

Resistant Place Identities in Rural Charleston County, South Carolina: Cultural, Environmental, and Racial Politics in the Sewee to Santee Area¹

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Abstract

The cultural and political implications of landscape change and urban growth in the western U.S. are well-documented. However, comparatively little scholarship has examined the effects of urbanization on sense of place in the southern U.S. We contribute to the literature on competing place meanings with a case study from the rural “Sewee to Santee” region of northern Charleston County, SC. Our research highlights conflicting cultural, environmental, and racial politics and their roles in struggles over place meanings. Using focus groups, interviews with elected officials, and participant observation, we document initial African American resistance and eventual compliance with the prevailing anti-sprawl discourse and associated sense of place promoted by the Charleston County Planning Commission and others. Our research suggests that dynamics driving development in the rural, U.S. South are similar in kind to those in the Third World where natural resource decisions are informed by class, cultural, and racial politics.

Keywords: *sense of place, rural gentrification, political ecology, South Carolina Low Country, environmental decision-making*

Introduction

Researchers from a variety of disciplines seek to understand community response to environmental change (e.g., Hurley and Halfacre in press; Stewart et al. 2004; Lockaby et al. 2005; Redman et al. 2004; Johnson and Zipperer 2007). Examinations of how residents view their role within the rural environments of the U.S. is of increasing interest due to the development pressures these communities often face and the patterns of urban expansion found in the United States

(Walker and Fortmann 2003; Alig et al. 2004; Ghose 2004). Few studies have examined understandings of place identities in the southern U.S. and perceptions of rural residents about environmental change in their region (see Nesbitt and Weiner 2001 for a notable exception). Of particular note is the lack of scholarly work examining African-American views, and the incorporation (or lack thereof) of these views in local land-use decision-making (exceptions being Johnson and Floyd 2006; Falk 2003; Faulkenberry et al. 2000). We explore how place meanings or sense of place instructs rural residents' perceptions and discursive responses to encroaching urban expansion in a sub-section of the South Carolina Low Country,³ the Sewee to Santee region of northern Charleston County, South Carolina.

The scholarship concerning place meaning and contestations is discussed in various terms, but the central idea emphasizes group competition for control over place meaning and function. Walker and Fortmann (2003, 470) refer to “differing ideas of *landscape*” (original emphasis), or the politics of landscape and emphasize the role that competing rural capitalisms play in creating place meanings; while Nesbitt and Weiner (2001, 335) emphasize conflicting “environmental imaginaries” and the importance strategies of social reproduction play in constructing meanings. In Montana, Ghose (2004) suggests that the arrival of (generally wealthier) newcomers is leading to “rural gentrification” pressures and struggles between newcomers and long-time locals over how to slow the rate and impact of residential growth. Also in Montana, Robbins' (2006) research demonstrates the ways that particular discursive alliances may emerge among traditionally opposed groups, including those whose knowledge has been discounted and marginalized, around particular policy options. Hurley and Walker (2004) argue that the logics of conservation science may infuse the politics of land-use decision-making and allow “derailment” from long-term resi-

dent community preferences. In each of these cases, the authors draw attention to the role environmental discourse plays in constructing concern over on-going, exurban development. Class struggle is explicit in most of these examples. Yet, this research is largely silent on race, how both cultural and racial politics, along with class, can inform discourses which produce sense(s) of place.

Similar to these prior investigations of place, we also examine cultural and environmental contestations over place meaning or sense of place—specifically, whether municipalities in northern (upper) Charleston County should prioritize resource preservation to the exclusion of activities allowing for growth, or whether accommodations should be made for managed growth. As a point of departure and reflection of southern culture, our study also highlights the role of racial politics for sense of place formation in this area.

Sense of Place and Political Ecology

Sense of place focus falls under the larger rubric of political ecology as articulated by McCarthy (2002) who argues that the political ecological framing of struggles over environment, natural resources, and ecological processes should not be limited to Third World scenarios but are also apropos for considering environmental struggle in the Northern hemisphere. Many of the same issues (although on less dramatic scales) that spur debate in developing regions are evident in the affluent North. These include: 1) access to and control over resources; 2) the marginality of particular groups within a community; 3) livelihood considerations; 3) property rights and claims to resource access; and 4) the framing of local histories, meanings, and cultures in terms of resource use. Each of these issues is involved in our examination of sense of place in upper Charleston County. Along with racial politics, these factors strongly influence place perceptions by various constituent groups.

Within the context of political ecology or any other disciplinary lens, understanding sense of place can be a daunting task due to the need to document the range of views within a given community. We acknowledge readily that there can be multiple interpretations of place at a point in time and also across time. This is why the politics of place are crucial to gleaning place meaning.

Sense of place has been defined as the attachment, meanings, and satisfaction one applies to his/her different environments to give value and stability to his/her existence (Kaltenborn 1998; Williams and Stewart 1998). According to Kaltenborn (1998), residents with a strong sense of place perceive the environment as being less degraded from a natural state, although sense of place is vulnerable to significant changes in the physical landscape (Stedman 2003). If the

physical environment is important to place meaning, attachment, and satisfaction, then continued environmental degradation, which can be a result of increased development or deficient management, will lead to a loss of sense of place and a decline in quality of life (Stedman 2003). For the present study, we define sense of place as the affect (attachment), cognition, or meanings residents attribute to the place or region where they live and how these perceptions figure into their personal and social identity.

Low Country Transformation

Northern or upper Charleston County is a part of the South Carolina Low Country. Similar to other sub-regions in the South, the Low Country has undergone significant growth over the past 30 years. From 1990 to 2000, population in eight of the state's Low Country, coastal counties increased by nearly 30%. By comparison, the state's overall population increased only 15% in the same period. According to a report published by the Berkeley-Charleston-Dorchester Council of Governments (BCD COG), the University of South Carolina, and the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources, urban land-use growth (residential and commercial development) outpaced population growth in the three county area (Berkeley, Charleston, and Dorchester Counties) by a ratio of 6:1 from 1973 to 1994. Moreover, urban area is predicted to triple over the next 30 years in the Charleston region (Allen and Lu 2003).

Responses to land use change in the Low Country appear to vary greatly depending, in part, upon place conceptualizations and end goals for community. As a focus point, we examine variability in sense of place at a particular point in time and also the malleability of sense of place *across* time. In examining sense of place change over time, we elaborate on Larsen (2004) who posits that marginal groups can be catalysts for alternative place conceptions because of their dissatisfaction with totalizing place discourses. Resistance to the status quo develops because dominant discourses necessarily fail to encompass competitive views. Resistance groups emerge with alternative senses of place in an effort to assert their authority or to offer a counterbalance of perspective. An example of such resistance is evident in rural, upper Charleston County where the seemingly juxtaposed goals of resource preservation and poverty alleviation shape resident place perceptions and ultimately responses to growth.

This research expands an inquiry initiated in 2002-2003 comparing a majority African American municipality with a predominantly White municipality's sense of place and their respective responses to proposed growth (Johnson and Floyd 2006).⁴ We contend that in the late 1990s and early 2000s, African American elected officials in a small upper

Charleston County town resisted the dominant narrative of the Charleston County countryside as a place whose identity was *singularly* associated with resource and cultural preservation. Instead, town leaders articulated a view of this rural area as both a place of preservation and as a backdrop for economic expansion. For the all Black⁵ town council, rural, upper Charleston County continues to hold value, in part because of its potential for growth and development.

However, this follow-up study indicates that an alternative place conception has emerged within the predominantly African American town challenging this pro-growth position. These alternative place perceptions suggest that sense of place can vary both spatially *and* temporally. That is, at any given time, there exist multiple interpretations of place, depending upon the perspective of the referent group; and across time, the place identity vocalized by a group can change. These changes can occur as a result of political mo-

bilization initiated by economically, culturally and/or politically alienated groups, who may be motivated by an accumulation of perceived injustices, to mount a challenge to the *status quo*.

