

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA  
Merced

Re-Collecting the Past: An Examination of Rural Historically African American  
Settlements across the San Joaquin Valley

A Dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the  
requirements for the degree  
Doctor of Philosophy  
in  
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with an emphasis in  
World Cultures

by

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Committee in charge:  
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May 2017



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April 2017

Re-Collecting the Past: An Examination of Rural Historically African American  
Settlements across the San Joaquin Valley

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By

Michael Allan Eissinger

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May 2017

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### University of California, Merced

*Introduction to Sociocultural Anthropology*

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**Growing Along the Side of the Road: Rural African American Settlements in Central California**

*The Journal of the West*, Summer 2015, Vol. 54, No. 3, pp 13-26

**Kern County: California's Deep South**

Published in a special edition of *The New Mountain Pioneer*, in Frazier Park, California, December 2014

**The Recollection of a Forgotten Community: Fairmead Engineers the Present from the Past**

Published in the proceedings of the *Southwestern Anthropological Association 185th Annual Conference*

**Fairmead: A Century of Change**

Locally published book commemorating the centennial of a small California farm town. Proceeds donated to local community organizations (May 2012); also used as a textbook at several levels.

**The Politics of Going Home: Dynamics of African Americans Finding a Home...**

*Hindsight Graduate History Journal*, Spring 2008, Vol. 2, 52-65, California State University, Fresno

## **PAPERS / PRESENTATIONS**

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### **Growing Along the Side of the Road**

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### **Recollection of a Forgotten Community: Fairmead Engineers Present from the Past**

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### **Water and Power in Rural California African American Settlements**

*33rd Annual CCPH Conference*, California Council for the Promotion of History, Hanford, October 2013

### **Where Water Flows Communities Grow: Water and Rural California African American Settlements**

Annual Meeting of the American Society for Ethnohistory (ASE), New Orleans, September 2013

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Annual Meeting of the Southwest Oral History Association (SOHA), Las Vegas, April 2013

### **At the Edge of Forgetting: Rural African Americans Fade Into the San Joaquin Valley Mist**

*Borders and Crossings*, 111<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting of the American Anthropological Association (AAA), San Francisco, CA, November 2012

### **At the Corner of Your Eye: Recollections of Forgotten Communities**

*Telling Stories: Analysis, Interpretation, and Narrative*, Annual Meeting of the Southwestern Anthropological Association (SWAA), Chico, CA, April 2012

### **Obscured by the Tule Fog: African Americans Fade into the San Joaquin Valley**

*33rd Annual Central California Research Symposium*, Fresno, CA, April 2012

### **Growing on the Side of the Road: Historically Black Settlements in Central California**

*Horizons of Change: The Unexpected, Unknown, and Unfortunate*, Annual Meeting of the Pacific Coast Branch of the American Historical Association (PCBAHA), Seattle WA, August 2011

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*Critical Ethnic Studies and the Future of Genocide: Settler Colonialism/Heteropatriarchy/White Supremacy*, University of California, Riverside, Riverside CA, March 2011

**Cookseyville and Lanare: Two Rural California African American Townships**

*Moving beyond National, Cultural, and Disciplinary Boundaries*, Annual Meeting of the Pacific Coast Branch of the American Historical Association, Santa Clara CA, August 2010

**Allensworth: Least Successful All-Black Rural Community in Central California**

*2010 Annual Meeting of the California American Studies Association*, Long Beach CA, April 2010

**The Transplantation of African Americans and Cotton Culture to California's Rural San Joaquin Valley during the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries**

*29<sup>th</sup> Annual CCPH Conference*, California Council for the Promotion of History, Monterey, October 2009

**African Americans and Cotton Culture in the Rural San Joaquin Valley**

*Graduate Research and Creative Activities Symposium*, Department of Graduate Studies, California State University, Fresno, Fresno, May 2009

**Rural African American Communities in the San Joaquin Valley**

*Beyond the City Limits: The Rural African American Experience in the West*, Central Valley Institute for Regional and Historical Studies, April 2008

**The Politics of Going Home**

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*West of the West*, funded by a California Humanities Grant 2016

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#### **AWARDS / HONORS / GRANTS / SCHOLARSHIPS**

**California Humanities Grant 2016**  
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**Stipend Award: 29<sup>th</sup> Annual CCPH Conference, Monterey, October 2009**

**California State University, Fresno**

**Provost's Graduate Scholarship:** 2007-08, 2008-09

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*Graduate Student Executive Board Member 2014-2016*

**Southwestern Oral History Association (SOHA)**

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**Pi Gamma Mu (Honor Society)**

**Alpha Gamma Sigma (Honor Society)**



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I made several trips to both South Dos Palos and Teviston with Arax, Lowe, and a former classmate from my time at the California State University, Fresno, Joel Pickford. Pickford's work as a photographer and videographer helped fill in some of the blanks in my field notes from those trips, and it was very nice to know that I could essentially go back to the instant replay to pick up details that went past too fast at some of the larger events we attended.

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able to express my gratitude. She took a chance on me and I will continue to try to make good on her gamble. Every day in the field, I hear her voice asking me, “But, how will you observe that?”

One additional person who deserves acknowledgement is James Mullooly, Chair of the Anthropology Department at California State University, Fresno. Jim was originally a reader on my MA committee many years ago, and has provided the opportunity for me to teach Anthropology courses at Fresno State. However, when it came down to pulling this document into some semblance of completion, it was Jim who spent many hours reviewing what I had written and helping me put it into the final form you see, here. A true friend and colleague, I appreciate his help, his neutral eyes, and his patience.

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I rely almost daily upon two other scholars and colleagues: Melissa Morris, at the University of Missouri, Kansas City and Elvia Rodriguez, formerly at the University of California, Riverside. These amazing people have been there, for years, to provide feedback, encouragement, and an occasional kick in the pants. I could not have done this without them. When we first entered graduate school, Melissa and I made a pact to keep each other sane for the duration (little did we know just how long that commitment would end up running, or how difficult that task would turn out to be). I do not know how well I succeeded, but I can honestly say that she fulfilled her promise, beautifully. My dear friend, Doctor Rodriguez, is now my colleague at both Fresno City College and at California State University, Fresno. Her ongoing support and encouragement continues to be invaluable.

I want to thank my late mother Marie Carlson who, unfortunately, did not survive her long illness or me completing this dissertation. She contributed, in many ways, to making all this possible, from the moment I returned to college, in 2004 to begin the process that culminates in this document.

Finally, to my wife Corkey, and our son Nikolas: You have both sacrificed more than anyone to make this happen. This has been rough on both of you – the long hours at the University, teaching, and conducting fieldwork have often kept me away from you both. Thank you, for your love and support throughout this process. All of this, like everything else I do, is dedicated to the two of you.

## **ABSTRACT**

### **Re-Collecting the Past: An Examination of Rural Historically African American Settlements across the San Joaquin Valley**

by

Michael Allan Eissinger

The purpose of this dissertation is to examine three primary research threads: to reclaim an invisible or lost history, to explore reasons why that history remains invisible or lost, and to examine the processes whereby individual and collective memories are remembered, forgotten, recollected, or discarded in the process of understanding the past, the present, and the future. Towards that end, this dissertation examines the past and present in relation to almost two dozen rural historically African American settlements throughout the San Joaquin Valley. In addition to capturing a lost and forgotten history, contemporary issues, including water and poverty, are addressed. As this dissertation captures much of this invisible history, it also looks at the impact of that history, the impact of reclaiming that history, and how an historical absence or presence impacts individual and collective identity. After an extensive literature review of theory relating to practice, habitus, power, and identity, several chapters are dedicated to laying out the lost history of these communities. These chapters are followed by chapters that examine the contemporary lives of the people who continue to live in these communities. This blend of historical and ethnographic research provides a picture of the past, the present, and (in some cases) a vision for the future.



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## CHAPTER 1: Introduction

What follows covers three distinct, but intertwined threads of inquiry I have been examining over the past several years. I will be repeating these three main points, throughout, to keep the reader (as well as myself) focused. These three primary questions include: reclaiming (what I often refer to as re-collecting) an invisible or lost history, exploring the reasons why this narrative remains absent from the broader telling of history, and the processes whereby the past and associated memories (individual and collective) are remembered, forgotten, recollected, or discarded.

The first thread represents my on-going attempt to learn as much as possible about historically majority or all-black rural settlements in the San Joaquin Valley of Central California. Initially, I stumbled upon their existence following a *Fresno Bee* newspaper article about a family reunion of the Cooksey family (Marcum 2007). The Cookseys, beginning in 1946 lived in a collection of homes (with a church and a corner store), often referred to by locals and family members as Cookseyville. Founded by the children of former slaves, Cookseyville provided a home base for three generations of Cookseys. From there, my research has gone from looking at a small handful of rural enclaves to almost twenty such communities. Early on, I classified these communities into two designations: *colonies* and *townships*. I chose the term *colony* to differentiate Allensworth, which was the intersection of the culminating exercise of the so-called Exoduster Movement and the California Colonization Project, from other more organic, less-planned communities that sprung up around the Valley. There were several attempts to build all-black colonies between 1850 and 1910, with Allensworth one of the few to break ground. The other designation I gave rural black communities, at the time, was *township*. I applied that term to any community not specifically begun as a black *colony*. The term, however, became problematic for several reasons. In some parts of the United States, the term *township* has a legal definition applied to specific units of municipal organization and, in some cases, governance. Additionally, the use of the word *township*, for those who remember the apartheid years in South Africa, holds specific connotations of forced black settlements that resembled internment or concentration camps. Although, I used the term to reference all or majority black communities, many of which arose because of exclusionary practices, the possible connotations created by using the term were not helpful to the discussion and could be misconstrued as a political statement I did not wish to make within that context. With the help of my primary graduate advisor, Robin DeLugan, we settled on various forms of *Rural Historically Majority African American Settlements* to cover these communities. While not as easy to say or write as *Black Townships*, the description accurately describes these communities overall. As my research progressed, I continued to learn more about these settlements and have since broken them down into four classifications, which I will expand upon later in this work. These classifications, which can be preceded by the term *Black or Majority Black*, include *Colonies*, *Unincorporated Towns*, *Unincorporated Neighborhoods*, and *Labor Camps*. For more details about these types of communities see Chapter 4.

Any examination of these communities (regardless of how each is classified) must examine the economic, social, legal, and extralegal practices that created the need for such segregated communities in the first place. Systemic practices such as redlining,

sundown towns, and restrictive covenants excluded blacks from renting or purchasing homes and land in and around many Valley communities during the long-standing practices of the Jim Crow era (1877-1967), and they became manifest in the creation of these settlements. The ways in which the residents of Lanare, Fairmead, and South Dos Palos (just to name a few) dealt with these systemic exclusionary practices and managed to build homes, churches, and businesses is a fascinating example of how individuals, families, and communities survived, and occasionally thrived, under less than perfect conditions. Over time, I expect to continue to expand my knowledge and understanding of each of these unique settlements, but it is my hope the material presented here is sufficient to demonstrate the overall patterns and structures that existed within these communities.



Figure 1: Teviston Family heats their home in the early 1960s (courtesy of Ernest Lowe).

The second thread is much more theoretical in that I seek to apply germane research and thought about social memory to my overall study. Chapter Two is, by far, the most theoretical, as I examine various aspects of recollection and re-collection, remembrance, nostalgia, and forgetting. These topics appear appropriate for examination, especially in the light of the absence of any broad knowledge of even the existence of these communities and their central role in the history or social memory of the region. Chapter Three, is much more focused on the actual history (and classifications) of individual communities. Laying out the similarities and differences of these communities, is my attempt to find a classification system that, for the purpose of my research, structures these communities into manageable groupings. Chapter Four, while continuing to examine the history of these settlements, examines the ways in which memory and individual memories are associated with the landscape—the ways in which memory may be centered or situated within particular spaces such as places to eat, shop, work, or worship.

Chapter Five looks at the impact of water on many of these settlements. This is an important part of the historical aspect of the story. Many of these communities have been shaped by water (or the lack, thereof) for more than a century. In some cases, the very reason these properties were available to persons of color was that earlier, white settlers were unable to acquire sufficient water to farm successfully or, in some cases, even live in these communities.

Chapter Six represents my attempt to apply the theoretical aspects of social memory and the historical foundations within an ethnographic study of one of these communities and how elements within that community have used the past to, in a variety of ways, engineer the present and the future. Illustrating how a community uses the past to define the present and establish a vision for the future has been one of the most interesting (and rewarding) parts of this research. This chapter examines several aspects of Fairmead, an unincorporated town where I have worked with the locals for many years. In 2012, I wrote a local history for the town centenary, and participated in an array of activities from the dedication of the local water tank, community events (holiday celebrations; fund-raising events; community meetings; meetings with California High-Speed Rail Authority, members of Madera county, state, and federal agencies, and other activities).

Chapter Seven may be the most personal part of this dissertation. It documents one of the most amazing weekends I have ever spent in the field. Several researchers spent a weekend with an elderly photographer (Ernest Lowe) who had been in the area in the early 1960s. His thousands of photographs of black, Hispanic, and white farm workers and their communities in the Valley have provided amazing insights to the lives of these communities, more than fifty years prior. We took Lowe back to the communities wherein he worked, just to see if we could locate anyone from those original photographs or, at least, anyone who might be able to provide information about the people and places represented in those images. The events of that weekend are almost unbelievable.

From the moment, I first became involved with this research, I have been interested in the process of re-collecting and recollecting the history of these communities and restoring them to our collective history. As will be discussed in subsequent sections,

this part of the procedure requires that I continue two lines of inquiry. The first is archival research. This research primarily focuses on the earliest days of the establishment of the community—possibly before the arrival of any African Americans—through the use of existing oral history transcripts (where available), old newspapers (both general circulation and those written specifically for the black community), county and city records (where and when available), and other primary sources. As these communities are small, unincorporated, rural settlements, the archival record is often scarce or, in some instances, non-existent. It is also part of what Lipsitz referred to as “what it is possible to learn from the ethnoracial and ethnospatial imaginary that has been forged out of the struggles with racialized space” (Lipsitz 2011, 244).



Figure 2: Cotton Pickers outside Pixley in 1961 (courtesy of Ernest Lowe).

Regardless of the amount of archival material available, much of the historical reconstruction must come from those who experienced that history, within that racialized space. This course of action requires using a variety of methods, including oral histories, participant observation, surveys, discussion groups, and other research mechanisms to try to extract as much of the past as possible. In fact, to a certain degree, this second process—collecting the remembrances of individuals and converting them into a community history directly relates to the second major set of issues I hope to address: social memory and the impact on community. What I hope to measure, with these inquiries, is a sense of community over-time (Cattell 2002, 82).



Figure 3: Teviston family home in the early 1960s (courtesy of Ernest Lowe).

Finally, I want to add that I grew up in small towns, some as small as just a couple of hundred people. These communities are very much like the ones within which I have spent much of the past several years doing research. The towns in North and South Dakota in which I grew up were predominately white—although in some cases the Swedes, Norwegians, and Germans often wrangled—many of these small towns were of similar size and economic make up as Fairmead, South Dos Palos, Lanare, and the other rural settlements. As a child, I lived in communities that resembled the mythical

Mayberry of TVs *Andy Griffith Show*. Towns like Glenham, South Dakota and Hankinson, North Dakota were towns with a few hundred residents who lived and worked within the boundaries of their own communities. My mother, a school teacher, was a divorcee who did not drive, and we lived in these communities without a car. We shopped locally (except for what we ordered from the *Sears Wish Book*). Growing up, I knew all my neighbors in these tiny towns that were, for most part, self-sustaining. Thirty years after leaving the Dakotas, my family and I made a short visit to my grandmother's home in Wyndmere, North Dakota. She had lived in that house since she was three years old. My mother and uncle spent most their childhood and teen years in that house and that small town. I have memories of that place being a bustling community of just over six hundred people with several grocery stores, a hardware store, auto and farm implement dealers, cafés, a hotel, a motel, bars, the grain elevator, a post office, a barber, the *Tastee-Freeez*, a drive-in theater, and other businesses that served the locals. Upon our visit in the late 1990s, we discovered that the last grocery store had been converted into a senior center, the barber shop was now a museum (of sorts—there was a collection of old stuff in the window), the bank had closed and replaced by an ATM, and the only remaining businesses were the grain elevator, one mini-mart, and a bar. For everything else, the residents headed off to Wahpeton and the Walmart or K-Mart stores. I understand the frustration of the residents of these rural California enclaves who, with great nostalgia, look back at the past of their community and wonder as to the absence of the stores, cafés, infrastructure, and other elements of community that once made their hamlets home. The Walmartization (do not know if that's a word, but I will use it, here, as it is the clearest term to describe the effect) of the American landscape and the further dependence on the automobile has signaled the death of many of these little towns. Only a concerted effort, on the part of those who live in these places, will provide even the slimmest chance of recapturing any of that past. Of course, there is also one major difference between my experience and those of the people living in these San Joaquin Valley settlements: I was never subjected to the same bigotry and racism that created these segregated communities.

Ultimately, if there is any significance to my contributions with this study and the pages that follow, I hope it will accomplish at least part of what I set out to do. I hope to restore to the history of the region, the state, and the nation, these places that once were home to many of our neighbors. Additionally, I hope to better understand the role of memory and identity as it functions, day to day, on the ground.

## CHAPTER 2: Theory and Historiography

### *Theoretical Foundations*

I have been writing about the lives and history of African Americans in the San Joaquin Valley for several years. One of the joys of this research and my various writing projects is the fact that much of this material is newly discovered—few other scholars have addressed these subjects. However, that has also meant I needed to round out my readings in many areas in such a way as to provide the broadest, strongest foundation possible. To do this, I generally focused on those topics most germane to African American history, the history of blacks in the American West, California history, labor history (especially agricultural labor history), as well as theoretical readings on race and ethnicity, identity, social memory (including specifics on remembrance, recollection/ recollection, forgetting and nostalgia), agency, power and domination. The following section covers some, but probably not all, of the secondary sources that fit into these broad categories, which have influenced my thinking and writing on these subjects.

Aspects of memory that I wish to examine have to do with individual actors, their response to power (in this case, the systematic and systemic racism that created these settlements), and how memory and history forge both individual and collective identity. Anthony Giddens explains that an individual actor could neither be treated as a passive participant, nor endowed with unlimited free will (Giddens 1979, 150). At the heart of being able to intervene in the world and to resist intervention, the individual has, at the most basic level to resist power, or what Giddens refers to as the ability to “act otherwise” (Giddens 1984, 14). I view the creation of these communities, not just as a situation where these were the only places within which African Americans could purchase land or homes, but as an act of resistance to the restrictions placed on Blacks via redlining, restrictive covenants, and other racialized practices that preferenced whites, while limiting the options for people of color. Robin D. G. Kelley aptly describes the ways in which African American youth at a Pasadena, McDonald’s restaurant franchise *acted otherwise*:

We... turned work into performance. Women on the cash register maneuvered effortlessly with long, carefully manicured nails and four finger rings, Tossing trash became an opportunity to try out our best Dr. J moves. The brothers who worked on the grill... were far more concerned with looking cool than ensuring an equal distribution of reconstituted onions on each all-beef patty. Just imagine a young black male ‘gangsta limp’in’ between the toaster and the grill, brandishing a spatula like a walking stick or a microphone... while all of this was going on, folks were signifying on one another, talking loudly about each other’s mommas... The employees... were constantly inventing new ways to rebel... we never knew where the struggle would end... my fellow employees... were neither total victims of routinization, exploitation, sexism, and racism, nor were they “rational” economic beings driven by the most base utilitarian concerns... (Kelley 1996, 2-3).

These workers performed their jobs, but found a variety of ways to resist the power of the hegemonic (and, what could be more hegemonic than McDonald's?). This balance between individual choice and the dictates of society lie at the heart of *Practice Theory*. Pierre Bourdieu defined *Practice Theory*, in detail:

The theory of practice as practice insists... that the objects of knowledge are constructed, not passively recorded, and... that the principle of this construction is the system of structured, structuring dispositions, the *habitus*, which is constituted in practice and is always oriented towards practical functions... One has to return to practice, the site of the dialectic of the *opus operatum* and the *modus operandi*; of the objectified products and the incorporated products of historical practice; of structures and *habitus* (Bourdieu 1990, 52).

Sherry Ortner described the impact of the new theoretical framework on the field:

It restored the actor... without losing sight of the larger structures that constrain (but also enable) social action... It “grounded” cultural processes... in the social relations of people on the ground (Ortner 2006, 1).

Giddens referred to a “dialectic of control” within which the use of power was characteristic to all human interaction, however, using available resources, even subordinates can influence the activities of those in the position of dominance (Giddens 1984, 16).

In the United States, a system of racial rule has always been in place, operating not merely through macro-level, large-scale activities but also through micro-level, small-scale practices. The racial regime is enforced and challenged in the schoolyard, on the dance floor, on talk radio, and in the classroom (Omi and Winant 2012, 316).

Symbolic violence and *habitus* maintain order within the broader society by informing individuals of not only their role or position within that society, but also their available actions. Individuals and sub-groups within the broader society resist dominant or hegemonic power, through a variety of ways, however that resistance tends to be understood by the subaltern because of their participation within the broader society.<sup>i</sup>

[D]ominion and power... are logically presupposed by that of agency and by... agency/structure connections... [These] structuring properties [provide] the ‘binding’ of time and space in social systems... [and are] understood as rules and resources, recursively implicated in the reproduction of social systems... To regard structure as involving a ‘virtual order’ of differences... implies recognizing the existence of knowledge... of ‘how things are to be done’... social practices organized

through the recursive mobilization of that knowledge and... capabilities that the production of those practices presupposes (Giddens 1979, 1964).

The individual acquires the knowledge and capabilities through an understanding of available options. In *The Logic of Practice*, Bourdieu likens the human body to a “memory pad” in which the “relation to the body is a fundamental dimension of the *habitus* that is inseparable from a relation to language and to time” (Bourdieu 1990, 52). The human body, through early, often seemingly invisible training assumes postures, gestures, and even social relations (relative to sex, gender, dominance, and other aspects of culture) which play out in social hierarchies and divisions between people and practices.

Most of my research focuses on settlements that would not exist except for historical *de facto* and *de jure* practices of discrimination and segregation that forced African Americans to live in unincorporated rural communities. It is an ugly fact of our history that these practices are the direct result of the overt, systemic institutional and societal racism that dominated much of the first three quarters of the twentieth century. Understanding the social construction of race and the ways in which racism has been used by the hegemonic to exert power is crucial to understanding the history of these segregated settlements. William J. Wilson explained how systemic racism works:

When the ideology of racial exploitation gives rise to normative prescriptions designed to prevent the subordinate racial group from equal participation in associations or procedures that are stable, organized, and systematized (e.g., the electoral process, residential patterns, and formal education), institutional racism exists. Institutional racism therefore represents the structured aspect of racist ideology... collective racism connotes the existence of informal societal or group norms that specifically reinforce sporadic collective acts of racial discrimination, exploitation, and suppression... (Wilson 1973, 34).

Essentially, the creation of these rural communities, or their historical transition to majority- or all-black populations, can be seen as a mechanism of resistance against the power of the hegemonic. Although power and domination are framed differently within Bourdieu’s theory of practice than they are expressed by Michel Foucault, who posits that power is pervasive at every level of society, *practice theory* cannot exist without reference to both. Ortner pointed out that “Practice theory did not ignore power... but neither did it make it central to the theoretical framework in the ways that seemed called for by... critical work on inequality and domination...” (Ortner 2006, 4). As with many of the key concepts of *practice theory* discussed above, various scholars cite different specifics about the role of power in society. Bourdieu’s concept of *habitus* is most like Foucault’s view of the mechanisms of power as “a deeply internalized structure, powerfully controlling and largely inaccessible to consciousness” (Ortner 2006, 7-8). Michel de Certeau suggested that both “Foucault and Bourdieu... articulate[d] a discourse of non-discursive practices” (de Certeau 1988, 61). He likened them to the two poles of the theory of practice, with Foucault focused on so-called *panoptic procedures*,

while Bourdieu concentrated on *strategies* (de Certeau 1988, 63).. Likewise, John Gledhill linked Foucault's *strategies* with Bourdieu's concepts of domination (Gledhill 2000, 150). Bourdieu asserted—in another reference to game theory—that absolute power rests with those who can “change the rules after each move, or whenever it pleases, according to its interests” (Bourdieu 2000b, 229). Aaron Cicourel, linking Bourdieu's writings to Karl Marx's notion of power and Claude Lévi-Strauss' symbol systems, summarized Bourdieu's description of the activities of those holding power, in *Outline of a Theory of Practice*:

The dominant power group, therefore, seeks to impose... a ‘cultural arbitrary,’ or symbolic system of meanings, and a projection of legitimacy that seeks to conceal the power relations that are the basis of its force (Cicourel 1993, 96).

Anthony Giddens defines the power organized into the cultural or institutional order as *dominion* while *power* is expressed as the “actual social relation of real on-the-ground actors.” However, for Giddens, power is just one of many *modalities of practice* (Ortner 2006, 5). These modalities, Giddens explained “serve to clarify the main dimensions of the duality of structure... relating the knowledgeable capacities of agents to structural features” (Giddens 1984, 28). Through the monitoring of their own activities (and those of others), the individual is able to interpret, based on “stocks of knowledge” whereby they are able to ascertain meaning and determine appropriate action (Giddens 1984, 29). However, he also stressed that power is also central to any social theory (Giddens 1979, 68). In his writings, individual actors are, to some degree *knowing subjects* who can weigh their condition and devise methods of possible resistance (Giddens 1979). Further illustrations of this resistance by knowing subjects are found in African American folklore—stories well known by early twentieth century African Americans who lived in the segregated rural enclaves at the heart of my study. Many of these stories, some handed down for generations, include a hero described as the *trickster*. These stories depict an underdog—characters known by such names as Monkey, Brer Rabbit, and Daddy Mention—who, through cunning and guile, tricks those in authority (often represented by white landowners, townsfolk, or other symbols of the hegemonic), often using the rules, themselves, to trick or trap their opponent (Levine 1977, 370-386). Giddens stresses that individuals operate within society by enmeshing “rules and the ‘methodological’ interpretation of [those] rules in the continuity of practices” (Giddens 1979, 68). More simply put, Giddens insists that action and structure are intrinsically and reciprocally interconnected (Giddens 1979, 49, 256).

Symbolic power, as expressed in the writings of Bourdieu, is imposed by “culturally arbitrary conditions” by a capricious authority, claiming legitimacy through both a symbolic and material environment (*habitus*) through stable, transportable dispositions (Cicourel 1993, 91). Marshall Sahlins focused on practices of interpersonal power relative to impersonal forms of constraint, which are apparent in the imbalance of power that exists in all societal relationships (Sahlins 1985). Robin D. G. Kelley suggests that “examples of black working-class resistance in public spaces offer some of the richest insights into how race, gender, class, space, time, and collective memory shape

both domination and resistance” (Kelley 1996, 56). To illustrate this point, Kelley described a number of ways in which, prior to Rosa Parks’ well-documented excursion on a Birmingham bus, black riders often used a number of tactics to resist those restrictions placed on them. Working within the rules, African American bus riders often “made noise” as a form of protest. Loud talking, using profanity, and other verbal indiscretions by blacks on buses could result in the transgressor being ejected or even arrested:

Although one could argue that “making noise” was not always a clear-cut act of resistance or protest, even the act of cursing took place in a specific sociohistorical context in which repressive structures and institutions circumscribed black mobility and access to public space. The voices themselves, especially the loud and profane, literally penetrated and occupied white spaces. Moreover, the act of cursing... represented a serious transgression of the racial boundaries (Kelley 1996, 71).

Individual resistance to power can take many forms. Antonio Gramsci put forth the idea that hegemonies impose strong, but never thorough, control (Gramsci, Hoare, and Nowell-Smith 1972). For Gramsci, the hegemonies exercise power through a combination of consent and coercion (Gramsci, Hoare, and Nowell-Smith 1972). Likewise, Giddens’ theory of structuration rejected the rigid assertions of structuralism by insisting that the “structural properties of social systems are both the medium and the outcome of the practices that constitute those systems...” and posited that structures, within this definition, are “both enabling and constraining” (Giddens 1979, 69). This interplay of limitations and choices lies at the heart of practice theory. William J. Wilson suggested, four decades ago, that the collective image of any non-hegemonic racial group is developed and shaped in what he referred to as the “public arena” wherein dominant voices shape public opinion (Wilson 1973, 37). Michael Omi and Howard Winant expand on that notion and link the formation of race, regardless of the culture (the United States, South Africa, or elsewhere), as intrinsically political because the definitions of race deal with the relationships of power and resistance, (Omi and Winant 2012, 304, 1986, 60-61).

The meaning of race is defined and contested throughout society, in both collective action and personal practice... racial categories... are formed, transformed, destroyed and reformed... *racial formation*... [refers to]... the process by which social, economic and political forces determine the content and importance of racial categories, and by which they are in turn shaped by racial meanings (Omi and Winant 1986, 61).

Michel de Certeau defined several concepts related to power and agency that are useful to connect with research that relates to race and historical discrimination. According to de Certeau, *strategy* is a conscious calculation of the relationship of power that occurs at the moment that the subject, with “will and power... can be isolated” (de Certeau 1984, 35). This *strategy* provides a mental or emotional *place* or *environment* of power and agency that belongs to the individual, from which he can ward off external

threats or make forays into the surrounding culture (de Certeau 1984, 36). Unlike a *strategy*, which includes its own space, a *tactic* is calculated action performed in the space of the *other*. According to de Certeau, an agent implementing a *tactic* lacks power and operates from a position of weakness: a reaction, rather than an action (de Certeau 1984, 37-38). In his definition of his term *procedure* de Certeau makes the association between Bourdieu and Foucault. According to him, *procedures* are...

...schemas of operations and of technical manipulations... it is possible... to clarify their functioning relative to discourse (or to “ideology,” as Foucault puts it), to the acquired (Bourdieu’s *habitus*), and to the form of time we call an occasion... These are different ways of locating a technicity of a certain type and at the same time situating the study of this technicity with respect to current trends in research (de Certeau 1984, 43).

*Procedures*, to use de Certeau’s term, support the notion that the formation of race, and indeed the development of racism, itself, is, as Wilson posits, a collective process (Wilson 1973, 35). Lipsitz also suggests that, within an American framework, place, or the relationship between places, is crucial to racialized identity. Race, according to Lipsitz, is “place bound” (Lipsitz 2011, 6). As, mentioned above, the central focus of all my research will be a series of small, rural communities. Space, place, and locality all play an important role in the formation of identity—even racial identity:

[I]dentity... exists and persists because segregated neighborhoods and segregated schools are nodes in a network of practices that skew opportunities and life chances along racial lines. Because of practices that racialize space and spatialize race, [race] is learned and legitimated, perceived as natural, necessary, and inevitable (Lipsitz 2011, 6).

Likewise, it is an important organizing principle to recognize that stories, in a variety of forms (such as archival material, oral histories, observations, and anecdotal stories) bring to creating the sense of community in these *places*. To me, it is those stories and the methods of their creations that are most interesting. Through stories, place is defined, memory and identity are created, and community is established, maintained, and recognized (both from within and without).

The circumscription of the narrative is thus placed in the service of the circumscription of the identity defining the community. A history taught, a history learned, but also a history celebrated... A formidable pact is concluded in this way between remembrance... and commemoration (Riccœur 2004, 85).

Whereas Paul Ricœur linked identity to narrative, which is reinforced by the collective commemoration, Charles Taylor suggested that the demand for stories (narrative) “is given urgency by the... links between recognition and identity, where this latter term designates... a person’s understanding of [self]” (Taylor and Gutmann 1992, 25).

I seek to focus my research beyond the historical narrative of these communities (while retaining the importance of this aspect), to include a theoretical and ethnographic examination of how memory—individual and collective—works and its relationship to what we usually refer to as history. These communities, since the 1980s, have been transitioning from populations that were all or majority African American to majority Hispanic. Today, blacks continue to have a significant presence within these communities, but they no longer are the majority population in most. One reason I want to conduct my research is the desire to reclaim the stories of these communities—the historical narrative of these communities throughout the twentieth century—before that history is erased from memory. This desire was best articulated by Lawrence W. Levine, who wrote that the history of African Americans has often “been rendered historically inarticulate by scholars who have devoted their attention to other groups and other problems” (Levine 1977, ix). Without passing any judgment as to the reasons for these exclusions, the desire to recapture, or re-collect this history remains one of the most important aspects of my dissertation research. As I have worked to piece together these narratives, new lines of inquiry have opened relating to the ways memory shapes our understanding of the present, how social or collective memories are retained or lost, and the process by which memories can be re-collected/recollected. Thus, there are three distinct threads contained in my research: reclaiming an invisible history, exploring the reasons why this narrative remains absent from the broader telling of history, and the processes whereby these memories (individual and collective) are remembered, forgotten, recollected, or discarded.

Bourdieu, linked the recollection of history—memory—to the function of *habitus*, defining the unconscious as the “forgetting of history which history itself produces by incorporating the objective structures it produces in the second natures of *habitus*...” (Bourdieu 1977, 78-79). As one whose work straddles the narrative of history and contemporary ethnography, this relationship between history and *habitus* provides a stepping off point from which to link past and present:

[T]he *habitus*, the product of history, produces individual and collective practices, and hence history, in accordance with the schemes engendered by history... a past which survives in the present and tends to perpetuate itself into the future by making itself present in practices structured according to its principles... the continuous exercise of the law of external necessities... is the principle of the continuity and regularity which objectivism discerns in the social world without being able to give them a rational basis... (Bourdieu 1977, 78-82).

de Certeau pointed out that “historiography separates its present time from the past” (de Certeau 1988, 3). However, Bourdieu insisted that, through the power of *habitus*, the past lives on in the present.

The *habitus* is the product of the work of inculcation and appropriation necessary in order for those products of collective history, the objective structures... to succeed in reproducing themselves more or less

completely, in the form of durable dispositions, in the organisms... lastingly subjected to the same conditionings, and hence placed in the same material conditions of existence (Bourdieu 1977, 85).

The knowledge of these rural African American settlements is apparently not widely spread throughout the region. Their existence diminishes as these communities transition from predominately (if not all) black to populations that are mostly Hispanic. Many second and third generation African Americans have left these segregated enclaves and moved elsewhere, including the urban centers of the Valley. This accelerates the “general and gradual loss of factual information” (Fentress and Wickham 1992, 73-74). Unless there is a corrective—something that returns these communities to the collective memory of the San Joaquin Valley—their existence appears to be destined to be among those things of the past that become blotted-out.

Lewis Coser, in the Introduction to his translation of Maurice Halbwachs’ *On Collective Memory*, posits that “historical memory... can only be stimulated by indirect ways through reading or listening... the past is stored and interpreted by social institutions” (Coser 1992, 24). Therefore, there may be little correlation between the historical memory of African Americans in the rural San Joaquin Valley and the historical reality. James Fentress and Chris Wickham link the transmissibility of a memory as requisite for it to be more than individual memory; before it can become social memory or history:

Social memory... is articulated memory... memories which are collectively held... are patterned in ways that are both semantic and sensory... as in the case of individual memory, the images held in social memory are composite... transmitted socially only if they are conventionalized and simplified... (Fentress and Wickham 1992, 42).

I want to understand the processes behind the creation of social memory as much as I wish to understand historical omissions. It is the primary processes of collective memory—recollection and forgetting—that are at play here. My job, as a scholar, continues to be one of championing a certain level of intellectual integrity, which, hopefully, will result in restoring this part of the historical narrative. There are many aspects to the study of memory. These include individual, collective, and public memory: recalling, recollecting, and forgetting. Of great concern to the social scientist, of course, is the latter. Ricœur categorized it as one of the “dysfunctions of memory...” and claimed that “...forgetting is lamented in the same way as aging and death: it is one of the figures of the inevitable, the irremediable” (Ricœur 2004, 426).

Essentially, two forms or realms of forgetting are emblematic for my research interests. First, there is the absence of memory in the public sphere. This problem can be corrected by re-collecting (a term to which I will return, later) and is, to a certain degree, the easiest form of amnesia to cure. Secondly, there is the conscious or unconscious forgetting that occurs when informants present incomplete, mistaken, or false information. While unconscious forgetting may be accidental, conscious forgetting may

represent a conscious attempt to control the ways in which the historical narrative (or collective memory) can be used to shape relations of power and resistance.

Too little memory... can be classified as a passive forgetting, inasmuch as it can appear as a deficit in the work of memory. But, as a strategy of avoidance, of evasion, of flight, it is an ambiguous form of forgetting, active as much as passive. As active, this forgetting entails the same sort of responsibility as that imputed to acts of negligence, omission, imprudence, lack of foresight, in all of the situations of inaction, in which it appears after-the-fact to an enlightened and honest consciousness that one should have and could have known, or at least tried to know... social agents remaster their capacity to give an account (Ricoeur 2004, 449).

Bourdieu cautioned against relying too heavily on the description of events, meanings, or practices as provided by native informants:

Native theories are dangerous not so much because they lead research towards illusory explanations as because they bring quite superfluous reinforcement to the intellectualist tendency inherent in the objectivist approach to practices (Bourdieu 1977, 19).

[T]oo much faith in native accounts can lead one to present a mere ideological screen as the norm of practice; too much distrust of them may cause one to neglect the social function of a lie socially devised and encouraged, one of the means agents have of correcting the symbolic effects of strategies imposed by other necessities (Bourdieu 1977, 43).

Throughout my research, I have been aware that the stories and histories I research are not what one would consider general knowledge. Within the historical record, the majority of these communities seldom reach the margins of, let alone have any impact on, the central narrative. While almost every telling of the history of the region focuses on agriculture, seldom does any recounting of the past include the people who worked the soil, rather giving preference to those who own the large-scale farming enterprises. One of the very first phenomena I experienced, when beginning my research was that residents (both black and white) usually equated my research with Allensworth. When I challenged that notion, people, regardless of their background, would often pull from the recesses of their memory another rural black community. Rather than rely on the public memory of Allensworth (I explore Allensworth history in Chapter 4), each person could recollect other such communities. This recalled memory usually came from a person's own experience with a community: they had lived near it, knew former residents, or had other connections that forged a personal connection. Familiarity with these communities made them appear commonplace to the point that they could not be *the stuff of history*. I will address these events in greater detail in Chapter 3.

It is my fear that such personal knowledge may be at risk through the process of collective *forgetting* that functions within the creation of public memory. Ricoeur suggests that...

[F]orgetting is bound up with memory... its strategies and, under certain conditions, its cultivation worthy of a genuine *ars oblivionis* result in the fact that we cannot simply classify forgetting through the effacement of traces among the dysfunctions of memory alongside amnesia... (Ricœur 2004:426).

I am trying to correct the *dysfunction of memory before it progresses to amnesia*. It is not all that uncommon, although often unfortunate, for the recollection of the past to be incorrect. This process contributes to the “general and gradual loss of factual information” (Fentress and Wickham 1992). Maurice Halbwachs posited:

The individual calls recollections to mind by relying on the frameworks of social memory. In other words, the various groups that compose society are capable at every moment of reconstructing their past. But, as we have seen, they most frequently distort that past in the act of reconstructing it... society, in each period, rearranges its recollections in such a way as to adjust them to the variable conditions of its equilibrium (Halbwachs 1992:182-183).

If, as practice theory asserts, *habitus* builds the present upon a foundation of the past, one of the most interesting aspects of examining remembrance is how different individuals and groups within society view the past, especially at different times and places. Giddens linked memory with perception (Giddens 1984:46). How we remember (the past) is how we understand (the present).

Society represents the past to itself in different ways: it modifies its conventions. As... members [accept] these conventions, they inflect their recollections in the same direction in which collective memory evolves... We should hence renounce the idea that the past is in itself preserved within individual memories as if from these memories there had been gathered as many distinct proofs as there are individuals... (Halbwachs 1992, 172).

In my explorations, I deal with collective memory at several levels. There is official, broad, hegemonic history, reflected in the history of the region taught in the schools. This understanding of the past, is what usually informs public policy, newspaper accounts, and local historical society publications and events. This is the commonplace, or everyday understanding of the historical narrative. This version of history is often manifest in an economic and political history of a region and favors those at the top of the heap—the movers and shakers. It is at this level where I hope to address the absence (or blotting out) of the memory of rural African American communities. Obviously, being populated, in most part, by non-white, often poor agricultural workers, these rural communities play only a small role in this sort of history and memory creation. However, there is a collective memory of the past as it relates to the people who lived in these communities. This is the location from which memory needs to be mined if the larger collective memory is to be corrected. Even smaller examples of collective memories

include individual families or church and community groups. Halbwachs illustrated how memory works in these smaller groups.

[E]ach family has its... memories which it alone commemorates, and its secrets that are revealed only to its members. But these memories... consist not only of a series of individual images of the past... [T]hey express the general attitude of the group; they not only reproduce its history but also define its nature and its qualities and weaknesses... the various elements of this type that are retained from the past provide a framework for family memory, which it tries to preserve intact... (Halbwachs 1992, 55-56).



Figure 4: African Americans picking cotton outside Teviston in Tulare County, in 1961 (courtesy of Ernest Lowe).

The recovery of the past is indispensable; that does not mean that the past should control the present, but, on the contrary, it is the present that makes of the past whatever it wants... We all have the right to decide for ourselves when to forget and when to remember (Todorov 1996, 12).

By removing African Americans from the cotton fields, the reality of the landscape becomes *blotted out*, in favor of a different memory. Creating a new collective memory, one that can unify those who share it, often requires that facts are lost or transformed. These collective memories held by smaller, more discrete groups is often a “potential space of cultural experience that one has shared with one’s friends and compatriots that is based... on elective affinities” (Boym 2001, 53). Fentress and Wickham addressed this process:

[T]he blotting-out process during transmission is not just a general and gradual loss of factual information... social memory is not always good at conserving facts... They are lost whenever... old information is no longer meaningful; or... because they do not fit into the new... context designed to hold the information... This helps us perceive a general pattern in remembering and forgetting... facts must be transformed into images, arranged in stories... Once memory has been conceptualized into a story, the process of change and of factual loss naturally slows down (Fentress and Wickham 1992, 73-74).

One of the functions of collective memory, or in a more formal sense of history, is to create social cohesion and collective identity. It is through the process of imagining a shared identity, oftentimes based on a shared past, by which community is established. Benedict Anderson, places this imagination at the center of communal identity:

[A]ll communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined. Communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined (Anderson 2006, 6).

One way in which that imagining can be changed is by creating, from archival and ethnographic sources, a history for a community. Does acquiring a past, through a written history, impact the present and the future? This related directly to that thread of reclaiming an invisible history, mentioned, above. Is there an impact created by the small history book I wrote for the centennial in Fairmead? I want to know if converting individual memory into written history changes the way in which the members of that community perceive themselves as a community and whether that perception impacts their vision for the present and the future. Fentress and Wickham indicate that:

[W]riting... freezes memory... in textual forms which evolve in ways quite unlike those of oral memory... If written knowledge can substitute for community memory... the knowledge of what that community is and was... (Fentress and Wickham 1992, 10).

Examining any possible impact created by the knowledge of what Fairmead “is and was,” as recorded in my book, along with other projects with which I have been involved, should illuminate questions concerning the links, in this instance, between historical memory and community cohesion. This should put forth a good test of the idea that “Our knowledge of both the past and present is built on ideas and recollections in the present mind... Our confidence... is limited by the possibility that they will be contradicted by new experience or better ideas...” (Fentress and Wickham 1992, 24). “[E]ven at the moment of reproducing the past our imagination remains under the influence of the present...” (Halbwachs 1992, 49).

Stories—narratives—are the mechanism with which to create memory. Memory, as the foundation of *habitus*, defines the framework for culture. The individual, playing the game within the rules she has learned from infancy, both reinforces and modifies that *habitus*. One way in which that *habitus* may be altered over time is if the memories, whether through collective or individual forgetting, are altered or obscured. This final process is what Maurice Halbwachs described as “the past... reconstructed on the basis of the present” (Halbwachs 1992, 40).

Stories, especially historical narratives, are situated and located within, and on, the landscape. Citing Henri Lefebvre, Chandra Mukerji posited that “Human life is lived in spaces that are simultaneously representational and constraining, framed by the needs of the economic system as both concepts and places” (Mukerji 1994). I contend that, within these communities there are sites of memory or places that function as containers of memory. These spaces include businesses, churches, community centers and schools. Most of these elements exist in these settlements, today. Individuals commonly discuss these spaces when referring to their community’s past. These communal, shared spaces (or, in some cases, the memories of these spaces) are a major part of how individuals view their connection to the community. It is at the intersection of these physical representations of society (communal spaces) and culture about which Tim Ingold, commented:

Culture and materiality... overlap or intermingle... Little attention is paid to actual materials and their properties. The emphasis is almost entirely on issues of meaning and form... on culture as opposed to materiality... Culture wraps itself around the universe of material things, shaping and transforming their outward *surfaces*... (Ingold 2000, 340).

Clearly, one way to approach my research concerning these historically rural African American settlements is to examine the material culture of these communities, as reflected in these public, shared, and communal structures (in the sense of buildings, not of social structures).

The physical features of our artificial environments help us forge social bonds that extend over time as well as space. Buildings and language records, for example, can... extend networks of actors beyond face-to-face interactions; they can even function as depots for social memories that help to define the cultural meaning of temporality and/or sustain residues

of ways of life that are no longer favored by present systems of power (Mukerji 1994, 145).

It is within the spaces encapsulated in these structures where individual community members interact at the same time they form and maintain both individual and collective identity. Therefore material culture, as reflected in places to eat, drink, dance, learn, worship, consult, and shop, functions as “a central point of articulation between the form of the thing [these spaces] and the behavior of the people who made it and used it” (Preston 2000, 22). Associated with these memories, especially those linked to particular spaces and places, is a nostalgia for a past that may (or may not) have actually existed. Nadia Seremetakis suggested that nostalgic memory is “the sensory reception of history” (Seremetakis 1994, 4). The smells and tastes of a bacon Swiss burger, from the Mammoth Orange stand on the highway in Fairmead, conjure a nostalgic memory more real (if exaggerated) than any written history. Fond memories of the sounds and smells of “Shorty” Oehler’s Fairmead market say as much about his willingness to extend credit to patrons, black, Hispanic, or white, as anything I could write about the store in my little history book.

Omi and Winant, reflecting on the origins of their theory of racial formation, three decades ago, posited that the concept of race needed to be “critically engaged in its own right” (Omi and Winant 2012, 303-304). It was specifically for this critical engagement that I frame my research within African American history or culture, and to pursue an understanding of the underlying concepts crucial to the development of both. I increasingly continue to be more and more interested in understanding (or at least identifying) the mechanisms at work within that same narrative. By their very nature, most—if not all—of these mechanisms are rooted in systemic racism. The first wave of African Americans from the American South were agricultural labor. Blacks were first recruited as early as 1884 and continued to be highly preferred workers, well into the 1960s. Seldom an economic consideration, black field-hands from the South—men, women, and children—were sought specifically to replace Chinese labor. The selection of and preference for one subaltern group over another was a racial and racialized decision. One Kern County editorial praised black laborers because they “...belong in this country; they are citizens and far more desirable to have among us than the Chinese whom they will displace and drive away...” (Kern County Californian Editorial Staff 1884).

It was racial attitudes against the California Chinese that drove Valley farmers to seek out African Americans from the country’s Deep South. It was also racism, manifest in the commonly practiced procedures of separation and segregation that these same white farmers and their urban neighbors used to control the newly arrived black populations for decades. Fairmead, South Dos Palos, Home Garden, and many of the other black settlements only existed because they were near towns that practiced exclusionary practices of sundown laws, redlining, and restrictive housing covenants (Loewen 2005, Oliver and Shapiro 2006). These policies by local governments “instituted restrictive zoning ordinances to keep blacks out of certain neighborhoods, and the federal government’s policies... were complicit in these efforts” (Lewis et al. 2004, 68).

These practices, of course were intended, prior to the Civil Rights advances of the mid-1960s, to exclude what Emory Bogardus referred to as *racial invaders* (Bogardus 1980, 115). What makes my examination of these rural communities unique, however is that most research has, to date, focused on the outward migrations of southern African Americans to urban communities (de Graaf et al. 2001, Flamming 2005, Fogelson 1993, Gregory 2005, 1989, Hudson 2002, Schiesl and Dodge 2006, Self 2003, Sides 2006b, a). These rural San Joaquin Valley communities, like their urban counterparts, represent racialized space, wherein “discriminatory land use and lending policies” were used to control one portion of the population, based solely upon their race (Lipsitz 2011, 243). It is not simply enough to claim that segregation was the result of racism, without understanding the underlying principles that lay behind the creation of (and control over) race.

One could not effectively analyze patterns of residential segregation, for example, without considering the racial categories that were utilized and encoded in research, in public documents, and in legal decisions at a given place and time. One had to ask not only how race shaped segregation but also how segregation reciprocally shaped race, how it invested racial categories with content and meaning. To assert that race is a social concept marks the beginning, not the conclusion, of “doing” racial theory (Omi and Winant 2012, 304).

### ***Historical Underpinnings***

Trying to position the history (and memories) of these communities within the broader history continues to be one of my concerns. Nikhil Pal Singh asked, concerning the history of the African American community in relation to broader American history, if it was possible to understand such a relationship as one of “racial particularity to a national universality” (Singh 2004, 14). What is the relation, therefore between a localized past (in the case along both racial and geographic lines) and the broader more widely understood and established general, communal history—history with a capital “H?”

Speaking of history (with or without a capital “H”), most of what proceeds this section is theoretical in nature. Historical examples have been used to illustrate theoretical foundations. This next section, however, covers, briefly, some of the straight historical sources upon which I have relied to establish the historical context within which I place my work. This material falls, loosely, into two broad categories. The first grouping includes what can be called African American historical works: those texts which focus on African American individuals, communities, movements, or cultural foundations. The second collection of materials generally include historical works that focus on the American West, regional history, California, labor, social or cultural movements, subaltern groups and communities, and other broad topics that relate, to varying degrees to my research.

Although some of these works have already been referenced, I want to focus on important framing or background material upon which I rely. It is important to contextualize the arrival of African Americans into the San Joaquin Valley, both in time

and in reference to their points of origin. The majority of African Americans in the San Joaquin Valley, like most blacks in this country, trace their roots to the Southern states. Any sources that can frame that migration become important to my research. Large numbers of African Americans came west in waves at the end of the nineteenth century, during the late 1910s and early 1920s, throughout the Dust Bowl, and for the duration of, and after, World War II. Each wave of migration brought new blood into the broader African American community in the Valley, often with different expectations and goals depending on the period in which they arrived. Jack Temple Kirby's article *The Southern Exodus, 1910-1960: A Primer for Historians* provides a broad framework within which to understand the dynamics of the migration. In this work, as with the writings of historian James N. Gregory, Kirby looks at the migration patterns of both Southern whites and African Americans, and focuses on the mechanisms that linked southern regions to specific locations outside the South (Kirby 1983, 585-600). Kirby aptly illustrated the mechanism of *stem family migration* whereby southern families followed early scouts or pioneers (often fathers or elder brothers or single uncles) to specific areas throughout the American North and West. The early sojourners, after securing employment and housing, paved the way for family members and former neighbors to follow as the migration continued and expanded. Kirby's work is only eclipsed by James N. Gregory's *The Southern Diaspora: How the Great Migrations of Black and White Southerners Transformed America* and his earlier, smaller book, the *American Exodus: The Dust Bowl Migration and Okie Culture in California* (Gregory 2005, 1989). In both books, Gregory addressed the movement of southerners to other parts of the United States as more than simply a migration, or even a series of successive migrations. Instead, he frames the out-migration of southerners as a full-fledged diaspora in which an homogeneous community (southerners, regardless of race) are disbursed widely throughout the United States. Within that so-called homogeneous group (southerners), he traced the similar and different paths followed by white and black southerners.

Like Kirby, Gregory stressed the importance of stem family migration patterns, but also demonstrated the importance of *gateway institutions*, such as the church, as one of those pull factors that drew individuals to specific communities (Gregory 2005, 221). Finally, Gregory sets 1979 as the end of the diaspora, an observation that closely matches my own anecdotal observations of the inward mass-migration to the Valley from the South (Gregory 2005, 322). Gregory's colleague at the University of Washington, Quintard Taylor, wrote:

Despite the evidence of racism all around them, many African Americans continued to believe the West did offer a chance for both economic opportunity and political freedom... Two hundred thousand African Americans seeking... opportunities migrated to West Coast shipyards and aircraft plants during World War II... In their own way, black westerners... who refused to accept the boilermakers' discriminatory union plan in World War II, or who confront racial discrimination today through the courts of in direct action... demand justice (Taylor 1999, 313-314).

Other, less extensive (or perhaps less ambitious), sources provide valuable insight to this diasporic movement. Generally, I found each too narrowly focused on specific regions or times, however taken aggregately, these works provide statistical and economic background that is hard to locate, elsewhere. It is for these reasons that, in addition to broader works, I feel compelled to include these additional books and articles: Louis M. Kyriakouides' *Southern Black Rural-Urban Migration in the Era of the Great Migration: Nashville and Middle Tennessee, 1890-1930*, Richard L. Wm. O. Scroggs' *Interstate Migration of Negro Population*, Howard A. Palley's *The Migrant Labor Problem—Its State and Interstate Aspects*, Calvin L. Beale's *Migration Patterns of Minorities in the United States*, Donald Holley's *The Negro in the New Deal Resettlement Program*, Manning Marable's *The Politics of Black Land Tenure: 1877-1915*, and Ira D. A. Reid's *Special Problems of Negro Migration During the War* (Beale 1973, Holley 1971, Kyriakouides 1998, Marable 1979, Palley 1963, Reid 1947, Scroggs 1917).

