughs]

MC: That's what we did. Every week we had to take it out of the living room.

DS: Wow. How many people would come?

MC: We'd have a lot of people.

DS: A lot of people?

MC: A lot of people came, because it was a lot of us, and we had people from out of town, like Durham and Hillsborough and Pittsboro, various places, and we had different preachers. But my pastor now is my mother's brother.

The mobility of the community is characteristic of black geographic space. Historically, transatlantic enslavement, Jim Crow, Great Migration, and other forms of racialized displacement forced this kind of adaptability for the purpose of survival. Rather than fixedness to

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the particular coordinated Cartesian space, the religious community's continuity from the Rollingwood site to the current one reflects its dependency on the ongoing narrative of their family and their continued lived experiences of socially relating to the congregation. This collective adaptability evokes the logic of the garret (McKittrick 2006). The family's living room may have played a critical role by accommodating collective Christian worship when space for it may have been difficult to find elsewhere. For black American communities, such worship is an iteration of a particular institution, the "black church," which strives for liberation and social transformation (McCutcheon 2015; Lincoln and Mamiya 1990).

These spaces are not free of racialized contestation. The sons of the white landowner who sold Mary's father the land repeatedly attempted to reclaim the land from him asserting that the lawful sale was invalid. Their challenges were only deterred by him standing his ground with a shotgun in hand. Overcoming such challenges, being adaptable, and retrofitting home space allowed the congregation to continue over the years. Further, the "church," as a matter of black geographic space, being contingent on the collective relations of its members rather than some designated discrete place allowed it to persist. The church and such relations continue today:

> MC: But later on, my mother's brother built that church. He was the pastor of this church up here, St. John now. They had another name, Lord's Temple, they started out, but they changed the name to St. John Church. But my pastor now, which is my mother's brother, he built that church.
> DS: And when was that?
> MC: In the [19]50s.
> DS: In the [19]50s?
> MC: Well, actually, what was that, Ann? [19]70s and [19]80s that church was built, wasn't it? Yeah.
> RM: I think it was the [19]70s.
> MC: In the [19]70s.
> RM: The early [19]70s, because—.
> MC: Um-hmm, yes. I was trying to get him to come over, but one of the members, former members, of our church just passed, so he was going over to the house.

Across the interview, the physical location of the church space at any given time is continually and most prominently placed within the family's property. Its location within county boundaries is less fixed. It moves from Rollingwood to the current family land. In addition, its architectural position is less fixed as well. It moves from the family living room to a dedicated church building. Even so, *it* moves and continues to unite its congregation across the twentieth century. The congregation is undeterred by these spatial fluctuations.

Despite the adaptability of their black geographic familial space, Mary and Regina express anxiety about possibly losing the particular plot of family land on which Regina currently lives. This is because they see such a prospect as an affront to their historic familial and communal relations altogether. Their interview relatedly reflects an appreciation for how difficult it has been to maintain sites for space-making social relations in the black community. Regina describes imploring her son to buy family property:

> RM: And my son didn't want to buy my grandparents' property up there. My cousin lost it. My son did not want to buy it. He said, "Mama, I might not want to live out here all my life." I said, "Honey, I know you don't want to live out here, but my grandfather owned this property, and they struggled to get this property. They worked hard for this property. Once the land is gone, it's gone. The earth ain't but so big. I'm telling you, if you don't buy this property, you're going to be in trouble."

Regina's narrative suggests maintaining ownership of the land is more important than its occupation. She wants her son to buy the land regardless of whether or not he intends to live on it. Further, she recounts attempting to buy property that cannot be readily built on, because of septic draining issues, simply because it is historic family property. Its lack of construction potential is no deterrence. Indeed, the land itself and the space it has provided for historic collectivity beyond inhabitation is what matters. Such space provides opportunity for collective existence and the physical actualization of black community, which she recounts as having been contested. Intergenerational accounts of the land is what emplaces her home and community.

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While the collectivity has existed beyond particular parcels of property, landownership, generally speaking, predicates the historic instances of community via church congregation on family-owned land. Such property-cum-community conditions highlight black geographies' conflation of narrative and physical space. While black geographic space is narrated, it is also physically grounded.

Both mother-daughter oral history interviews evidence how intergenerational narratives highlight longstanding community emplacements. Their stories of intimate family life employ reflections of the natural environment and religious congregations to demarcate the materiality and longstanding nature of their respective communities. While the mothers and daughters speak from different historical perspectives, their joint narratives provide unified accounts of their communities. Indeed, it is suggested that their varied perspectives make the narrated community spaces appear formidable to outsiders. This is because their historically varied perspectives align harmoniously. Both pairs recite passed-on stories and firsthand accounts of their community's collectivity. Their narratives also suggest that intergenerationality provides not only insight into these communities but space-producing qualities for the communities themselves. In this sense, attending to intergenerationality is more than a matter of gaining insights into particular black communities but also one of better understanding their social infrastructure.

THE IMPORTANCE OF INTERGENERATIONALITY

The oral histories reviewed in this paper suggest that intergenerationality is an important component of the interviewees' lives; the mothers and daughters are clearly close. However, the histories represent intergenerational interaction that is important to the spaces they inhabit, as well. As this paper argues, intergenerationality produces black geographic space. Such an

argument is critical in light of previous discussion of what intergenerationality means for human geographic scholarship. In this discussion section, I will touch on how previous work with intergenerationality focuses on the consequences of age segregation within communities rather than the critical import of intergenerationality for the existence of the communities themselves. I will then briefly recount and analyze how intergenerationality has been shown to matter by the two oral history interviews. This occurs via the collaborative *gendered* recitation of place-demarcating narratives between mothers and daughters. The interviewees narrate "home" and recount family histories as occurring within and being evocative of their respective community's spatial boundedness. Indeed, the intergenerationality undergirding their narratives produces black geographic space.

Feminist and intergenerationality geographers have warned about the consequences of age segregation. The efforts of geographers approaching intergenerationality are meant to speak out against such unchecked age segregation as a matter of social justice (Hopkins & Pain, 2007; Vanderbeck, 2007; Vanderbeck & Worth, 2015). Such segregation disrupts the transmission of localized knowledge, which is dependent on intergenerational interaction (Vanderbeck 2007; Katz 2001). This is the sort of transmitted knowledge highlighted by the black geographic narratives McKittrick and Woods (2007) implore us to consider. The segregation that thwarts the intergenerational dissemination of such narratives results in potential losses of community cohesion and function (Vanderbeck 2007). While, as interviewee Regina Merritt attests, the age segregation of prominent interest to geographers is an immediate issue for the future of her community space functioning, this paper does not set out to highlight that real jeopardy. Instead, I mean to highlight how intergenerationality is one way the narratives, already believed to be of import in black geographies, are important to black productions of space. Further, I highlight the

corollary of the age segregation consequence, which is that the mother-daughter interactions are indeed central to the narrative aspect of black geographic space and thus, perhaps, the very existence of the black community's from which they come.

While intergenerationality is important for many sorts of social spaces, analysis of the oral histories contained in this paper suggest it is critical to the bare existence of the black communities considered. A sort of intergenerational consciousness advanced by the oral histories relay the secluded, historical depth of the communities—how long ago they were founded, their sensorial conditions, and how much they have changed. Such consciousness comes out in recited family histories and is thusly gendered. To be sure, tending to family histories is conventionally feminized work in Western society (Leonardo, 1987; Smith, 2012). It also holds particular importance for black geographic space due to its place-inscribing properties. When Judy describes the natural beauty of her home and community space, she claims the trees, spring, and general scenery as the fabric of communal collectivity. This discursive practice of narrating "home" counts as the typically gendered work of tending to home that has been previously reckoned with by feminist geographers (Domosh, 1996; Marston, 2000). Indeed, Gertrude recalls giving the history of a nearby "slave house" during her youth because it was the only way she could pursue certain social relations: "I went there and sat on the porch and gave the history of that house. Because, you know, that's how my mama would let me go up there and date." In this case, the gender identity of the interviewees is not merely coincidental. It is important to consider how, as Marston (2000) does, gendered relegation to home space has been subverted by women for collective political action. In some cases, this subversive work may support the existence of otherwise marginalized community space, like rural black farms.

If the home might be the characteristic and, at times confining, domain of femininity (Valentine 2007a; Marston 2000), home and community at-large becomes blurred for the rural communities considered here. Indeed, church services, health care, and farm work all occurred within home space for the interviewees. Further, the typically gendered work of interviewees historicizing family ties supports understanding their black community space (Smith 2012). Gertrude and Judy gestured to old family photos as they did the land itself in reference to the changes and struggles brought about state-community interactions. These often gendered tasks must be appreciated for the political work they advance. Implicated in interviewees' accounts was the community itself, as real as any other, though historically denied government recognition.

For the black geographic spaces considered here, the intergenerationality of familial narrations siting home is critical to their ongoing collectivity. While feminist geographic thinking begins to approach such centrality with its focus on intergenerational narrative and lived experience (Valentine 2007a), there is still much to be understood regarding how critical intergenerationality may be to the holistic existence of some racialized communities. Black geographic framework prompts reckoning with how oral articulations of historical "home" space emplace family and community units within and across individual lives. Regina and Mary's respective and intertwined narratives provide different historic perspectives of a unified though evolving home-cum-community space. Their collective intergenerational account allows such black geographic space to be known as inhabitable. Their account also implores its continued status as such—through landownership. Regina and Mary's oral history show that intergenerational bolstering allows the space of "home" to encapsulate hard-earned community spaces often ascribed to more masculine, public spatial understandings—church, general stores,

and cafeterias. While feminist geography has shown that spaces of commerce and those of social reproduction are interconnected (Marston 2000), these black geographic narratives show that intergenerational ties undergird the production of space to accommodate interchanging economic and other sorts of collective emplacement.

CONCLUSION

This paper has considered how the narratives of mother-daughter interviewees illuminate the spatial situation of their historically black rural communities. The primary focus of this paper has been the intergenerationality of such narratives. Black geographic theory suggest narrative and lived experience are paramount to understanding black diasporic spatial productions. This paper has aimed to highlight how the intergenerationality of such narratives may support their centrality to black geographic space. Oral history provides a useful means of attending to black geographic narratives and their intergenerational frameworks for being inclusive of full life-courses and illumining firsthand accounts of everyday life in the rural communities considered here. The mothers and daughters recounted anecdotes and memories in unison. They also challenged each other to recall events more thoroughly.

Their familial stories are called on to illustrate how black communities have been emplaced. It is not for me to say whether this is the sole means of knowing the spatial information mobilized by the stories. However, it is one way. What is clear is that the blood ties themselves are not necessarily of paramount importance when it comes to these familial descriptions of black geographic space. For both mother-daughter pairs, the home doors were figuratively and literally opened to community members. Meals, land, and work was shared with other families to the extent of explicitly blurring the denoted boundaries separating "family" and

"community." In one instance, Judy Nunn Snipes uses the terms interchangeably. This suggests that we should attend to intergenerationality as it emerges and not limit analysis to family interactions.

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FOR THE RECITED SPATIAL NARRATIVES OF BACK WAYS

FOUNDING BLACK SPATIAL HUMANITIES

The cartographic representation of black community space has a history wrought with racism, imperialism, and exploitation (Alderman & Inwood, 2013; C. Woods, 2002). At the same time, digital innovations of geospatial tools have arguably come to offer opportunities for more just representations (Crang, 2015; Offen, 2013). Projects like Motor City Mapping and Detroit Food Map exemplify the purchase of such representations, which are shaped with input from marginalized communities in defiance of the notably hegemonic practice of map-making. These digital projects support claims that the yet growing practice of creating StoryMaps and other media-embedded sorts democratizes the means of making what we consider maps (Caquard 2013; Corner 2011). What, then, is there to "currently" say for the cartographic enterprise at-large's legacy of racism? Moreover, what potentials are there for minding the alterity of black spatial collectivity given the potentials of digital media beyond the whole of cartographic representation? In the summer of 2016, academics from around the United States gathered in address of such questions for the NEH Institute on Space and Place in Africana/Black Studies.

Broadly speaking, we came together at the Institute out of concern for how African and African diasporic spaces might be better represented via digital technology and media. We shared our research and listened to trailblazers who presented on projects like The Virtual Harlem Project, which uses immersive virtual reality to represent the black cultural mecca

Harlem in the 1920s-30s. With a focus on space and digital technology, conventional geospatial technology took a central place in the collective toolkit of the institute participants. Presenters like Judith Madera, author of *Black Atlas: Geography and Flow in Nineteenth-Century African American Literature* (2015), furthered this theme. As a consequence, one of three weeks was dedicated largely to learning how to better use different GIS technologies. Such a focus on the map reflects a trend in black digital humanities undertakings and "an emerging focus on the role that geospatial technologies can have in engaging with the history of race across the African Diaspora" (Kim 2017, p. 1). A focus on GIS gives pause considering how black people and their spaces have been violently managed via geospatial representations. Redlining and the colonial carving of Africa are only examples. To be sure, however, many self-determined black negotiations of space are readily quantifiable and traceable via cartography, even if still unmapped.

With a critical need for disempowering maps as total forces of racial inequality, more equitable uses of geospatial technology may be useful. However, in this article, I attend to the inherent limitations of geospatial technology, even in light of the transformative work of counter-cartography and recent turns to narrative cartography. My analysis emerges from the conclusion of the Institute and during the follow-up session that set two tasks: (1) crafting a book project reflecting our collective work and (2) more generally, identifying the ground that holds our multidisciplinary work together. We named both "black spatial humanities." My aim is to consider how such a dual intellectual project, black spatial humanities, might be more critical of geospatial technology and its limitations. I then propose digital animation as one potential counter-mapping alternative.