Our case study draws heavily on Larsen (2004) who challenges Harner's (2001) assertion that a coherent sense of place occurs only when interest groups with connections to power and capital impose their conception of place onto the larger populace. This influence can be achieved by seduction, as when labor bosses identify themselves with the proletariat or by more coercive forces that ramrod folk interpretations of place. The point is that those who control the means of production or whatever dominant activities occur in a place also shape place meaning. Harner (2001) argues against the ability of marginalized groups to construct significant place meaning because of their lack of influence.

Alternatively, Larsen (2004) counters that meta-narra-

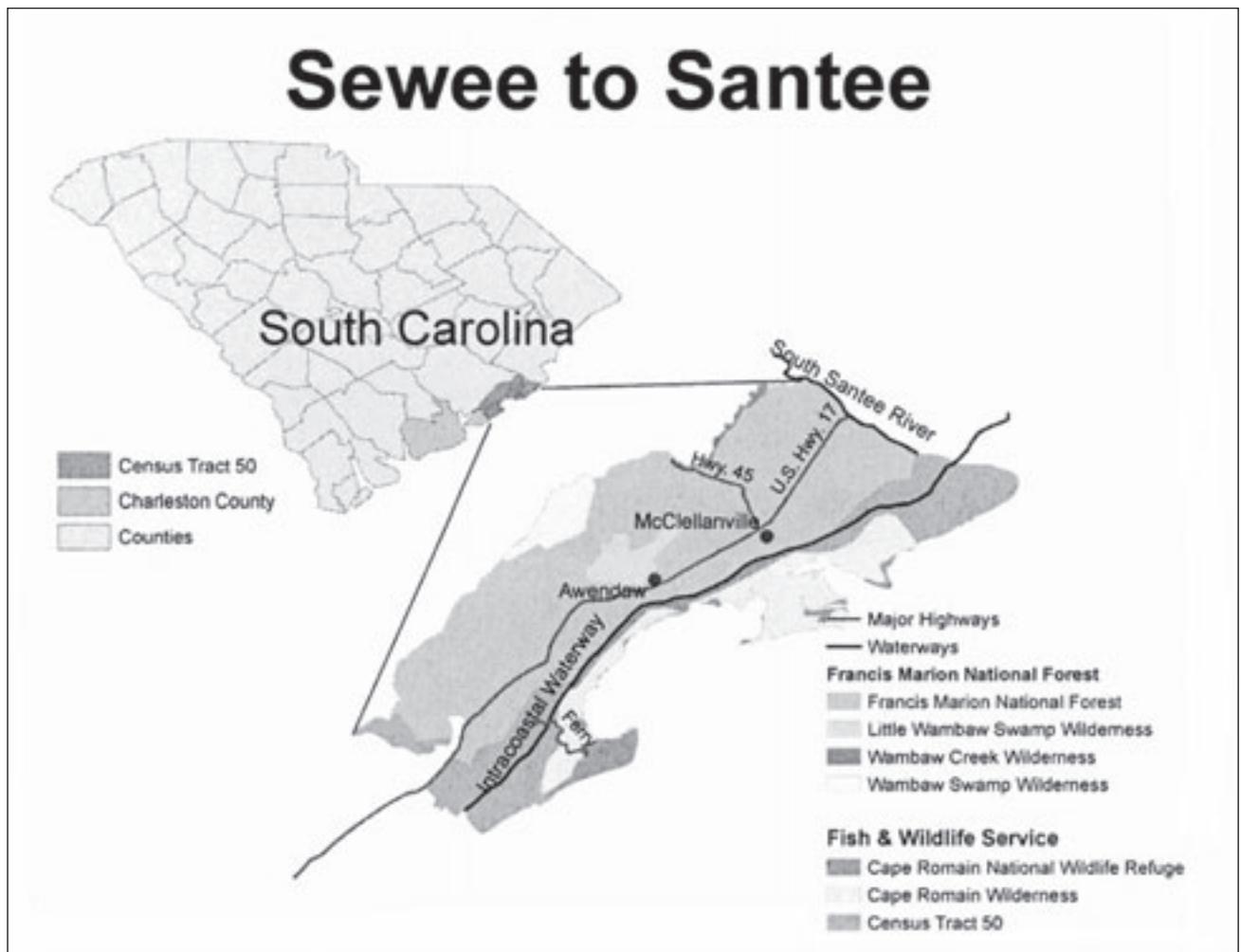


Figure 1. Sewee to Santee Study Area

tives are incapable of representing voices from the margin. Such resistance arises continually "...because dominant consciousness can never completely anticipate, incorporate, or respond to what is actually being lived on the ground" (Williams quoted in Larsen 2004, 947-948). Peripheral groups can and do assert active agency by resisting totalizing discourses of place. Larsen (2004) effectively makes a case for political ecological applications in the First World with reference to marginal group struggle for control over place meaning and function.

Similar to Larsen (2004), we argue that initial African American resistance to the framing of rural Charleston County as pristine countryside shows how a relatively powerless group can resist established place meaning. Blacks challenged the larger (majority White) Charleston County and indeed, the global emphasis (spearheaded by First World organizations) on resource preservation and conservation (Goldman 2004; Hurley and Walker 2004). However, subsequent *within*-group resistance (an African American faction offering an alternative to the articulated Black view of the rural area as a place of growth), drawing on conservation discourses, represents yet another form of resistance to the established "Black" position on place meaning and development. Our study documents these changes and suggests possible trajectories for this political mobilization.

Study Area

The "Sewee to Santee" area of rural, upper Charleston County approximates the county's East County planning area or census tract 50 (Figure 1). This subsection of the South Carolina Low Country represents roughly 295 square miles of land area and has a total population of 5,091. The resident population is roughly 66% African American and 34% White. Like many areas in the American West, a large percentage of the land base in Sewee to Santee is public land (roughly 80%), with both federal and state ownerships represented.⁶ Much of the land remains undeveloped with a topography characteristic of coastal regions, including salt marshes, tidal inlets, barrier islands, and maritime forests.

In 1986, the United Nations nominated roughly 483 square miles within Sewee to Santee to be included as part of the Carolinian-South Atlantic Biosphere Reserve. These reserves carry the distinction of a "mosaic of ecological systems representative of a major biogeographical region, including a gradation of human interventions that are significant for biodiversity conservation and that offer opportunities to explore and develop conservation on a regional scale" (Gregg 1999, 25).⁷ The designation included the Santee Coastal Reserve, state-owned Capers Island and Washo Coastal Reserves, and the Cape Romain National Wildlife

Refuge. Capers Island and Washo Coastal Reserves are recognized historically for rice cultivation during the antebellum period (Charleston County Comprehensive Plan 2006).

Much of the human settlement in the area occurs in small, unincorporated clusters. There are two incorporated towns in Sewee to Santee, Awendaw (Oh-en-daw) and McClellanville. The former incorporated in 1992 in an effort to fend off encroaching urban growth from the greater Charleston area. Residents were concerned that their community would be overtaken by the suburban growth from Charleston occurring to the immediate South in Mt. Pleasant, South Carolina. The 2000 census estimated Awendaw's population at 1,195 residents, 65% African American and 35% White (U.S. Census Bureau 2000a). Until recently, most elected officials were African American. There is now one White councilwoman who won a seat in the November 2007 elections. Data were collected for this project when Awendaw's town council was all Black. Awendaw proper consists of three residential and commercial pods located within 8.6 square miles (about 5,500 acres) along U.S. Highway 17. Small portions of the Francis Marion National Forest are also included within the town's borders. After incorporation in May 1992, town citizens appointed the current mayor, William Alston, who has been reelected in four subsequent elections and is the current mayor. Alston grew up in Awendaw and is also a minister with the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church. He pastors a congregation in downtown Charleston.

