

# A Tale of Two Towns: Black and White Municipalities Respond to Urban Growth in the South Carolina Lowcountry

**Cassandra Y. Johnson**

USDA Forest Service  
320 Green Street  
Athens, GA 30602-2044<sup>1</sup>

**Myron F. Floyd**

Department of Parks, Recreation, and Tourism Management  
North Carolina State University  
Raleigh, NC 27695<sup>2</sup>

## Abstract

*Sea Islands off the South Carolina coast have experienced rapid development rates in the past half century. This trend is now impacting the rural Lowcountry (coastal) near Charleston, SC. A better understanding of traditional rural communities' responses to expanding urbanization is critical because of the obvious threat to the natural environment in rural areas and also because of the potential threat to the culture and value systems held by long-time residents. This exploratory, qualitative study examines the response of two municipalities to growth. Majority black "Newborn" has initiated legislative actions that may encourage growth and is much more receptive to development initiatives. In contrast, mostly white "Seaside Village" is strongly opposed to proposals that may result in development. The bifurcated town responses are theorized in terms of procedural justice and sense of place.*

**Keywords:** urban sprawl, environmental justice, Gullah

## Introduction

From the end of the Civil War until the 1950s, descendants of African slaves (the Gullah people) were the primary inhabitants of South Carolina's Sea Islands (Pollitzer 1999). Now, islands such as Hilton Head and Kiawah have been developed into popular tourist destinations replete with recreation amenities geared toward the affluent resident and vacationer. Both the Gullah people and their culture on these islands have all but vanished as population increase from outside the region and urban development have transformed many of these once remote islands (Blockson 1987; Halfacre et al. 2001; Hart et al. 2004; Singleton 1982; Woods 2002).<sup>3</sup> In 1982 Emory Campbell, director of the Penn Center Gullah

cultural organization on St. Helena Island, remarked, "We [Gullah people] have become the endangered species" (original emphasis) (Singleton 1982).

Similar population and economic pressures have also impacted the rural South Carolina Lowcountry or coastal mainland. Population in the state's eight coastal counties increased by more than 28% from 1990 to 2000 (U.S. Department of Commerce 2002a). To compare, the state's overall population increased only 15% in the same period. Population increases in the largely rural tri-county area (Berkeley, Charleston, and Dorchester Counties) surrounding Charleston stem primarily from in-migration of retirees and others attracted by the amiable climate and relatively lower living costs (Hawkins 1990). A study conducted by the Berkeley-Charleston-Dorchester Council of Government shows that from 1973 to 1994 urban area growth in these three Lowcountry counties increased by 256% (Allen and Lu 2003). The amount of urban area is predicted to triple over the next 30 years in the Charleston region (Allen and Lu 2003).

Despite the potential threat to traditional lifestyles that could result from such growth, the appeal of commercial and residential development remains attractive to leaders of a largely black municipality in the Lowcountry. These elected officials appear willing to accept the possibly negative side effects associated with commercial and/or residential development in return for much needed economic stimulation. Similar to respondents in Lake's (1996, 165) study of McDowell County, West Virginia, black officials in this town strongly maintain that Lowcountry blacks have a right to decide what type of infrastructure and businesses should be added to the local economy.

The governing board of a virtually all-white neighboring municipality, on the other hand, has voiced strong opposition to any initiatives that might encourage sprawl-like growth. Whites cite examples of unchecked growth and dissolution of

community in neighboring areas as reasons not to pursue development friendly activities. References are made specifically to African American communities that have been over-ridden by development.

This paper examines exploratory, qualitative data on these two rural municipalities' responses to proposed urban development and infrastructure. The two towns, majority black "Newborn" and majority white "Seaside Village"<sup>4</sup> are in North Charleston County. This investigation focuses on municipal responses to urban growth initiatives in these two small, southern rural communities. The study is an attempt to better understand underlying reasons for disparate responses by African American and white town leaders. We frame this problem as one involving procedural justice, specifically the attempt by community leaders to make vital decisions about local land use. Sense of place theory also informs this inquiry.

### Urban Growth

Urban growth<sup>5</sup> is a much discussed phenomenon affecting life quality at all points along the rural to urban continuum (Benfield et al. 1999). Though the concept is widely debated, there is a lack of consensus on its characteristics or effects (Lopez and Hynes 2003). Johnson (2001) refers specifically to sprawl and includes the following criteria in his definition: 1) separation of land uses — for instance, residential, shopping, and work in different places; 2) sole reliance on automobile for transportation; 3) growth at periphery of urban areas; 4) homogeneous populations along racial, ethnic, housing, and to some extent class lines; and 5) lack of cooperation among local governments to address negative impacts of unchecked growth.

Lopez and Hynes (2003) add leapfrog development, strip retail development, and loss of greenspace, including rural agricultural lands and peri-urban areas. Ewing (1997) contends that sprawl is not a discrete state but exists in degrees. Like Johnson (2001), he believes it is important to look at the impacts and indicators of sprawl such as how accessible homes are to non-residential functions like shopping and employment.

In a report issued by the U.S. Forest Service on the condition of southern forests, Wear (2002, 153) discusses the negative impact of urban expansion on the South's forests: "[u]rbanization...will strongly influence changes in land use during the next twenty years. Urbanization will continue to consume forest land and agricultural land..." Kolankiewicz and Beck (2001, 15) describe more general effects of unchecked growth on the natural environment:

*[s]prawl has contributed directly to the degradation and decline and fragmentation of natural habitats*

*such as wetlands and woodlands, and this 'habitat encroachment' is also implicated in the demise of hundreds of species of wildlife now listed as threatened or endangered by federal and state governments.*

The Sierra Club (1998) also lists the effects of sprawl, which include traffic congestion, longer commutes, lowered air quality, loss of agricultural, forest, and wetlands, and increased taxes. In sum, each of these definitions and assessments of sprawl emphasize less than efficient or sustainable land uses.

Alternatively, Gordon and Richardson (1997) argue that "compact cities" where high density development is mandated (in contrast to lower density "sprawled cities") represent inefficient land use planning because of the government-controlled, top down process by which such planning is effected. Among other things, Gordon and Richardson (1997) charge that consumer preferences for roomier living space such as that afforded by low density, suburban development should be given high priority in land planning decisions. They argue that the continental U.S. contains an ample supply of undeveloped and agricultural land and central city revitalization projects are costly and inefficient relative to suburban development.

Hayward (1998) also argues for a hands-off, laissez-faire approach to urban growth. He criticizes "liberal," centralized governments and sustainability initiatives such as "smart growth." These stifle economic activity and engender a climate of doom with respect to available greenspace. According to Hayward (1998) the totality of urban and suburban development accounts for less than 5% of the entire land area in the contiguous U.S. Kahn (2001) also makes a case for urban development with data from the 1997 Housing Survey. Data indicate that sprawl increases the home ownership rate for African Americans because of reductions in real estate prices at the urban fringe.