BACKGROUND

     Arguments could be made for simply mapping black North Carolina communities'
historic wagon roads. The stretch of roads are often central to the black communities that used
them; they are the sites around which communities grew. Despite their importance, many of
these paths were never shown on official road maps. Accounts of them are embedded in oral
history interviewees' stories of growing up as well as in passed down genealogical anecdotes.
These stories and anecdotes refute the blank space of dominant maps that omit the wagon roads.
In critical cartography, a growing interest in the narrative-cartography relationship offers some
guidance for reckoning with such oral counter-mapping (Caquard 2013; Leszczynski 2015).
However, while this work may offer allied support for black spatial humanities, the back ways
narratives show that objects that counter maps need not be some alternative versions of map
themselves.

     As I hope to make clear, practitioners of black spatial humanities have a responsibility and
opportunity to clarify the distinction between the scope of representable black space and the
established boundaries of critical cartographies. They should do so in interest of both
appreciating the potential support found in critical cartographic scholarship, and establishing the
boundaries of black spatial humanities and its representations of space. In accord with recent
critical cartography insistences (Caquard 2013), black spatial humanities and its digital
representations of space could benefit from considering means of representing space beyond
cartographic visualizations as well as critically assessing the purchase of cartography. Dominant
constructions of maps arose in the 1500s to assist growing Western empires control wide swaths
of territory. Critical cartographers theorize the ongoing role of the map from the scale of global

empires to that of local governments. They also show such representations then are never neutral, but always at the service of the state (Pickles 2004; Wood, Fels, and Krygier 2010).

Among critical cartographers and GIS researchers alike, narrative has been identified as one way to decenter these limiting, state-biased representations of space (Caquard 2013; Kwan and Ding 2008). Such work aligns with core suggestions in the black geographies subfield, a likely locus of black spatial humanities thought (McKittrick and Woods 2007). However, there is one presently pertinent difference between critical cartography and black geography when it comes to representations of space; while core critiques of cartographic approaches find fault with the dominant maps' normativity (Wood, Fels, and Krygier 2010; Knowles, Westerveld, and Strom 2015), black spatial humanities has the potential to recognize the normativity of black spatial representation as a matter of promoting radically different understandings of space—ones where narrated black collectivity predicates place rather than cartographic positioning. In accordance with black geographies, this chapter will examine the potential importance of "regularity." Rather than eschew all order, black productions "*reconfigure* classificatory spatial practices" (McKittrick and Woods 2007, 5, emphasis added). This *re*-configuring describes what happens to the ways researchers know such practices. The productions in and of themselves might be more original. In meditating on non-cartographic representations of black spatial productions, this chapter will therefore also take up the task of "embracing the normative" (Olson and Sayer 2009) for the purpose of emancipatory knowledge production.

The argument that I will advance begins with the premise that black life's demarcations of space with narrative have been subject to some normative regulatory forces born out of alterity. The preservation of these narrative demarcations depends on such regulation. For instance, a story of an elder first plotting a community farm requires some consistency in its

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telling from generation to generation, or the community's historic shape will become tenuous. As detailed by black geography scholars such as, Clyde Woods, Katherine McKittrick, and Angel David Nieves, critical study of black space must account for the practical rigidity of such humanistic processes in order to counteract under-developed analysis, particularly those that simply enumerate the physical conditions of black neighborhoods (McKittrick and Woods 2007). The demarcation of lived black spaces is often undertaken at the behest of state authority, but it is regulated by other means, like evocative family anecdotes, which do not necessarily suit integration into dominant cartographic frameworks. Considering black spatial narratives and their regulatory alterity means potentially learning from historic (yet relatively unpopular in geographic practice) methods for representing space. If cartographic views historically obscure perspectives in the interest of appearing non-normative (Wood et al., 2010), then the digital animations that I provide are attempts to bend representations toward humanized understandings of space, which embrace the normative potential of black spatial alterity.

THE MEASURE OF BLACK GEOGRAPHIES

The subfield of black geographies focuses on the production of space by narrative and lived experience. Its foundations are most often traced to the intellectual legacies of Clyde Woods and Katherine McKittrick, both of whom have described their work explicitly as "black geographies" (McKittrick and Woods 2007). I focus on the "black geographies" through the work of Kathryn McKittrick, Clyde Woods, and their noted sources of inspiration (i.e. Sylvia Wynter), as well as work included in and resolutely followed by their *Black Geographies and the Politics of Place* text. Seminal work in the subfield focuses on the collective emplacement of black people in contexts of disenfranchising dominant and state-led economic or infrastructural

development (Nieves 2007; Woods 1998). Such development, like urban renewal and interstate highway building, intensifies uneven participation in modernization along racial lines (Bullard, Johnson, and Torres 2004; McKittrick 2011).

Modernizing state development and planning facilitates new rationales for uneven participation, or the disproportionate burden of environmental harms. Meanwhile, the metrics of modernization ignore the vitality of black communities. The too-frequent result is that black communities appear suited for unwanted byproducts of modernizing development including ultimate demise (Mbembe and Meintjes 2003; McKittrick 2011). This is seen in countless cases of waste facilities plotted in historically black neighborhoods (Pulido 1996; Woods 2002). From planners' views, black communities often appear as uniform sites of dilapidation and pathology rather than places of community, family, and history (Pulido 1996; 2000). As with the demarcating back ways narratives, black geographic scholarship provides a less morbid view of these communities and those living in them.

Drawing substantially from the work of black feminists like Sylvia Wynter (2006; 1994) and Hortense Spillers (1987), black geographies fosters a growing recognition that historic black emplacement implicates intent, collective refutation of the West's "black" identity. Across periods where the black identity was meant to signal the dichotomy of jolly slave or corrupt convict, disseminated traditions, stories, and ways of navigation draw forth an alternative, self-determined understanding of who black people are self-determinately and outside of those representations (McKittrick 2006). Indeed, self-identifying as people collectively capable of place-making alone goes against Western racial marginalization. Such self-identification predicated the moments of the environment justice movement whereas black community advocates had to first affirm the existence and importance of their communities alongside

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defending them against environmental ills. The appreciation of black geographic identity-cum-space work aligns with feminist geography and claims that certain marginalized subject positions accommodate different ways of producing space (D. B. Massey 1994; Rose 1993).

Black geographies are created for what Woods calls the "reestablishment of collective sensibility," or the communal creation of epistemologies where blackness is not meant to negate humanity (Woods 1998, 30). Translated into Western knowledge frameworks, these geographies exist within monumental swaths of historic racism, like the space of the Americas. From the view of such frameworks, they emerge via subversive, habitual acts of survival like traveling along the back way (Nieves 2007; Woods 2007). This is the reason that back ways might act as a route into both place and space, for as a black geographic feature, the back way acted as a refuge from potentially violent interracial encounters while provide a habitable place of relationships and knowledge. Interviewees recount leaving main roads after sunset for the back ways in their youth and then traveling on the back ways that lead to homes, churches, and other community members. By explaining and describing these stories of places left off our maps, an narrating such everyday practices steadies the road as a special place that grounds a common recollection and understanding of its surrounding area sustained by those living there. Retelling the stories of the back way as a place of refuge therefore is intended to act as a counterforce to its erasure, with community itself, and not just its exclusion and abuse, understood as historically central to our geographic understandings of the South. Those living there have a collective heritage and historical record beyond conditions of shared blackness and whatever that imposed identity might mean over time.

Black geographies literature demands we look beyond the victimhood of the communities to see the vitality at stake when the state fails to recognize the ongoing importance of historic

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narrative and lived experience (Woods 2002; Nieves 2007). Rather than translating radical black geographic spaces like Rogers Road into the language of cartography, however radical, we must altogether reconfigure the ways we know spaces to be demarcated and sustained. These ways are hardly outside normative conditions. Black spatial humanities has stake in taking on this challenge, because it has an elaborate discipline of cartography to contend with.

WHY CARTOGRAPHY FALLS SHORT

A recent focus on narrative in cartographic study has meant subverting dominant maps, or critically enhancing what may be learned from them (Bodenhamer, Corrigan, & Harris, 2015; Caquard, 2013; Peterle, 2018; Tally, 2014; Wood, Butler, Glass, Mobilio, & Monson, 2013). Such work calls for more attention to history, artistic expression, and subjective experience. One part of this complements humanists' recent reckoning with a historic concern for cartographic representations that has gone without adequate reflection (Offen 2013). Other humanists and cultural geographers have joined long-standing critical cartographic explorations of what digitalization and increased accessibility mean for more humanistic visualizations of space (Caquard 2013). Following the maxim of maps producing place, critical cartography projects consider how the accessibility of online map interfaces, like Google Maps, might allow laymen to "play" with the territories and places wrought by cartographic visualizations (Corner 2011; Pickles 2004). Concerns with democratization parallel arguments in history suggesting digital accessibility might usher in a welcomed upset of who gets to say exactly what archives are during their digital renovations (Cohen and Rosenzweig 2006). Alongside these vibrant, transdisciplinary conversations in new journals like *GeoHumanities¸* there are others reminding

scholars to remain mindful of cartography's fundamental shortcomings even as it attends to more humanistic matters like narratives (Leszczynski 2015; Rose 2016).

In *Rethinking the Power of Maps* (2010), "Talking Back to The Map," Denis Wood laments the failure of public participation GIS (PPGIS) to de-hegemonize the business of mapping: "I'd have to say, despite the high idealism and great goodwill of perhaps all its practitioners, that PPGIS is scarcely GIS, intensely hegemonic, hardly public, and anything but participatory" (160). Wood goes on to decry the lack of similarities between PPGIS projects and counter-mapping work of Debord and The Situationists who embraced emotion while constructing more complete "geographic information systems" based on localized subjective experience. The creation of the Situationists maps, for instance, began with *dérives* through the city streets of Paris, with no particular methodical approach beyond a phenomenological engagement. Eschewing the order imposed by power broking planners like Le Corbusier, Debord created *The Naked City* map. It was arranged with cut-out portions of Parisian maps interspersed with swirling arrows to suggest the subjective and meandering in-and-out flows of *derives*. The work serves as a reminder that concerns with emotion and subjectivity that are missing from dominant spatial visualizations, have not been entirely lost on contemporary geographic visualization, even as they constitute the margins of that particular analytic and empirical examples.

In cultural geography, there is a substantial number of recent and notable methodological undertakings which follow in the tradition of Debord and The Situationists. These are methods empowered by a long-standing reaction to ordering, dominant cartographic representations. They embrace anything-but-abstract outputs. Analyses by Knowles, Westerveld, and Strom's (2015) promote "inductive visualization," which privileges the emotions and narratives of Holocaust

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survivor testimonies rather than attempting to contort them to fit any sort of conventional GIS visualization. The visualizations take the shape of two-dimensional pictorial and chart-like timelines with no prescribed form. It follows that these visualizations might avoid conforming to what Wood (2010) lambasts as the "normative goal" of PPGIS to "construe the public monolithically, as a people united about ends, if divided over means" (162). This is taken to include work, like Kwan and Ding's (2008), which makes efforts to humanize GIS with oral history and personal accounts.

Considering the tension between these PPGIS projects and abstract work like the inductive visualization of Holocaust testimonies, I am inclined to question the discursive work surrounding considerations of "cartography" and the assumption that their techniques are bound to produce regressive normative representations, almost by default. By seemingly assigning "normative" legibility and fixedness exclusively to the likes of maps, counter-projects are potentially left as the makings of fatally incomprehensible visual representations of space. In other words, counter-cartography loses its potential to represent differently. This critique of representation then runs the risk of assigning certain perspectives or people as being unrepresentable, the spatial equivalent of those in the margins having "names their captors would not recognize" (Spillers 1987, 72). In criticizing PPGIS supporters who tout its legibility to politicians, Wood, Fels, and Kyrieger (2010) says, "what [the supporters] really mean is that the message has been reframed into the language of regulation" (164). I am inclined to think that for black geographies, "regulation" might not be regarded so negatively, because regulation may also facilitate an expectation for other understandings of space though the establishment of new methods, symbols, and stories in the service of new normativities. Olson and Sayer (2009, 181) argue that much critical geographic work has "become increasingly reticent about making its

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critiques and their standpoints or rationales explicit, or has softened its critiques, so that in some quarters being critical has reduced to trying merely to 'unsettle' some ideas or to being reflexive". In this sense, "normative" means making evaluative claims via notions of good and bad, flourishing and suffering. I am moved to consider the normative work inherent in the place-charting narratives of the back ways communities. They have been mobilized repeatedly in efforts to have outsiders readily know of embattled land uses and tenures. In this way, I consider the telling of the narratives counter-mapping, which problematizes the nowhere at all-ness in which conventional maps place black life with weathered anecdotes and oft-recounted community sentiments.[3]

When I recorded the narratives of the back ways communities, their space-charting qualities were readily apparent. These narratives made the communities at once material and historic for me, they have been mobilized in grassroots political fights against the local government and in preservation of community itself. They call for representation that reflects their intelligibility. While the visualizations like Debord's are important and undeniably politically engaged, we must not ignore the allure or comprehensibility of dominant cartographic representation as we attempt to counter it. I do not mean to discount the intellectual projects of Knowles et al (2015) and Wood (2010), in teasing out the flattenings and endless ethical quandaries posed by creating visual representations of space within traditional GIS. On the contrary, I agree with such underlying critique and the "intensely hegemonic" fate of PPGIS "as we know it." I am weary of even public GIS projects, about which Clyde Woods (2002) and Katherine McKittrick (2006; 2011) offer critiques, and which raise questions about the empirical,

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[3]"Nowhere at all" is a construct adapted from Hortense Spillers 1987 essay, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book." It describes the co-constitutive disruption of identity and spatial orientation for the newly enslaved during Middle Passage.

positivist nature of mapping that naturalizes, or presents as merely factual, the often

dysfunctional conditions of African American neighborhoods. At the same time, I am aligned

with the call of PPGIS projects like those lambasted by Wood, which moves us to assess the

social justice impacts of counter-mapping in albeit normative contexts. Most importantly,

however, I recognize intelligibility as an important motivation for black spatial humanities

though not one for which the holistic alterity of black productions should be sacrificed.

