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# Reservoir Noir:
# Drowned Towns, Uneven Development, and Black Dam/nation in New Deal South Carolina

By

Morgan Paige Vickers

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Geography

in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor Jovan Scott Lewis, Chair
Professor Nathan F. Sayre
Professor Stephanie E. Jones-Rogers
Professor Nik Heynen

Summer 2024

Abstract

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Morgan P. Vickers

Doctor of Philosophy in Geography

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Professor Jovan Scott Lewis, Chair

*Reservoir Noir* illuminates the making of the New Deal Santee-Cooper Hydroelectric and Navigation Project in rural South Carolina, the subsequent inundation of the floodplain between the Santee and Cooper rivers, and the unmaking of 901 Black and poor white families therein. Through the case study of the Santee-Cooper Project, this dissertation illuminates how race and the environment are coeval, simultaneously produced by governments and white elites, often to destroy or displace both. South Carolina's ecological and racial history are not historical anomalies but are instead representative of the larger American project of Black suppression for the benefit of white progress. *Reservoir Noir* demonstrates a commitment to a structural analysis of the processes that constitute America's social, moral, and geographical self-identification. It illuminates the "wasted" environments and inhabitants that have always been regarded as incompatible with progressive futures. Exclusion, destruction, and dispossession are not new or even wholly "modern" projects, but, rather, are constitutive of American history. *Reservoir Noir*, therefore, illuminates the inequities of the New Deal project, and its manifestations in rural South Carolina, to offer guidance for addressing racial, environmental, social, and political-economic crises of our own times — as well as the infrastructures being introduced to "solve" them.

*It matters not, I Know, this is my*
*Beloved land. It matters not, I Know*
*That I hold sacred every spot where lie*
*Remains of those who died so long ago;*
*Who lie in peace close to the homes they loved.*
*It matters not that 'neath these age-old trees*
*High-minded men so eagerly once roved*
*In search of homes. Far over distant seas*
*They came. And here, they lived, And Heaven smiled.*
*For note how from Virgin Wilderness*
*They made a Garden; how they tamed the Wild.*
*And found in their new land happiness.*
*It matters not that all of this must go.*
*All my regrets - they matter not, I Know.*

Francis Marion Kirk, *Sonnet of Regret* (1935)

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# Acknowledgments

I worked my way through graduate school amid the Covid-19 pandemic. Halfway through the second semester of my graduate career, the world stopped. I learned to be a scholar, to think capaciously, to connect the dots from the isolation of my bedroom, reading books and writing fragments as I stared at the same four walls.

I end my graduate career now at a different world-altering moment, one marked by the violent murder, removal, and genocide of Palestinians. The ecocidal imperatives of the settler colonial regime are driven by simultaneous social, historical, and narrative efforts to frame historic Palestine as "uninhabitable," and then to use the infrastructures of war to materially make it so. As I write this, the settler state is drafting recolonization schemes, envisioning a future in the absence of the people who have lived on the land for centuries; likewise, college campuses are actively suppressing student and faculty protests with militarization, threatening not only academic life, but also all of our liberties. Put simply, I cannot write about the removal of poor and racialized populations, the destruction of historical ecologies, the violent implementation of uneven infrastructure projects, and the recolonization of emptied lands, among other violences, without witnessing, thinking about, advocating against, actively condemning the same patterns in real-time. As C. L. R. James reminds us, "The violent conflicts of our age enable our practiced vision to see into the very bones of previous revolutions more easily than heretofore… Such is our age and this book is of it, with something of the fever and the fret. Nor does the writer regret it. This book is the history of a revolution and written under different circumstances it would have been a different but not necessarily a better book" (James, 1989, xi).

While writing this dissertation, I lost two grandparents, my maternal grandmother in 2020 and my paternal grandfather in 2023. Like many historians, I processed my grief by following traces, flipping through my family archives, and holding personal artifacts. I had a privilege not afforded to those whose lives I illuminate in this dissertation — the possibility of returning home to the many enduring places that raised me, where I knew I would be surrounded by the many communities that made me. I visited final resting places, wrote and delivered a eulogy, and asked my ancestors for guidance. From my Grammy, Kaye Gooch, I received a deep desire to make sense of the past, connect unseen dots, (dis)entangle myth, memory, and history. From my Baca, Glendon Llyrd Vickers, I received literal and metaphorical seeds — demonstrations of a life of generous love and proof that Black ecologies are not merely theoretical or historical interrogations, but a lived reality.