As indicated, there has been considerable debate about the impact of sprawl on plant and wildlife habitats and the social inequities created when lower income minorities are left in central city districts to deal with problems that typically accompany big city life (Ewing 1994, 1997). However, there is less information comparing racial group perceptions of sprawl in receiving communities. Faulkenberry et al. (2000), Falk (2003), and Freitag (1994) address this issue with case studies of minority and low income group responses to tourism development and land use change. In each instance, marginalized groups were excluded from decisions about development initiatives and consequently reaped little benefit from new economic activity. The most socioeconomically disadvantaged sub-groups in these communities had little or no decision-making authority regarding natural resource use.

Environmental injustices existed in these communities with respect to representative decision-making about the land.

Environmental justice scholarship typically discusses environmental toxins and hazardous facilities and how these are distributed disproportionately in poor and low income minority communities. However, environmental justice can be extended to include procedural processes involving community decisions about the production of environmental benefits and liabilities — for instance, decisions about whether a landfill should be allowed in a community, choices concerning the provision of neighborhood parks, or active participation in decisions about land development (Floyd and Johnson 2002; Taylor 2000).

Lake (1996) maintains that environmental justice should be considered in terms of the right of community self-determination and autonomy. Procedural justice, as a more fundamental component of environmental justice, has to do with fair representation of the poor and minorities in decisions about not only where to distribute environmental goods or threats after they have been produced by others but also representative participation in decisions about the nature and quantity of both environmental outputs. We address urban expansion from the perspective of procedural justice, that is, active popular participation in decisions about land use and growth. Both Newborn and Seaside Village have developed political and economic strategies to effect procedural justice in their respective towns.

The sense of place literature also provides perspective on this issue. Sense of place focuses on meanings individuals and social groups assign to physical locations (Stedman 2003; Williams and Stewart 1998). In this literature, researchers have theorized about how place meanings and landscapes are socially constructed from interpersonal experiences (Eisenhauer et al. 2000; Greider and Garkovich 1994), collective memory (Johnson 1998) and symbolic languages and discourse among people (Stokowski 2002).

It is generally recognized that because landscapes and environment are socially constructed, a diversity of meanings can be associated with a single locale or landscape (Greider and Garkovich 1994). As a result, sense of place research also brings attention to the contested nature of landscape meanings. The coexistence of multiple place meanings, which are not always compatible, invites questions about the social and political consequences of multiple versions of place realities (Stokowski 2002; Yung et al. 2003). Inquiry along these lines highlight ways power and local politics can be used to legitimate claims related to place definition (e.g., Pred 1984; Soja 1989; Vandergeest and DuPuis 1996).

The sense of place literature complements the environmental justice perspective in two respects. First, it suggests that underlying the differences in opinions about growth and

development between black and white municipalities are divergent conceptions of desired realities. Second, divergent views about development are being contested and negotiated against a backdrop of historical divisions and power imbalances between blacks and whites.

## Newborn Controversy

Newborn was incorporated in 1992 in response to the urban expansion that was rapidly making its way northward from metropolitan Charleston. Rural residents in the then unincorporated rural area feared their community would be consumed by the upscale development that had transformed nearby Charming City (pseudonym) into a suburban bedroom city of Charleston. Newborn's incorporation in 1992 was considered a wise decision by other rural communities in the Lowcountry because it seemed a pro-active response to urban encroachment. The town is located within 8.6 square miles (about 5,500 acres) along a major U.S. highway.

The 2000 census estimated the town's population at 1,195 residents, 64.6% African American and 34.4% white. At the time of data collection, nearly all municipal leaders in Newborn, mayor and town council members, were African American. The city planner, who holds an un-elected position, was the only white member holding a leadership or planning position in the town. All current municipal leaders are African American.

In 1997, Newborn citizens passed a referendum to establish municipal water. This decision was based on the popular perception that many poor blacks have contaminated wells. Support for the water system was reinforced with a 1999 report issued by a community-based environmental group. The group conducted an assessment of rural, upper Charleston County and reported that "substandard housing, lack of safe water and sanitation" were critical threats for many area residents (Seewee to Santee Economic Forum 1999). Residents reported that sewage from poorly constructed septic systems was contaminating well water.<sup>6</sup>

There were concerns, however, from white residents that installing a public water system would attract aggressive developers.<sup>7</sup> The town's mostly black leadership took the position that growth, whether commercial, residential, or industrial would benefit the town's small economic base. They also reasoned that publicly managed, natural reserves in the area would buffer extensive development.

Over the next several years, Newborn government took further steps that would seem to encourage urban development. In 1999 plans were publicized for construction of the water distribution system. Two years later, Newborn announced plans to hold a referendum on implementation of a sewer system but canceled plans for doing so because of the

controversy surrounding the decision.

Concurrent with the decision to hold a sewer referendum, Newborn government officials were approached by a developer proposing to convert 1,500 acres adjacent to the town into a resort-style, high density, upscale suburban development which included private residences, office and commercial space, and an 18-hole golf course. Asking prices for residential lots were to average \$85,000 to \$100,000. To compare, median housing values in Newborn are \$78,000. Citizens were aware that Newborn's proposed water and sewer lines would service this development. Lowcountry residents voiced growing concern that Newborn officials would compromise the town's integrity by allowing such a construction, especially since Newborn had been incorporated to avoid this type of development.

Growth opponents were further alarmed when Newborn annexed 749 acres of the 1,500 acre tract intended for suburban development in late 2001. Only after a considerable amount of public opposition did owners of the property decide against the resort development. In 2002, Newborn also proposed implementation of municipal property taxes to help pay for proposed spending increases. Newborn town council sidetracked the plan when a small but vocal group of residents opposed the tax plan.

Upper Charleston County offers relatively few gainful employment opportunities for working class or poorer residents. The census defined industry category "education, health, and social services" employs the greatest number of workers in both Newborn (21%) and Seaside Village (27%). Fewer residents work in natural resource related industries — agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting or mining (2.1% Newborn and 13% Seaside Village).

### Seaside Village

Seaside Village is about ten miles northeast of Newborn. The town was incorporated sometime between 1858 and 1859. It is described as a charming, southern fishing village with a long and distinguished history dating back to a Native American community. Seaside Village has 459 total residents; 92.6% are white and 7.4% black. Most residents are either middle-aged or older families who have lived in the town for a long period. Seaside Village proper is surrounded by predominantly rural, unincorporated African American communities that have a Seaside Village mailing address but are not included within town limits.