CONSIDERING THE LEGILIBILITY OF SOCIAL SPACE

To fully account for the coeval regulatory and alterity natures of black spatial

productions, the false dichotomy that divides humanistic, localized productions from regulation

and abstraction needs to be troubled. In critical geography, this division manifests with the

assistance of several theories which attempt to delineate the operation and construction of social

space. De Certeau's strategic-tactical division is one for which strategic space is that which a

dominant government imposes in a top-down fashion. In contrast, tactical space is the everyday

person's lived, embodied, and fleeting emplacement. It is said to subvert the rigidity of strategic

space (Certeau 2011). This differs from Deleuze and Guattari's striated-smooth space distinction.

Striated space is that which forcibly alters inhabitable environments. It is conceivably less

organic than the smooth space accorded to "nomadic" movement (Deleuze and Guattari 1988).

Feminist theory builds upon these multiplicities of space, and critiques rigid conceptualizations

of space as masculinist and dominant, reinforced by violence. Such space is necessarily

subverted by the insistent fluidity of bodies (Longhurst 2001; McDowell 1999). Beyond shaping

theoretical frameworks, such dualism has impacts on the practices and potential outcomes of

spatial scholarship.

However, wholly resisting "totalizing" views, and centering unresolved "tension" and partiality (ie, Rose 1993; Sharp 2005) may not totally suit the conduct of black spatial humanities. Indeed, following such edicts might mean over-determining the partiality of some accounts from interviewees and other subjects and failing to mind the ways such accounts are at work to *uphold* totalizing views and productions of space. If we accept Woods (1998) claim that the blues establishes an entire epistemology that challenged a global plantation logic, it stands to reason that it might accommodate worldviews of its own, albeit ones characteristically cast from localized positions (i.e. the Mississippi Delta). Through cadence and melody, the Blues configures all it touches through its doubly critical and "just music" work. By committing ourselves solely to partiality and tensions, we fail to account for that which is not in tension, per se, or that which is creative and unifying rather than confrontational. Such creativity may be subversive yet like the Blues or a personal recount of some back way. For the digital productions of black spatial humanities, dualistic thinking distorts and discounts the potential variability of abstraction—that is, the abstract is always posited as most dominant and never subversive but always subverted. I wager that the potential of black spatial humanities is partly hinged on overcoming the prevalence of this dualistic thinking. Like Harriet Tubman's classic hymns enlivening the Underground Railroad, black spatial productions have always been coevally intelligible and subversive. We must honor this legacy as we advance conversations surrounding black spatial humanities.

PRACTICAL MATTERS AND REPRESENTING THE BACK WAYS

By centering oral histories, the *Back Ways* project draws from the life stories of African Americans who have lived around historic wagon roads in Orange County (NC) through the

twentieth century and onwards. The interviewees weave long road narratives in their own personal histories covering birth, school, work, marriage, and the achievement of old age. Though the work of black geographies scholarship has improved critical knowledge-making practices of racialized geographies of the American south, we do not know how such sites may be critically conceptualized via digital media. The firsthand accounts provide one way of attending to the interrelated benefits and difficulties of life on the back way.

Telling the stories of formerly obscured and marginalized African American communities in the U.S. South like those of the back ways requires methodologies for accessing previously unrecorded data, along with analysis and presentation approaches that may counter the dehumanization resulting from many of our white-washed histories. Doing so advances existing research on the back ways of North Carolina and efforts to develop alternative digital expressions of place and space that better express the concerns of black geographies. At the 2016 NEH Black Spatial Humanities Institute, I began designing a new digital humanities project to facilitate analyzing, curating, and sharing the oral history-recorded experiences of back ways community members. Simply, the work is meant to visualize oral history clips with animation similar in form to common television cartoons. The clips illuminate unique black geographic information through firsthand accounts of living in the spaces and through passed-down stories of elders doing so. The visualizations are to illustrate the spatial practices of individual community members, like the daily chore of drawing water from a creek, along with transformations of the landscape, such as the development of the road. The work is meant to yield more critical and accurate representations of communities formed around the roads.

Orange County, the location of the back ways communities, is the home of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. According to the U.S. Census, it has the highest median

household income in the state and its schools are recognized as being the best of North Carolina. Despite its notable progressive political leaning, Orange County, as described by the interviewees, is also noted for intense interracial tensions that include violence and harassment over the 20th and 21st centuries. One back ways interviewee, for instance, Dr. Freddie Parker, recounts the grim transition from attending the all-black Central High School to the newly desegregated Orange County High School in the 1960s: "It was rough. A lot of bloodshed." His history laments a lack of foresight afforded to his community's demand for desegregation: "I don't think we really had the foresight to see what it really meant, because if you decide that you're going to bring the walls of segregation down, the white students are not coming to your school." Across shifts like school desegregation occurring in the encompassing interracial Orange County, the rural and historically agricultural back ways communities are characterized as maintaining a sense of accommodating normalcy for its residents, which is, however, as precarious as it is essential to the everyday and historical emplacements for those residents and their families.

The back ways, historic wagon roads used by black farming families, themselves evidence the grounded nature of the communities that emerged around them—communities with histories of land cultivation and inhabited heir's property. Some residents who contributed their oral histories are as much community historians by virtue of living on inherited property along a back way for as long as nine decades and descending from back ways community founders. Indeed, the histories lie with them and not in any official archives. Meanwhile, the narrated coordinates of community boundaries uniquely lie in those histories for the historical denial of recognition on the part of local governments. Some back way communities lie in formally

marginalized zones called "extra-territorial jurisdictions."[4] In the context of the Back Ways

project, all are described with nods to antagonistic county-community relations.

Back ways represent communities' historic exclusion from state transportation mapping,

surveillance, and development (Scott, 2017). In oral history interviews, participants explain that

this widespread exclusion is said to have contributed to community and family autonomy from

hostile government policies. For those who lived along them and used them, the roads are often

presented as entangled components of century-long family histories which anchor the black

community to the physical environment. Recent development and modernization of these roads

through paving and other forms of "improvement" ignore the communities' historic and

racialized emplacement. However, road improvements also help to highlight how erasures arise

when the communities are delineated with US Census blocks and natural features of the

landscape; narrative and heritage are considered too messy even when recognized as important

factors to consider in development (Louis Berger Group 2001).

Indeed, there is little applied work which minds space-charting accounts of communal

subjectivity and historic experiences with the actual impact assessments of communities in local

and regional development projects in the U.S. South and elsewhere. It is through such

understanding that "regulation," which I am interpreting here as the systematized narration of

historic black geographies by those principally residing in them, might be important for

representing spaces of black collectivity. Without doing so, we fail to really reckon with the

integrity of these real sites of historic and ongoing collectivity. Indeed, these sites have had to be

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[4]This term is used by governments, in this case the surrounding city governments, to mark places subject to the
authority of their planning/development that lie just outside of their boundaries. These jurisdictions lack elected
political representation in city government.

both other-ed and reliable. They requires communities' regulation of knowledge, and thusly call for representation that is sufficiently accommodating of regulation.

Centering personal accounts facilitates the intricate steadfastness of back ways communities like Rogers Road. Population counts and geographic coordinates do not relay its historical depth and intergenerational importance. Without featuring the narratives in spatial representations, the community risks being rendered as an area where black people have happened to live for some time. The road would not be understood as a binding locus for the families who moved there to live "on it" by buying a home. While the narratives that do provide this information are performed and recited, thus not fleeting or ungraspable, representing them in a fashion comparable to cartography in abstraction and legibility is a difficult undertaking. Even so, it is an important one for the purposes of such legibility and communication.

The inclusion of multimedia animation is somewhat novel in historical accounts of Black life in the U.S. South. My choice of this medium is based on its ability to allow for temporal representations of spatial dynamics such as a community's formation over the twentieth century (Johnson 2002; Lorimer 2010). Further, empirical work in geography has found it to be better suited for promoting course material retention (Crooks et al 2005; Edsall and Wentz 2007), a point that is perhaps especially important to take into account when communicating marginalized histories that have been violently erased from the landscape and from our public knowledge. Animation is characteristically familiar and engaging. While the reading and interpretation of maps may be intimidating to viewers, engagement with animation is intended to be approachable while also clearly implying their own obvious representative character. "Cartoons," as commonly consumed media, are already recognized for being subjective and partial compared to feigned immutability of maps, however public. This empowers potential involvement to include

community members' robust critique of what is being produced rather than acquiescent compliance for fear of getting something wrong or not really understanding. As an output, animation stands to be considerably more accessible to diverse audiences. Indeed, academics as well as publics are bound to continually struggle engaging with supposed public-faced digital projects that require a specific literacy, even if they do so out of reluctance to over-simplify.

Because of this ease of access and legibility, the communication of unique spatial information is more likely. This is important as the primary point of the animation is to have people know of black geographic space singularly demarcated by personal and community narratives. The animations depict life at the scales of the home and the community for the rural *Back Ways* enclaves. Having these two scales of animation establishes the historical depth of the farming communities established around wagon roads. The underappreciated space-demarcating practices accorded to black geographies are too important to toy around with obfuscation. We must be attentive to the robust alterity that black communities have counted on for generations now.

THE PROCESS OF CREATING ANIMATIONS

For this dissertation project, three animations were created with a professional animator. These clips came from the set of *Back Ways* interviews. The first step of the process was to isolate three pertinent oral history clips in which interviewees relay some spatial detail of the community's shape and historic presence, with features that clearly emplace people and portray them as dwelling in and interacting with the landscape. The interviewees chosen for these animations were in their eighties and nineties. The clips were taken from a collection of already coded and analyzed transcripts. The process involved combing through the pre-coded clips to

determine which were most suitable for animation. The criteria used limited clips to recounts of

movement through community space (i.e. walking to church) and recounts that were succinctly

shared in interest of short animation capability. The clips that were eventually chosen are

colorful and affective examples of everyday life in the back ways communities. After the clips

were selected, they were individually edited with Adobe Premier to improve the quality of the

audio and order the narrative if necessary. Editing on Premier sometimes involved rearranging

the order information was spoken to account for backtracking and achieve greater clarity of the

geographic features and events involved in the narrative. The results of such editing are

described in the text below:

ORIGINAL TRANSCRIPT	EDITED FOR ANIMATION
HR: My parents, my grandparents across the street and mother used to walk through the woods from there, across the street, up to that church, about four miles. DS: Wow. And how do you think the roads got in such bad condition? Or do you think it was more just people started driving more and needed to use the roads? HR: I don't think the roads never were in good condition. It never was a through road where actually cars drove through. It was just a road to the church and then out. So, it wasn't a state road that was kept by the state or anything. It was just a road that they created. That's the way I understand it. DS: Okay. And if you know any stories or have any experiences, how did the congregation of the church react to the idea of relocating it initially? HR: I think that they were. This is what I hear. I don't know for sure. DS: Okay. And—. HR: I remember going to the old church years ago. But my sister says she remembers going to my great-grandmother's funeral there,	*I remember going to the old church years ago. It was on an area called Seven Mile Creek. My grandparents, across the street, and my mother used to walk from there, across the street, up to that church—about four miles. They were having service once and somebody saw a snake come down the wall.*

and it's a story that she remembers. They forgot her and left her standing out there.
 	
      DS: Oh, no!
 	
      HR: And it was in the winter. [Laughs] So, they were wondering where she was. I think at that time they were driving. I can look up the date. But they went back and they found her, and she was standing out there crying.
 	
      DS: Gosh. At the funeral?
 	
HR: I heard one story about somebody—they were having service once, and somebody saw a snake come down the wall. [Laughs] So.	

The editing was essential for giving the animator a clear story to depict. As is the case with the original transcription above, Harold Russell describes a number of different scenes related to the life of the church when asked about its general history. Illustrating all of the details of his oral history, with the looping and bypassing of time, would have been challenging both for the animator, and also due to financial constraints. This therefore required limiting the length of animation clips, and not all parts of a coherent narrative could be included for animation. Each of the three animations was limited to ~30 seconds, which meant that certain portions of the narrative like Harold's sister being left at the church, had to be removed. Care was given to ensure the clips remained true to the content described in the oral histories throughout the process of animation. No editing occurred to alter the meaning of Harold and the other interviewees' accounts. Nonetheless, it is important to clarify that these representations are not more comprehensive in their data coverage than a cartographic representation of the same space. They are similarly selective, though the types of spatial data that are selected for representation are very different than those that might be selected for cartographic mapping.