Like all intellectual projects, this one was greatly improved by the feedback received following my public presentations. I am grateful to the University of Michigan Museum of Art (UMMA), the Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum, and the European Society for Environmental History for inviting me to dialogue with artists and interdisciplinary scholars. This work was greatly improved through conversations held and connections made during the annual meetings of the American Association of Geographers, the American Society of Environmental History, the Caribbean Studies Association, and the National Council on Public History, as well as the Yale (Re)Thinking Landscape Conference, the Dismantle Preservation Virtual Unconference, and the Placing Conference at the University of Pennsylvania EnviroLab.

The questions offered by audience members and moderators, as well as the feedback given by the anonymous reviewers of the *Annals of the American Association of Geographers*, *The Arrow Journal*, *Environment and Planning F*, *American Anthropologist*, *Environmental History Now*, and Sage Publications, all improved this work substantially. Portions of this dissertation, notably the Chapter 'Swampification,' were published in the *Annals of the American Association of Geographers* special issue on Race, Nature, and the Environment in 2022. Other select sentences were published in 2023 in *The Arrow Journal*.

My education, archival research, and fieldwork were graciously supported by fellowships from the National Science Foundation, the South Caroliniana Library at the University of South Carolina and Wilson Library at the University of North Carolina. Additional research was performed in-person or virtually with the South Carolina Historical Society, the National Archives and Records Administration, the South Carolina Department of Archives and History, the Orangeburg Historical Society, the Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library, and the Schomburg Center. Edward Blessing, Jessica Elfenbein, Al Hester greatly broadened my knowledge, from inside archive to out in the field.

Despite the isolation of the pandemic and of graduate school, I have emerged with several collaborators, co-conspirators, comrades, and friends. The Department of Geography at UC Berkeley is full of thoughtful and generous thinkers, who nurtured, supported, and advocated for my work from the very beginning through the submission of this dissertation. I am always inspired by my graduate peers and my undergraduate students, who demonstrate the beauty and power of loving, studying, and struggling together as a united collective. Though I could not include them all on my committee, each of the following faculty members in the department (and more) played a hand in my intellectual development during my time at Berkeley: Tianna Bruno, Sharad Chari, Desiree Fields, Jake Kosek, and Brandi Thompson Summers.

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Thank you, a million times over, to my dissertation committee. Nathan F. Sayre brought generous analysis to every conversation, nurtured my writing, and always reminded me to dig deeper into the empirics, to tell a fuller story. Stephanie E. Jones-Rogers possesses such deep and rich historical knowledge, a passion for teaching, and a sharp attention to detail. Nik Heynen is a generous and capacious thinker who takes seriously the work of graduate students and will drop

everything to grab lunch with you. Finally, so much of the past five years would not be possible without the mentorship and generosity of Jovan Scott Lewis, my chair, who challenges, pushes, laughs with, and uplifts me in all my endeavors. I am so lucky to have learned from all of you.

I love being a Vickers. My love of history undoubtedly emerges, at least in part, from our shared habit of sitting around the kitchen table on a Friday night until the early hours of the morning, reminiscing, looking through our own personal archives, and breaking bread with one another. My parents beautifully demonstrate how hard work, comic relief, good music, and unwavering love are the fabric of a full life. My siblings remind me to be present, to be goofy, to stay humble, and, of course, that challenging authority is best done as an organized collective (sorry Mom and Dad). Thank you to my beautiful grandmother, who reminds me every day to cherish community, learn everything I can, and see as much of the world as possible.

My partner, Kristal, has been with me from the very early days of my graduate program, and played an enormous role in my ability to make it through. How beautiful it is to feel seen, to be known, and to laugh every single day. Kristal is the clearest demonstration of love, compassion, kinship, and joy. She and our two beautiful, rambunctious, and gentle-hearted cats bring an impossible amount of joy to my life.