A commercial fishing business has been the primary employer in town for many years, although the owner, who is the town's mayor, says declining fish populations and competition from foreign markets have weakened business. The company employs 15 full-time employees and indirectly sup-

ports 40 families in Seaside Village. The business grosses six to seven million dollars annually according to the business' owner, Mayor Cleveland of Seaside Village. The business acts as a clearing house for the catch brought in by shrimp boat operators. The mayor no longer wishes to maintain the business and instead is encouraging the fishermen to form a cooperative where they would take over the processing and marketing of the shrimp. Aside from the shrimp business, there are few other businesses that employ a significant number of workers. Most area residents commute to one of the larger cities to either the south or north for work.

In contrast to Newborn officials, Seaside Village's governing body is strongly opposed to any type of development that would detract from the town's rural character. Large, commercial developers have not approached town leaders with plans to develop properties, although the town plans to construct a commercial area which would provide small, non-chain store type services such as a grocery store or bank. In 2000 plans were announced for development of a "commercial corridor" project on the federal highway that borders Seaside Village, but town leaders were careful to stipulate that the development be compatible with the naturalness and architecture of Seaside Village.

### Methods

The study region encompasses an area of about 308 square miles in upper Charleston County, South Carolina. This area includes two towns, Newborn and Seaside Village, and several unincorporated communities adjacent to these towns.<sup>8</sup> This part of Charleston County contains abundant natural resources that are protected and managed by both federal and state agencies. The percentage of the population below poverty in this part of the county (16.9%) is commensurate with the rest of the county (16.4%) (U.S. Department of Commerce 2002b). But the poverty rate for African Americans is about six times higher than for whites (23.5% and 4%, respectively) (U.S. Department of Commerce 2002b).

Data sources are 45 newspaper articles from Charleston's *The Post and Courier*. These articles appeared from October 1998 through September 2004. *The Post and Courier* was the only newspaper we could find that covered this issue. Articles were selected based on their relevance to the Newborn controversy or to land use changes in upper Charleston County in general. Five articles also discussed problems associated with heir's property in rural South Carolina. This type of landownership is common among African Americans and has implications for long term land use planning.

Newspaper articles were analyzed using content analysis (Babbie 2004, 314-324). Articles were read initially to determine underlying themes that differentiated African Ameri-

can and white responses to development. Themes that appeared most often across the articles were selected as the primary themes. Primary themes contained a number of related words or indicators that referenced a larger issue. For instance, the primary theme “drinking water and sewage disposal” could include these exact words or more general descriptors such as “infrastructure,” “potable water source,” or “drilled wells.” A matrix was constructed to organize the thematic categories. The matrix cross-referenced key themes with the 45 articles.

The first author also collected data from 12 individuals representing governmental, educational, and environmental leadership positions in the study area. Initial respondents were selected as informants because they had either voiced concern regarding area development or were viewed as community leaders. Non-probability, “snowball” sampling was used to identify subsequent respondents. Initial respondents were asked to recommend other informed area residents who might participate in the research project. Interviews were conducted in September and October 2002 and in April 2003.

These in-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted using a questionnaire developed by the first author. The purpose of these interviews was to elicit data that would expound upon press coverage of municipal response to proposed development (support for improvements in community infrastructure and commercial and residential growth) and to uncover issues not contained in press reports. Study participants were asked about Newborn and Seaside Village government views on development, their personal history (e.g., where they grew up, length of time in area, occupation), community strengths and weaknesses, citizen involvement in a locally based environmental and community development group, race relations in the area, and their personal perception of development in the area. Respondents were also encouraged to expound upon topics not raised by the interviewer.

Eight interviews were conducted face-to-face and four by telephone. The final four interviews were conducted by telephone because financial constraints precluded face-to-face interviewing. Three women and nine men were interviewed. Four informants were African American, and eight were white. Informant ages ranged from the late 30s to late 60s. Pseudonyms are used to protect respondent anonymity. Interview length averaged one hour.

Interview data contain responses from more whites than African Americans, and also more males are represented than females. Thus, the data are more representative of the views of these groups. This is a common limitation of non-probability sampling.

Interview data were analyzed with cross-case content analysis (Patton 1990, 371-459). Similar to the newspaper data, these data were also organized by thematic headings.

The interview material was read initially to determine pertinent thematic categories and then read repeatedly to assign excerpted text to the relevant themes. This data source allowed for verification of the newspaper themes.

## Results

Both press reports and individuals interviewed for this project remarked that support for urban development was divided along racial lines. This was said to be the case both within Newborn and between the towns of Newborn and Seaside Village (predominantly white Seaside Village compared to predominantly black Newborn). An article in Charleston's *The Post and Courier* dated August 2002 emphasized the racial divisions within Newborn concerning support for growth propositions:

*Town meetings have not been particularly pleasant affairs during the past two years. For the most part, white residents have opposed having public water and sewer systems because they feared it would cost too much, make [Newborn] more attractive for suburban-style development and possibly force out some long-term residents. They also opposed the annexation because the Georgia-based developer was proposing a Hilton Head-style development that was out of character with [Newborn]. Generally, blacks supported the council's action on those issues. Some expressed resentment over what they perceived as newer residents or [Newborn] residents living outside town boundaries trying to dictate the town's future....Whites seemed to be opposed to property taxes, new staff positions and pay raises. While some blacks initially questioned the budget, most attending meetings either ended up supporting it or were noticeably quiet.*

Also, Kai (white), a 39 year-old engineer with a local utility, remarked on different positions taken by African Americans and whites at a Newborn town council meeting he attended:

*There were...the audience was full of people. It was almost all white. All the white people in the audience opposed the developments. The handful of blacks in the audience never said a word.... You can't dispute when you go to a meeting, all the people opposing [development] are whites. All the people for are black or all the people just not saying anything other than a couple (laughs) are black. You know, I can't ignore that.*

We submit that the four themes identified below con-

tribute to the bifurcated stances taken by African American and white citizens, and that these issues are also reflected in the municipal responses of Newborn and Seaside Village governments regarding development. Combined data sources revealed four key themes or issues that differentiated African American and white responses to development: 1) resident need for sanitary drinking water (by means of a public water system) and sewage disposal; 2) heir's property; 3) black church hegemony; and 4) lack of African American stewardship and engagement with natural resources.

The first two themes were prominent in both newspaper reports and interviews. Twenty-one or roughly 47% of press reports referenced public water and sewer, and all interviewees made statements about this issue. Five articles were devoted entirely to the problem of heir's property. Six interviewees discussed the heir's property dilemma. The third issue was referenced in four press reports but more strongly in personal interviews. Four respondents discussed this problem at length. The remaining theme emerged from interviews. Three informants emphasized the relevance of African American engagement with natural resources to the current land use controversy.

### Drinking Water and Sewage Disposal

One of the most pressing issues in this rural area is the perception that the water is not safe to consume. Respondents remarked that water contamination worsened after Hurricane Hugo in 1989 because of the uprooting and scattering of wooded matter and debris. There is also concern that sewage disposal systems may cause health problems for some poorer residents (Trident United Way 2003). The region's low, flat topography causes drainage from improperly located septic tanks or other on-site sewage disposal systems to contaminate surface and groundwater, the primary sources for well water. These wells may be dug too shallowly or too close to on-site septic systems.