About ten miles north on U.S. Highway 17 is the ocean-side village of McClellanville, which boasts a much longer history than Awendaw. The town traces its origins to Sewee Indian settlements in the pre-colonial era. It was incorporated in the mid 1800s by wealthy planters who retreated to the breezy marshes surrounding McClellanville to escape the heat and humidity of Charleston. McClellanville is located along the marshy, South Carolina Intracoastal Waterway and is imbued with a small town ambiance reminiscent of bygone eras. Residents take pride in knowing their neighbors well, feeling safe enough to leave doors unlocked, and allowing their children to roam the town unsupervised. Residents refer to the town simply as "the Village." Like Awendaw, McClellanville has no urban signatures such as fast food outlets or national chains, police or fire department; however, the small town contains a museum chronicling the Village's history, an arts council, and several upscale gift shops. Also significant is that the state's first poet laureate, Archibald Rutledge, is a McClellanville native. McClellanville has long attracted artists, residents say, because of a town atmosphere that valorizes individualism and creative expression.

The 2000 census reports that roughly 448 of the town's 459 residents were White (roughly 98%) although unincor-

porated areas adjacent to McClellanville are largely African American. These areas have designated McClellanville addresses but are not included within the town's jurisdiction. Unincorporated residents are not represented on town council, cannot vote on proposed referenda, or assume any other decision-making role in town politics. The unincorporated areas are governed by Charleston County. Socially and economically, incorporated and unincorporated McClellanville are separated by racial and cultural politics that encourage the respective African American and White communities to fiercely guard their apportioned spaces.⁸ McClellanville's current mayor, Rutledge Leland III, has been in office since 1976, when he was first elected. He grew up in the Village and is a descendant of town founders. McClellanville town council includes an African American male.

Hurricane Hugo, which struck the South Carolina coast in the fall of 1989, was a defining event for both McClellanville and other places in the Low Country because it focused national attention on the cleanup efforts ensuing from the storm. Some who came to help with the relief effort were attracted by McClellanville's small town quaintness and subsequently bought property in the Village. McClellanville respondents remarked that it has become increasingly difficult to buy town property because of escalating housing prices. Median house value increased 53% in McClellanville in the five year period from 2000 to 2005.⁹ Respondents say these increases are fuelled, in part, by second home buyers who use their McClellanville residences as weekend retreats.

Interpreters of Sewee to Santee

Over the past 30 years, urban growth has steadily penetrated the forested and agricultural lands south of Sewee to Santee in the form of sprawling development patterns. Small, rural municipalities and unincorporated Black communities have been either annexed into growing towns outside of Charleston or else resisted incorporation and are now surrounded by large, affluent development. This juxtaposition of relative wealth and poverty highlight the need for planning that preserves and protects traditional settlement areas from urban encroachment (see Brabec and Richardson 2007).

In the 1990s, Charleston county officials surmised that the pace of urban growth and sprawl was consuming county land at unsustainable rates. Significant areas of concern included downtown and central city districts, as well as the leapfrog development that had begun to spread into the rural portions of the county. Cultural and resource preservation became the guiding motifs for land use planning, with the articulation of goals that were deemed necessary to sustain and enhance the vision or sense of place of the county's rural

areas as cultural and natural treasures. Charleston County framed these rural areas as complete and self-perpetuating (given only moderate human disturbance), not needing modification or development of any kind. The prevailing sentiment from county leaders is that growth and development in the rural areas would only increase Charleston County's sprawl and in doing so compromise the rural areas' ecological integrity and the human communities and cultures that have co-existed with the natural features over generations.

We identified three sources articulating this dominant discourse on place for rural, upper Charleston County. These sources are evident at the local, state, and federal levels. At the local level are the Charleston County Council, Charleston County Comprehensive Plan (2006), the eleven entity "Blood Pact," and the attitudes and opinions of private citizens. State-level promoters of resource preservation for Sewee to Santee stem mainly from environmental lobbying groups prevalent in the area—the South Carolina Coastal Conservation League; the South Carolina Nature Conservancy, which manages a 200 year-old cypress lake and cypress-gum swamp important for bird habitat (Washo Reserve) in Sewee to Santee; and the South Carolina Native Plant Society. State-level preservation is also promoted by the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources through the 24,000 acre Santee Coastal Reserve and the 2,100-acre undeveloped Capers (barrier) Island, lying approximately three miles offshore. Federal advocates of environmental protection are natural resource management agencies such as the U.S. Forest Service and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Dominant Discourse on Sewee to Santee

Like the mostly privately owned acres comprising the ACE Basin¹⁰ to the South, Sewee to Santee contains extensive biological diversity, including rare plant and animal habitats and species. Because of this abundance, local authorities interpret upper Charleston County as a place that should be devoted primarily to resource preservation. This vision of the rural countryside is codified in Charleston County's Comp Plan, which was approved in 1999 and updated in 2006 and 2007. Prominent in the plan is the goal of maintaining the traditional rural character and ecological integrity of the county's rural communities.

The Comp Plan designates Sewee to Santee as part of the county's 'Rural Landscape.' Within the Rural Landscape, Sewee to Santee (exceptions are the incorporated areas of McClellanville and Awendaw) is designated as an 'Agricultural Area.' The Agricultural Area is defined as the outer edge of the county's rural landscape. To help control sprawl in the Agricultural Area, the county stipulates key objectives for this land use category—farming and resource management, low density development, small-scale commercial develop-

ment, and no public water or sewer services. Housing densities are restricted to one dwelling unit per acre to one dwelling unit per 25 acres, depending upon whether the residence is in an agricultural, residential, preservation, or resource management area of the larger Agricultural Area (Comp Plan Executive Summary 2006, 8). The plan also restricts public water and sewer service to existing urban and suburban areas. Public water and sewer extension are not prescribed for the Rural Landscape. This restriction is significant for rural municipalities who view public infrastructure as critical to growth.

Another instance of local level definitions of the rural countryside is contained in the so-called “Blood Pact” initiated by the City of Charleston and the neighboring Town of Mt. Pleasant in November 2005. The agreement called for a regional approach to sustainable development with the involvement of 11 local municipalities and utilities. The aim was to limit development on 25,000 acres of private lands adjacent to the Francis Marion National forest. Fundamentally, the pact challenged local entities to reaffirm stipulations already contained in the county Comp Plan, such as restrictions of water and sewer lines to urban and suburban areas and the prohibition of housing densities exceeding those contained in the Comp Plan. Over the past ten years, individual Sewee to Santee residents have also spoken passionately about their fears of urban encroachment and the dissipation of traditional culture and environmental degradation. These expressions are contained in the focus group data collected for this project.

State-level advocates stressing resource preservation in Seewee to Santee are the influential South Carolina Coastal Conservation League, the state affiliate of the Nature Conservancy, the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources, and the South Carolina Native Plant Society. The Coastal Conservation League and Native Plant Society, in particular, maintain an active interest in growth controversies in rural Charleston County. The Coastal Conservation League is an environmental watchdog and lobbying group that has been involved in protests in the Sewee to Santee area. For instance, during the height of a recent controversy involving land development in Awendaw, the league protested proposed development and posted “before and after” photographs of land that had been zoned for development, with the latter showing 400 homes superimposed on 392 acres offered for sale by a prominent, local family. Critics of the organization contend that the graphics visually misrepresented the proposed development.