In documenting this history, I seek to challenge “progressive” histories, push back against uneven development schemes, illuminate the joys and complexities of Black Lowcountry life in the Santee-Cooper Basin, and consider pathways toward eco-social repair. So much of the trauma that the residents survived, as well as the justifications for the inundations and dispossessions, is still murky, unknown, tied down, and intentionally hidden. It is my hope that this dissertation will allow us to begin to dive below the surface to denaturalize the infrastructures and ecologies that continue to shape our world and the stories we tell about it.

# Introduction:

# Black Dam/Nation

> "How far may men fight for the beginning of comfort, out beyond the horrid shadow of poverty, at the cost of starving other[s] and what the world calls lesser men? How far may those who reach up out of the slime that fills the pits of the world's damned compel men with loaves to divide with men who starve? The answers to these questions are hard, but yet one answer looms above all, — justice lies with the lowest; the plight of the lowest man, — the plight of the black man — deserves the first answer, and the plight of the giants of industry, the last."
>
> - W. E. B. Du Bois, *Darkwater*, 52-53

> "It is not only necessary to fight for the liberty of your people. You must also teach that people once again, and first learn once again yourself, what is the full stature of a man; and this you must do for as long as the fight lasts. You must go back into history, that history of men damned by other men; and you must bring about and render possible the meeting of your people and other men."
>
> - Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 293

## Introduction

Eighty years after the inundation of Lake Marion, I boarded a pontoon from the boardwalk of Taylor's Landing in Eutawville, South Carolina. The pontoon was not my own and was certainly not captained by me, but rather belonged to an archivist named Edward Blessing, who spent many afternoons in the summer of 2022 pulling archival records for me at the South Caroliniana Library. With Edward's archival assistance, I teased apart the story of the creation of Lake Marion, which made up one-half of the largest land-clearing project in United States history at the time of its creation (O'Reilly 1939). Upon hearing I had not yet visited the reservoirs I was studying, Blessing offered to take me out on his family boat.

Lake Marion is choppy. Cut the engine of a boat while in the middle of the lake and you will feel yourself rocking back and forth aggressively with the waves. Turn your head in a circle and you may not even be able to see the shore. Often referred to as South Carolina's "inland sea," the reservoir spans over 110,000 acres across five different counties and contains over 300 miles of shoreline (South Carolina Department of Natural Resources 2014a). While the enormity of the reservoir gives it a sense of emplacement, entangling it with the present ecologies and active recreational industries of the region, it does not feel like an ancient body. Rather, still-living trees, waterlogged tree trunks, sandbars, rocks, stumps, or even, at times, graves jut out of the water, creating obstacles for even the most skilled boat captains, and leaving a material trace

of man's manipulation of the landscape (Rheney 2008; Singletary 2008). These traces of past lives and terraformations instill in visitors a sense of grief, of haunting.

On the boat, Blessing navigated us using 1927 United Postal Service rural delivery route maps of Orangeburg County. Using this map, Blessing ferried us to the semi-submerged town of Ferguson, which was once a hill upon which a kiln and other lumber mill buildings lay. At its peak, the town employed approximately one thousand workers, built fifty-three cottages with indoor plumbing for "the better class of employees," and constructed ninety-seven houses for "good [common] labor" (Kinzer, 2017, 135-136). Ferguson had its own water supply system, electric lights, and even its own hospital. On average, the mill, owned and operated by the Santee River Cypress Lumber Company, had approximately 200 to 250 Black laborers at all times, most of whom performed the logging activities in the swamplands and were forced to live far away from the mill in lower, flood-prone regions in or adjacent to swamps, and approximately 100 to 150 white laborers, who were given better and safer jobs in the mills and homes located on higher, dryer ground (Ibid.).

From Ferguson, we boated approximately 100 yards west to the site of a former mill village, then cut the engine. As we rocked back and forth, hearing only the sound of the choppy waves and wind gusts, Blessing cross-referenced the digitized map and the boat's depth finder, attempting to locate a former landed presence in the middle of a vast body of water. After a moment of silence, he said, "We're eleven feet above the floor of the lake. Right now, we're sitting where the roofs of the houses would have been." The group sat in silence for a moment, listening to the waves lap up against the side of the boat.

We were overwhelmed by inundation.