Not much has been written about communities similar to the ones I have been studying. Most recent research, as I will demonstrate shortly, has focused on urban centers. However, as early as 1946, sociologist Mozell C. Hill looked at a variety of the historic and economic conditions that led to the formation of black segregated towns and rural settlements in Oklahoma (Hill 1946, 254-268). There are additional scholarly sources that looked at the establishment of all-black communities based on the model established by Benjamin "Pap" Singleton, Col. Allen Allensworth, and others. These so-called *Exodusters* sought to establish separate African American towns as safe havens for blacks to develop businesses, industries, schools, and organizations, free from outside influences (Fleming 1909, Garvin 1948). Dwight Bolinger even suggested that as "the word exoduster was in vogue about 1880 with reference to the mass migration of Negroes from the South to settle in the North, especially in Kansas... this would be a good name... for the dustbowl refugees in California" (Bolinger 1941, 317). These efforts were often highly organized by corporate entities that sought outside investment and attempted to oversee the promotion, construction, and development of these colonies. Whereas these efforts are well documented in Oklahoma, Kansas, and other western regions, such is not the case within California. In addition to these published sources, I found several dissertations and theses, which provide historical background about segregated African American communities. These include, Stephen Anthony Vincent's *African-Americans in the Rural Midwest: The Origins and Evolution of Beech and Roberts Settlements, 1760-1900*; Chleyon Decatur Thomas' *Boley: An All-Black Pioneer Town and the Education of Its Children*; Rhonda M. Ragsdale's *A Place to Call Home: A Study of the Self-Segregated Community of Tatums, Oklahoma, 1894-1970*; Michael William Mansfield's *A Slide, a Swing, and an Oak Tree': Maysville, Alabama and the Birth of an African-American Community*; Kenneth M. Hamilton's *The Origin and Early Developments of Langston, Oklahoma* (Hamilton 1977, Mansfield 2005, Ragsdale 2005, Thomas 1989, Vincent 1991). One other text that needs to be mentioned, at this time, is *Dust Tracks on the Road*, by Zora Neale Hurston (Hurston 2006). Although never employed as a cultural anthropologist, Hurston was a student of Franz Boaz, and her autobiographical and analytical account of her own life, growing up in a segregated southern black community provides rare insights into the total experience. As I have already mentioned, I have included these texts to demonstrate that there are several

sources from which material can be gathered to triangulate the trajectories, or otherwise compare and contrast different communities.

For a general history of the earliest migration of African Americans to California (not specifically tied to African American settlements), three of the best sources remain Rudolph Lapp's *Blacks in Gold Rush California, Black California: The History of African Americans in the Golden State*, by B. Gordon Wheeler, and the anthology *Seeking El Dorado: African Americans in California* (de Graaf et al. 2001, 156-157, Lapp 1977, Wheeler 1993). Although very little evidence pertaining to African American communities in the San Joaquin Valley is available directly through these secondary sources, they provide insight into wide range of topics. Lapp cites several statistics about black populations, housing, churches, and professions in Stockton between 1850 and 1870 (Lapp 1977, 111-117). Although these statistics pertain specifically to an urban community, interesting parallels and links may be made to other black or segregated communities. For example, Lapp pointed out that the majority of the owners of black business in Stockton, in the nineteenth century, were barbers (Lapp 1977, 113). Several primary sources suggest that this trend was common throughout the region. Lapp also introduced the Wysinger family of Stockton. Other members of that same family, within a few years, turn up in Fowler and Visalia, including one family member from Visalia who was at the center of the landmark 1890 California Supreme Court school segregation case that desegregated California schools sixty-five years before the two Brown Cases (1890). Professor Quintard Taylor, of the University of Washington, is one of the leading scholars of African American history, especially in the American West. His *In Search of the Racial Frontier: African Americans in the American West, 1528-1990*, traces African American history on the landscape of the West through Reconstruction, the initial migration pre-Depression, urbanization during the decades on either side of the start of the twentieth century, World War II, and the post-War years. Although helpful in broad terms, the sections that cover non-California locations, like Tulsa, Bismarck, and Denver provide a broad context within which to place the migration to the Golden State (Taylor 1999). One of the most interesting books is *The Negro Trail Blazers of California*. Compiled from a number of sources by Delilah Beasley in 1919, this book includes detailed information about many individuals and communities. Although not a scholarly work in any sense of the word, this book provides clues and basic information pointing to possible archival sources or other data (Beasley 1919). Until Mark Arax focused a series of *Los Angeles Times* articles on the Valley's Black Okies, the only secondary source that mentioned any of the rural all or majority black settlements in California is Beasley's classic which may have been the only secondary source to mention any of these Valley communities. Beasley made one reference to the all-black colony at Bowles Colony, outside Fowler, in Fresno County (Beasley 1919, Arax and Wartzman 2003, Arax 2002a, b). Finally, Richard Steven Street's massive *Beasts of the Field* covers subaltern labor in the fields of the San Joaquin Valley, including extensive sections on Japanese, Chinese, Native American, and African American labor (Street 2004a).

One even more localized source includes the fiction and non-fiction essays of Gerald Haslam. Having grown up the son of Okies in Kern County, Haslam has written extensively about his experiences. Included among his stories are some episodes involving African Americans in the southern parts of the Valley (Haslam 1975; Haslam

1999; Haslam 2005a; Haslam 2005b) (Haslam 2005b, a, Haslam 2000, Haslam 1999, 1975, Haslam and Haslam 2014).

One other area within so-called Black History that needs to be included in this overview of available material is a collection of books and articles that examine the black, usually segregated, communities in the urban centers of California. The largest body of this work focuses on Southern California communities, possibly because of the proximity of several excellent programs (and participating scholars) at the University of California, Los Angeles; University of Southern California; and The Claremont Colleges. Three of my favorite works about the African American community in Southern California remain *Bound for Freedom: Black Los Angeles in Jim Crow America*, by Douglas Flamming, Josh Sides', *L.A. City Limits: African American Los Angeles from the Great Depression to the Present*, and the anthology *City of Promise: Race and Historical Change in Los Angeles*, edited by Martin Schiesl and Mark M. Dodge (Flamming 2005, Sides 2006b, a, Schiesl and Dodge 2006). Likewise, David Torres-Rouff's examination of late 19<sup>th</sup> Century Los Angeles provides insight into ethnic and racial relations in California's Southland during that period. Flamming's work is a brilliant portrait of the long arc of the African American community in the Central and Vermont neighborhoods of Los Angeles. This was one of the few parts of the Los Angeles basin where homes were not restricted by residential covenant, nor as impacted by the practices of redlining, and the resultant community grew and expanded economically, culturally, and professionally to become the West Coast version of Harlem:

Du Bois gave the movement its defining name—the “Renaissance”—in an article he wrote for the *Los Angeles Times* in 1925... the paper ran a large photograph of Du Bois... which praised Du Bois as “an educator of high standing and wide recognition.” Du Bois insisted that New Negro Art was not strictly American in origin but actually a reemergence of black African artistry... This Renaissance ideal found voice in black L.A. in 1926... (Flamming 2005, 285).

Throughout his book, however, Flamming, covers a variety of developments including commercial growth that allowed the black district to “support their own” by shopping throughout the Central district and by utilizing the services of black insurance companies, lenders, newspapers, and other services and producers (Flamming 2005, 124-125). He also demonstrates the role of education (especially the ties to the University of California, Los Angeles) and the Church in developing the capacity of the community through the first half of the twentieth century. *Bound for Freedom* proves to not only be an excellent reference, but provides a solid example of this type of historical narrative. Josh Sides' *L.A. City Limits*, continues the story, documenting Los Angeles' black community throughout the second half of the past century. Sides covers the period of the inward migration of African Americans during the war years, the Civil Rights Movement, the Watts Riots, and all the other major events of the period (Sides 2006a). A pair of articles in the edited anthology, *City of Promise*, provide additional background on the African American community in Los Angeles, as well as comparison companion articles that cover Latinos and Asian-Americans. Delores Nason McBroom's article, “*All Men Up*

*and No Man Down*”: *Black Angelenos Confront Refracted Racism, 1900-1940*, presents a detailed picture of the networks of African American newspapers, political and social groups, and other organizations created in Southern California at the opening of the twentieth century and their impact, not only in the region and state, but nationally (McBroome 2006, 59-60). She also pointed out the very successful boosterism of the Southern California African American community that attracted blacks from throughout the American South (and, to a lesser degree, the northern urban industrial centers of the so-called Rust Belt) (McBroome 2006, 59-61). No doubt, this “Go West” ideology parallels similar admonitions from Singleton, Allensworth, and other boosters who promoted the inward migration of African Americans to California. This impact, as well as labor recruitment efforts, contributed to the influx of blacks to the San Joaquin Valley following 1900, as well. Being involved in developing community lay, to some degree, at the heart of the Southern California black community:

As a result of black Angelenos’ determination to preserve the openness of all avenues of economic and social activities for their welfare, civic engagement took on a myriad number of tasks... participants remained current with ideas and movements that spanned the nation during the early twentieth century (McBroome 2006, 64).

Civil engagement and the desire to determine their own future created an atmosphere where African Americans sought ways to control their own destiny, within a highly restrictive system of Jim Crow that covered California. Indeed, the formation of many of these all or majority black communities, throughout the rural regions of the state, can be seen as a direct reflection of this move toward self-determination. McBroom’s article goes on to demonstrate how various means—newspapers, businesses, political and social organizations—were used to protect what rights blacks had, and to work to expand upon those limited rights:

The rising leadership... presaged a new generation of civil rights activism in Los Angeles; yet, they could not have succeeded in mobilizing support without the socio-political network of associations that an older generation of black Angelenos carefully nurtured from 1900-1940 (McBroome 2006, 80).

Josh Sides picks up the story of the Southern California black community at the close of World War II, and closely parallels much of the material he covers in his larger volume (Sides 2006a). One of the most important concepts that Sides brings to the entire discussion is that to examine the history of African Americans in California, the story must encompass a much larger geographical tapestry:

To know the history of African Americans in Los Angeles, one must be willing to think, first, not only historically, but trans-regionally as well; one must be willing to consider the myriad complexities of the westward migration of an historically Southern people; one must also penetrate the

often impenetrable meanings of blackness to African Americans themselves and, no less important, to their neighboring Latinos, Anglos, Asians and Jews in Los Angeles; and one must wrestle with the vast geographical terrain of the greater Los Angeles region, within whose expansive boundaries African Americans have found both Promised Land and Purgatory. Finally, one must nurture a healthy skepticism about reducing the Los Angeles African American experience into simple narratives of either triumphant progress or grinding decline (Sides 2006b, 109).

In fact, this admonition applies to all African American communities (if not most communities, in general) throughout California: a land of migrants and immigrants. As such, it fits the black population of Fairmead and Home Gardens just as well as it does those in Central or Watts. The article details labor and job discrimination, neighborhood segregation, and other factors, which had to be overcome or resisted by Southern California's black community.

Like Sides' article (and the bulk of his book), Robert O Self's *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland*, is a community study of the Northern California city responsible for many of the ships built during World War II, and the impact on the newly constituted black community in that city and region (Self 2003). What links Self and Sides to my research is labor. Many of the blacks who relocated to the San Joaquin Valley at the close of World War II did so because they came to California to work in wartime shipyards and factories. When displaced by returning servicemen, rather than remain in urban centers, some African Americans elected to seek new homes on California's rural landscape.

There remains one small section of black-focused literature that has been informative in relation to both contemporary activities and historical foundations. These are books that have focused on organizations and institutions that function within (or on) the black community. The three most germane works are Steven Gregory's *Black Corona: Race and the Politics of Place in an Urban Community*, Philip F. Rubio's *There's Always Work at the Post Office*, and several chapters in Robin D. G. Kelley's *Hammer and Hoe: Alabama Communists During the Great Depression* (Gregory 1998, Kelley 1996, Rubio 2010). While *Black Corona* focuses on the urban area of Corona, in Queens, New York, it provides an excellent example of how to apply concepts of power as enunciated by Foucault and Gramsci to the interactions between black grassroots community organizations and the hegemonic power structure. Having attended community meetings in South Dos Palos with community advocacy groups such as the California Rural Legal Assistance (CRLA) and Madera County Planning Commission meetings in Madera County with Fairmead residents, *Black Corona* provides an excellent example for examining these types of interactions. Although organized labor—such as the United Farm Workers—played little part in the lives of the residents of these communities (after 1933, there was little organization among black farm labor), the works by Kelley and Rubio both demonstrate the intersections that occurred between labor, civil rights, legal battles, the black church, and other organizations and movements within the black community. Often segmented into isolated pockets, these books

demonstrate the interconnectedness of these seemingly disparate ideas and suggest areas of inquiry that might otherwise be overlooked.

As I approach my research, I rely on the extant body of literature that deals with the history of African Americans, the American West, and California, critical race theory, social memory, practice theory, power, and theoretical foundations. Although the prior section of this chapter touches on many such references, I am aware that there are additional works that may, ultimately, impact my research and my writing, going forward.

## CHAPTER 3: Methodology<sup>ii</sup>

### *Individual and Social Memory*

In a prior chapter, I posited that my research question included three primary foci: reclaiming an invisible history (the history of these communities and the people who live in them); to understand the reasons why the broad public narrative fails to include these communities; and the processes surrounding the individual and collective memories and how they are remembered, forgotten, recollected (or re-collected), or discarded. It is the second of these goals that is addressed in this chapter as I examine some of the ways in which the story has been isolated and eliminated within the broader narrative of California (and U.S.) history.

Facets of social memory such as recollection and re-collection, the creation and purpose of history, nostalgia, and the roles played by memory and history on individual and collective identity all inform my research. Beyond recreating (through collection, recollection, and re-collection) the histories of these communities, my ethnographic interest in the current affairs in Fairmead, for example, centers on the interaction and intersection of the past (social memory and history) and the present. Understanding how memory (collective and individual) works, therefore, is central to my research in a variety of ways.

Since I first began studying these communities, an interesting phenomenon has occurred when discussing my work. When I initially tell someone that I am doing research on *Historically Rural African American Settlements in the San Joaquin Valley*, most Valley residents respond with something along the lines of “Oh, you’re looking at Allensworth?” However, once I start to explain the types of communities included in my research, most of the long-time residents of the San Joaquin Valley suddenly name off one or more community names off the top of their head—in almost every case the names of settlements with which they had personal, first-hand knowledge. A California State University, Fresno (commonly referred to as Fresno State) anthropology professor; the husband of a Fresno City College Spanish instructor; West Hills Community College, Lemoore students; and other friends and acquaintances all identified at least one additional community. This is how I was originally introduced to Fairmead and learned the name of Home Garden. A Fresno State student first told me about the collection of black farmers on the Valley’s Westside. It may be anecdotal to suggest that respondents relied on the public or social memory of Allensworth in their first response, assuming that any scholarly study would examine the so-called famous settlement, rather than the lesser known, seemingly less important or less interesting communities with which they are personally familiar.<sup>iii</sup> I hope to develop, beyond anecdote, a method to examine how this intersection of public and individual memory works in relation to history.

In each case, the person telling me about these communities relied upon the common or public memory of Allensworth to respond to the description of my research, even though many of them knew there were other such communities. Somehow, somewhere, within the psyche of people living in Central California is the notion that there was a black community in the South Valley named Allensworth. Most of these people had, I discovered through conversation, never even been to the Allensworth state

park, yet, they knew it existed. Much of this awareness may have been due to the media coverage of a controversy over the proposed building of several mega-dairies on the perimeter of the park. Other people are only aware of the park because of historical landmark signs posted near the closest off ramps on State Highway 99 for “Allen Allensworth State Park.”

But, then, as I alluded to, earlier, in each case, something else happened. I rejected the shared memory of Allensworth, with my assertion that I was working on other, often impoverished, rural communities. This caused, a sudden augmentation of the collective memory by their own personal memory and their individual remembering of another black settlement. Almost every person with whom I talked knew about the existence of at least one of these other communities. Once challenged to think beyond the confines of the superficial narrative of Allensworth, each was able to recall—produce a recollection—from personal knowledge of another settlement. This recalled memory (rather than the public one) almost always came from their own experience with a community: a personal connection. It may have been that this made the community to which they were connected personally appear commonplace to the point that it could not be the stuff of history. Aleida Assmann refers to this individual memory as “autobiographical memory” that is uniquely imprinted on the individual who experienced the events and suggests that such memories...

...can be *shared* with others. Once they are verbalized in the form of a narrative or represented by a visual image, the individual’s memories become part of an intersubjective symbolic system and are, strictly speaking, no longer a purely exclusive and unalienable property... they can be exchanged, shared, corroborated, confirmed, corrected, disputed, and even appropriated (Assmann 2008, 50)

What I suspect happens, in those cases where Central Valley residents automatically respond “Allensworth” is that the collective memory comes to the surface as an almost automatic reaction. When that superficial memory is rejected, or called into question, there is a conscious remembering (the process of recollection) that calls up individual, private, and personal knowledge: the autobiographical memory. However, it is my fear that this personal knowledge may be at risk through the process of forgetting, and the process of replacing individual memory with an agreed upon cultural, social, and public memory. In this context, I do not mean to imply the forgetting that accompanies old age or senility, but rather a form of collective forgetting that functions within the creation of public memory.

Throughout this process, I have focused on so-called social or collective memory, as opposed to history, for several reasons. First, in relation to memory, each individual carries her own intimate recollection of the past in relation to her own life, but the remembrance of the past, both as official history and shared memory, goes beyond the individual. Aleida Assmann proposes that:

[H]uman beings do not live in the first person singular only, but also in various formats of the first-person plural. They become part of different

groups whose “we” they adopt together with the respective social frames. A social frame is an implicit or explicit structure of shared concerns, values, experiences, narratives. The family, the neighborhood, the peer group, the generation, the nation, the culture are such larger groups that individuals incorporate into their identity by referring to them as “we.” Each “we” is constructed through shared practices and discourses that mark certain boundaries and define the principles of inclusion and exclusion. To be part of a collective group... one has to share and adopt the group’s history... The collective memory is a crossover between semantic and episodic memory: it has to be acquired via learning... (Assmann 2008, 51-52)

The urgency with which I have been driven to reconstruct the lives of these communities—and those who lived in them—stems from my personal fear that they will be forgotten and that their role in the history of California will be obscured to the point of nonexistence. Perhaps, in this case, My goal is to counter the dysfunction of memory before it progresses to amnesia (Ricœur 2004, 426). Hopefully, it is not too late.

### Collective Memory

In what follows I examine those aspects of collective memory most intimately associated with forgetting by looking at how different recollections about the history of the San Joaquin Valley contribute to sublimating the memory of black settlements and leads to the creation of a memory that ultimately excludes any trace of their very existence. What remains is not only an incomplete picture, but a false one. Ricœur would term this a “failure of memory” (Ricœur 2004, 80). The examples that follow come from a variety of sources. The first, taken from a 1986 paper on the geography of the San Joaquin Valley by a University of California, Berkeley geographer actually addresses African Americans within the rural landscape, but does so in such a way that, unintentionally, advances the process of forgetting.<sup>iv</sup> The second is an example from another University of California professor: this time a labor historian from UC Riverside. In this example, an extensive history that should have included the participation of numerous ethnic groups that have participated in the rural landscape focuses, instead, narrowly on a single population to the exclusion of all others. The third example comes from one of the most successful farmers who, over the course of his long career in Central California agribusiness hired (usually indirectly) tens, if not hundreds, of thousands of migrant workers to work in his fields of cotton. In this case, he paints a picture in which the participation of African Americans is denied outright, irrespective of evidence to the contrary. Finally, I address some thoughts surrounding the use and misuse of public space, in relation to these settlements, and how such uses contribute to the twin processes of creating a community of social memory and promoting selective forgetting.

University of California at Berkeley geographer, James J. Parsons provided the first example of how the formation of collective memory includes an element of forgetting. In 1986, he described the colorful ethnic mosaic of California’s Great Central Valley:

Armenian immigrants... began arriving in the Fresno area in the 1890s... Hanford, Newman and Gustine have large Azorean minorities... Swedes at Turlock and Kingsburg, Yugoslavs at Delano, Dutch at Ripon, Germans at Reedley and Lodi, and Basques at Bakersfield. Italians and Italian-Swiss are concentrated in the wine industry and in dairying... Filipinos... in the asparagus fields of the delta. Like the Sikhs... their Valley base is Stockton... Russians in Kerman, Assyrians in Modesto and Turlock, and Japanese around Livingstone... (Parsons 1986, 378).

Parsons claimed that the first ethnic farm laborers in the San Joaquin Valley were Chinese immigrants. He fails to mention Native American labor, which preceded the ethnic Chinese in the late nineteenth century prior to the State putting a bounty on Indian scalps. He notes that “anti-Chinese sentiment intensified” at which point they left the fields for the urban centers (Parsons 1986:378). This intensification of anti-Chinese sentiment would have corresponded with the Chinese Exclusionary Acts of 1882, 1892, and 1902.

The Japanese came next but in the end had the same fate although they were the largest factor in the Valley labor market as late as 1909. Today (1986) [Japanese-Americans]... are among the most successful growers in the Valley (Parsons 1986, 378).



Figure 5: Black Okies in Teviston in the early 1960s (courtesy of Ernest Lowe).

However, as he had done with Native Americans, Parsons fails to mention that as early as 1884, just two years after the passage of the first Exclusionary Act, the ethnic group most sought-after to work in the fields of Central California was blacks from the American South. This is especially true in the search for skilled labor to work in the fields of cotton which would eventually yield one of the largest cash crops of the region (Reuck 1884a, Raymond 1884b, Smith 1884, Raymond 1884a, 1886, Curtis 1888b, a,

Raymond 1888). In fact, many of the displaced Chinese laborers left California for Mississippi specifically to replace migrating blacks (Loewen 1988). Parsons' omission of African Americans from the Valley landscape is striking. It might be understandable, even forgivable, to omit the contributions of Native Americans, as that group played only a small role in the earliest days following statehood of Central California ranching and a limited part in the earliest days of the establishment of agriculture. Yet, for almost eighty years, African Americans were regularly recruited from the South to work in the fields and orchards of Central California. According to a New Deal government report, the California Cotton Growers and Manufacturer's Association imported "experienced Negro cotton workers directly from the South" to work an "extensive tract" of cotton planted in Kern County (Barry 1938). The same report quotes an unspecified farm publication editorial (approximate date 1880s-1890s) to illustrate the arrival of African Americans into California agriculture:

Twenty-five colored people from the southern states passed through Sacramento one day last week... and they report that more of their race will follow... Many of them have found employment at preparing and planting lands... for vines and trees, and they are supplanting Chinese where domestic help is required (Barry 1938).



Figure 6: African Americans pick cotton in Tulare County. This photograph was taken in either 1961 or 1964 (courtesy of Ernest Lowe).

In both integrated and segregated work crews, African Americans toiled with farmworkers of Japanese, Filipino, Anglo, and Mexican descent (Torres 1994). It is not that Parsons failed to address the African American population; he mentions the group most often referred to as the Black Okies (Arax 2002b, a, Johnson 2006, LeSeur 2000). These African American migrants, like their white counterparts, left drought-stricken southern plains states (mostly from the panhandle of Oklahoma and Texas) during the period of the Dust Bowl:

The black component of the Dust Bowlers—and they continued coming during World War II—is confined to the large Valley cities. I know of no black rural enclaves, nor are blacks often seen doing agricultural work. A small black colonization project in Kings County was organized in 1910, but it fell victim to bad water and alkali. The area is now a state park (Parsons 1986, 379).

I have selected this passage as the starting point in this exercise because Parsons sums up the general knowledge—or the public memory—of rural African Americans in the San Joaquin Valley in just three little sentences. Every single sentence of this paragraph, however, is wrong. It is not all that uncommon, although often unfortunate, for the recollection of the past to be incorrect.

Once again, we turn to Maurice Halbwachs who posited, “The individual calls recollections to mind by relying on the frameworks of social memory... society... rearranges its recollections... to adjust them to the variable conditions of its equilibrium” (Halbwachs 1992, 182-83).

Parsons, likely inadvertently, distorted the past by the way in which he reconstructed it here. African Americans did come to Central California as part of the Dust Bowl and did continue to come during World War II. In fact, African Americans, responding to the call of labor recruiters throughout the Carolinas, Arkansas, Oklahoma, Texas, Georgia, and other Southern states, arrived in the cotton fields of Kern, Tulare, Kings, Fresno, Madera, and Merced Counties from the late nineteenth century through the 1960s (Arax 2002b, Johnson 2006). A correspondent in the *Bakersfield Californian* observed...

I went to Buttonwillow for two days and while there investigated the labor camps of the big cotton bosses... there are several camps there, mostly owned by Miller and Lux... the sub-bosses advertised all over Alabama... they brought out several Negro... families, promising to pay them five dollars a day... (Bakersfield Californian Editorial Staff 1935)

Carey McWilliams, one of the earliest chroniclers of farm labor in California, pointed that African Americans were an integral part of farm labor in California, citing what he referred to as “typical” examples:

The Hotchkiss ranch near Los Banos may be taken as a typical California cotton ‘plantation’ ...In 1937 it imported some 250 Negroes from

Louisiana, under contract, to pick cotton. The corporation maintains a store where food and other supplies are sold to the Negroes at fancy prices. Lunch wagons are rolled into the fields so that the workers may eat while they work (McWilliams 2000, 195).

While Parsons correctly noted that the largest number of African Americans ultimately migrated to the “large Valley cities” (Bakersfield, Fresno, and Stockton) he makes no mention of the fact that many who lived in and near these urban centers worked as field labor.



Figure 7: African American cotton pickers outside Pixley in 1961 (courtesy of Ernest Lowe).

Griffin and Hargis noted that “blacks’ and whites’ histories... have unfolded on a shared landscape, but they do not necessarily share a common sense of their place in it” (Griffin and Hargis 2008, 44). In other words, how people are seen (or how they see

themselves) can be very different, depending upon factors, including race. In the paragraph just prior to Parsons' description of the so-called Black Okies, he waxes poetic about the white Okies:

[W]hite Protestant Anglo-Saxons from Texas and Oklahoma... refugees from drought and poverty. The Okies, immortalized by Steinbeck in his writings, came west along Highway 66 in their jalopies to look for relatives in Weedpatch and Arvin and "the water that tastes like cherry wine." Their indomitable optimism, their determination to survive and to overcome, was captured in the songs of Woody Guthrie... and the photographer Dorothea Lange. In those days cotton was still harvested by hand, and seasonal demands for labor were large... Today, first- and second-generation Okies occupy dominant positions throughout the Valley (Parsons 1986, 379).

In addition to the different framing and tone of these two paragraphs, Parsons points out the photojournalism of the great Dorothea Lange, whose images of the people of the so-called Okies occupy the apex of our collective memory of the Dust Bowl years and the plight of the migrants. Whereas Parsons claims that "nor are blacks often seen doing agricultural work" Lange, herself, produced photographs of African Americans working in the fields of California at the height of the inward migration of the Okies and Arkies. Perhaps this ability to block out the images of blacks in the field, in favor of those white Okies now occupying "dominant positions throughout the Valley" is what Halbwachs had in mind when he wrote, "...members... inflect their recollections in the same direction in which collective memory evolves..." (Halbwachs 1992, 172).

It is important to address the difference in tone between the two paragraphs—the ones describing the white and black Okies. In the paragraph about African Americans, Parsons makes statements like "they continued coming" and they were "confined to the large Valley cities." These are factual statements, with little or no judgment. Even his observation that "nor are blacks often seen doing agricultural work" does not appear to imply that these were not hard working people, rather that they were just not a part of the rural landscape. However, in his paragraph describing the arrival of the white Okies—a population despised by the local population to the point where Steinbeck's novel was banned from the Kern County Library (Kapell 1982), he employs an array of descriptions that illustrate a certain admiration for their contributions. He refers to them as "refugees from drought and poverty," claims that they are "immortalized by Steinbeck in his writings," mentions their jalopies, and their "indomitable optimism, their determination to survive and overcome" (Parsons 1986, 379). These are not simply statements of fact. This is painting the image of a people with words. These are the *salt of the earth* people worth remembering. One group is celebrated while the other is catalogued. One group is described as having done lauded deeds and to have been made immortal while it appears that the other contributed nothing worth noting.

There are two other problematic statements in Parsons' original paragraph about blacks in the San Joaquin Valley: "I know of no black rural enclaves" and "A small black colonization project in Kings County was organized in 1910, but it fell victim to bad water and alkali. The area is now a state park" (Parsons 1986, 379). Since the end of the nineteenth century there have been more than a dozen such all or predominantly black rural communities in the region. Apparently, Parsons was just not aware of their existence. These communities include Cookseyville, outside Atwater; South Dos Palos, near Dos Palos; Fairmead, between Chowchilla and Madera; Lanare, four miles west of Riverdale; Bowles Colony, near Fowler; a collection of black-owned farms outside Raisin City; Home Garden, southeast of Hanford; the Matheny Tract, outside Tulare; Teviston, south of Tipton; and, of course, Allensworth, the colonization project to which he referred. Additionally, Centerville may have begun life as an all-black community. According to one estimate, as many as forty-thousand African Americans lived, rurally, just in the Tulare Lake Basin by the early 1960s (Arax 2002a).

Parsons' next claim that "A small black colonization project in Kings County was organized in 1910, but it fell victim to bad water and alkali..." is problematic in a number of ways. Allensworth was the culmination of the so-called Exoduster movement that founded many all-black communities throughout Kansas, Oklahoma, New Mexico, and elsewhere. This movement, led by Benjamin "Pap" Singleton and others, spanned the end of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth. It is not unreasonable to consider Allensworth to be the last effort of that movement, especially considering that Singleton's son Joshua was one of the earliest settlers in the small community (de Graaf et al. 2001, 156, Ramsey 1977, 85).

However, the moniker of colony, as used in relation to Allensworth, is not taken from the Exoduster movement, but rather from a process that was referred to as the Great California Colonization Project that built a number of communities throughout southern and central California (Mead 1916) between the 1890s and the 1920s. The term colony was applied to a collection of tracts (often town lots as well as farm lots) which were marketed around the world to prospective farmers, in an effort to transition from the large landholdings of Miller and Lux, Tevis and Carr, Leland Stanford, Charles Crocker, Collis P. Huntington, and Mark Hopkins, and the other early California land barons (Igler 2001, Morgan 1914, Rayner 2008). The Allensworth colony was built, at the same time, and by the same (white) developer, as the Alpaugh colony, a few miles away. Few, if anyone, continue to refer to that town, Dos Palos, Madera, Fairmead, Exeter, or any of other

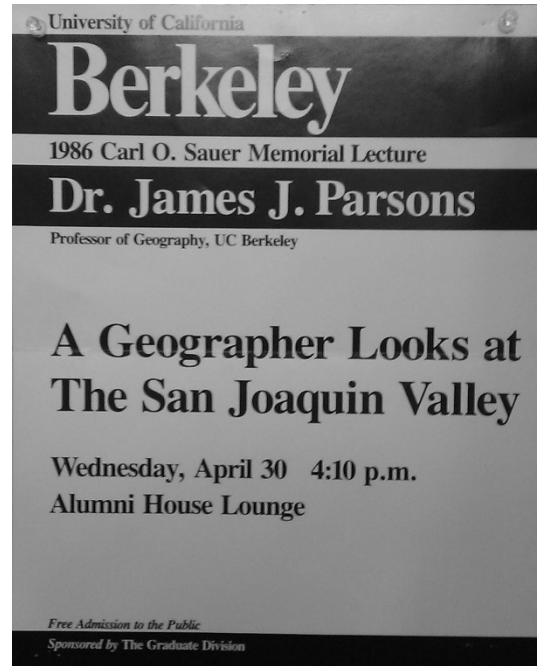


Figure 8: Poster for a presentation of the paper by Professor James J. Parsons at UC Berkeley that hangs in the cubicle of a fellow graduate student at the University of California, Merced.

numerous communities that were formed as part of the colonization project as a colony. While there were efforts, in the nineteenth century to form a black colony in Baja California (in Mexico) by supporters of Marcus Garvey, there is no connection between Allensworth (or any of the other Exoduster projects) and that colonization effort. To refer to Allensworth as a colony while no longer doing so for all the other communities that began as part of the colonization efforts sets Allensworth apart. The use of the term makes it sound as if blacks were colonizing California rather than participating in the widespread real estate venture that populated much of Orange County, and the San Fernando, San Gabriel, and San Joaquin Valleys. It makes it sound like a colony is a *black* thing, rather than a *California* thing.

Parsons' suggests (correctly) that bad water and soil were responsible for the demise of the Allensworth community, and ultimately, in a sense, they were. However, the failure of the original developer to deliver a promised water system to Allensworth meant that the residents were dependent upon individual wells, rather than on a municipal water supply. Instead of installing the system that was specified in the contract (something they did do in Alpaugh), the developers, having recouped their investment and earned a small profit, elected to give the shares of the Allensworth water company to the town's residents and walked away (Ramsey 1977, 49-53). The result, of course, was that Allensworth literally dried up and blew away.

Parsons' final statement "The area is now a state park" (Parsons 1986, 379), appears to be little more than the expression of a plain fact. However, it too presents the careful reader with a couple of problems. First, he is correct. There is a state park at the site of the historical community of Allensworth. It is apparently often forgotten (or never known) that there continues to be an unincorporated town, named Allensworth, just south of the Allensworth State Park. That community includes a mixed population of blacks, Hispanics and whites. The implication, in Parsons' version of events (which tends to coincide with most people's understanding) appears to be that Allensworth ceased to exist and was replaced by a park or a memorial. The memorial has become the reality, and the real town (which physically exists) has faded from vision. Even when one visits the park, the town itself appears to be so far from the reconstructed homes and businesses that it does not *feel* like it is part of Allensworth.

It is unlikely that Professor Parsons intended to perpetrate a hoax or fabricate a lie about the history of African Americans in the San Joaquin Valley, yet his apparently well-intended reference to all-black rural communities actually painted a picture that is baseless and inaccurate. It is, however, a story that matches the perceived reality believed by long-time Valley residents. The well-understood narrative of farm labor throughout the San Joaquin Valley remains based on the notion of Hispanic labor replacing Asian labor, sometime in the early days of the twentieth century.

The vision of blacks picking cotton in California fields, or living in rural black settlements, conjures many associations with America's Deep South. Perhaps that association is what many in Central California would rather avoid. Some (both black and white) might prefer to limit an awareness of the exploitation of African Americans in the state. In many of the interviews I have done with African Americans who lived in these rural enclaves, they have proudly discussed the fact that they, and other members of their family, picked cotton (as well as other crops from fruit to beans), or, just as proudly

stating that they never had to pick cotton a day in their life (Brooks 1977, Williams 2010). By diminishing or eliminating the all-black or majority-black settlements that dotted the San Joaquin Valley landscape, Parsons inadvertently discounts that part of the past and prevents African Americans from being able to “reclaim the past as an important part of the present, and to reconsider, to revalue, and to reassess” (Assmann 2008, 54). Removing black farm workers from the cotton fields, the reality becomes *blotted out*, in favor of a different reality, in the form of a new (false) memory. New collective memories often require the loss or transformation of existing facts. James Fentress and Chris Wickham addressed this process, “[T]he blotting-out process... is not just a general and gradual loss of factual information...” (Fentress and Wickham 1992, 73-74). They warn that old information loses meaning or fails to fit into new contexts, while suggesting that “facts must be... arranged in stories...” (Fentress and Wickham 1992, 73-74).



Figure 9: Tagus Ranch sign from the 1940s, along Highway 99 (photo by Paul S. Taylor, from *Everyone Had Cameras*, Richard Steven Street).

Apparently, the knowledge of the existence of these rural black settlements is not widespread throughout the region. This continues to diminish as most (if not all) these communities make demographic shifts from predominately (if not all) black to majority Hispanic. Second and third generation African Americans have moved elsewhere, including to urban centers in the Valley. This results in the “general and gradual loss” of accurate memories or facts (Fentress and Wickham 1992, 73-74).

I had hoped that Devra Weber’s book, *Dark Sweat, White Gold: California Farm Workers, Cotton, and the New Deal*, was going to help prevent just such a blotting-out. Here was a book dedicated to tracing cotton’s history in Central California. The write-up on the inner flyleaf proclaimed:

The history of cotton in California is defined by the complex and changing relations among workers, growers, unions, and the agents of local, state, and federal governments, and yet these have never before been fully analyzed (Weber 1994, front flyleaf).

Finally, a scholarly work—Professor Weber is a respected member of the history faculty at the University of California, Riverside—that fully covers the story of labor in the cotton fields of Central California. I hoped that this book would be useful in my quest to reconstruct the history of these rural communities and the people who lived in them. But, as I read farther down the blurb in the flyleaf, I noticed something. It read:

[S]he shows that Mexican workers—women as much as men—consistently developed strategies and organized against the harsh conditions they faced... In 1933, despite the threat of deportation, they launched a series of strikes... unmatched at the time in number and size (Weber 1994, front flyleaf).

There were a series of agricultural strikes in 1933, among the largest being the Pixley Cotton Strike. However, many of these were organized by outside activists from the Cannery and Agricultural Workers Industrial Union (CAWIU) (Rivera 2005, Torres 1994, McWilliams 2000, 220-224). Weber claimed that between seventy-five and ninety-five percent of strikers in Pixley were Mexican (Weber does not differentiate between Mexicans and Mexican Americans) (Weber 1994, 79). Robert Torres and Alicia Rivera have both pointed out that the brief success of this strike was predicated upon the solidarity maintained between three groups of striking farm workers—Hispanics, blacks, and white Okies—and the inability of the growers to divide them and play one group off against the others (Rivera 2005, Torres 1994). Weber does not make it evident, even in her notes, how she came up with the percentages she reported. Her endnote cites a survey and offers no explanation for the twenty-percentage point spread, or how the ethnic or racial backgrounds of the strikers were designated or calculated for the report she cites, or how she interprets that data to support her claim. Contemporary newspaper articles state that the crews working in the fields were mixed, white, brown, and black. Eventually, a local editorial from late October of 1933 suggested that:

Perhaps white sheeted Knights might throw the fear of the devil into those whom neither state nor federal authority was able to throw the fear of god. The mystery of what is under a sheet is sometimes a powerful influence (*Visalia Times-Delta* Editorial Staff 1933).

The Ku Klux Klan seldom resorted to racially motivated violence in Central California because the threat was generally sufficient to control minority groups, especially southern blacks. If the strike was all about Mexicans, the threat of Klan violence would mean very little. However, if a significant number of the strikers were southern blacks, any threat of the Klan would be significant.

I do not wish to suggest that Weber's work consciously seeks to suppress the memory of other subaltern groups in the fields of California, simply on her description of the strike of 1933. Throughout the work, I did find a handful of references to blacks. The first implies that although African Americans may have been considered for work in the cotton fields, they were neither pursued nor considered ideal labor. Describing the state of the labor force in the mid-1920s, Weber remarks:

San Joaquin Valley growers began to compete for workers, attempted to entice workers away from other ranches, and placed advertisements in local and southern newspapers to attract pickers, spurring rumors that southern blacks would be imported, much to the consternation of those who had feared all along that cotton would eventually “saddle [California] with a negro problem” (Weber 1994 includes quote from *Pacific Rural Press* 1925).

In fact, recruiters had actually brought in black labor from the South, specifically to work in the cotton fields of the Valley, since 1884, when the first group arrived to pick cotton on Kern Island (now Bakersfield) (Cleveland Gazette 1884, Kern County Californian 1884, New York Times 1884b, a). Recruiting and hiring African Americans, from the South, continued through the early 1960s (Arax 2002b, a, Arax and Wartzman 2003, McWilliams 2000, 224). As I already mentioned, I have interviewed dozens of African Americans, and read numerous oral histories of others, most of whom picked cotton at some point during the four decades leading up to the establishment of the mechanical means to pick cotton in the mid-1960s (Brooks 1977, Cooksey 2007a, Cooksey 2007b, Cowlings 1977a, Cowlings 1977b, Digby, Pierro, and Watkins 1976, LeSeur 2000, Pilkinton 1977, Hannibal and Watkins 1977). Later, Weber acknowledged the existence of blacks in the fields (something that might surprise Parsons):

A man whose wife first said it “nearly killed him” to work under a black contractor later developed respect for his boss. Two months after Texans had demanded the expulsion of Mexicans from the Arvin camp, the unit elected a Mexican worker to the camp council. Mexicans, blacks, and Anglos were later to work together in the Workers Alliance and in Unions (Weber 1994, 149-50).

There are three significant points in this short excerpt. First, she points out that a black man worked as a foreman, or crew boss, in the field (over white and Hispanic labor). She continues to address racism and bigotry when she writes about whites pushing for exclusionary practices to be implemented in the labor camp. Finally, she specifically points out that the three groups “Mexicans, blacks and Anglos” worked together in the union (Weber 1994, 150).

She reiterates this last point when she mentions that during the Cotton Strike of 1938, “Mexicans, Anglos, and blacks met... nightly for strike meetings” (Weber 1994, 183). Weber makes just two more, similarly brief mentions of African Americans throughout the rest of the book. On the book’s back flyleaf, it states “...Mexican farm workers emerge for the first time as historical actors shaping their own destinies” (Weber 1994, back flyleaf). This framing tends to downplay the role played by African Americans, as well as poor whites during the Depression, to focus on that of Hispanics in the fields of cotton.

I do not want to diminish the importance of Professor Weber’s work. This is a well-researched, authoritative examination of the role of Hispanic farm labor in

California's cotton industry. This is a must-read for anyone who hopes to understand California agricultural labor, with the caveat that the story she tells is actually the story of *Hispanic* farm workers and their relationship to cotton, not the definitive work about labor in cotton, nor on agricultural labor, in general. Weber's book demonstrates that "the past is... reconstructed on the basis of the present" (Halbwachs 1992, 40). Today, the vast majority of those working in the fields, groves, and vineyards of Central California (regardless of crop) are Hispanic, therefore, the narrative that Mexicans and Mexican Americans are the primary source of labor for California agribusiness is a narrative that is not to be questioned. It becomes a case of 'it always was,' even though the reality is that 'it wasn't always.'

If Parsons' *forgetting* is as problematic in its unintentional nature as it is in its inaccuracy, Weber's transgressions, on the other hand, are little more than her overstatement of the narrative of one group to the (inadvertent or deliberate) exclusion of others who can make similar claims. In both cases, public memory suffers from the forgetting of much of what we would call *truth*.

There are other ways that blotting-out of the memory of African Americans in the cotton fields of Central California serves to blot-out their presence. One striking example of this was when one of the most powerful titans of California Agribusiness, J. G. Boswell, said, in 1999, "Blacks? We don't really have any blacks in this town" (J. G. Boswell, quoted in Arax and Wartzman 2003:19-20) in reference to his hometown of Corcoran, California. Besides having Arax and Wartzman point out that Boswell's long-time foreman was African American, it should be clear to anyone that what he said is just not true. This is made most evident by the fact that just outside the Corcoran city limits sits the one time, all-black enclave of Sunny Acres.

During the 1930s and 1940s, when California saw a large influx of the so-called Okies, hundreds of African American field hands who worked on Boswell's land lived in a labor camp at one end of Corcoran, referred to by locals simply as "Nigger Town." The tarpaper shacks and tents of the labor camp were supplemented by juke joints, brothels, and churches. Eventually, many of the black families looking for a healthier environment moved out of the labor camp, across town, to a forty-acre plot of land originally known as Boot Hill. Tulare's Edwin Matheny, a travelling salesman, sold the land to black residents (when no one else in the area would), for a low down payment. He financed his clients himself.<sup>v</sup> Eventually, during the summer of 1964, the local residents, while working to get a water and sewage system for their settlement, renamed the rural enclave Sunny Acres, (Arax and Wartzman 2003, 258). Yet despite this history that spans at least half a century, in which African Americans lived (at one point) in both a segregated labor camp and a segregated settlement, Boswell was able to claim, with no reservation, that few, if any blacks, ever lived in Corcoran.

Perhaps, in all three of these previous cases, it is important to try to ascertain the motives behind the authors. In the case of Parsons, the passages I dissected are from a piece on the physical geography of Central California, into which he inserted a small section on the human landscape. It is possible that Weber always intended to cover the history of Hispanic labor in the cotton fields of the San Joaquin Valley, and as such, the exclusion of African Americans was due solely to the process that every historian has to employ to limit the scope of a specific work. Boswell, on the other hand, may either have

had a reason to diminish the contributions of African Americans in his own fields, or, as the product of a southern family, he may have retained prejudices and predispositions that skewed his thinking and his expressions. Regardless of the motivations, however, the result is the same. Each of them removes African Americans from the cotton fields of Central California. Without blacks working those fields, there is no logical explanation for the existence of non-urban black communities throughout the Valley. If the only black community that ever existed was Allensworth—and it failed—there is no place for blacks (other than a memorial space) within the shared memory that represents life in the San Joaquin Valley. This creates a narrative within the shared memory that blacks only live in urban spaces in the San Joaquin Valley and the only attempt to create an all-black, non-urban space, was Allensworth, and it failed. However, I do not wish to leave this subject without offering some hope against the notion that history always obscures the past. In fact, it is both individual and social memory that stubbornly insists on bringing the past into focus. Larry J. Griffin and Peggy G. Hargis posit...

[T]he past is not really, can never be, past at all. It is recalcitrant, stubbornly refusing to go away or be discarded. It haunts recovery and sabotages amnesia. The past reminds—makes—us who we are and, sometimes, when we acknowledge that past, it also makes us wish we were not who we are... It spurs acts of sacrifice and greatness. It renews, even paradoxically, as it defies newness. In its inevitability, the past is always everywhere, persisting into the present and thus presaging the future (Griffin and Hargis 2008, 42).

### Memorial as Memory

Although, seemingly not directly related to forgetting, there is one additional thing about the town of Allensworth, the related state park, and its use as a public memorial that needs to be addressed. The following observations are intended to provide a starting point from which to examine some of the questions surrounding the park and its uses. As I mentioned, earlier, Allensworth is known, almost universally, throughout the San Joaquin Valley. Part of that common knowledge comes from the physical existence of the park itself. Locals see signs for the park along the highway and read about conflicts between supporters of the park and her neighbors (disputes over land use). Local news stories usually carry some background about the founding of the community, and its ultimate fate. Basically, there is a loose narrative known by most Valley residents concerning Allensworth. Parsons' provides much of this story above, however, for the sake of what follows I am going to paraphrase it something like this:

A long time ago, some black people tried to build an all-black town in the Southern San Joaquin Valley. They built a library and a school and had lots of plans, but—probably because of poor planning and a lack of administrative skills—the town had been built on bad soil with little water and it failed. Years later, to honor the ill-conceived attempts made by these black people, the State built a park on the site to which, every year, a

bunch of African Americans from Los Angeles and Oakland visit the park to commemorate the failed effort.

Although this may appear to be (and, of course it is) an oversimplification of the story, it is not too far from the various versions I have heard from Valley residents. Allensworth has become part of the collective memory yet, its story is not a positive one. In fact, it is a story of failure, of bad decisions, and of a group of people who obviously did not know what they were doing, or who, at the very least, made some very bad decisions. Viewed in this light, the park is a monument to a failed enterprise. The park, itself, creates a history and perpetuates memories:

The past is memorialized in monuments, museums, days on the calendar, and sacred and quasi-sacred commemorative rituals; it is packaged and sold as heritage tourism; it is continually discussed... that is, the past as lesson... (Griffin and Hargis 2008, 42).

Every June, people gather to celebrate Juneteenth, a “quasi-sacred commemorative” ritual to mark of the end of slavery in the United States (Griffin and Hargis 2008, 42). The commemoration at the park also celebrates Colonel Allen Allensworth, and those who had the dream that the original town Allensworth (and now the Allensworth park) represents. The event repeats and reinforces a narrative about the founding of the doomed community, and the connection of those present to those who originally participated in that dream. As Ricœur noted, “A history taught, a history learned, but also a history celebrated... A... pact is concluded... between remembrance... and commemoration” (Ricœur 2004, 85).

The virtual (and often literal) descendants of those who participated in the original project often attend the event, as well as the curious who come to the park to see what *might* have been. Here is where the notion of collective memory and the role of forgetting and recollecting come into play with the notion of commemoration and memorialization. Within our shared memory Allensworth has come to represent the attempt by African Americans to build their own community in the San Joaquin Valley. Ricœur links identity to narrative reinforced by the collective commemoration. Therefore, part of that identity becomes linked to, not just the dream of the community of Allensworth, but the failure of community as well. There are numerous historically African American communities in the San Joaquin Valley. Most of them sustained larger populations for longer periods of time than Allensworth. However, none of them has ever entered the collective memory. They have not entered the narrative because they do not serve the narrative. Not only does the existence of these other communities remove the uniqueness of Allensworth as the only all-black rural community in the Valley, but, these communities represent alternatives to Allensworth’s failure. With fewer resources, and fewer expectations, these other communities survived, even if they did not prosper. Over the years, they provided homes to hundreds of families. Each settlement has supported churches and (to varying levels of success) businesses. From these communities the grandchildren of slaves and their descendants attended school, some went to college and entered professions, and many of them moved beyond the confines of these segregated settlements. Yet, every

year, these communities are left out of the celebration at Allensworth, and out of the collective memory. Each year, they step farther back into the fog of time, where, unless their stories are preserved, they will eventually fade away, and the only community that will be remembered will be the one that failed. Teviston and Sunny Acres are each less than twenty miles from Allensworth. Few of the Juneteenth celebrants are aware of the existence of these communities, nor the history of the thousands of African Americans who made these, one time, all-black communities their home. If, as Paul Connerton suggests, a commemorative celebration is where a “community is reminded of its identity as represented by and told in a master narrative” (Connerton 2008, 70) then, the Juneteenth celebration at Allensworth is, in fact, reinforcing a specific narrative. On the positive side, the celebration commemorates the hopes and dreams that went into the foundation of that community. Perhaps the nostalgia for the hope that was embodied in that community is the representation of a “potential space of cultural experience that one has shared with one’s friends and compatriots that is based neither on nation nor religion but on elective affinities” (Boym 2001, 53). On the inverse, the Juneteenth celebration reinforces can be seen as representing the failure of African Americans to fulfill that dream. Once again, we may be seeing that the past is reconstructed based on the understanding of the present (Halbwachs 1992, 40). It also becomes evident, as suggested by Griffin and Hargis, that white and black Americans historically remember the past differently. They suggest that it...

...is not the *avenues* to the past that separate black and white Americans; it is, instead the *content* of the past. *What* is remembered and *how* it is remembered are at the root of distinct group memories... (Griffin and Hargis 2008, 57).

What does this say about present conditions, both within the hegemonic community that has framed the broadly accepted narrative and those subaltern groups (in this case, African Americans) that find themselves excluded from that narrative? How might the story change if the Juneteenth celebration actually celebrated all the rural black Valley communities, rather than just the so-called colony of Allensworth? Would recollecting (re-collecting) the pasts of these communities change the observance? Would doing so change the master narrative?

Some of the examples in this chapter—specifically excerpts of the Parsons talk and Boswell’s remark about blacks in Corcoran—I have referenced in conference papers. I have had several long conversations with colleagues and friends about these and other examples—such as my thoughts on the Allensworth Juneteenth celebrations and Weber’s book. Often my thoughts—and the words that came from them—have tended to express, on one hand, my frustration that the stories of these people may be lost forever, and on the other hand, a righteous indignation brought on by the apparent injustice of these people having lost the ability to be heard or seen. I have, often times, seen myself as a crusader seeking historical justice for the victims of this cruel twist of fate that has excluded their story from the narrative of Valley history. However, this is the first time in which I have attempted to address the processes behind this injustice or historical miscarriage. Griffin and Hargis support my concern raised by the discrepancies and

disparities of the broader (white) narrative that tends to blot out the historic role played by systemic and systematic racism, in America.

Race is at the heart of the collective remembrance of black Americans... white Americans' memories, on the other hand, had little overtly to do with race... If whites... do not remember the struggle for racial justice... they then are licensed not only to forget Jim Crow as well but also to be more ignorant of or indifferent to racism's continuing legacy... we see in these patterns the invisibility of race among the privileged and the inevitability of race among the dispossessed and the disenfranchised... at the beginning of the twenty-first century, a nation... racially cleaved by its memories of a past so differently experienced (Griffin and Hargis 2008, 62).

The primary, and most active, processes of collective memory are recollection and forgetting. My job is to attempt to restore a missing element of the historical narrative. Although

So, I will continue my crusade. I will continue to try to bring these stories back to the narrative. Because, by doing so, the narrative becomes more noble, more inclusive, and more human.

## CHAPTER 4: Re-collecting and Reclaiming History

My primary objectives for this research has three major aspects: to reclaim an invisible or lost history; explore explanations as to why that historical narrative remains absent from the broader telling of history; and to examine those processes that impact the individual and collective memories that make up history are remembered, forgotten, recollected, or discarded. In this chapter, I will attempt to re-collect a basic history of these communities and try to make sense out of how they formed, what sustained them, and how they changed over time, to answer (in part) the first of those three primary questions.

All or majority black communities have a long history in the United States. Following Reconstruction (normally credited with the Compromise of 1877 that gave Rutherford B. Hayes the presidency and returned control of the South to southern Democrats), segregated southern communities were always part of the landscape, as African Americans were systematically excluded from white communities (Hurston 2006, Loewen 2005). One very successful movement associated with all-black towns was the so-called Exoduster movement as promoted by Benjamin “Pap” Singleton and Columbus M. Johnson (Fleming 1909, Garvin 1948). This project established so-called *Race Towns*, such as Nicodemus and Singleton, Kansas. It was expected that these planned communities were to develop businesses, factories, shops, schools, and organizations within an atmosphere that was free from outside white influences. These expansion efforts were often highly organized by corporate entities that sought outside (occasionally white) investment and coordinated the marketing and building of these settlements. Turn of the century boosterism, support by African American leaders, including Booker T. Washington, W. E. B. Du Bois, and Marcus Garvey, contributed to these ongoing efforts (Lapp 1977, 265, de Graaf et al. 2001, 156-157).