Founded in 1996, the Native Plant Society partners with other environmental organizations to maintain and enhance habitats favorable to native plants. Local members have also been instrumental in contributing to the dominant narrative of Seewee to Santee, emphasizing environmental protection,

particularly as it pertains to native plant preservation and the eradication of invasive, exotic species. Group members’ promotion of native plants reflects their attachment to the Low Country’s botanical landscape and the cultural heritage symbolized by these flora: “Native plants and the native landscape in many ways define us as a state and a people, giving us a sense of belonging, a sense of place” (South Carolina Native Plant Society website).

Federal promoters of ecological integrity are the very prominent U.S. Forest Service and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. According to estimates, 66,319 acres of the Francis Marion National Forest are located in census tract 50 (which approximates Seewee to Santee), and roughly 65,000 acres of the Cape Romain National Wildlife Area are in Seewee to Santee. As a natural resource agency, the Forest Service’s overriding management objective is ecosystem management. On National Forests in the South, this translates into the long-range objective of long leaf pine restoration. For the Francis Marion in particular, this also includes maintenance of a wider diversity of forest systems, including maritime forests and cypress tupelo swamps and habitat restoration for various threatened and endangered species like the Red Cockaded Woodpecker (Sutton 2006; Dupre 2006). Timber harvesting has been restricted to post-Hurricane Hugo regenerated pine stands and has averaged only 3,000 acres in recent years (Dupre 2007).¹¹

The management objective of National Wildlife Refuges is also habitat protection for the area’s biodiversity generally and threatened and endangered species in particular. Management emphasizes the protection of the Class I Wilderness contained in the refuge. Central to refuge objectives are mandates that privilege improvements to non-human habits and systems, as opposed to human habitats. As such, infrastructure improvements or additions that would increase human convenience, such as public water and sewer installation or residential development are deemed incompatible with agency vision and interpretation of the area’s naturalness.

Agencies and authorities at each of these levels—local, state, and federal—frame Sewee to Santee as a place that should be devoted primarily to natural resource preservation. Indeed, this is a vision also congruent with global efforts to promote sustainable development of limited natural resources. We argue that this interpretation or ‘sense of place’ of the rural countryside represents a hegemonic position within the region because it represents the monocular view of powerful entities at levels extending from the local to global (Hurley and Walker 2004). Alternative conceptions of Seewee to Santee as a site of both resource preservation *and* moderate urban design do not figure into this irreproachable vision of the countryside (Duncan and Duncan 2001).

Awendaw Resistance

Resource preservation advocates promote no growth or contained growth as being unquestionably beneficial to the long-term interests of all citizens, regardless of political persuasion, socioeconomic standing, or racial/ethnic group affiliation. However, this slow growth reification does not encompass the views of various interest groups in Sewee to Santee. As in other parts of the U.S., private property rights groups in the South see important aspects of the preservationist agenda, such as restricted housing densities, as limiting private property rights and market development (McCann 2002; Hurley and Walker 2004).

In the late 1990s/early 2000s, the greatest resistance to the framing of Sewee to Santee as a place primarily of resource preservation came from the majority African American town council and Black mayor in Awendaw. They argued that Awendaw needed to expand, both in terms of population and financial assets, if it intended to survive as a municipality. This resistance is set within and against the increasingly complex social, cultural, and economic change of the region.

African American families have lived in Sewee to Santee for generations and trace their lineage directly to the Gullah people.¹² Substantial numbers of Whites have also resided in the area for multiple generations and have family lines tracing back to the antebellum era. In recent years, however, increasing numbers of affluent and middle-class Whites have migrated to Sewee to Santee, attracted by idyllic conceptions of country living and low population densities. In contrast to the middle-class status of long-time Whites and increasingly upper-middle class White migrants, the majority of long-time African Americans occupy a marginal position with respect to key indicators such as education, income, and poverty levels.¹³ Substandard housing is also a long-standing problem for African Americans in both Sewee to Santee and the rural Low Country generally.

Historically, African Americans have not possessed sufficient capital to generate profits in the Low Country's agricultural sector; rather, they provided unskilled labor to area plantations and farms owned by Whites or worked as wage laborers in the once-burgeoning seafood industry. Indeed, persistent rural poverty characterizes the socioeconomic condition of many area Blacks. Pointing to the stark differences between well-off Whites and poor Blacks, Awendaw leaders maintain that economic growth would improve the life quality of African Americans by providing a larger tax base to fund poorly performing schools and basic services needed by residents.

In the early to mid-2000s, Awenda leaders began to argue fiercely that the preservationist emphasis in Sewee to Santee mostly benefits middle-class residents (the majority of whom are White) because this group can better afford to

forgo growth for environmental preservation. Blacks charged that Whites are typically not confronted with challenges to basic survival such as contaminated drinking water. In support of this contention, a recent wastewater disposal and potable water study conducted by an environmental consultant at the behest of the Sewee to Santee Development Corporation showed that well water from 33% of homes (N=300) surveyed in Sewee to Santee (excluding Awendaw) were contaminated with coliform bacteria and of these, 6% contained "health threatening" fecal coliform (Cofer-Shabica 2006, 4). Also, roughly 70% of those surveyed supported implementation of a wastewater management utility and were willing to pay between \$5 and \$20 per month for service. Although no data on race were collected, the report suggests a large number of those surveyed were African American.

Awendaw's Alternative Narrative of Place at a Point in Time

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, Awendaw resisted county-level appeals to curb growth in the town, a move which in effect was also a rejection of the predominant sense of place of Sewee to Santee as a bucolic nature preserve. To the county's dismay, Awendaw town council proposed and won support for the installation of a public water system in 1997 and proposed a public sewer in the same year (as of writing, construction had begun on the system, but there is no estimated completion date). A referendum was not held on the latter proposal because of public outcry from anti-growth, White citizens against a corporate sewer system. Anti-growth interests reject this infrastructure because they believe public utilities encourage development.

Because Awendaw is incorporated, it can devise its own comprehensive plan. Although the language in the town's plan is commensurate with the County's Comp Plan of nature preservation, the planning ordinance that operationalizes the plan permits housing densities of one home per quarter acre, compared to the one home per acre agricultural regulation stipulated in the County's Comp Plan. This authority, in conjunction with public water and sewer proposals, has enabled Awendaw to act independently of the county in formulating its response to growth.

Another instance of Awendaw's alternative narrative of place was its rejection of the proposed Blood Pact. Again, town leaders insisted that the terms of the agreement would stifle the town's growth potential. Awendaw proper consists of an 11 mile stretch of three discontinuous residential and small commercial pods that run along U.S. Highway 17 and are located within or adjacent to the Francis Marion forest. The low density development and lack of commercial activity is indicative of a rural area. However, town leadership has tried to distinguish Awendaw, as town, from the surrounding unincorporated areas. A position paper issued by

the town after an emotional debate about the town joining the Blood Pact stated: "Awendaw is a town and needs to be considered as a town, not as a rural area." Town leaders insist on the town's ability to provide necessary conveniences such as grocery stores, banks, and medical facilities. Opponents of Awendaw's position, both inside and outside of the town, argue that these services are inconsistent with a Rural Area, as defined by the county. The town's growth position is viewed as ironic by those who maintain that Awendaw was incorporated in 1992 to resist the very type of growth proposed by the town. The Blood Pact eventually failed because Awendaw's agreement was pivotal to the success of the Pact. All 11 identified entities had to agree to render it effective.