The clips chosen for animation communicated vibrant instances of life within three back way community spaces. Each is taken from a separate oral history interview collected in the summer and fall of 2014. The selected segments depict scenes of everyday life in the historically

agricultural black communities of Orange County. The scenes cover the holistic and encompassing life community members were able to have all within these rural spaces of collectivity, and include themes of healthcare and religious observance. As described above, Harold Russell's clip depicts how his family walked four miles through the woods to reach a wooded church site. Mary Cole describes how her childhood home served as the space for church service and how she had to move the furniture weekly to accommodate the congregation. Gertrude Nunn discusses how her mother sent her to get spring water and mended her brother's leg within the home space after he cut it badly with an axe. These clips were chosen for the vividness of the descriptions and the ease by which I reasoned an animator would be able to depict the words spoken.

EVERYDAY METHODS OF COLLABORATING FOR AN ANIMATED PROJECT

The process of hiring a professional animator was facilitated by a website called upwork.com which matches freelancing creative professionals, such as animators and sound editors, with job opportunities. I selected this service due to its transparency and reputable standing. Those in need of service are able to post advertisements for jobs along with a fixed price for the task. The figure below is an image of the call for an animator as it appeared on the website. After posting it, I was able to "invite" animators to place bids based on their public portfolios, which are also accessible for browsing on the website. Other non-invited animators were able to also place bids for the job. The animator I worked with, Stella Rosen, was invited to undertake the job based the look and quality of her previous animations. Once invited, Stella accepted the position and we entered a contract.

Job Details

Animation   Posted 23 days ago

🏷 $400
Fixed Price

I'm completing a doctoral dissertation, and I'm looking to have three ~30 second animations done to complement it. They will depict scenes of everyday rural life described in pre-recorded oral history interviews, which will provide the audio for the animations. I'm hoping for them to be very simple and maybe even just motion graphics. The pre-recorded audio clips describe simple things like sorting beans from a garden and moving furniture.

$$ Intermediate Level
I am looking for a mix of experience and value

Figure 1: A screenshot of Upwork.com

After securing the contract, Stella and I corresponded and exchanged media via the Upwork website's messaging feature. I shared the first clip with her and described the scene as it is described in the clip itself, in order to ensure that she identified the key features. I also provided photographs of time/region-appropriate clothing and scenery from the Yale Photogrammar repository. Finally, I provided some background information about the person speaking, such as age and tenure in the community space, as well as the community space (i.e. its status as a family farm). Within a day's time, Stella delivered a video storyboard of the animation, which is depicted below. This storyboard provided a rough play of the animation and its contents. Upon receiving feedback, Stella then altered the storyboard and sent an updated version, which is also depicted below. This process revising storyboard occurred with all three clips, with them all going through two or three rounds of storyboard revisions. For example, with the first clip I requested that the speaker be depicted as a young girl witnessing the story and that her action of running to a spring for water be included, which were not shown on the initial storyboard as shown below. Having these aspects animated were critical for the overarching goal

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of the animations being the humanizing of long-disregarded rural sites of black collectivity. Such sites have been historically unmapped and considered merely wooded and meager. The animations were meant to highlight the evidence of rich livelihoods that occur within the rural spaces themselves along with the people who have lived within them.
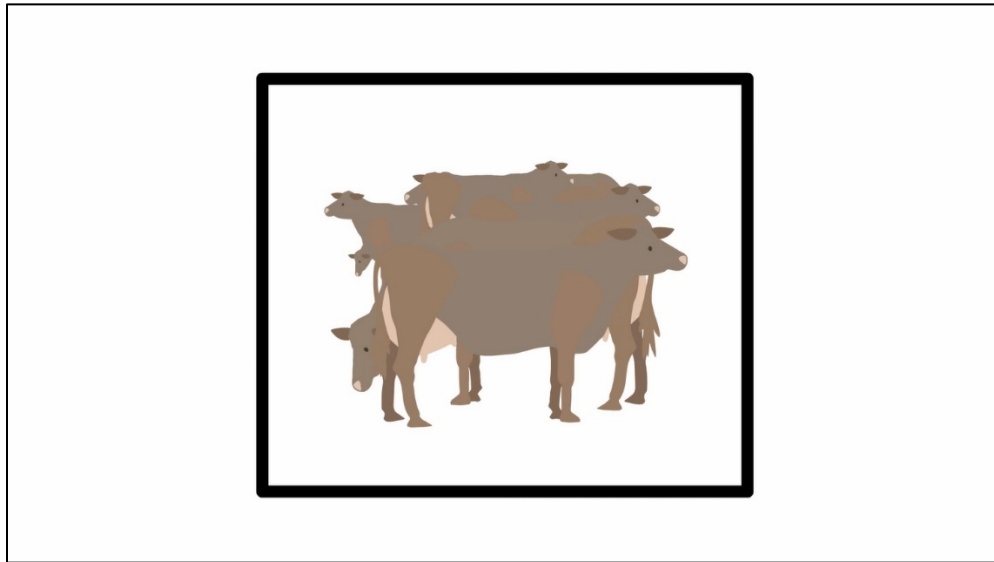

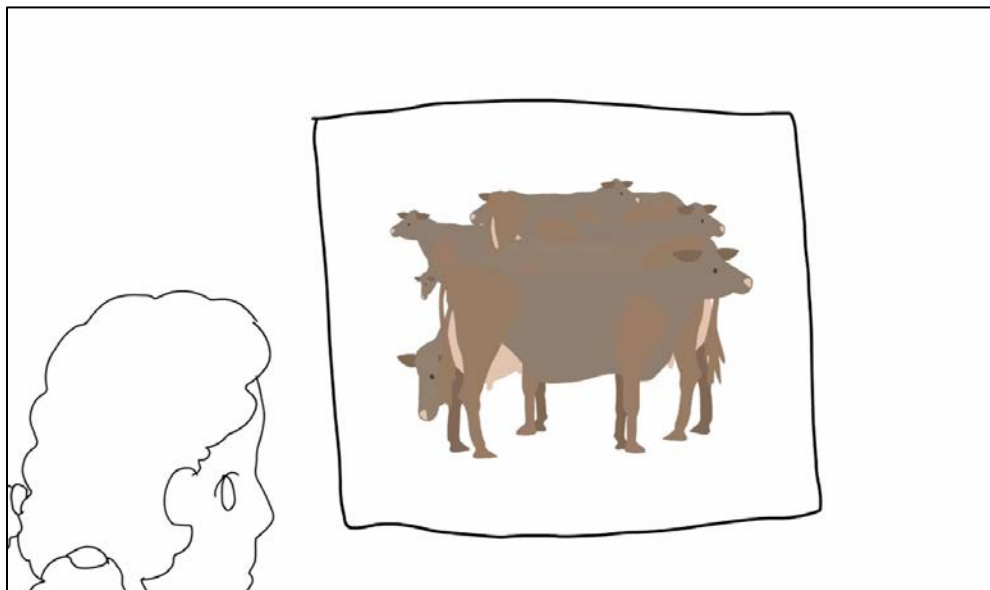*Figure 2: A first draft of clip storyboard*

Figure 3:A revised draft of clip storyboard

Both of the above depictions included are taken from the same mark in time. They are shown to illustrate the transformation of the animations' eventual content in accordance with the aims of the project, which were to ensure that representations were also populated with a gaze of the creator of the content (ie, the oral history participant). The process of producing these illustrations was made easier by the responsiveness and talent of the animator, and was supported by my clarity when contracting her; I was careful to convey that I intended to show how the communities from which the stories come exist, and make their histories tangible. She was receptive of such an aim and it showed in the work she was able to produce.

THE FINAL ANIMATIONS

The animations are colorful, dynamic depictions of everyday life in three different historically black *Back Ways* communities in rural Orange County, NC. They show the actions of community residents against and in relationship to the surrounding wooded environments to the effect of humanizing the often disregarded landscape. Oftentimes, such populated black environments are discursively marginalized or altogether elided in dominant representations of space. Indeed, as Price (2004) notes, exclusion of racialized peoples to such discursive unmapping in the wild is critical to the function of Western understanding of place. Such exclusion, in the form of cartographic erasure and otherwise, allows local governments to disregard the robustness and life within the sites of black spatial collectivity. This then eases the facilitation of harmful land-use like the placement of a landfill in the Rogers Road community, which is the setting of one of the animations. The map then is a historically polarizing tool of exploitation and harm for these communities. In light of this, the three animations provide some

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alternative means of counter-mapping without reinvigorating the potentially hostile function of the map itself.

Animation 1: https://vimeo.com/263541225 (password: backways)

In the first animation, Harold Russell describes the wooded site of his family's historic church. Harold Russell is a community elder who returned to his rural enclave following a career in chemistry. He received his PhD from Cornell University. Harold Russell has taken on the unofficial role of historian for Harvey's Chapel, a church founded by his ancestors and the one he attends today. Part of his historical work has involved going a search for the original church site's land deed and attempting to uncover how the church came to be located in a relatively remote location. The location of the church is the focus of Russel's animation clip.

The clip opens with Harold stating that he remembers going to the church many years ago, which is shown surrounded by trees. Two birds fly across the sky as the screen pans across the interrupted mass of greenery before settling on the home of Harold's grandparents as he names the location of the church, "near Seven Mile Creek." Harold is then heard recounting how his mother, in her youth, and his grandparents would walk four miles from their home to the church as a regular practice while the animation depicts them strolling through tall grasses and shrubbery. Though simpler than the other two clips in terms of action, this animation illustrates the wide-ranging forested landscape that site the historic collectivity of Harold's family and community. The animation concludes with Harold telling how someone once saw a snake slither down the wall of the church. By depicting the woods and the church's emplacement side-by-side, the animation shows how the rural and natural environment are intertwined. It implicates the ways that the natural environment vis-à-vis the greenery and the snake betray the emplacement

rather than the absence of human collectivity vis-à-vis the church. The wilderness, typically depicted as blank space on the map, is portrayed as setting for Harold's family mobility and his community's coming together.

Animation 2: https://vimeo.com/263541003 (password: backways)

In the second animation featuring Mary Cole, she recounts moving furniture in her childhood home weekly to make room for church services. Today, she is community elder whose father bought land that came to be a community epicenter. Including providing space for religious worship, her father's land also accommodate a sizeable farm and the residences of some of Cole's relatives. Throughout her oral history, Cole recounts the effort and activities that went into her home serving as community space—the bubbling kitchen and myriad relations colored her childhood experiences. In addition, the status of her home as community space involved work on her part, which is recounted in her clip about moving furniture before worship service.

The animation opens with a shot of her family house. The sun replaces the moon to show how the services and need for moving furniture occurred mornings and nights. On Wednesday nights her family hosted bible study while congregants showed up for worship services on Sunday mornings. Such weekly day and night activity undergirds the status of their home as the designated site for the church. The animation then moves to inside of the home where a preacher is shown delivering a sermon. Mary narrates the scene relaying how different preachers would come to lead the congregation. The scene then shows a crowd of people as Mary recounts how many people would come to attend the services. Such depiction enlivens the historic communal centrality of Mary Cole's family land. The animation concludes with a young Mary being shown

struggling to move a sofa as she recounts having to move the furniture to accommodate the

crowd. The animation concludes with a flashing view of the room that held the congregants now

shown as a living space full of furniture—sofa, vases, end tables, and a coffee table—as Mary

recalls vowing to never moving her furniture so much again as an adult.

Animation 3: https://vimeo.com/263540643 (password: backways)

The third animation illustrates an emergency situation from the childhood of Gertrude

Nunn where her mother sent her to fetch water from a nearby spring to treat her brother's wound.

Nunn has spent decades living in the rural community that she currently calls home, Rogers

Road. She is a well-known matriarch of Rogers Road, which is named after her father. She has

also acted as an advocate for the community—organizing and speaking out against the placement

of an ill-conceived landfill. She recounts such instances of modernization and how they have

affected life in the community space. Reflecting on earlier times, like the one in her animation,

she recalls an aspect of self-sufficiency in times of crisis that may now be gone.

The animation opens with a young Gertrude turning towards a developing pasture scene

of cows grazing. Immediately, the agricultural setting is established with the livestock and the

Gertrude recalling the everyday practice of having to take them out to graze. Her brother's injury

was a result of his carrying an axe while taking them to do so. At this point, the scene turns to

being a disembodied axe in the center of the screen. The animation carries on with Gertrude

recounting how the axe fell off her brother's shoulder and badly cut his leg. The animation then

depicts the disembodied axe in the center falling to create an also disembodied wound at the

bottom of the screen. As Gertrude recalls blood flowing out vigorously, the screen with a fluid

pale red hue. The scene then turns to an alert young Gertrude running from the spring as

commanded by her mother with an overflowing pail of water in hand. The healing effect of the water is implicated in what follows. Gertrude recalls her mother cleaning the wound with the water, packing it with mud and a felt hat, and then wrapping it with clean cloth. These actions are depicted one-by-one. They are all disembodied. The relationship between the resources of the land—fresh spring water—and the well-being of the community are represented by the animation via the healing of Gertrude's brother via her mother's knowledge. The animation closes with her remembering how the wound heal leaving her brother with no complications.