Water and sewage disposal are especially problematic for African Americans because blacks, compared to whites, are more likely to have improperly dug wells or sewage removal systems. According to the United Way regional health assessment, improper sewage removal is a typical factor in health problems related to contaminated drinking water. The assessment states that the most reliable drinking water source is a public system or properly drilled wells (Trident United Way 2003).

In 2001, Newborn requested Charming City Water Works to test 16 wells in Newborn in response to resident complaints about contaminated water. Lab results showed that three of the 16 wells in Newborn had unacceptably high fecal coliform counts. Coliform is bacteria found in warm-blooded animals, so the contaminant could have originated

with humans (fecal matter or other household sewage) or with some other animal species. Proponents of the municipal water system in Newborn point to these results as a clear indication of widespread water contamination, while opponents assert the opposite. Wells in the region also contain relatively high levels of sulfur dioxide and iron oxide. These chemicals create premature rust in sewer and plumbing equipment and taint clothing a reddish color.

As stated, Newborn residents passed a referendum in 1997 allowing the town to provide public water. This was viewed as undesirable mostly by white residents because they felt such infrastructure would attract developers. Again, nearly half the press reports mentioned the problem of drinking water and proper sewage removal in upper Charleston County. The articles begin with a 1999 story describing Newborn's efforts to secure water from Charming City and subsequently from a neighboring county. Over the course of time, Charming City decided not to supply water because of concerns about unchecked growth in the Newborn area. Newborn officials, however, were adamant about the water system. A 2003 article, in particular, stressed that Newborn politics were divided racially over the water dilemma because blacks were more likely to believe their wells were contaminated."

*The effort [to provide municipal water] has been a subject of controversy during the past year that has been divided mostly along racial lines. The all-black council and many black residents supported the water system because many wells don't provide safe drinking water.*

Many white residents opposed the water extension because they feared it would spark more suburban development of the now-rural landscape. They argued that the town could solve the drinking water problem with less money by focusing on individual wells.

Survey participants were more candid about black/white differences in access to clean water and proper sewage removal. All survey participants discussed the drinking water and sewer problems, especially differences between African American and white access to sanitary water and proper sewers. Maria, an elementary school principal who is African American, talked about the formation of a grassroots, environmentally-based, community improvement group of which she is a member. She says that when the group formed in 1997, whites in the group were surprised to learn about contaminated water in black households and of the substandard housing in which many blacks lived. Maria elaborates on the general black support for municipal water in the study area:

*We talked about our separate communities. There were a lot of things that the uh, white community*

did not know about the needs of the black, and so we opened their eyes to a lot of stuff like uh, bacteria in the water. Lots of our kids did not have bathrooms and stuff like that. They just couldn't believe it...It has always been known that the African American community wanted more development, and that was what we have to still get out to the African American community. Having more development doesn't necessarily mean the quality of life is going to change because we figure, "oh, if we get water pumped in here, it's gon' solve our bathroom problems, our septic problems, what have you." It's not that simple.... We just felt, a majority of the blacks felt that once water is pumped in here, our, our problems will be solved, and so, that, I think people realized that if developers come in and manufacturers come in, the blacks are gonna say: "Yea! By all means." Because we feel that it would, would raise the quality of our lives. But we haven't looked at what was happening.

Mayor Tucker, Newborn's African American mayor, stresses that poor quality water is an on-going problem in Newborn. He remarks that because black citizens in Newborn are not as well off economically as whites, they are less able to afford properly dug wells. The mayor believes that strong support among black voters enabled passage of the water referendum. Kai, the engineer, suspects the "real" reason the public water system was introduced by Newborn officials is because they envision aggressive growth plans for the town. He stresses that the public water and sewer system would provide the necessary infrastructure for high density residential and commercial development. He is also concerned that some of the poorer residents may not be able to afford monthly water bills.

Eddie is a 64 year-old retired detective who grew up in the northern-most end of the study area, in an all-black community adjacent to Seaside Village. He moved to New York at age 18 and lived most of his adult life there. Eddie and his wife Rose moved back to South Carolina and built a home in the still all-black community in which he was reared. Both Eddie and Rose are very active in the community as volunteers. Eddie is a volunteer firefighter and a deacon at a local church. His community also does not have a public water system. He says that a similar referendum for water service that was to be piped in from a neighboring city was rejected by Seaside Village residents. Eddie attributes the rejection to white residents in Seaside Village who feared municipal water would promote development.

*So, when that first came up, to run the line from [Williamsville] all the way down here to, to the*

*county, where it end down here at [Southside River], right. And they already had it set up, but the people voted against it. There was a vote against it and the reason why they voted against it was because they didn't want big business to come in.... Specially the white folks [voted against water] 'cause see a lot of black folks still does [sic] not vote, you know that. A lot of them still, in this community, a lot of them still do not vote! And see the white folks, they vote and their thing is "Hey, let me keep [Charming City] into [Charming City], don't want them to come down here." Because see [Charming City] got problems 'cause they developed so fast and they couldn't control the growth. Then the growth got out of hand. Now, [Newborn] gon' be the next. 'Cause [Newborn] done set up their own little town. So, you see [Newborn] can annex the water from [Charming City].*

When Eddie is reminded that Newborn plans to establish its own public water system he responds:

*Which would be ideal because now when you set up your own system, you know, you control it.... But a lot of people had that, "Oh, if you put that line in then growth come in and whatever have you.... We can't control it, whatever." But it would have been a good thing.*

Eddie also says his brother and other family members strongly supported the water line. Eddie supports commercial development, even chain store type commercialization such as McDonald's or Wal-Mart because he feels these large chains could offer competitive pricing and employment to teens and other working class community members. He doubts, however, that such businesses would locate in his part of the county because whites who own most of the property in the area feel threatened by development.

Thomas, a retired heavy equipment operator, lives in another all-black community near Seaside Village. He has lived in or around the area his entire life. Thomas is also a volunteer firefighter, and he heads the summer lunch program for school age children. During his interview, he stressed that the most pressing concern for his community was the need for safe drinking water. His family buys bottled water from a distributor in another county. He felt strongly that the area needed a municipal water system to redress the water problem. This alternative was preferred to on-site filters because he believed filters provided only a temporary solution.

Thomas also strongly supports commercial development in the area and admires the growth plans advanced by Newborn. He stresses that it is the responsibility of older generations to initiate economic and social improvements so that

younger generations can have a better life quality. When asked whether he thought development would increase taxes, he replied that he owned no taxable land and that prices would continue to rise regardless of improvements in the local infrastructure. He also admitted that he had not considered whether or not he could afford the monthly cost of a municipal water bill. His main objective was to see the system installed.