This alternative definition found a solid support base among African Americans. Black leaders' appeal to fellow Blacks' sense of powerlessness in comparison to "outsiders" (detached county government located 40 miles to the south; affluent, recently migrated White fellow citizens, higher income Whites in McClellanville) helped the Awendaw government to frame its growth visions in the familiar, passionate terms of civil rights struggles. The everyday hardship and lack characterizing Black life in Sewee to Santee was pitted against dominant interest groups that did not share these same privations. The hegemonic view that resource preservation outweighs growth was challenged by a local, Black government which countered that the dire need in the Black community for clean water and sanitary living conditions had to be considered along with, if not above, resource preservation. According to Larsen (2004), Awendaw created an alternative "structure of feeling" about the rural countryside, which was constructed in contrast to the preservation narrative or "structure of expectation"¹⁴ promulgated by majority White interest groups at the local, state, and federal levels.

Thus, economic growth (somehow in conjunction with resource preservation), became the alternative Black vision for Awendaw and, by extension, other parts of Sewee to Santee. An "African American" sense of place congealed around this framing. In the early 2000s, these economic and cultural concerns appeared to unite the African American community in an intractable position. African Americans presented a united front on development issues, at least publicly.

Data and Methods

In 2002/2003, the first author examined resident responses to urban growth to better understand issues dividing Black and White community responses to development (Johnson and Floyd 2006).¹⁵ To more thoroughly investigate resident perceptions of development activities and place perceptions, a follow-up study was conducted from September

2006 through March 2007 to examine sense of place and residents' positions on growth. For the present study, we used a mixed method approach and gathered data from focus group interviews, local elected officials, government documents, local press coverage, and participant observation of community groups.

This investigation included four focus groups, moderated by the second author, containing seven to 12 participants per group. The first group had ten participants, two of whom were African American; the second, 12, all White; the third, eight, all White; and the fourth, seven, all African American by design. The relative lack of participation by African Americans in the first three groups suggested the need for a group that included only Blacks. Socio-economically, respondents represented both working and professional classes, although working class respondents were predominant in the all African American group; and four of the seven participants in the African American group were retired.

For the focus groups, we obtained a snowball, convenience sample of Seewee to Santee residents (Babbie 2007). Because African American participation was difficult to garner in the first three groups, we decided that an all Black group might encourage more participation from African Americans. We relied heavily on assistance from our community collaborator at the Sewee to Santee Community Development Corporation to help facilitate recruitment in the Black community for the fourth (all Black) group. A total of 37 residents were involved in the focus groups.

Participants were administered a semi-structured, open-ended interview protocol with questions addressing length of residence in the South Carolina Low Country, perceptions of place and development activities, challenges confronted by communities, and Low Country politics. Data analysis involved an interpretive approach in which primary themes were assessed by multiple reviews of transcripts. Specific topics analyzed were perceptions of place and development activities, community challenges, and race relations.

Data collection also included one-on-one interviews with four members of the McClellanville town council, two Awendaw town council members, and a silviculturalist and district ranger on the Francis Marion National Forest; participant observation and note taking at an Awendaw public hearing and two Awendaw Community Action Group meetings; informal interviews with landowners in Awendaw; and a ground truthing data collection at one of the area's African American churches. One-on-one interview and document data were analyzed through a combination of grounded theory (Strauss and Corbin 1990) and content analysis (see Berg 2006). Through a mixed method approach, we were able to capture multiple perspectives about sense of place and changing identities in the study area.

Data collection was challenging due to long-term mistrust of outsiders prevalent in the Sewee to Santee region as well as ongoing debates about residential and commercial development and conservation. However, we believe our triangulation approach (see Berg 2006) provides robust data, giving insight into the dynamics of the human-ecology interactions prevalent in this rural region. Our reporting of results is by theme below.

Perceptions of Seewee to Santee

Across all focus groups, respondents described Seewee to Santee as a place of boundless natural beauty. They emphasized the climate, stressing both its positive and negative aspects. Participants spoke wistfully of smells and sensations evoked by the Low Country's salt air and humidity, of the fragrance of rare plants and ordinary pines, and of clean air and water flowing in area streams and rivers.¹⁶ They also joked about relentless mosquitoes, thick undergrowth, and persistent summer heat. With a mixture of pride and regret, respondents commented that Seewee to Santee contains the largest stretch of undeveloped barrier islands left in the country and that the Francis Marion National Forest's Hell Hole Bay Class I Wilderness area is "one of the last great places on earth." Study participants also appreciated the area's solitude, the fact that one could walk area beaches and not encounter other humans.

In terms of human culture, respondents stressed the uniqueness of an admixture of African American Gullah heritage, plantation culture, and remnants of Native American civilization. These were evidenced in Seewee Indian ruins on outer beaches, standing plantations and plantation ruins, and old churches. An African American respondent noted that U.S. Highway 17 is referred to as the "AME Corridor" because of the large number of African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Churches located on the road.

These physical and cultural features are embedded in a social structure where racial divide and inter-group mistrust persists. Respondents in focus groups one and two stressed that Low Country politics and social relations are influenced to a great extent by long-standing animosity and racial divisions between the Black and White communities. Whites remarked that reasons for Black/White divisions could be attributed to "deep wounds" inflicted on the African American community from the past and that these had never been addressed. One Black respondent insisted that race relations were exemplary, and some cited instances of improved relations between the groups; but the majority of respondents, both long-time and more recently migrated individuals, spoke at length about the widely accepted social distance between African Americans and Whites. These differences are most apparent in the socioeconomic divide between the Black and

White communities, and very importantly, contribute to the different stances Blacks and Whites have taken on area growth.

When asked specifically about race relations between the largely White incorporated and mostly Black unincorporated sections of McClellanville, all McClellanville town council members indicated that no active hostility existed between these areas; and that the residential segregation simply reflected people's preferences for living with those who shared similar values and interests. None of the council members favored annexing the unincorporated areas.

Overwhelmingly, participants cited unchecked urban expansion as the single largest threat to Sewee to Santee. All White respondents, with the exception of one, strongly criticized Awendaw's pro-expansion stance. Reactions ranged from anger and indignation to pity. White respondents felt that Awendaw leaders simply could not grasp the long range significance of their actions. The economic growth imagined by Awendaw leaders, they argued, would not be realized by poor Blacks because many Blacks do not have the education and skill levels required for the types of high-tech manufacturing or information processing businesses the town hopes to attract.

Consistent with the 2002/2003 data, the focus group data indicated that three issues contributed to differences in African American and White interpretations of Sewee to Santee—again, the need for improved facilities and services, specifically potable drinking water; heirs' property¹⁷ vulnerability to development pressure; and dominance of local Black churches in political affairs. That African Americans are more likely than Whites to have unsafe drinking water, to be more willing to sell rural land, or to be strongly influenced by the church all seem to coalesce into a Black position on growth that favors development. Respondents iterated that Blacks believe development in the form of improved infrastructure (public water and sewer lines) would remedy the drinking water problem; and that developers offering to buy Black-owned land with no clear title would immediately improve Blacks' financial situation.

The first two issues were discussed in all four groups. African Americans mentioned the importance of the church in their communities but in no way criticized area churches or their leaders. As noted by many commentators, the Black church assumes an active role in secular activities, particularly politics. Our data also suggest that Black churches in Seewee to Santee command considerable influence on local political opinion.

The following quotations highlight discussions relating to drinking water and heirs' property. Black church dominance is addressed in the following section in the context of Awendaw as a hegemonic entity.

Drinking Water and Heirs' Property

Much of the focus group discussions centered on the immediate need for potable water and heirs' property in the African American communities:

If you don't have decent water to drink, if you don't have decent sewer facilities, what normally are public facilities if you live in a city, if you don't have that, then I think you look a little bit more favorably in terms of development. In terms of city water, city sewage, and things like that. And I can certainly see why, because if I had to live in some of the situations that some of the people around here do, I'd want it developed too, as much as I love the woods and shore and stuff like that....If you don't have running water, you'd be glad to have Mt. Pleasant Waterworks bring their water lines down here.