Successive waves of African Americans from the Southern states began arriving in California’s San Joaquin Valley as early as 1884 (Raymond 1886, 1884b, a, Reuck 1884b, a, 1881a, b, Smith 1884).<sup>vi</sup> One of the first documented groups arrived in boxcars from Texas to Kern Island (now Bakersfield), with additional groups following a few years later to work the Butler farms (and other large-scale enterprises) in the Fresno area (Curtis 1888a, b, Raymond 1888). However, even with this long history of the importation of African American labor to the Valley, the common perception remains that blacks are relatively new arrivals and that their numbers remain small and urban (Parsons 1986). In reality, however, my research indicated that many laborers lived close to the fields, orchards, groves, and vineyards in segregated, often impoverished rural settlements. The contributions of these African Americans to the agricultural life of the Valley remain virtually invisible, in both popular culture and academic circles as well as the economic life of the region. In 2006, the *Bakersfield Californian* published an article about Willie Gene Johnson as part of its *Dust Bowl Diaries* series. Johnson, a so-called Bakersfield Black Okie, arrived in Kern County in a Model T truck in 1934 (Johnson 2006). Both photographs accompanying the article erroneously identify Johnson as being one of the first African Americans in that county. His arrival as part of the Dust Bowl migration to Kern County postdates the first significant influx to the southern part of the Valley by almost half a century (Johnson 2006). Each February, to mark Black History Month, articles in the *Fresno Bee*, the *Visalia Times-Delta*, or the *Bakersfield Californian*

highlight early San Joaquin Valley “pioneers” like the black rancher Gabriel Moore or the Buffalo Soldiers in Yosemite, Sequoia, and Kings Canyon National Parks (Keeler 2007, McEwen 2008). However, with few exceptions, little, if any, historical attention (academic or popular) has focused on African American communities in the region. This is true of the few historical works that pertain to the San Joaquin Valley, but it applies especially to the history of specific ethnic and racial groups, throughout the region. Generally, the history of the region (and therefore, the understanding and memories of most residents) tends to focus on the achievements and contributions of large agricultural concerns, not on the diverse groups of people who often provided the labor to those enterprises. This has provided a limited knowledge of regional history [influencing what history is taught and understood]. This focus echoes Pierre Bourdieu’s description of how those in power “impose the legitimate categories of perception and appreciation” (Bourdieu 1993, 106). These powerful voices drown out the historical whisper of these rural segregated settlements. As such, like similar communities elsewhere across the American landscape, they remain absent in the majority of secondary sources, as well as the public’s imagination. Historian Thomas Knight pointed out, as early as 1975, the “curious absence” of academic interest in the subject of all-black settlements (Knight 1975). Likewise, anthropologist Flora Price referred to the “short shrift [that] has been given to the... many all African American towns... and communities...” throughout the United States (Price 2003). Historical portions of my dissertation seek to fill the gap and advance the understanding of these issues, specifically as they relate to the histories of some of these communities in the San Joaquin Valley.<sup>vii</sup> The bulk of the *historical* research for my study relies heavily on primary sources such as archival material (including newspaper articles) and oral histories or life stories (both archival and those that I have gathered, myself, in the field).<sup>viii</sup> I hope to not only reconstruct the history of these forgotten or neglected communities, but to provide a foundation for a more broad utilization of history and social memory as it relates to the present and (as in the case of Fairmead, in Madera County) the future and the aspirations for the future.

The focus on this second point (the function and impact of historical and social memory on the present and future) comprises a major piece of the *ethnographic* research for this dissertation. By examining recent and on-going activities within one particular community to address various social and economic issues such as crime, poverty, and infrastructure needs, I continue to look at what role (if any) that historical narrative and social memory play in contemporary events and in possible future outcomes. In other words, how do history and memory contribute, today, to community cohesion and a willingness and ability to organize to address current issues and help to formulate a vision for the future.

## Colonies



Figure 10: Map of All-Black Colonies

The earliest attempts to establish all-black towns throughout California coincide with a second movement that would ultimately be responsible for the creation of numerous towns, especially in Southern California and the San Joaquin and Sacramento Valleys. This was known as the *Great California Colonization Project*.

The establishment of towns and cities in the San Joaquin Valley developed in successive waves over the course of the last century and a half in response to the economic and social conditions of the time. Immediately following statehood (1849), large organizations, such as Miller and Lux (cattle), A. B. Butler (raisins), and Haggin and Carr (grains and cotton), controlled the majority of the farmland in the Valley. Population centers arose around the Southern Pacific Railroad and the rivers where steam-powered paddleboats transferred people and goods between coastal cities and the state's heartland. However, by the beginning of the twentieth century, numerous efforts were under way to develop communities, large and small, across the Valley. Many of these so-called colonization projects were designed specifically to establish networks of small, diversified family-owned farms. One such project was organized by the Co-operative Land and Trust Company who built, among other

Valley towns, the unincorporated town of Fairmead, in northern Madera County (Spreckles 1912b). The Co-operative Land and Trust Company had been involved in California real estate development since its inception in February of 1904 (Hattersly-Drayton 2008). J. S. Cone and A. M. Thompson directed development from their Palo Alto offices (Clough 1968). Their efforts included colonization projects around the city of Merced, the Jordan-Atwater tracts, and the Livingston Colony (Co-operative Land and Trust Company 1912). In 1911, the Co-operative Land and Trust purchased approximately six thousand acres, in Merced County and created the small town of

Winton (Spreckles 1911). It appears that there had been interest in subdividing the Fairmead area for several years:

According to their advertising circular, *Fairmead for Farmers* (c. 1913) the Company tried to buy land in the area for several years, “but landowners refused to divide their estates and small-time farmers were shut out.” Curiously only one landowner is listed in the area on the 1891 Thompson Atlas, a “F. G. Newlands.” Newlands is enigmatic as no other information on him... can be found. (Perhaps “Newlands” is an alias for one of the land barons, as for example William S. Chapman?). A letter dated November 1, 1913 from E. N. McCardle of the Madera Abstract Company, however, notes that at least by 1913 the Fairmead Colonies included lands formerly owned by [John] Olcese and [H. J. and H. A.] Buchenau (Hattersly-Drayton 2008, 15).

A 1912 classified ad, in the *Los Angeles Times* exemplifies the approach to selling these rural agricultural developments (*Los Angeles Times* Editorial Staff 1912):

**FOR SALE: WHY YOU SHOULD INVESTIGATE  
FAIRMEAD FARMS.**

Because California farmers have bought nearly 3000 acres in the past three months. They know good soil and what constitute ideal conditions. There can be no better recommendation than this.

Because Fairmead Colonies are located on the **STATE HIGHWAY** from Los Angeles to San Francisco, and on the main line of the **S.P.R.R.** and in the geographical center of the great **SAN JOAQUIN VALLEY**.

Because we have an abundant and cheap **WATER SUPPLY** and a deep rich sandy loam soil.

Because the Fairmead soil produces in abundance **ALFALFA, FRUIT, VEGETABLES** and nearly all the other products of California.

Send us your name and address and we will forward literature on **FAIRMEAD.**  
**CO-OPERATIVE LAND & TRUST CO.,** “Lands That Produce Wealth.” 557 Spring St. Los Angeles, Cal.

Figure 11: Reproduction of a classified ad from the *Los Angeles Times*, 1912.

M. C. Coats, of the California Development Board, explained this process of colonization in California’s inland Valleys, using Fairmead as the prime example of the process, in 1912:

In the many sections of the interior Valleys... the land company selects good land near transportation, grades the avenues, puts on water, builds school houses, establishes experimental gardens, with experts, who advise the settler just what to do, giving the settler an opportunity to pay for the land from the products, and finally handles these products to the best advantage for the settler. This is California in 1912, up to date... All that is required is energy. Nature furnishes the other requisites of sunshine [and] soil... The Sharon estate... sold part of its Madera ranch to raise money for San Francisco building construction... With the development of the underground water this region will soon fill with small farmers. Fairmead colony is the name applied to the new district. Surveyors have been at work on the tract for several days platting the farms and laying out the townsite on the railroad... several successful wells have already been put down. Construction work on the Fairmead hotel began two days ago. The establishment of a town at this point is creating a great deal of interest, for it will be the only large town between Madera and Merced and will be the shipping point for more than 60,000 acres of land... Many fine subdivisions are now open for settlement near good towns, where it is a pleasure to live. Sunshine, soil and water, mild winters, fine markets and good neighbors mean independence, health and happiness to the man who locates on the 20 acre diversified farm (Coats 1912).

Although Fairmead was a model of this form of development, for my purposes, I will explore it later in the section that covers unincorporated towns, as it was not specifically established as an all or majority black community. The fact that it was started just a few years after the Allensworth Colony and shared a similar fate has more to do with access to clean potable water for household and irrigation use than with the economic foundations of either town.

There were several early attempts at black colonization in Central California. As early as 1859, a group of Stockton businessmen formed a *Savings and Land Association* offering four hundred shares, at \$25 each, to collect \$100,000 with which to purchase land. African Americans from the Valley, the Bay Area, and elsewhere invested. Similarly, thirty years later, on December 15, 1891, a group of African American financiers from the Bay Area and Texas formed the Colored Colonization Association of Fresno County with the singular purpose of accumulating \$100,000 to invest in land for a black colony in that county. The *Articles of Incorporation* defined the group's purpose:

To purchase and acquire lands in the State of California and subdivide and sell same. To lay out town sites thereon and sell the same and the lots thereof. To form colonies of coloured people on said lands and to subdivide parcels of said lands into such tracts as may be suitable for such purposes. To advance moneys for such purposes. To accept payment for lands sold and moneys advanced on deferred payments and to do all the things necessary to carry out the purposes mentioned herein. Also to bring

coloured people for Colonization purposes from other states of the United States (Colored Colonization Association of Fresno County 1891).

The original board of directors included several prominent businessmen, including A. F. Holland and Frank A. Alexander from the San Francisco Bay Area, J. Sanford and E. H. Brown from Fresno, and A. J. Wallace, Anthony Lilly, and S. Williams from Waco, Texas. The Articles of Incorporation also included a list of initial investors, each of whom purchased up to ten shares at ten dollars a share. The director, A. J. Wallace, held the majority of the initial shares with ten. The bulk of the investors were from either Fresno or the Bay Area. These two projects are the earliest known colonization projects in the Valley and occur during the four decades before the establishment of Allensworth. Although initial investors bought shares, it appears that little, if anything, resulted from these early attempts to establish organized all-black colonies in the Valley.

### The Bowles Colored Colony, Monmouth, and Centerville

Possibly the earliest known all- or majority-black rural settlement that actually took shape in the San Joaquin Valley, originally known as the Bowles Colored Colony, sits four miles west of Fowler. Established around 1900, Bowles, like many of the communities that followed, began life as little more than a collection of homes and small farmsteads. This small settlement still stands amid the farmland of Fresno County. Many of the earliest Bowles residents arrived in the San Joaquin Valley as either a direct, or indirect, result of agricultural labor recruitment efforts that began in the 1880s. Among the earliest of these recruits were W. W. Eason and his wife from Atlanta, Georgia. After saving money he earned as a ranch hand and she as a laundress, they purchased land in Bowles to raise peaches and grapes. Over the next few years, they also acquired as many as fifteen town lots in Fowler.



Figure 12: Centerville storefront. One of the oldest structures in this tiny town. It may have been built at the time of the initial black colony, near the end of the 19th century. (contemporary photo by author).

Another family that helped establish the Bowles Colony was the Pilkinton Family from Richmond, Virginia. Wellington Pilkinton, Jr. was the first African American in the region to market dried peaches and raisins. He became an early member of the local raisin association. In 1903, his father and mother, both former slaves, joined him in California. They purchased a small farm adjacent to their son's 100 acres at the Bowles Colony that Wellington Sr. continued to farm until his death in January of 1927 (Lang 2005). To promote the development of Bowles, the younger Pilkinton donated a parcel of land

to the African Methodist Episcopal Church (A.M.E.) (Pilkinton 1977).

According to an undated clipping from the *Fresno Bee* (provided without citation, by the Fresno County Historical Society), David Jennings had been born a slave. His former *owner*, Wade Hampton had been the governor and a United States senator from the State of Virginia. A long-time resident of Bowles and Fowler, Jennings was 104 years old, upon his death (*Fresno Bee* Editorial Staff).

Although Fowler had both an A.M.E. and a black Baptist church, many rural African Americans, like Eva Bell Cowings who moved to Monmouth from San Francisco in 1913, attended the Bowles A.M.E. church regularly. At that time, three or four other black families also lived in Monmouth, a tiny hamlet of several houses and a few farmsteads south-west of Fowler (Cowlings 1977b). Other residents of Bowles included William H. Boatman, Marshall Sutter, William Asken, Hayes Patrick, and John Maxey (Rehart 2002, 127). By the mid-1920s, twenty to thirty African Americans lived in Bowles (Cowlings 1977a). However, during the Depression many of the black farmers in Bowles (and elsewhere) lost their land and subsequently moved into Fresno where they took jobs in construction, domestic service, and other more stable vocations or to other parts of the state or the country (Cowlings 1977a).

Today, Bowles is little more than a small collection of homes, standing among the farmland of southern Fresno County. No longer a black enclave, just 1 percent of the contemporary population claimed to be African American on the 2000 Census. The majority population, at 64 percent, now reports as white (US Census Bureau 2008). Unfortunately, other than occasional mentions in old newspapers and a few references in some interviews conducted in the 1970s, there remains little from which to put together a more complete history of Bowles (or Monmouth and Centerville), at this time. Hopefully, in the future, I will be able to locate useful sources with which to flesh out these stories.



DAVID JENNINGS.

Figure 13 Photo of David Jennings, of Bowles and Fowler (from undated *Fresno Bee* article (courtesy the Fresno Historical Society).

## Allensworth Colony

One of the few communities where any secondary sources existed when I started this research was Allensworth. While many of the available sources are little more than self-published photo or commemorative books, one work stood out. Eleanor Mason Ramsey's 1977 dissertation, *Allensworth—A Study of Social Change* (Ramsey 1977). This unpublished work, which earned Ramsey a Ph.D. in Anthropology from the University of California at Berkeley, provides valuable information about this black colonization effort. Beyond providing historical narrative, Ramsey suggested an interdisciplinary, ethnohistorical approach to the examination of similar communities; one in which she relied heavily “on the memories of the participants, who must be seen as active agents...” (Ramsey 1977). Ramsey's reliance on first person memory, in the form of interviews and personal correspondence as a method of scrutinizing the motivations behind the creation of community underscores that, beyond a few isolated and far-flung newspaper articles, few primary or secondary sources offer specifics concerning the settlements at the heart of my research. This remains the only comprehensive history of the community and has provided, in some ways, a model that I try to emulate – namely providing as many original voices as possible. However, as her original interviews are not archived anywhere and there are few other sources, you will see many references back to Ramsey's dissertation, throughout this section.

In 1908, five African Americans in Los Angeles established the California Colony and Home Promotion Association (Beasley 1919, 154). The members of the Board of Directors of the Association included Col. Allen Allensworth, a Baptist Minister; the Reverend Willie H. Peck, a minister in the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church; William Payne, a former schoolteacher and businessman; J. W. Palmer, a former miner; and Harvey Mitchell, who was in real estate. The purpose of this association was to promote a race colony in southern Tulare County. I use the term race, here, in the manner in which it was used within the black community throughout the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup>. Any term preceded by the word “race” during this time, especially, but not exclusively, by black newspapers (originally called Race Papers) was expressively recognized as pertaining to black. Generally, this meant a black owned (but, not always) enterprise that catered to a black clientele. So race records were recordings by blacks for a black audience (although, at various times, these were purchased in large numbers by white customers), the black-owned and targeted newspapers, as I mentioned were referred to as race papers, and, by extension, all-black towns were referred to with the designation “race towns.” Allensworth, as this community was to be known, was just one of two neighboring communities developed by William O'Bryan, president of the Pacific Farming Company. Established just a few years apart, Allensworth and Alpaugh developed within different contexts. Alpaugh, the all-white community in which O'Bryan made his home, was located on a parcel of land known as Atwell Island, a tract in the dry Tulare Lake basin with fertile alluvial soil. Early on, the developer drilled ten wells and installed a city water system. Two other primary investors, Valley residents J. O. Brubaker and W. H. Wilber, relocated to the new town, committed to its success (Ramsey 1977, 49-50).

Situated on highly alkali soil, Allensworth, on the other hand, was financed by a group of Los Angeles investors. Although the original plan for the community called for

both wells and a water system, neither was ever delivered by the developers. In both communities, Pacific Farming Company acted in a sales and management role (Ramsey 1977, 50-53).

Allensworth and Alpaugh were not unique Valley communities, in one respect. Like many of their neighbors, they were planned agricultural communities, promoted by land developers for profit. Ramsey describes these communities:

Most agricultural communities founded in this tradition were organized on small tracts averaging 10,000 acres, subdivided into 50x100 foot town lots and 1 to 29 acre rural parcels. Acquisition of the vast acreage associated with large-scale farming was rarely possible and certainly not economically feasible within this scheme, since land in subdivisions was as a rule higher in price than were large parcels of unimproved land.... Group settlement was the business strategy employed to generate a profitable number of sales in the shortest time frame (Ramsey 1977, 45-46).

This process required three distinct steps: land acquisition, recruitment, and group settlement. With the land acquired by Pacific Farming, the last two steps became the responsibility of the California Colony and Home Promotion Association, as part of its plans to establish a race colony in the Valley. Earlier attempts by the California Colony and Home Promotion Association to acquire land had failed. The Pacific Farming Company acquired the land, which allowed Col. Allensworth and his associates to establish and build the colony. Apparently, based on the unfolding of subsequent events, O'Bryan and the original investors cared little about the progress of the venture beyond the initial steps (Ramsey 1977, 55).

The establishment of a race town was to provide a haven in which blacks could develop and exhibit skills needed to survive and succeed within the broader multi-ethnic society. Allen Allensworth's comments to the African American newspaper, the *New York Age*, concerning his goal to "organize a town, to become a model city, surrounded by intelligent farmers" was not unique (Allensworth 1912).<sup>ix</sup> This pivotal ambition not only motivated the founders and early pioneers who established the Tulare County community of Allensworth, California, but many of those who founded similar towns in Kansas, Oklahoma, and New Mexico. To these Race Men, the idea was to demonstrate, in an atmosphere free from those restrictions, that African Americans were capable of participation in the larger social, educational, economic, and political spheres. Whereas forced segregation often promoted discrimination, colonies such as Allensworth were thought of as an opportunity to dispel it (Ramsey 1977, 15).

Col. Allensworth had suggested that African Americans "must change public opinion by meeting its demands... What are we to do? Educate public opinion" (Allensworth 1889). The town of Allensworth, therefore, was more than a place to live. It, like many similar communities, was a way for African Americans to "resolve their subordinate caste frustration" (Hill 1946, 268). From the outset, Allensworth was considered both a social experiment toward achieving these means, and the kernel of a

model community to demonstrate the ability of African Americans to achieve the same level of success as their white neighbors, given an equal opportunity. Several settlers who participated in the building of Allensworth had been involved with the Exoduster movement elsewhere, including Joshua Singleton, the son of “Pap” Singleton (de Graaf et al. 2001, 156). Singleton arrived with his wife and eleven-year-old son, Henry, in 1912 (Ramsey 1977, 85). Another veteran Race Man, James Alexander Hackett saw the potential of the new colony and moved there in 1910. Upon his retirement in 1917, he moved with his family to Allensworth, where he remained until his death in 1932 (Ramsey 1977, 82-83).



Figure 14: Reconstruction of a church in Allensworth. (photo by author).

The Pacific Farming Company subdivided Allensworth into approximately eleven hundred city lots and one-, five-, and ten-acre rural parcels. City lots sold for between one and four hundred dollars, depending upon size and location. The price for the rural lots included an additional charge for irrigation water from the Allensworth Mutual Water Company, based on the total number of acres acquired. Generally, the water companies existed only on paper. Although the developer initially drilled three of the promised ten wells, few provisions were made for pumps, irrigation systems, or town water. The fertile land surrounding Alpaugh sold for thirty dollars per acre whereas the alkali soil in the Allensworth area was priced at \$110 an acre. By 1913, Pacific Farming, having earned a large return on its Allensworth investment, withdrew from the venture. Rather than

provide the promised water systems, the principals simply assigned the (now worthless) stock in the two water companies to the residents of Allensworth and transferred the problem, and any associated debt, to the town (Ramsey 1977, 57-63). In relation to the situation between the developers and the town, Joshua Singleton's son, Henry, quotes him as saying:

The venture was a skin game, plain and simple—White men cheating Black men. Pacific Farming did not intend to honor the contract, and the Race could not command the political support to make it do so (Henry Singleton Interview with Eleanor Ramsey" (1975) cited in Ramsey 1977, 155-158).



Figure 15: Home used by Col. Allensworth and family when visiting Allensworth. (photo by author).

By 1914, the public utility company still had not extended electricity to Allensworth, and used a recession as an excuse to further delay doing so (Ramsey 1977, 63). Water, power, and other infrastructure issues would continue to plague the fledgling community. Within a year, the Santa Fe Railroad installed a spur line to Alpaugh and bypassed Allensworth. This was a major blow to the economy of Allensworth (Ramsey 1977, 65). Within six years of the creation of the colony, the town still had limited water, no power, and lost rail service. All of these were elements upon which the promoters, and pioneers, depended upon to establish a successful town. After 1914, all political activity centered on issues concerning the local water board and the necessity of providing municipal and agricultural water (Ramsey 1977, 76).

Population figures for Allensworth are difficult to ascertain. Census records for both the 1910 and 1920 census do not appear reliable (Ramsey 1977, 100-101). Ramsey compiled, from a variety of sources, estimates for the population of the colony. By late summer of the first year, according to her estimates, there were as many as thirty-five families in Allensworth. By the beginning of 1911, there were approximately eighty residents, with the count exceeding one hundred within a year. Ramsey concluded that the largest possible population, at any one time, was somewhere between 120-200 individuals. She claims that the population peaked during 1914 (at about 160), with the largest amount of growth between 1909 and 1916. She pointed out that the population

was in a constant state of flux as people moved in and out of the colony. To demonstrate this, she used county registers from 1915 and 1920. The register, in 1920, included just one more name than the 1915 register; however, half of the names on the 1920 list do not appear in the list from 1915. So, although there is only a net increase of one, half of the population changed during that five-year period (Ramsey 1977, 102). As of 1920, after almost ten years, the population of Allensworth probably never exceeded 150 settlers (de Graaf et al. 2001, 156). By 1930, the population of Allensworth dropped to just forty-four (de Graaf et al. 2001, 156). Often students who wanted to further their education, and residents who sought gainful employment, found it necessary to relocate, temporarily, or permanently, to other communities (Ramsey 1977, 138). One early Allensworth pioneer described his job search:

Upon arrival in Allensworth I immediately started looking for a job. Alpaugh, Earlimart, Corcoran, Terra Bella, Porterville... wherever I went the reception was the same. Until this day the signs which almost seemed to come at me from the windows, business after business are still graphic and humiliating: *No negroes... Filipinos... Mexicans... Dogs*. After a few weeks of this I struck out... I headed south to Bakersfield (Norvin Powell Interview with Eleanor Mason Ramsey" (Tulare, CA: 1976) cited in Ramsey 1977, 155-158).

This need to find employment outside the colony plagued Allensworth for much of its existence. Early on, it became obvious to most residents that the colony itself was insufficient to provide steady work. Surrounding communities were often loath to provide skilled employment to non-whites. A few Allensworth farmers were able to make a solid living from the land; however, most residents combined part-time or seasonal work with part-time farming. Allensworth, like other so-called race towns grew through patterns described as *family stem migration*. For example, Henry Singleton's sister-in-law, Fannie Johnson Smith, moved to Allensworth shortly after Singleton. She joined a maternal aunt who was already living in the Tulare County colony (Ramsey 1977, 112 & 150).

Allensworth's boosterism also contributed to the expansion of African American communities in other nearby towns. Many immigrants, after seeing the harsh conditions in Allensworth, settled in nearby towns where they perceived better-established infrastructures and greater economic opportunities. Links between African Americans in other communities and Allensworth existed. Between 1910 and 1924, several families moved from Allensworth to Tulare, including members of the Smith, Washington, and Archer families (Smith 2008). In 1919, Lee Crane left Allensworth for Fowler for economic reasons. He desired to pursue truck farming (commercially growing vegetables for market), rather than concentrate on growing sugar beets, which was, at the time, the focus of agricultural efforts in the colony (Beasley 1919, 153). Elmer Carter, former proprietor of Carter's Livery in Allensworth, moved to Tulare by 1920 (Ramsey 1977, 163). In that year, Norvin Powell, whose father was elected Allensworth's constable in 1918, moved to Tulare with his family (Ramsey 1977, 158,168). Early leaders in Tulare's first African American Baptist Church relocated from Allensworth in that same year. In

1925, Frank Milner opened the Last Chance Barbershop on South K Street in Tulare. For years, Milner had been the barber in Allensworth (Smith 2008).

However, the migration between Valley towns and Allensworth was a two-way affair. For example, W. H. "Bud" Hall, another well-known Race Man, and his sister, Mary Bickers, moved to Allensworth from Bakersfield shortly after hearing Col. Allensworth speak in that city (Ramsey 1977, 64). John and Clara Morris sold their successful Bakersfield catering company to build and operate the Allensworth Hotel (Ramsey 1977, 153). At the time, Bakersfield had one of the largest African American populations, with over two hundred and fifty blacks living in the Kern County seat (Ramsey 1977, 88). It is likely, based on anecdotal evidence, that Hall was among those earliest agricultural recruits who arrived by train from the Carolinas in 1884. Bickers, the town's first postmistress who also ran the first grocery store and café in the colony, returned to Bakersfield in 1911.

By the time the California Department of Water Resources determined that Allensworth's water supply contained unacceptable levels of arsenic, in the early 1920s, just thirty-four families still lived within the colony (Ramsey 1977, 189). Their departure marked the end. Allensworth was one of the last endeavors of the Exoduster movement. Based on a separatist philosophy that stressed the ideals of self-sufficiency, the importance of education, and a focus on community building, the goals of Allensworth were lofty. However, it was never possible to achieve most of those lofty goals. The town was plagued from the outset by neglect from the developer which resulted in a domestic water supply that could never support the town. Alkali soil, the lack of access to agricultural water, and other local conditions made it difficult to support small-scale farming efforts. It is easy to make direct comparisons between Allensworth and Blackdom, New Mexico. Both suffered from poor soil and no access to adequate rural or urban water. Racism and economic factors limited employment factors in neighboring communities. Economic conditions created by the loss of revenue when rail service was moved to Alpaugh limited economic opportunities within the community (Price 2003, Ramsey 1977). In 1946, Mozell Hill examined the types of communities built by African Americans throughout the United States and created several classifications to differentiate both the creation and operation of these communities. At least two of these designations apply directly to Allensworth. If viewed simply as a Utopian Community (a community built upon an ideological or futuristic vision), the dream faded against economic reality (Hill 1946, 254-268). If seen as a Promoter's Enterprise (simply a commercial enterprise, directly aligned with the California Colonization Project), the town succeeded for the original (white) developers who made a handsome return on their initial investment; however, for those who migrated to the Central Valley community, the results fell short of expectations. Never compatible with the economic realities encountered by the pioneers of Allensworth, the principles of self-sufficiency actually became another factor that contributed to the failure of the planned community. In fact, Allensworth's self-sufficiency is an oxymoron. Dependent upon developers, the railroad, state and county agencies, and outside employers from the outset, the pioneers had little, if any, control over their destiny. The model of a freestanding all-black community, in the San Joaquin Valley in the twentieth century may have failed because it tried to be, and do, too much.

## **Unincorporated Towns**

Whereas colonies, as I use the term here, were planned communities, often stemming from the separatist or African Nationalism philosophies of early black leaders like Marcus Garvey, Booker T. Washington, and W. E. B. DuBois, the next two community types—unincorporated towns and unincorporated neighborhoods—come out of the harsher realities of Jim Crow era practices that many are surprised to discover thrived throughout California. Anne Bellows described the conditions that created many of these communities:

Lanare was settled without the benefit of government planning or investment. The community's existence however is far from accidental. Rather, the community of Lanare represents the determination of farmworkers and other low-income families to carve out a toehold in a landscape that was made mostly unavailable to them. Industrial-scale farms... employ a consistent population of farmworkers, but besides fast-disappearing (and historically substandard) employer provided housing, there's almost nowhere... for low-income families to live... small rural communities... [have] long provided an important opportunity for autonomy, home ownership, and community for African American and Latino workers... Lanare has been shaped... by a background landscape of exclusion and neglect (Bellows 2013, 4).

Colonies may have represented the aspirations of middle class African Americans, but it is these more organically formed communities a few miles outside incorporated (and usually exclusionary) predominately white rural communities where most working class blacks (and Hispanics) were able to build communities. Some, but not all, of these communities initially began during the period of the California Colonization Project, but not as black colonies. Others sprouted at other times as the need arose. There are, I believe three significant reasons that these communities are primarily absent from the historical record: they are small rural (out of sight, out of mind); poor; and, as I have already pointed out, historically primarily populated by African Americans (although, today, they are mostly by Hispanic, demographically). Daniel T. Lichter, Domenico Parisi, and Michael C. Taquino address the first of these two factors: "Rural communities and people... remain invisible, hidden away in isolated or economically depressed regions or small towns..." (Lichter, Parisi, and Taquino 2012, 365).

Some of these unincorporated communities, such as Fairmead, in Madera County and South Dos Palos, in Merced County were originally developed during the period of the Colonization Project, but, were not intended to be all- or even majority-black communities. Some of them started out with very different ethnic and racial roots. Fairmead, for example, initially attracted numerous Mennonite families from the Volga region of Germany and Russia. Italian immigrants who entered the area to work on the railroad, on the other hand, initially populated South Dos Palos. Several factors differentiate these from *Black Colonies*. Not all of these originated as colonies. Lanare, in Fresno County; Teviston, in Tulare County; (possibly) Stratford, in Kings County; and El Nido in Merced County may not have been started within the framework of the colony

model at the turn of the twentieth century. At some point, however, in their history, demographic shifts moved large numbers of African Americans into these communities and while one hundred percent of the residents may not have been black, the settlements were considered by their residents and those in neighboring communities as black communities. Due to lack of growth or dwindling populations, over time, these communities never incorporated. They remain, thereby, under the jurisdiction of their respective county governments. Small, poor, rural enclaves of African Americans or, more likely, today, majority populations of Hispanics often fare poorly when competing with other, more affluent communities in their counties. The result is these rural enclaves continue to be victims of neglect in relation to infrastructure, such as street lighting, sidewalks, water, and sewage, or other similar basics.

## Fairmead

I need to preface this section by explaining that in 2012, I wrote and published a book covering the history of Fairmead. This work was written for the centenary celebration planned for that year by Fairmead Community and Friends, a local organization that works to improve the lives of Fairmead residents. Although I have included some details of the early history of the community, here, for clarity, that book contains much more detail, especially covering the periods from 1912 through the 1970s (Eissinger 2012).

Like several of the other historically majority African American settlements, Fairmead started out as just another colony in the California Colonization Project. It was not originally envisioned as a black community. However, conditions, over time, made it less attractive to non-blacks, and with no exclusionary restrictions and the availability of land, became one of the larger majority-black communities. Fairmead was the model for the colony form of development. Agricultural parcels went on sale in the Fairmead Colony in March, 1912. The following month, the town site was surveyed, and non-rural lots began selling (Hattersly-Drayton 2008, 8). In the first weeks of the project the San Joaquin Light and Power Company extended electric power to all parts of the Fairmead colony, roads were graded to each property as they were sold, wells for domestic use and irrigation were drilled, and the Fairmead Inn, although still under construction, was open for both accommodations and dining (Spreckles 1912e). In the first month, the Co-operative Land and Trust sold over one thousand acres in the Fairmead colony (Spreckles 1912c). By November of the first year, Fairmead supported a garage and cinema while locals bragged about all the cement sidewalks and curbs, wide avenues, and a “constant stream of settlers” (Spreckles 1912f).

[Fairmead] will soon be one of the most important agricultural points in Madera county. It is the business center of the Fairmead district... Fairmead is now assuming all the proportions of a modern town. Its future is assured... The streets are wide, a water system has been installed, and water is piped throughout the town. Several blocks of cement sidewalks and curbs are already laid, and the cement and street grading work are still at work.

A new business block is nearing completion... Plans for another business block are being drawn up and work will be commenced on this building within a short time (San Francisco Chronicle Editorial Staff 1912).

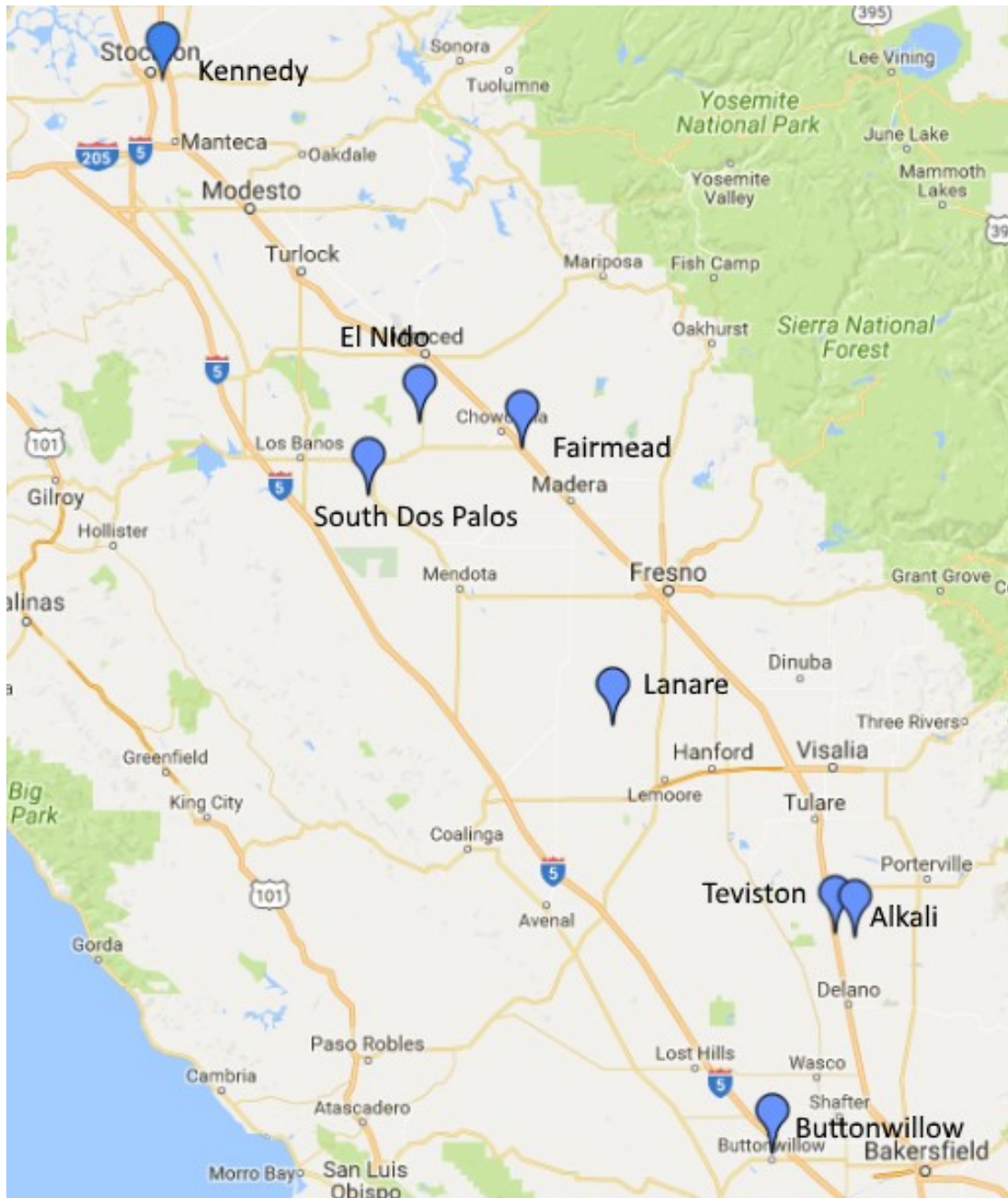


Figure 16: Map of Unincorporated Black Towns in the San Joaquin Valley



Figure 17: Downtown Fairmead circa 1912 (courtesy of Fresno Pacific University Library).

Development, during the first year of Fairmead's existence was so rapid that the colonization effort was mentioned at least once a week in newspapers like the *San Francisco Call*, well into 1913, with regular coverage in the *San Francisco Chronicle*, and other California newspapers. In October, 1912 land worth more than ninety-thousand dollars (approximately eleven hundred acres) changed hands in the Fairmead colony (Spreckles 1912a, d).

By the third year of the colony, there were two churches, an elementary school, a local paper, a popular hotel, which hosted thanksgiving dinners of up to fifteen hundred guests before it burned down in 1914, a post office, a large lumber yard, a cheese factory, an insurance company, a pool hall and cigar stand, a blacksmith, and a garage (Eissinger 2012, 18-25).

What started out, in 1912, as a potential land boom began to show signs of weakness within just a few years. By 1916, University of California, Berkeley professor Elwood Mead reported that many of the colonization projects (including Fairmead) were developed by speculators who cared less about developing sustainable agriculture than in turning a quick profit. Having purchased much of the Central Valley land for five to fifteen dollars per acre, most of these companies resold the subdivided land at 150 an acre, or more. Although many of these speculators provided improvements such as roads and utilities, the motives were profit, rather than community building (Mead 1916).

The real farmer... who had no intention of speculating... found himself in an atmosphere which often swept him off his feet. When he was told that if he would make the first payment, the land would do the rest, he accepted this as reliable advice, invested nearly all his capital in this first payment, and the land did the rest, which too often was to turn him adrift with the loss of his money and the gain of some useless and disagreeable experience (Mead 1916).

By 1914-15, the building fever in Fairmead appeared to have cooled—but not completely died down. Outside promotion waned. Farming became more diverse. Press reports indicate that many of the farmers had begun tending dairy cattle, and that nearby creameries were paying top dollar for the milk and butterfat from those operations

(*Pacific Rural Press Editorial Staff 1913a, b*). By the fall of 1914, over one third of all cows in Madera County were on dairies within the Fairmead colony (*Pacific Rural Press Editorial Staff 1914*). Articles referencing to the growth of Fairmead all but disappeared from the urban newspapers (Mosteller 1918b).

As 1918 came to a close, there were local frustrations about the slow growth of a town that had once looked so promising. Charles Mosteller, the editor and publisher of the *Fairmead Enterprise* summed it up:

As to the future, the *Enterprise* would like to see at least an effort made to make the little town of Fairmead grow into the thriving community that all were led to believe it would be, and for one, we will undertake to do all we can to that end (Mosteller 1918a).

Mosteller sold the paper in 1920. The operation was moved to Chowchilla and renamed the *North Madera County Enterprise* (Mosteller 1920).



# FAIRMEAD COLONY

Ever hear of it? No. It's brand new. 14,000 acres in small farms just placed on the market. Rich, sandy loam, lots of water, part of the famous Sharon ranch in Madera county. The soil of this district is unsurpassed for growing alfalfa, fruit, grapes, and vegetables. Our new town, FAIRMEAD, will be the shipping and supply point for this great tract and 50,000 adjoining acres.

FAIRMEAD COLONY is our sixth. We have successfully colonized five others in Merced county, 14,000 acres in all. Our last, a 5,500-acre tract, filled with settlers in less than nine months. Fairmead will do better. The best locations and opportunities are open to those who buy today. Tear out this ad, and send it to us with your name and address. We will send full particulars.

## Co-operative Land & Trust Co.

"Lands That Produce Wealth"

595 MARKET ST., - - SAN FRANCISCO

Figure 18: Classified and display ads, like this one from the *Pacific Rural Press*, from 1912, advertised the availability of land in the colony. Although most of the advertising materials pushed the farmland, articles often extolled the new town of Fairmead.

Fairmead's population dwindled during the first years of the Great Depression. The developers had long-ago sold off the last of their holdings and had moved on. Fairmead landowners sought new opportunities. One such landholder, Jacob Yakel, a Jewish farmer in the Fairmead region was willing to sell land to African Americans and carry the loans himself (Steele 2012). While the town of Madera was, to a certain degree, racially mixed, Chowchilla, north of Fairmead, was quite exclusionary and blacks and other persons of color found it impossible to rent or purchase property there. Financing in Madera County was difficult to come by for blacks wanting to buy property. Fairmead offered African Americans both town and farm lots for sale as well as the all-important financing. According to one resident, to whom Yakel sold twenty acres in the late 1930s, the family was able, through hard work, to pay off the loan for their property in just seven years (Steele 2012).

By the early 1920s, the Amey family, possibly the original or first black family to move into the area, was already established in the Dixieland region (Lopresti, Natarajan, and Sandoval 2010). Dixieland was the nickname given to one of the thirteen Fairmead farm colonies (5, 10, 20, and 40-acre lots with electricity, but no water or sewage). According to the 1930 census, other early African American families included Leslie and Mabel Wheeler, and their niece Johnnie Ray Wheeler, and their neighbors John and Pinkie Bell. The brothers Robert and Monroe Ward, with their wives, Mary J. and Glenarbra [sic], were also among the earliest black families in the area. They lived next door to each other at the time of the 1930 federal census. Monroe's sister-in-law, Anne Sanders also lived with them. Next door to the Wards, lived Willie and Beatrice Johnson, along with their children, Willie Jr., Genieva [sic], Lena, and Mattie, along with the elder Willie's brother, Jessie. Elsewhere, in the Fairmead colonies lived Texans Raymond and Sadie Carter, their son Albin and their daughters Ruth and Willie. Nearby, Elijah and Lucinda Hall of Arkansas made their home. Will Smith, from Iowa, and his wife Willie, from Kansas, also moved into the Fairmead colonies during the 1920s. Illustrative of the migrant nature of the Fairmead Colonies in 1930, Frank and Doria Whittle, an African American couple from Oklahoma and Mississippi, and their four children, counted among their neighbors the families of Pedro and Yanacia Ozcoidi, from Spain, and Joseph and Jane Tirreyne, from Italy. The Whittle family provides an illustration of what is often referred to as stem-family migration: family members migrate from one location to another, to live close to other family members. Immediately next door to Frank Whittle lived his brother Eazel, with his wife Annie and their two children. Frank's next door neighbor appears to be the father, or uncle, of the two younger Whittles, William and his wife Clarise [sic]. Emmet Gross, listed as the grandson of William and Clarise, lived at the same address. The Temple and Francis Carter family, African Americans from Texas lived just two doors down from the Whittles. Other African Americans, Harrington and Bessie Ballinger, and Robert and Bessie Bailey moved into Fairmead from Oklahoma during this time. Other black families came from Illinois (Samuel and Mary Owens), Georgia (Clarence and Loyusta [sic] Hawk), and North Carolina (Clarence and Idell Midgit).<sup>x</sup>

By the time of the 1930 census, Fairmead had demographically shifted from a community dominated by Eastern Europeans and Italians to one that contained a significant (although not exclusive) black population. Fairmead would never be entirely

or exclusively African American, but between 1930 and the mid-1960s, African Americans made up a significant majority of the town and surrounding farms. Following the adoption of the mechanical cotton picker and chemical defoliant, which eliminated the need for skilled labor to pick cotton, and the coincidental passage of Civil Rights legislation, the racial makeup of Fairmead—like many of these communities—began to change again, and the majority population shifted from black to Hispanic over the decades to follow. I will examine Fairmead in greater detail in subsequent chapters.

### South Dos Palos and Midway

Almost thirty miles directly west of Fairmead sit the communities of Dos Palos, South Dos Palos and Midway. South Dos Palos and Midway have been, at one time or another, populated by largely African American populations. Like Fairmead, Dos Palos started out as part of the Colonization projects of the early twentieth century. Like Fairmead, this was not begun as a black colony. Whereas, Fairmead was developed by the Co-operative Land and Trust Company which purchased the land upon which it planted its colonies from larger landowners, Dos Palos was actually developed by San Francisco's Miller and Lux, one of the richest and most powerful business partnerships in the State. In 1891, the Southern Pacific Railroad built a depot and hotel for railroad workers in the new community of Dos Palos (Robinson 1989a). This effort was part of a building boom, that year, that included establishing the towns of Dos Palos, Firebaugh, Mendota, Collis, McMullen, Jameson, Cando, Caruthers, and Hedwick (*Los Angeles Times* 1891). Miller and Lux used the colony model to sell off land that spanned the county line between Fresno and Merced Counties. The town center, developed as a market center on the Merced County side of the line, with those portions of the rural colonies within Fresno County remaining farmland. Originally, in the first two decades of the twentieth century, the majority population of the new community consisted primarily of Italian immigrant families (Robinson 1989b). Well water was so unreliable, at that time, that water had to be brought in, on the train, for the earliest settlers (Robinson 1989b). Nevertheless, the Dos Palos post office was established in 1898 (*Los Angeles Times* 1891). By 1903, agriculture was well established, in the Dos Palos area, as evidenced by the coverage of large fields of alfalfa growing outside the small town in the April 25<sup>th</sup> edition of the *Pacific Rural Press*, of that year (*Pacific Rural Press* Editorial Staff 1903). Although the original townsite of Dos Palos suffered from a lack of access to a reliable aquifer, some of the rural farmsteads advertised access to ample groundwater (*Pacific Rural Press* Editorial Staff 1903). In the same year, Miller and Lux were given kudos by the same newspaper for their advanced dairy techniques at their Dos Palos dairy (Loomis 1913).

The first African American family to move into Dos Palos (now South Dos Palos), may have been the King family, in 1924. Mrs. Carrie King's sister, Elizabeth, was married to Edgar Peterson, both originally of Texas. The latter couple moved from the Lone Star state to Oklahoma, and by 1920 had relocated to Southern California. Seven years later, in response to the encouragement of Carrie King and her husband, Elizabeth and Edgar Peterson moved their family to farm their own twenty-acre plot, outside Dos Palos. Like many local farmers, the Petersons normally grew cotton. As new African American families moved into Dos Palos and the surrounding land, some were able to

purchase their own land, others worked as hired hands on dairies, or sought seasonal work picking cotton and other crops.

Within a few years, the black families in Dos Palos included the Kings and the Petersons, as well as the Straughter, Barnes, and Rice Families (Robinson 1989a). This small group of African American families began church services on “boxes and benches” under the shade of local trees, as there was no building available for them to use (Robinson 1989a). Over the next few years the Todd, Hutton, Pool, and the Montgomery families arrived in the area. By 1930, Reverend James Peterson—Edgar Peterson’s brother—arrived in Dos Palos and established the First Baptist Church. After initially holding services in the building owned by the local Seventh Day Adventist Church, the group built their first chapel (Robinson 1989a). Unfortunately, in 1934, at as the Great Depression raged on, many local African American families lost their homes in Dos Palos. Even the building for the First Baptist Church was foreclosed upon (Robinson 1989a).



Figure 19: Boarded up storefront in South Dos Palos (contemporary photo by author).

One unique aspect of Dos Palos reflects the power of white flight. As more and more African Americans moved into Dos Palos, white businesses and families moved several miles north to establish a new town. By moving the post office, at the same time, the new town became known as Dos Palos, and the original townsite was renamed South Dos Palos. The area between South Dos Palos and Dos Palos, which also attracted many people of color (who were restricted from living in Dos Palos proper) became known as Midway, because it is mid-way between the two Dos Paloses. Over time, some of the commercial buildings in South Dos Palos, many of which were still owned by the white businessmen of Dos Palos, were originally boarded up before ultimately being razed. However, unlike in Fairmead, several remnants of the commercial center remain in South Dos Palos.

Katherine Brooks Lane recalled what she referred to as “subtle... racial tension” growing up in Dos Palos in the 1930s and 1940s (Lane 2008):

There were several places the African American felt they could not go. One was called The Four Corners and supposedly it had a sign that read ‘No Colored Allowed’... When we went to the movies we chose to sit in a certain section. I don’t think we had to... (Lane 2008).

Many of the black farmers and farmworkers congregated in Dos Palos at the corner of Blossom and Center, by Pingel’s Drug Store in the evenings, and at least two bars—the Midway Club and the White Front Club—catered to a black clientele.

Just as in Fairmead, the close of World War II, and the shrinking demand for labor in the shipyards of Richmond led to many new African Americans moving into and around Dos Palos. Some were lucky enough to have enough money saved to purchase their own land while others sought seasonal field labor. As cotton became more mechanized, in the mid-1960s, those who relied on seasonal work either branched out to other crops, or more often, left the area and sought employment in the urban areas of the Bay Area, Stockton, Fresno, or elsewhere (Lane 2008). Some of those, like Dewey Todd, who moved to Dos Palos from Oklahoma, in 1941 to pick cotton, eventually found more stable work, locally. After ten years in the fields, Todd was hired at the Dos Palos High School to work in the maintenance department, a job he held for twenty-eight years (Todd 2008).

During the so-called Federal War on Poverty which spanned the late sixties and early seventies, South Dos Palos received grants to build one of the first Head Start programs in the area, as well as install a water and sewer system (Lane 2008, Todd 2008). Like similar communities—Lanare, Teviston, and Sunny Acres—residents carried water to their homes in buckets and milk cans (Todd 2008, Arax 2002a, *Time Magazine* 1959). Today, South Dos Palos (and Midway) are a designated census tract with just over twenty-two hundred residents (according to the 2010 Census) with an annual median household income of just under twenty-nine thousand dollars.

### Teviston

Many blacks eventually settled in Tulare and Kings Counties—some of them outside the Tulare county town of Pixley. Just as “Pap” Singleton led many southern blacks to Kansas, and Allen Allensworth called for pioneers to form the foundation of a model black community in California, Teviston, was populated as the result of the efforts of a few individuals. These men needed farm labor, and bore little resemblance even to F. W. Ownbey or other nineteenth-century labor recruiters, who transported boxcars full of African Americans to work in the fields of Tevis, Haggin and Carr, in Kern County; or the Butler Farms of Fresno.

Three of the men who contributed to this migration were Walter Irons, a white sheriff in Oklahoma; his younger brother Gus, who ran a labor camp in the Tulare Lake Basin; and a bus black driver named Robert Parker. Gus Irons was a labor contractor who promised a steady stream of labor to the largest Central California landowners like the Boswells and the Salyers (Arax and Wartzman 2003, 258). His brother, the sheriff of McCurtain County, Oklahoma, guaranteed safe passage to blacks from his county who wanted to get away from the never-ending debt in which they were trapped as part of the

long-standing sharecropping system that replaced slavery after the collapse of reconstruction. Thirty-five dollars was the fare to the San Joaquin Valley. Thirty-two times, beginning in 1948, Parker, a former bootlegger, picked up groups of African Americans on the steps of the county courthouse to begin the fifteen-hundred-mile trip. Under the cover of darkness, he picked up other escaping sharecroppers across Texas, Arkansas, and Oklahoma at secret rendezvous in fields or wooded areas or under bridges (Arax 2002a). The former bootlegger described his part in the story:

They paid me three hundred dollars a trip for haulin' a load, and I made thirty-some trips. In facts, I was goin' to these plantations—steelin'm off 'um. And, I'd tell'm what time to be there, watching for the school bus. We wouldn't go to the plantations, all the time, because they'd run you off'a the plantations. You weren't allowed on it. But, they'd get up on the bridges and anything and stay up there all night, on the bridges, and, I'd pick'em up, the next day. Back there, they was paying fifty cents per hundred-pound. Out here, they was payin'em a dollar and a half a hundred-pound of cotton. So, look at the difference between fifty cents and a dollar more, in California. Course, they worked like hell, when they got here, to make it. A lot of 'em built homes, and everything—doing good. And, I helped a lot of people. And, I'm proud of it. Very proud of it (Robert Parker interview in Pickford 2015).



Figure 20: Homes in Teviston in the early 1960s (courtesy of Ernest Lowe).

Other labor contractors like Mozell Stokes, Cowboy Williams, or Bubba Lee transported large numbers of African Americans to the San Joaquin Valley from Oklahoma on flatbed trucks, the migrants riding fifteen hundred miles sitting on homemade benches that had been bolted to the truck bed (Arax and Wartzman 2003, 262). Eventually, Parker, like many of those he transported across the country, settled in a rundown shack in Teviston (Arax 2002a). In the 1940s and 1950s, a black real estate broker—George Brown—had been instrumental in selling most of the small acreage plots to African Americans, in Teviston. Some of the people with whom I talked about his sale of

the property thought that he sold the land for the county or the state. I was unable to determine, from those conversations, whether Brown carried the contracts.

Near the end of 1959 Teviston finally installed a water pump atop a recently dug, deep-water well to provide, for the first time, water to the more than three hundred residents of the dusty village. Prior to that time, the residents of Teviston carried water from the nearby towns of Pixley and Earlimart in milk cans, drums, and buckets (Time Editorial Staff 1959). Over a year before, Bard McAllister—a “bearded Quaker in a red beret”—began working with Teviston residents to form their own water district, to dig a well and provide water to their small houses and shacks (Arax 2002a). By the dawn of the twenty-first century, even with running water, little had changed:

Teviston...is a glorified squatters’ village on the outskirts of Pixley. The city cops don’t come here, and neither to do the city sewer lines. There are no stoplights, no schools and no businesses, except for a soda machine (Arax 2002a).



Figure 21: Teviston's community water well, in the early 1960s (courtesy of Ernest Lowe).

Although many of the black residents of Teviston owned sufficient land to farm at a subsistence level, they had no water for crops. Excluded from the Pixley Irrigation District, even though the canals ran through their lands, the residents in and around the small black community had no access to agricultural water. While the fields surrounding

their settlement received adequate water, the residents of Teviston were assessed a regular annual payment to offset any water that might have trickled from the canals into their wells (Arax 2002a). Today, a few of the African American settlers remain in Teviston. Hispanic farm workers have replaced blacks, both in the fields and as the majority population of their small community (Arax 2002a). Today, with just a thousand residents, many of whom are now Hispanic, the tiny hamlet of Teviston remains one of the poorest communities in this study, with an average household income of just twenty-three thousand dollars, per year. Over the years, large numbers left for other parts of the state seeking work. A few of the old-timers remain, although Spanish-speaking farm laborers now dominate Teviston (Arax 2002a).

## Lanare

Just as with Teviston, Lanare is losing its unique, African American composition. Hispanics now make up the majority of the population in this little hamlet, just four miles west of Riverdale. Littered along the edge of two miles of Mt. Whitney Avenue and partly up the side roads in southern Fresno County, this dusty little collection of homes, trailers, three churches, and a mini-mart was once home to an even larger population of African Americans. Today, over one hundred blacks make up almost 20 percent of Lanare's 560 residents. Whereas the community once featured juke joints and illegal games of poker and dice, today it is little more than a sleepy, dusty backwater for farm workers and the poorest of the rural poor. On one of the three north-south roads that cut across Lanare sits the small, aging, ramshackle Lanare community center, surrounded by a dirt yard and a chain link fence. In contrast, the predominately white town of Riverdale sports a recently built, large, freshly painted community center, with trim lawns and weed-free flowerbeds. It is impossible to ignore the stark differences between the two communities.



Figure 22: Most of Lanare lies along Mt Whitney Blvd, just four miles west of Riverdale (contemporary photo by author).

Named after an early landowner, L. A. Nares, Lanare grew after the second World War as labor contractors brought in African Americans, primarily from Arkansas and Oklahoma. As with communities in Kings, Tulare, and Kern Counties, these contractors initially focused on field hands to work cotton (Powell 2008).

For decades, most people in Lanare lived in substandard, often makeshift housing with no running water. Until the mid-1960s, most of the black children attended the small Binder Elementary School, west of Lanare. After it closed, the children began attending school in nearby Riverdale. Clustered among the homes were a few businesses: a bar, owned by a one-armed man named Jack; a welding shop; and a market run by Willie Brown. South of the road, on land with water, was the largest business—Powell's Warehouse. It had been a lumberyard before Dr. Robert Powell's father purchased it after World War II. Powell converted it into a grain warehouse. Many of the residents of Lanare found seasonal work in the warehouse or driving trucks during the two grain harvesting seasons. Across the road east of Powell's, sat the Rodeo Café, a small diner and bar frequented during the week by local farmers. In the evenings and weekends, local blacks cranked up the jukebox, and the Rodeo Café became the center of Lanare's nightlife. Illegal gambling, usually in the form of a long-standing crap game, flourished in the barn behind the Rodeo. Next door, the Lanare Café was known for some of the best Mexican food in the district. Eugene Tomasetti sold parcels in Lanare to farmworkers on installment plans. His son Louis continued selling parcels in the community until as recently as 1992. He's mentioned in the 1919 History of Fresno and its leading characters as a dairy farmer in the area (Bellows 2012).