CONCLUSION

The animations produced here were able to depict stories of life in the back ways communities. By just listening to the recorded audio or reading through the transcripts, it is easy to miss the particular illuminations of space relayed by the oral history accounts. The animations, however, provoke viewers to reckon with the viscerality and particularities of day-to-day life in the rural black collectives. At the same time, the animations presented here are not without limitations. One is the limitation of cost. It took specialized skill to create the animation, which I like most researchers, do not possess. This meant hiring an independent artists for a limited amount of animation. Naturally, the vast bulk of the spatial account contained in the back ways interviews were left out. Relatedly, the need to hire an independent contractor meant the process of creating them had to be done by someone without much knowledge of the research project—Stella is a professional animator who, by no fault of her own, is not aware of the black geographic and critical cartographic discourses nor the empirical data that predicates the creation of the three animations.

Future work with animation, like that modeled here, could benefit from more robust partnerships with animators. It could have been useful to have Stella onboard at an earlier stage of the project and in thinking through what questions were asked in interviews and what the broad research aims were. Another limitation of animation, here and generally speaking, is the inability to comprehensively represent space. They do not depict how large or populated the communities are. In light of this, it is critical to remain mindful of what scale of space are comparatively represented—that of everyday life, which perhaps makes the lack of comprehensibility a trade-off. With these limitations considered, the animations were still succesful in relaying the regularity of occupying the back ways communities as narrated by interviewees.

The regularity of the narratives depicted by the animations is evident in their telling. While Gertrude's daughter was not yet born during the incident, she is heard in the clip prompting and corroborating the telling of the story. In the portion with Mary Cole, she mentions how she told her kids, as she tells in her oral history, that she vowed to never move furniture in her own home as a result of the previously recounted practice. Harold himself was not yet born when his mother, in her youth, walked with his grandparents to the church; the narrative and its place-illuminating qualities were passed down to him. Also, he recounts the story of the snake, which had been told to him before he told it again. Such is the nature of the narratives, which themselves animate the space of the rural black communities as historic and lived-in sites of collective self-reliance. In order to represent such spaces in depth, we cannot rely on the conventional map. Indeed, such is true for the social depth of all communities.

While cartography provides useful tools for digital humanities and the conduct of black spatial humanities, the spaces wrought by black collectivity are likely seldom to find sweeping

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purchase there. If we take seriously the charge of Woods and McKittrick (2007) that narrative and lived experience are the ins to black geographic space, we must too consider means of representation that accommodate rather than assimilate such humanistic matters. In this paper, I invite the reader to consider animation only one potential means of representing the narratives of individuals from the three black communities. This means is undoubtedly incomplete and inadequate to "do the job" of representing the totality of any black geographic space on its own. We must also consider the possibilities of film, still art, audio, and other sorts, which often are produced most entirely from within communities themselves as being representations of space. We must too be mindful of the impossibility of the task—representing that which is unfolding and often intently unseen. It is my hope that this work of aligning the narratives vis-à-vis animations as counter-cartographic and space-demarcating widens the scope of reckoning with such (im)possibilities of alterity represented.

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BEFORE THE BACK WAY: SITUATING ROADS AS CULTURAL MATTERS

INTRODUCTION

Transportation geography has been called out for eliding geography's "cultural turn" (Hanson, 2003, 2006; Shaw & Sidaway, 2011). Some critics contend that such is a missed opportunity emerging from a failure to recognize the "hopes and dreams" of alternative transportation systems (Attoh 2014). However, the lacuna also includes ignored *lived* alternatives. As histories of southern transportation teach us, prior to early 20th century legislation, the road network as we know it emerged from a very different situation (Ingram, 2014; Preston, 1991). This situation represents a time when farmers and other local men maintained personal ties to the few roads they were responsible for minding (Ingram, 2014; Wells, 2006, 2012). The roadways were their own creations, and they responded to the whims of weather like the crops of the small farms they wove around. They were created without concern for science or engineering. Instead, they were products of intimate dedication and pride; they were understood in some cultural terms like being the conduits to individual churches and family farms (Wells, 2006). Such cultural understandings are not well reflected in the typically scientific discourse of transportation geography.

While not all transportation geographers agree that the sub-discipline has been as lacking as Hanson (2006) and Attoh (2014) suggest, even the defenders agree that the field needs to reposition its substantially positivist core (Goetz, 2006; Goetz, Vowles, & Tierney,

2009). Meanwhile, cultural geographers have tended to ignore processes that appear to fit too neatly into scientific management (Crang, 2012; Lorimer, 2007). Indeed, as Attoh (2014) contends, this is an issue because "doing cultural geography not only means continuing to ask questions about representation, cultural meaning, and ideology, or how each feed back into the material world, but it also means asking those questions in venues where they have otherwise found little audience--venues like transportation geography."

This paper joins Hanson (2003, 2006) and Attoh (2014) in considering a cultural turn in transportation geography. It attempts to say that such a turn may mean more than recognizing some more characteristically equitable transportation futures. It is also a matter of recognizing the emplacing cultural ties to various instances of transportation infrastructure that have occurred. I aim to highlight the evident limitations of regarding roads as mere technology via the case of Progressive road advocacy and policy. While there are series and varied ways roads have been discursively relegated to be supposed matters of engineering and science (Wells, 2006, 2012), this paper considers the Progressive Era Good Roads Activists and their *Southern Good Roads* publication in particular to show how such scientific discursive work transformed the Southern United States' wagon roads from cultural objects to placeless technologies. I consider how such modern land transformation in the United States erases marginalized perspectives from the morphologies of resultant landscapes, which demands consideration of cultural matters, like songs, to assess such perspectives and their regard of the road.

The empirical section of this paper centers a report by Bayard Rustin recounting his time spent on a 1940s roadwork prison camp in rural North Carolina. By closely reading his testimony and included transcriptions of work songs heard on the camp, I consider the prison camps, which were created to construct modern roads explicitly in the vision of the science-minded Progressive

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activists. Other similar prison work songs recorded by folklorist Bruce Jackson are considered via in-depth readings and interpretations. Trending themes across the songs, such as, longing for romantic attention, are weighed. Altogether, the songs betray a spatial codification of the roadwork site as one of racialized struggle. The black laborers songs reinforced a particular cultural view of the Progressive road. By creating place for what Woods' (1998) calls the "reestablishment of collectivity," they troubled the placeless characteristics of the Progressive road. Such discursive work with song is an offshoot of what Sharpe (2016) calls black life "in the wake" of plantation life. Indeed, the songs were direct iterations of work songs produced on plantations in collective response to confinement, transgression, and dehumanization. However, the prison work songs maintained a particular emplacing quality for taking on the characteristically placeless-ness of the already remote, discursively technologized roadwork sites. As Weheliye (2014) notes, such conditions and their attendant violence provoke alterity for black people, include the imprisoned laborers.

Collectively, Black Geographies (McKittrick, 2011; McKittrick & Woods, 2007; C. Woods, 2002) and historical studies on transportation (Ingram, 2014; Ireland, 1991; Lichtenstein, 1993; Preston, 1991; Wells, 2006, 2012) offer guidance for this paper's culture-focused work on roads. These fields offer framework for tending to the context and emplacing qualities of imprisoned laborers' songs. The approach that I take in this work is a black geographies one that explores how the well-established dominant view of roads as technology, instigated by Progressive Era advocacy, operated alongside the cultural emplacement of convict laborers on the roads such Progressive advocacy directly yielded. And while the modeled framework does not adhere to Lefebvre's triad of produced space (conceived, perceived, and lived), it does rely on the underlying principle that "social" space is

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simultaneously co-constituted by different productive practices (i.e., those of planners and

those of on-the-ground individuals) (Lefebvre, 1991). The task of this work, then, is to assess

the songs' record of such on-the-ground space production on the unlikely site of the

Progressive road.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND: THE PROGRESSIVE ERA ROAD PROBLEM

At the turn of the 20th century, wagon roads were present throughout the U.S. South and

were virtually the only means of traveling distances too far to walk and too short for railway.

They were mostly haphazard and worn out paths fitted, at best, with whatever gravel or rock was

nearby, and they often became impassable in the event of poor weather (Ingram 2014; Wells,

2006). Little more could be said for their ability to handle the increasingly possible motor vehicle

travel (Preston, 1991; Wells 2012). In 1910 there were, a US Congress-commissioned report

entitled *Federal Aid to Good Roads* poses, 48,285 miles of such roadway in North Carolina

(Bourne, 1913). In addressing the nationwide improvement of these wagon roads, there were

questions regarding the constitutionality of federal funds—such an infrastructural interstate

funding situation was unprecedented (Weingroff, 1996; Wells, 2012). There were also pleas to

have the roads improved via privatization where tolls would fund roadwork rather than the vastly

public network of roads that would become the norm (Wells 2012). While roads were needed to

support growing motorized industry, their widespread use in rural areas was as wagon ways for

farmers who used them to transport crops to market and for the general public who traversed

them for travel to church and other meeting places (Wells, 2006).

The question of how to modernize these roads as they became critical to the movement of

new petrol trucks and the commodities they carried was debated on a national stage (Bourne,

1913). Further, in 1910, United States' factories had put out 187,000 motor vehicles to Americans who had never before owned a car (Wells, 2012). The introduction of cars set into motion what would become a national characteristic, even an identity—a nation full of motor vehicle drivers. At the onset, the wagon roads were in most areas the only available infrastructure providing any semblance of accommodation for these new automobiles and they were sorely inadequate—new, improved roadways were needed. Meanwhile, the Good Roads Movement (1890-1930) activists, a group of bicyclists and eventually motorists and scientists, were calling for expertly planned and maintained roads throughout the country. The activists formed state-level Good Roads Associations throughout the country and effectively lobbied for increased government oversight and funding of modern roads such as with the 1916 Federal Road Act, which provided twenty-five million dollars for road construction (Weingroff, 1996). In a 1910 North Carolina Good Roads Circular, noted road improvement advocate Joseph Hyde Pratt says that the NC state government, in particular, should provide "well-trained, competent road engineers to assist each county in the proper location of its roads, in giving advice as to the best and most economical road for the county to build, and in supervising, as far as possible, the actual construction of these roads" (Pratt 1910, 1). Despite such pleas from the Good Roads Movement, increased automobile ownership, and the still much more prominent reliance on wagon travel for much of the South, in the early 1900s there were few roadways that were improved and that could be traversed freely year-round (Preston, 1991). Across the region, the condition of the wagon roads stayed exceptionally grim even after automobile ownership became commonplace and despite the wishes and pleas of many. Most Southern roads, particularly in rural areas, would remain unrefined for years to come and well beyond the Progressive Era.

The Good Roads activists' work spanned approximately forty years between 1890 and 1930, and had a significant impact that was largely latent (Preston, 1991). Indeed, while they may have faced much challenge in immediately shaping the morphology of the country's infrastructure, they reconfigured the ways roadwork was administrated and labored (Ireland, 1991; Weingroff, 1996). Specifically, the policy endorsed by the road planners took hold in the South during this period integrated two key aims: state aid/oversight of road-building and the use of convict labor. The success of such advocacy depended on the activists first transforming the way the construction of roads was regarded into being a matter of everyday practice to one guided by expertise. Noting this discursive transformation in a 1911 NC Good Roads Circular, Pratt writes: "The old idea that anybody can build a dirt road is fast losing ground, and our people are beginning to realize that road construction, even of dirt roads, requires the services of men who have been trained in this line of work" (Pratt 1911, 1). The supplanting of old ideas would lead the way to significant government funding for road development though not without challenges.

Figure 4: Page from May 1911 Southern Good Roads showing precise specifications for a concrete culvert. This image illustrates the developing image of roadwork being a matter of science and expertise.

The question of federal aid to states for the development of roads in the South, like many other issues of federal funding to states, was contentious during the Progressive Era (Ingram, 2014). Unlike other Progressive programs, however, road building was tied intricately to the use

of convict labor (Ireland, 1991; Lichtenstein, 1993). The hope of Southern Good Roads activists was to have each state in the South—from Texas to Virginia—maintain a system for the employment of convict road labor. Reflecting such hopes and considering the monumental task of bringing about modern roadways throughout the South, one good roads periodical contribution states: "Convict labor has been found successful wherever tried in the south, and it will prove a powerful factor in solving the problem" (*Southern Good Roads*, 1910). The roads these planners initially intended to improve or construct with convict labor were wagon roads that had been historically created and maintained with little order or uniformity across the Southern region.[5] Prior to and during the time of this advocacy, the labor for road building came largely from the more longstanding use of statute labor—a system where men were required to simply dedicate a few hours each year to roadwork (Wells, 2006). Mecklenburg County (NC) became the first county in the state to officially sanction the use of convict labor on road construction in 1885, leading to statewide attempts at emulation. However, a shortage of available convicts for roadwork made the widespread application of the Mecklenburg approach impractical (Ireland, 1991).

Given the straining demand for convict road labor and concerns instigated by Progressive prison reformers about the potentially inhumane conditions of the county and convict leasing camps, a strong case was made for state control of convict labor on the roads and, in some parts, also of the road construction itself. In a plea that rhetorically aligns with the prison reform discourse, North Carolina State Prison Superintendent, Julian S. Mann, called for state control of convict road labor. Of a 1907-1908 prison report written by Mann, historian Robert E. Ireland

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[5]Southern Good Roads, January 1910, p. 9. Quotation commending the momentum of the movement's aim to develop wagon roads: "Some of the facts which [an advocate] presented were a revelation, and demonstrated conclusively that the south has definitely embarked upon the great enterprise of building for itself an adequate system of improved wagon roads."

notes that the document "was as much a blueprint for the development of a state highway system as it was a statement of prison reform" (Ireland, 1991, p. 136). A trajectory for the use of convict road labor and the state control of road construction as a coupled undertaking was set (Ireland, 1991). The intent of this coupling is evidenced in the 1933 joining of the State Prison Department and the State Highway Commission to form the State Highways and Public Works Commission. The union lasted until 1957, realizing the vision of Mann and the decades-long activism of Good Roads Movement proponents who had consistently advocated for such a situation. However, their advocacy alone was not capable of bringing about such reform (Ireland, 1991; Preston, 1991). By many accounts, including their own, the Southern Good Road activists were largely unsuccessful during their own time (Preston, 1991).