A participant in the same group commented later:

Those of us who are against development have got this sort of impossible dilemma. We very much want the poor people who live here to have good drinking water and septic systems, but we either do it by funding it very expensively on individual house to house basis or else you have the county, or somebody like Mt. Pleasant come down the road with a giant pipe that everybody taps into, and everybody starts developing from. So either we have to find a way of helping individuals, or we have to succumb to the giant monsters to the south.

Those opposing a municipal water system argue that public utilities are a precursor to urban expansion. If these services are put into place, developers would have the necessary infrastructure to initiate intensive building out in a rural setting. Again, Awendaw officials welcome such development as it represents one small but fundamental step towards bringing quality of life for the Black majority on par with that of Whites.

In terms of heirs' property, respondents addressed the contradiction between the county's stipulation for lower residential densities in the rural areas, on the one hand, and traditional, Black settlement patterns in rural areas where typically higher residential densities predominate to accommodate extended family residences. Given that these Black settlements are often on heirs' property, property rights advocates and others in the Sewee to Santee area charge that the county's restrictions will undermine Black settlement patterns and ultimately disrupt Black culture. An African American in the first focus group addresses this issue:

...I guess the comment was made...about how many houses you can put per acre, and here we say that you should only be able to put one house on five acres or whatever, whatever crazy number that people are saying, and then we talk about the Black community, where we're trying to help them...

So you're talking about two different things here. So...you can build one house per five acres, but then, then a black family who wants to split their property up to give it to their kids or whatever, they can't do that. They can't build on that property. You see what I'm saying? So you can't have it both ways. It's either got to be one way or it's got to be the other way...

A counter point was made that county regulations excluded traditional heirs' property "settlement areas" from the lower densities. But the first respondent maintained that if heirs' property owners did not obtain public water, they still would not be able to subdivide their property for residential use because of new state regulations prohibiting multiple wells and waste disposal systems on rural land. The Black respondent stressed that the solution is a public water system that would allow densities as high as one dwelling per quarter acre. Here, the Black respondent evoked a cultural argument for resource use, similar to McCarthy's (2002) examination of Wise Use advocates in the western U.S. The respondent argued that Black cultural preservation was contingent upon African Americans being able to continue subdividing family land and developing the higher residential densities.

Speakers at an Awendaw public hearing also framed the heirs' property situation in terms of property rights, making the argument that the county's low density regulations in rural areas denied families the ability to subdivide their property for multiple family members. For one speaker representing a landowner's rights group, this amounted to property loss because lower housing densities would cause land prices and taxes to increase, eventually forcing low and middle income owners to sell land.

Heirs' property was discussed more thoroughly in the African American focus group. Here, respondents alluded to the financial straits of many local Blacks and heirs' property sales as an immediate remedy:

Yeah, because the developer, they don't care. As long as they get one to sell, that's it. Because if you read about Cainhoy [unincorporated place in neighboring Berkeley County] and places like that, they really got burnt...and once they [developers] get it [land], they turn it over just like that [snaps fingers]. So what they paid you, they getting ten

times that amount...I tell people 'hold on to what you got, and if anybody want it, that means it's valuable to you, so don't never let it go, 'cause once you let it go, it's all over...all over.

The problem of African American land loss has gained prominence in recent years and is an issue taken up by groups such as the Federation of Southern Cooperatives/Land Assistance Fund which advocates for Black land retention in the South. Aside from obvious property loss resulting from these sales is the issue of culture loss. Indeed, many of the arguments presented by respondents, both for and against development, have been tied to cultural preservation. The importance of cultural politics in land-use decisions must be underscored. Central here is the concern that Black land may be transferred to White ownership with a consequential disappearance of Gullah culture and Black political influence in Seewee to Santee and elsewhere in the Low Country.

African American Sense of Place across Time

The most notable finding in the 2006/2007 data is a significant shift in the African American sense of place. As stated, the reticent Black position on place appeared immutable in the early 2000s. Public opposition to development at that time came solely from White, anti-growth factions. There was no counter-narrative from African Americans. Yet, in a space of roughly four to five years, a Black faction in Awendaw distanced itself publicly from the pro-growth position. This opposition group joined forces with the existing White anti-development interests, forming a group called the Awendaw Community Action Group (ACAG).

The bi-racial group is fronted by Samuel Robinson, a returning African American who grew up in Awendaw but lived in Washington, D.C. for more than 30 years. Much of the group's organizing and support is tied to Robinson's church. Important here is resistance from African Americans intimately familiar with the hierarchy, social mores, and etiquette of the Black community. These African Americans and others in the Seewee to Santee area are questioning the long-term impacts of development on the natural environment, sense of place, and their rural Black heritage.

In December 2006, a White Awendaw resident commented on the change occurring in the Black community:

Well, that's [Black united front] been shaken very recently...in the last month, there has been a dramatic awakening in, in Awendaw...and ah now some of the concerns that have been limited to a few of the Caucasians have been taken up by a lot of the Blacks, and there is a major political emergence in, in the town of Awendaw...It is against development.

African American respondents also remarked on changes over the past five years in Black attitudes towards Seewee to Santee:

Lot of change in the past five years, we're slow to wake up, it takes time. You think it's [development] not gonna happen to me, but it's happening. A lot of people are wising up, it's coming fast.

I really think, uh, the Black folks that have heirs' property, we're realizing what we really have....I think a lot of people just realizing now, this legacy from our grandparents.

Public acknowledgement and acceptance of a rural, black Gullah identity for some Blacks appears central to this change in place perspective. For example, when asked specifically about the significance of Gullah heritage to local Black identity, African American respondents intimated that when they were younger, this culture was "looked down upon" [by Blacks] because they thought it was backwards. But respondents seem to recognize connections between cultural traditions and land preservation now.

The catalyst for the formation of ACAG was the rezoning of 324 acres of privately held land from general agricultural to planned development in 2006. This parcel is referred to locally as the "White Tract" after the family that owns the land. A great amount of controversy ensued when a residential development of up to 400 homes was approved for the land. The White family intended to sell the land to a developer who planned a gated community. The developer promised affordable housing would be included in the development, but area Blacks questioned whether affordable housing would be contained within a gated community. Samuel Robinson related that long-time Seewee to Santee African Americans who questioned the development asked that he be a spokesperson for the Black community in opposing the project. Robinson subsequently attended a community meeting called by anti-growth interests in Awendaw, where he committed to working with the anti-growth lobby and helping to reconcile Black growth and White anti-development camps in Awendaw.

The ACAG views Awendaw's pro-growth position as antithetical to both the town's and the rural area's character. Similar to Larsen's (2004) Southside residents, ACAG articulates an alienation *in situ* of citizens from town policies. However, in contrast to Larsen's (2004) example, this alienation is not imposed from outside agents but from those most familiar with the area's rural heritage, elected Awendaw officials. ACAG members and others have formulated a 'structure of feeling' to counter Awendaw's 'structure of expectation' centering on economic expansion. The former prioritizes both resource and cultural preservation. These can be

seen as constituting a consolidated rural heritage because land stewardship, for both African Americans and Whites, is intertwined with culture in this community. Robinson comments:

Our group is dogged in our efforts to preserve the heritage of this little community and to oppose the efforts of those individuals, be it members of the town council, be it developers...or be it Black owners of large tracts of land, to destroy the very character of this community.... We now have Black politicians who can see no farther than the dollar....And the development is slowly but surely forcing out Black folks, and it's being done in a very subtle way....