The Lanare cooperative began in 1975 with 12 members who took a federally funded 21 week job training program to learn "the basics from the time the seed goes into the ground." [director Eddie] Nolen said. Half of that original group now works full-time training others and producing crops on 40 acres of once-barren San Joaquin Valley land. "The average education level was sixth or seventh grade, so the best thing to do was to capitalize on the thing they already knew about — their farming ability." Nolen said. This year, members of the Lanare cooperative began raising earthworms for fertilizer and building a greenhouse located underground to save on insulation costs. These programs are primarily for senior citizens who need extra income but can't take on the tough tasks in the fields...The cooperative which now has trained 36 families, also has expanded into house plants. Nolen says they sell well during winter months when work in vegetables is at its lowest ebb..."If things come out good, you can make better off the cooperative." said one member, Mary Shoals. Almost two-thirds of the 24 people trained this year have moved on to jobs on private farms. Nolen said. "The end result of the project will be to build to the point where they are taking care of themselves, no longer dependent on the overall cooperative." he explained (Associated Press 1976).

Most black residents of Lanare worked as farm labor, close to the settlement. This included picking tomatoes and other vegetables, chopping and picking cotton, or working for Powell's or at the nearby turkey farm. During agricultural seasons, these diverse activities provided reasonably steady employment for many Lanare residents. Although the work might have been steady, it was back-breaking. "Picking cotton is about the

worst. It's hard on your hands. It's hard on your back... it's hard on your knees." (Elvira Roberts interview in Pickford 2015)

During the early 1970s, community development funds became available to some of the most impoverished areas of California, and Lanare residents built houses, or moved in mobile homes, drilled wells, dug septic tanks, and generally improved the quality of life. Prior to that time, like the residents of Teviston and other rural black settlements, Lanare residents toled water across Mt. Whitney Avenue from Powell's Warehouse and other businesses that allowed them access to a water spigot. Lanare remains poor to this day.

Racism, according to Powell, existed in Riverdale, the predominately white town east of Lanare, but it was maintained at subtle levels. Throughout his school years, blacks and whites attended Riverdale High School without incident. When he ran for class president, in the mid-1970s, his campaign manager was a young black woman from Lanare (Powell 2008). However, there were those who were uncomfortable with mixed school populations. The establishment of some of Riverdale's private Christian schools may have been a direct response to that situation.

In June 2007, the "staff and faculty of the tiny Riverdale Christian Academy... tried to spoof the experiences of slavery in this country, some going so far as to adorn themselves in blackface makeup..." (*Fresno Bee* Editorial Staff 2007a). Photos of the graduation celebration were published on the Internet. Captions on the posted photos included "The slaves served lemonade—it was a hoot!" (*Fresno Bee* Editorial Staff 2007b) Another photo showed the return of a "runaway slave" by a white man wearing a New York Yankees jersey. True to the nature of the Internet, even though the photos were removed from the original website, they were copied and are now preserved at other sites (Hill 2007). Although this represents just one recent incident, it suggests lingering racial attitudes in Riverdale. None of those attending appeared offended by the events staged at this graduation party, which was planned and executed by adults in charge of this small Christian school, including at least one pastor (*Fresno Bee* Editorial Staff 2007b).

Today, the population of Lanare has dwindled to just 576 people (according to the 2010 Census), with a median household income of almost forty-three thousand dollars per year. The bulk of the population, today is Hispanic.

### Other Unincorporated Settlements

Over the years, I have identified additional communities that fall within the category of Unincorporated Towns. However, time and resource constraints have yet to allow me to conduct much research into the history of these communities. Generally, I have identified them based on anecdotal evidence in other interviews or primary sources. I can do little more than list these communities here, and hope that, in the future, I will be able to examine their history before it disappears from memory.

Alkali once sat just East of Teviston, and being able to differentiate between the two often proves difficult, as the borders between the two communities tended to be fairly fluid. Little remains, today of this unincorporated community, as it has been replaced, almost entirely by farmland. Therefore, most of the discussion about Alkali, along with the five or six labor camps scattered throughout the area, will likely be aggregated into the discussion of Teviston. One small settlement that appears to have had

a large African American population, in the past, is El Nido in Merced County. Currently, the tiny hamlet boasts just two hundred and fifty people with an annual average household income of about twenty-nine thousand dollars, making it among the smallest and poorest settlements in this study. Stratford, in Kings County, is currently predominately Hispanic, however, it continues to house several predominately black churches, including Harvest Time Pentecostal Church of God, and Calvary Church of God in Christ. With a population of just thirteen hundred people, and a median household income (per the 2010 census), of just over forty-five thousand dollars, Stratford remains a settlement for additional research. Both the communities of Westley and Kennedy, outside Stockton, are predominately Hispanic, today, yet my inquiries suggest that like Lanare, Fairmead, and Teviston they have rich stories to tell about the lives of rural African Americans in the San Joaquin Valley.

## Unincorporated Neighborhoods

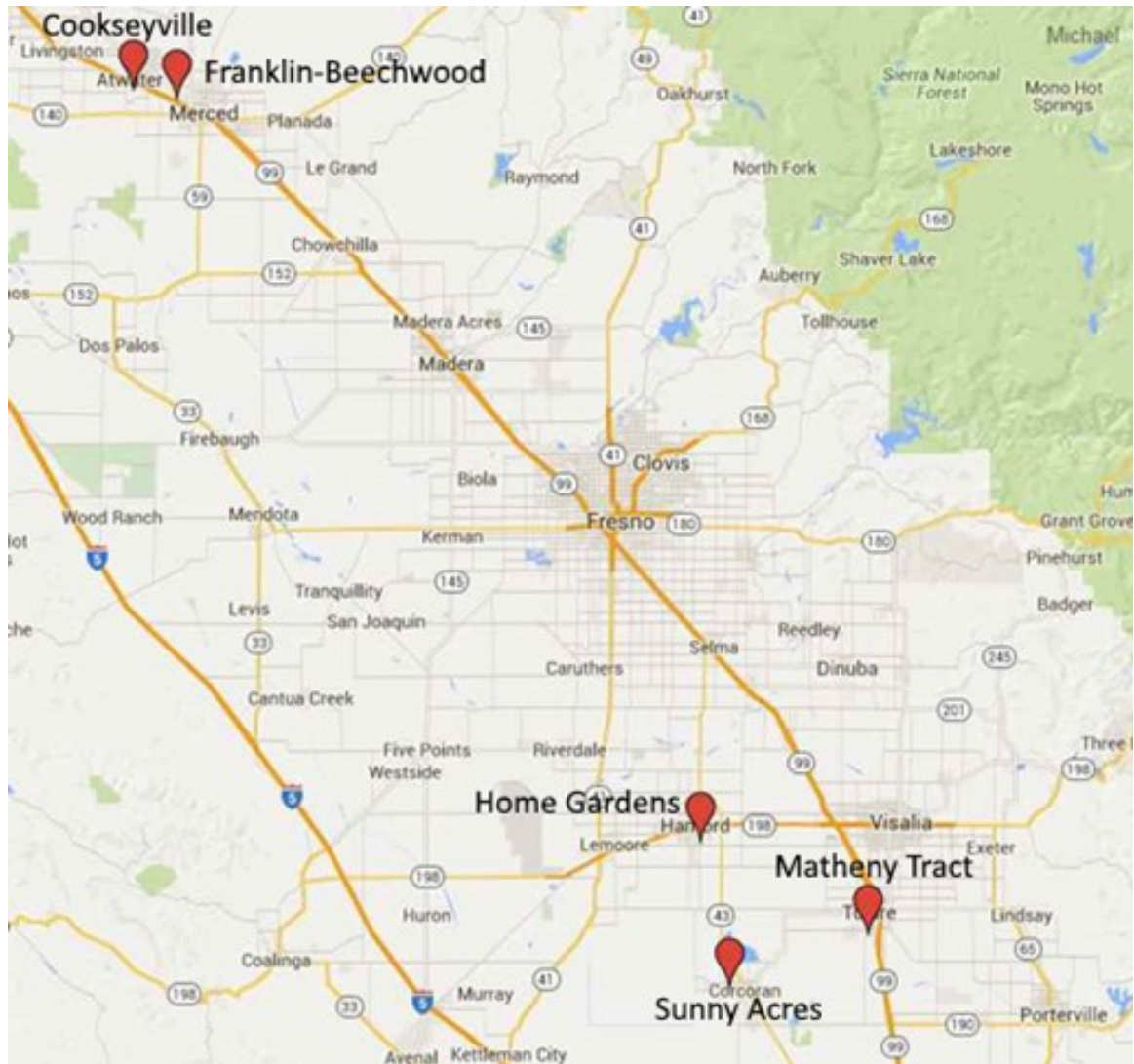


Figure 23: Map of Unincorporated Neighborhoods in the San Joaquin Valley

Another category of black settlements grew up near small towns, where the residents could take advantage of jobs and shopping, even when they were unable to live within the town, itself, due to redlining, restrictive covenants, sundown practices, or other *de facto* or *de jure* racial restrictions. The physical location of these communities on the outskirts of town clearly demonstrates their peripheral nature. For example, in Kings County, Home Gardens was developed outside the town of Hanford in the 1960s, with an almost all-black population. Between Home Gardens and Hanford, like a large buffer zone, sit both the Kings County Fairground and a cemetery. Similarly, majority (or all-) black unincorporated neighborhoods were established when Edwin Matheny sold Tulare County land (and homes) to African Americans who wished to become landowners on the periphery of both Tulare and Corcoran (creating the Matheny Tract and Sunny Acres, respectively). Similar in composition to the Unincorporated Towns—many of these had

their own churches and businesses—they differ, specifically, by their distance from the nearest town. Although often separated from the main town by a freeway or other barriers, these settlements are physically adjacent to other, larger, incorporated towns. Cookseyville, in Merced County, was a large family compound south of Atwater (just beyond the freeway and airport). For comparison, Cookseyville housed more people, for a longer period, than the better-known and celebrated colony of Allensworth. At the familial center of the Cookseyville compound lived Sid and Oleva Cooksey, children of slaves. Within three generations, Cookseyville produced doctors, lawyers, teachers, accountants, and other professionals, yet the history of that settlement, like so many others remains untold, and invisible within the broader context of the history of the region

### Sunny Acres/Boot Hill

Gus Irons the former bootlegger who brought many African Americans from Oklahoma and Texas to work for large growers like J. G. Boswell, along with other labor contractors, brought many of the residents to another black settlement in Kings County (Arax and Wartzman 2003, 258). Scores of African American field hands who worked for Boswell and Salyer originally lived in a Corcoran labor camp simply called “Nigger Town” by local white residents (Arax and Wartzman 2003, 258). One former resident described the labor camp as “...a wicked place” (Gertha Toney interview in Pickford 2015).

Saloons, bars and juke joints; illegal gambling and brothels; as well as a few all-black churches were found littered among tarpaper shacks and tents...

...when the fog was real heavy, and the cotton was real wet, you couldn't pick. We rolled our cotton sacks out, on the ground, under the trailer, and we'd start big gambling deals. Sometime people'd win five hundred dollars, six hundred, thousand dollars. And, when the sun shined enough where you could pick; quit gamblin' and go to work. (Robert Parker interview in Pickford 2015).

However, the Wild West nature of the camp was not the sort of life many of the Black Okies sought when they came to California. Some families, wanting a better life built a new black neighborhood on the other side of Corcoran. Gertha Toney's grandfather was a slave, and her family made the trip to California to escape the shadow of life in the south:

When I first came to Corcoran, it was very small. It didn't have no town out here, it was just tents. Everybody had their own tent. And, then my husband had to get two tents. He bought his first tent, then he added the first tent onto the second tent, and made a little cabin outta it... That was a wicked place, it was people from every direction, and everything, and they did everything; killed one another. We was nervous and scared. (Gertha Toney interview in Pickford 2015).

Initially dubbed Boot Hill by the residents of Corcoran, this settlement sprang up on forty acres just outside Corcoran, on the opposite side of town from the labor camp. Edwin Matheny, a travelling salesman from Tulare, sold the land to African American clients for a low cash down payment and reasonable financing terms that he handled himself. He also moved in houses to the parcels of this small black enclave. Many of these homes were available because they needed to be moved to clear the way for highway construction. Howard Toney, who had built a small, functional shack on the property he bought from Matheny, purchased two such houses for his property. He rented one out while his son lived in the other (Arax and Wartzman 2003, 272). However, the homes had no running water. As with other black settlements, the residents of Boot Hill had to carry water in milk cans and buckets from a single spigot in Corcoran. A few homes did have some electrical wiring, mostly for a few lights, or to power a small well pump. Almost all of that wiring was the handiwork of Howard Toney.

In 1964, Toney began working toward providing water to his neighbors using Federal assistance money. Toney and his neighbors tried to rally local support for the project in the city of Corcoran. Toney hoped the city would install a short section of water mains from the edge of town to the black settlement. Although Corcoran would allow the black enclave to connect to the municipal water system, the city would not provide any assistance to make it happen. Toney and his neighbors formed the Sunny Acres Water District, which used a federal loan to install municipal water to the newly renamed black community (which was renamed to Sunny Acres after the water district). Corcoran ultimately installed water mains. Although Corcoran has annexed the Mexican American neighborhood on one edge of town, Sunny Acres remains separate from Corcoran (Arax and Wartzman 2003, 285). Maybe, J. G. Boswell was right when he said, in 1999, “Blacks? We don’t really have any blacks in this town” (J. G. Boswell quoted in Arax and Wartzman 2003, 19-20).

### Cookseyville

In 1943, Sid and Olevia Cooksey, along with their adult son Timothy and their son-in-law “Doc” Wilson, arrived in California to work in the Bay Area shipyards. The family settled, temporarily, in Richmond (Marcum 2007). During a family drive down Highway 99, Sid purchased several acres of farmland outside the Central Valley town of Atwater. Although the details of the transaction are sketchy, family members believe that Wilson, Sid, and Drew Cooksey paid cash for the original property, as it was difficult for an African American to get credit in Atwater at the time. One family member indicated that in order for a black man to borrow as little as one hundred dollars, the local bank required a co-signer (Cooksey 2007b).

At the close of the War in 1945, Sid, Olevia, and Timothy returned to the family farm outside Fordyce, Arkansas. Wilson and his wife, Edna (Cooksey) moved to the Atwater property where they began farming and raising their family.

By this time, Sid Cooksey had acquired about 160 acres in Arkansas. Within a year, Ku Klux Klan activities intensified in that state. A white neighbor offered to purchase the front eighty acres from the Cookseys, who continued to live and work the back eighty (Marcum 2007). Shortly after that, in part to escape the increased presence of the Klan and to provide greater economic opportunities to their children and

grandchildren, Sid and Olevia returned to the Atwater property. Timothy, the youngest son, his new wife Myrtle, and several other family members returned with Sid and his wife (Cooksey 2007a). Timothy described the 1946 trip as akin to the opening of the 1960s television program the *Beverly Hillbillies*:

We were sort of like the Hillbillies. We had a truck. We had a car. We loaded all the stuff on the truck... most all they could get on it... some of it, they left. And we had the car and all of us made our arrival from Arkansas to Atwater, California.... let's say ten people (Cooksey 2007b).

The family proceeded to build additional homes on the property they purchased during the War (Cooksey 2007a). Over the next decade, six of Sid and Olevia's seven children and their families moved to the family compound, which came to be known as Cookseyville by local residents. Sid died in 1950, at seventy-one years of age. One family member remembered Cookseyville as...

Just the family, it was the whole community of family members and...there was no fear there. We all knew everybody; you could go to every door... we all knew we could go to any one of them for help... it was a family affair (Kemp 2007).

The family built or moved in additional homes to accommodate the expanding population (Cooksey 2007a). They dug several wells, soon after arriving in Atwater, initially hitting water at just sixty feet. As the population of the compound increased, the shallower wells began to dry up. Deeper wells, as deep as two hundred and forty-five feet, were sunk (Cooksey 2007b). Initially, some of the homes utilized outdoor privies; however, over time, they converted all of them to septic tanks. The last tank was installed by 1959 (Cooksey 2007a). This basic infrastructure of wells and septic tanks accommodated the small community, which received electricity from the county grid.

Ozie, Timothy, and Cornelius Cooksey brought skills important to the construction industry upon their arrival in California. This allowed them to find local employment away from the compound. Between construction jobs, most of the men also worked agricultural jobs to supplement their family's income. For example, Ozie's primary profession was laying large underground concrete pipes and other concrete work. Between construction jobs, he worked at a turkey ranch, a sweet potato farm, and other agriculturally based jobs. Many of the older men also hunted and fished together, with the product of their labors adding to the stores of meat and fish (Kemp 2007).



Figure 24: The Author leaving the Cooksey Family Church (courtesy of Alicia Barela).

About half of the Cooksey property remained agricultural. Sid and other family members raised hogs and occasionally, a few head of cattle (Cooksey 2007b). Each family grew a large garden, chickens, and several fruit trees that provided produce for the families. Some families also raised rabbits. Black-eyed peas, peanuts, corn and other staples were dried or canned (Cooksey 2007a). Cooksey children often went to a nearby thicket to pick wild blackberries (Cooksey 2007a). At one point, in the 1960s, a nearby vineyard was removed to make way for expansion of the Atwater airport. The landowner allowed neighbors to remove the existing vines. Most of the Cooksey households added one or more grape vines to their gardens, providing fresh fruit and raisins for many

years (Dunn 2007). Although each household maintained their own house garden, the families exchanged surpluses, and shared in activities such as operating smokehouses, butchering, and distributing shared pork and beef (Cooksey 2007a).

For a while, Icy Ford, one of Sid and Olevia's daughters, operated a country market at the intersection that marked the southeast corner of the Cookseyville compound. "Doc" Wilson built the building, and Icy operated it, with occasional help from other family members, for many years (Cooksey 2007b). In addition to selling dry and canned goods, candy, and other non-perishable items, the store provided an outlet for the compound's agricultural surpluses, such as eggs and garden produce. As the only market in the area, it served both the Cooksey compound and its rural neighbors:

[T]hat was the only store around in the long distance, so...in the middle of the night if you needed bread, you could go wake her up... have her open the store, and she'd give you a loaf of bread and milk... you didn't go and try to get a candy bar, or something like that... but if you needed... sandwich stuff or a loaf of bread... she would open the store to let you have something like that... But, it was pretty convenient, you know... (Cooksey 2007a).

Some third-generation Cookseys remember, as children, selling their aunt freshly picked blackberries to earn enough money to buy a cupcake and a Grape Nehi (Cooksey 2007a). However, in the early 1960s, Icy's health deteriorated, and the family closed the store, which after being torn down, left the corner vacant (Cooksey 2007b).

In 1956, Ozie Cooksey and his children were the last to arrive from Arkansas. At that time, Cookseyville became home to around one hundred people and included a country

market and a nearby church (Timothy still serves as pastor of the church. Several family members remain in the congregation, even though they now live in Atwater or other nearby communities). By the mid-1960s, as many as ninety Cooksey grandchildren, and great grandchildren, lived within the confines of Cookseyville. Some of these lived with their parents while a few who were older and married established their own households on the property.

### Home Garden

Home Garden, in Kings County, immediately south of Hanford, is one of the more recent majority black settlements. Like many of the others, however, was a real estate development built in the late 1960s, which attracted a large black population. This community is, in no way, related to the earlier California Colonization Project, although as it was little more than a developer's project that attracted a large number of African Americans. Some residents came from outside the area, such as Los Angeles and the San Francisco Bay Area. Others had previously lived in the former black neighborhood referred to as "Brown" because it centered on Brown Street, south of Hanford's historic China Alley (the center of the former Chinatown). The Brown neighborhood was destroyed to make way for the freeway that runs east-to-west through Hanford. Other early residents had lived in the black labor camps on the Westside of Kings County. Today, Home Garden remains a designated census tract, separate from Hanford, with a population of just nineteen hundred people (according to the 2010 census), with an annual median household income of almost thirty-five thousand dollars. Home Garden is home to three churches (at least two of which remain predominately black). I have always found it interesting that this specific neighborhood is both as close and as far as possible from the rest of Hanford. Several cemeteries lie immediately south of State Highway 198. The Kings County Fairgrounds are next as you continue down 10<sup>th</sup> Avenue. At the southern edge of the fairgrounds, well out in the "the country" is found Home Garden.

### Other Unincorporated Neighborhoods

To date, I have only identified a few other unincorporated neighborhoods including the Matheny Tract (named after Edwin Matheny, the white businessman from Tulare who also sold property to African Americans in Sunny Acres, Teviston, and Alkali). The Matheny Tract is just outside Tulare (in Tulare County) and is closely related, geographically and through familial ties to the other black settlements Teviston and Alkali communities near Pixley.

## Labor Camps.

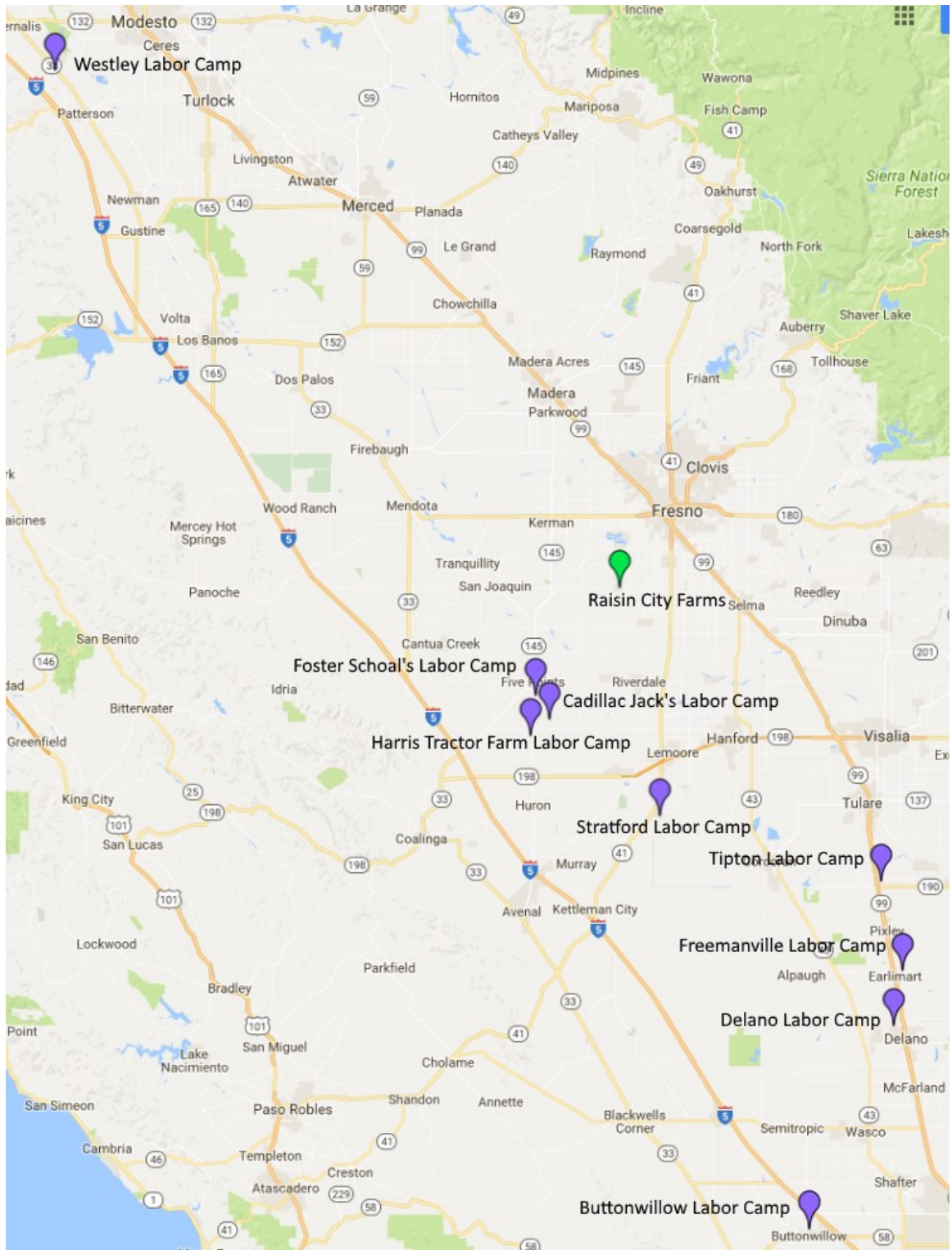


Figure 25: Map of Labor Camps and Black Owned Farms in the San Joaquin Valley

Finally, the last classification of settlements that I use to organize historically rural black settlements in the San Joaquin Valley is black labor camps. Many San Joaquin Valley farmers, especially on the Westside maintained segregated year-round labor camps between the 1930s and the late 1960s. Following the Pixley Cotton Strike (and other large-scale agricultural strikes) in 1933, most farmers segregated their labor camps to maintain isolation between whites (so-called Okies, in this case), Hispanics, and blacks. Many blacks moved from the black labor camp outside Corcoran across town, to Sunny Acres, seeking better living conditions than those offered by the camp (Arax and Wartzman 2003, 258, Rivera 2005, Torres 1994). Robert Parker described the camp he helped build, outside Stratford:

It had one-room apartments. Like a man and his wife, had two little rooms. They had a kerosene cook-stove, and a bed. And, they had a wash house, where everybody's shower in. If you had a wife and kid, it was two rooms (Robert Parker interview in Pickford 2015).

As previously mentioned, some of the residents of Home Garden, outside Hanford, lived, for years, at San Joaquin Valley Westside labor camps such as Foster School's or Cadillac Jack's Labor Camps. Other African American farm labor lived year-round at the Harris Tractor Farm Labor Camp, on land owned by Harris Farms. Dorothy Toney described arriving in the labor camps of California...

It was kinda like the *Grapes of Wrath*, because we were all in the back of the truck, on top of the mattresses and the other stuff we were bringing from Arizona to California. Everywhere that my mother and father stopped, they had a baby, and we had to live there until the baby was old enough to travel. So, a stop-over kid was just the kids that were born during the time they were traveling from Texas to California... My mom and dad brought us to California. And, then they told us we were coming to the promised land. And, here they brought us from a house to a tent. And, we lived in a tent. And, of course, you couldn't lock the door: it was just a flap. It flapped up, and it flapped down, and then that closed the door. . We didn't like living in the camp. We didn't like living where so many people were all around us at all time. We didn't like the murders and the killings and the fights. There was a fight, every weekend. This was the *wild, wild* west... There was a lot of gambling that went on... They were having sex with the women who were coming in from the town, into the fields. They were prostitutes. Sometimes they would have sex in the fields, under the trailers... and they would follow 'em back home. There was just sex. (Dorothy Toney interview in Pickford 2015).

The labor camps are now closed. In some cases, material evidence remains in the form of small shacks or facilities. At some point, before all the participants scatter or die, the history of these communities needs to be reconstructed from the recollections of those who occupied them. This portion of the history remains in the realm of future research.

At this point, I mention them only for the sake of being complete in my descriptions of the settlement categories, as the only places where they may appear in the dissertation is in those instances where residents of unincorporated towns or neighborhoods had ties to the labor camps.



Figure 26: Farmer or contractor owned labor camps, like this one outside Teviston, in 1961, formed the basis for many all-black rural communities (courtesy of Ernest Lowe).

In 1938 James Freeman and his wife Otie purchased ten acres south of Teviston and set up a tent city that was used as a labor camp.<sup>xi</sup> Freeman, a black preacher and labor contractor, called this settlement Freemanville. (Lloyd 2014). Freeman, made multiple trips to the lower Midwest states returning with black families seeking work in the fields of California (Lloyd 2014). Otie Freeman, who ran a store in Teviston, described the first year in the new settlement:

The first year we lived in a tent... I cooked and washed clothes outside in a tub. We used a eucalyptus stump as a table which I had put a tablecloth over... They lived in tents under eucalyptus trees like us (Lloyd 2014)

In a 1974 interview, Otie Freeman described how her husband, James, had drilled a well and built a tank house to service Freemanville. She described how residents had previously drawn water from sources in Pixley in barrels and milk cans (Lloyd 2014). James Freeman died in 1950, so that well and storage tank made water available in Freemanville prior to that year.



Figure 27: All that remains of Freemanville, the black-owned labor camp just outside Teviston (contemporary photo by author).

## Other Labor Camps



Figure 28: Detail from a panorama entitled Corcoran "cotton picker's" camp in October of 1933. It is unclear from the source if this is an integrated camp or one used exclusively by black or Hispanic workers (photo Ralph H. Powell).

But Freemanville is just one of numerous all-black labor camps throughout the San Joaquin Valley. Unlike the unincorporated towns and neighborhoods, these have proven much more elusive and ephemeral, lost to the mists of history. For most of these, I only have approximate locations and little detailed information. For most of them, I have uncovered little more than names and general locations. I know, from various interviews that there were camps near Buttonwillow, Corcoran, Tipton, Stratford, and Delano, as well as Harris Tractor Ranch (in southern Fresno County, associated with Harris Ranch). Cadillac Jacks Labor Camp and Foster Schoal's Labor Camp. Reclaiming this history has turned out to be the hardest part of this study and I only include this small section to flesh out the types of communities occupied, over the years, by rural African Americans in the San Joaquin Valley.



Figure 29: Another detail from the panorama of the Corcoran "cotten picker's" camp (photo Ralph H. Powell).



## CHAPTER 5: Containers for Memory

In this chapter, I continue to examine my three primary objectives for my research: reclaim a lost history; explore why that historical narrative remains absent from public history; and the examine how the individual and collective memories are remembered, forgotten, recollected, or discarded. In this chapter, I will, to a certain degree combine the first and third of these objectives as I look at what I refer to as *containers for memory*, and try to understand the role played by the memories of physical places and spaces and how these are used to frame both individual and collective memories of life in black San Joaquin Valley communities.

Over the course of the past several years, as I have examined rural historically African American settlements across the floor of California's Central Valley I have tried, from time-to-time, to approach the material from different theoretical and methodological perspectives. In this chapter, I interrogate some of my findings within an anthropological framework of material culture—viewing material culture as containers of memory. Robin Boast suggests, “the construction of human identity is wholly fused with the construction of the identity of things” (Boast 1997, 189). Therefore, it should be possible to examine these African American communities using the approaches presented in current thought related to material culture. In order to do so, the first step required is to ascertain what aspects of material culture all (or most) of these communities shared. Halbwachs contends that connecting a memory to a specific location requires positioning those memories within shared memory: “[W]hen we attempt to localize... memories... [we] have to place them within the totality of memories, common to... groups that are... lasting” (Halbwachs 1992, 52).

The populations of these communities have generally included both farm workers and farm owners (both large and small landholders). Specific implements, such as the cotton sack or the short-handled hoe are not representative of everyone's experience in these communities. Other aspects of material culture—cars, homes, home furnishings—from what I have observed in the field, tend to be essentially identical to those of populations of similar socioeconomic standing (both rural and urban), thereby providing little insight into shared identity or other aspects of community-building specific to these small, unincorporated towns. This differentiation at the level of artifact reinforces the point made by Pierre Lemonnier when he wrote that “[w]ithin a given society, not all subgroups of individuals share exactly the same material culture” (Lemonnier 1986, 19).

After reviewing field notes, oral history interviews, newspaper clippings and other sources, I see one limited aspect of material culture that relates, almost universally across these communities: shared public spaces. By shared public spaces, I mean those places wherein community members interact, come into contact with other members of the community, and develop shared memories which contribute to the shared, communal memory specific to each of these communities, but which also connect them in a variety of ways. After suggesting that “...material culture worked in fashioning human bonds and facilitating human life...” Chandra Mukerji asked, “[H]ow do people live in a material world... How do people construct social meanings and group lives...” It is the construction of social meanings, memory (or memories), and identity (or identities) that I wish to extract.

The spaces I have identified, here, include (but are not limited to) local businesses (primarily stores, restaurants, cafes, bars, juke joints, and markets), churches, community centers and schools (or the equivalent), and what I call infrastructure (parks, street lights, bus stops, etc.). To one degree or another, the majority of these elements exist in almost every one of these communities, while others are present in a smaller subset. Where possible throughout the following section, I will provide specific examples, along with photographs, where available.

One reason I feel comfortable approaching the material culture of these communities through these shared spaces is because in interviews and other contacts, informants repeatedly returned to discussing these sites when recalling the community's past. For a variety of reasons, some of which I hope to reveal here, these communal, shared spaces (or, in some cases, the memories of these spaces) are a major part of how individuals within each community see their own connection to the broader community. Concerning the juncture of physical representations of society (communal spaces) and culture Tim Ingold, posited that "Little attention is paid to actual materials and their properties... Culture wraps itself around the universe of material things, shaping and transforming their outward *surfaces*..." (Ingold 2000).

As already mentioned, much of my work focuses on concepts of community, social memory, and, of course, individual and collective identity. Victor Buchli puts forth (referencing Julian Thomas), that "material culture [should] be viewed as the raw material for the creation of narratives, decontextualized and redeployed as agents continuously change their use of material culture in the creation of narrative expressions of identity" (Buchli 1995, 186). Within this context, I see these spaces as containers of memory from which these narratives (the stories told to me by informants about these spaces) are preserved and revealed.

Part of my reason for an examination of these communal spaces—businesses, schools, community centers, churches, and public infrastructure—ties back to Foucault's focus on how society is formed, and power exerted and resisted within institutions that can most accurately be considered to be built communal spaces (Foucault 1965, 1995, Foucault et al. 1991). I have addressed much of the theory upon which I rely for this study concerning power and agency in Chapters Two and (to a lesser extent) Three. Once again, I return to Mukerji who posited that "Human life is lived in spaces that are simultaneously representational and constraining" (Mukerji 1994, 160). As my interest in these communities focuses on the social, it should be understood that "there is no absolute division between the material and the social, and that what division does exist is neither stable nor definitive (Boast 1997, 185). One subgroup of these spaces represents the boundary of power and resistance; where residents resist against the constraints placed on them by the hegemonic. This would include schools, community centers, and, of course, the group of items I refer to here as infrastructure. It is within these spaces, often controlled by County Boards of Supervisors or other outside entities, where residents of these small, predominately subaltern communities overlap with the mechanisms of political, economic, and social power.

Almost none of the references in my field notes and interviews that pertain to local businesses reference employers. They often reference the owner of the business, but these are personal and interpersonal remembrances, not recollections of the workplace or

the relationship between employee and employer. The only exception to this is the labor contractors who hired residents to pick cotton, and other crops, from the southern tip of the San Joaquin Valley to the bean fields of Oregon. Instead—and my motive to examine the impact of these entities as material culture—the majority of the businesses referenced all contained spaces wherein locals could interact and connect. This includes places to eat, drink, and play, grocery and general stores, and places to meet and worship. They are often characterized, contemporarily, by their absence.

Barbara Nelson, one of my most helpful and reliable informants, was quoted in the *Madera Tribune* describing Fairmead as “...overlooked... no store, no park, no community center, no sidewalks, no street lights...” (Frances 2008). In each case cited here the community is perceived to be, in some way, lacking. An absence of these things apparently diminishes the community, and in turn, the shared identity of the residents. However, the individual need, in this case, by Nelson, to remember these things, represents what Assmann referred to as “a general desire to reclaim the past as an important part of the present” (Assmann 2008, 54). This can be extended to allow one to assume, as confirmed by my observations, that when asked about their lives within these settlements—community life, rather than their family or private lives—informants tend to focus on shared spaces: spaces that, as I have already mentioned, function as containers for memory. Maurice Halbwachs describes how place and space allow individuals to reconstruct events into useful memories:

A given scene... which has been fixed in our memory therefore does not reappear as the depiction of a day such as we experienced it in the past. We compose it anew and introduce elements borrowed from several periods which preceded or followed the scene in question. The notion that we have at this moment of recreation of the moral nature... of the event itself—now judged from a distance—imposes itself on our mind with so much power that we cannot escape being inspired by it (Halbwachs 1992, 61).

Although that particular quote deals specifically with the collective memory within the structure of family, I believe that it can just as easily be applied to the memories related to specific places, and the people contained with them—containers of memory.

One would think, going through many of my field notes and interviews, that people living in rural communities think about little other than food. This might be a natural connection to agriculture, as most of these rural communities, at one point or another, have served as homes to agricultural workers, but I think it really has to do with a combination of a focus on (usually past) economic aspects of the community and a focus on communal spaces, or places that encapsulate memories. In this chapter I use the term place to designate a socially constructed space that contains human interaction and space is used to describe a location that might be associated with economic activity, ritual practices, or other activities (Massey 1994, Martin 2003). These spaces can be, more or less, divided into three specific categories, places to eat, places to drink (and dance), and places to purchase things to eat and drink. Although the first two should probably be considered individually (and would be in a longer, more specific study), for my purposes

here, I will combine them and within this section I will explore places to eat and drink and stores or markets.

### ***Places to Eat***

“Tell me what you eat, and I’ll tell you who you are,” is attributed to the French author Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin. Probably the most commonly referred to types of public or shared space within my research are those places where people purchased prepared food and drink. These include a range of cafes, restaurants, bars, night clubs, juke joints, and fast food establishments. For my purposes, here, I will reword the above quote to “Tell me *where* you eat, and I’ll tell you who you are.” Pierre Bourdieu confirmed the importance of places where people share the consumption of food and drink:

The café is not a place a man goes to for a drink but a place he goes to in order to drink in company, where he can establish relationships of familiarity based on the suspension of censorships, conventions and properties that prevail among strangers... a site of companionship (Bourdieu 2000a, 180)



Figure 30: The Mammoth Orange burger stand stood, until a few years ago, along the side of Highway 99, and was not only the most recognizable public landmark marking the small rural hamlet, but it was also the last business and the last place to purchase a meal (courtesy of James Lancaster).

By far, the best known (whether famous or infamous) eatery in any of these communities is the Mammoth Orange hamburger stand that, until 2007, stood on the side

of Highway 99 in Fairmead. This last remnant of the once-popular kitch architecture (symbolized by the string of gigantic citrus-shaped juice and hamburger stands that began dotting the highways and byways of California in the 1930s) fell victim to the expansion of the freeway through Madera County, which cut off access to the popular road-side attraction. For many locals, the Mammoth Orange was not only a place where locals and travelers purchased the best bacon & swiss cheeseburgers in the state since the 1950s, but it represented the most recognizable landmark pointing to the existence of the town, itself.

As much as the Mammoth Orange represented a local landmark, other eateries appear in numerous interviews. Often, these references are tied to specific and personal memories that include important events or periods. These included familiar events like dating, family gatherings, or other affairs, as well as to specific individuals. There were a number of other places where people could eat, drink, and be merry. At least three married couples from Fairmead referred to a place called the Dew Drop Inn (really). At one point, one of the couples referred to it as a nightclub, while another used the term juke joint. Essentially, it was a bar and grill, or a restaurant with a bar and a dance floor, where people often went to dance to the music on the juke box (Williams 2010, Nelson 2012). When pressed about the use of the term juke joint, the couple who originally brought it up, described it as a place to eat, drink, and dance. At least two couples related, in general terms, having gone to the Inn, in terms that clearly identified these outings as more than just grabbing a burger and a beer. My impression, in both cases, was the Dew Drop Inn in Fairmead, was, for some residents, a place where, for the lack of a better term, people went on dates or other special occasions. Other reports include various eateries over the years. In almost every case, informants not only referenced the place itself, but the people who ran them and the comments about the atmosphere, the décor, or the specific types of food they served (Nelson 2012, Williams 2010). Not once did I ever hear that the food was less than delicious. Lanare, in Fresno County, was also reported to have similar places to eat and drink. Newspaper articles refer to long-standing crap games and a knifing at a juke joint in that community (Arax 2002a). Residents described the Lanare bar and grill, known as One Armed Jack's (operated by a one-armed man named Jack), and a Mexican restaurant that was supposed to have the best food for miles around (Powell 2008).

There may be a possible bright spot to address the nostalgia surrounding the Mammoth Orange stand. The Fossil Discovery Center of Madera County (located west of the remaining village of Fairmead) has purchased the metal shell of the old kitchen part of the structure (the actual giant orange)(see figure 31). The director of the Discovery Center eventually hopes to restore it and provide limited food service as part of the museum and discovery center.



Figure 31: What remains of the Mammoth Orange, now located at the Madera County Discovery Center, outside Fairmead (contemporary photo by author).



Figure 32: Jack and Dimple's Cafe in Teviston in 1961 (courtesy of Ernest Lowe).

## ***Places to Shop***



Figure 33: One of two structures in Bowles (formerly Bowles Colony) that appear to have originally been used as businesses (contemporary photo by author).

In almost every interview, a current or former resident mentioned the various and sundry stores that, at one time or another, provided service to the community. Frank Mort suggested that shopping (in all its forms) presents...

...localized points where consuming meshes with social demands and aspirations... What they underline is that consumption is... about articulating... [individual and collectivism]... in a new relation (Mort 1991, 160-173)



Figure 34: This former storefront in Bowles appears to have been re-purposed as a home (contemporary photo by author).

I found it common, therefore, to encounter descriptions of stores and markets in the interviews of residents of these rural settlements. As one Fairmead resident lamented, “I... see no change in the present. It’s the same: no store, no park, no community center...” (Frances 2008). One third generation Cooksey resident reminisced about the store his aunt ran in the Cookseyville settlement: “that was the only store around in a long distance...” (Cooksey 2007a).



Figure 35: This was the site of the original market, in Cookseyville. Torn down decades ago, the small country market served the Cooksey compound and its rural neighbors (contemporary photo by author).

Another member of the extended Cooksey family remembered that the market provided the basics:

[M]y aunt had a little grocery right there on the property and we could go get, you know, milk and bread, ice cream, candy, and stuff like that. But, we still had to go into town to go to the bigger store... (Kemp 2007).



Figure 36: Teviston Store in 1961 (courtesy of Ernest Lowe)

When the Mammoth Orange stand was demolished in 2007, one of the biggest blows to Fairmead was the loss of the tiny mini-market at the back of the Mammoth Orange property where locals could purchase bread, milk, and other staples. It was the last place to where many of the Fairmead residents (some of whom are quite elderly and

most of whom are quite poor) could purchase staples and other items without relying on a long stand at the county bus stop and a ride into Madera or Chowchilla to shop (Nelson 2012, Lopresti, Natarajan, and Sandoval 2010).

In the 1960s, Teviston had one store with a gas pump. Adjacent to that store was the communal water well, from which residents pumped water that they carried to their homes.



Figure 37: "Shorty" Oehler opened his small market in Fairmead in the middle of the 1940s. It continued to serve the area for almost 40 years (courtesy of the Oehler family).

In 2011-2012, when I wrote a small book about the history of Fairmead, I noticed a fascination by many of the past and present residents with the businesses that are no longer there—including stores and markets. Part of this focus may be redirection to point out no stores remain within miles of Fairmead. It also appears that many of these references are to those communal spaces and the people associated with them. Long-time Fairmead residents pointed out that Stewart “Shorty” Oehler who opened Shorty’s Store in the mid-1940s “was known to extend credit to local Fairmead residents: black, white, or Hispanic. His willingness to do so kept many families afloat between paychecks, or during lean times” (Eissinger 2012, 55-56). Members of the Oehler family, who no longer lived in Fairmead confirmed these and other stories about Shorty and his wife Kathleen. Much of the attachment to the physical store itself, was the result of a personal connection between the Oehler family and the locals (or was it actually the other way around?). I believe that both sides stressing this willingness of a white store owner to provide credit to a predominately black clientele harkens back to the fact that, to a great degree, the creation of the majority black community in the first place, was the result of systemic, legal, and extra-legal racism. Chowchilla, the nearest community, was legally exclusively white until 1965. Prior to that time banks often refused to provide credit to rural blacks (which is why in Lanare, Fairmead, Sunny Acres and the Matheny Tract, African Americans were able to purchase land only because a few white land-owners were willing to sell blacks land, carrying the loans for the land themselves). The willingness of a white shopkeeper, like Shorty Oehler, ran counter to the prevailing practices of the time.

Today, Lanare retains just one mini-market, which includes a pair of gas pumps. This small market sits on the western extremity of the town on Mount Whitney Blvd., and is swamped with customers in the mornings as farm workers pick up the makings of

their breakfast and lunch, as well as in the early evening as they return to their homes from the fields.



Figure 38: Mt. Whitney Mini Market in Lanare (contemporary photo by author).

However, Lanare, at one time, had several other businesses. Originally, the Powell Grain warehouse provided work for many of the Lanare residents. Today, nothing sits on the section of land south of Mt. Whitney Avenue where the warehouse once stood. However the empty shells of several other former establishments stand as reminders of earlier times. The most recognizable include an old Hancock gas station where the price of gasoline appears to be just under thirty-four cents per gallon, and what might have been the Rodeo Café.



Figure 39: Hancock Gas Station, in Lanare (contemporary photo by author).



Figure 40: Storefront on Mt. Whitney in Lanare. Possibly the former Rodeo Cafe (contemporary photo by author).



Figure 41: Mellow & Son's Wrecking Yard, in Teviston (contemporary photo by author).



Figure 42: Converted commercial building in South Dos Palos (now a residence). Referred to as the "candy store" by informants who fondly remembered the penny candy counter from their childhoods (contemporary photo by author).



Figure 43: One of the more substantial commercial buildings still standing (but, long ago abandoned) in South Dos Palos. Several residents remembered it as a repair shop for small appliances and electric motors (photo by author).

### ***Places to Worship***



Figure 44: Teviston Friendship Baptist Church in 1961 (courtesy of Ernest Lowe).

Among the most significant sites of both inclusion and exclusion within these communities were (and continue to be) the churches in these communities. Jacqueline Cogdell Dje Dje pointed out the centrality of the church within the black community:

Because the church was one of the few institutions within black culture that did not have interference from other groups, it became a major focal point for not only social and political activities in the black community, but for artistic expression and events as well. The church was a place

where blacks received training and performed with the arts (cited in Fried 1996, 239).



Figure 45: Teviston Church of God in Christ provided solace to impoverished African Americans who worked in the cotton fields of Tulare County (courtesy of Ernest Lowe).

While Cookseyville only ever had a single church that provided spiritual sustenance for the community, many of the other settlements included multiple churches representing Coptic, Pentecostal, Second Baptist, Church of God in Christ, African Methodist Episcopal, and other denominations (Eissinger 2008, 2012, Arax 2002b, a, Arax and Wartzman 2003). As the communities began transitioning from populations that were majority-black to majority-Hispanic, during the last quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, newer churches (often with services performed in Spanish) replaced or supplemented the older black churches (Cooksey 2007b). Fairmead, Home Garden, the Matheny Tract, Lanare, and other locations each continue to support two or more churches, with at least one of them still servicing a majority black congregation.

Church was at the center of life, in these communities. One former Cookseyville resident said:

[W]e all went to church, all the time... Mostly everything was being held at the church... I've always been in a church growing up, so it was just something that's expected and something that we enjoyed and did all the time... we always make a joke that when we grow up if you didn't go to church on Sunday, don't ask to go to the movies or anywhere else (Kemp 2007).

One third-generation member of the Cooksey family related how important church was to her and to the community:

I remember I got my mom's Bible and I remember her passages of scripture, her sermon notes and I remember there could be like four or five passages of scripture... and some of the sermons I'm in now, there's just

one scripture that they give you and I thought, Wow he [Elder Jefferies] used to walk them through the Bible every sermon... I didn't know 'til I was older that the pastor couldn't read... but, he could quote you the Bible... church went on forever. My friends would be at the park. I'd be at church... my girlfriend went to the Baptist church, but she always got out way before me... In Pentecostal church they shout and it just can be a little longer service than others (Dunn 2007).



Figure 46: Church of God in Christ in Teviston. The Sunday I took this picture, the church was closed (Photo by author).

By the 1920s, the Amey family had already set down roots in the Dixieland region of Fairmead. Enoch Amey, the patriarch of the Amey family, along with his wife Lula and their ten children, at one time owned more than two hundred acres in the area and was directly responsible for bringing many of the African Americans into the area (Lopresti, Natarajan, and Sandoval 2010). Enoch Amey founded the Ethiopian Coptic Church of Fairmead, the first black church in Madera County, in the 1920s. In conversations with local African Americans, this early church is either remembered fondly (especially by members of the Amey family) or as a source of disunity. Clyde Nelson mentioned, in one conversation, that at some point after other black churches were functioning in Fairmead, that they held a meeting to discuss the “goings on” at the Coptic Church. He did not elaborate beyond that comment (personal communication with the author).

W. C. Brown, having returned from World War II, founded the Open Door Church—Soldiers of Jesus Christ, a black Pentecostal church affiliated with a church in South Dos Palos and one in Arizona. This church was the result of a promise W. C. had made, during battle, that if God would spare him, he would build a church when he returned home. Initially built on the original twenty-acre Brown farm, W. C. and his wife eventually purchased two and a half acres up the road from the farm on Avenue 19½.

They hitched the small wooden frame building to a team of horses and dragged the church, on rollers, to the new location (Steele 2012). Presently, Madera County has exercised eminent domain over the church property, which is slated to be incorporated into the county waste disposal site in the near future. The building still stood in 2013, the last time I looked for it. It now appears to have been razed.



Figure 47: Holland Fellowship Hall sits behind the St Paul AME Church in Teviston (contemporary photo by author).

In 1943, Emma Mitchel and Reverend Ernest Simpson established the First Baptist Church in Fairmead. For several years, they met in the homes of church members. Also active in the founding of the church were members of the Howard family. In 1945, the name of the church was changed to the Galilee Missionary Baptist Church. Simpson ministered to the church, in Fairmead, until 1950. Several pastors, each of whom served from one to four years, except Reverend Curtis Ward Sr. who held the position for over fifteen years, from 1952-1967, succeeded him. The longest serving minister at the Galilee Missionary Baptist Church is the current pastor, Reverend R. L. Walker, who has served the church since 1981. Over the years, the church has continued to expand (the most recent addition to the classrooms and multi-purpose room was completed in June of 2000).



Figure 48: Ushers at the Fairmead Assembly of God Church (courtesy of Fairmead Community and Friends).

In the summer of 2014, the author Mark Arax and I spent much of one Sunday in Fairmead doing some research on several projects, and attended service at Reverend Walker's church. We arrived at the church a few minutes before service was to begin. We were greeted at the front-door of the church by one of the ushers. Two male and four female ushers were dressed all in white suits, with white gloves. I recognized one of the ushers as Girtha Williams, and saw several other familiar faces in the congregation from other community events. I am sure that Arax and I stood out as the only non-black faces in

the crowd, that morning. We entered the tidy little church and made our way about half-way up the isle on the left side of the pews. I remembered, as I sat down, that I sat in about the same place, more than five years earlier, attending the Cookseyville Church outside Atwater. While Reverend Timothy Cooksey's small black Pentecostal church basically served a small collection of family members and neighbors, the Galilee Missionary Baptist church served a cross-section of the Fairmead black community with members from many of the families who had lived there since the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s. A baby grand piano graced one side of the front of the church while a Hammond B3 (with Leslie speaker) and a relatively complete drum kit flanked the other side of the altar. Behind the pulpit was a choir loft with several microphones suspended and on stands providing sound reinforcement. Two half-stack sized Crate brand speakers were mounted on either side of the front of the church, and additional handheld and stand-mounted microphones were provided for the preacher, deacons, singers, and announcements. The several podiums on the dais were both nice pieces of oak furniture. the sanctuary was modest, but well cared for and well maintained. This was not a lavish congregation, but one that provided for the needs of the faithful.

I have always found services at black churches to be among the most moving and uplifting celebrations I have ever experienced, and the congregation at Galilee did not disappoint. I am not a believer, but I get great joy from the celebration. Once the Hammond B3 began the distinctive chords that make the instrument a favorite of black churches, blues, and classic rock artists as diverse as Booker T and the MG's, Santana, and Procol Harum, the congregation rose for the entrance of the choir. Eleven lovely middle-aged ladies strutted down the center isle to the rhythm laid down by the organist and drummer, making their way to the choir loft. A few of the male members of the choir

were already seated before the women entered, and over the next twenty minutes more choir members arrived through a back door. The tardiness of some of the singers was obvious enough that Pastor Walker commented, “The choir gets bigger every time I turn around.”



Figure 49: The doors of the Open Door Church, in Fairmead, are now closed, and the building is slated for demolition to make way for the expansion of the county dump (courtesy of the Brown family).

Following the choir’s processional, the two deacons, middle-aged black men impeccably dressed, each in turn, read a short scriptural reading and offered a prayer. The prayer reached the level of a chant, as one deacon rapidly recited a litany of people and things for which he was thankful, with each sentence punctuated with a staccato “Thank you, Jesus.” The overall effect of this rapid fire stream of thoughts and wishes was to flow over the listener, not necessarily at a conscious level, but at a visceral level. This was not so much a benediction but a download, punctuated by the echoes of “Thank you, Jesus!” and “Amen” coming from throughout the congregation. A congregational “responsive” reading followed, wherein the deacon read one sentence from scripture, followed by the congregation reading the next sentence, and so on, throughout the entire reading. The cadence of the reading, both from the front of the church and from the pulpits, again, transformed what could have been a dry reading into a rhythmic chant which continued the momentum.

After several announcements for upcoming events at nearby churches, Sister Tijuana Wilbon asked first-time visitors to stand and introduce themselves. Arax and I rose, said our names and indicated that we each hailed from Fresno.

To this point, the organist had provided a soundtrack to the proceedings. It was now time for the choir to raise the roof. A couple of simple hymns, which featured several soloists, got the assemblage on their feet, clapping hands, singing along, and swaying to the music. Driven by the Hammond and the drummer, the call and response refrains energized the small church. The music segued directly into the passing of the offering by the white clothed and gloved ushers. The smiles on the faces of the ushers were sincere, and the atmosphere vibrated with a joyful and welcoming atmosphere. As the ushers returned to the front of the congregation with their golden plates filled to overflowing with dollar bills, checks, and other coin and currency, the music swelled and the choir exploded in praise and gratitude. Parishioners sang along and swayed, some with upraised hands. Reverend Walker arose from his chair behind the lectern and began scatting, singing and shouting to segue into his sermon. Although the tiny man (who can often be seen wearing cowboy boots and a large Stetson) is probably in his late sixties or early seventies, he strutted, while he preached. Other than a few moments when he occasionally, returned to the podium to read a text or review his notes, Walker was in constant motion. His long cream-colored robe bounced and swayed as he punctuated his sermon, which included moral commentary and uplifting passages of encouragement and praise. In the finest tradition of Southern Baptist preachers, his voice soared from heights of praise, to growls of disapproval, punctuated by clapping, comments and affirmations, and rounds of “Amen” and “Thank you, Jesus!” This sermon was neither grounded in the Gospel of Wealth nor the Social Gospel, this was a sermon of live right, do right, accept Jesus into your heart, and be saved: Protestant Christianity at its most basic level, and the impact on the majority of the believers was palpable. This congregation believed.