During the last decade of the Progressive Era, Good Roads activists in the South - still active yet mired by some defeat - published the Southern Good Roads periodical (1910-1919). The periodical served as the public voice of Southern Progressive road experts and proponents of the Southern Good Roads Movement. Through their writing, these activists disseminated articles and reports to create compelling image of an American South in need of, and fit for, a modern system of roads and highways. The network they imagined was to be a matter of science and expertise rather than individual labor and responsibility (Wells, 2006). They regarded such an improved network as critical to the livelihood of the United States. In the inaugural issue of the monthly, meant to reach layman, experts, and farmers alike, a salutatory reads, "Just as blood to sustain the body cannot be pumped through decrepit veins, just as a railroad that consists principally of a right of way and two streaks of rust cannot develop a country, so country road that is mostly mud and mudholes and ruts and hills cannot develop a country" (*Southern Good Roads*, 1910, p. 22).

The *Southern Good Roads'* content was largely focused on the bigger picture of road development and intricate matters concerning its development—oversight and funding, particularly. The pages were also filled with ads for equipment and materials reflecting what would become a rapidly growing road construction industry.
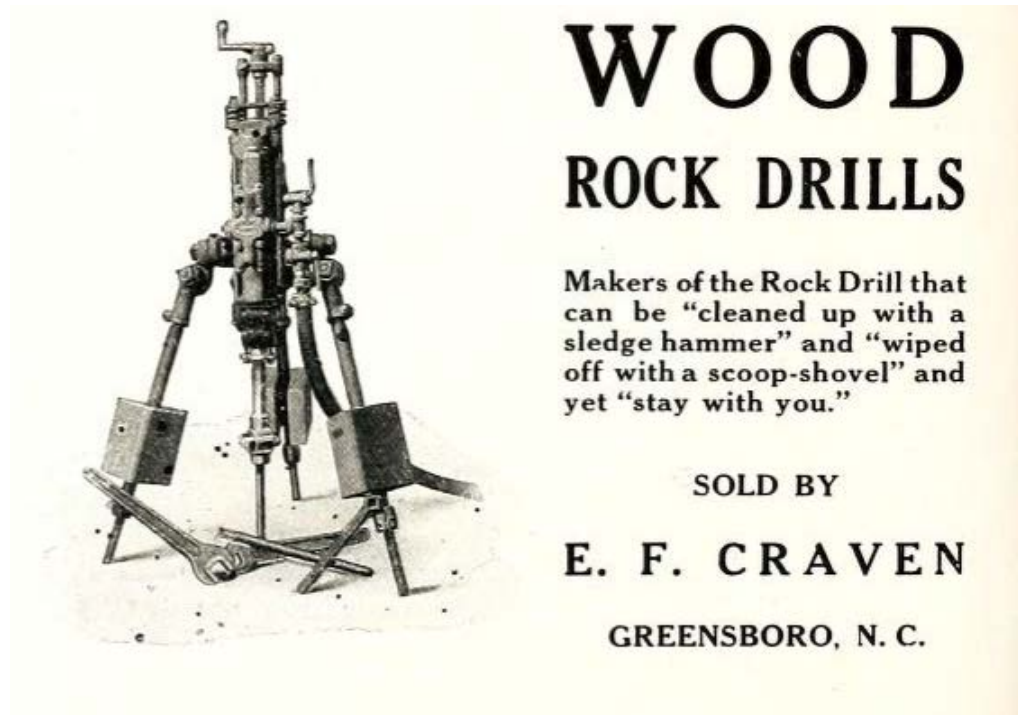
Figure 5: Advertisement for rock drill in June 1911 Southern Good *Roads*

The periodical's creators came to know an inevitable development of transit in the South and the U.S as a whole would depend on the fruition of the Good Roads Movement vision—an abundance of linked, reliable, and expertly planned roads on which the automobile could be driven (Wells, 2012). Already they worked up a particular Southern setting for the Progressive and efficient technology known as "good roads," meant to improve communication, lessen travel time, and ensure the sustenance of the region. Such roads were characteristically technocratic; their cultural histories were hardly regarded by the *SGR* and only to disparage the outmoded

labor tax system of road construction (Ireland, 1991). The newer and improved means of road

labor, the good roads activists contended, would be much more impactful and efficient. It would

also mean difficult, disorienting work for the often black prisoners they deemed fit to do it.

CONVICT LABORORERS' CULTURAL VIEW OF ROADS

The chain gang workers placed in the vision of Progressive advocacy were lodged in

remote locations on labor camps for the purposes of building and modernizing roadways

(*Southern Good Roads*, 1910). The dehumanizing regard of their bodies as mere sources of labor

led to rules forbidding activities that would outwardly foster collective and noticeable

emplacement amongst the laborers (Rustin, 1949). As such, they had to orient themselves under

the watchful eyes of guards and in a way that subverted the overdetermined will of state-

endorsed animalization. Songs and rhymes became a means of emplacement that, as I describe

below, features the road as a place and thus challenges a planners' view of a transitioning,

disembodied space.

Early issues of *Southern Good Roads* offer many examples showing that supporters of

the related movement unanimously agreed on the substantial use of convict labor for

modernizing the South's thousands of wagon ways. In the region, where the convict laborers

were vastly black, the state-maintained roadwork was intended in part to supplant a convict lease

system that was essential for asserting and maintaining racial order during a shifting economy

(Lichtenstein, 1993). For the landowning agrarian class, "the penal system could be used as a

powerful sanction against rural blacks who challenged the racial order upon which agricultural

labor control relied," and that for "planters denied recourse to the slave whip, the chain gang

served as an important element of rural labor discipline" (Lichtenstein, 1993, pp. 13, 2). The

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convict road labor provided a nexus for the rationalization of Progressive road planners

regarding penal slavery, which would keep road development costs low (Ireland, 1991). This

would also benefit white agriculturalists, whose dominance had depended on uncompensated

black labor. For the building of roads, convict labor was explicitly racialized. Lichtenstein

discovers through archival sources, "penal reformers [calling for more public convict laborer]

hoped that white prisoners would be remanded to a central penitentiary while blacks would work

the public roads in chains, since the "moral standard[s]" of blacks are "not lowered by this form

of publicity" (Lichtenstein, 1993, p. 90). Indeed, Lichtenstein's claim aligns with the records of

Progressive road-building proponents.

Racist sentiments regarding convict labor were expressed via federal level

correspondence (the sort between federal agency leaders and others via letters) as well as in

state-level reports (e.g., North Carolina's Biennial Prison Department reports from 1897 to

1906). For example, in defense of racially uneven convict road labor, the 1912 federal Office of

Public Roads assistant director Julien Wilson said black people were more suited for convict

road work because they "do not possess the same aversion to working in public…as is

characteristic of the white race" (Lichtenstein, 1993). Convict road labor was secured to usher in

industrialization as well as maintain racial hegemony in the Southern region.

The labor of building modern roads included smoothing road surfaces, digging ditches

for water run-off, and fitting the roads with material that would ensure they stayed adequate,

such as, macadam (Ireland, 1991; Wells, 2006). The process of road development was therefore

intensive and debilitating for the laborers. However, Progressive Era planners fixed their

attention to efficiency irrespective of the corporeal harm the process of road building wrought for

convicts. At the same time, they remained committed to Progressive ideals of humane treatment

of people, which included convicts. In the October 1910 *Southern Good Roads* publication, a contribution of convict labor states: "It is necessary to consider the moral and physical health of the prisoner while he is paying his debt to society" (*Southern Good Roads*, 1910). To square the conflict between the depravation of convict labor and their humanitarian principles, they rested solely in a belief that the system was at least better than leasing, which would become a suspect claim with the actualization of convict road labor.

CONVICT LABOR IN ROAD BUILDING.

A convict having committed a crime against society has been during his prosecution, conviction and punishment, a large expense to society and his punishment should, as far as possible, compensate society for this expense and for his crime. It is necessary to consider the moral and physical health of the prisoner while he is paying his debt to society.

What better way can these two principles of the treatment of criminals be carried out than in the construction of public highways? All will admit that convicts are much better off if they are employed at some form of labor, and there is no work that they can do that will be of more benefit to society which they have wronged than the construction of good roads. Then again, these roads are public and are used by the whole of society, so that in their construction, the greatest good of the greatest number is being accomplished and without causing any feeling of competition with free labor.

Its finished product, a good public road, belongs to the state and does not have to be disposed of in competition with products made by free labor. These conditions are not obtained when convict labor is employed in manufacturing industries; in mining coal or other mineral products; in farming; or in leasing convicts to railroads or other corporations.

Figure 6: October 1910 Southern Good Roads writing making case for convict labor in road construction

As Lichtenstein (1993) reports, one Progressive journalist lambasted the conditions of state-run prison camps in the South in a 1924 expose comparing the practice to prior convict leasing: ""PLEASE, READER, DO NOT READ THIS CHAPTER UNLESS YOU CAN STEEL YOUR heart against pain," cautioned Frank Tannenbaum in his 1924 expose of conditions in southern

prison camps. The catalogue of horrors introduced by these words strongly resembles George Washington Cable's earlier indictment of convict leasing, The Silent South, published in 1885" (Lichtenstein, 1993, p. 85). Revelations such as Tannenbaum's did little to dissuade the Progressive activists who continued to be singularly focused on improving the nation's roads.

By 1949, the convict labor system was well instituted in North Carolina, and historical figure Bayard Rustin, best known as a right-hand man of Martin Luther King, Jr., found himself thrown in the midst of it. Born in 1912, Rustin was a lifelong advocate for social justice. While his gay identity, involvement with the communist party, and time in prison for evading the draft long barred him from the spotlight, his public role in the 1963 March on Washington turned him into a well-known national figure noted for racial equality advocacy (Podair, 2012). Before that time and while still relatively unknown, he was arrested in North Carolina for sitting in the Jim Crow section of public transportation. After surrendering to the Orange County (NC) officials, Rustin was sentenced to 30 days on a prison labor camp or chain gang. There he developed material for a firsthand scathing report on the state of the road labor camp entitled, "A report on twenty-two days on the chain gang at Roxboro, North Carolina." In addition to work songs and ethnographical reflections, Rustin's recorded basic statistical data about the inmates, like the length of stays, as well as autobiographical recounts. In the very beginning of captivity, Rustin's acclimation to the labor camp was spatially disorienting and isolating: "About 2:00 p.m. I was ordered to prepare to leave for a prison camp, but the guard professed ignorance of my destination, and I still could not send my mother an address. As it turned out, more than a week would pass before I could get a letter off to her" (Rustin, 1949). In this instance, Rustin's new emplacement is denied any form of external validation, such as an ability to relay information to family, or the important locational dimensions that are provided by addresses and postal services.

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He goes on to board a small truck with a locked screen and carry on to what was until his arrival

an unknown location.

TABLE 6

Length of Sentence

Length of Sentence in months	Number of Men	Percentage
1 (30 days)	8	18.19
2 (60 days)	2	4.54
3 (90 days)	3	6.80
7	1	2.27
12 (1 yr.)	9	20.45
15	1	2.27
18 (1½ yrs.)	4	9.09
24 (2 yrs.)	8	18.19
36 (3 yrs.)	1	2.27
41	1	2.27
48 (4 yrs.)	1	2.27
54 (4½ yrs.)	1	2.27
72 (6 yrs.)	1	2.27
96 (8 yrs.)	1	2.27
108 (9 yrs.)	1	2.27
102 (10 yrs.)	1	2.27
TOTALS	44	99.96

Average length of sentence in months ... 22

Figure 7: "Length of Sentence" table from Rustin's report

Rustin's account depicts a chain gang where the means prisoners have to emplace

themselves collectively and individually are constrained by severe conditions of the roadwork

site. The convicted men on Rustin's camp, in deplorable and bleak conditions, spent the bulk of

waking hours toiling in ditches and on roads. As Rustin notes, the prisoners were objectified and

strategically forbidden from the most basic human activity: "The guard-prisoner relationship and

the conditions and regulations were such as to create in the men who "worked" us the same

attitude they had toward the tools we used" (Rustin, 1949, p. 27). In a nearby section of the report, Rustin recounts: "Skills among the men were few but what there were had no outlet. Over and again the walking boss would say, "Don't try to think. Do what I tell ya to do"" (Rustin, 1949, p. 26). Despite strategies meant to dehumanize the prison laborers, collective emplacement arose via imaginative rhyming and singing. As with Delta Blues musicians dehumanized and subject to the threat of lynching (Woods, 1998, p. 25), the songs provided some means of criticizing the laborers' spatial predicament without instigating relatively excessive exposure to violence. Of the practice, Rustin says: "The poetry was almost always a description of life in the camp or of the desire for women or of the 'fear of time'" (Rustin, 1949, p. 19).