*That's what I want if, if the water come in, if people want to build, set up stores or filling stations, or fast food restaurant, that's good. That community is growing. You've got more people coming in. And it has to be growing.*

*Well, there are some people don't, don't want anything...if you want something for you ah, grand kid them to come behind you, to look after, if you don't get it, they gon' be steppin' in the same shoes. They gon' have the same trouble that I having now. Tryin' to get that, that water...*

Mayor Cleveland (white) of Seaside Village admits that Seaside Village residents also have problems with water and sewage; but again, his response differs remarkably from that of Mayor Tucker and the two blacks who live adjacent to Seaside Village. Similar to Kai, Cleveland believes these problems can be alleviated with options such as filters. He also feels the installation of public water and sewer would set the stage for aggressive developers to come in and “pick apart” the town’s zoning ordinances. These ordinances were put in place to thwart urban-style development. Martha (white), Seaside Village’s zoning administrator echoes his sentiments:

*Right, we don't have, uh, city water or sewer yet, we just have septic tanks and uh, wells, individual well. And of course, there are pluses and minuses associated with that, too, but, uh, the majority of residents within town [Seaside Village], right now, seem to indicate they don't want to get water and sewer because, uh, rapid development usually follows that so quickly, you know...And development on smaller parcels and everything, and we would like to avoid that.*

Both African American and white responses demonstrate human agency and specific measures taken to bring about procedural justice. With respect to African American interests, Eddie, the retired detective, talks about black political apathy but also refers to the need for a community to control its water supply. Newborn’s Mayor Tucker also spoke with confidence about the black vote ratifying the water referendum in Newborn. And Thomas, the retired heavy equipment

operator, stressed the urgency of the black community acquiring a reliable water source so that subsequent generations would not have this concern. Each response emphasized community decision-making, the black community taking responsibility and authority for providing potable water. White respondents — Mayor Cleveland, Martha, and Kai — also expressed agency in establishing a safe water supply, but their responses centered on individualistic solutions (filters fitted to particular wells) rather than a collective, state-sponsored reply.

Response differences may relate to a variety of cultural or structural factors. Again, because whites are more economically secure, they are better able than blacks to afford reliable filtering systems. Also, as Thomas suggested and Mayor Tucker alluded to in his interview, African Americans may perceive this effort in terms of a political struggle, safe water being a right to which poor, African Americans are entitled. Taken in this light, it follows that blacks would respond collectively through political action and seek a solution that provides equitable benefits for all community members.

### Heir's Property

In the mid-1990s, the state of South Carolina required all incorporated and unincorporated places to formulate comprehensive land use plans. This was part of an effort to preserve rural land in unincorporated parts of rural counties by lowering development density. At the time the plans were formulated, the county developed a comprehensive plan for Newborn because the town did not have the staff to do so. Newborn later rejected the county-provided plan because of zoning regulations associated with it that restricted lot sizes. The town government established an independent planning commission that produced a land use plan specific to the town. According to Kai, town leaders were concerned that the county-imposed zoning regulations would no longer permit higher density, “heir’s property” subdivisions. Traditionally, there have been few or no restrictions on either the size of individual lots or the number of lots that could be subdivided on heir’s property.

Heir’s property or tenancy in common (Mitchell 2001) became prevalent among African Americans when the freedmen purchased or were deeded land after slavery. They commonly treated the land as communal property within the family. In such cases, land is passed to subsequent generations without having been probated, so there is no clear cut deed specifying exact ownership.<sup>9</sup>

Mitchell (2001) estimates that 41% of African American-owned land in the Southeast can be classified as heir’s property. This system of landownership is also very prevalent in the South Carolina Lowcountry. Press reports estimate that “[t]housands of acres of Lowcountry land is heirs’

property, particularly in black communities” (Menchaca 2002, np).

Area residents and community interest groups fear that heir’s property may be more attractive to developers because of a recent court ruling. In this case, one family member not living on the land wanted to sell her land interest, but the extended clan could not resolve internal disputes about land division and a selling price. After six years of haggling, a court ordered the family to sell its 17 acres for a price offered by a willing buyer. Profits were distributed among the heirs according to ownership interests. The buyer then advertised a sale price for the land at three times the amount paid for it.

Five articles were found relating to heir’s property, dating from December 2000 to September 2002 (Bartelme 2000, 2001, 2002). These articles were not specific to Newborn but addressed the issue generally in the Lowcountry. The articles all emphasized that African American-owned land was more vulnerable to loss because of communal ownership and increasing land values in the area.

Both Bobbie (white), a mental health professional, and Maria, the school principal, believe the recent court case increased the likelihood of property being sold because it illustrated weaknesses in individual owners’ rights associated with heir’s property. Bobbie also remarked that because of the extreme poverty faced by some who reside on heir’s property, residents would be more willing to sell because of the immediate profit realization.

*So, basically, with this [shows newspaper clipping of court case], what we’re saying is that the vulnerability of the property being chopped up has increased.... People know that first of all they can. They can sell it. And secondly, they, they’re living in conditions that are uh, with no opportunity. Conditions that no one would want to live in. Uh, and they don’t have any opportunity of themselves to improve that...and so, they want to leave. They just have not been able to sell it in the past. Because first of all you couldn’t get clear title. The people weren’t that interested in buying it. Well now you got all that cleared up.*

Adam (white), a businessman, also stressed that in some cases one of the dire effects of an heir’s property sale could be displacement rather than economic advancement of poor blacks. Residents involved may be dispossessed not only of their traditional home place but also of options for future home ownership because proceeds received by individual owners may not suffice to purchase a new home.

Mark (white), a retired researcher and environmental advocate, also said that rural landowners who sell may have no other options except public housing.

*If you got 20 heirs to, to ah, a ten acre plot, 20 acre plot that gets sold for five thousand dollars an acre ah, you know, you don’t have near enough to replace your home. You had a subsistence life on there, picked up jobs where you could find ’em. Ah, ah, not had much opportunity to, to, to develop skills other than what could be passed on by, by your relatives... and so ah...you’re the new housing project material.*

Salvador (white), a horticulturalist, has written grant proposals with teachers at the predominantly black Seaside Village high school in an effort to fund an environmental education program. In working with the students, he stresses that black-owned land is especially vulnerable to development because educated blacks want to move away.

*If you get a little bit of education, right? Why do you want to stay there? You’re not gonna want to stay there. So if they move out, what’s gonna come in? Not another black family, not another poor black family. Development. They’re gonna say “look at that beautiful land that they’re living on. I could get it for a song.” You know, and they’ll buy it up. They’ll buy up the whole damn thing, and then there goes development. You know, they’ll take all these little individual lots that people own or they’re heirs to, whatever you want to call it, you know, and make it one nice big lot. And now we can put development there.*

Heir’s property did not arise as an issue in interviews with Seaside Village whites, but Eddie, the retired detective, alludes generally to the control Seaside Village whites have with respect to property ownership and development. These statements contrast sharply with those earlier describing the possibility of black land loss.