Figure 50: Possibly Fairmead's most recognizable landmark, today, the Galilee Missionary Baptist Church is the largest remaining church in the unincorporated town (contemporary photo by author).

I had noticed that Communion was to be offered. Having only been in a Christian church a half dozen times over the past four decades, I was curious to see how it was done, at Galilee Missionary Baptist Church. I thought back to the times I had gone to

Mass with Catholic friends, growing up, or even farther back in a small community church in Glenham, South Dakota—a town actually smaller than Fairmead—where we occasionally attended church when I was just reaching school age. I recalled helping the travelling preacher cut up pieces of white bread to represent the Host while my mother poured Welch’s™ Grape Juice into small Dixie™ cups between Sunday School and the service. Having not seen communion, since that time, I was curious to see how it was done, here. After the ushers wheeled out a table containing a shiny vessel that I assumed held the necessary bread and juice, Reverend Walker, with the help of the deacons, stepped behind the table, revealed that the vessel was actually several stacked trays with a cover, and invited the faithful to communion. As members of the congregation came forward, each was given a small, sealed cup, holding about half an ounce of grape juice and a small wafer. The little factory sealed packages were taken back to the pews where younger and the older congregants struggled to peel off the first layer to get the host, and the second layer to get to the grape juice; without spilling anything. However, no one drank or ate until all were ready. Reverend Walker, at one point, mentioned that the reason for the packaging was for “sanitary reasons.” Several times he checked to make sure that everyone was ready; pausing for those who were having trouble with the packages to get help from their neighbor. When everyone was prepared, he bade everyone eat—which they did—and drink, which they did. I found the notion of taking communion, as a community, interesting, as I had always experienced it as an individual ritual, performed by the priest or minister, at the altar. This sense of community was further strengthened when the preacher began his final benediction and the majority of the congregation left their seats to move to the front of the church where, in a large, multi-ring, semicircle, then held hands and embraced the nurturing comfort of their fellow believers.



Figure 51: Assembly of God Church, in Fairmead (contemporary photo by author).

Fairmead is also home to the black Fairmead Assembly of God Church, and in 1952, Andrew Brown established the Grace Tabernacle Church across the street from the

Fairmead Grammar School. These churches continue to serve the community of Fairmead.

Between the property known as Cookseyville and the city of Atwater, the Bethany Church functioned, essentially, as the Cooksey or Cookseyville Church. A black Pentecostal denomination (Church of God in Christ), Bethany was led, for many years by Timothy Cooksey, then the second oldest remaining member of the Cooksey family who had created the all-black community that approximately a hundred and fifty family members called home between 1946 and the late 1970s. By the time I first visited the church, in 2007, Timothy was in his early eighties, and the congregation, originally comprising most of the Cooksey family, as well as black servicemen and their families from nearby Castle Air Force base, had shrunk to just Timothy's immediate family and a few friends and neighbors. Far more modest than the Galilee church, in Fairmead, Bethany still functioned as an anchor, not only to those who still lived in the area, but for family members who recalled growing up in the shadow of their small church.

Several Cooksey family members recalled the centrality of the church, in their lives when remembering life in Cookseyville. Renee Dunn (formerly, Renee Cooksey) described the centrality of the church to family life:

We walked to church... it wasn't far... church would be from 11:00 to 1:00 or 11:00 to 2:00, depends on how... the spirit moves... we walked to Sunday school and my mom came and it was a family, the whole family came—went to the same church. My uncle (Timothy Cooksey) helped the pastor build the church... that's where, even as I grew older, a lot of that come to me; as I got older the teaching I received at the church... everything about the community would have been spiritual. It would have been based on Jesus... there was always prayer. If something went wrong, you know to pray. You know you got to pray... and to this day, we still do that (Dunn 2007).

Timothy Cooksey told me that the founder of that church, Elder Jeremy Jefferies...

...built a bit, a little church right here in the front... So he run the church as long as he lived. He was the pastor of the church. And, I took care of him and his wife after they got old 'cause they couldn't take care of themselves... me and my wife took care of it. After they got... sort of old, later on, they said "We want you to have the church" ...so they made up the deeds to give me that... They said "You took care of us, we're going to give you this." So they did (Cooksey 2007b).

Dunn recalled that growing up Elder Jefferies, often asked women to read passages during services. As a young girl, she could not wait to reach the age where she could contribute in this fashion. Later, when she mentioned to a family member how much she enjoyed being called upon to read scripture during services she was told "Well you know he couldn't read?" (Dunn 2007).

But, he could quote you the Bible. You could read the scripture and he would break it down, line upon line, precept upon precept. He knew the Word of God back and front. It was just fascinating to me. And he couldn't read it so people read it to him and he took it in. That's amazing (Dunn 2007).

Allen Cooksey told me that the Church originally ministered to the needs of a larger black community in and around Atwater:

...the church was... only recently kinda been the family, coz before that, once you went back towards town there were a lot of other black families... and, there wasn't that many black churches, so people came from to town to come out there... there was Elder Walker. He got stationed at Castle, and then they used to come out there... Atwater was probably ninety-five percent white, so... most of the influx in, other than us, were from the military (Cooksey 2007a).

I interviewed members of three generations of the Cooksey family and throughout their little church provided a touchstone for recollection of family and community life within the small enclave known as Cookseyville.



Figure 52: Four Generations of Cookseys following services at the Bethany Church that essentially served as the Cookseyville Church for decades. In the center of the photo are Myrtle and Timothy Cooksey (courtesy of Alecia Barela).

Today, the church rents out the sanctuary, following their own services, to a small Hispanic congregation – *el Templo Sinai*. This practice is not uncommon, as these rural hamlets have been transitioning, since the 1980s, to populations that are majority-Hispanic from majority-African Americans; the two groups have found ways to coexist, even if they do not always coalesce as a single community. This coexistence is often marked by severe demarcations where the two populations seldom overlap. This separation is magnified by the divisions created by multiple (and ethnically oriented) churches in these small settlements. This is one reason Fairmead for example continues to

try to acquire or build a community center as various factions of the community refuse to attend meetings in churches where they “don’t feel welcome.” (Nelson 2012).



Figure 53: Pioneer Tabernacle Community Church in South Dos Palos (contemporary photo by author).



Figure 54: St James Primitive Baptist Church in South Dos Palos (contemporary photo by author).



Figure 55: St Mark CME Church in South Dos Palos (contemporary photo by author).

By one estimate, there are currently as many as three dozen black churches in the Tulare Lake Basin (portions of Kings and Tulare Counties). These include Reverend Alfred King’s Shilo Church of God and Christ, founded in 1948, which serves just a handful of aging parishioners; the Church of God in Christ, in Stratford, with a congregation of about a hundred, led by Oradio Smith; the House of Prayer in Teviston where Pastor Lonnell Smith commutes from West Fresno for services twice a week; and Denis Turner’s church, the Calvary Baptist Church, in Lanare, that meets in a building

that, in one of its many past lives, served as a juke joint or bar (Arax 2002b). Although some of these are suffering from dwindling congregations, they continue to serve as a repository (or container) of memory, today. Their on-going existence not only provides a place to contain memories from the past, but a place wherein new memories are created and both past and future memories are curated.



Figure 56: Golden Harvest Apostolic Church on 2nd Place, in Home Garden (outside Hanford) (contemporary photo by author).

### ***Places to Learn***

Schools and community centers represent a different type of space in that they generally belong to, or are funded by, governmental or civic groups, often from outside the local community. While the children from Cookseyville were always bussed into Atwater for elementary school, junior high, and high school, black children from Lanare were, for decades, segregated from the white students of nearby Riverdale while attending Binder Grammar School, a mile or two west of Lanare (and the opposite direction all-white Riverdale). By the late 1960s, Fresno County closed the rural school, and students from Lanare were bussed into Riverdale. Students from Teviston and Alkali attended elementary school in either Delano or Earlimart. One of the few communities within which there has always been a local elementary school is Fairmead. For over one hundred years, Fairmead has had at least one elementary school that has provided, to varying degrees, a center and a focal point to the community.

Fairmead never got its own high school. From the beginning of the community, in 1912, however, elementary education was a priority. The town's developers—the Cooperative Land and Trust—built a school for the early Mennonite settlers from the Russian/German border regions; first called Munich and later renamed Dixieland (in an effort to distance themselves from the Kaiser during World War I). Classes were initially in German (Enns-Rempel 1992). The first graduating class of seven students advanced from the Dixieland school in May 1918. Johann Lichti, one of the early Mennonite immigrants told relatives, back home, “Many people might think that only a few of us

live here. We have, however, 85 students in our school, with three teachers...” (Lichti 1915).



Figure 57: The original Fairmead Grammar School (photo provided by Fairmead Community and Friends).



Figure 58: Fairmead's Dixieland School (photo provided by Fairmead Community and Friends).

During the first year of the town’s existence, public elementary school was held in a warehouse space that belonged to the Kenton Grocery Store. A Mrs. Storey and her daughter taught the school (Clough 1968, 126). In 1913, construction of the Fairmead Elementary school (also referred to as the Fairmead Grammar School) was completed. The building included an auditorium 125 feet long and forty feet wide, with a raised stage at one end and a kitchen at the other end. Community events were often held in the auditorium, in which over 100 new “opera style” seats were installed in 1916 (Mosteller 1916). That same year, Mary Campbell and Florence Latham became the teachers for the two main classrooms of the Fairmead School. Campbell often made soup for the students. Children were encouraged to bring a cup and a spoon (for the soup), along with anything else they wanted for lunch. This practice continued until 1928 when the school hired a cook to provide hot lunches (Clough 1968, 126). At times, parents brought hot dishes for the children's’ lunches at the Grammar School (Steele 2012). Just as with the Dixieland

School, the first graduating class of eleven eighth graders from the Fairmead Grammar School was in May of 1918 (Mosteller 1918b). It appears that the first graduating class attended high school in Madera, however two Fairmead students—Willard Sinclair and Lester Williams—successfully circulated petitions to include Fairmead students into the Chowchilla High School district. In 1919, they were successful. From that point on, most children graduating from Fairmead’s elementary program have continued to attend high school in Chowchilla (Chowchilla District Historical Society 1933).



Figure 59: The current Fairmead Elementary School is used by fifth graders from Chowchilla and Fairmead (Photo by author).

By the 1920s, the demographics of the community began to shift toward majority-black. Children from African American families attended school in Fairmead. This included black children from the Brown, Amey, Mitchell, and Williams families (among others) who attended school in the two-room Fairmead elementary school building. With just two classrooms, and two full-time instructors, the Fairmead School ran grades one through four in one classroom, and grades five through eight, in another. All the children of Fairmead, black and white, attended school, played, and worked together during these years. After graduating from Fairmead Elementary, the majority of the Fairmead children attended high school in Chowchilla. As Chowchilla was an all-white community, at the time, the vast majority (if not all) of the black high school students at Chowchilla High School were from Fairmead. There, black students often maintained their friendships (black and white) from their younger days, in Fairmead.

Not all Fairmead teenagers attended Chowchilla High School. Many of those living in the Dixieland area attended high school in Madera, just a few miles to the south of Fairmead. One of these students was Menelick Amey. In 1924, Amey was included in a team photo in the Madera High School Yearbook.

In 1953, a new public elementary school opened for business. This modern building replaced the two classrooms, auditorium, and kitchen that made up the Fairmead Grammar School, which had been built forty years earlier. The original building, divided into separate sections was moved to other locations (two rooms moved to a site close to Madera, and one at the Berenda Reservoir). All remained in use for many years (Clough 1968, 126). For most of its existence, the Fairmead Elementary School has been part of the Chowchilla Elementary School District. Since the 1970s, to achieve racial balance within their district, the school has implemented a unique way to bus their children and

create some commitment to inclusion and integration. This resulted in a system where each school in the district included children from only one or two grades, and for many years, the Fairmead school has housed all the fifth graders from throughout the district. As the district includes a local history project in their fifth-grade curriculum, my book *Fairmead: A Century of Change* was adopted, several years ago, as the primary text for that project. In February, 2012, a long-time goal for the residents of Fairmead moved one step closer to fruition when the County Board of Supervisors and the Chowchilla Elementary School District agreed to redevelop a portion of the school property for a playground and park for the community. Since that time, the Chukchansi Gold Casino and Resort has awarded a grant to fund the project (Papagni 2012).

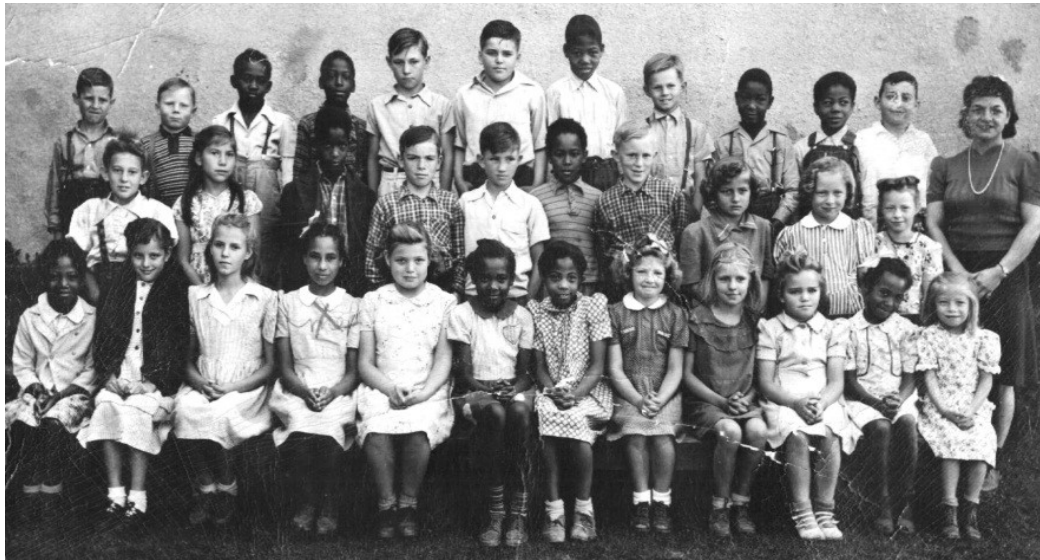
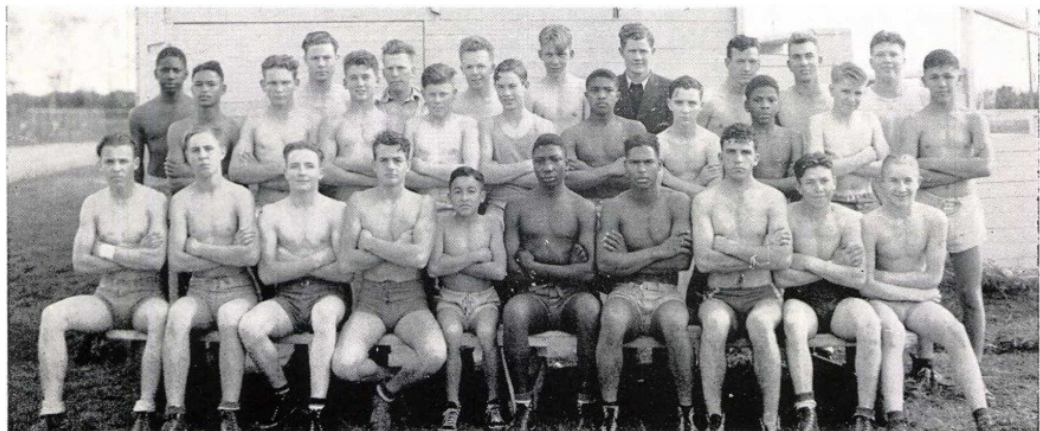


Figure 60: Class picture from Fairmead Elementary School, 1944, Grades 1-4. Miss Kermigian was the teacher for all four grades. (photo courtesy of Barbara Steele)



Seated—J. B. Lynch, Blackie Lynch, Fred Jones, Richard Farias, Henry Reaves, Enoch Amey, Lehman Cozby, Lonnie Doshier, Lavon Nesmith. Row 2—Menelick Amey, Hurshel Kilcrease, Reynard Martin, Chadwick Rodgers, Odes Erwin, Leroy Vaughn, Herbert Creamer, Henry Reaves, Ellet Shoemate, Gene Farias. Row 3—Curtis Melton, George Pearson, Lemual Wilson, George Clark, Philip Wright, Olen Pearson, Denver Moore, Elvin Davis, Max Cowger.

Figure 61 1924 Madera High School Yearbook Photo (courtesy Madera School District).

### ***Places to Consult, Organize, and Work***

While schools are under the control of school boards, which traditionally offered little access to power to the residents of the economically challenged, rural, and minority-populations, community centers provide, to a certain degree, various levels of local control over access and use of resources. Only a few of the communities in which I have examined currently have community centers: Lanare, Home Garden and South Dos Palos. Some of the other settlements may indeed have community centers, and many of them use fellowship halls and other facilities of local churches or schools. One of the dreams of many of those most interested in preserving and promoting Fairmead is to be able, at some point, to build a community center in that community.

In numerous conversations Barbara Nelson, the chair of Fairmead Community and Friends, has repeatedly indicated the need for a local community center because of the lack of willingness of more recently arrived Hispanic residents to attend meetings in a black church, and vice versa. A few years ago, her organization tried to get the Madera County Board of Supervisors to use eminent domain to seize an abandoned home and make it available as a community center. While nothing ever developed on that front, Fairmead Community and Friends has been working with the local elementary school to make facilities available, in the evenings and weekends more often, to provide for so-called neutral ground for community events (including their recent centenary celebration).

The George Washington Carver Community Center, in South Dos Palos/Midway is a prime example of the impact that a community center can have in a small, unincorporated settlement. In 1962, the Dos Palos Poverty Fighters opened the original center as a base for community activity. As part of the so-called War on Poverty in the 1960s, they campaigned to bring in natural gas lines, established one of the country's first Head Start Programs and eventually brought in running water to the community (Brown 2011).



Figure 62: UC Merced Student Analia Rangel-Garcia and Denard Davis at the Carver Center in South Dos Palos (courtesy of Brian McGee).

In South Dos Palos and Midway, the George Washington Carver Center originally provided the impetus that led to expanded access to running water and pre-school education. The Lanare Community Center also provided neutral ground, during the 1960s and 1970s, when redevelopment funds from the War on Poverty were used to establish micro-farming programs in which local, poor, residents grew tomatoes and other crops on their small Lanare properties for market. The program was successful enough to garner several glowing reports in the local media before the program collapsed. Today, that same community center is at risk of being shut down. Fresno county is forcing the Lanare water district into receivership and turning the water treatment plant over to private ownership. However, the deal requires that the residents of Lanare (with a current unemployment rate that exceeds fifty percent) to pay off a major portion of the debt. The deal could force Lanare to lose the community center and adjacent park. According to an on-line news site, Lanare residents are not happy about the possibility of losing their only public space.



Figure 63: George Washington Carver Center in Midway (contemporary photo by author).

This situation also points out the importance of a neutral, shared space within these communities in which various factions are able to come together to solve local problems without the issues that arrive by trying to meet in churches, private homes, or other locations which may or may not be seen as welcoming to all factions of the community.

It is not fair that we have to close our community center, this is the only place we can use to come together and work to improve the conditions of our community... (Solario 2011).

In no way to I wish to suggest that all of these so-called containers exist in every one of the almost two dozen communities in this study, nor that they mean the same to every person who ever lived in these communities. That said, however, I felt that this

information was necessary to examine the ways in which the physical landscape (both spaces and places, in this case) can encapsulate, not only the history of a settlement, but the historical, present, and even future identity of the community and the individuals that live within that place.



Figure 64: The Lanare Community Center (contemporary photo by author).

### ***Places to Remember***

Finally, I want to address the Allensworth State Park, on the site of the best-known rural all-black settlement in Central California. I have written elsewhere about the Park as a container for collective memory and about the Juneteenth Celebration that focuses on Allensworth, to the exclusion of the other all-black settlements in the region. I want to address how the Park itself, as a reconstruction of the hopes and dreams of the town's founders, and reflects, to a certain degree, some of what I have written here. Among the reconstructions at the park are a few homes, including the house used by Col. Allen Allensworth and his family when they visited the town that bore his name (he retained his primary residence in Southern California). However, the bulk of the reconstructed buildings are commercial or civic buildings, including a small hotel, the library and school, a church, a bakery, a barbershop, and at least one store. I see the choices of these buildings, rather than expend resources on restoring and reconstructing more homes, as stemming from several motives. At the most superficial level, I would quite cynically suggest that these commercial and civic spaces were chosen for reconstruction because they represent not only shared spaces (as I have been arguing, here, for similar spaces), but because they represent a certain level of economic achievement that could, arguably, differentiate Allensworth from the other all-black communities. If the bulk of the park is filled with commercial buildings (with little to no reference as to the relative success of these enterprises), it presents the notion that each of them succeeded, at least enough to be worthy of being remembered by the state.

However, examining the actual history of many of the Allensworth businesses, it becomes clear that success was not the norm. In little more than a decade, Allensworth had three different barbers, the bakery was only in business for a short time, and most of the other businesses struggled to continue to stay in business, while *Shorty's Store*, in Fairmead, served the local population for much of four decades (under two different owners) (Ramsey 1977, Eissinger 2012). I do not wish to diminish the achievements, or the hopes of the early settlers of Allensworth, but I also believe that they should be considered in relation to the reality of life in the fifteen or so all-black settlements that grew up, often organically, throughout the Central Valley that provided homes, businesses, and other opportunities for significant populations for the better part of a century. The original Allensworth school and the library, while in operation, received the bulk of their funding from Tulare County, and which served the local population well, represent that intersection between the larger, in this case, predominately white community (Tulare County) and the local, all-black population. Today, at the park, no mention is made of the lack of municipal water or sewage. Had Tulare County provided assistance with those two municipal projects, it might have insured the on-going life of the town of Allensworth, rather than see it dwindle to a ghost town in less than two decades (Ramsey 1977, 2004).



Figure 65: The reconstructed interior of one of the markets/stores in Allensworth State Park (contemporary photo by author).

But, on a more positive note the park itself, represents a shared, public space, and acts as container for social and public memory. And, just as shared spaces in Fairmead, Lanare, South Dos Palos, and other Central California settlements provide links to individual and collective pasts, the fact that similar spaces are reconstructed at the park highlight the importance of the associations created by such shared spaces. Here, is an example of material culture as a container for memory, both creating a public, shared memory about itself, but functioning to both stand-in and reinforce the memories associated with similar spaces in other contexts.

My interest in these so-called containers of memory was initially sparked during the Fairmead Centennial Celebration, in 2012. As I listened to the conversations in which current and former residents paged through my book (*Fairmead: A Century of Change*) and the event's official program, it was not unusual that a picture of Shorty" Oehler's market or a photo of an old school or church sparked a long, detailed conversation about the people and events associated with those spaces. Memories were contained within those spaces that included family gatherings, courtship, and friendship. These buildings and businesses often acted to encapsulate great joy or sorrow. Many of the memories were specific to an actual building or space, or the person who operated the store or pastored the congregation. But, other recollections were of events that occurred in relation to those containers, but were not specific to them. Several side conversations included reminiscing about going on dates to local eateries or juke joints (often referred to as clubs, bars, or juke joints). The sights and sounds of these places were as much a part of the remembered occurrences as the events, themselves. If I have any regrets associated with this work, the one thing that bothers me the most is the fact that I was engaged at the book table, for most of the event, and I was unable to interview many of the former Fairmead residents before they left their old home and returned to their contemporary lives. I have, however, begun incorporating old photographs (or contemporary photos of old buildings) in my interviews, as these visual reminders tend to help form a framework for these memories.

However, these containers of memory do not necessarily mean the same thing to everyone. Some of these places were inclusive, in that large numbers of residents had strong connections to them. Others, however, tended to be less inclusive if not entirely exclusive. Churches, for example, tend to be remembered fondly by members, but may not have the same impact on others. Clarence Nelson expressed displeasure with Enoch Amey for establishing a Coptic Church in Fairmead, and told me, briefly, that several of the men in the community asked him to shut down that church in favor of a more mainline Christian denomination (Nelson 2012). The concept of memory containers helped me as I formulated and conducted this research, in that, it allowed me to go beyond looking just at history (this happened here, and so forth) and try to ascertain deeper meanings. I continue to be less interested in the events that happened in these locations than what those events meant. The association with the location (or container) provides the subject with a memory trigger that can, occasionally, bring out much deeper and more insightful information during the recollection (and re-collection) process.



## CHAPTER 6: Where Water Flows Communities Grow

In both preceding chapters I addressed two of my primary research topics: the reclamation of invisible history and the examination of reasons why the narrative remains lost. The next three chapters examine the third question, namely, the exploration of the processes used by members of these communities to individually and collectively engage the past, both as memory and as history.



Figure 66: Col. Allensworth State Historic Park attempts to recreate some of what early settlers built in the dusty fields of Central California (contemporary photo by author).

In early October, 2014, as I made my normal drive from Fresno to the University of California campus outside Merced, I passed a large vehicle carrier loaded with a Mack truck. Reminiscent of the smaller fuel tankers used at airports (as opposed to the larger tankers commonly used for fuel or milk transport), the cargo (a truck on the back of a truck) looked like it had either just been manufactured or refurbished and reminded me of the smaller tankers with which I was familiar from growing up in the late fifties and early sixties. However, as I passed the truck-on-truck conveyance, I noticed a few words stenciled over the shiny bright paint job: “Potable Water Only.” As I sped by, I remembered conversations from just a few weeks prior in which several residents of

Fairmead concerning how families in that community were trying to deal with their wells were running dry. Some families had been without potable water for months.

California's Great Central Valley, once an alluvial plain between two mountain ranges has become one of the most productive agricultural regions on Earth. This transformation was only possible because of the massive redistribution of the water that once filled numerous lakes and rivers into irrigation systems and urban water works. Begun with a series of irrigation districts at the end of the nineteenth century, according to the Bureau of Reclamation of the United States Department of the Interior, the current Central Valley Project, as the current federal project is known includes twenty dams and reservoirs, almost a dozen power plants, and five hundred miles of canals, conduits, tunnels, and related facilities to manage more than nine million acre-feet of water, including about 5 million acre-feet for farms—enough to irrigate about 3 million acres as well as enough water to supply close to a million households (Bureau of Reclamation 2013). These numbers do not include the hundreds of additional miles of canals, pumping stations, and other features of the many irrigation districts throughout the region. California has lots of water. Unfortunately, little of it is where it needs to be for either irrigation or human consumption.

The lack of potable water, as well as water for irrigation, contributed to the fate of many rural all- or majority-African American settlements that cropped up beyond the city limits of farming towns or on the edge of cotton fields, orchards, and vineyards throughout the San Joaquin Valley. Utilizing archival material, as well as first-person interviews and other ethnographic sources, this chapter surveys how black rural settlements struggled to survive while the land under their feet turned to dust without the life-giving power of water.



Figure 67: The reconstructed home of the Allensworth family when they visited the colony (contemporary photo by author).

For a number of years, I have been studying a series of rural historically black settlements throughout Central California's San Joaquin Valley. Whether planned colonies like Allensworth; unincorporated town sites like Lanare, Fairmead, or Teviston; or labor camps such as Harris Tractor Farm or Cadillac Jack's Labor Camp, my research has focused on trying to understand the processes that created the need for such

settlements and maintained them, as well as those factors that relate to social memory, forgetting, and nostalgia In 1908, five African American businessmen, in Los Angeles including Col. Allen Allensworth, established the California Colony and Home Promotion Association to promote a so-called race colony in southern Tulare County (Beasley 1919). The town of Allensworth was one of two neighboring communities, less than five miles apart, developed by the white developer, William O'Bryan, and his Pacific Farming Company.



Figure 68: The Allensworth branch of the Tulare County Library, with books donated from as far away as North Dakota, was just one of the institutions established by the early colonists of Allensworth. This building, like all the buildings in the park, is a reconstruction, based on the original (contemporary photo by author).

Allensworth was situated on highly alkali soil, and although the original plans for the colony called for a domestic water system and agricultural irrigation, neither was ever delivered by O'Brian, and his Pacific Farming Company (Ramsey 1977). Alpaugh, built on good land, was provided with the water needed to survive, Allensworth, built on poor land, was to receive none.

As I detailed the rise and fall of Allensworth in Chapter 4, I will simply refer you back to that section, here. Suffice it to say that, ultimately, it was the lack of access to both fresh potable water for homes and agricultural irrigation water that led to the demise of the highly touted and well-advertised black colony.

During the first five years of the colony, promotion fell upon the shoulders of Allensworth and William Payne, another member of the board of directors. It was their

responsibility to recruit residents to make their planned community a success (Ramsey 1977). Occasionally, Journee White conducted speaking tours to promote the colony as far away as New Orleans, while Allensworth and Payne focused on speaking engagements throughout California. (Ramsey 1977). Advertising materials included a promotional newspaper, the *Sentiment Maker*; various circulars and flyers; and news releases to both the white and black press, including so-called *race papers* such as the *Western Reserve*, the *Oakland Sunshine*, the *Los Angeles New Age*, the *Los Angeles Eagle*, and the *New York Age* (Ramsey 1977). Local white papers, such as the *Tulare Register*, the *Visalia Daily Times*, and the *Delano Record* also published promotional material. By April 1914, the *Los Angeles New Age* began running a regular column called “Allensworth Notes” (Ramsey 1977).



Figure 69: A post card from approximately 1920 showing a "busy day" in Fairmead (courtesy of Fairmead Community and Friends).

Founded just four years after Allensworth, the community of Fairmead looked to be one of the state's most successful colonization ventures. Unlike Allensworth, however, this colony was never envisioned as a community, which would ultimately host a majority African American population.

North of the city of Madera, and initiated before the start of the nearby Chowchilla Colony (which would be racially exclusive through the 1960s), Fairmead appeared to have everything. For almost a decade, newspapers around the nation lauded the remarkable advantages offered by this miracle on the Valley floor. Within a year of initial construction, electricity was connected to every town and rural lot. Eighteen freight and passenger trains stopped at the Fairmead depot, every day. At least two general stores competed for local trade. A local cheese factory shipped cheese throughout the Western States. The largest lumberyard south of Stockton provided building materials to the town and the thirteen agricultural colonies. The Fairmead Inn, boasted a world-class chef from

San Francisco and provided accommodations to celebrities, politicians, and businessmen. Mennonites from Russia and Germany arrived to purchase agricultural and town lots. Farmers were encouraged to irrigate their fields with groundwater, pumped from wells as shallow as sixty feet. Unlike some of the neighboring colonies and developments, the promoters of Fairmead felt that abundant groundwater would be sufficient for both town and irrigation uses. However, as the population and the subsequent demand for water increased, Fairmead, like Allensworth began to dry up. By 1920, the *Cooperative Land and Trust*, the developers who built Fairmead, closed their local office and moved to Fresno, having profited as much as possible from their initial investment.

Throughout the twenties and thirties, businesses left Fairmead, often relocating to the larger, incorporated towns of Chowchilla and Madera. By the early thirties, the lumber yard, cheese factory, hotel, and most of the other businesses were gone, except a market or two and several juke joints—or as the locals preferred to call them, lounges.

During the 1920s and 1930s, as white settlers moved out of Fairmead, African American families moved in. These black families came to work the fields of the San Joaquin Valley. As in many areas of the Valley, Madera County relied heavily on the production of cotton, the number one cash crop in the county. Cotton required a skilled labor force, and many blacks from the American South arrived ready to work, skilled in planting, chopping, and picking the valuable crop. For African Americans, the choice of where to live hinged on several factors; primary among them were exclusionary practices that prevented them from moving into nearby communities. Madera, the county seat, was originally known as the *Alabama Colony*. Founded in 1869, by former Southerners who “lost their fortunes, their positions and were unhappy under the existing social conditions,” white southerners who had abandoned the South during Reconstruction, established the town, although the majority of those original settlers returned to Alabama by 1877 (Robbins 1955). The original Alabama Colony was not considered a success in the early days of the colonization efforts, in the Valley. As one early chronicler put it:

The earliest colony proved a failure. It was... comprised almost exclusively of Alabamians, and was known as “The Alabama Colony.” Want of water, lack of experience and disinclination to labor had much to do with its disastrous outcome (Ziegenfuss 1891).

At the time Fairmead was being built, Madera had its own irrigation district, as part of the statewide initiatives that irrigated many parts of the Valley, and had ceased to be as exclusive as it had been under the expatriate Confederates during Reconstruction. However, Chowchilla, which began the same year as Fairmead, remained exclusively white until the 1960s. Banks in neither Madera nor Chowchilla were willing to make loans to non-whites, making it difficult for African Americans to purchase homes in or land near those communities. Fairmead, as an unincorporated community under the jurisdiction of Madera County was unable to enforce housing restrictions. This would open the door to black settlers in and around Fairmead. Fairmead landowners sought potential new residents from other populations. One such landholder, Jacob Yakel offered African Americans in the Fairmead area town and farm lots, and provided the all-

important financing needed to purchase these properties, bypassing the need for bank loans (Steele 2012).

Many African American families began moving into Fairmead, by the late 1920s and early 1930s, an inward migration that continued, at various levels, until the 1950s. Both census records and interviews indicate that many of these newcomers arrived through the mechanism often referred to as stem-family migration: family members migrate from one location to another, to live close to other family members. They came from Arkansas, Texas, Oklahoma, Illinois, Georgia, North Carolina and other parts of the country. Most of these names were taken directly from the handwritten census records from the Federal Census of 1930. Henry Brown an African American who initially purchased twenty acres from Jacob Yakel had two goals: raise cotton and get his family far away from the rising tide of the Ku Klux Klan, in Arkansas.



Figure 70: Henry and Odessa Brown built their home in Fairmead when options were limited in nearby "exclusive" communities (courtesy of Barbara Steele).

In 1950, the Fairmead Mennonite Church, which had been founded by German and Russian immigrants to the Fairmead Colony in 1913, closed its doors and relocated the church to Madera. By that time, many of the immigrant families had moved to Madera, or to Reedley, another community with a large Mennonite presence. By this point, the majority of the population of Fairmead was black. When I asked the archivist at the local Mennonite university why the Fairmead church had closed their doors and moved away, his reply was “there probably wasn’t anything there for them.”

Whether it was the changing demographics or the lack of irrigation and potable water, whites continued to flee Fairmead, as the black population continued to increase.

Although never completely black, the African American population was, by far, in the majority, and sustained a larger black population, for a longer time, than Allensworth. It is ironic that the lack of water caused African Americans to move out of Allensworth, and, at almost the same time, made it possible for blacks to purchase land and move into Fairmead.

As I have mentioned, in earlier chapters, I am interested in how social and public memory impact the present and the future. In doing so, I have been very interested in the *perception* of Fairmead, as well as the reality on the ground. One way to look at how Fairmead is understood by the larger San Joaquin Valley community is to look at how area newspapers report on activities within the community.

Doing a text search through newspaper databases that contain area newspapers, I was able to find a marked difference in coverage, effective in 2007. When I wrote my local history book about Fairmead, I relied heavily on a combination of oral history interviews and newspaper archives to reconstruct—or re-collect—the history of the first fifty or sixty years of the community. However, once the early, commercial boosterism of the original colony disappeared from newspapers around the state, the bulk of the coverage (between 1922-2000) consisted of a few letters to the editor (often in agricultural publications) and crime reports. The first glimmer that things might be changing, for the better, was an article in the *Fresno Bee* in September 1990 that announced the formation of a new community group, and cooperation provided by Madera County:

In the Madera County community of Fairmead, many homes and businesses are abandoned and weeds have overrun streets and sidewalks. But things may soon change. Residents want to give this once-bustling railroad town a face lift, hoping to improve life and possibly profit from a nearby women's prison...

Fairmead, located along the Southern Pacific tracks at Avenue 22-1/2, dates to 1912. In its heyday 1,500 residents were served by a hotel, two newspapers, a general store, a barber shop, a pool hall, two blacksmith shops, a lumber yard and other stores (Lopez 1990).

This paragraph illustrates one application of social and collective memory: nostalgia, drawing attention to the things that had been in the community (none of which remained, by the time the article was written). The article continued...

Today, 350 residents have immediate access to only a hamburger eatery and a minimart at Avenue 22-1/2 and Highway 99. The closest gas station and grocery store are in Chowchilla or Madera. The community is most closely identified with the Fairmead Landfill, which is just west of town.

But that status could change once the new women's prison opens in October. The prison on Avenue 24 is about three miles from downtown Fairmead. It will house about 2,000 inmates and have a staff of 900 full-time employees. There also are plans to construct a second, duplicate

women's prison across Avenue 24, adjacent to the first... Today developers say Fairmead is attractive to both developers and home buyers because land prices are generally 30 percent less than in the cities of Madera and Chowchilla. (Lopez 1990).

However, the proposed development that was supposed to follow on the heels of the construction of the women's prisons never materialized. Few, if any jobs at the facilities went to Fairmead residents, and because of county restrictions that prevented any new permits for septic tanks, there was no opportunity for building new homes for prison employees, in Fairmead. All the growth, promised by the politicians and developers who promoted the prisons, ultimately went to Chowchilla and Madera (McCarthy 1991). By 1993 (according to numbers published in 1995), the county estimated that "...of 733 [prison] employees, 257 lived in Madera; 51 lived in Chowchilla; 195 lived in Fresno County; 51 lived in the Merced area; and 179 others lived in other places, from Stockton to Armona" (Thorne 1995).

That did not deter Fairmead residents, including Fred Williams, relative newcomer John Rhone, and other residents from wanting to see improvements made within their small rural enclave:

Fred Williams, who has lived in this predominantly African-American community since 1940, said, "We're going to clean this place up. Residents are tired of living in a slum."... Williams said the weeds and trash and dilapidated structures have to go. Williams is a member of the Concerned Citizens of Fairmead. The group's goal, said its president, John Rhone, is to show county officials that residents want more police and fire protection, and better streets, curbs and gutters. Rhone said, "I believe government will not have a desire to get involved unless residents first show concern and pride for their neighborhood" (Lopez 1990).

This article in the *Fresno Bee* is the earliest reference to the group Concerned Citizens of Fairmead; the group addressed some of the same issues as the later, and more successful, Fairmead Community and Friends. These early attempts at community organizing were met with mixed results. "[T]here has been some temporary hard feelings... That, I believe, will change once the old-timers realize the benefits," said Rhone, who moved to Fairmead a few years earlier (Lopez 1990). Fred Howard, who had lived in Fairmead since 1957, was skeptical, "I have been here a long time, and... [county officials] haven't done anything to better the place." However, Mark Miller, the Assistant County Engineer told the *Fresno Bee* that almost twenty condemnation notices were issued on homes and business buildings. He credited work done between the Concerned Citizens group and County Supervisor Al Ginsburg, for the focus on Fairmead (Lopez 1990). By the following summer, Madera County, with funds from the State of California, began surveying several unincorporated areas of the County, including Fairmead to inventory substandard and derelict properties (*Fresno Bee* Editorial Staff 1991). Fairmead resident Caroline Williams, when asked about Concerned Citizens of Fairmead, remembered the group and believed that, for most of its short existence, it was primarily just Williams and

Rohn. Apparently, following an initial flurry of activity, the group died out. The 1990 article in the *Fresno Bee* was the last mention of the group Concerned Citizens of Fairmead, in the public record.

By 2007, however, this earlier group had ceased to exist and *Fairmead Community and Friends* was formed. According to an article in the *Madera Tribune*, from June, fourteen local residents formed the new group. By September, of that same year, the *Fresno Bee* started reporting about the organization, established by Barbara Nelson, Nettie Amey, and Lawyer and Annie Cooper. Until 2014, when Nettie Amey left the board, those four have remained active in the executive board, along with Vickie Ortiz, Caroline Williams, and Elaine Moore.

Fairmead Community and Friends, a newly formed group of retired residents of this small Madera County community near the junction of Highways 99 and 152, will sponsor the first Fairmead Family and Friends Fun Festival Day from noon to 4 p.m. Saturday at Fairmead Elementary School.

In partnership with the Community Action Partnership of Madera County, the Fairmead group seeks to help less-fortunate families and to improve the tiny rural community, said festival chairperson Nettie L. Amey (Lyons 2007).

To the best of my knowledge, this was just the second mention of the locally organized community group in any area newspaper, and signaled a change in the coverage afforded Fairmead in the regional press. Additionally, this is the first mention of the affiliation between Fairmead Community and Friends and the Community Action Partnership of Madera County. Their arrangement allowed Fairmead Community and Friends to function under the non-profit status of the larger, more established group. This included assisting with legal issues, money, grants, and other administrative activities. This arrangement continued until 2015, when the local community organizers attained independent, not-for-profit status.

By becoming more vocal, to both the press and county and state agencies, the new group brought the plight of the community into a broader public sphere. Even governmental officials acknowledged the impact of Fairmead Community and Friends. County Supervisor Vern Moss credited the group with drawing attention to the problems of Fairmead, "There wasn't really anybody coming forward wanting to do a lot of things before." (Collins 2010a). Vice-president, Barbara Nelson said, "We shouldn't have to live like this. So we got the group together and decided to do something" (Miranda 2007b). Lawyer Cooper, another resident, said, "We don't want to look like a blighted area. We just want a decent area to live, for us and our children." (Miranda 2007b). Terry Barnes, the elementary school's principal, described Fairmead, "...like a lost little area... people live here, but the services for them are few and far between" (Collins 2010a). Nettie Amey, publicly called Fairmead the "red-headed step-child of Madera County" (Collins 2010a).

By June of 2007, Madera County officials announced their ten-year strategic plan for the Fairmead area. Claiming a core population of five hundred, the plan was unveiled as supporting up to eighty-five hundred residents, including sewage and water facilities, commercial development, housing tracts, and other improvements to the area. More than fifty Fairmead residents—including members of Fairmead Community and Friends—attended the county’s rollout of the plan, on the thirteenth of June. Nettie Amey, then-president of the group, suggested that the county focus on sewage, commercial development as close to the freeway, as possible, and on cleaning up existing sections of the community before focusing on expansion (Miranda 2007a).

By the summer of 2008, Fairmead experienced an event that foreshadowed things to come when both pumps that supplied the central water supply failed, causing Fairmead to spend five days with no water in the central system (Kemp 2008):

Residents were still without drinking water Monday after five days of awaiting test results that will show whether water from their community system is clean enough to drink... Fairmead's two pumps went down... [T]he primary well had failed, and had begun to suck air. Anderson Pump Company of Chowchilla serviced the primary well and decided to place the pump 20 feet deeper in the main well. When the back-up pump was turned on, it blew a motor, and was worked on most of Thursday to no avail... water was purchased at Food 4 Less in Madera, to be hand delivered to the residents for drinking and bathing. Late Friday, the pumps were brought back on line, and are now drawing water from 280 feet below ground. "Nobody had any warning, it just happened, but they brought us water, and they worked late into the night to try to get the pumps going again," said Jozette Carrillo, a resident of Fairmead (Kemp 2008).

It was reported, the next day, that the water was potable, and residents could return to using their domestic water supply. A follow-up article, in the *Madera Tribune*, suggested that a half-million gallon storage tank would be beneficial in dealing with the water issues of Fairmead (Madera Tribune Editorial Staff 2008b). As evidenced by old photographs, the town had previously had two water towers, however, by this point, the “in-town” residents relied on water directly from the pumps, which meant that at times of high demand, the system struggled to keep up with demand. By early August, 2008, Madera County announced that it had received a one and a half million dollar Community Development Block Grant to upgrade the Fairmead water system (resulting in the construction of the water storage tank) (*Fresno Bee* Editorial Staff 2008c, e).

The first time I became aware of Fairmead Community and Friends, was shortly after an arson fire on the campus of Fairmead Elementary School. The story in the *Fresno Bee* initially identified the location of a July 1, 2008 fire that caused thirty-thousand dollars of damage, as “an elementary school near Chowchilla...” (*Fresno Bee* Editorial Staff 2008d, Madera Tribune Editorial Staff 2008c, Benjamin 2008). This conflation of Fairmead as part of Chowchilla has been common, for decades. Perhaps, this is due to the fact that, at the time, there were no signs identifying Fairmead and few Valley residents

could have located it on a map of Central California. Although, I dislike it when scholars ask questions (rather than answer them), I wonder if a location does not have a sign on the freeway, does it exist? Is such identification the cause or the result of Fairmead being expunged from the broader history of the region? Since the construction of the new off-ramp and overpass just south of Fairmead, in 2010, new signs on both the southbound and northbound lanes of the freeway announce “Fairmead Next Exit.” Fairmead Community and Friends advocated these signs, strongly, at the time of the freeway expansion that resulted in the loss of the Mammoth Orange hamburger stand and the tiny mini-mart run by the owners of the eatery. During the construction of the freeway expansion, Barbara Nelson commented, “There used to be a sign pointing the way. Now, they are tearing up the freeway and we are without signs saying where Fairmead is. The area is overlooked, but it’s here. People live here. There is not much money here but people care and they have a concern for the community” (Frances 2008). A classic case of one-step forward, and several backwards. Nelson, who grew up in near-by Madera, was then the vice-president of Fairmead Community and Friends. She described Fairmead to the Madera Tribune as “...overlooked...” she expressed her fear for the future of her community (Frances 2008). The fire provided one of the first opportunities for Fairmead Community and Friends to serve the community and demonstrate its commitment to the future. It partnered with elementary staff and faculty to raise funds to replace the equipment destroyed by the fire with a late-August fundraiser—which ultimately cleared over a thousand dollars for the equipment—at the school. President Nettie Amey said, “The community of Fairmead has come together because of this... We will not let anyone trash our community and we hope people... will come out and support the event” (*Madera Tribune* Editorial Staff 2008a, Collins 2010a).

On September, 20<sup>th</sup>, 2008 Fairmead Community and Friends held their first Fairmead Family Festival, in association with Community Action Partnership of Madera County. The stated purpose for the festival was “to help less-fortunate families and to improve the tiny rural community” (*Fresno Bee* Editorial Staff 2008a). Having attended several of these festivals, I can attest that these are opportunities for various community and non-profit organizations to conduct outreach to the Fairmead community. Some of these have included assistive phone services, agencies providing food and medical assistance for poor families, funding for home repairs and upgrades, mental health services, and a broad-spectrum of available services and products. Normally, local performing groups from churches and the school, as well as local bands, dance and acrobatic groups, mariachis and folklorico dancers, or other entertainment rounds out the program, throughout the day.

Since that time, the group has advocated for community issues that relate to the Fairmead area. According to the group:

Their goal is to... help make Fairmead a better place for families to live... The community is still in need of a new water and sewer systems, safe paved roads, sidewalks and adequate streetlights. Fairmead Community & Friends is working to get a public park and a multi-culture community center to meet, work together and socialize with their neighbors (Ortiz 2012).

Fairmead is not the only majority black settlement that has experienced issues related to water. Many blacks settled in Tulare and Kings Counties—some of them in and around the township of Teviston, outside Pixley, near Allensworth State Park. Over the years, large numbers left for other parts of the state seeking work, while others moved to nearby towns like Pixley, Tulare, and Hanford. A few of the old-timers remain, although Spanish-speaking farm laborers now dominate Teviston (Arax 2002a).<sup>xiii</sup>

Teviston's population arose directly from the efforts of a few individuals. Those who brought African Americans to the Pixley area needed farm labor. These labor recruiters provided a steady stream of labor for large Central California landowners like J. G. Boswell (Arax and Wartzman 2003). Initially, thirty-five dollars was the fare paid to drivers working for the labor recruiters to be taken to the San Joaquin Valley. Robert Parker often collected African Americans from the steps of a Texas County courthouse, from the edge of fields, or under bridges to begin the fifteen hundred mile trip to Teviston (Arax 2002a). I included the story of Robert Parker and his trips to Oklahoma and Texas in the chapter covering community histories, as a prime example of how local agricultural labor contractors poached labor from the American South. Other labor contractors, similarly transported large numbers of blacks to the San Joaquin Valley from Oklahoma on flatbed trucks, the migrants riding fifteen hundred miles sitting on homemade benches bolted to the truck bed (Arax and Wartzman 2003). However, Teviston was actually little more than a dusty spot nestled between the cotton and produce fields in the heat of the San Joaquin Valley sun. Most of the residents lived in small wood frame homes, with no access to water or electricity. Near the end of 1959, Teviston installed a water pump on their new deep-water well, providing water to the residents of Teviston. To that point, Teviston residents carried water from Pixley and Earlimart (Time Editorial Staff 1959). A year earlier, Bard McAllister assisted Teviston residents to form a local water district (Arax 2002a).



Figure 71 Teviston residents distributing water from their well to individual residents in 1961 (courtesy of Ernest Lowe).

The December 28, 1959 edition of *Time Magazine* included a story about the installation of the first electric well in the area, which was to provide water to the residents of the dusty backwater:

For the children this week there were few toys, little tinsel—only one Christmas tree (at the church) in the whole community. But the 300 Negroes of Teviston had a promise of bounty that seemed greater than all the growing things in the green valley: fresh water that would run to every house in Teviston from the deep well on the empty lot. And standing over the well like a monument, was the gift (sold at half price by one company, installed at no charge by another) that they had given to each other—the pride of the new Teviston Water District—a big, blue, beautiful pump (Time Editorial Staff 1959).

Because of the lack of funds to pipe the water to individual homes, Tevistonians still had to lug water in buckets and milk cans, but the distance from their homes to the new pump was far less than making the trip to nearby Pixley, and the pump promised the possibility of a future water system (that never fully materialized) (Time Editorial Staff 1959).

Many Teviston residents who owned farm land found themselves excluded from the Pixley Irrigation District, however, they had no access to water for irrigation. While nearby fields received ample water, Teviston residents were assessed an annual fee to offset water that might have leaked from the canals (Arax 2002a). In Teviston, as elsewhere, where water flowed, power followed.

Blacks employed by Boswell and Salyer initially lived in a labor camp outside Corcoran. (Arax and Wartzman 2003). Life in the labor camp was rough, surrounded by

gamblers, hookers, and shysters. However, families that wanted a better life moved across town to form a new black settlement, initially dubbed Boot Hill and covering forty acres just outside Corcoran. Edwin Matheny, a salesman from Tulare, like Jacob Yakel in Fairmead, sold the land to African American clients for a low down payment and reasonable payments. Not relying on banks for the loans, these transactions were strictly between the homebuyer and Matheny. He also moved in houses to the parcels of this small black settlement. Howard Toney, who had built a small, functional shack on the property he bought from Matheny, purchased two such houses for his property.

In the summer of 1964, Toney began the process of bringing running water to the homes of his neighbors. Federal assistance money, through the *War on Poverty* program, was available to help the nation's poorest populations, and the people of Boot Hill qualified. Toney and his neighbors hoped to demonstrate local support for the project by enlisting the city of Corcoran. Hoping to get the city to install less than a mile of water mains from the edge of town to the black township, he and his supporters approached city officials.



Figure 72 Water Can (converted milk can) used to tote water in Teviston and the cotton fields near Pixley (contemporary photo by author).

Corcoran was willing to allow the black enclave to connect to the municipal water system; however, the city was not disposed to provide any assistance to make it happen. Shortly after, The Sunny Acres Water District received a forty-six-thousand-dollar federal loan to install municipal water. The city of Corcoran did eventually install the water mains halfway to the black community. Sunny Acres was the name given to the enclave by Toney to replace the unofficial name of Boot Hill. Although Corcoran would eventually annex the Mexican American neighborhood on the outskirts of town, to this day, Sunny Acres remains separate, and apart, from Corcoran (Arax and Wartzman 2003).

The majority population of Lanare, another historically black settlement is now predominately Hispanic. Even with recent demographic changes blacks still make up almost twenty percent of Lanare's population. Once a bustling community, today Lanare is little just a dry patch of land for farm workers and the rural poor.

Like Matheny and Yakel, Eugene Tomasetti directly sold parcels in Lanare to African Americans. For decades, the bulk of the residents lived in converted busses, tarpaper lean-tos, and shacks, with no water, on the land on the north side of Mt. Whitney Avenue. During the late 1960s and early 1970s, federal funds were targeted at some of the poorest areas of California, and Lanare residents built homes, drilled wells, and installed septic tanks. Even with these improvements, Lanare remains poor (Powell 2008). Unfortunately, just as Fairmead still struggles with sufficient water for her population, Lanare residents struggle with the added problems created by having water so polluted by agricultural chemicals that they rely on an expensive, water treatment facility that they can no longer support through local property taxes. While other possible funding sources are being sought, the treatment facility has been shuttered and residents are forced to purchase drinking water or risk their health with water from the local system.

In the 1960s Lanare, Sunny Acres/Boothill (outside Corcoran), and South Dos Palos/Midway used federal moneys to establish water districts and build the infrastructure to deliver water to residents in those African American communities. Although Sunny Acres was able to build the water and sewer system in the early 1960s with money from the Johnson administration's poverty programs, Corcoran refused to allow the all-black community, that had grown on the edge of town, to be connected to the city system for years (Arax and Wartzman 2003). Nevertheless, these systems ultimately had an impact. As one South Dos Palos resident described it, "Before that, we had to carry water in cream cans," Dewey Todd, a cotton picker from Oklahoma, recalled in a 1992 memoir published by the Dos Palos Sun. "It was a lot of work" (Brown 2011).

The same was true in Lanare, where residents carried water, in milk cans, across Mt Whitney Blvd from Powell's Grain Warehouse to their homes on the north side of the street (Powell 2008). For many, after Lanare built the water system, it appeared that economic growth could be restored to the sleepy hamlet (Associated Press 1976). As recently as the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Lanare residents fought to get improvements on their aging water system, which is contaminated by high levels of arsenic toxins penetrating their groundwater. Unfortunately, the plant currently sits idle, as the residents of Lanare are unable to afford to operate the plant (Grossi 2011).



Figure 75: Water treatment plant in Lanare, California (contemporary photo by author).