The characterizations of time on the chain gang recounted by Rustin are multi-faceted. Among discontent with food and sexual deprivation, the song and rhyme differentiate the road as a dire and familiar place: "I woulda told you / But I thought you knowed / Ain't no heaven / On the county road." These lines characterize the road as a particular place that bears collective meaning and experience—an undesirable one without salvation—that is collectively considered common knowledge. Also, in that rhyme targeted towards men who complained about the work, are a couple of lines that reflect on the salient factor of race for the work: "Give dat White man / Sumpin' of your time" (Rustin, 1949, p. 20). There, a distinction is made between the black workers and the white man that the work serves. The rhymes facilitate collective and racialized orientation around the road as a place without any mercy. The name of the place the black men narrate is the daily visited "road," itself. Such designating marks the site of toil as the conventionally placeless road, which is named rather than say, worksite or chain gang. Another rhyme goes: ""Boys, git up, grab your pone…This fool's made it and he's headin' home" (Rustin,

1949, p. 14). The road and right-aways are depicted as less desirable *locations* comparable to the home of a prisoner set to be released.

Because the road work setting was ever-changing as the convict laborers moved from site to site, it is not easy to think of it as a distinguishable and meaningful place. How then might the road be tied to salvation or a lack thereof? McKittrick and Woods (2007) argue in favor of looking beyond the dominant spatial classifications that might establish the road as something other than place, not because of its materiality, but because of the human subjectivities that make it and maintain it. Applied to Rustin's recount of the rhymes and songs of the chain gang, a case may be made for the historical emplacement of chain gang laborers on and around the road, undifferentiated as the place itself may be. As Casey notes, "Given that we are never without perception…we are never without emplaced experiences" (Casey, 1996, p. 19). Through song and rhyme, an alternative vision of the road is both collectively articulated, shared, and remembered as a place of toil, struggle, and dehumanization.

For the convict laborers, fostering a collective emplacement was not meant to transform the material referents of the landscape. That would have been dangerous. Instead, they configured it conceptually to represent a sort of antithesis to home—a contemptuous and disdainful place where one does not want to be. As simple and obvious as such a collective regard for the road might seem, the laborers had little opportunity to collectively reach such consciousness together—they were watched even in their sleeping quarters where men had to announce getting out of bed for any minor reason. Recounting the rule book, Rustin wrote: "'No inmate may get out of bed after light are dimmed without asking permission of the guard,' and so all night long men were crying out to a guard many yards away: 'Getting' up, Cap'n,' 'Closing the window, Cap'n,' 'Goin' to the toilet, Cap'n'" (Rustin, 1949, p. 3). In short, to have fostered a

collective emplacement anymore outwardly than songs would have surely been met with some repercussion. The creation and spread of this knowledge "under the gun" of the prison guards, subverts strategies of dehumanization.

Nonetheless, the laborers' productions of place were not without empirical discreteness. They did not only exist in metaphor, which McKittrick and Woods (2007) state is the implication of a lens used too often to view instances of black place-making. Rather, the laborers spoke of a very real material landscape—the ever-present tough ground to work and the other material obstacles they faced on whichever worksite they toiled. In one of the lines Rustin recorded, the men say, "[s]ome to the right-aways—some to the road," with right-a-ways referring to the "cutting of trees, brushes, and shrubs which cover the ditches and new road ways" (Rustin, 1949, p. 14). In the context of their peculiar situation, however, the collective emplacing work required circumventing and subverting the authority of dominant abstract productions of space by centering ones that do not fit neatly into the Progressive vision. While their lived and narrated subjective configurations of the road refer to the material road and the work there itself; the subjectivity of their emplacements, the particularity of these black senses of place may not be verified by only looking, no matter how closely, at the material composition of the road or plotted coordinates on a map.

For those on the chain gang, even negligent control of the material landscape was hardly possible under the gun of guards. Moreover, these men did not have control over the material conditions of even their sleeping quarters. Their bodies were subject to a rationalized and mechanical-like physical captivity. Of the prison camps, one proponent writing in *Southern Good Roads* noted, "These camps accommodate from 50 to 60 convicts. In summer they consist of canvass tents: in winter of boarded up barracks. They are located midway of a section of road

to be worked, so that they can work two miles in one direction and two miles in the other, and when this four mile section is completed, they are moved to another section" (*Southern Good Roads*, February 1910). Despite their rhymes, which convey a particular and lived relation to the road (as place), the convict laborers perhaps left no material traces, tracks, or dents that might characterize the road as a place of labor. When restricted from such activity, the convict laborers and their subjective regard for the road, are subject to an immediate material absence in the landscape.

CULTURAL PRODUCTIONS AS MEANS OF EMPLACEMENT

While the convict laborers made place on the roads, it is not happenchance that they were imprisoned there. The roadwork sites were to them ultimately *prison* camps. Such confinement of black people to sites of forced labor was inaugurated by antebellum plantations in the South (Blackmon, 2008; Muhammad, 2010). As a site of confinement, the road itself was neither critical to nor productive of whatever sense of place emerged amongst the laborers (McKittrick, 2011). Rather, the road and all its discursive and material displacing was the predicament to be overcome for the establishment of spatial collectivity. The use of music for such a purpose is not unprecedented. As a reflection of this, Clyde Woods introduced the concept of "blues epistemology," which highlights the cultural emplacing work of music for black collectivity (Woods, 1998). Indeed, music has been used to foster collectivity and imagine liberation in spaces of confinement like the subversive use of spirituals within the space of the plantation (Gioia, 2006; Thompson, 2014). In the case of chain gang work songs, some of the same tunes carry over into the lived spaces of the laborers from the plantation (Franklin, 1979). These songs, like "Pick a Bale of Cotton," reference "masters" and "mittresses." Such musical genealogy

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relays the persistence of collective dissatisfaction with the conditions characteristic of both enslavement and incarceration. Further, the genealogy undergirds a collective reckoning with a seamless transition from enslavement to mass incarceration, or "slavery by another name" (Blackmon, 2008).

There are some notable differences between the spatial situation of the plantation and that of the chain gang. The plantation and the chain gang were historically linked sites of black torment and, for many, untimely death (Blackmon, 2008; McKittrick, 2011). When black people were arrested and placed on chain gangs, they were taken from their homes and confined to gender homogenous camps. Indeed, such conditions were recounted in the songs produced on the chain gang (Franklin, 1979). This is to say that the musical emplacements fit the particularity of the historical situations rather than represent mere reprisals of plantation productions. Like the song "Rosie," recorded in a prison work camp in the 1940s by Alan Lomax, longing for female attention is a common trope in the songs of the all-male work camps. A number of the songs recorded in Bruce Jackson's *Wake up Dead Man* are described in the remainder of this paragraph (Jackson, 1972). While these songs were recorded on 1960s' Texas prison camps that were not for road construction, they reflect the encompassing genre. "Julie" highlights the anxiety of such longing in captivity and being compelled to escape: "Better get the sergeant… / My feet is getting itchy… / Got to see my Julie." Other songs, like Jody, also stem from such longing with the lyrics stating: "Ain't no need of writing home / Jody got your girl and gone." The same song, Jody, highlights another trope, which is a desire for home: "First thing I'll do when I get home / Call my woman on the telephone" (Jackson, 1972). Home, in these instances, represents a relative freedom. Indeed, as focused on in this paper, the lyrics and melodies of the chain gang songs, like "Hammer Ring" also reflect the often remote conditions of prison camp life. Whether

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they were logging or building roads, convict laborers would find themselves in remote seclusion. Such is the impetus for the particularly emplacing work of the chain gang songs for imprisoned black people of the time.

While the conditions and sentiments the songs reference were likely shared by all, only black inmates are noted for producing the songs across American prisons. The work songs considered in this paper are uniquely African American. Folklorist Bruce Jackson visited a Texas prison to record the songs sung there and reported the following:

> "White and Latin-American inmates (about 70 percent of the convicts) do not sing these songs, nor do they have any body of metrically functionally songs of their own used in similar fashion. The songs and the style of utilizing them are the property of black inmates exclusively, and they are clearly in a tradition going back beyond the importation the first Negro slaves to the Virginia Colony in 1631" (Jackson, 1972).

The racial homogeny of the songs is likely due to the spatial situation the work camps preserved and reanimated—that of life on antebellum plantations. The "blackness" of the music was apt to draw forth enculturated memories of lethal labor in the sun and under conditions of captivity where work songs were also sung. Treating the sound of striking hammers and axes as percussion, the inmates' songs lyrically reference the work itself along with collective longings for elsewhere—home and the company of lovers, most particularly. The plantation and then the prison camps advanced inhumane transgressions against blackness, which epoched the emergence of collective consciousness that might withstand such multigenerational affronts. This grammar/epistemology/framework manifested through black creativity like the work songs or the blues. Fostering such a creative framework for collective consciousness and its attendant cultural productions in inhospitable captivity demands spatial conditions—it always has to manifest *somewhere*, even in confinement to the placelessness of roads. Indeed, as black laborers were

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held on the road, the infrastructures were regarded as placeless entities, or technologies. This is the condition by which the road becomes place for the convict laborers.

Sharpe considers the difficult conditions predicating black collectivity "in the wake" (Sharpe, 2016). In one sense, this "wake" refers to the disturbed water that trails behind ships. Metaphorically, the historical disturbance of black life, trailing behind slavery, is the inescapable situation in which collective black livelihood manifests. Sharpe considers her own family's stories of tragedy "to mourn and to illustrate the ways our individual lives are always swept up in the wake produced and determined, though not absolutely, by the afterlives of slavery" (Sharpe, 2016, p. 8). Indeed, the trailing conditions following slavery, the wake, have a place in this discussion of convict work songs. It stands to reason that the wake is what moves their rhythms from the plantation to a 1940s chain gang, trailing from one site of captivity to another (Franklin, 1979). The "wake" are the conditions described—lamented and syncopated. The songs *reckon with* those conditions. In addition, they yet *create* something more than what is offered by the material conditions of captivity—an archive of interracial transgressions and collective desires for romantic contact and more. All together, these activities of the songs —reckoning and creating—implicate place in the captive conditions of convict labor on the characteristically, non-place of the road. Such is a place for collective subjectivity, which cannot find grounding on what is offered by the Progressive road-as-technology.

In *Habeas Viscus* (2014), Weheliye considers "enfleshment" as a possibility for alterity, such as place-making on the Progressive road. He argues that in conditions of deprivation, the flesh "operates as a vestibular gash in the armor of Man, simultaneously a tool of dehumanization and a relational vestibule to alternate ways of being that do not possess the luxury of eliding phenomenology with biology" (Weheliye, 2014, p. 44). Indeed, the often

deadly nature of the convict roadwork and its remoteness provoked alterity. Exposed to the

harshness of the sun and Southern humidity, the flesh of the imprisoned laborers registered

subjective experiences of these conditions as being offshoots of arduous plantation life. As

Weheliye suggests, such is not grounds for celebratory recognition—life against the odds!—

instead, we might recognize that it is a lack of "luxury" that necessitated the subjective

collectivity of the imprisoned through song. We may also recognize that such collectivity shines

light on the false limitations Western understandings of "human" vis-à-vis what constitutes

place.

ELIDED PERSPECTIVES IN MODERN ROAD LANDSCAPES

The planned landscape of American "good roads" worked to conceal the integral

processes of subordinated, sometimes forced, labor, a characteristic that is shared by many

modernizing development projects in this country. Examples include the slaves on the massive

the antebellum South's plantation farms (Berlin & Morgan, 1993) and the underpaid Chinese

laborers who constructed the country's first transcontinental railroad (Dearinger, 2016). The

uneven power dynamics that undergird such subordination of labor and subsequent regional

development go relatively unchecked (Mitchell 1996). The turmoil spurred by the conditions of

this labor has been as visceral and deadly as it has been productive and transformative. As

workers behind massive, regional land development, convict laborers often met maiming and

death on the job (Blackmon, 2008). This is not uncommon in the historic transformation of the

American landscape, and geographers have traced these dynamics (Mitchell, 1996, 2007, 2010,

2011, 2012; Weiler, Otero, & Wittman, 2016). In Don Mitchell's *Lie of the Land*, the interplay

between labor and the produced morphology and representation of the California landscape is

explored. In his own words, the book is an attempt "to wed a literature on landscape with that on labor history" (Mitchell, 1996, p. XI). In this instance, the California landscape depends upon the necessary disadvantage and extreme poverty of domestic migrant farmworkers. This California landscape is one in which absence and presence come together in the beholding eye. Like one detailed by Wiley, this notion of landscape involves taking seriously the views of varied witnesses—it contests that the landscape exists only in some process(es) of seeing and conceiving of a particular arrangement of absences and presences, or spaces and places, respectively (Merriman et al., 2008).

Our conception of the very word—landscape—tends to naturalized power relations as well as the political and social disenfranchisement of marginalized people that are within it (Olwig, 1993). The disenfranchised, not coincidentally, make up the laborers who work to create planned farms, streets, and organized swaths of land, which achieve visually suggestive harmony and successfully obscured troubled labor relations. There is a need for work that assesses the spatial productions of the laborers behind modern development such as that modeled here in this paper. To advance such work, we must look beyond the morphology of the landscape itself. For, as with the modern "good roads," the landscape represents enforced perspectives of the politically dominant and their own ideologies. This occurs at the explicit expense of those without such relative power. The physicality of the modernized roads were determined by advocacy of Progressive activists. Indeed, the physical landscape, itself, "lies" in relaying the emplacements and subjectivities of others, most notably the laborers.