*...But, see the white folks own most of the land if you look at it. You riding down there, they got them little plantations back up in there. They own them, you know. Don’t forget, they get a break from paying their taxes and all that. So, they’re, they’re the ones that if they don’t sell, then they know it [development] can’t happen, right.... But the majority of the white folks, they don’t want it because they want to keep the rural character just the way it is....*

He went on to say:

*The problem that I have is that the people that, that in control of the whole thing, they the one that gon’ put the kibosh on it...squash it. ’Cause they the ones that have the money. They the ones that have the property.... ’Cause see like [Seaside Village],*

*the, the mayor own ah, own most of the land in [Seaside Village].*

Before land in coastal South Carolina was highly valued, the legal status of heir's property was actually a hindrance to sales. But as demand increased for natural area amenities, so too has pressure increased to find ways of converting available land to developed uses. Clearly, heir's property status can undermine African Americans' ability to attain procedural justice, in terms of land use decisions. If blacks, as a collective, do not own significant acreage, they have less of a voice in decisions about how land should be used. Black respondents in Faulkenberry et al. (2000) also lamented the loss of political power that accompanies land conversion.

Not only is there a loss of physical land and political influence when land ownership transfers from the black community, but also the disappearance of cultural practices associated with the land. This includes subsistence activities that have sustained black Lowcountry communities for generations (Falk 2003; Faulkenberry et al. 2000). The loss of both the material and non-material aspects of black Lowcountry culture reflects the dissolution of sense of place and with it, felt identity<sup>10</sup> relating to the area. There is some evidence to suggest that when people willingly migrate to other places, they readily adapt to their new surroundings (Cuba and Hummon 1993). However, when they are displaced or do not have the means (whether economically, socially, or spatially) to recreate a comparable sense of place, their felt identity may suffer (Milligan 2003).

### **Black Church Hegemony**

The traditional black church is still very influential in most parts of the rural South. The church not only serves a spiritual role in the lives of its members, but just as importantly, the church is involved in secular activities, especially politics. Day (2001) stresses that the black church differs from white mainstream churches in that the former makes less distinction between church and state. A ready example is the active role assumed by the church in the civil rights era. In many rural areas, the black church is virtually synonymous with local politics. The pastor and deacons act as spokespersons for the black community in civic and political affairs. Respondents indicated that Mayor Tucker plays such a role in Newborn. He is both the town's mayor and a minister of one of the AME [African Methodist Episcopal] churches. Other influential town council members are also members of local churches. While these associations may be the norm in many small towns, the conflation of the mayor's dual roles appeared to cause concern for some whites interviewed for this study. Both Mark, a retired researcher, and Nelson, a 51 year-old planner for Charming City, saw inherent conflict of interest between Mayor Tucker's position as mayor and his

religious role. Mark and Nelson stressed that African Americans are reluctant to challenge policies supported by Tucker because of the mayor's status in the community as both a mayor and a minister. Mark states that Newborn government is controlled "100% by the AME church." Mark stressed that he is not anti-church but is offended at churches "taking a political position in ignorance."

*Well, I think...the general citizenry has been pretty much dependent upon ah, the ministers of the AME Church to represent them, to be their advocates, to be their guidance. That's what I see as, as the government, so to speak, of the people of this area. ...And ah, and I trust completely that those, that those church leaders feel sincerely that bringing in this infrastructure is essential to improving the plight of a group that is suffering from a lack of services and for lack of economic opportunities.... So, what I see is, a well-meaning, a well-meaning approach or a well-meaning ah, leadership that does not understand what this development is going to do. They do not understand that, that the people that need these services and need these economic opportunities will be, will suffer the most if those are brought on board in the manner that they are being brought on board.*

*I think that generally the black community that ... support, ah the, church leaders..., I think...are totally convinced, all of them are convinced that ah, this infrastructure is...the way to go.... Of that segment [black community] that supports the government in power, they all support ah the, this infrastructure because that's what their leadership tells them to do. Not because they understand it.*

Mark lived in a predominantly African American neighborhood in Charleston where he felt residents were forced out by what he called neighborhood "homogenization," — a process whereby affluent whites moved to the neighborhood, housing prices increased, and blacks were no longer able to afford the taxes on their homes and were obliged to sell. Mark believes that the installation of a public water system and sewer in Newborn would eventually lead to the same sort of displacement of African Americans from the rural area.

Newborn's Mayor Tucker also admitted that blacks are reluctant to publicly voice their opinions on proposals for the infrastructure during forums at the town hall. It is generally assumed that most blacks favor commercial development in some form. However, the exactness of this supposition is difficult to gauge given that a considerable number of blacks do not voice an opinion on the issue. Nelson, the Charming City planner, ran for a city council seat in 2002 but lost to the

black incumbent. While campaigning, he said he met some blacks who did not agree with the mayor and council's plans for growth and development in Newborn, but they did not assert a contrary opinion because they were intimidated by both the mayor and local churches. When asked about the kind of intimidation, he responded:

*Ah, I think there's just sort of a thought that, that they need to stick together. And in fact, I'm certain of it. Ah, there was a, when the mayor saw that what we were putting, the effort we were putting into this [campaign] and ah, that we were very serious, we spent some money, put signs up, sent flyers, mail outs to all the people. Ah, went door to door. We, we really embarked upon a campaign that, that [Newborn] had never seen before. Ah, it was organized and we worked hard. He [Mayor Tucker], ah, he sent a flyer out to all the AME churches saying you know, "Don't sit back, that these white guys are working hard and they could really win. Don't take this for granted just because you know, there are more black folks up here. You need to get out and vote." And he actually invited them to a, ah, ah, a church function to talk about the candidates and said he would tell more, tell the true story or something to that effect at the meeting.*

The correspondence Nelson refers to is included in a *Post and Courier* article:

*A few weeks ago, [Tucker] sent a notice to 'Our Pastors, Their Members and our Citizens At Large,' saying: 'Please, Please, Please, as James Brown says, make sure you vote for [Bill Cox and Debra Turner]. We can't afford to take this election for granted.' [Tucker] also urged attendance at a meeting at [Grace] AME Church because, he said, 'Everything that should be said can't be said in this notice.' He signed it, 'Yours in the struggle.'*

Nelson said he tried to attend this meeting, but when he got to the church, he ran into the town council president (also a church member) and was told by her that no such meeting was taking place. Nelson doubted her claim but felt that he could not challenge her. Nelson said Newborn's powerful black officials take the position that town residents (both black and white) are "either with us or against us" on the municipal water issue. According to Nelson, the Mayor likens the infrastructure controversy to civil rights issues, which the mayor was involved in during the 1960s. Nelson felt such a characterization constructs the situation as one involving racial politics when actually the problem is more one of economic inequity.