The lack of access to clean water destroyed the hopes and dreams of the middle-class blacks who sought to build Allensworth. However, that same condition—lack of access to water—led to the accidental creation, over time, of other historically black rural settlements in the region. It is sad to consider that white residents abandoned these unincorporated communities because they had poor access to water, which, in turn, created them some of the few available options for people of color. Fairmead, South Dos Palos, and Lanare, like Allensworth, were initiated as part of the California Colonization Project. Allensworth, as either a promoter's project or a utopian project, dried up and blew away.<sup>xiii</sup> However, the residual infrastructure in the other communities provided a foundation upon which these poorer settlements were able to hang their hopes and dreams. The absence of water—and the power connected to such access—created a void into which African American settlers, powerless to go elsewhere, ventured to create their own communities. Over time, they built churches, operated businesses and farms, and accomplished many of the goals (although to varying degrees of success) that the founders of Allensworth laid out at the creation of their failed colony. Conditions that halted development in one community allowed for the fulfillment of those same objectives elsewhere.

I want to clarify one point, at this juncture. Part of my concern about the ways in which Allensworth have entered the broader public memory and public history is a narrative, supported by the creation and maintenance of the park, that the community completely disappeared by the end of the 1920s and that the park, as it stands today, is the legitimate successor to the original black colony. In reality, the unincorporated town of Allensworth still exists south of the state park. I often point out the town in the background of images in PowerPoint presentations that include Allensworth, to illustrate that the town still exists and while it no longer is exclusively African American (it has a large Hispanic population, currently), a remnant of the earlier settlers and their spiritual descendants still remain in the small, impoverished community and continue to deal with the same issues related to water. In addition to the high contaminants in the local drinking water, like so many poor communities, Allensworth's little ground water has been hit hard by the recent drought.

It was about the same time that I saw that water truck on the back of a truck when I began getting calls from *NBC News*, *National Public Radio*, the *New York Times*, the *Los Angeles Times*, and other news organizations and freelance writers, fact checking stories intended for a national audience focused on the impact of the drought in California: primarily the bearing on rural communities with dry wells. I also provided contact information for many of the locals in communities, such as Fairmead. It was fun to see familiar names and faces in national media, and great to see them getting the attention they deserved. It was during this time that Mark Arax made contact concerning issues related to water and the drought in Fairmead that lead to my initial contact with Ernest Lowe, so good things do come out of crisis.

In previous chapters, I have examined social memory theory, provided several short community histories, addressed the absence of African Americans in the written history (and social memory) of the San Joaquin Valley, and established several categories into which I have sorted the communities I have studied. What follows incorporates much less archival and historical research and, instead, focuses much more on my ethnographic fieldwork, specifically in Fairmead, South Dos Palos and Teviston.



## CHAPTER 7: Fairmead: A Town Re-collected

### *Memory in the Employ of the Future*

In the late 1950s, Joe Stewart was a labor recruiter in Madera County. Always dressed in bib overalls, the cigar-smoking African American, like “Shorty” Dawson and other labor recruiters, who hired rural blacks, sought experienced workers from places with names like Lanare and South Dos Palos. In 1959, Stewart hired a young Clyde Nelson from Fairmead to sharpen hoes and to work as the water boy, while older children and adults from Nelson’s hometown filled hundred-pound cotton sacks in the heat of the San Joaquin Valley fields. Equipped with a small bucket and a dipper, it was Nelson’s task to keep up with the pickers as they moved through the fields to provide liquid relief from the heat. If the young Clyde lagged, Stewart let out a yell that echoed across the cotton fields of “WAAATTA BOY! WAAATTA BOY!” (Eissinger 2012).

I open this chapter with this vignette because the recollection of that story is close to the center of my work. The communities included in this study are normally not the first thing that comes to mind when Central California residents think about their history. Few people living in the area know much, if anything, about the long role these communities have played in the history of their state. One of the driving forces behind my research has been to place these settlements, and the people who lived in them, back into the broader history of the region, the state, and the nation.

Elsewhere I have addressed issues related to the invisibility of the history of these rural settlements within the broader context of social or public memory throughout the San Joaquin Valley and the state. I have attempted to understand whether there is an impact of re-collecting a history from archival and ethnographic sources on individual and group identity. For example, in 2012, I wrote a small book covering the basics of the history of the unincorporated town of Fairmead. This was coordinated to dovetail into the celebration for the unincorporated town’s centenary (1912-2012). Research for the book included both archival and ethnographic methods and covered most of the century, focusing on the most positive aspects of the past, and hopeful signs for the future. The process of turning memories into history was one of the most interesting aspects of this project and one that begs for additional examination. Jacob Climo posits that an “individual’s sense of self and identity results from narrative constructions integrating past, present, and future” (Climo and Cattell 2002). Therefore, what are the processes and impact of collecting these elements of individual (and I would suggest, collective) identity, and codifying them into a history? What is the relation between history (with a capital H) and memory (individual or social)? Of course, in this context, I generally consider history to include those expressions and recollections of the past that are presented in some sort of formal form, be it written, photographic, or documentary. Memory, on the other hand, may source elements from those sources, but resides in the minds of residents of the area. History tends to be codified, while memory kept alive in the minds of those who remember. If the last memory fades with the death of the last person who remembers it, the memory is lost. Once codified, however, an incident, a person, or even a place may fade from memory, but it can be recreated and reintroduced into memory from the historical sources. History is the creation of the repository of memory, where memory is alive in those who retain and maintain those memories.

In this section, it is my intention to examine how memory works inside one of these communities. Through this ethnographic study I want to illustrate how memory has been used to create a sense of collective identity and how, through the use of nostalgia and identity (through a shared past) one community is actively working to build a better future. I want to examine what happens when individual memory becomes shared. Every story in a history book, each memorial marker, or any artifact in a museum represents individual memories placed, through the process of publication, commemoration, or preservation, with the confines of public memory. My goal, here, is to examine the ways that “collective and social memory, has proffered new questions about the interpretations of how individuals and collectives are both constituted by the past and mobilize it for present-day projects” (Griffin and Hargis 2008, 43).

I have done significant archival and limited ethnographic research covering almost twenty rural historically African American settlements throughout the San Joaquin Valley, however, I have spent most of the time doing both types of research on (and in) the Madera County community of Fairmead. The vignette above is taken almost directly from my book for Fairmead’s centennial celebration in 2012. I have been attending meetings and fundraisers, interviewing current and past residents, and generally focusing on Fairmead since 2010. I have established friendships and working relationships with several of the so-called shakers and movers in the community and have been privileged to participate in the widest range of activities. Among the reasons I have spent more time in Fairmead than any of the other communities has been the willingness of the residents to share, not only their past and present, but their hopes and goals for the future with me. Additionally, Fairmead is the one community where residents have banded together to try to affect social change within their community and they have, over the course of several years, successfully used memory, history, and nostalgia to choreograph those changes.

I first became aware of Fairmead as one of the communities that I wished to study the summer before I began working on my Master’s degree in 2006. That summer, I was an intern at an archaeological field school in the foothills above Merced. One of the archaeologists in charge of the site—a long-time Valley resident—asked me about my plans for graduate-level research, and I described to him the work I hoped to do, to which he responded, “You know about Fairmead, don’t you?” (Lajeunesse 2007). This was just one of many such conversations where locals, relying on their own individual memories, were able to point out settlements to include in my research. Unfortunately, I was unable to begin working with residents of Fairmead for several more years. When I began my doctoral research at the University of California, Merced, my advisor, Professor Robin DeLugan, had several contacts in Fairmead. Earlier she had been engaged in several research projects in the area. It was at her suggestion that I made my first trip to Fairmead in 2010.

### The Water Tank

From my first visit, it was obvious from what little I was able to observe (with scant background information about or experience in Fairmead) that change in Fairmead was being driven by forces at the grassroots level. Madera County has only two incorporated towns—Chowchilla and Madera—with all the other communities in the county remaining unincorporated and under the jurisdiction of the Madera County Board of

Supervisors. That means that all county resources are divided up among the nineteen unincorporated towns and the rural, agricultural regions of the county. As I was about to learn, the epicenter of organizing in Fairmead centered around an organization called Fairmead Community and Friends, and three women at the center of that organization: Elaine Moore, Barbara Nelson, and Vickie Ortiz. While others, like Lawyer and Annie Cooper, and Lettie Amey have also served on the board during the time of my research, my interaction with them is less. Some of this simply reflects that the level of participation (often due to health issues) of these members is less than that of Moore, Nelson, and Ortiz, who are generally at every gathering and every event.



Figure 76: Elaine Moore, Barbara Nelson, and Vickie Ortiz standing in front of the new water storage facility in Fairmead shortly before its dedication (courtesy of Wendy Alexander/The Madera Tribune).

### ***Fairmead Community and Friends***

Fairmead Community and Friends, as early as 2008, began establishing themselves as a proponent for change in the community. Initially working with Community Action Partners of Madera County, they held fundraisers and community festivals as early as 2008 (*Fresno Bee* Editorial Staff 2008b). By the end of 2009, Fairmead Community and Friends held public meetings, in conjunction with the Madera County Planning Department to discuss “ways to revitalize Fairmead” (*Fresno Bee* Editorial Staff 2009). By the middle of the next year (2010), the efforts of Fairmead Community and Friends were beginning to garner attention from local media.

No one seems to know why this tiny town is dying... the bumpy dirt roads, boarded-up homes and overgrown grass medians scattered

throughout Fairmead are evidence of a town in decay... Madera County planners... consider Fairmead, an unincorporated town of about 700 residents, to be the county's top revitalization project (Collins 2010b).

Whether... society is directed toward the past or toward what is a continuation of the past in the present, it participates in present-day functions only to the extent that it is important to adapt these functions to traditions and to ensure the continuity of social life throughout their transformations (Halbwachs 1992, 129).

In 2008, Barbara Nelson (long-standing president of the board of Fairmead Community and Friends) described Fairmead as “overlooked...” (Frances 2008). She was quoted in the *Madera Tribune* as saying, “I look back in the past and see no change in the present. It’s the same: no store, no park, no community center, no sidewalks, no streetlights” (Frances 2008). However, as I was to discover through archival research, almost every one of those things had existed in Fairmead’s past and (to some degree) live on in the memories of individuals.

Vickie Ortiz moved, with her husband, to Fairmead in 2011. They relocated to the small rural community after thirty years of her husband telling her that his dream was to own a small piece of dirt. Unable to find an appropriate piece of property near Ceres, where they worked, they purchased some property in Fairmead around 2008. After three years, they moved a manufactured home onto the property, and became residents of Fairmead. Although dissuaded by some of the conditions they discovered in their new home, the Ortiz family was determined to settle in. Ortiz regularly received fliers and invitations to community meetings and other gatherings sponsored by the organization. Eventually, she showed up at a committee meeting, where one of the existing members suggested she take some notes, or the minutes. The former secretary had passed away the prior year, and there was a need to recruit someone to fill her shoes. Unknown to Ortiz, she was that recruit. After attending several meetings, Barbara Nelson suggested they hold an election to elect Vickie Ortiz as the secretary.

### Researching and Writing *Fairmead: A Century of Change*

One aspect of re-collecting a past for Fairmead was my project of writing a book about the town’s history. This project was part of the process of creating a collective memory to tie together the individual residents of Fairmead and the surrounding area into a community with a shared past, and a shared identity. Aleida Assmann stated that:

Institutions and groups do not possess a memory like individuals do... Individuals and larger social groups... do not “have” a memory—they “make” one for themselves with the aid of memorial signs such as symbols, texts, images, rites, ceremonies, places, and monuments. Together with such a memory, these groups... “construct” an identity... based on selection and exclusion, neatly separating useful from not useful,

and relevant from irrelevant memories... a mediated memory (Assmann 2008, 55)

I was happy to be part of this process of making memories for Fairmead by extracting individual memories—along with archival sources—to create a shared memory or history. In early 2011, I met with the board of Fairmead Community and Friends to discuss their upcoming centennial project, which included, among other things, the first parade in the community's one-hundred-year history, and a day-long celebration of the community's past, present, and (sometimes uncertain) future. Although, I had been introduced to a couple of the members of the organization, this was my first opportunity to meet the rest of the group, as well as meet them as a collective. It was an interesting group. Nettie Amey, a member of the first black family to move into Fairmead in 1922 and a founding member of Fairmead Community and Friends, sat next to Vickie Ortiz, the most recent import to the area. Barbara Nelson (current president) had grown up in Madera, but had returned to the area with her Fairmead born husband. Annie and Lawyer Cooper had been recent arrivals, although Lawyer had familial ties and, Like Barbara Nelson's husband Clyde, had grown up in and around Fairmead. Elaine Moore, a local farmer, had been in the area for many years by that time. I remember this meeting because although it was in the hall at the Baptist Church, where many of the group's events occur, most of the lights were not turned on. Everyone sat at a single, long table illumined by a couple of lamps.

I joined the group at the table and passed out a short (four or five page) introductory history I had assembled from some newspaper clippings and an interview or two I located through various sources. This allowed me to pitch the idea that I wanted to write a book to commemorate the first one hundred years of Fairmead's existence. Luckily, the group wholeheartedly welcomed my offer, and we set about making plans for the book's completion and release to coincide with the actual centennial celebration (2012). For me, this was a major breakthrough and opportunity. In earlier studies, especially with older informants, I found my biggest obstacle was to gain *entrée* or access to individuals willing to share their stories with me. It cannot be overstated how difficult it is for a middle-aged (or older) white man to do ethnographic and first-person research in African American communities—especially those communities, like these rural settlements, that were created and maintained through the systemic racism of Jim Crow, sundown practices, red lining, and restrictive covenants. I have had multiple people ask me, “Why are you doing this?” “What's in it, for you?” or other questions implying that I must only be interested in these stories if there is some profit or other benefit in it for me. Of course, I do have ulterior motives in that I want to do this research and, ultimately, I want to finish this dissertation and get to the point where I can focus on telling even more stories. Beyond that motive, however, I believe my motivation for doing the research has always been pure and up-front. However, as I mentioned, gaining the trust of residents has been one of the worst hurdles. Timothy Cooksey, who I interviewed in 2006-2007 was always reluctant to sign the informed consent form required by my Institutional Review Board (IRB), at the time. After a year, I was able to get him to sign it by taking with me an African American professor, DeAnna Reese, from Fresno State, to one of my visits to Cookseyville. Dr. Reese spent about an hour chatting with Timothy's wife, Myrtle, explaining that we wanted to tell the story of Cookseyville and the only way we

could interview present and former residents was with this explicit consent. Eventually, Mrs. Cooksey and Dr. Reese convinced Timothy Cooksey to sign the form. However, my heart broke when he handed the signed form to me, and asked, “You’re not going to try to take my house away from me, now, are you?” Although it is sad that such fears and resentment still exist, but understandable based on our long history of discrimination, segregation, disenfranchisement, and other abuses directed toward various minority populations in the United States.

I was determined that I would, from that point on, try to establish as solid a rapport as possible with a local community, while doing my research. I understood the need to not only demonstrate my academic *bone fides*, but to demonstrate, through words and deeds my sincere desire to give back to the community as much, or more, than the community gave me. I became determined to establish long-term, trusting relationships (even friendships) with residents of the communities wherein I conduct research. It seemed to me that offering to write the history of Fairmead was one way in which I could accomplish both objectives: gain *entré* and give back to the community. I had already been introduced to, and met with, several officers of Fairmead Community and Friends. My primary graduate advisor, Robin DeLugan, had conducted some survey work, in conjunction with the law school at the University of California at Berkeley, and had established a good working relationship. Her introduction, combined with the offer to not only write the book but to donate proceeds from the book to Fairmead Community and Friends, laid the foundations that ultimately allowed me to interview local residents, each of whom seemed to be interested in the progress of the project. I remember, one visit to Fairmead, with Caroline Williams, where we were spotted by Robert Williams (Caroline’s late husband’s uncle). I had spent a memorable afternoon sitting in rickety old chairs in Robert’s front yard, talking about “old times.” On this occasion, Robert waved to us and called out, “Git any more good stories?”

Luckily, with the help of residents (Caroline Williams had already gone to the Madera and Chowchilla libraries and extracted copies of everything available in either institution), interviews, and access to numerous archived newspapers, I was quickly able to piece the history of the little hamlet of Fairmead together and write a short, uncritical, history of much of the town’s first centenary. Because this was supposed to be part of the centenary celebration, I made the conscious effort to, primarily, focus on the less painful aspects of the history of the community. I left out the gangs and drug dealers from the 1980s, the kidnapping of a bus full of school children making their way from Fairmead back to their homes in Chowchilla, in the 1970s. In fact, I elected to leave crimes and other negative aspects of the history of the town out of the book in an effort to provide the most positive memory or public history, possible (for the event). Subsequently, Mark Arax has asked me if, in the future, I would be willing to write what he refers to as “the rest of the book.” Perhaps, one day, soon, I will do so. For now, the commemorative book was my way to gain access to, and participate in, the affairs of the community.

### The Centenary Celebration

Much rode on the Centenary Celebration. For several years, Fairmead Community and Friends strove to make their presence meaningful for residents of Fairmead. They had repeatedly invited their neighbors to events with mixed results. Some of the newer

arrivals (most of whom were Hispanic—many of whom spoke little or no English) were leery of the motives of the group that was viewed, mostly, of being made up of older, predominately black, residents. The inclusion of Vickie Ortiz to the board helped disavow some of those concerns, but as she speaks no Spanish, she was not able to assist in the outreach to that portion of the population (subsequent, Spanish-speaking additions to the board have improved this issue). Some residents were reluctant to attend meetings at the local churches (most of which were viewed as so-called Black Churches). Occasionally, to try to counter those objections, meetings were scheduled at Fairmead Elementary School, however, costs were an issue and using that facility had to be reserved for functions for which the group could justify the additional expense. Initially, the organization encountered additional resistance from some residents because they began, as had an earlier community group, to seek stricter enforcement of building, trash, and other codes. Many in the community felt that the group was being pushy and causing problems while others understood the need to clean up the neighborhood. Over the years, little-by-little, Fairmead Community and Friends made progress, but that progress often came at the expense of trust and commitment from residents. The Centenary celebration was seen as a way to build unity by focusing (as you do at any sort of homecoming celebration) on a shared past—a history. This was an enormous undertaking for this small group of community volunteers. None of them had ever had the experience of organizing a parade or a large community event like the one scheduled for the summer of 2012. Nelson and Ortiz (chairperson and secretary) spent more than a year leading up to the parade and community fair that followed on the day of the Centenary celebration. They booked vendors and community groups, arranged for parade entries, coordinated with County agencies, including fire and police, to make sure everyone was safe on the day of the event. My participation in the celebration was limited to manning the table where I sold copies of the Fairmead book and answered questions, so while the vendor fair was under construction, and the stage was prepared for performing groups from local churches, schools, and other organizations, I set up in the school cafeteria with my books.

I knew I needed to be able to control the publication of the Fairmead book, so I elected to use an online service called CreateSpace.com (now owned by Amazon.com). This allowed me to print-on-demand for a lower cost than photocopying the same number of pages and show up with a professional looking paperback book. For about two weeks prior to the event, the book was available online via Amazon.com and through an individual purchase site provided by CreateSpace for authors to link to from their own websites. I noticed that during that two-week period, that sales (for such an obscure title) were quite brisk. I knew friends and family were not the only ones purchasing that many copies, and I had no idea as to why this was happening. I arrived at the school at the appointed time and found the small table that had been reserved for my book sales at one end of the cafeteria. In the center of the room, there was a projector showing many of the historic photographs I had included in the book (as well as others that were left out), and there were a few of the long lunch tables set up for people to sit and talk, eat (there were food booths and food was available inside the cafeteria) or watch the slides. I set up a stack of the books as well as some copies of my MA thesis (I sell bound copies of that work because, until now, it remains the most comprehensive and complete work about rural historically African American settlements in the San Joaquin Valley). Gradually,

ahead of the parade arriving at the school, residents (past and present), family members, and friends began trickling in to see the displays. I sold more than a quarter of the one hundred Fairmead books (and quite a few copies of the thesis) during the parade. Several women came up to me with purchased copies of the book, and asked me if they could get me to autograph their copy, even though they did not purchase it at the event. Of course, I obliged, and signed their books. After the third or fourth lady brought her own book, I asked her where she had gotten it. She explained that the Chowchilla schools use the Fairmead campus for all fifth graders (each school in the district has just one or two grades and students are bussed from school to school, each year). Chowchilla included a so-called local history unit in their curriculum. In prior years, they had used a few different (and dated) books relating to the history of Chowchilla, but accidentally, one of the teachers at the Fairmead school had stumbled across the Fairmead book, on Amazon, and the school had decided to focus on Fairmead, rather than Chowchilla, that year, and as such, several of the faculty purchased copies of the books for use in their classroom. I told her that I wished she had contacted me before purchasing the books, as I would have been happy to have provided them to the school, at cost. A few minutes later, the elementary school's principal came up to me to follow up on the offer I had made to the earlier teacher. I assured her that I was not in this for the money and that I would be happy to provide as many copies as the school wanted, for future use. A half-hour later, the assistant superintendent for instruction approached me and set in motion an order for about three hundred and fifty copies of *Fairmead: A Century of Change*, for classroom use. Several weeks later, I delivered several large, heavy boxes of the book to the district office and received a check to cover the cost of the books. I have often wondered what impact that book has or will have in the foundation of new memories. What will ultimately be the impact of having every child that goes through Chowchilla schools knowing the history of Fairmead—and the exclusionary history that contributed to the community trending majority African American from the mid-1920s through the early 1980s? Will these children, when they grow up and serve on the Chowchilla City Council or when, as citizens, they vote for a bond measure that impacts Fairmead, will they view the dusty little hamlet south of town differently than it had been viewed by their predecessors? These are questions I cannot answer, as those children are, as of this writing, just getting ready to enter high school. Perhaps some future graduate student will read this section of this chapter and be interested in trying to measure the impact of those few hundred books.

I checked out some of the vendors and performers, but I really did not see the parade. There are dozens of images of different entries on the Fairmead Community and Friends' website and their Facebook™ page. To me, though, the majority of the action, happened in the cafeteria. I was happy to see my advisor, Robin DeLugan and my colleague, Kim McMillon (at the time, the only African American student in my graduate group) make the trip to Fairmead to support the event (and, I think they were there to support me, as well). However, once the parade finished, the room quickly filled up, and I spent the rest of the day frantically trying to cover all the sales and sign a bunch of autographs. I remember thinking that I wished I could be multiple people, however, because many fascinating conversations were whirling around me, as people looked through the book and saw images or names they recognized and began recalling a

treasure trove of stories that were missing from the book and much of my research (many of those with very interesting stories were former residents who had come back for the day, and I was never able to make contact with most of them). The book which was supposed to be both a repository of memory and a tool to make those memories public, was working as the catalyst to extract new memories from those present. This process of attaching new recollections to the images and other reminders of the past is something that I have repeatedly seen throughout this process, an example of which is the primary focus of the next chapter.

The parade and centenary celebration ultimately had the desired effect. It brought the community together and established Fairmead Community and Friends as the primary local agency to which residents would turn, in the future, during times of crisis.

### **Progress: Today and (Hopefully) Tomorrow**

In 2013, the Chukchansi tribal council awarded Fairmead Community and Friends a grant to purchase (and maintain) a new truck to transport materials to fundraising events, provide service at community events, and to drive committee members to meetings with governmental and non-profit organizations. On July 21, 2014, Barbara Nelson, Vickie Ortiz, and Norma Bustillo drove around the community with a box filled with popsicles and dry ice, handing out the cool, sweet treats to residents and to show off the latest manifestation of progress in their tiny unincorporated community.

### ***Fairmead and the Drought***

I have already addressed, in broad terms, the central role played by water in the lives of the people that live in the San Joaquin Valley, in the prior chapter, Chapter 6: Where Water Flows Communities Grow. Recent history in Fairmead is illustrative of the bigger issues surrounding water.

The summer of 2014 saw one of the worst droughts in California history, and by mid-August, the residents of Fairmead who relied on county water (provided by the well and storage tank updated in 2010) were on Stage 4 alert, meaning that, among other restrictions, they were not allowed to water their lawns. However, many of the residents outside the center of the community, remain on private wells. On August 5, 2014, members of Fairmead Community and Friends, along with Fairmead residents, attended a Madera County Board of Supervisor's meeting to seek relief for, private well owners whose wells had dried up as a result of the water crisis. Ultimately, more than twenty homes were identified with depleted wells. Commercial well drillers were contacted to see what could be done to drill new, and deeper wells, for these homes, and were told that, due to the water crisis, the lead time on drilling a new well was between eighteen and twenty-four months. Although Madera County had no solutions or answers for the residents, the action did result in direct, although short-term, results. Vickie Ortiz reported that...

The GREAT part of the day is when the Madera County Farm Bureau heard our urgent pleas for help at the meeting and have offered to assist these Fairmead private well owners with an emergency plan (Ortiz 2014).



Figure 77 Fairmead residents and members of the Board of Directors of Fairmead Community and Friends attend the Madera County Board of Supervisor's Meeting to discuss water issues (courtesy of Fairmead Community and Friends).

Although a limited and short-term solution to the problem, the Farm Bureau began delivering two and a half gallons of water per day, for each member of the households with depleted wells throughout Fairmead. Additionally, by August 19, the Madera County Food Bank had also delivered eight pallets of bottled water to be distributed to all the residents of Fairmead. Many residents took advantage of the free water, including about a dozen farmworkers who were not in town the day of the giveaway, but who contacted Fairmead Community and Friends, were assured that water had been held back for those who had missed the initial distribution.

A few years ago, Fairmead residents, along with planners from Madera County, agreed to designate Fairmead as within Chowchilla's secondary sphere of influence. This designation means that although Fairmead is not close enough to Chowchilla's current borders to be annexed, it can (and in some cases, must) be considered in future plans. Jointly, the communities of Fairmead and Chowchilla have an increased chance to apply for Federal and State funds for water and sewage improvements—both of which are necessary for any future growth in Fairmead proper. Recently, the Madera County Planning Department published, in anticipation of future growth in both nearby Berenda and Chowchilla, a *Fairmead Specific Plan* for future development of the community (Madera County Planning Department 2008, 6). The plan, was supposed to be “a first step forward in serving a low income community with a crippled infrastructure system” (Madera County Planning Department 2008, 6). The county hopes to provide a major overhaul of Fairmead's infrastructure, to promote industrial and commercial development in Fairmead (Madera County Planning Department 2008, 8-9). One aspect of all this city and county planning is that, after more than a hundred years, the possibility of Fairmead getting access to sufficient potable water (and sewage treatment) is beginning to look like a distinct possibility. Local residents have taken an active role in that future. At the core of this operation is Fairmead Community and Friends.

It was Fairmead Community and Friends who, through constant pressure on county officials were able to get the county to upgrade a water storage facility that, although still insufficient to the needs of the community, has greatly mitigated some of the worst problems related to water in the homes of Fairmead residents. According to news reports, the new facility was the result of a one and a half million-dollar grant from

the State of California to under-served communities (*Fresno Bee* Editorial Staff 2008c, e). By 2010, Fairmead’s water issues were being taken seriously throughout the area:

Fairmead... doesn’t have a single business... Even if someone wanted to open one, they couldn’t—the aging well-water system wouldn’t support it... For decades... the water system has constantly been on the blink, sometimes shutting down for days at a time and forcing the county to haul in bottled water and portable toilets. The water pressure is so low that Fairmead Elementary School doesn’t bother to water its grass during the summer (Collins 2010b).

It was the reliance on groundwater that stymied the growth of Fairmead while nearby Chowchilla was able to prosper and grow because of the implementation of rural irrigation canals and a more modern city water system (Eissinger 2012).

Likewise, Fairmead’s water problems continue, as the homes rely on aging septic tanks for waste water. At this point Madera County will not allow residents to replace or install new septic systems, at the same time it is unable to install a water treatment system. The town also suffers frequent water shortages. In 2009 the community received a one-million-dollar Community Development Block Grant, funded by the State of California and the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development. The grant allowed the County to build an expanded water storage facility—two hundred and twelve thousand gallons—to replace the older, smaller, and less efficient water tower(s) that served Fairmead (Howell 2011, Alexander 2015). However, the new system still does not provide adequate storage to prevent shortages of water to local residents (Nelson 2012).



Figure 78: A recently dedicated (2011) water storage facility in Fairmead still provides inadequate water supplies to the community (contemporary photo by author).

Chandra Mukerji pointed out that if “the bridges on a highway are designed explicitly to exclude busses and trucks, they limit the social contacts among those who live near that road; only those wealthy enough to own cars will be joined by such a

system” (Mukerji 1994, 145). Likewise, the lack of infrastructure to deliver fresh, clean water in poor rural communities limits the ability of such localities. Foucault, Giddens, Bourdieu, and others, as I summarized in Chapter 2 Theory and Historiography, have much to say about systemic power and individual and collective resistance, and this aspect of material culture—the infrastructure of these small, rural settlements—represents such an intersection. Mukerji echoes these sentiments when she suggests that “state formation was in many ways a kind of material practice accomplished through science and technology, resulting in the transformation of parts of nature into territories of political regimes” (Mukerji 1994, 158). Water, as controlled and allocated by local municipalities, water districts, and county governments is as much a part of material San Joaquin Valley culture as roads, street lighting, and other large infrastructure projects. Repeatedly, through the history of rural towns and hamlets in the Valley, we see the impact of control of and access to water. This chapter began with a description of me spotting a brand-new truck being transported up Highway 99 in Madera County marked as a vehicle to be used to deliver potable water.



Figure 79 Thelma Williams' home has been without running water since 2008 (courtesy Ezra David Romero/KVPR).

Fairmead was hit hard by the drought. One of the reasons was that the water system, which had failed the town a century before, was inadequate to serve the needs of the population in the small town center while most of the properties just outside the scope of the water district relied on their own wells for domestic potable water, as well as

irrigation and other outside activities. After many years attempting to make life better in their community, Fairmead Community and Friends secretary, Vicki Ortiz told me that suddenly, by 2011-2012, she was receiving phone calls from her neighbors—including some neighbors who had never shown any interest in the organization or its activities—asking for help with their dried-up wells. Initially, Ortiz told the callers that there was probably little, if anything they could do to help, but she said she began collecting details from residents and it became clear that this was a widespread, chronic issue and perhaps, Fairmead Community and Friends was the only entity that could make a difference.

One of the families hit the earliest, and most dramatically, by the drought was Lawyer and Annie Cooper (both members of the executive board of Fairmead Community and Friends). Annie Cooper relayed the story of the day in June 2014 that water ceased to flow through the pipes of her home, immediately after the farmer across the road had completed drilling a new well to irrigate his almonds.

I was doing dinner that day, and it's like about four o'clock... I called [Lawyer] and said you know this water is really getting short. There's hardly any coming out. He said it'll pick up later on this evening and the next hour this water was gone. We've been without it ever since (Annie Cooper in Romero 2015)



Figure 80 Annie and Lawyer Cooper have lived without running water in their home for a couple of years. (courtesy Ezra David Romero/KVPR).

Annie Cooper told one journalist,

I thought we were just alone, and then you get to talking, and it's the whole community... We're all drying up. The orchards are draining everything. We've changed our whole way of living. Hauling water in the back of a truck. Not being able to cook. Not being able to take a decent bath. Driving your clothes five miles to the wash house (Annie Cooper in Arax 2015).

By 2015, Annie Cooper had had enough. She wanted out, however, Lawyer has been connected to this land since his family arrived in the 1940s, following the close of World War II. His roots go deep into this community:

Outside is so dusty. So dusty. The wind picks up at night, and it just blows right on through these little cracks... I sweep and sweep and look in the dustpan. It's shocking how much dirt. If I didn't have plastic covering the living-room furniture, it would be black. No kidding... I told Lawyer, 'We got to go. We got to go.' But this land, for him, ain't so easy to leave (Annie Cooper in Arax 2015).

Thelma Williams is a member of one of the largest African American families in the Fairmead region. Her grandfather, father, and uncles once owned the largest dairy in the state of California – the only black-owned dairy, at the time. Like Lawyer Cooper's family, the Williams family moved to Fairmead to escape city life (they had been in Richmond and Long Beach building ships during World War II and rather than return to Arkansas, they sought farmland in California, settling in one of the few regions where land was available to African Americans. Thelma had moved away from the rural enclave, returning more than two decades ago to reconnect to her roots. She has been without water for most of the past eight years, and showers at the homes of relatives, where she fills large water bottles for home consumption. Since her well has gone dry, it has all been about managing limited resources, "So when I'm done rinsing my dishes... I save that water in a bucket so I can use it for the toilet because you cannot afford to just waste any kind of water" (Romero 2015). Even her small, backyard garden that had provided tomatoes, greens, and other items for the household and family gatherings is now a dry patch of dirt. Thelma's seventy-six-year-old mother, Girtha Williams still has some water, but she has to manage it, carefully, "I'll wake up like about three o'clock in the morning the flow is kind of good. So I'll wash the dishes and stuff, but like after early in the morning it kind of slows down" (Girtha Williams in Romero 2015). Robert Williams, Thelma's father, is one of the most interesting characters in Fairmead. I have interviewed him twice, and we often speak at local events or meetings. A dyed-in-the-wool Lincoln Republican (much to the disdain of most of his relatives and friends), he lives in one of the two houses on his property (Girtha lives in the other). He has farmed his forty-four acres for decades. We once spent an afternoon sitting under the big trees in front of his house, chatting about the good old days. It was one of the best days I spent in

Fairmead. We joked about all the old tractors he had sitting on his property (most of which were in running order, at the time). Thelma told Amy L. Alexander:

I'm not sure how he does it... But he stays on his schedule—he goes out, gets on that tractor of his, and will just turn the hay and soil over and over. It's dry, dry, dry, but he isn't about to stop... My father is used to being the person in the community who was always helping out others... Now, the kinds of things that we used to do for everyone else—those who were in need—we're relying on the county and others to do for us... We know times change, for good and bad... Now, we're out here scraping by with basically no water. You can't really see where the solutions are. Sometimes you get desperate and just start thinking, 'Well, maybe we should try a rain dance or something' (Alexander 2015).

Elaine Moore, another member of the board of Fairmead Community and Friends, relayed her family's story to the online news site, *Fusion*, when she told them, that in 2011, she turned on a faucet in her home and the only thing that came out was wet sand, "It just kind of seemed all at once," Bob Wile reported for *Fusion* (Moore in Wile 2013). Wile also pointed out how ironic it was that Moore and her husband, unlike many of their neighbors, were immediately able to dig a new well for their property because they, like many of the surrounding farms, had switched to almonds and had the revenue with which to invest in a new well. (Wile 2013). Other Fairmead area residents were not so lucky, Pat Kennedy moved to Fairmead in early 2015, unaware just how extreme the impact of the drought would be to her family. Unable to flush the toilet more than twice a day or use appliances that require large amounts of water (washing machine and dishwasher), she reported to Wile, "I wash dishes by hand, then I use that water to put in the toilet tank so I don't have to use drinking water" (Kennedy in Wile 2013).

By August 2014, the Madera County Farm Bureau began providing bottled water to households in the Fairmead area. I remember, at the time, both Vickie Ortiz and Barbara Nelson wondered aloud to me whether the deliveries from the Farm Bureau were intended to detract from the fact that the lack of water had been worsened by new wells installed around the area to irrigate almonds and other nut crops, all of which are water intensive. The weekly deliveries of 340 cases of 16-ounce bottles of drinking water were a welcome respite but did nothing to address the long-term problems associated with the lack of access to potable water. By November, that same year, the deliveries ceased and Madera County took up some of the slack, continuing water deliveries to Fairmead. Using funding from the California Disaster Assistance Act, the County was able to continue providing drinking water to homes and large tanks to store non-potable water were delivered to many of the homes not connected to the domestic system (relying on individual wells), but only to those homes where the homeowner lived in the property (no assistance, originally, for renters). The pace of getting access to assistance has some residents frustrated, "Why do we have to go through so much of this?" Said Jean Wilson, "Let all of them get their water cut off, everybody's water cut off for one month and have one station for everybody to go get water, and see what happens" (Wilson in Wile 2013) A pastor at one of the two predominately black churches in Fairmead, Wilson moved into

the community almost two decades ago. When asked about her effort to get assistance with the water situation, she remarked, “There were no resources and nobody could tell me anything and I was just kind of shuffled around” (Wilson in Romero 2015). Normally quiet, Lawyer Cooper told a reporter,

I thought about no runoff from the mountain, and they’re still getting all this water from the earth. I thought about the people who are doing without, just for someone to get rich. I thought about the rivers going dry and the lakes and everything. I thought about those things, and it hurt. For us to come and try to live a decent life here... it’s not our fault the water’s going dry (Lawyer Cooper in Arax 2015).

One thing that I noticed, several times, over the years, when dealing with infrastructure issues concerning Fairmead, is their reliance and interest in the community’s past and linking that to the present and the future. For example, discussing the drought and the issues dealing with the dry wells, one elderly lady remarked to a meeting with Fairmead Community and Friends and the California High Speed Rail Authority, that she knew she would not be around for too many years, but that a community with such an illustrious past as Fairmead should not be neglected. She began citing some of the highlights (most of which were in my book, *Fairmead: A Century of Change*) as reasons why investment should be made in the community, rather than let it just dry up (no pun intended). Elaine Moore said, “I’ve got great-grand babies,” she said. “My husband bought the original property in high school. Are we going to have a legacy?” (Wile 2013). Jean Wilson pointed out the past when discussing the present, “It used to have a post office and stores and things like that, but time has changed it” (Wilson in Romero 2015).

While much can be said about the construction of California’s first (and only) high speed rail project that will, ultimately link Los Angeles with the San Francisco Bay Area and Sacramento with stops in Bakersfield, Fresno, and Merced, I only mention it in this dissertation because the intersection where the north-south line (to/from Sacramento) meets with the east-west line (to/from the Bay Area) lies in and around Fairmead. The high-speed trains need wide curves, which eat up considerable amounts of the landscape. Two of the proposed routes cut right through Fairmead, sitting less than a thousand feet from the current elementary school and bisecting many of the local properties. Combined with issues of water and sewage, the construction of this vital California infrastructure project will have a major, negative impact on the community unless careful, well-thought out remedies are considered. While the proposed construction of the high-speed rail system is still a few years away, the issues surrounding potable water continue to be among the most pressing issues for most community members.

In early 2015, former *Los Angeles Times* reporter and author, Mark Arax and I made a short visit to Fairmead. He was in the midst of researching a book about the ongoing water crisis in Central California, especially as it related to small, poor, and predominately non-white communities such as Fairmead. At approximately 10:30am, we met Barbara Nelson in the parking lot of the Galilee Missionary Baptist Church. After introductions, we drove around Fairmead, talking specifically about water—or the lack

thereof—in Fairmead and the surrounding farms. As we drove by the water tank, I noticed a hand-painted wooden sign encouraging residents to conserve water while warning them of low pressure. Another sign on the adjacent property designated that spot as future water storage for Fairmead. Nelson explained to Arax that although the houses close in to the town center were on the water system fed by that tank and pump, the majority of the homes beyond that point were currently on wells, many of which were between four and seven hundred feet deep and were experiencing shortages, stoppages, or low pressure. We then drove by the two individual wells that feed the small tank, as she explained the plans to try to get a third well for the unincorporated town and expressed her frustration that, unfortunately, at this time, there was little that could be done for those with dry wells. She said that her cousin had been without water for over three months.

We drove around the outlying areas, taking specific note of the almond orchards that surround the town. Arax was interested in trying to understand the impact of such water-intensive farming on the potable water supply. We saw several newly planted orchards, as well as some recently re-planted acreage, and spotted several parcels as large as sixty acres that had been recently prepared for new trees. On at least one of these vacant parcels, we spotted a large, brand new and shiny wellhead and pump ready to pump more groundwater onto the roots of new trees when planted.



81 Pallets of bottled water delivered to Fairmead as part of the short-term solution to the community's water issue (courtesy of Fairmead Community and Friends).

I attended a Fairmead Community and Friends board meeting on Monday, February 9, 2015. at which they were informed that they were one of four Disadvantaged Communities (DAC) in Madera county with a seat on the water advisory board, and that for the following year, Fairmead (though Fairmead Community and Friends) would represent all four of the DACs in the county. DAC status, according to the California

Water Resources website, is determined based on the DAC definition provided in Department of Water Resource's Proposition 84 and 1E Integrated Regional Water Management Guidelines, dated August, 2010. An annual Median Household Income (MHI) of less than \$48,706 is the DAC threshold (80% of the Statewide MHI).

On Monday, March 23, 2015, I was present for a well-attended community meeting at the Galilee Missionary Baptist Church, in Fairmead. This was one of the more significant meetings I had attended, and illustrated just how much progress Fairmead Community and Friends had made since I first started attending their meetings, a few years before. As was the custom, the meeting opened with a number of announcements. These included invitations for several events in Chowchilla, the date for an event at which Fairmead Community and Friends would be distributing donated clothing to community members, and the date that the board would make a formal announcement to the Madera Board of Supervisors about their recently completed status as a free-standing non-profit organization. For several years, the group had functioned under the umbrella of the Community Action Partnership, but the paperwork had finally come through for their own 501(c)(3) status. Community Action Partnership of Madera County (CAP) handled their banking and legal affairs as well as provided structural support and training. Now, all those activities were under the purview of the Fairmead-based organization that had been organizing, locally, since at least, 2007. Elizabeth Wisner (Community/Family Services Coordinator, CAP) continued to provide support and encouragement, at the same time, working with the group on community projects.

There were three large items on the agenda that evening. The first two were what drew the majority of the community members to the meeting: dealing with the water crisis. The first speaker was Wisner, from CAP. Her presentation laid out the relationship between the community and her organization. She explained that her group was working with the Madera County Environmental Health division and the Madera County Sheriff's office (the latter had the responsibility for emergency management, which would oversee drought relief), and the California State Water Resources Control Board to provide relief for the homes throughout the area affected by the drought. The project, would ultimately provide potable (drinking) water, in bottles, to impacted households, and install temporary tanks for household water. The water delivered to the tanks would be potable; however, since they could not ensure the quality of the pipes, connections to the household water system, or the tanks over time, they would not certify the water as potable (hence the need for the bottled water).

On Monday, June 22, 2015, Fairmead Community and Friends held their monthly community meeting, outdoors, on a small strip of dry grass in front of the parking lot at the Fairmead Elementary School. Because of my teaching responsibilities, I had missed the prior board meeting and community meeting, and this was a good chance for me to get updated on any progress that had been made, during my absence. The location was selected because the date conflicted with an event at the church where they usually held their meetings. Even though it was well over one hundred degrees, about thirty members of the community attended the meeting, which also promised a chicken and hot dog meal, at the close of the formal meeting. Unfortunately, my presence was a little distracting. A film crew from the university was doing a short film about my research, so the camera and sound crew were visibly present throughout the gathering. The formal meeting began

with a couple of announcements. There would be a community meeting for comments with the High-Speed Rail Authority, sometime in the near future (the date had not been finalized) and Fairmead Community and Friends would be hosting a bingo fundraiser at Farnesi's Steakhouse in Chowchilla, in early July. Normally, the fundraisers were held at the Fairmead Elementary school multi-purpose room (cafeteria). We were told that Farnesi's would not charge the group for the use of the room if participants agreed to purchase food during the event. I was surprised to hear that they had chosen this particular location because Barbara Steele and several other Fairmead residents had, in the past, indicated that they avoided the eatery because African Americans were always made to feel as if they were not welcome in the place – nothing overt, just not a welcoming reception. It will be interesting to observe the dynamic, myself. I often attend these events as it provides me with an opportunity to observe the dynamics within the community: who attends, how residents cluster at the tables, the types of conversations, and other subtle aspects of community life that often are not revealed in interviews or other more formal settings. Wisener and Jill Yaeger from Madera County Environmental Health Division, representing the two groups partnered with the Madera County Sheriff's department to address water issues in and around Fairmead, provided an update to the community on the current efforts to mitigate the water issues in Fairmead. They confirmed that those on the "town" system were now able to get ample water for their household needs (they remained on watering restrictions for their lawns and other landscaping, however, the repaired well, and the larger tank that had been installed five years, before, was finally serving the needs of the core community, and it appears that even if the system was to be expanded to homes and farms within a mile or more of the current system it could accommodate that expansion. It was announced that, contrary to prior announcements, those rural families who would be receiving tanks under the emergency provisions may not be able to retain the tanks once their wells were brought back on-line or they were connected to the existing water system. The County and State felt that once a family was provided with a so-called permanent solution, the tanks should be moved on to other households where they could provide relief. They indicated that the bottled (drinking) water would continue to be delivered – they were in the process of setting up delivery routes and schedules. Additionally, delivery of water would begin (finally) to those families with existing tanks within the next few weeks. Deliveries of new tanks to those families most in need (in other words, those who had been without water, the longest) for non-potable use, would commence shortly, thereafter. This was seen, by many, as welcome relief, as some households had been without water for as many as five years, and the relief process has felt, for some, to be moving at a snail's pace. These announcements reassured many of the locals that progress was being made. Following the meeting, several additional households filled out the intake paperwork needed to get them into the program. As the crisis continues, and as the County and State continue to make outreach efforts through Fairmead Community and Friends, it appears that more and more people are beginning to believe that there is hope for the survival of their little community.

As the meeting progressed, another staff member from the CAP conducted what she referred to as a Community Needs Survey. She indicated that this was the follow up survey to one taken several years, prior. She commented that during the earlier survey, a

small handful of residents participated and that she was happily surprised at the greatly increased participation in this meeting, even outdoors on a very hot, dusty, summer evening. After reviewing some of the improvements that had come to pass, since the earlier survey, she began eliciting comments from the community members as to what they wanted to see in Fairmead, in the future. The list was one I had heard or read many times before: a community center; better street lighting; improved bus service to Chowchilla and Madera; a park with barbeque grills and a playground; repairs to the streets, curbs, and medians; a market or other commercial development; and other general improvements that harken back to many of the things that Fairmead residents once enjoyed. Because of the economic decline, lack of water and sewage facilities, and other factors those things no longer existed in or near their community. Many of these requests manifest a nostalgia for a lost past. I thought of the pride expressed in many of interviews I had conducted with locals about the eateries, bars, stores, and other places that had once graced Fairmead.



Figure 82 Congressman James Costa visits Fairmead (contemporary photo by author).

If there is ever going to be any progress in Fairmead it will be because of the efforts of residents and their organizing. As time goes by, locals are tackling more complex issues. On Tuesday, June 30, 2015, members of the Board of Directors for Fairmead Community and Friends, along with community members, met with representatives of the California High Speed Rail Authority to discuss possible routes for the high-speed train being built, ultimately, between Los Angeles and the San Francisco Bay area. Fairmead is situated at a crucial juncture, as it at the spot where one line will continue to head north to Sacramento, while another branch line will break off toward the

Bay Area, along State Highway 152. In the earliest proposals, there were around seventy different possible routes at this intersection—which requires additional space because of the wide sweeping turns required by the fast train. All of those proposed lines, essentially, went through some part of Fairmead. Over the past 100 years, infrastructure has impacted Fairmead. Although, there have been some positives, over the years, most so-called improvements have ultimately had a negative impact, or they have seen the benefits funneled off to other communities. Originally, the Southern Pacific railroad provided as many as 18 trains each day, running north to the Capital in Sacramento, west to the Bay Area, or south to Fresno, Bakersfield, and Los Angeles. Early hotels, eateries, and other local businesses profited from the tracks that, like in many Valley communities, intersected the center of the town. As Highway 99 grew up along the tracks, this also brought traffic to local businesses. However, by the 1920s, passenger traffic to Fairmead was discontinued, the largest hotel (The Fairmead Inn) had burned to the ground, and the community relied more on the highway for commerce and access to the outside world. What had once been a lifeline ultimately cut the town in half. The county located the county dump to the edge of where the town had existed on the west side of the freeway, ultimately leading to many people abandoning their homes and businesses on that side of the road. When 99 was expanded to a four-lane divided road through Fairmead, this further cut off the west side of the community, further concentrating families and homes on the east side. Most of the freeway development on Highway 99 was focused, for decades, south of Madera (primarily linking Fresno to Bakersfield and Los Angeles). The stretch of 99 that cut through Fairmead remained four-lane divided, and at least the Mammoth Orange hamburger and juice stand was able to remain in business, for many years—ultimately the last business to close in this tiny rural hamlet. Many years ago, the community had felt the impact as the interchange from Highway 99 to the east-west road, State Highway 152, to Los Banos (and the Bay Area) was built, widened, and expanded to accommodate greater traffic loads headed to San Francisco, San Jose, and Monterey.

During California's prison-building frenzy of the 1990s, a pair of correctional facilities were built east and south of Chowchilla, on land that was originally part of the Fairmead colonies. Many Fairmead residents were concerned about increased traffic, noise, and crime, and objected to the building of the prisons in their back yard. However, at the time, they were reassured that these prisons would benefit the small community in terms of jobs and other improvements. Two decades later, the memory of those hollow promises plays heavy on the minds of many long-time Fairmead residents, as neither the benefits nor the jobs ever materialized. Normally, at any meeting discussing outside development in the area, the prisons are mentioned by one or two community members as another example, from the past, of Fairmead coming up on the short end of the deal.

When one of the richest caches of fossils was discovered on the site of the Fairmead Solid Waste facility (the dump), funding from Madera County, private donations, and several large grants, decided to build a museum and educational center in Fairmead. The residents hoped that this development, on the west side of Highway 99, opposite the remaining population center of the unincorporated town, would bring some economic benefit to the struggling little community.

In 2008, the freeway was extended north from Madera through Fairmead (basically, extending the freeway all the way to Merced, eliminating all the cross traffic

on that stretch of highway). The new access point to Fairmead was not put next to the Mammoth Orange, but rather a beautiful new overpass and off-ramp were built south of Fairmead, which provides better access to the dump and the *Fossil Discovery Center* on the West side of the freeway. Whereas, before the expansion of the freeway, motorists had easy access to the historic eatery from the road, it now required them to wind their way through the new overpass and find the access road (Fairmead Blvd). Just a few miles south of Fairmead sits a truck stop with several large gas stations, a Denny's restaurant, and other fast-food establishments. North of Fairmead, at the next major off-ramp is a similar collection of gas and food options, meaning that drivers essentially by-passed Fairmead completely. Business dried up for the Mammoth Orange, and it closed in 2011.

Two of the three remaining proposed routes for the High-Speed Rail impact Fairmead in two ways: proximity to the elementary school and hemming in the town part of Fairmead on the North and East sides (as Highway 99 has done on the West). The third, and apparently, least likely to be adopted, skirts south of Fairmead and connects to the east-west route several miles west of Fairmead. Although, this would be the preferred route for most Fairmead residents, it is not favored by the Authority. This is understandable because of the Authority's commitments to make improvements to the State Highway 152 and because keeping the train near the existing transportation corridor limits the impact on neighboring farmers and other property owners. Logically, the two other routes are better for the future train. The community's first objection—proximity to the elementary school—originally took up much of the discussion. Several people expressed safety and aesthetic objections to having the train that close to the elementary school. It was pointed out that, at its closest, the train would be almost one thousand feet (three football fields) away from the school, the authority would provide sound-walls and landscaping (possibly even a park) to shield the school from the impact of the train. At one point, one of the members of the Authority proposed that if it made sense, they would actually construct a brand new, state-of-the-art school facility elsewhere within the Fairmead community to eliminate the problem. From there, the discussion moved into a brief discussion concerning the current water situation (the school has its own well) and the moratorium against any new septic systems in the area (which would preclude any plans to build a new school without addressing those issues). When the member of the Authority suggested that those things could be mitigated, they again suggested they could move the school. Barbara Nelson pointed out that the school belonged to the Chowchilla Elementary School District and that, in the past, issues with the school facility resulted in the District suggesting that the best solution would be to close the Fairmead elementary school and move the children (currently bussed from Chowchilla to the school for fifth and sixth grades) to other buildings in Chowchilla. Since the school is one of the last facilities in Fairmead that provides any services, a place to meet, and a park-like area for use by the community during off hours and the summer, the discussion finally moved away from offering to move the school to other solutions.

The second issue expressed by Fairmead residents concerned the fact that the new routes would create additional barriers and limit access where it cut through the community. Representatives from the High-Speed Rail Authority explained that only a few, small roads would be closed off and that overpasses would be built on all the main roads crossing the tracks to maintain access to both the north and west of the community.

One community member suggested that the proposed routes would pass directly through areas of Fairmead slated for development (proposed, but yet to be approved, due to the lack of any substantial funds with which to implement the plan), the plans for which have been drawn up by the County to help develop Fairmead in the future. The members of the Authority repeatedly suggested that they would provide any infrastructure or capital improvements needed to mitigate the impact of the proposed routes. They did not flinch when one of the participants pointed out that the greatest need for future growth would be to either connect to Chowchilla's existing sewage system, or build one specific to Fairmead as part of the local water district. The Authority members pointed out that they were building massive water reclamation ponding basins for farmers and water districts to the south of the area, and were willing to do whatever it would take to assist the community, going forward.<sup>xiv</sup> Since any attempt to connect to water treatment and sewage systems in Chowchilla would require that the pipes be run under the proposed High Speed Rail line, it appeared that, logically, this was one area in which the Authority could help Fairmead. In fact, this one infrastructure improvement could, in the long run, provide the needed push to allow Fairmead to reverse course, and begin rebuilding. Because of the lack of sewage facilities and the county's refusal to allow any new septic systems to be installed (even to replace existing systems), Fairmead cannot grow. The inability to build new homes is one thing, but this also means no new businesses can be built until this issue is solved. Currently, the state is providing three million dollars to repair and expand the local water district's water system, offering to extend it as much as a mile from the existing pipes and adding an additional well. They have already repaired the existing well, which is finally providing sufficient water to handle the existing system and the extensions. Solving the water and sewage infrastructure within Fairmead could be the two most important steps in guaranteeing a future for the small rural community. A meeting was scheduled for two weeks later. The Authority agreed to get copies of the county's plans for future development, and the community was tasked with bringing suggestions for ways that the Authority could bring benefits to the community to offset the intrusion of the rail line.

Originally, I had hoped that the writing of this dissertation and the conclusion to some of the issues associated with Fairmead would run parallel. I wanted to illustrate the impact and efficacy of the hard work and dedication of local community organizers. I would like to have been able to show how residents were able to leverage through their activism benefits for their community. Sadly, most of these issues, whether water, sewage, or the impacts of the actions and decisions of High Speed Rail Authority, extend into the future and we will not see the results of their efforts for quite a while. I finally had to draw a circle around the current status of my research and commence writing. As of this moment, none of these projects have advanced much beyond what is included in this chapter.



## CHAPTER 8: Full Circle



Figure 83 Nathaniel Knox and his three sons pick cotton in Madera County in 1933 (photo courtesy of Fairmead Community and Friends).