—

On April 7, 1934, South Carolina passed legislation to incorporate the South Carolina Public Service Authority,[1] a "Body Corporate and Politic" endowed with the right to build canals, dams, reservoirs, and power plants in order to develop the Santee, Cooper, and Congaree rivers for navigation, hydroelectricity, swampland reclamation, and the reforestation of the region's swamplands. The Authority was purportedly designed "for the benefit of all the people of South Carolina and for the improvements of their health, welfare, and material prosperity" (Biles, 1984, 7). Central to its founding was the explicit goal of constructing the Santee-Cooper Hydroelectric and Navigation Project.[2]

Constructed over 27 months between 1939 and 1942,[3] the Santee-Cooper Project required dozens of Harza Engineering Company engineers and more than 12,500 laborers from contractors of the Public Service Authority, the Civilian Conservation Corps, the Works Progress Administration, and other state and federal work agencies to clear hundreds of thousands of acres of swampland, timberland, and farmland to erect a 42-mile system of dams and dikes that would impound Lakes Marion and Moultrie (originally called the Santee Reservoir and the Pinopolis Reservoir).[4] Whereas Lake Marion spans over 110,000 acres, the smaller, downstream Lake

[1] Today, the South Carolina Public Service Authority is known as the Santee Cooper company, or, simply, Santee Cooper. In this dissertation, I use South Carolina Public Service Authority, the Public Service Authority, or the Authority to refer to the organization responsible for construction by the name they were referred to at the time.
[2] Henceforth referred to as the Santee-Cooper Project.
[3] As I will illuminate in Chapter 2, nearly half a decade of legal battles between the Public Service Authority and various power companies across the state and region led to a massive delay in the construction of the project that was accompanied by massive budget cuts due to the prolonged nature and insecurity of the Project (Biles 1984).
[4] In this dissertation, I use the current names, Lake Marion and Lake Moultrie, rather than the original names, for consistency, and because the reservoirs were renamed shortly after construction, unlike the South Carolina Public

Moultrie, spans over 60,000 acres within Berkeley County and possesses over 200 miles of shoreline (South Carolina Department of Natural Resources 2014b). At the time, the combined construction of the two reservoirs constituted was the largest land clearing project in United States history, which one reporter described as South Carolina's "most portentous undertaking… since the Civil [W]ar" (O'Reilly 1939; see also Biles 1984; Hart 2013).

Central to the Santee-Cooper Project was the removal of 901 families, totaling between 2500 and 3000 people.[5] An estimated 80 to 95 percent of these families were Black, and almost all were working-class or poor agrarian families living and working on the same lands cultivated by their families for generations (Edgar 1984; Hart, 2013, 129; O'Reilly 1939). For Black and white people in the Basin, "Life was good, but we were all poor" (Lovern, 1996, 166). Infrastructural divestment, structural underdevelopment, racial capitalism, and centuries of enslavement left Black people in decaying homes — some of which were slave cabins — that lacked electricity and protection from the mosquitoes that dominated the region. While they lived in rural regions and faced abject poverty, crumbling transportation systems, limited opportunities, and malarial conditions, Black families in the Basin had complex, capacious, and rich communal lives.

Many Black families lived in marginal, swampy regions that were regarded with disdain by white community members, but offered Black people space for subsistence farming — particularly the cultivation of Black foodways, especially rice and sugarcane — and the free grazing of cattle and pigs. Others remained on the plantation lands where they or their ancestors were previously enslaved. In all-Black communities, including Cedar Hill, Brownsville, Black Oak, Ferguson, and Spiers Landing, children attended community schools, families joined one of dozens of churches, and family members of all ages worked as farmers, tenant farmers and sharecroppers, mill workers, domestic workers in white homes, teachers, carpenters, general laborers, and more (Edgar 1984; Hart, 2013, 129; Kinzer 2017; Lovern 1996; The News and Courier 1941; O'Reilly, 1939; U.S. Census Bureau 1930). These families were not only materially dispossessed, but they were also rendered dispossessable and insignificant through various processes of social submersion, which I call *dam/nation*.