According to a press report, the only white town council member, a woman, vacated her seat in the 2002 election because of racial strife surrounding development issues. This council member supported the two white candidates who lost the election but voiced her opinion about the town's black leadership. She is quoted as saying the two white candidates will "think for themselves....It's the truth and it's eating at me....People are tired of having a dictatorship, and it's about time our town gets its priorities in perspective...."

Maria, the elementary school principal, also criticized the area's black churches. She believes they ignore the material needs of poor blacks. Maria contended that the church leadership asserts control over parishioners by discouraging higher educational attainment:

*The black churches, in this community, have contributed little, if any, towards the betterment of the people in this community. And they'll probably get very upset with me for saying that, but it is the honest truth. And nothing, or very little to [a grassroots community group]. Absolutely nothing, NOTHING! Zilch, zero!...*

*I was the only person who took a stand, wrote a letter to all of the trustees, and to the minister and say to him: There's no way I can support the building of \$100,000 house for him as a parsonage when I knew the housing situation here was so bad....I said out of that \$100,000, we could have built ten houses through Habitat [for Humanity] 'cause you only need \$10,000. They ignored me, they were so angry with me because I spited the minister.*

*Not only are they that little involved in community efforts, but in the education of the children around here as well. You seldom go to church and find ministers who really have a strong educational support program for children.... And for the children, to hear you from the pulpit say how important it is to do well in school, so you can be successful, to get the American dream. And I don't hear that. I hear the beating down about it, and I hear throughout the churches, they are against people with nice, a good education.*

Both black and white respondents criticized the role black churches played in the development controversy and black church involvement in the community generally. Also important here is the fact that, as a rule, African Americans and whites worship separately. This is a situation which again highlights social differences between the two populations. (Mayor Tucker mentioned attending a service or ceremony at a local white church, but this seemed confined to a

special occasion.) Because of the still strong influence of rural churches (both black and white) on political and social opinions, it is crucial to consider the implications of separate churches. In such situations, particularly in an area with a history of racial antagonism, it is important to consider how misinformation and biases about the “other” can be perpetuated in a public forum not frequented by racial others.

### **African American Stewardship and Engagement with the Natural Environment**

As indicated, the study area contains diverse ecosystems ranging from undeveloped beaches to forested uplands. These privately and publicly managed outdoor areas provide unique outdoor recreation opportunities for wildland and wildlife interaction. These amenities, however, appear to be perceived differently by members of the African American and white communities. For instance, when asked about community assets, all white respondents answered that the area’s natural resources distinguished the area and were a source of pride. These individuals all stressed that they both enjoyed and wanted to preserve the region’s natural, rural character. The natural environment was one of the primary reasons white respondents either continued to live there or had moved to the area.

Of the black respondents, only Thomas explicitly stated that he enjoyed visiting the natural outdoor areas. Black respondents emphasized that the region’s people were its most valuable asset. But this was conditioned with the caveat that African Americans, for the most part, participated relatively little in political and civic activities.

Salvador, the horticulturalist, stressed that local blacks needed something to engender them to region. Again, he believes blacks have little connection to the region’s natural resources. He fears that if blacks do not develop a stewardship of the area’s natural resources, there is a greater likelihood that they will sell land to developers. Salvador feels that if black students develop an academic interest in the natural environment, this interest might evolve into a sense of personal stewardship and identification with the area’s wild nature. Salvador also addressed the lack of black connection to natural areas when talking about his motivation for trying to obtain funding for environmental education.

*They [black students] never get to go to the forest. They don't even know about these pitcher plant bogs and the uh, the Carolina Basil. Things that are really unique and beautiful about that area. They never get a chance to see it. They don't even know about it...*

When asked why the students do not interact more with the natural areas he responded:

*They're afraid, they're afraid.... I know A: they're afraid of snakes. You know, and so, and their parents are afraid of snakes. And so you don't want to go out in the woods because of snakes. B: what I heard from someone in the Forest Service is that, they've had evidence of wrongdoings in the woods with blacks, you know, and...uh, I don't want to quote that, but I do have information on that....this is very bad, you know, in the '60s, hangings ....things like that so they, the...the parents don't let them.*

Bobbie, the mental health professional, also believes there is a lack of outdoor recreational opportunities in the region for lower income residents. She said that forest and ocean-based recreation involve large expenditures that most low and moderate income locals cannot afford.

Eddie also mentioned that blacks make very little use of forest recreation facilities in the region because of lack of knowledge about facilities in the area. He related that a nearby state park was underutilized by local blacks because they were unaware of the recreation facilities there. He also talked about the absence of blacks on federally managed areas and the lack of recreation facilities in the community.

*Yes, like I said earlier about the park. It's right there, they don't use it. So, other people are using it. You see that ah, right there that, that place we go fishing, the gun club or whatever they call it there. You see mobile homes coming in here, people, boy scouts coming in or whatever have you, where they going? Right down to that club. They set up, it's beautiful down there. They do the cookout, the camping — all white. On a Saturday, you figure they giving something away down there. They be going in there, boom ba boom boom, but you don't see us [blacks]. But we can do the same thing. But we don't. We don't...With all the water here, we ain't got nobody that, that can swim or whatever have you. So there's a lot here that we could, that we need!*

Respondent comments seem to contradict the prevailing idea of Lowcountry African American husbandry towards nature. One of the main criticisms of urban encroachment in this area is that it threatens traditional subsistence activities practiced by blacks, such as fishing and hunting. Our respondents, however, indicate that blacks are not involved in these activities to a great extent. This lack of involvement cannot result from development activities because this area is still primarily rural and forested. There is likely a considerable number of area blacks who participate actively in subsistence or nature based recreation activities, but these indi-

viduals did not participate in this survey because of the non-random nature of respondent selection. The extent to which area residents participate in outdoor recreation and other forms of nature interaction will be central to a subsequent community-wide survey.

## Discussion

In late January 2003, the *Post and Courier* announced that Newborn had been awarded a \$2.2 million federal grant to assist with funding municipal water. This grant, along with \$2.1 million in state funds provided the necessary funding for the system. Also, in summer 2004, Mayor Tucker and black, incumbent town council members retained their seats in a largely unopposed town election. And, as predicted by public water opponents, Newborn appears on the verge of economic expansion. A new gas station and country store opened in Newborn in the spring of 2004. The town's administrator sees the store as the optimistic beginning of commercial development in Newborn.

The added infrastructure, recent elections, and store opening represent a significant accomplishment for the town of Newborn. The water system is a testament to local autonomy for the small municipality, and the low voter turnout in the elections appears to give tacit approval for town leadership. Seaside Village maintains its moderate views on development and its commitment to preserving the town's quaint, rural character. Firm plans on construction of the commercial corridor have not been announced.