For several years, almost every time I gave a public presentation or a conference paper that referenced African Americans in the fields of Central California, I opened with a 1933 photograph of Nathaniel Knox and three sons standing in a cotton field holding cotton sacks (see above). It is not a great photograph. It appears to have been taken by someone using a Brownie or similar small format camera. You can see the shadow of the photographer coming from the bottom of the photo, into the cotton field. Not a great photograph. It was, however, the only photograph that clearly illustrated the reality before the agricultural landscape of the San Joaquin Valley was filled with what is often perceived as nameless, faceless, Hispanic workers (most of whom residents assume are undocumented or “illegal” and, as such, warrant little, if any, thought). I usually asked the audience, “Where was this photograph taken?” to which I usually received the answer, “Mississippi.” I do not know why the default assumption as to the location of picking cotton is normally “Mississippi,” but that has been, and continues to be the usual response. When I corrected the members of the audience and pointed out that it was actually taken somewhere in Madera County, confusion often flashed across their faces. This creates cognitive dissonance, in that most Americans are trained to view images of blacks in cotton fields as a negative thing—exploitative, at best; reminiscent of slavery, at its worst—and that these images stereotypically are centered on the Southern states. This initiates an association of this image (and others that are similar) with what we see as the historical roots of the picture which results in “Mississippi” being the default answer. For many (especially white) Californians the idea of African Americans dragging cotton

sacks through the damp fields of cotton just outside their own backdoor makes little sense. I focus on this because this disconnect between what one knows and what one accepts, in relation to social and public memory, winds its way throughout my research: people prioritize memories that neither challenge pre-existing notions nor shed an unfavorable light on themselves or their community (which could be local, regional, or state-wide, in this case). Acknowledging a recent past where blacks picked cotton in the fields that dominated the seven counties of the San Joaquin Valley for more than half of the Twentieth century draws a parallel between what most (white) Valley residents refer to as AgriBusiness and the plantation of the American South. While Ricœur posits that the most accurate connection to the past remains memory, he also points out that forgetting is an issue:

... we have no other resource, concerning our reference to the past, except memory itself. To memory is tied... a claim—that of being faithful to the past... the deficiencies stemming from forgetting... should not be treated straight away as... dysfunctions... we have nothing better than memory to signify that something has taken place, has occurred, has happened *before* we declare that we remember it... testimony constitutes the fundamental transitional structure between memory and history... (Ricœur 2004).



Figure 84: One of the few photographs of blacks in the fields by Dorothea Lange. Taken during the San Joaquin Valley Cotton Strike of 1938 (photo Dorothea Lange, from the FSA/OWI Collection, Library of Congress).

For me, locating physical evidence—in this case, photographs of African American farmworkers in the San Joaquin Valley offsets the forgetting at the same time

that those images suggest comparisons to the American South. The comparisons—large land holdings by a few, very wealthy, white farmers, worked by subaltern populations (Native Americans, Chinese, Black, Japanese, and many others who have worked the fields over the years)—are not how most Valley residents want to see the basis of their economy. If our great agricultural heritage (as it is often referred to) resembles the plantations of the South, that puts into play a moral question about the treatment of those currently in the fields. Most of us who live in the Valley do not, unfortunately, want to acknowledge that connection and comparison.



Figure 85: A clandestine union meeting by the National Farm Labor Union, taken in October of 1949. Notice the interracial mix of farmworkers, indicating the union's willingness to cross racial and ethnic lines (photo Wayne Miller).

I have the picture of Nathaniel Knox and his three boys standing in a Madera County cotton field, picking cotton (see the photograph on the prior page). Here was proof of reality of blacks picking cotton, by hand, in the San Joaquin Valley, and a direct link between our large farms and southern plantations. Arax had suggested this link in *The King of California* and his *Black Okies* series of articles for the *Los Angeles Times*, and James Gregory devoted many pages in several books tracing the migration from the South to Central California (especially, the San Joaquin Valley) but it is often overlooked

as we go through our daily lives (Gregory 1989, 2005, Arax 2002b, a, 2009 , Arax and Wartzman 2003). However, one photograph from eighty years ago could be an outlier. It could have been misidentified as having been taken in Madera County and have *actually* been taken in Mississippi—after all, in a democracy the majority rules and most people clearly believed that the photograph had been taken in the American South, not the San Joaquin Valley. I had a picture, but it was *just one* picture (see figure 83). I secretly lusted for more period photographs that I could use to illustrate and illumine the lives of the wonderful people who I knew lived in these communities, over so many years. Unfortunately, most of these families were extremely poor, in the early 1960s. Cameras were not cheap and film processing was a luxury in which most of these families could not have indulged. There were few, if any, collaborating photographs from the work camps and the fields. I have lamented, elsewhere, about the absence of even a passing acknowledgement of the contributions of African Americans to the agriculture of the San Joaquin Valley. Volumes have been written about the participation of the Chinese and Mexicans and Mexican-Americans, some work has been done concerning Native American labor and Japanese labor.<sup>xv</sup> Blacks, in our fields, have been largely overlooked even though there are significant primary sources upon which to rely to tell the story. I have been able to locate about a half dozen photographs of blacks in California fields by Doretha Lange (most of which remain unpublished). Richard Steven Street, in his otherwise excellent and wide-ranging *Beasts of the Field: A Narrative History of California Farmworkers, 1769-1913* barely touches on African Americans (usually, as individuals with other groups) and does not include a single photograph of blacks in or near the fields (Street 2004a). However, in his later work, *Everyone Had Cameras: Photography and Farmworkers in California, 1850-2000*, he does include African Americans, however, the two photographs he included that are labelled as including blacks in the San Joaquin Valley were from photographer Matt Black and were taken from the same photo shoot as the images originally included in Arax's Black Okie articles (Street 2008, 550-551, Arax 2002b, a, 2009 ). Because Black has been unwilling to allow anyone to use his photographs for academic use (even with attribution), I have chosen to not include copies of these, here. One additional photograph shows Alonzo Flannigan and his wife (see figure 86). The caption indicates that the family relocated from Arkansas to California, but there is no way to know from the text or the caption whether or not they are located in the San Joaquin Valley, the Imperial Valley, or one of the smaller coastal agricultural regions (Street 2008). In *Photographing Farmworkers in California*, Street did find some African Americans, however, he claims, in the caption of a photograph of Alice Mark (see figure 87), by Wayne Miller, that blacks had left the fields because the majority of cotton was harvested by machine as early as 1950 (Street 2004b, 176-177). He cites no sources for this claim. This statement is incorrect, as I know from my own research and first-hand accounts that hand picking of cotton continued well into the 1960s when, by 1965, human labor was replaced by the combination of the mechanical cotton picker and strong defoliant (agent orange). Street does include a 1949 photograph taken by Wayne Miller at a clandestine union meeting where the majority (but, not all) of the farm workers are black. Miller was active in the fields of Central California in the late 1940s and early 1950s, and produced, at least, one photo essay, on black farm labor. Street includes just two other photographs (out of approximately two

hundred images) of blacks in the fields, both taken by a photojournalist named Ernest Lowe, from the 1960s. The first is labelled as being in Teviston. I will explain, later, it was actually photographed in South Dos Palos—I have met most of the subjects in the photograph, and stood across the street from where it was taken (Street 2004b, 199). The second depicts cotton pickers taken at such an obscure angle the race or ethnicity of the subjects is unclear (Street 2004b, 202).

The few photographs I was able to borrow from many of the folks I interviewed were from much later—usually, beginning in the 1970s—and most of them were of family gatherings, new cars, or other events that warranted the expense of taking and processing a picture. No one saw the need (or had the desire) to document life in the labor camps and fields.

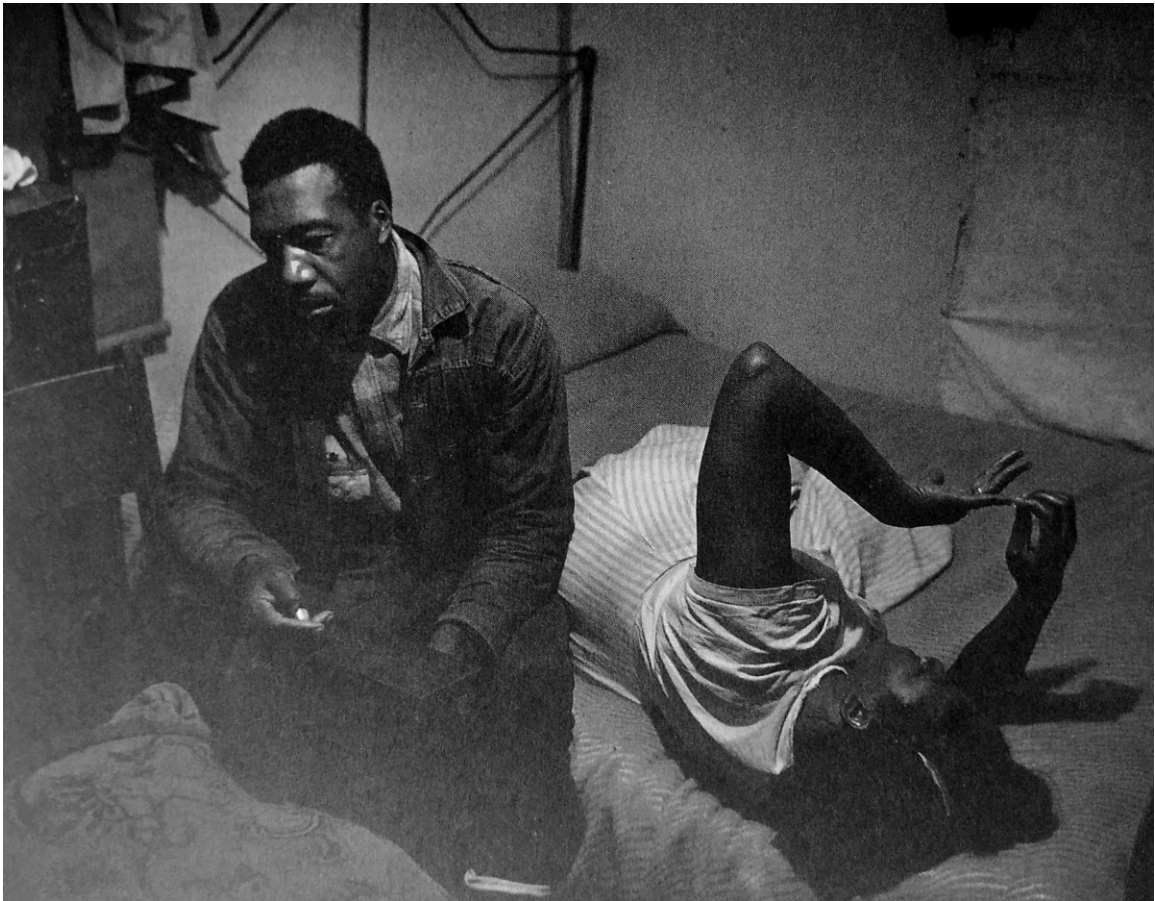


Figure 86: Alonzo Flannigan came to California from Arkansas in 1948. "This is worse than the early 1930s... I can't seem to make a nickel for the winter (photo by Wayne Miller from *Everyone Had Cameras*, Richard Steven Street).

I have been telling stories in presentations and publications about rural African American settlements throughout the Valley collected from oral history interviews in archives, interviews and observations that I conducted, secondary sources (such as the aforementioned material from Arax and Gregory, as well as works by Gerald Haslam and others) (Haslam 1975, 1999, 2005a, Haslam 2000). I often cited a *Time Magazine* article about the day Teviston (outside Pixley, in Tulare County) established its own water

district and installed its first pump, (Time Editorial Staff 1959). This story, like the stories of African Americans in the fields needed additional corroboration. Oral histories and life stories rely on individual memory (which can often fail) and are subject to many potential problems: I often tell my Anthropology students that informants lie. Often they tell interviewers either what they are comfortable sharing with the outsider or what they believe the researcher wants to hear. One of the pitfalls of conducting highly-specialized, narrowly-focused ethnographic research on hidden histories, such I have been doing for many years, is that ultimately potential sources (and even collaborators) may be few and far between. There are few archived sources of material concerning the communities I have been examining for the last few years and even fewer other researchers who have looked at this material. Luckily, I am not completely alone, in that there are at least three other individuals (none of them academics) who have also conducted long-term research in the black rural settlements in the San Joaquin Valley. One such colleague is author and former *Los Angeles Times* reporter Mark Arax.



Figure 87: Alice Mack, who migrated in 1946 from Arkansas to California (photo by Wayne Miller).

I first met Arax in 2008 at a conference at Fresno State sponsored by my then primary thesis advisor, Dan Cady, and coordinated by my long-standing friend and

colleague, Elvia Rodriguez (with whom I now teach at both Fresno City College and Fresno State). The conference, entitled “Beyond the City Limits: African Americans in the American West,” perfectly demonstrated how little academic attention had been focused on rural African Americans. Most research had been focused on urban centers and largely ignored blacks in the fields (I have come to the conclusion that part of this is the result of the *nostalgic guilt* to which I alluded to, earlier).<sup>xvi</sup> We put out an international call for papers in all the best academic databases and listservs and, in the end, had to scramble to fill out the roster for the one-day conference. We ended up inviting several non-academic speakers (mostly related to Allensworth and the Col. Allen Allensworth State Park). However, Arax and I were a two-man panel about rural African Americans in the San Joaquin Valley. He read a chapter from *The King of California*, and I presented one of the first papers that attempted to cover the spectrum of communities that existed across geography and time. We had little interaction, other than the panel. After the conference, we went our separate ways. However, Arax had played a pivotal role in my landing in this field of research. I first heard his name more than a year before that conference when Professor Cady brought Arax’s *Black Okies* articles to our oral history methods class in an effort to re-tool our main assignment. Originally, Cady had assigned us each to find an old person and conduct an interview as the capstone of the semester’s work. I was fifty, at the time, and one of my classmates wanted to interview me: not the most efficient way to approach the assignment, but without a unified project, there are few alternatives in an undergraduate class, such as that. Several weeks into the class, Cady arrived late to class waving an article from the *Fresno Bee* about Cookseyville (Marcum 2007). He read the article which was about a family reunion associated with a small, rural, all-black settlement outside Atwater, known as Cookseyville, to the class and asked us if we would be willing to scrap our original interviews and work as a team to interview the Cookseys, if he could make arrangements for us to do so. Most of us were relieved because few had actually settled on a subject and this took that responsibility out of our hands and gave us something upon which to focus. The *Black Okies* articles were Cady’s next contribution to our background reading and my introduction to Arax. Based on those four newspaper articles (Marcum’s article about Cookseyville and Arax’s articles from the *Times*) and our textbook methods on conducting oral history interviews, we interviewed members of the Cooksey family in Fresno, Atwater, and Sacramento, California. Somehow, in the process, I became the *keeper of the transcripts*. In addition to conducting my own interviews, I was tasked with making sure that the resulting transcripts were all formatted consistently and made available for future scholars. I ultimately made several bound copies of those interviews for Cady and myself, so we would always have access to that information. Almost a decade later I still mine those interviews for a fact or incident to make a point in a paper, lecture, or presentation.

So, I was not surprised to get an email from Arax asking me if I was still doing fieldwork in Fairmead. He was writing an article about water and the drought and hoped I could provide access to community members. Luckily, one of my next scheduled trips to Fairmead was a large community celebration with booths and local entertainment, and I knew that most of the people Arax might be interested in interviewing would be in attendance. So, I told him I would meet him at the festival and introduce him to as many

people as I could. A few weeks later, while watching a local mariachi group perform under a covered stage area at the Fairmead Elementary school, Arax and Joel Pickford arrived and, as promised, I began introducing them to the locals. Pickford, a photographer and videographer I first met when we were students at Fresno State in an Ethnographic Methods class, had gone on to do fieldwork in Southeast Asia, and was now working with Arax on his on-going research; having recorded many hours of video interviews and taken numerous contemporary photographs. I had not seen Pickford since our class.

Arax has told often related the story of how, in 2000, while driving north on State Highway 99 through the heart of the San Joaquin Valley, he pulled off to examine a scattered collection of dusty homes, shacks, trailers, and churches in the small, majority-black rural community of Teviston. That serendipitous side trip led to him writing the award-winning series of articles for the *Los Angeles Times* about the so-called Black Okies as well as his biography of J. G. Boswell (Arax 2002b, a, Arax and Wartzman 2003). For two years, along with photographer Matt Black, Arax gathered hundreds of hours of taped interviews with many of the residents of, not only Teviston, but Lanare, Stratford, and other historically African American rural settlements throughout the San Joaquin Valley. Although most of Arax's interviews were recorded on Arax's beat-up old cassette recorder (circa 1982), Pickford, a local videographer and photographer, had recorded video versions of some of the interviews, hoping to produce a small documentary about these unique settlers to the Valley.

While watching activities unfold in Fairmead, I lamented to Pickford that I longed for more historical photographs to help triangulate the stories I collected and wrote about. There seemed to be little available from the families, and even less from the normal sources such as the Library of Congress, university libraries, or other depositories of primary sources. He proceeded to tell me that he and Arax had been in contact with "some old guy who lives up in Sebastopol" who took lots of pictures in the sixties and who was making them available for use in a film they were producing about so-called black Okies. I was thrilled at the possibility of a few more images I could use to help illustrate my research and asked if he thought this guy might allow me to make use of some of his pictures. We exchanged contact information and returned to the task at hand.

A few days later, Pickford sent me some PDF files containing what amounted to proof sheets of hundreds of photos from the early 1960s of African Americans in the fields, in their homes in labor camps, congregating after work at the local market, children playing and attending school, adults at church, local landmarks (stores, cafes, and other businesses) and even a series of photographs showing residents drawing water for their homes from the very spigot described in that 1959 *Time Magazine* article. I literally cried with excitement when I saw all the stories I had been reading, hearing, and telling staring back at me through these fifty-year-old images. Not only were there hundreds of pictures, but they were amazingly beautiful rich, black and white photographs that rivaled any of those from the WPA collections I had spent so many hours slogging through trying to find blacks in the fields of California. Quantity and quality in one spot.

Suddenly, on my computer monitor, was the actual spigot that was fed by that well. Here were pictures of people filling milk cans with water for domestic use, just like I had heard from and read in interviews both Arax and I had done in Lanare, Teviston,

and elsewhere. For years, I had access to just one picture of African Americans picking cotton in the San Joaquin Valley. Suddenly, I had was looking at dozens of pictures of men and woman picking cotton, dragging sacks, lifting them onto scales, and dumping the white fluff into trailers to be taken to the gin. Here were beautiful children, laughing and playing; the scarred hands of cotton pickers; the sun-dried faces of mothers and fathers along with their bleached wooden shacks and busted up cars and trucks. The history that, for years, I had so desperately been trying to recollect about these communities was suddenly jumping out at me from hundreds of stunning photographs taken more than half a century earlier. Not only had Lowe been there and taken more than a thousand photographs, but, he had an amazing eye and had captured incredible images that rival those taken by the more famous Works Project Administration (WPA) photographers from two decades earlier. We had struck gold.

Several emails to Lowe later, it became clear that he had little additional information that he could add, beyond the circumstances of the photos being created. He had no names, was uncertain of the relationships between the people he photographed and was not able to locate, geographically, exactly where he took some of those photographs.

I immediately sent Lowe (the photographer) an email asking for permission to use his pictures in my academic publications and presentations (with attribution, of course). The next morning, Lowe sent me a lovely email granting permission to do just that, and over the course of the next few years, Arax, Pickford, and I have become quite familiar with the thousands of images created by Lowe in the 1960s (there is an equally impressive collection of images from non-black labor camps and settlements, as well, that needs to be archived and made available for scholars from around the world).

Little did I know, at that time, how fascinating and productive this relationship would become. The four of us—Arax, Pickford, Lowe, and I—were about to have the first of several adventures that grew out of our research.

In 1960, Lowe, a recent undergraduate from University of California at Berkeley, made his first trip to Teviston, South Dos Palos, and several other labor camps throughout Central California. Originally, Lowe had been introduced to Teviston by Bard McAllister. I knew that name. McAllister had been described by Arax as a “bearded Quaker in a red beret” (Arax 2002a). He was also mentioned in the *Time Magazine* article from 1959 about setting up the water district and the initial pump (Time Editorial Staff 1959). McAllister had been a field representative for the *American Friends Service Committee*, in Tulare County; a Quaker organization that did outreach to communities in need. Lowe interviewed McAllister while studying at the San Francisco Art Institute, and credits him (and that interview) as the initial inspiration for photographing California farm workers.

The prior year, Lowe had begun working for the Pacifica network station in San Francisco: KPFA. Having studied documentary photography with John Collier Jr.. Lowe sought to combine his photographic talents with his broadcasting career.

It was natural for me to combine interviewing for a radio documentary with photography... I'd just walk up to people in a camp or an orchard and say, 'I hear you folks are getting a raw deal. I'd like to take your pictures

and talk with you so people back in the city can do something about it.’  
(Lowe 2016).

A year later, Lowe showed Dorothea Lange his photographs, to which she declared, “this is my family album” (Lowe 2016). She lent him a 35mm camera and funding to buy film and pay expenses to continue his work. He made subsequent trips throughout the San Joaquin and Salinas Valleys the following year, in 1963 and 1966. By 1964, Lowe had relocated back to the Porterville area (in Tulare County) from where he spent months snapping images and recording long, detailed interviews. As the mechanical cotton picker primarily replaced manual labor by 1965, some of the photographs of blacks picking cotton in the San Joaquin Valley are among the only such images ever captured on film (Lowe 2016).

I nearly always was welcomed into farm worker communities and camps with warmth and enthusiasm for my mission. Very seldom did anyone decline being photographed or interviewed... (Lowe 2016).

It was a cold December day, shrouded in fog the first time he made his way to Teviston, just outside Pixley, in Tulare County. Having already spent half a year photographing farmworkers and their lives in labor camps and farm worker settlements, Lowe was still “amazed to see shacks as raggedy as the ones...” he found in Teviston (Lowe 2016). Later, he remarked...

The children I photographed that first day looked like stereotypes of poor kids, snotty noses, thin clothes, grim faces in the Valley cold. The shacks were strung out on mostly dirt roads, muddy in the winter, dusty and hot all other seasons... the mostly black farm workers lived in houses they had built or moved from farms where they’d been condemned. There was no water system other than the sky... Residents hauled water in metal drums and milk cans from Pixley... I was the first journalist to document any of the forgotten Black Okie settlements, missing then from California’s history (Lowe 2016).



Figure 88 Ben Beavers looks on as his children play in this photograph taken on Ernest Lowe's first visit to Teviston. Beavers was instrumental, along with Bard McAllister, in setting up Teviston's water district and getting the funding for the first pump in the community (photo courtesy of Ernest Lowe).

Teviston's children, made quite an impact on the young Lowe. He told me, at one point, that some civil rights and labor activists with whom he was involved criticized him for taking pictures of what appeared to be happy children playing and laughing while being surrounded by extreme poverty and horrible conditions. His response was that, "...kids are kids and know how to play no matter what..." (Lowe 2016)

Teviston's children improvised their playgrounds and toys. Their parents couldn't afford store-bought. They showed country road smarts in making something from nothing. Charles Beavers climbed the eucalyptus tree by his family's home to anchor this rope swing (seen in the above photograph). His brothers and sisters and all their friends played for hours here... I was impressed by the way the older kids took care of the younger ones. That's what made their large families work. Teviston's teenage boys named their football field The Dust Bowl, with a sad laugh. Several of these young men went on to play football in college (Lowe 2016).

Recently Ben Beavers, Jr. told Lowe, "We never went hungry, though some days we only had tortillas with some sugar on them... we never felt poor..." (Lowe 2016).

The following year, Lowe returned to Teviston immediately after a wet winter storm had soaked the tiny community. He described "...the sun coming in low under dark clouds, reflecting from the puddles, illuminating the shacks with a golden saving grace" (Lowe 2016).



Figure 89 Teviston after the rain in 1961 (photo courtesy of Ernest Lowe).

In February of 2016, Lowe sent me a poem he had recently written about that day. With his permission, I used it in a presentation I gave, that month, at Porterville College, as part of their commemoration of Black History Month. I have reproduced it, below, attempting to maintain as much of his original formatting as possible.

Lloyd Tevis  
    once owned more land  
        than he could ride across  
            in a day's time.  
He fought Miller & Lux  
    for the water of the Kern River  
        way back before it became  
            a channel of dry sand.  
In 1961 I pulled off 99  
    into Teviston  
        a storm ended  
            and the dark sky opened  
                to let the setting sun shine  
                    upon the shacks of Black Okies.  
Teviston was lit up  
    puddles reflecting day's last light.  
        The homes pieced together  
            from scrap wood  
                glowed intensely.  
How would Lloyd Tevis  
    have calculated the value  
        of this one and only memorial  
            to his great wealth?

Lowe made a couple of other interesting observations on that second trip. He suggested that although (at the time) Jack and Dimple's Cafe Bar-B-Que was feeding locals in Teviston, there were several other abandoned buildings where other commercial enterprises—stores and eateries—had already failed. And, then, there was water—or lack thereof. I have written before about the lack of potable water in many of these historically black settlements. The stories of Sunny Acres, Lanare, South Dos Palos, and Fairmead all include water issues. Teviston, Alkali, and the labor camps around Pixley were no different. The *Time Magazine* article I mentioned earlier precisely described Teviston in the lead paragraph:

In a barren place surrounded by the lush abundance of California's San Joaquin Valley live the 300 Negro men, women and children of Teviston. Most... went to the Valley from Oklahoma, Texas and Arkansas some 20 years ago as migrant farm workers, pinched their dollars, and with earnest pride bought their own land on a sandy alkali flat and called it home (Time Editorial Staff 1959).

I have often written about that pump, and it was Lowe who, like some of the long-time residents of Teviston, could not only verify that story, but could actually produce proof of the existence of the pump and the ways in which residents relied on it for their day-to-day needs.

### **Day One: South Dos Palos**

The plan was set. We would take Lowe back to some of the communities where he had been in the 1960s and where, during the twenty-first century, both Arax and I had already done some research and fieldwork. At ten in the morning, on March 20th, 2014, I rang the doorbell of Arax's home. The door was answered by an elderly gentleman, whom I knew, right away, to be Ernest "Ernie" Lowe. He was a slight man with fine features, long wispy sliver hair, pulled back into a thin little ponytail. He had gentle eyes and a soft, soothing voice. When I introduced myself, at the door, his eyes twinkled, as a smile broke across his face. I knew spending the rest of the weekend with this gentle soul was going to be a pleasure. Arax, his son Jake, Pickford, Willey, and I were going to take Lowe—and some of his pictures—back to the places where he took them, fifty-four years before. This was the day in which we wanted, if possible, to reconnect this eighty-year-old photographer with subjects he photographed when he was just twenty-five. We had no plan, other than to take Lowe back to South Dos Palos and Teviston. We had great hopes, but few expectations. In addition to shuttling Lowe, each of us had specific reasons for being there, but not one of us knew what to expect. Arax had never been to South Dos Palos and wanted to compare the experience there to what he had discovered in the settlements to the south. Jake Arax was shooting a video for school (actually, documenting the story of Lowe's return trip after more than fifty years), Pickford was there in his capacity as a photographer and videographer for Arax. Tom Willey was there to gather background for an interview with me, to be aired live, the next month. I was there as part of my on-going research into rural historically black settlements.

I was the only one of the group who had any contact with the African American community in South Dos Palos and Midway, and the majority of that consisted of little more than having attended several meetings at the George Washington Carver Center—a non-profit community center that had been rededicated, a few years prior. The Carver Center had functioned as the focal point for some demographic and economic research conducted by my graduate advisor and some of the University of California, Merced undergrads, in conjunction with California Rural Legal Assistance (CRLA) in 2010-2011. I had written a brief history of the three communities in the Dos Palos area for a museum exhibit, in 2012-2013, but had not focused much of my actual research on that community. It was not quite the “blind leading the blind” but it was close.

After we caught the Arax chicken, who had escaped while we were preparing to leave, we piled into Arax’s Lexus and headed to Madera. There we met Tom Willey. As we were very crowded in the backseat of Arax’s car, Pickford and I moved into Willey’s car, and we headed along the back roads out of Madera to South Dos Palos. As most of my contact in South Dos Palos was at a more institutional level, I really knew my way around this small-unincorporated town no better than did my companions.

Before going any farther, I have to describe Mark Arax, and what it is like going into the field with him. I am trained as an academic—both an historian and an anthropologist. As such, I am methodical. I seek ways to gain entrée to the communities I wish to study—often working through community organizations, prior contacts, other academics, or other links to the people I want to talk to. I run my research through the Institutional Research Board (IRB), make sure I get implicit or explicit consent for the use of interviews, photographs, and other primary documents. I also tend to seek out multiple long interviews to drill down through the surface. I try to cross the line into the worlds I want to study as gingerly as possible, to not inflict or interject myself into the subject. For me, time is my friend. I hope to establish long-term relationships of trust and exchange. Arax, on the other hand, is an award-winning journalist. As such, he works very differently. For Arax, heading into the field requires little more than a crusty beat up old cassette recorder and an idea. As a reporter, he has eliminated those filters that keep a distance between two strangers, and he has developed a capacity to insert himself fearlessly into any circumstance. I have watched him, several times, in the field, just thrust himself on people who were reluctant to be interviewed, by basically shoving this recorder in their face and asking, “Do you mind if I ask you a few questions?” Amazingly, I have never seen anyone say “No.”

We stopped in Madera where we met up with Tom Willey, a local organic farmer who hosts a talk show on the local Pacifica station, KFCF. Several weeks after the trip, Willey interviewed me on his show about my broader research.

After a short discussion to ascertain how to proceed, we decided to take a back road into South Dos Palos, rather than the freeways. We wanted to enter South Dos Palos (SDP) proper, rather than drop through Dos Palos and Midway. So, rather than take the well-known and well-worn Highway 99 north to State Highway 152 (parallel to the high speed rail that is currently being constructed to run through the Valley connecting Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Sacramento with stops in Merced, Fresno, and Bakersfield), we headed along two-lane country roads, eventually entering South Dos Palos on what had once been the main street of Dos Palos – the Santa Fe Grade (originally built by the

railroad companies to bring workers and water to Dos Palos and send meat, leather, and dairy products to the San Francisco Bay Area).



Figure 90 Teviston residents distributing water from their well with steel drums and milk jugs. Ben Beavers pours for a local minister (photo courtesy of Ernest Lowe).

The two Arax men, Pickford, and Lowe were in the white Lexus, in front, with Willey and me in the Volvo, bringing up the rear. South Dos Palos had originally been Dos Palos, but, like many places in the Valley, water had been a major issue since the founding of the town, so in the 1930s, whites from Dos Palos essentially moved the town from its original location to a new spot a few miles north, where there was access to adequate ground water to quench the town's thirst. Almost immediately, the town incorporated and petitioned the Postal Service to relocate the Dos Palos post office to the new town. This created a vacuum in the original town (unincorporated) which became known as South Dos Palos, while the area between the two communities was called Midway. One of the first ordinances passed by the new Dos Palos, like many of her neighbors throughout the San Joaquin Valley, was to make Dos Palos exclusive—whites only. This forced African Americans to remain in either Midway or South Dos Palos. African Americans had been long established in the area, with the earliest records indicating that black farmers were active in the area as early as 1922, and the first black

church followed soon thereafter. Several labor camps were also in or near South Dos Palos, all of which led to a concentration of blacks, due to segregation and exclusionary practices, in the older community. This history was important to our selection of the route to South Dos Palos because we wanted to enter the original community, not get off the freeway in Dos Palos, make our way across Midway, and then come into South Dos Palos from the backside. Rather, by making the cross country on back roads, we entered South Dos Palos where the original downtown had existed.



Figure 91 Home in converted storefront in South Dos Palos. Originally, this was a general store with a penny candy counter, which earned the store the name "The Candy Store" among local children (contemporary photo by author).

We pulled the cars off to the side of the road near the intersection of Santa Fe Grade and 6<sup>th</sup> Street. We must have been an unusual sight because Lowe, Pickford, Arax's son, and I were all snapping photos of the post office, some agricultural sheds, two former storefronts that had been converted into homes, boarded up storefronts and vacant lots where the only indication of what had been there was the placement of the trees that had provided shade to residents from the hot Westside sun. As we wandered around like kids with new toys, Arax stayed by the cars. A middle aged woman drove up, and seeing all of us romping around the area, asked him what was going on. He explained why we were there and asked if she knew where in town we could find any African Americans. What came out of this lady's mouth will forever be one of the greatest examples of irony, as well as one of the most meaningful responses to both Arax and me. She looked him in the eye and said, "We don't have any blacks. They all moved away." This confused Arax as he had interviewed African Americans in South Dos Palos. He

knew I had done some work with the Carver Center, in Midway, which was a community center that serviced the African American community in the area and met blacks who lived in South Dos Palos. One reason her response resonated with both of us was because I often quote a section of *The King of California* where Arax asked J. G. Boswell about African Americans in Corcoran. For many years, on one side of Corcoran sat an all-black labor camp. Arax has interviewed several people who, for years, lived in that camp. Both of us have written about Boot Hill/Sunny Acres (an all-black neighborhood, just outside the city limits). According to Arax, Boswell's main labor foreman, for twenty years, was African American. Yet, when Arax asked Boswell about blacks in Corcoran, Boswell's response was, "Blacks? We don't have any blacks in Corcoran" (Arax and Wartzman 2003).



Figure 92 South Dos Palos Post Office (contemporary photo by author).

Arax asked the South Dos Palos white lady in the green car about some of the specific people he had interviewed over the years. She knew them, but her explanation was that they were on the outskirts of town—they were in the country.

Undeterred, we loaded up the cars, once again, and decided to turn north on 6<sup>th</sup> Street. It is important to understand that South Dos Palos is quite small, going only a few blocks each way. We could have gone door-to-door in an afternoon with the crew we had, if forced to do so. Instead, we drove about a block before Arax (driving the lead car) spotted a young African American woman walking on the side of the road. He pulled up next to her (at which point Willey and I were wondering if we were going to end up jailed or killed) and with a brief explanation asked if she knew where we could locate some of the black families in the community. Her response, quite different from the first lady we encountered, was, "They're all over the place."

We drove to the end of the block, turned left on K street, and spotted three lovely black and mixed-race children playing around the stump of an old apricot tree, in one of the front yards. Once again, because he has none of the normal filters that prevent most

people from simply trundling in, Arax pulled up in front of the house and called the young lady who was watching the children over to his car. While watching this, I thought about what a bizarre sight we must have presented to this beautiful girl. Two cars full of middle aged (and older) white men, a couple with long hair, several with white beards, cruising a poor black and Hispanic neighborhood, and pulling up in front of the house with three young children playing in the front yard. We probably looked like refugees from Child Molesters Anonymous or the Ku Klux Klan. That was, in my opinion, a brave young woman willing to walk out to the curb to talk to Arax through the window. I was in the second car. We held back a few minutes and watched. Arax passed some of the photographs through the window, and I heard the woman say, "That's my uncle!" She began yelling into the house, "Granny, Granny, come out here, these people have pictures of my uncle!" The picture she was looking at included children who, since the photographs were taken in 1961, would now be senior citizens. Her grandmother responded that she could not come out front because she had not had time to do her hair and was not going to go out in public looking like that. However, within just a few minutes, our new friend had identified several other family members in the photographs and her grandmother could no longer contain her curiosity.

The younger lady continued to look through the photographs, while she called her uncle, in Los Banos, on her cell phone to tell him that we were there with pictures of him as a child. A white-haired lady came into her front yard, complaining that she had not had an opportunity to fix her hair, and the two women began browsing the photos and recognizing more and more faces. Each time someone was recognized, the younger lady got back on her mobile phone and called one or more people to tell them what was going on. She made calls all over South Dos Palos and other parts of California, even calling one of her relatives in Atlanta, Georgia to tell her about what was happening. Within a few minutes, there were men walking toward us from both ends of the street, and eight or nine cars pulled up in the driveway and in front of the house. In about a half-hour, we had not only identified almost every person in each of the photographs we brought, but we found three of the children whose pictures Lowe had taken, fifty-four years earlier. The looks on the faces of these (now) middle-aged black men and the peace and pure joy of the smile on Lowe's face will remain etched on my brain for the rest of my life. It was an amazing sight. People posed for photographs holding the only pictures they had ever seen of themselves as children—pictures they were seeing for the first time in their lives. People reminisced about being young while others wracked their brains to try to identify as many of the faces as they could.

For half a century, Lowe had looked at the faces of these beautiful black children starting out at him from the images he created in 1961, and he wondered what had happened to those children. Suddenly, three of them stood in front of him and told them about the others in the photographs, where they were, what they remembered from that day, and trying to figure out where, on the greatly changed landscape, the pictures were taken. For their part, I can only imagine how they felt. One of the older men—a young teen when Lowe took his picture, in 1961, walked up with a bit of attitude to the group assembled in his relative's front yard. However, the moment he saw his own face beaming back at him across the five decades that had passed, since that day, he broke out into a huge, spontaneous grin. He softened and suddenly, we were all talking about

cousins, friends, and activities that flooded from the recesses of memory. I thought about my own memories from the first half of the 1960s. Most of those memories are associated with pictures in the photo albums kept by my mother and my grandmother. I do not really know how many of those memories are actual memories reinforced by the images in those albums and the retelling of the events by members of my family, or if the images and the stories create what appears to be memories because I have heard those stories and seen those images so many times. These residents of South Dos Palos were very poor in 1961. As can be verified from the photographs, they lived in little more than simple tarpaper and board cabins that lacked plumbing and electricity. They do not have photo albums with holiday snaps from fifty years ago. They did not have images upon which to hang their memories: until now.

At one point, Arax sat down in the yard, looked up at me through his sunglasses, and remarked, “Man, it brings tears to my eyes.” He was right. Not only did I find myself getting a little choked up as I watched this incredible reunion, but every time that I recounted the experience from that day emotions welled up within me making it hard to continue until I forced back the tears. By the time we left, we had been invited to a family reunion the following month, at which we were assured we would meet others of those who appeared in the photographs. We all agreed we would be making the return trip.

But, I will never forget the look on Lowe’s face. Now, eighty years old, he had connected with a part of his past he thought he would never touch, again. Suddenly, the children he had photographed as a young photojournalist and broadcaster, fifty years prior, were talking to him, as adults, and telling him about their lives, then, and telling him about their lives since the day he took those pictures. They pointed out that the labor camp shacks where he took most of the pictures of the children had been right across the street (and down a couple of houses) from where we all now stood. He had hit the mother lode, and he was floating on a euphoric cloud like a child who had just discovered he was in Santa’s workshop. Over the intervening years, I have asked Lowe several times how it felt, and every time I do he gives me the same answer he gave me, later that day. “Wonderful! It was just wonderful!” I doubt I will ever get a better or more complete description of how he felt and the look of child-like bliss and glee that he wore the entire time we were in South Dos Palos verifies that it really was “Wonderful! It was just wonderful!” (Lowe 2016). At another time, he described that initial encounter:



Figure 93 Joel Pickford snaps a photograph of Marilyn Marshall holding a photograph of herself as a child taken by Ernest Lowe more than fifty years prior to this impromptu and accidental meeting (photo courtesy of Ernest Lowe).

At the first house I visited folks came out and started puzzling over my fifty-four-year-old photos. Soon the front yard was crowded with relatives from the neighborhood and they had named most of the kids in the photos I brought. Laughing about the time capsule I'd brought to them, they photographed my prints with phones and iPads and called distant relatives about their discovery (Lowe 2016).

How ironic? When Lowe originally photographed these children (now senior citizens) none of the family members could afford a camera, the film, nor the processing. I started this chapter explaining that I had scant pictorial or physical evidence of blacks in the fields and these rural communities. One reason for this was simply that these subjects were poor and something as exotic as a camera was considered a luxury. There are no family snapshots from the 40s, 50s, or 60s for most of these families, not because they did not want to create memories, but because they did not have the resources with which to document those memories.

While all this was going on, there was little I could do other than observe. I watched people pose for photos: some with their old pictures, others with Lowe. I listened to men in their sixties and seventies talk about growing up as one family living in two of the labor camp shacks, with their mamma making sure they had clothes, food, and the Bible, while they all worked in the fields—cotton, beans, grapes, sugar beets, and all the other crops that I have learned to expect. They talked about the family members in the photos who were deceased, about those who had struggled with drugs and alcohol over the years, and those who had been successful or just made do. The photographs reopened old wounds and fond memories. There were phone calls to relatives throughout California, as well as calls to Oklahoma, Texas, and other parts of the country. It was, as Lowe said, “Wonderful!”



Figure 94 Three members of the Marshall family browsing through never-before-seen photographs of themselves as children (photo courtesy of Ernest Lowe).

Before we left, we were invited to an upcoming family reunion, and we agreed that some of us, at least, would make the trip. Emotionally drained and intellectually high as kites, we decided we could all use some lunch.



Figure 95 The Marshall Children Clarence, Joe, Lee, and Zella Marshall, Willie Brewster, Lee, Vincent, (bottom row) Marilyn, Timmy, and David Marshall, in 1964, posing between the farm labor shacks in which they lived. Family members currently live across the street from this location (photo courtesy of Ernest Lowe).

Collecting all the photographs, now annotated with names (and the current locations and statuses of some), we returned to our cars and drove through midway to Dos Palos where we sought out the Blossom Street Diner. There was no place to eat in South Dos Palos, so we had to make our way to the larger community if we hoped to find a place to get some lunch. The six of us—Mark and Jake Arax, Pickford, Willey, Lowe, and I—sat at a large round table in the front corner of the large local diner. Of course, the conversation feverishly revolved around our “success” of the morning. Pickford pointed out an item—The Works—on the menu that summed up our feelings about what we had witnessed, that morning: “The Works! Jumbo biscuit topped w/sausage gravy, home fries, onions, green peppers, 3 scrambled eggs, bacon, sausage, ham & cheese covered w/country gravy \$9.99.” After Joel read the description, Lowe added, “On a waffle?” That sentiment characterized how we thought about the morning—it provided just about everything on a single plate. After lunch, we basically figured we could do no better than we had, that morning, and we piled back into the cars and headed home to Fresno.



Figure 96 Three generations of the Marshal family pour over Lowe's photographs of their family from half a century earlier (photo courtesy of Ernest Lowe).

We drove back to Fresno, amazed by the events of the day, knowing that what we had just experienced was a once in a lifetime occurrence. We wondered about the odds of finding, out of the blue, some of the very people we sought. We were all amazed that with very little effort, beyond simply showing up, we were able to find people in the photographs and could now begin the process of collecting the stories connected to the faces captured half a century before.

Later that evening, we all gathered, once again, at the Arax home for dinner and a preview of the rough draft of the Black Okies documentary that Arax and Pickford had been working on. We were joined by my son, Nikolas, and our conversation kept returning to the events earlier in the day. We all agreed that our next adventure, planned for the following morning, could not possibly be as exciting or as fruitful.

## **Day Two: Teviston and Pixley**

The next morning proved to be, yet another, beautiful morning. The weather was just perfect for running around the Valley and had it had not been for massive road construction on Highway 99 between Fresno and Pixley (where we would leave the freeway for back roads) it would have been a perfect day in the field.

We knew that the best place to find people on Sunday would be at one of Teviston's three black churches, so we decided we needed to leave Fresno earlier. We planned to leave the Arax home between 9:00 and 9:30 that morning. I arrived promptly at 9, and, once again, the door was answered by Lowe. He was still in his robe and pajamas, and I made the assumption that, once again, we were going to get a slow start. Although, unlike the prior day, we did not have to recapture a chicken, we did leave closer to 9:30 than the hoped for earlier time. Arax expressed his concern that no matter what we found, this second day, it could not compare to the discoveries of Saturday, and he feared that we were all in for a letdown.

Once again, I drove the second car, and Lowe and I followed the Lexus with Arax, Pickford, and Arax's son Jake through Fresno, and south down State Highway 99 toward Tulare County. On the drive, which took more than an hour, Lowe and I talked about his feelings, the day before, upon finding the grown-up children in his photographs. He said that the only way he could convey what he felt was "utter joy." It was obvious, from watching him, at the time, that he could not believe his good fortune. Our conversation drifted during the drive from his description of a conversation about Buddhism with my son the night before, a long, detailed description of his experimentation with LSD in the sixties, and the various strains of marijuana he grew to provide relief for his late wife as she battled cancer. Lowe also filled me in (roughly) as to his history working for both Pacifica Radio and the San Francisco National Public Radio (NPR) and Public Broadcasting Stations (PBS). Following Arax, we pulled off 99, south of Pixley, and snaked our way under the freeway to the east side. This was my first visit to Teviston, and I did not know what to expect.

In fact, for each of us, our expectations were low (but, our hopes were high): none of us imagined that any experience could match the prior day's activities, so Lowe and I talked about the events of the weekend, a little about his earlier trips to the area—after fifty years, many of his specific memories have faded, but he could recall enough points to give me a good idea of his activities and purpose back when I was just starting elementary school in a tiny town (with a population no larger than those of most of these rural settlements) in South Dakota. Overall, it was a rich, interesting, and informative hour in the car, heading to our first destination.

Day two of our travels with Lowe was also my introduction to the Teviston area. For years, I had written about the place, citing Arax, *Time Magazine*, various newspaper articles, and other secondary sources, but, to that point, I had not even cruised the neighborhood. We spent most of the day running all over Teviston and Pixley in what seemed, at times, like being scattered across the entire area. We pulled off Highway 99 at about 11am. As it was Sunday, the plan was to try to catch as many locals, as possible, after their local church services. Following close behind Arax's car, we stopped at the first Teviston church we came across. This was *House of Prayer Church of God in Christ*. The building appeared to be in the middle of some renovation. I recognized the

building from one of Matt Black's photographs published in association with Arax's Black Okies *Los Angeles Times* articles, but newer parts of the building had been tacked on, since the earlier photo was taken almost a decade before. It appeared that the construction project was nearing its completion. We were not sure, from what we saw, whether there was going to be service, that morning, as there was still construction tape (like police tape) across the front of the steps, and everything looked like it was buttoned up, tightly. We pulled up into the few parking spaces at the front of the church. Pickford, Lowe, and I jumped out of the cars and began taking pictures of the empty church. Arax assured us that there were other options. After a short consultation, we decided to move on to another church (it was a Sunday morning, after all). We proceeded east, passing the Friendship Baptist Church. The parking lot of this second church appeared to be full, so Lowe and I assumed services were underway, and were surprised when Arax continued East down Avenue 80 to the intersection with Road 132. Here, almost all the homes appeared to have been built quite recently. The bulk of the yards were hemmed in by chain link fencing and bore little resemblance to the bulk of the homes and yards in Teviston. Even Teviston is becoming gentrified. These newer homes are not affordable to the majority of the residents of Teviston and we were curious as to how and why this section was being developed. We would later discover that most of these newer homes were being built by Cecilia Jackson, an African American transplant from Southern California who is developing what she refers to as *Teviston Ranch*: a development of small commercial properties and new homes. She has installed new wells (for her development) and made it clear that she has no intention to develop affordable homes for existing residents. Turning north, we passed several homes of every description. There were modified, expanded, and improved structures that began life as labor camp housing, several homes appeared to have been built in the thirties, forties, and fifties and moved to their current site, and a few homes built more recently. As we made our way on the rough paved road, I noticed a large eucalyptus tree under which several men were sitting near the front of a yard with a small tract home and a large fenced off area that appeared to house numerous mobile homes and recreation vehicles (most of which appeared to be occupied). At the time, I was unaware that we would be returning to this very spot, later in the day.

At the end of the road, where Road 132 terminated at Avenue 84, we came to the side of the St. Paul African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) Church. The church site consisted of two, free-standing buildings. The small chapel sat on the north (front) of the property, and a small, L-shaped fellowship hall sat on the back half of the fenced property. we parked our cars on that side of the little complex. Once, again, we all got out of the car, and Lowe and Pickford grabbed their cameras and began documenting our visit. I snapped a few on my phone, for future reference. Arax entered the enclosed back yard and went up and knocked on the door of the fellowship hall.



Figure 97 Ernest Lowe looks on as Mark Arax chats with Dorris Brooks at the A.M.E. Church, in Teviston (photo by author).

Dorris Brooks stood in the doorway, and Arax asked her if she remembered him. She said she did and invited us in. Arax introduced all of us—she remembered Pickford, from before—and we talked about the history of Teviston. Brooks had not arrived in Teviston until the 1990s, so she doubted she could identify any of the people in the photographs, but she wanted to see them, anyway. She asked for copies of some of the pictures. She often compiles a Teviston “History” display for an event in Pixley and asked if she could include historic photographs. We were informed that services had not begun, yet. Sunday school was taking place, in the chapel. As we talked and enjoyed a fresh cup of coffee, we awaited the conclusion of Sunday School, hopeful that we would be able to get more information when the congregants made their way to the fellowship hall for cookies and coffee. Arax and I stepped outside to strategize, and he told me that, based on his earlier experience in Teviston, the majority of the members of St. Paul’s A.M.E. were late comers, and were much more likely to be from the black middle-class than from the crop of earlier arrivals—what he always refers to, as the Black Okies. Based on that information, we expected very little from the members of that church, but we were reluctant simply to walk away without a little more investigation. While Arax, Lowe, and Brooks talked about Lowe’s trips to Teviston in the early 1960s, and they examined the photographs we had brought, I took advantage of the cup of coffee offered and wandered around the fellowship hall and yard a bit. Although the facility was modest and aging, everything was clean and freshly painted. The grass in the side and back yard was trimmed and mowed. The small gravel parking area on the West of the building was simple, but well-maintained. While this was, by no means, a wealthy congregation, they took pride in their house of worship.

After about twenty minutes, the main service concluded and a few of the members of the church made their way to the fellowship hall for coffee, juice, and cookies. There

were several school-aged children, dressed in their Sunday best: girls in nice dresses and boys in suits and ties. I talked, for a few minutes with some of the children before refocusing on the adults in the room. Several other church ladies came in, and each of them looked over the fifty-year-old photographs we laid out on a couple of the tables. Pickford and Lowe engaged them in conversation as they perused the images. Unfortunately, not one of the people who came in after service was able to identify anyone in the pictures. Neither the former mayor (now, Mayor *Pro Tem*) of Delano, Ruben "Ruby" Hill nor his daughter recognized anyone, either, but indicated that (one of these days) they could contribute to our growing body of knowledge about the black migration to the San Joaquin Valley. I took his card and will be contacting him, soon, to get more information about his part of the Valley. The only real interest in Lowe's photographs came from Brooks, who suggested that these images could be useful in celebrating Pixley's history. As the president of the Teviston Betterment Association, she told us she always looks for ways to assist her community.

We expected we would be unable to recreate the success of the prior day's trip to South Dos Palos, but we had hoped to, at least, see some spark of recognition, and perhaps uncover one or more leads as we tried to identify and locate (if possible) the subjects of Lowe's photographs. Unfortunately, at this location, none of that was to be found.

After the members of the congregation had downed the coffee, juice, and cookies, we decided to crawl back into our cars and determine the next possible destination. Arax suggested that our best bet was to return to the first church we stopped by and see if they were holding services. Almost a decade prior, he had interviewed several members of that church and he felt that the members of that church were more likely to have lived in Teviston, five decades earlier. We concluded, before leaving the A.M.E. Church, that most of those in attendance were more recent arrivals to Teviston and the surrounding area. The majority of them were more financially secure (most were retired) and higher up on the economic ladder: few of those to whom we spoke ever worked in the fields.

Retracing our route through the heart of Teviston, we returned to *Friendship Baptist Church* on Avenue 80 where, as Arax had correctly assumed, services were underway. We parked in the (now opened) parking lot and made our way into the rear seats in the church. As we, essentially, crashed the party by coming in during the middle of the service, we garnered a number of curious looks from members of the congregation as we came in and sat down. Almost immediately (and without asking) both Lowe and Pickford began hopping around the sanctuary taking stills and video of the proceedings. This generated a number of askance glances from the worshipers, and I shrank into my seat. What must they have thought of four middle-aged white guys barging into their worship service and making nuisances of themselves? Luckily, the preacher, Reverend Robert Daniels remembered Arax from earlier visits to Teviston, and at one point asked Arax to share the reason for our visit. Arax had interviewed Reverend Daniels and his father, also Reverend Daniels. This allowed Arax and Lowe the opportunity to talk about the purpose of our trip and to explain, in part, our rude intrusion (although, I am still not convinced that we did enough to offset the damage).

Reverend Daniels suggested that there be a short break where Lowe could lay out his pictures to give members of the congregation a chance to see if they recognized

anyone (as well as see the photographs). Lowe laid them out on a couple of empty pews, and the congregation took a quick look at the images displayed. During the ensuing discussion, the only point of real interest was that, later that day, at the *First Baptist Church* on Compton street, in Pixley, they were hosting “Old Fashion,” an event when they invited all the African American churches in Tulare county to a celebration of their past, and presented historical artifacts and told stories about how they and their parents (and, occasionally, grandparents) came to the Valley to work the fertile fields, vineyards, groves, and orchards. We made our goodbyes and headed back to the cars. The gracious and kind reception we received, even though we were disruptive and disrespectful was palpable and will remain with me as the one highlight of this particular encounter.

So far, Sunday was not going as well as Saturday. We had yet to locate anyone who recognized the people in Lowe’s photographs and our Teviston trip was almost half over. We had some time to kill, as it was barely lunchtime, at this point. The collective service, in Pixley, was scheduled for three that afternoon (it was not even noon, yet). As we drove down Road 132 we passed a house that we had already driven by twice, under an old eucalyptus tree. This time, however, several people were milling around the property. We pulled up along the side of the road near the large tree. Sitting under the tree were several African Americans who appeared to be as old as in their sixties, to youngsters, and everything in between. Immediately at the base of the tree sat several old chairs—some lawn chairs, other’s just chairs—where the three men sat, talking. Just south and west of the tree was a tract home that (we found out, later) had been moved onto the property. Probably built in the 1950s, it looked like it had been added to, at least a few times, over the years. But, behind that house and running the full length of the property (running parallel to the road) was a fenced off area housing several travel trailers and campers. Repeatedly, while we talked to the people out by the road, I watched individuals roaming around this back lot, sometimes carrying stuff from one trailer to the next, occasionally venturing out to the dusty front area where we were passing around photographs and talking to the locals, or going into a little sheltered area that appeared to house a communal refrigerator and freezer. At least some of the residents of this back area, based on snippets of conversation, were related to the home owner, but we did not take the time to try to ascertain the extent of these relationships, as we were on a mission to recreate (even a tiny example of) the success, from the prior day. However, even if we were not to make that connection, I was fascinated by what we found on this small property. This visit turned out to be quite informal. The four of us mingled with the different people in the yard, showing photographs and asking questions, but these were not formal interviews. In fact, we did not even make a note of names of those to whom we chatted. The homeowner, was an aging black man (probably in his early sixties, but looked much older). His significant other (I neither asked, nor cared, if she was his wife, but based on what I heard, it was obvious that they were a couple) was probably twenty-years younger, white and blonde. Among the men initially sitting out by the tree were a couple of Hispanic males. Overall, this population on this property was quite diverse, with some of the children arguably mixed race.