We should be about preserving our vast natural resources. We should be about preserving the rich cultural heritage of Black folks along this corridor [U.S. Highway 17]. We should be as citizens, Black and White, very concerned about the national forest, and what we're gonna do will impact upon the Francis Marion National Forest. I mean, we need that forest just like White folk need that forest, just like the Indians who were the original settlers around here needed that forest.

It is significant that the ACAG is based in one of Awendaw's Black churches, the Sewee Missionary Baptist Church. This affiliation helps to legitimize the organization. The sanctioning by the African American community, coupled with legal expertise of the existing anti-growth group, has aided the group in mounting a serious challenge to the Awendaw government. Group meetings are held at the church, and Black members attend the church. This Black faction opposing development also finds its support base in the church just as the pro-growth interest is also embedded in area churches.

ACAG's presence in the community has not been without controversy. The Black community is divided in its support for the mayor and his allies, on the one hand, and an alternative vision advocated by ACAG. According to Robinson, during the height of the White Tract controversy, someone with vested interests in the White family land attempted to run him over at a local convenience store because of his stances on growth. An Awendaw council member also related that Mayor Alston had received threatening phone calls for his pro-growth position. Robinson stressed that some African Americans considered him a sellout.

*Awendaw Hegemony*¹⁸

We argued earlier that Awendaw is in a marginal position vis-à-vis larger preservationist interests. This remains true in the larger context of the county and state; however, Awendaw

can also be said to hold a hegemonic position relative to the anti-growth interests in the Seewee to Santee area. Because the town can fashion its own zoning and planning regulations, it has the power to disrupt county, state, and federal visions of the area as primarily rural.

Awendaw's power is evidenced clearly in the town's insistence and ability to acquire a public water system. There were lengthy comments in the first three focus groups charging that Awendaw's Mayor Alston is intolerant of alternative views on development and that some of his tactics to silence opposition are undemocratic. (This criticism was not brought up in the Black focus group.) For instance, respondents commented that the mayor would not allow those who promoted individual wells, rather than public water as a solution to the water crisis, to present their position at town council meetings. Also, only residents within the town were permitted to voice an opinion on contentious zoning proposals, and those speaking were required to notify the council in advance of their desire to speak. Respondents in the mostly White focus groups iterated that individuals with anti-development views are disenfranchised in terms of participatory government because these viewpoints are rebuked by the Awendaw government.

White participants stressed that the Awendaw government has been able to wield such control over the Black electorate because of its connection to area churches. Mayor Alston is an AME pastor and council members attend area churches. Critics of Alston and the council contend that prominent Black churches in Seewee to Santee serve as a surrogate government for a largely politically apathetic Black citizenry. Elected officials are accused of using their positions in the church to political advantage.

Along these lines, an African American also stressed that Black identity in the Low Country is characterized by close relations with immediate family, extended clan, and family friends, who may also be considered pseudo family. And these family groups are situated in particular Black Churches, to which locals have life-long and generational allegiances. So, the church becomes the civic and political representative for collective family groups, and the spokesperson for the church is the pastor. This respondent emphasized that reverence to pastors is reminiscent of hierarchical, African social systems that venerated tribal chiefs. Contemporarily, the Black pastor can be said to represent this authority figure. An African American interviewee comments:

*See, Black preachers are more than preachers
...Black preachers are really African chiefs.
...Preachers are looked upon as the ultimate source.
[Now characterizing the attitude of Black church members] "I don't care what it is, I'm going to Rev-*

erend Jones. Reverend Jones say, Reverend Jones say..." Well, if 'Reverend Jones' takes an activist position in the church, relative to what's going on in the community, then members of the church naturally follow...All these people [Black Awendaw town council members] grew up in various churches, with the exception of Jeff..., and all these people still attend these churches, so they got allegiance and family, so people will overlook what's right and go with their family...and it carries over into politics. [Characterizing local Black allegiances] "I'm votin' for Johnny 'cause that's my cousin. I'm votin' for Reverend Alston, I don't give a damn what he does! That's my family, he belong to my church or he's the preacher. Preachers can get away with anything."¹⁹

The physical context is undoubtedly relevant to African Americans' sense of place, as is evidenced by strong support for nature preservation among Black respondents and its role in Sewee to Santee's distinct character; moreover, those in the African American focus group said they hunted and fished. Still, it seems that the natural environment has been more of a taken-for-granted background against which culture—religion, family connections, and social organizing—have been more salient activities than resource preservation. With respect to this point, an Awendaw town council member remarked that Black attachments to Awendaw revolve around family: "I would dare to say that 99% of African Americans that are here are here because of family members, they're not here just so they can say 'oh Awendaw's a beautiful place, let's move to Awendaw.'"

Black/White distinctions in resource preservation among Blacks may have to do with the fact that, historically, the Black relationship to the land in this area was more compelled than the White, well into the 20th century. As the Black respondents iterated, to be associated with the land meant toil and arduous work. In 1969, Eldridge Cleaver, a former Black Panther wrote: "In terms of seeking status in America, Blacks—principally the black bourgeoisie—have come to measure their own value according to the number of degrees they are away from the soil." This statement is instructive given that all participants in the African American focus group were born in Sewee to Santee or elsewhere in the Low Country but had spent significant portions of their lives elsewhere. These were older residents who left the Low Country in the 1950s and 1960s, typically relocating in northern cities, in search of better living conditions away from agricultural economies. Now, retired, they bring back the organizational skills and confidence to challenge existing authority structures.

Many of the Awendaw Whites opposing development are transplants, rather than natives, who bring organizational know-how and political savvy to the countryside in much the same manner as returning African Americans. For White residents, however, positions on growth cannot be neatly categorized into "Beenyer" versus "Comeyer"²⁰ because long time McClellanville Whites are strongly opposed to urban growth in the rural area. Their sense of place is reinforced by historical associations and accomplishments that set the Village apart from the surrounding countryside. There is a prevailing sentiment that newcomers are welcome, only if they conform to the expectations and aesthetic sensibilities of existing residents. The small town quaintness characterizing the Village is prized, protected, and defended all the more because of its stark contrast to Awendaw. This exclusivity is articulated succinctly by a McClellanville town council member:

You know, pick the hell out of Awendaw, tear it apart, rip it up, do what you want, and we'll benefit from the new high school that may be placed out there and the new grocery store that's there, 20 new doctors, dentist offices that are there, whatever, we'll benefit from that, but for God's sakes please don't get any closer to us.

A number of implications can be read into these sentiments. The overt reference here is to Awendaw's impending growth, but racial and social distance might also be implied. These comments suggest a territorialization of (White) McClellanville space and Black Awendaw. Yet if contestations over growth are to be resolved, a community-wide vision is imperative. Given a distance of roughly ten miles between Awendaw and McClellanville, any substantial Awendaw build out would affect McClellanville's southern periphery. Historical demarcations of race, class, and now positions on growth appear as impediments to community collaboration.

When viewed from the wider perspective of political ecology, many of the issues identified by McCarthy (2002) are apparent in this study—marginality, cultural claims to resource use, livelihood concerns, among others. Rural, upper Charleston County is not the Third World, but this case finds common ground with other political ecology studies in the United States, where the lack of access to taken-for-granted necessities such as potable drinking water, adequate housing, and health care are persistent problems for the rural poor. This lack is amplified by the increasing settlement of affluent migrants whose comparative wealth contrasts starkly with living conditions for the poor and marginally educated.

An Awendaw town council member conceded that growth and changing demographics would likely mean that Blacks would eventually lose political control in Awendaw.