Mitchell calls out perhaps bygone practices of landscape geography, in particular, for being complacent in the propagation of ideologies represented by modern landscapes: "Morphological approaches to landscape, like those geographers specialized in, were not just

incomplete, but were theoretically and politically suspect as long as the ideological biases built into the landscape concept were not squarely faced" (Mitchell, 1996, p. 4). Indeed, scholars have for decades now taken on charges calling morphology-focused landscape studies simply apolitical (Mitchell, 2003; Olwig, 1996, 2003, 2005). Not considering the lives of the laborers behind the Progressive era arrangement of modern roads would mean missing a crucial component of obscured political practices wrapped up and hidden in the visibly fabricated materiality of the South. Further, we risk believing the "lie" of modern roads being mere seamless technologies hardly dependent on engrained racial inequality.

Geographers of the South who have considered the region's legacy of racism illustrate that despite attempts to claim color-blind policies, local and state governments in the region remain responsible for toponyms, infrastructures, and means of development wrought by racial legacies of paternalism, unpaid labor, and inequitable distribution of resources and opportunity (Alderman 2013; Domosh 2015; Inwood 2011). In the light of such work, the convict labor considered here is just one aspect of how the region's landscape is intertwined with naturalized racial inequality. The imprisoned laborers' songs reflect their perspectives from the position of visceral racial disenfranchisement on which the modern morphology of the region's landscape depends. Attending to such perspectives means possibly understanding how the relegating power of racial inequality displaces racial minorities for the sake of modern development and also the productions of spatial alterity that may follow such forcible assignment.

CONCLUSION

        In this paper, I attempt to show how the site of the Progressive era road was coevally coded as a disembodied technology by its technocratic planners and a site of dire emplacement

by the mostly black convict laborers who actually constructed them. While the planners used political rhetoric and propaganda, the laborers used rhyming songs set against the syncopated slamming of heavy work tools. To be sure, the imprisoned laborers' presence on the road sites was tied up in the very same Progressive discursive lobbying that produced the road as a site of disembodied technology. The first section of this writing attempts to highlight such a linkage between the racialized presence of the laborers and the codification of roads as technology. The paper then moves into considering how the laborers dehumanizing and intently culturally sterilized predicament in the work camps predicated the use of songs to foster collectivity and emplacement. I mind how the songs themselves are cultural matters which delineate the roadwork site as one of depravation following the novel framework of transatlantic enslavement's plantation. Ultimately, this paper aims to show how the Progressive planner's technocratic configuring of the road and the subsequent dehumanized material conditions of such a site for its laborers failed to entirely stymie the possibility of the laborers cultural emplacement there via song. This in turn underscores the importance of culture for conversations about transportation infrastructure, a noted lacuna for transportation geography (Attoh, 2014; Hanson, 2006).

Existing studies from subfields outside of "transportation geography" have exposed some critical and cultural geographic import of transportation ways. Of particular importance to the present project is the way in which space becomes the discursive relegation of transportation ways to undifferentiated placeless-ness. However, previous studies remain concerned with questions of mobility rather than ones concerning transportation infrastructure itself (Binnie, Edensor, Holloway, Millington, & Young, 2007; Cresswell, 2006; Edensor, 2003; Grieco & Urry, 2016; Martin, 2012, 2013; Merriman, 2004; Merriman et al., 2008). For instance, Martin

(2013) considers how the logistical underpinnings of shipping container mobilities attempt to render the land and sea boundless surfaces for the movement of commodities. Such rendering elides any cultural or differentiating qualities of the vast spaces shipped goods traverse. Martin (2012) also considers how the boundless, borderless flows of such mobility are troubled when people "appropriate" the vehicles of commodity mobility vis-à-vis undocumented migration. Indeed, the flows reveal their limitations via the expulsive treatment of undocumented immigrants—borders, for them, are most bounded and binding. Similarly, Cresswell (2006) considers how the coevally increasing opportunities and restrictions of mobility temper experiences of modernity. These restrictions on mobility against increasing opportunities for movement (i.e. air travel) are regarded for predicating spatial differentiation. However, there is a lack of work, which advances conversation on how relatively static emplacement on transportation infrastructure produces spatial differentiation as this present paper attempts to do.

Mobility geographers have also questioned what sort of experiences of spatial differentiation mobility on roadways, in particular, makes possible. Such work too leaves a gap for work attending to static emplacement on or near roadways and questions of spatial differentiation. Merriman (2004) considers how movement across England's M1 Motorway implicate various "placings" for travelers despite prior academic work regarding roadways as being devoid of human emplacement. His contribution aptly reveals the possibility of phenomenological placement on roadways against compelling arguments that they are characteristically "placeless" (Relph, 1976) and "non-places" (Augé, 1995). Comparatively, Edensor (2003) considers firsthand emplacing experiences of driving along England's M6 Motorway against such arguments, as well. Together, these mobility geography considerations of the road leave the road in stasis relatively unchecked as a site of cultural emplacement.

This paper is different from the mobility geography work for showing how the otherwise placeless-ness of the roadway is appropriated in convict laborers' emplacement on the roads—how they create place in the nowhere at all-ness of such sites where they are characteristically bound to rather than moving on. Songs like "I'm in the Bottom" reflect the remoteness and discursive unmaking of their spatial predicaments (Jackson, 1972). Indeed, their emplacement is dependent not on qualities of the road as a site of mobility but rather its relatively non-placeness in stasis and their collective experiences on such a site. By considering the convict laborers' songs, then, against the backdrop of the Progressive road policy, this article attempts to highlight how roads are paradoxically both technocratic endeavors that work to eschew place and static settings for black productions of spatial alterity. While it is true the laborers would move from site to site during road construction, what is also true is that the songs would often remain the same—with undeterred reference to the same grueling site of the road.

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CONCLUSION

This dissertation considers instances of black spatial collectivity in rural parts of Piedmont North Carolina. The Orange County back ways communities narrate long-standing collectivity around the site of the historically unmapped wagon roads. Their narration sites community and family while challenging the blank space with which the communities are represented on state maps. Comparatively, the imprisoned laborers described in Rustin's report were confined to the roadwork camps in Roxboro (Person County) for weeks virtually without spatial referents and discrete means of articulating their location beyond the contiguous developing road. In the vision of Progressive Good Roads activists, they remained confined to such space and produced songs there that fostered collective emplacement on the road as a site "in the wake" of forced plantation labor (Sharpe, 2016). The sites inhabited by the imprisoned laborers and the back ways communities are only examples of black collective emplacement of an endless number within the region. However, like many others subject to imprisonment, extra-territorial jurisdiction, and harmful environmental injustices, these instances of collectivity are all marked by confinement and exclusion from dominant representations of space.

In *The Production of Space*, Lefebvre writes: "Empty space in the sense of a mental and social void which facilitates the socialization of a not-yet-social realm is actually merely a representation of space" (p. 190). The songs and oral histories considered in this dissertation evidence the criticality of such a point for black collectivity. Whether on the confines of the

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remote roadwork site or situated around an underdeveloped back way, the musical and narrative

productions considered here relay historic collective emplacement on the yet created Progressive

road or the unmapped wagon way. These sites are dogmatically purported "empty space" from

the views of Good Roads activists and transportation planners. Collective emplacement on the

back way or roadwork site, then, implicates breach of the logic that holds these emplacements to

be unmade or nowhere at all (Spillers, 1987; Weheliye, 2014). In advancing the black

geographies paradigm, I attempt to assess the fabric and function of such emplacement.

Black geographies insists we recognize that racialized community and bodily precarity

are epochal for productions of spatial alterity. This alterity is the ground for oftentimes

surreptitious autonomy, which then fosters collectivity and undermines Jim Crow subordination

and state surveillance (McKittrick, 2006; McKittrick & Woods, 2007; Nieves, 2007). Even so,

the literature also reminds us that the materiality of black collectivity remains vulnerable for

being labeled as blighted and deteriorating from top-down or planners' views (Bledsoe, 2017;

Nieves, 2007). As artificial boundaries drawn around 'communities' may be products of

gerrymandering or racially disproportionate extra-territorial jurisdiction zoning, political

underrepresentation may mean less opportunity to counter such disparaging and life-changing

judgements (McKittrick & Woods, 2007). The spaces wrought around historic roadways through

narrative and song are precarious but they are also real and enlivened. Indeed, the collective

spatial productions of black collectivity are not cause for celebration—they do not undo the

workings of race—but they do indicate critical, underappreciated alterity and livelihood

(McKittrick, 2006, 2011, Wynter, 1994, 2006). It is imperative that critical means of attending to

them are advanced, which is what this dissertation attempts to do.

The construct of black geographies compels spatial analysis that looks beyond any traditional geography-as-discipline model. McKittrick (2016, p. 2), for instance, considers how "engaging interdisciplinarity and forging relational knowledges assist in anti-colonial academic research and teaching while also disrupting biocentric scripts, disciplined ways of knowing, and the spatial workings of knowledge." The black geographic paradigm highlights the ways that confinement to biocentric scripts and spatial workings vis-à-vis disciplined research means re-invigorating racially uneven and interpolated value judgements like "blight," and failing to account for how characteristically black spaces contain any degree of vitality, much less the possibility of some state-neglected feature like a dirt road actively sustaining the life of these communities (McKittrick, 2016; Woods, 2002).

Reaching alternative understandings of spatialized black collectivity here means first harnessing interdisciplinary regard of narrative and lived experiences (McKittrick & Woods, 2007). To be sure, the purchase is in the relationality—the linking of humanistic music or oral history to discrete geographic emplacement, for instance. Such humanistic-geographic interdisciplinarity allow us to unsettle disciplined tropes of victimized black communities and to see the black vitality in spaces of state-orchestrated erasure and neglect. This dissertation attempts analyze the specificity of enlivened geographic analysis by considering the conditions, functions, and potential representations—some particularities—of black geographic space. It is not enough to say that black geographic space exists. We must attend to the ways it does.

In the first article, I consider how "nowhere at all," or the site of black cultural unmaking, fails to entirely rebuke the black collective senses of place in the form of collective articulations of community. In this paper, I weigh the purchase of oral history in relaying some particular conditions of black geographic space for one collective in Orange County, the Rogers Road

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community. I consider the oral history accounts of three individuals from the community, which reveal rurality and family as being critical components of how they articulate the parameters of their community. Cultural unmaking, or relegation to nowhere at all, predicate these articulations and suggest that they are important to assessing the very existence of Rogers Road as a unique historic collective. This paper ultimately suggests that oral history provides one critical in to weighing black geographic space, with which I urge further exploration.

As the first article questions the viability of oral history as a form of narrative, the second questions what aspects of narrative might make it important to black geographic space. It submits intergenerationality as one important aspect. To do this, oral history interviews with mother-daughter pairs are consulted to show how their intergenerational family narratives demarcate and historicize the historically black communities in which they reside. Analysis suggests such intergenerational narratives relay how their land-owning families provided space for the establishment of black geographic back ways communities. Specifically, their family narratives detail how community space was provided for religious worship and enjoyment of the natural environment. This article attempts to look under-the-hood of black geographic reasoning in-practice to better appreciate how "narratives" may be so evocative of emplacement.

The third article questions of black geographic space may be represented. Despite the advancements of critical cartography and newer narrative cartography, the enterprise of mapping still enlivens legacies of racial marginalization and exclusion. This article was motivated by my participation in the NEH Institute on Space and Place in Africana/Black Studies where we came to regard our collective practice as "black spatial humanities." In this paper, I question what purchase such an undertaking might find in mapping and argue it may behoove us to advance cautiously. I consider how more critical discourse in cartography support the creation of

representations, which tend to eschew regularity. Regularity, however, I argue, is critical to black productions of space vis-à-vis black geographic thinking. The back ways narratives I collected draw forth spatial accounts in the forms of stories passed on intergenerationally and told again and again. At the same time, these accounts demands attention to alterity unaccommodated by conventional cartographic productions. Considering this, I submit three digital animations to suggest that animation may be a useful alternative for the representation of black collectivity.

In the fourth article, I consider the songs of the imprisoned laborers to see how they evidence cultural emplacements in the harsh conditions of the technologized road. The laborers' emplacement, I argue, means overcoming the discursive placeless-ness fostered by the Progressive Good Roads activists that the resultant material conditions it wrought. The laborers, as intended by the activists, were lodged in remote, isolated camps away from evident spatial markers. They used songs to foster collectivity in this site against the will of prison guards and fostered conscious perspectives of the road as a site of racialized torment and depravity. These conditions precede from the inaugural displacement of the plantation and the work songs that arose there to also foster collective consciousness. This article establishes the potential of black senses of place in sites of inhospitality. There is no doubt that the roadwork sites were deadly and horrendous, however, as Weheliye (2014) urges, we must still account for the livelihood of those subject to such racialized terror.

Ultimately, this dissertation strives to support future analysis of black livelihood in spaces characterized by neglect. I urge geographers and other researchers of space and blackness to look beyond tropes that fail to appreciate how collectivity manifests alongside hardship. Doing so, I argue, is not a matter of celebrating the resiliency of black communities but rather one of better attending to the complexity of black life. In this dissertation, I offer work songs and oral

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history as critical foci of analysis, intergenerationality as an important aspect of black geographic narratives, and animation as a viable means of representation all for the purpose of accounting for such complexity. It is my hope that at least some part of these offerings proves useful in advancing critical study of black spatial collectivity.

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