The different responses of these municipalities to development — one with a mostly lower-income black constituency and the other with a middle to upper income white citizenry — reflect deep class divisions that are highly correlated with race. As informants indicate, racial differences in support for municipal water should more accurately be framed in terms of socioeconomic differences between blacks and whites. More fundamental is the co-existence of two societies, a black one in desperate need of economic improvement and a white society that is much more economically secure. Yet, race cannot be easily dismissed in this context because of historical patterns of racial inequity, mistrust, and social segregation. We believe these all contribute to Newborn town leaders describing the situation as one of continuing white domination.

Opinions about development also cannot be explained simply as differences between more ecologically minded newcomers versus long-time, utilitarian oriented residents (Smith and Krannich 2000). With the exception of Kai, survey participants from Newborn opposing development were relative newcomers. However, sentiment among long-time informants from Seaside Village was clearly delineated along

racial lines. Long-time whites opposed development, while long-time blacks welcomed it.

Development issues in both Newborn and Seaside Village are primarily about self-rule. The government in Newborn sees as its primary (or most loyal) constituency a marginalized black electorate that stands to benefit from development. In winning the political battle for establishing public water, the black government demonstrated that it has the power to make not only vital decisions about the placement of environmental goods or services (e.g., where a new water system would be located) but also about whether this would be established at all. According to Lake (1996), this type of decision making, the equalization of decisions about environmental and civic production, constitutes true environmental equity.

The victory also served a symbolic function by successfully contesting, challenging, and legitimating claims about place within the local political system. Municipal water will provide safe water for household use in Newborn and perhaps spur development. Beyond these tangible outcomes, however, municipal water represents the collective aspirations of the black community for raising their standard of living and transforming their community into a more desirable place to live.

But a larger question is whether the political authority garnered will result in sustained socioeconomic improvement for poor blacks. The newspaper article reporting the gas station and grocery store opening included comments from a local black patron who appreciated the store's convenience but was also concerned because he saw no black employees working in the store. Political power is not necessarily coupled with economic power.

An important vehicle for expansion of local political power appears to be the black church, particularly the AME church. As discussed, separation of church and state are less pronounced in traditional black communities. Historically, this familiar, uncensored place has provided the foundation for much of black society. Blacks only rarely criticize the church outside the black community. As Nelson observed, this has to do with presenting a united front to the larger society. It also concerns preservation of black sovereignty in at least one sphere, the religious, where whites have no purview. It does not appear likely that blacks who oppose Tucker's position will align with whites against development. To do so would effectively excommunicate blacks from local black society.

Seaside Village leaders also insist on self-determination, but this appears to be based on a different set of priorities. These are concerned mostly with preserving local culture and protecting their unique sense of place. The town has a history, a collective memory of itself as a cohesive unit that can be

traced back to pre-colonial times. Residents can identify specific landmarks and artifacts located within its borders. There is even a museum within the village chronicling white settlement of the town as a refuge for aristocratic plantation owners. One of the state's most applauded poets hails from the area, and many of the town's citizens bear the surnames of town founders. Seaside Villagers boast a proud attachment to these cultural and natural resources. Residents want to preserve this legacy, and they have a level of economic security that permits them to do so.

In contrast, there is no shared history or sense of place of Newborn as a unified municipality. The town does not have a continuous layout but rather is a linear collection of residential and commercial pods. There is no identifiable town center, just the old segregated school house converted to town hall. There is only a generalized rurality, which to unemployed or underemployed African Americans may not be viewed with the same kind of appreciation whites demonstrate. For African Americans, community identity appears more closely associated with family, friendship, and community ties to local churches (Falk 2003).

The residents of Seaside Village appear to share an established sense of place. And opposition to the development was an act to protect what they value about their town. On the other hand, it seems that within Newborn a sense of community around a different set of meanings is emerging, notably around economic development and future prosperity.

African Americans' perception of the natural environment is also crucial to understanding municipal views on development. Interview data suggested a relative lack of black engagement with the area's natural resources. But as Salvador stressed, if blacks do not develop a custodial guardianship of the region's resources, chances may be greater that developers could purchase black owned land.

Black concern for environmental issues and the absence of African Americans in natural resource recreation settings have received a considerable amount of scholarly attention (Hershey and Hill 1978; Jones 1998; Mohai and Bryant 1998; Parker and McDonough 1999). One of the more compelling explanations has to do with the meanings groups attribute to the landscape (Lee 1972). Rural landscapes in the South contain multiple meanings for African Americans. These areas can be benign places where people fish and relax but also contain collective memories of oppression for blacks (for instance, settings where lynchings and exploitative labor occurred) (Johnson and Bowker 2004).

We believe black residents are equally as concerned as whites with environmental quality. However, the dire economic straights of many area blacks and the government's sincere concern for these marginalized citizens make New-

born government more willing to trade ecological benefits for economic ones. The presence of natural amenities represents economic opportunity and prospect for attracting development rather than primarily an environmental legacy that should be left undisturbed. Thomas' statements about adult responsibility to secure basic services and job opportunities for younger generations reflect this idea.

As rural southern areas undergo change and development, responses to change among blacks and whites are likely to vary along race and class lines. Future research needs to explore further underlying factors associated with racial differences in response to urbanization and development. In particular, this work should attempt to understand better how blacks and whites, both historically and contemporarily, experience and draw on rural landscapes for defining personal and collective identities.

## Endnotes

1. Author to whom correspondence should be directed:  
E-mail: [cjohnson09@fs.fed.us](mailto:cjohnson09@fs.fed.us)
2. E-mail: [myron\\_floyd@ncsu.edu](mailto:myron_floyd@ncsu.edu)
3. Some characterize the social and economic transformation of Charleston and the Sea Islands as a reintroduction of "a culture of servitude" because significant numbers of former black landowners have become employed in low-wage service sector jobs in the tourism economy (Faulkenberry et al. 2000).
4. Pseudonyms are used for all place and respondent names.
5. We use the terms "urban growth, expansion, encroachment" and "sprawl" to describe residential, commercial, and or industrial growth occurring in rural or forested areas. Some writers distinguish between growth at the urban fringe and that which happens outside of urban areas (Heimlich and Anderson 2001, 2). We do not make this distinction.
6. The sample size was not given.
7. In support of this contention, Allen and Lu (2003) found that an area's proximity to waterlines and forest areas were significant predictors of urban area growth in other parts of Charleston County.
8. This area is roughly equivalent to the city of Charleston's East County Planning Area, with a total of 5,091 residents. Sixty-four percent are black and 35% white (Berkeley-Charleston-Dorchester Council of Governments 2002).
9. According to Pollitzer (1999), such ownership in common is reminiscent of African cultural practices in which land is held in stewardship by collectives rather than being privatized. Heir's property allows for extended family residence on the land. Relatives either build houses or install mobile homes on the land.
10. Felt identity has to do with a person's subjective identity, that is, who the persons feels he or she is apart from others' assessment of the individual (Goffman 1959).
11. References for newspaper quotes are not provided in order to retain municipal anonymity.

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