The council member, however, is willing to accept these losses for policies he believes will better the lives of local African Americans. Political power may change hands more quickly than anticipated. Town council elections held in November 2007 resulted in the unseating of this council member and the election of two slow growth council members, one being the current ACAG chair, Samuel Robinson, and a White female. Thus, the council now has two representatives who were elected on a preservationist platform. Residents hope that the newly elected members will help to bring about a more balanced position on growth. Just as importantly, the election of an African American and White who both strongly oppose rural development represents the culmination of hard fought resistance to the Black *status quo*.

The formation of ACAG in Awendaw seems to signal a turning point in the Black sense of place and land aesthetic. There appears now an urgency to sustain the natural resource base because these are now recognized as exhaustible. ACAG represents a formalized, resistant “structure of feeling” which can promote this new sense of place articulated by some Awendaw Blacks. However, at present, the resistance is localized in this organization and cannot be said to pervade even Awendaw. As indicated, Awendaw is fractionalized by the development controversy. There appears to be no single ‘Black’ position on growth. Larsen (2004) stresses that resistant senses of place are by nature “unstable” because the ideals and energy that spawned them may eventually succumb to pressure from the center.

Alternatively, resistant identities can develop into what Larsen (2004) calls emergent culture, which involves more solidly formed, forward looking organizing that brings peripheral ideals to the center. In the case of Black Awendaw’s resistance, an emergent culture could arise from this challenge if Black residents are willing to form coalitions with those external to their traditional culture. This partnering is already evident in the formation of ACAG, as it involves both African American and White activists.

Additional possibilities exist for expanding ACAG’s resistant identity into a larger Black, cultural movement articulating resource and cultural preservation. The Sewee to Santee Community Development Corporation (CDC) (mentioned earlier) is another non-profit grassroots organization dedicated to improving the environmental health of lower income residents while preserving the natural environment in the Sewee to Santee area. This organization was formed after Hurricane Hugo when the urgency for potable drinking water among Blacks was made known to the larger community. This group also includes African American and White members who stress resource preservation. Also, the recently formed group, Concerned Citizens for the Unincorporated Areas of District One, is an all-Black organization originat-

ing from the unincorporated Black areas surrounding McClellanville. The group formed in opposition to a tax levied on the unincorporated portions of Charleston County for storm water runoff. The group advocates for residents in the unincorporated areas, who, they feel, are not represented adequately by the Charleston County council. Group members are leery of development initiatives, which they see as benefiting external elites.

Each of these grassroots collectives, ACAG, Sewee to Santee CDC, and the Concerned Citizens group, represent points on a possible network dedicated to resource and cultural preservation in Sewee to Santee. Important here is active involvement by African Americans who are addressing issues and needs relevant to the Black community while at the same time recognizing their commonality with the larger ecology and culture of the South Carolina Coast. It appears this appreciation for place extending beyond one’s home church or community is a recent recognition for some African Americans; yet this insight represents an important juncture in local race relations, environmental preservation, and cultural heritage. The success of these newly formed coalitions is not guaranteed but will depend on local actors who can strike crucial balances between environment and people, between the very real needs of impoverished citizens and the nature which has sustained them for generations.

Endnotes

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2. Author to whom correspondence should be directed: E-mail: cjohnson09@fs.fed.us
3. Low Country refers generally to South Carolina counties below the fall line. These include Beaufort, Berkeley, Charleston, Clarendon, Colleton, Dorchester, Georgetown, Hampton, Horry, Jasper, Lee, Sumter, and Williamsburg. Low country also derives from the region’s proximity to the Atlantic coast and its low, flat topography.
4. In Johnson and Floyd (2006), pseudonyms were used for place names.
5. African American and black are used interchangeably.
6. Square miles of privately owned in-holdings are not subtracted from these figures.
7. South Carolina subsequently withdrew from cooperation in the biosphere reserve program due to incompatible goals between the state

- and neighboring states with land in the Carolinian-South Atlantic Reserve (Gregg 1999, 32).
8. This social definition of place is evident in African Americans' fight to keep the predominantly-black Lincoln High School in McClellanville open. Lincoln High was established in the 1950s for black students and has remained an identity symbol in the black community. In 2007, 161 students were enrolled at Lincoln High. Because of low enrollment and poor academic performance, county officials have proposed on several occasions to close the school, but protest by African Americans has kept the school operating. Most White children in the McClellanville area either attend the better performing schools closer to Charleston or the private Archibald Rutledge Academy in town. African American students are also bused to the larger Charleston schools. Whites in McClellanville defend the private school, citing the lack of academic rigor and accountability at the public schools as reasons not to send their children there. The public middle school, located in the Village, is also predominantly black. The historic building housed the white high school before integration.
 9. Available at <http://www.city-data.com/city/McClellanville-South-Carolina.html>.
 10. The 1.6 million-acre ACE Basin is named for the Ashepoo, Combahee, and Edisto rivers in the Low Country. According to the Nature Conservancy, the basin represents "one of the largest areas of undeveloped wetlands/uplands ecosystems remaining on the Atlantic Coast. This interlocking web of ecosystems includes forested uplands and wetlands, extensive tidal marshes, managed wetlands, barrier islands, and peatlands" (www.nature.org/wherework/northamerica/states/southcarolina/preserves).
 11. These objectives notwithstanding, the Forest Service has been heavily criticized by members of the Native Plant Society for management that the Society believes is detrimental to native flora. These criticisms are leveled at the Francis Marion's intention to improve roads within the forest and also the forest's provision of easements to a local water utility to cross Forest Service lands.
 12. The Gullah are direct descendants of slaves brought to the Sea Islands and South Carolina and Georgia mainland to cultivate rice and other plantation crops. Gullahs were able to maintain more direct cultural links with their African heritage, as evidenced in their speech, worship forms, living arrangements, and burial practices (Pollitzer 1999).
 13. In Awendaw, approximately 3.9% of Whites are estimated to live below the poverty line, compared to 16.7% of African Americans. For East County, estimates are 5% for Whites and 23.5% for African Americans (U.S. Census Bureau 2000b).
 14. Williams defines structure of feeling as an affective response to hegemony. It is an offensive measure adopted by an out-group to assert a competing interpretation of conflict. Structures of expectation are normative models of behavior or feeling.
 15. This analysis revealed four primary issues that differentiated African American and White responses. These have to do with both socio-economic and cultural differences between the groups—specifically 1) an urgent need for sanitary drinking water and sewage disposal among blacks; 2) higher economic incentives for African Americans to sell family land; 3) relative lack of black land stewardship; and 4) hegemony of the black church which influenced black political opinions. None of these issues characterized White residents' relationships in the study area.
 16. An exception is Jeremy Creek in McClellanville, which respondents say is polluted.
 17. Heirs' property or tenancy in common (Mitchell 2001) became a prevalent form of landownership among African Americans after the Civil War when the freedmen purchased or were deeded land. Owners treated the land as communal property within the family. In many instances, land has passed to subsequent generations without having been probated, so there is no clear deed specifying exact ownership. A recent court case in the Low Country concerning heirs' property set a precedent for forced sales of such land by a single heir.
 18. An anonymous reviewer directed our attention to the sometimes ambiguity or shifting of dominant and resistant positions. Dominance and resistance appear straightforward and often immutable but in fact may not be absolute because these positions make sense only when contextualized, as our paper demonstrates. The reviewer suggests Awendaw's "hegemony" is tenuous given the larger emphasis on resource preservation by influential actors. We accept this argument but maintain that in the politically autonomous town of Awendaw, for a period at least, pro-growth politicians were able to exert political and social pressures in such a manner that marginalized oppositional views.
 19. White respondents in McClellanville also emphasized the importance of family relations in their community. Havard (1981, 39) lists family alliances as a defining trait of southern culture.
 20. Gullah dialect for "been here and come here" (Spain 1993).

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