Figure 98 Joyce and Delores Perry Lula Jenkins, and Annie & Goldie Beavers (center) in 1961 sit in the back of a pickup with a barrel of water from Teviston's new pump (courtesy of Ernest Lowe).

Among those who greeted us, when we disembarked from our vehicles, were three dogs. The middle-sized was a mutt of some kind. There was no way, from looking at it, to determine what breeds of dog made up its ancestry (other than an all-American mutt). The larger of the three was actually a three-legged bulldog mix. The dog never seemed to notice it had only three legs and managed to get around as well, or better, than the other two. Finally, the last little dog was a Chihuahua-terrier mix with an under-bite. Obviously, much older than the other dogs, this was the ferocious creature that protected all of his domain. With a crooked grimace and a crabby disposition, he herded the other two canines around the yard and approached us as if we were trespassers, growling and barking like he was ready to rip out our throats. Having always had good luck dealing with dogs, I tried (unsuccessfully, I might add) to make friends with the little guy. He was having none of it, and, at one point, even snapped at me. Luckily, this time, I was faster than he, and still have all my fingers. He continued to hover several feet away from the various conversation groups, barking, growling, and snarling for the remainder of our visit.

This brief stop, however, saw a marked change in our fortunes. For much of the visit, Arax, Pickford, and Lowe talked to the men about life in Teviston and went through the photographs. He was initially unable to identify any of the people in the old photographs. However, there was a young African American lady—probably in her late twenties—who looked at the photograph of a bunch of children sitting in the back of a pickup and another of children playing in a yard and declared, “That’s my aunt Goldie.”

In fact, the young lady was Goldie Beavers, daughter of Benjamin J. Beavers, one of the Teviston residents who had worked with Bard McAllister in the late fifties to bring water to the settlement. She's the young lady with the blond hair, in the photograph, above. This photograph had intrigued me because Pickford kept saying things like, "I really want to know the story of the white girl in these pictures." I was sure she was related to the other children in the picture (similar features), but I did not feel like going into a long discussion, so after suggesting a few times that she did not appear to be white, I let it ride. Since the young lady who pointed to the picture of Goldie and said it was her aunt was quite dark skinned, Pickford remarked, when she identified the girl, "you mean the white girl?" to which the niece replied, "She's not white—those are her sisters." Pickford was a little uncomfortable, but we made it through his peccadillo. Once we verified that the young lady in the photograph was her aunt, she was able to identify another of the girls as another aunt. Finally, after hours of running around Teviston, we had identified two people in Lowe's photographs. Unlike the day before, we had yet to locate any of the subjects, but we now knew that Goldie lived in Porterville and the other aunt still lived in the area. We were able to begin to fulfill our mission.

Most of the conversation under the eucalyptus tree at the side of the road morphed from trying to identify individuals to attempts to locate some of the homes and businesses Lowe photographed more than half a century earlier. We left with very little concrete information (other than the connection to the Beaver girl), but I took a great sense of peace. Sitting under that tree, in the gravel yard, with the strange collection of dogs and an almost as strange collection of people, there was a certain level of comfort I cannot describe. There was an easiness to the conversation that, although it often rambled from topic-to-topic, felt honest, sincere, and very comfortable. Perhaps it arose from the diversity. The people (including the researchers) were just as jumbled-up a conglomeration as the strange collection of mutts that hung around the edges of the conversations punctuating our discussions with growls and barks. The forty-five minutes (or so) that we spent on a warm spring day, on Road 132 in Teviston, chatting will linger in my memory as some of the most rewarding and most relaxing. We may not have come away with mountains of information, but we were refreshed and (speaking for myself) stronger.

We still had time to kill before the Old Fashion Day gathering at the First Baptist Church of Pixley. Lunch seemed to be in order, so we took off for a little Mexican place that Arax remembered from an earlier visit. He had enjoyed the place, so much, in the past, that he basically made it his regular hang out while conducting interviews in the area. Lowe and I followed Arax's Lexis to a small eatery in Pixley, right off Highway 99, where we enjoyed a leisurely lunch recalling the events of the prior thirty-six hours. Lunch dispatched, we made our way to the First Baptist Church of Pixley.



Figure 99 The author shows copies of Ernest Lowe's photographs from more than fifty years ago to residents of Teviston under the shade of an old Eucalyptus tree (photo courtesy of Ernest Lowe).

We wound our way across the freeway and up the side streets to the Pixley church by about two-thirty. This allowed us a few minutes to wander through the gathering crowd. Arax took the opportunity to locate some of the people in charge and asked if we could be added to the program. Once he explained our project, he was added to the program and both he and Lowe would be allowed to speak, and following the event we would be able to show Lowe's photographs and see if we could identify more of the people in the photographs.

The assembled congregation was interesting. Most of those gathered were middle-aged and older (which is what I expected, based on my experiences with other churches I have visited in other historically black rural settlements). Most of them, especially the ladies, were dressed in their Sunday finest, but some (especially among the few younger adults) were dressed a little more casually. Two gentlemen who stood out wore bib overalls. The overalls were spotlessly clean (both looked like they were wearing brand new Oshkosh overalls). Because these two gentlemen appeared to interact with many of those assembled, I assumed that this was not an unusual or unexpected form of dress (of course, my original assumptions were wrong, and these two played an important role in the upcoming program).

The first thing I noticed when we received our programs was the number of churches that had been invited to participate in the event. Although limited to historically black churches in Tulare county, almost thirty congregations were listed in the program.

Some of these were known to us, but others were new. Unfortunately, not all the churches participated and even some that were listed as being involved in the program, on the day of the event, failed to send participants. Either way, however, it appeared that after a frustrating day running around the area, we had, possibly, our best opportunity to get some answers in such as broad gathering.

The church quickly filled up. Although, not to capacity, it was a good crowd and those of us who had come down from Fresno sat in a couple of pews near the back. Occasionally, Lowe and Pickford made their way to the front to take photographs, but these were primarily reserved for the less formal portions of the program. Although there was a short benediction or sermon, the bulk of the program was focused on history.

After Reverend Nathaniel Hairston made his opening remarks, he introduced the invited speaker, a good, old-fashioned fire-and-brimstone Baptist preacher whose oratory rose and fell with the rhythms of old-time religion. I remember nothing about his message, other than the sheer pleasure of having ridden the waves of his voice, from whispers to thunder, punctuated by wiping his brow, gesticulating, and pounding his fists on the podium.

Once the religious portion of the program had concluded, the real reason I was there began: the history portion of Old Fashion Day. It now became clear as to why those two men were wearing brand-new Oshkosh coveralls – they were part of the program. C. J. Jones and Charles Carter essentially played a game of What’s This Thing, with the



Figure 100 C. J. Jones, "Our water supply..." (photo courtesy of Ernest Lowe).

assembled audience, holding up a series of artifacts with which the younger people in the hall were unlikely to recognize. These included things like a washboard, a slop bucket (which C. J. referred to as “our indoor plumbing” and a rotary phone, which, of course, he called, “our iPhone”) For me, the most interesting two artifacts were the long cotton sack and the water can (a modified milk can used to lug water from sources such as the pump by Jernagan’s store or from an earlier access point now located in a public park in downtown Pixley. C. J. Jones explained that these milk cans (which he referred to as “our water supply”) were modified, not only for domestic use, but for use in the fields. Wrapped in wet burlap (probably from feed or gunny sacks), these were used to deliver water to farm workers and are the precursors to the commercially available plastic water containers familiar to campers or construction workers, today. It was fun to watch him try to tease the identification of each object out of the

audience and he provided short descriptions of an item's use and function, once it was identified. I noticed that he skillfully tried to walk a fine line, when it came to life in the fields or in the labor camps, between projecting a positive nostalgia and illustrating the struggle associated with that time.

Arax spoke briefly about our mission and introduced Lowe who got up before the congregation and spoke, briefly, about his visits to the Pixley area (primarily Teviston and Earlimart) more than half a century prior and explained that we would lay out some photographs at the close of the program and hopefully, those in attendance could help us identify (and possibly locate) individuals in the pictures.

Once the meeting came to a close, about eighty percent of the attendees dispersed and went on with their lives. Some of the older people stayed and perused the photographs. Suddenly, after just little more than twenty-four hours, we once again struck pay dirt, and, again, it was the pictures of the children (now, senior citizens) that opened the spigot. As I mentioned, at the beginning of this chapter, Lowe had taken many photographs of children playing in the streets and yards of labor camps, in their homes, and at school. In the sixties, he had been criticized for depicting smiling children in less than optimum conditions.



Figure 101: Three of the Beavers children photographed by Ernest Lowe, in the early 1960s, sit with one of those photographs in 2015 (photo courtesy of Ernest Lowe).

Lying on one of the pews among the fifty-nine other photographs Lowe brought with him, that day was the photograph of five girls sitting in the back of the pickup truck when water was being delivered—a large metal barrel in front of them, filled with water and other pictures taken at that same time show water being delivered in buckets and milk cans. This was the photograph from which the young lady had identified Goldie Beavers, the girl that Pickford thought was white. Sitting right next to Goldie (in the photograph) was Annie Beavers. In attendance, that day was Annie Beavers, her sister and brother Ben (all children of Benjamin Beavers, one of the workers responsible for establishing Teviston's water district and someone with whom Lowe had spent a great

deal of time, during his visits in the 1960s). Because of spending so much time with the Beavers, fifty years ago, there were numerous photographs of the children playing, as well as individual portraits. We were able to identify many of the children and adults in the Teviston photos before we left the church that day.

As we walked out of the church, I passed Annie Beavers, one of the girls sitting in the back of the old pickup truck, in the photograph. As we passed, we said something (I do not remember what it was) and she smiled. When she did, she raised her hand over her mouth in *exactly* the same gesture as in one of the photographs. I drew her attention to it, and she admitted that it has been a lifelong habit, acquired in childhood (and, obviously continuing into her later years).



Figure 102: Shell of Jernagan's store in Teviston. In 1959, Teviston first received water service from a tap near this store. This photograph was taken on my first visit to Teviston, in 2015, where we were accompanied by Benny Beavers and C. J. Jones as we located (contemporary photo by author).

Happy that we had names for many of the pictures and contact information, I assumed the adventure was coming to a close, however, Benny Beavers and C. J. Jones offered to provide us with a tour of Teviston and the surrounding area. This was something I did not want to miss. We piled into the two cars, this time with Jones in the Lexus with Arax and Pickford, and Beavers climbed into the passenger seat with Lowe and me. We began making our way, first through Pixley (as that was our starting location). We located a pair of other churches with primarily black congregations, and then made our way to the middle of downtown Pixley where we were shown, near the edge of a small park in the center of town, the location where, in the 1950s and 1960s there was a public spigot where many of the poor rural folks (not just African Americans) acquired water for domestic use. Currently, there were just some pipes that might have been pumps poking out of the ground with a small cage around it, for protection. After

both Jones and Beavers told us stories of trips with their fathers or older siblings to that pump prior to the installation of the well in Teviston, we once again hopped into the cars and headed for Teviston, about three miles south of Pixley and back to the other side of the freeway. One of our first stops was the location of a spigot, installed shortly after the story in *Time Magazine*, in 1959, adjacent to Jernagan's market, out the outskirts of Teviston. Today, it sits fairly isolated, on a country road, however, that is not unusual for this part of the state where small, country markets did (and in some cases, still do) serve the needs of travelers and nearby farms.



Figure 103: Teviston water faucet: The access point to the well mentioned in a 1959 *Time Magazine* article. Lowe, Arax, Pickford, Bennie Beavers, and the author visited the site, next to the, now boarded up, market, in Teviston (see figure 103), in 2015. This photograph was taken in the early 1960s (photo courtesy Ernest Lowe).

When we pulled up, I immediately recognized the Royal Crown Cola sign, painted on the side of the building. Although the hot San Joaquin Valley sun has faded the bright red and blue paint even more than it was in the early 1960s, it remains clearly legible. Above is my photograph of the front of the building. Above, is Lowe's photograph from either 1961 or 1964, showing the faucet and associated barrel that was used by families to get water for cooking and cleaning (as well as bathing). The water pipes are capped off, but the seven of us stood on the original spot and discussed what it was like to have to rely on carrying water, every day, for the basics of life. Beavers and Jones had drawn water from that spigot. Lowe had photographed it. Arax and I had both written about it. It might not seem like much, to most people, but to us this was an important event. Not only did it validate the tales that we had been spinning about the links between domestic water and poverty in many of these black communities: Lanare, Fairmead, South Dos Palos, Home Gardens, Sunny Acres, and other historically black settlements each had (and some still have) issues related to access to potable water for their residents.

It is hard for me to put into words the feeling that I had standing on the site of that tiny bit of plumbing. I had known about that very spot for almost a decade. It was the focus of one of the very first primary sources I had found relating to these historically black rural settlements. The story of Bard McAllister and that water district were well known to both Arax and me. We had both written about this very spot many times, but were unaware of its location. Now, with people who could verify it for us, we were standing right there. I do not know how Arax felt, his only comment that might have given any indication as to his feelings was simply, "That's so cool!" Lowe remembered the photographs of the store, but, after more than five decades, he could not say he honestly remembered taking that specific picture or the events surrounding it, but he agreed that it was, indeed, the same building. As for Jones and Beavers, they were probably more astonished by our reactions and even our interest in such a mundane, homely thing as a water faucet attached to a telephone pole next to a country market, outside a tiny little unincorporated community, from half a century earlier.

Our next destination was the home of C. J. Jones. He wanted to change clothes and check in with his wife before we continued our explorations of the area. We drove through the ill-maintained back roads of Teviston until we passed several older homes with "For Sale" signs and turned down a single-land, gravel road to the Jones home. We parked in front of the house where we were invited in. Although, this was a modest house, it was well-maintained and, once again, brought home the economic diversity we had witnessed in Teviston. From the people living in the travel trailers through the middle-class homes, like the Jones home, to the gentrified new homes surrounded by chain link fences to keep out the local riff raff.

The seven of us wandered into the yard and talked about neighboring properties. Many of the adjacent lots had been owned, at one time or another, by friends or family members. Some of the homes that had once stood on these lots were torn down. Others were still in active use and had been improved over the years. One of the few questions I regularly ask is how they originally were able to purchase their homes. So far, I have yet to come across a single African American family who purchased a home in one of these rural enclaves in the forties, fifties, or early sixties with a mortgage or other loan from a bank. In every instance, as I have mentioned, before, the land (or home) was purchased directly from the land owner(s). When I asked C. J. about this property, he told me that the bulk of the homes in that area had belonged to Edwin Matheny, the Tulare-based businessman who sold homes to black families in the Matheny Tract (outside Tulare), Teviston/Pixley, and Sunny Acres (outside Corcoran). He was one of just a small handful of white businessmen who carried private loans for black households throughout the region. Jones pointed out the surrounding properties that he knew had been sold by Matheny to black families. It was basically every tract we could see. I asked him how it worked. As far as he could remember, he believed that the land had originally all belonged to Tulare county. Several times, he referred to Matheny as a "county agent" but, he never saw any county paperwork and every payment was made directly to Matheny. The only documentation as to the transactions that represented the mortgages on these properties was a small notebook Matheny carried when he arrived, each week, to collect his payments. Jones described how, each week, at basically the same time, Matheny would show up and park near the middle of one of the neighborhoods. In the case of these

properties, he would sit under a tree and wait for the home buyers to bring their payments. Most of these were (even for the time) quite small payments—mostly in the twenty to thirty dollar-a-week range—and the only real record of the payments was an annotation in the notebook noting the date of the payment and the amount. Most of these payments were in cash as few of these farm workers had bank accounts and purchasing a money order created an additional expense. Jones told us that one day, Matheny sat in his usual spot, making a mark in his book to register the payment he had just taken in, when he turned to C. J. and said, “You’re one of the good ones. You can buy any property I’ve got.” Jones explained that he assumed that this was Matheny’s way of pointing out that he had never missed a payment. He regretted that he had not taken him up on the offer to purchase additional properties, but at the time, he was only comfortable scraping together the one payment, each week. In my mind’s eye, I imagined similar conversations in the Matheny Tract and Corcoran, as well as with some of the other communities, like Lanare and Fairmead, where similar situations allowed African American families to purchase their own land at a time when it would have been quite difficult for those same families to do so under other circumstances.

We continued driving around Teviston and the surrounding fields while both C. J. and Beavers pointed out landmarks—old businesses or house sites. It was during this trip, during one of the conversations where we were all out of the cars talking, when we were told that, in addition to the half dozen black labor camps in the area, there was another (not completely gone) community just a few miles east of Teviston known as Alkali, where friends and relatives of many of the black residents of Teviston lived up through the sixties. As far as either of our informants could remember, Alkali had dried up (no puns intended, although there were chuckles when we phrased it that way) by the early to mid-seventies. Unfortunately, I can find no other reference to Alkali, at this time, on any maps or other documents. One more thing to put into my pile of topics that require further research.

Benny Beavers rode with Lowe and me, for most of this part of our adventure. As we passed abandoned and burned out buildings (and, even a few renovated structures), he usually knew the names of former owners or the businesses that had once existed within those walls. Beavers referred to at least two places during our drive as clubs. These were places where occasionally under-aged kids could get a drink. You could find, at most of these places card games or dice, as gambling was a popular pastime. When I pressed him about the nature of these so-called clubs, he admitted that a more apt description would have been simply to refer to them as juke joints. As far as he knew these were private affairs, not licensed by the county to sell liquor (probably not licensed as businesses). They might operate for a while out of someone’s house, a farm shed, or a section of labor housing, and then relocate, close, or pop up with a new name.

One of the more unusual sights Beavers wanted us to see was the pedestrian overpass that connected the east and west sides of State Route 99, the freeway that runs north and south throughout the heart of the Valley and that, at this point, acts as a barrier on the landscape between Pixley and Teviston. Those children that went to school in Pixley (rather than Earlimart) had to cross that overpass, daily to get to school. Often, for shopping or even gathering water, if a vehicle was not available, families made this crossing, between the predominately white world on the west side of the freeway and the

predominately black world to the east. But, the story that Beavers wanted most to tell us about that overpass had little to do with segregation, the injustice of the landscape created by the systemic racism that created the disparate worlds on the two sides of the freeway, or even about the treks he and his siblings made across that freeway for years. The story he wanted to share with us was about all the times he and his friends, probably between the ages of thirteen and seventeen would make the climb to the top of the enclosed pedestrian crossing to watch for “rich white women in convertibles.” He and his friends figured that, especially on warm days, they would be able to get a clear look at some woman’s cleavage. He said it was a silly, adolescent game, but he remembered those trips vividly and with great fondness. There, combined in that one story, however, were many of the pieces of the struggle. These were dirt-poor farm workers who were members of a society wherein they were second or third class citizens, not only based on their economic standing, but on the color of their skin (which had a direct impact on their economic opportunities). Here were a group of as many as five or six young African American males, just hitting puberty, looking down on the freeway as so much of what was out of reach speeded by below. Perhaps, the combination of a convertible, a wealthy white woman (with cleavage), and the means of escaping their lives in Teviston was an image that gave them hope for the future. Perhaps, the cleavage was far less important than even Beavers believes, today, and it was a deep-seated desire to be in that car, with that woman, driving as far away, as fast, as possible, that made those memories stand out so vividly

Throughout the early evening drive, I kept trying to build an image in my mind of the relationship between Teviston (and Alkali) to the labor camps that I had been told surrounded Teviston. I had recently read an article about the Freemanville labor camp, owned by the Freeman family. The *Fresno Bee* article from several years ago, mistakenly supported the claim that Freemanville was the spark that created Teviston and that the Freeman family should be seen as the founders of Teviston. While it is true that they owned this camp, a few miles south of much of what is seen as Teviston, and that they incorporated a small store that was patronized by other area residents (beyond those living in the camp), and the well in Freemanville pre-dates the Teviston water district and the associated well(s), there is ample evidence, both concrete and anecdotal to indicate that Freemanville was simply one of those six camps around Teviston, and the family either distorted or little understood the local history. Beavers and Jones said they knew the location of Freemanville (Arax admitted he had been there, but did not think he could find it, again), so we cruised out to the property where the camp was gone—the property is now just a farm—memorialized by a billboard-sized sign that reads, “Welcome to Freemanville.” Beavers told us that Mrs. Freeman, the widow of the original labor contractor who built the camp, still lived on the property. We hoped she would grant us some time, although none of us was prepared to do a full interview, at that point. The best we could hope for was entré—a solid introduction from a friend can often provide access to subjects that cannot be had any other way. We parked our cars where the driveway branched off from the end of the access road that lead to the property, and Beavers made his way to the house where he knocked on the door. We were too far away to hear anything, so we watched to see how the events unfolded. It seemed that Beavers knocked on the door for, at least, five minutes before we saw the front door open, behind the

screen. None of us, at that distance, could actually see through the screen, but we could tell that the door on the other side, that had been visible, before, was no longer evident, leading us to understand that someone had answered and a conversation was underway. Patiently, we waited while the conversation progressed. All we could see was Beavers from the back and the dark rectangle of the screen. After a few more minutes, we saw the door close behind the screen and Beavers turned to walk back up the long drive to where we were parked. We could tell, by the fact that he had not motioned us to enter the property, that his mission did not have a positive conclusion. When we made it back to within a range where we could talk and not be overheard, he told us that she did not want to talk to reporters, historians, anthropologists, authors, or anyone else about the history of Freemanville. We left it at that. The sun was now beginning to hang low on the horizon and those two tacos I had eaten hours before began to feel highly inadequate to getting me through the rest of the day.

During the several hours of our driving survey of Teviston, both Jones and Beavers had pointed out various current or past eateries—mostly local fast food (few chains view Pixley as a solid target for franchises)—and shared brief stories about owners; past and present. Almost universally, the discussion of the eateries centered on either their burgers, their fries, or their milk shakes. As we prepared to head out of Teviston, I suggested we grab a bite to eat. One of us would have to take Jones back to his place (he was still riding with Arax, at this point) and Lowe and I would drop Beavers off in Visalia on our way back north, to Fresno, so we figured that before that, we should, once again, sample the local fare. All the discussion about burgers, fries, and shakes, had me primed for a good, handmade burger from a local greasy spoon. After discussing all the options with the two local men, it was decided that our best bet would be a place called Three Brothers Drive-In, which originally was a drive-in owned by three brothers. Although, the three brothers no longer owned or operated Three Brothers, the food was excellent. The Indian or Pakistani family that now ran the place seemed determined to maintain the flavors that had established the eatery that had sat on that spot across from a large public park, for decades. We ate while we mulled over the events of the day, with our two new friends and then everyone made their way back to their own homes.

After we dropped Beavers off at his home in Visalia, Lowe said, “It’s good to know that those kids turned out alright.”

When I wrote my Master’s thesis, I called myself an ethnohistorian. Whereas, now, in the United States, most Ethnohistorians deal with subjects most closely associated with Native Americans, I continue to claim that original definition of the term as I feel it most accurately describes my approach to my research:

When the archeologist climbs out of his excavation... when the ethnologist records his last field note... when the folklorist turns off his tape recorder... and when the historian rewinds his microfilm... each have concluded an experience that will contribute substantially to the cause of ethno history [sic] (Ewers 1961).

While much of my research over the years has included the jobs described, here for the ethnographer (ethnologist) and historian, the exploration of Teviston with the locals, like

much of our exploration of South Dos Palos, the prior day, *felt* archaeological. Although the experience differs considerably from the hours I have spent, in the past, on my knees in the bottom of a pit or trench, scraping away at the earth, the mental framework with which I assessed my experiences on the landscape during this trip to Teviston were just as archaeological as ethnographic. I have often made trips to the different communities within which I do research to just get a feel for the place. I drive around in my car or on my motorcycle and even occasionally walk neighborhoods to see the relationship between homes, businesses (mostly gone, now), churches, and services. Like any good archaeologist, I try to take what I find on the landscape and juxtapose it against what I know about that community or similar communities and seek patterns. Often, these short survey trips provide connections that I missed relying solely on other types of sources. The trip with Jones and Beavers provided us with lots of opportunities to examine the ethnography, the history, and the archaeology of Teviston.



## CHAPTER 9: Conclusions

About two hundred pages ago, I indicated the purpose of this dissertation was to examine three primary research threads: to reclaim an invisible or lost history, to explore reasons why that history remains invisible or lost, and to examine the processes whereby individual and collective memories are remembered, forgotten, recollected, or discarded in the process of understanding the past, the present, and the future. While some of these threads weave in and out throughout this narrative, I believe that I have (more or less) clearly accomplished much of what I set out to do. Obviously, this process remains a work in progress. There is no way that I, or indeed anyone, will ever reclaim and recollect all the lost history of these historically African American settlements. The best any of us can hope for in this particular case is to collect as much material as possible before the sources are gone, and continue to try to reintroduce parts of the story to the broader history of the region. While it is clear that the reasons behind the invisibility of the history of these settlements remains rooted in systemic and systematic racism, the examples illustrated, herein, generally fall into the categories of restrictive covenants, redlining, lack of access to financing and to land, and sundown practices—all of which impacted residents of these communities. Finally, I have demonstrated, using Fairmead’s centenary and my book about the history of the town, as well as the adventures surrounding Lowe’s photographs, some of the ways in which memory works, in both understanding the present and envisioning the future, for the individual, the families, and the communities.

### ***Reclaiming an Invisible History***

I have always considered my work to be interdisciplinary. This is one of the two main reasons why I originally selected the World Cultures program at UC Merced. The others were the proximity of the university to the field and my desire to work with my primary advisor, Robin DeLugan. I have always viewed my work (and, by extension, myself) as interdisciplinary in nature. While I initially approached this research from an historical perspective (my initial research bridged my undergraduate and Masters programs), my goal was to always try to bring that past to life within the context of *history*, but to give voice to the people who made that history. One of the reasons that fieldwork took so much of my time, for the past few years, was that I needed to find avenues to tie the past to the present (and, as such, to the future). My ongoing participatory observation in Fairmead, although part of this dissertation, is part of a long-term study of the past and present that will continue long after this dissertation is filed away on a dusty shelf. I have fantasies about writing a thousand-page tome that covers the history of every rural historically African American community in the San Joaquin Valley or publishing a series of books, each one focused on a particular community: a follow up to the Fairmead book I wrote in 2012. I do not know if either of those will happen, but, my intent is to continue plugging along as long as I am able. I still have hundreds of hours of interviews, including my own, those recorded by Arax and Pickford, and others, from which to draw additional stories. Each new story fleshes out the overall *whole* that is the history of these communities and their relation to the broader history.

For this dissertation, however, I believe I have been able to reclaim enough to provide a solid explanation as to how these communities came into existence, how they

grew, and how (and why) they morphed demographically from majority or all black to settlements that are majority Hispanic, today. Simply by breaking down the communities I study into the four broad categories of Colonies, Unincorporated Towns, Unincorporated Neighborhoods, and Labor Camps, I believe I have been able to clarify some of the processes behind the establishment of these communities. Chapter Three clearly lays out these categories into which the extant communities have been sorted. This allowed me to compare, if you will forgive the cliché, apples to apples.

The factors that led to the creation of the colonies, such as Bowles or Allensworth, were very different from the conditions that moved populations into unincorporated towns like Fairmead, Lanare, or South Dos Palos. In the former, of course, these were planned, segregated communities born in the Exoduster movement and built upon the philosophy of separation until equal proposed by Booker T. Washington (and those who agreed with him, such as Allen Allensworth). Those are very different from the factors that sent African American families into existing, but often failing, towns where the lack of restrictive covenants and sundown policies, along with the willingness of landowners to sell directly to blacks, meant that at a time when it was very difficult for African Americans to purchase property or homes, these enclaves provided opportunities not available anywhere else in the region. Likewise, many of the unincorporated neighborhoods share many of the characteristics with the unincorporated towns. Where they differ is in proximity to the closest town. Home Garden, for example, is a legitimate part of Hanford, built after the construction of a new freeway in the 1960s plowed right through the historically black neighborhood near the center of town. The dependency and connection to the town is primarily what differentiates the neighborhoods from the towns. Again, it was through the willingness of landowners like Jacob Yeakel or Edwin Matheny that African American families were able to build homes and futures in these communities. Due to time and resource constraints, I have been unable to do much research into the black labor camps. This is yet another project for future research.

One point that I need to make when it comes to the different categories of communities is that there are several huge differences between the colonies and the unincorporated towns and neighborhoods. The first has a lot to do with the creation of these communities. The colonies were the product of the nineteenth century. As an extension of the Exoduster movement intersecting with the California Colonization Project, these were planned commercial communities with lofty goals rooted in their own historical space. Comparing the boosterism demonstrated in the advertisements and newspaper articles promoting Allensworth with those written to push Fairmead, illustrates one of the problems both experienced—a problem intrinsically tied to these later colony projects. To sum up that problem, one only need to look at the overall trajectory of the life of those two communities over the course of their first decade of life. In both cases, the promoters insisted that, in the future, these would be bustling cities with universities, schools, markets for farm goods, manufacturing, and other businesses. In neither case, could the towns live up to their own hype. Today, in addition to the small remnants of the town of Allensworth, the State of California maintains Col. Allen Allensworth State Park to commemorate the failed attempt to build a self-sufficient black community on the West Coast. The irony of the park, however, is that just a few miles

away communities like Alkali, Teviston, the Matheny Tract, and Sunny Acres, in the twentieth century, had larger black populations, for longer periods of time, and ultimately should be considered far more successful than Allensworth. Whereas Allensworth was, essentially, a middle-class project, these other settlements were populated by people much lower on the economic ladder. While the majority of the residents of Allensworth simply moved when the promise failed to materialize, the residents of these other communities stayed, worked hard, and built futures for their children and grandchildren. While the residents and movers of Allensworth never achieved their goal of building a polytechnic college within their borders, countless families from these other settlements sent their children to nearby community colleges, with many going on to complete four-year and advanced degrees.

The other great irony is that the processes that destroyed Allensworth (lack of both potable and irrigation water), in many cases, created the conditions in places like Lanare, South Dos Palos, and Fairmead that allowed blacks to purchase property in those communities. The clearest cases of this are Fairmead and South Dos Palos. In both of these towns, as the wells dried up whites abandoned the community creating a vacuum. In the case of Fairmead, one enterprising landowner began buying out his neighbors and selling that land, carrying his own contracts, to African American families, at a time when none of them would even have been considered for a bank loan or mortgage. In South Dos Palos, the move was even more dramatic, when the white population simply moved the town to a new location where there was better access to water for the town. Again, the vacuum created by the departure of the white population provided an opportunity for people of color to move into the abandoned area.

In the final irony, Allensworth collapsed at the same time as the black populations of other rural communities, as covered herein, began to increase. By the early 1920s, the population of Allensworth had dwindled to less than a hundred people (and would drop to less than fifty over the next decade). At the same time, the Amey family is established in Fairmead and the first black church is built in (South) Dos Palos. By the early 1930s, Allensworth was, essentially, a ghost town. At that same time, Dos Palos moved to its current location, leaving the old location to be renamed South Dos Palos and African Americans continued to move into the town. Following World War II, Allensworth is practically abandoned and wave after wave of African Americans are flooding into places like Teviston, Lanare, and Boot Hill (later renamed Sunny Acres). Tens of thousands of black farm workers migrated to the Valley (some as so-called Black Okies) initially into dozens of labor camps. While some of those same migrants ultimately ended up in the urban neighborhoods in Stockton, Fresno, and Bakersfield, many ended up in one or the other of these rural settlements.

The history of these communities is the history of the region, the state, and the country. Allensworth is the intersection of the Exoduster Movement and the California Colonization Project. It is part of the history of the first of those with such successful communities as Nicodemus, Kansas, or Langston and Boley in Oklahoma. It shares the history of California Colonization with dozens of other communities (non-black) such as Madera, Chowchilla, Exeter, and many others. Throughout the San Joaquin Valley, towns were (generally) built by one of two forces. The first was the railroads. You can identify railroad-built towns because (with few exceptions) the town originally ran parallel to the

tracks. Colonies, many of which were not on rail lines, tended to be built in grids with city/town lots in the center surrounded by uniform agricultural parcels.

I have demonstrated, in earlier chapters, the links between the history of these communities and the very important history of water (and access to it) that runs through the core of California history. I have clearly placed the populations of these communities to the broader so-called *Great Migration* of African Americans from the American South to the industrial north and both the urban and rural West. I have also demonstrated that world events (like the end of World War II) combined with local conditions led to the movement of people into these communities. Jim Crow, in the South drove blacks to California. Jim Crow in California, subsequently drove blacks into segregated communities. The onset of the demographic change moving blacks out of these communities while other populations move in can be linked directly to the Civil Rights successes of the 1960s. In every aspect, the history of these communities is linked to the broader California and United States history. This dissertation, along with my other publications and papers, as well as the publications of Mark Arax, the movie produced by Joel Pickford, and a photography exhibit of Ernest Lowe's historic photograph (planned for 2018 and funded by California Humanities), is beginning to reclaim this invisible history, through the process of re-collection or recollection. Gradually, this process is claiming (or reclaiming) a place in the broader history for these communities and the people who built them.

### ***Reasons Why the History Remains Invisible***

The second main thread of this study was to interrogate the ways in which the history of these communities, of black farm labor, and of the people who lived in these settlements remains absent from the broader, public history and to determine, if possible, the reasons for this absence. Chapter Two examined not only the scholarly omissions that perpetuate this absence from the historical narrative by examining several works where rural African Americans in the San Joaquin Valley should have shown up as major (or, at least, significant) players yet, for whatever reasons, were nonexistent (or greatly under-represented). If scholars, like Weber and Parsons do not see blacks on the agricultural landscape of the San Joaquin Valley, it is unlikely that the public will view that landscape any differently. Without an effort, these stories will never make their way out to the general population and into the general perception.

I also demonstrated how individual memory is trumped by collective memory citing multiple examples, over the years, where individuals with first-hand knowledge of these communities blotted out their own, personal memories, to equate Allensworth as the only rural black community with which they are familiar because, unlike Fairmead and Sunny Acres, Allensworth has official (governmental) and social recognition.

What I am unable to prove, of course, are the reasons why the history of these communities is absent from the broader social memory. One reason for this, I believe, is that much of it lies in systemic, systematic racism. It was racism, through exclusive Jim Crow practices, which included sundown town policies and laws, redlining, and restrictive covenants, that created these majority-black settlements. My thought experiment of showing a photograph of Nathaniel Knox and his three sons picking cotton outside Madera demonstrates that the image of blacks picking cotton is, in most people's

minds, linked to the American South and the plantation. That southern image is cemented in our psyche as being an isolated picture, peculiar to the former Confederate states—not taking into account the amount of cotton that was grown in Arizona, New Mexico, and, of course, the San Joaquin Valley—much of it picked by black hands for a century. But, I believe that the absence of a memory of blacks picking cotton in California, even with one hundred years of such a history, goes to a collective guilt or denial that disallows the reality of the link between what we, here in California, refer to as Agribusiness and the traditional plantation system of the pre-Civil War South. Large land holdings controlled by a few wealthy families worked by subaltern workers—almost exclusively non-white and exported from other regions to do the work. This has, historically, included the Japanese, Chinese, Hmong, Filipinos, African Americans, Sikhs, and others. Today, many Valley farmers rely on brown, nameless, faceless, Hispanic labor (most assumed to be undocumented, although there is no proof to support this belief). That image, of so-called illegals stooped over our fields has replaced and transformed any other possibility concerning the hegemonic view farm labor in California. Guilt, specifically what I call nostalgic guilt, facilitates a denial of much of our history—whether it includes the enslavement of millions of people of African descent or the genocide of millions of Native Americans, Americans have contributed to a refusal to reconcile their history with their present, thereby denying the reality of the past by masking it with the facade of a comfortable, if still inaccurate, present. To recognize the role of African American farm labor in the San Joaquin Valley, especially when that role includes the planting, weeding, picking, and chopping of cotton, draws uncomfortable parallels between the present (exploited Hispanic farm workers) and the past (exploited Asian and African American farm workers). To deny the past denies the present. This concept is best illustrated by J. G. Boswell’s comment that Corcoran had no black residents or the white lady in South Dos Palos who insisted that all the black residents of that community had moved away. This invisibility of black citizens in these communities is the result of an historical denial of our racist heritage. When confronted with problematic aspects of that history they choose (because of guilt) to ignore those parts for which they feel guilty, while elevating the rosier or happier memories. Perpetuating the invisibility of blacks in the fields of the Valley allows white (and other) Californians to ignore the obvious and demonstrable link between the labor practices in the *Old South* and those in the contemporary San Joaquin Valley.

### ***Memories Remembered, Forgotten, Recollected, or Discarded***

Finally, I hoped to demonstrate ways in which members of these communities—in fact, the communities, themselves—use memories (and history) to make sense of the present and to envision a future. (Throughout, I have found and documented numerous instances related to employing the past.) Just as Parsons and Weber excluded or even discarded African Americans from their descriptions of the landscape of the San Joaquin Valley, today, many of the residents of these settlements use history to define their communities, as well as their places within them. Fairmead residents regularly recall stories from the book I wrote in 2012 in meetings with outside agencies, such as the California High Speed Rail Authority or county, state, or federal governmental agencies. Even residents who are recent arrivals to the Madera County settlement depend on the

stories of the town's past to express their concerns for the present and to justify why investments should be made toward the community's future. Repeatedly, at community events, I hear black, white, and Hispanic residents using elements of Fairmead's past (even parts of the past for which they have no actual connection) as justification for efforts to try to bring the community back from total extinction. Although, I am sure that a few of these residents reference this past for economic reasons (to justify, for example, why the High-Speed Rail should pay top-dollar for land they need for the train project), but most, from my experience, genuinely love their community (warts and all) and want to see some of the things from the past—businesses, jobs, services—resurrected, and the community made *whole*, again. Containers of memory, like Shorty's Market, juke joints, the old schools and churches, provide a framework upon which to hang the re-collected memories. The formalization of portions of Fairmead history as commemorated during the centennial celebration as well as in my book and the official program for the event has provided a validation of the individual memories and created a shared past, even in those cases where it is based on non-shared experiences. Residents who arrived in Fairmead in the 1980s can point to events, people, and places that predated their arrival by half a century, while claiming that past for themselves. This is a common practice that I often point out to my lower division history students when I try to explain that early American history tends to exclude the history of the physical landscape. They learn about events along the Eastern Seaboard, not about the rich Spanish and Mexican societies that prospered in California long before statehood. This process is similar to religious communities that inject their history into the lives of people with no direct cultural or physical connection to those histories generating a sense of unity and belonging. I often point out that religious holy books—The Torah and the New Testament—are mostly historical and that a Jew born in Brooklyn and one born in Nigeria may have not physical or even recent biological connection to each other or the stories in the Old Testament, but they become unified by accepting and acquiring a shared history or heritage. Likewise, California requires anyone getting a degree from a State College or University to have a basic understanding of U.S. history, simply because sharing a history should unite those who embrace it. While I could write another two hundred pages on this subject, alone, suffice it to say, at this point, that we often form our identities based on a shared memory or history, and this is clearly demonstrated by the ways in which Fairmead residents *use* their history in the present. The history, representing a social framework of history upon which can be placed a shared identity and sense of community, has been utilized by local organizers (Fairmead Community and Friends) to help create shared goals for the future.

South Dos Palos and Teviston residents cherished fifty-year-old photographs of themselves as children and used the images to recall and reminisce about their past(s). Some of those who found themselves in the photographs of Ernest Lowe remembered those times fondly while the recollections of others were much less favorable. Re-collecting and recollecting their stories has, for me, been an honor and a privilege. Although, I would need to make a much more quantitative study of attitudes, I have the general impression that those who were adults in the 1960s, as expected, have much harsher memories of those times than those who were children, at the time. While the children remember playing, holidays, school, working in the fields, and other memories with a sense of nostalgia, the surviving members of their parents' generation tend to

remember the effects of poverty, the back-breaking effects of the actual work, the racism, the exploitation, and other less-favorable recollections. Similarly, in Fairmead the memories of residents were triggered by the stories in my book, the Centennial program, and other events. What I would have given to have been able to record the hundreds of conversations that went on during the centennial celebration. From that material, alone, I could have written many books about the history of Fairmead. Likewise, Arax, Lowe, Pickford, and I are in the process of trying to piece together the histories in other communities where the photographs provide, not only visual cues, but create bonds between the researchers and subjects that would otherwise be much more difficult to establish.

I also demonstrated how, while I can only suppose as to the why, many Valley residents discard memories (or forget) when they relate to African Americans in the fields and even the existence of these communities or the presence of blacks in these settlements. The readiness or ease with which people default to “Oh, you’re doing Allensworth,” when I describe my work, is easily explained, for most people, by the presence of the State Park, the signs on State Highway 99 for the park, and for regular newspaper accounts about events that pertain to the past of the community or on-going struggles with nearby farmers. However, numerous times, individuals who relied on the public memory of Allensworth, when pressed, had first-hand knowledge of one or more of these majority-black settlements and the people who lived and worked in them. The power of public history and memory to obfuscate actual, individual memory, has fascinated me from the beginning of my research. Intelligent, well-educated people—some lawyers and college professors—with intimate knowledge of Lanare, Home Gardens, Fairmead, and other communities, overlook their own memories in favor of Allensworth because of the validity given the latter by official state recognition and media coverage, while discounting their own knowledge because it lacks that same recognition and exposure. Individual memory is whittled away by the dominant cultural or social memory. Similarly, communities like Fairmead, are beginning to become part of that larger narrative. I would love to know, twenty years from now, the impact of the Fairmead book on local politics in Chowchilla and other parts of Madera County where (at least for a while) that little history book about the unincorporated town is used, regularly, by all school children in the region. Hopefully, I will eventually be able to produce similar volumes for some of the other historically rural African American settlements and provide the potential for creating new collective memories constructed from the individual recollections of those who built their lives in those communities.

### ***Future Study***

In some respects, there are many unanswered and unexplored questions about these Rural Historically African American Settlements across the floor of the San Joaquin Valley. Currently, I have not identified all the Unincorporated Towns or Neighborhoods that should be included. Additionally, I have been unable to do anything more than scratch the surface in relation to Labor Camps. While I have pieced together much of the history of South Dos Palos, Fairmead, Teviston, and a few other settlements, I have just begun to explore many of the other communities. Even in those communities where I have achieved some level of success reclaiming and re-collecting their history (and

everything that goes with that), there are many additional stories I hope to pursue. Fairmead, for example, is in the middle of negotiating with the State of California, the California High Speed Rail Authority, the County of Madera, the City of Chowchilla, and the Federal government to acquire a new sewer system and massive upgrades to its water infrastructure—two elements that will prevent the town from, literally, drying up and blowing away. Without access to sewers no new building permits will be allowed in the area, which means that no new homes can be built. More importantly, no business investment is possible, either. Without major upgrades to both water and sewage, there is no future for Fairmead. Likewise, I would like eventually to follow up with the children who have used my book about the history of Fairmead as a textbook and ascertain if knowing the small hamlet's history has any impact on the future perception of (and future actions toward) Fairmead.

The families related to the photographs taken by Ernest Lowe, more than fifty years ago, offer additional lines of inquiry as to the history of these communities. As the academic advisor, and interim project manager for a California Humanities grant project to build an exhibit from some of Lowe's images from South Dos Palos and Teviston, I will have the opportunity to continue following up with those families and other residents of those communities. Likewise, I have established contacts (or am currently cultivating those contacts) related to Home Garden, the Matheny Tract, some of the labor camps, and other communities where I have not been able, to-date, to conduct direct research. I plan to pursue these resources while they are still available. Many of those with first-hand knowledge of the history of these communities are quite elderly and many of those for whom I already have interviews have died since the interviews were recorded. The pool of informants is rapidly dwindling and the urgency I feel regarding the collection of their stories weighs on me, even as I write this. As is often the case, I kept postponing finishing this document until such time as I had more information. Unfortunately, there will always be another interview, newspaper article, or artifact that adds new information to the story—at which time, I will have no choice but to update and revise the story.

Perhaps my biggest regret, as to the material contained herein, is the lack of progress toward piecing together the history of any of the labor camps. Unfortunately, none of these camps continue to house black farm workers, so the only way I am able to gather data is to talk to those who, at some point, lived and worked in these camps. What I have been able to piece together so far has come, almost accidentally, through conversations, exchanges, and interviews of those who, upon their arrival to the San Joaquin Valley, spent some time in one or the other of the camps. Many of those (especially in King and Tulare Counties) went first to one of the labor camps before moving to one of the more permanent communities like Teviston. The neighborhood in South Dos Palos where the Marshall family now lives is across the street from the labor shacks in which many of the Marshall children grew up. Apparently, Delano, Strathmore, and Corcoran had large black labor camps. While Arax has some information about the Corcoran camp, little is recorded about the other two. The absence of the physical remains of these labor camps contributes to the loss of memory, or forgetting. The blotting out process continues as time takes us farther from the times when these camps provided the first housing for many new California residents. I fear that this history, like those of some of the small settlements which no longer have African American residents

(El Nido, for example) may be lost or, at the least, very difficult to uncover. I will persevere, however, and continue to work to unearth those stories, as well.

I mentioned, earlier, my dream of one day producing a series of small books, each telling the history of one of these black settlements. The West of the West organization has asked me to consider writing a revised version of my Fairmead book (or, as they put it, “Would you be willing to finish the book?”). Perhaps they will publish more than just the one title if that one is (at least somewhat) successful.

Finally, the most ambitious of potential future plans for this research is to expand what I have done with these majority-black communities and compare that to other subaltern settlements in the region, across the country, or around the world. Both the Chinese in the nineteenth century and Japanese in the first half of the twentieth century found themselves forced to live in segregated communities because of many of the same mechanisms that restricted the opportunities of American blacks: redlining, restrictive covenants, and sundown policies. Many Valley communities, throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, tried to obliterate their Chinatowns. Visalia burnt its Chinatown to the ground and rebuilt it in the first decades following 1900. Likewise, Merced used the expansion of State Highway 99 from a two-lane road to a freeway in the 1960s to literally cover that community’s Chinatown. Hanford, on the other hand, has tried, albeit quite late, to recapture, restore, and reclaim its historic “China Alley.” Although, I find it interesting that the only parts of Hanford’s Chinatown they want to address are the buildings that housed the earliest Chinese-owned businesses, not any of the sections of the community in which the Chinese were segregated from their white neighbors. At least two interviews with Fairmead residents suggest that there was a Japanese settlement not too far from that community, somewhere between Fairmead and Madera. I have not been able to ascertain whether this was a labor camp or a more substantial community.

These are local communities that should be compared to the communities in this study for the same reasons that I criticized both Professors Parsons and Weber: leaving a population out of the narrative while giving preference to another. It would also be beneficial to compare these settlements to other black communities across the country. This includes miners in Washington State, cotton pickers in Arizona, as well as Exoduster communities in Oklahoma and Kansas. Beyond the borders of the United States there are hundreds of subaltern communities where these same questions should be asked, especially in the areas of individual and collective identity and their relation to the public and private memories and history. Such studies should start with an interrogation of the inclusion or exclusion of these populations within the public or shared memory. Some of these examples could include the Travelers in the United Kingdom, Indigenous communities throughout Latin America, the Romany in Europe, or even the Hmong in China and Southeast Asia. In all of these, and other cases the relationship between the hegemonic power of the state (represented by social and public memory or history) clashes with individual and community memory and identity on the ground where they intersect. This study provides one possible model for such a study. While my subject matter remains very localized, I am certain that much of what was culled from the interviews, interactions, and other research methods can successfully be applied to other communities.

Each of the goals, outlined here, could take a lifetime to complete. Each of those goals for future research represents years of fieldwork and archival research. It is doubtful that I will be able to complete, to my satisfaction, any of them. My hope is that, perhaps, in some small way, this document and my other publications will inspire a new generation.

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## END NOTES

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<sup>i</sup> Within this context, I am using the term symbolic violence to include all of those non-physical representations of violence or threats of violence linked to segregation, discrimination, threats, intimidation, harsher prison sentencing, policing and other actions that simply imply the certainty of physical violence as the reward for noncompliance to social norms. *Habitus*, here, refers to the process whereby individuals acquire culture from their family, their schools, their social institutions (churches, clubs, etc.), media, and society, in general. Through the process of *habitus*, the individual learns what behaviors are acceptable within a specific context and what repercussions exist when an individual's actions are contrary to the expected, accepted response to external stimuli.

<sup>ii</sup> This chapter is based on a paper presented at the 111<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting of the American Anthropological Association, in San Francisco, November 2012.

<sup>iii</sup> Allensworth is the best known, almost universally, in the Valley. The State of California has built a state park on the site, and in recent years, there have been numerous stories in the local (and national) press about attempts to build mega-dairies next to the park.

<sup>iv</sup> Although, I first came across this paper several years before writing this chapter, I repeatedly walked past a poster for it in the Social Science and Management building at the University of California, Merced. A section of the second floor is reserved for graduate students in my program, and a colleague, who had attended Cal, thirty years before, proudly displayed a poster from Professor Parson's presentation of that same paper, on campus. I started to discuss my concerns about the paper with my colleague, and discovered that calling into question any part of it, especially without the written text, would be futile. I plan to present this fellow student with a copy of the published article, before either of us leave the program, to get his feedback on the article.

<sup>v</sup> Matheny is also responsible for financing African Americans in a development outside Tulare, known today, simply as the *Matheny Tract* or even *Matheny*.

<sup>vi</sup> Throughout this proposal, I will refer to the San Joaquin Valley as either the Valley or use the full title. Occasionally, I may also refer to the region as Central California, a term often used by locals to designate the area between Bakersfield and Stockton (the San Joaquin Valley). This is to differentiate it from the Central Coast (Santa Barbara to Monterey) or the Sacramento Valley, to the north. Normally, California's Central Valley is the term used to designate the combined Sacramento and San Joaquin Valley, which represent two distinct riverine systems that flow through the two regions.

<sup>vii</sup> For the purposes of this study, the San Joaquin Valley includes the counties of Kern, Tulare, Kings, Fresno, Madera, Merced, Stanislaus, and San Joaquin. This area may also referred to as California's Great Central Valley, or the Central Valley, however, that reference often includes the Sacramento Valley which lies north of the San Joaquin Valley.

<sup>viii</sup> Several sets of oral histories have proven to be invaluable to my work. The first is a series of interviews conducted by undergraduate students at California State University, Fresno, in the departments of History and Anthropology. This first series is stored in the Special Collections section of the Madden Library at CSU, Fresno. The

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second set of interviews were recorded in the 1970s by federally and state funded oral history projects. The Fresno County Historical Society has a collection of interviews of people (or family members) who lived in the area as early as the first decades of the twentieth century. Similar collections exist in other area archives. A third set of recordings, approximately 200 hours in duration, has been made available to me for my research by Mark Arax. These recordings were compiled over approximately fifteen years and were part of his reporting for several articles and books.

<sup>ix</sup> T Thomas Fortune established the *New York Age* (as the *New York Freeman*), in 1884. This was one of the *Race Papers* frequently used by Col. Allensworth and William Payne, the colony's main promoters to attract potential pioneers.

<sup>x</sup> These notes are taken from the hand-written census records. The spellings of individual names is based on those records, some of which may have been incorrectly recorded, while others are difficult to read in the original census-taker's handwriting.

<sup>xi</sup> Other sources suggest 1940 as the date the Freeman family bought the property. Although I was able to find just a few references in newspaper articles to Freemanville, I was unable to secure an interview with members of the Freeman family. On one of our visits to Teviston in 2015, Arax, Pickford, Lowe, and I drove out to the property south of Teviston and attempted to initiate contact. We were turned away.

<sup>xii</sup> For details concerning Fairmead, Teviston, and other communities mentioned in this chapter, please refer to Chapter 4: Re-collecting and Reclaiming History.

<sup>xiii</sup> I am using Mozell Hill's definitions in relation to Utopian and Promoter's communities, in this section. I have provided more detailed information about Hill's classifications in Chapter 4: Re-collecting and Reclaiming History.

<sup>xiv</sup> A ponding basin is little more than an open area, normally dug out to form a basin with sloping sides, where rain runoff is diverted and accumulated. The standing water trickles into the soil and, eventually, deeply into the aquifer, recharging the ground water. Some counties, like Fresno County, have extensive networks of basins throughout the county. Madera county, on the other hand, has no ponding basins and, as a result, has seen their own groundwater dry up faster than those counties that have established infrastructure to recharge the system. Over the last century, the San Joaquin Valley floor has, in some localities dropped an average of two inches per month, as the result of diminishing supplies of ground water (Kasler, Sabalow, and Reese 2015).

<sup>xv</sup> There are numerous works on labor in California's agricultural sector. I have referenced several throughout this dissertation, however, most of these were cited either because they included references to African Americans in the fields, or because of their lack of inclusion of blacks in California agriculture. Additional background can be found in a variety of works, including *Farming the Home Place: A Japanese American Community in California 1919-1982* by Valerie J. Matsumoto, *Growing Up Nisei: Race, Generation, and Culture among Japanese Americans of California, 1924-49*, by David K. Yoo, *The Politics of Prejudice: The Anti-Japanese Movement in California and the Struggle for Japanese Exclusion* by Roger Daniels, *The Elusive Eden: A New History of California*, by Richard B. Rice, *They Were Only Diggers: A Collection of Articles from California Newspapers, 1851-1866* by Robert F. Heizer, *This Bittersweet Soil: The Chinese in California Agriculture, 1860-1910* by Sucheng Chan, *Entry Denied: Exclusion and the Chinese Community in America, 1882-1943* edited by Sucheng Chan,

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and *Contagious Divides: Epidemics and Race in San Francisco's Chinatown* by Nayan Shah are just a few that look at Japanese, Native, and Chinese labor in California.

<sup>xvi</sup> For my purposes, here, I use the term, *Nostalgic Guilt*, to represent a state where the recollection (not re-collection) or remembrance of the past generates memories that create a feeling of guilt on the part of the person confronting that memory. I often tell my U.S. history students that until the United States embraces their dual original sins – native genocide and chattel slavery – the present conditions of racism, anti-immigrant hatred, and jingoism can never be addressed. The forgetting of these historical realities in place of such terms as “Southern Heritage” is caused by this nostalgic guilt. If the guilt is too strong, it is replaced with a nostalgic (often non-factual) memory. The 1950s might have been a great time for white Americans—especially the baby boomers whose childhood is rooted in those year, but most of those same boomers chose to forget Jim Crow, poll taxes, lynchings and other social ills common at the time.