## Dam/nation

In *Reservoir Noir*, I contend with multiple scales of *dam/nation*. As a colonial-imperial tool, dam/nation is a practice exerted upon racialized people and the spaces they inhabit, threatening to subsume their worlds. Drawing upon Frantz Fanon's notion of *les damnés*, or "the wretched" in the English translation, dam/nation is a form of white geographic domination that essentializes and abstracts Black people and their ecologies, linking the climates, conditions, afflictions, and characteristics of disdained biomes with the people who inhabit them (Asaka 2017; Fanon 1963; McKittrick and Woods 2007). In the Santee-Cooper Project, dam/nation manifests through the regulation and containment of Black life and swampland ecologies, because Black people, who often lived in or adjacent to swamplands in the Santee-Cooper Basin,

Service Authority, which still bears that name in legislative documents today, but is privately and informally referred to as Santee Cooper.

[5] It is difficult to get a definitive number of how many people were displaced, given the high rate of migrant and tenant farming, renting, and boarding (as opposed to homeowners, who were better tracked by the Authority's legal department).

were socially framed as embodying the conditions of the swamp: unproductive, pestilential, unruly, uncontainable, and in need of transformation. To be dam/ned is to be dehumanized, shunned, animalized rendered subaltern through psychic and social damage enacted by the colonizer (Chari, 2017, 166). It is to construct and materially produce "an archipelago of Human Otherness," an economically and politically "underdeveloped" population comprised of people of African descent, Indigenous peoples, the jobless, the homeless, the impoverished, and people systemically rendered jobless and criminalized (Wynter, 2003, 322).

While dam/nation etymologically shares roots with ecclesiastical imagery, harkening spirits, devils, demons, and deities "capable of possessing a human being," my invocation of the term is not spiritual or metaphysical, and instead aligns more closely with Sylvia Wynter and Katherine McKittrick's notion of the *demonic* (McKittrick, 2006, xxiv; Wynter 1990).[6] In Wynter's (1990) "Beyond Miranda's Meanings: Un/Silencing the 'Demonic Ground' of Caliban's 'Woman'" and McKittrick's (2006) *Demonic Grounds*, the two scholars conceive the demonic as a classificatory system in which race "functions to distinguish Man from his human (black, native, female) others" (McKittrick, 2006, xxv). Building upon Wynter's concept of the demonic ground, McKittrick proposes that demonic ground*s* are multiscalar and subaltern political spaces — "the space of Otherness, the grounds of being human, poverty archipelagos, archipelagos of human Otherness, les damnés de la terre/the wretched of the earth, the color-line, terra nullius/lands of no one" (Ibid., 123).

Dam/nation produces the *uninhabitable* — "nonexistent lands and underwater places" that are zones of geo-racial organization, i.e. "places and bodies outside God's grace" (Ibid., 129). This seemingly spiritual designation is wholly human, with white settlers having the power to designate any space of disdain or perceived sin as demonic or uninhabitable. Dam/nation is the process of producing a binary, through which white spaces are made pure and homogenous through the identification and removal of impure spaces and populations (Lipsitz 2007). Colonization framed underwater or semi-submerged spaces, including swamplands, as uninhabitable and therefore "naturally ungeographic" (McKittrick, 2006, 130). The designation of "uninhabitable" marks spaces as being improperly used, and therefore necessitates intervention, geographic transformation, and regulation to make the spaces inhabitable and profitable. The production of uninhabitable spaces — and thereby the enactment of dam/nation — is thus the production of uneven geographies. Dam/nation is thus linked with Hartman's notion of the "dispossessed" — a population "relegated as fungible, disposable, surplus, and not quite human" (Hartman, 2019, 94). The racialization of the Other is a process of white self-actualization; to make Black people dispossessed or dispossessable, they must be rendered nonhuman "for White subjects to know their own humanity" (King, 2019, 18; see also Cooper 2017). Tiffany Lethabo King states this plainly: "Man demands the invention and negation of the Negro and Native to know the self" (Ibid., 53).

Dam/nation is both a social condition and a class position. In *The Philadelphia Negro*, Du Bois tracks the four classes ascribed to Black people in the Seventh Ward of Philadelphia, a breakdown that we can also observe in the rural South. Grade One reflects the "families of undoubted respectability" who earn sufficient income and do not participate in menial labor; Grade Two reflects the "respectable working-class… in comfortable circumstances;" Grade

[6] Stephen Grace (2012) used a similar term in his book *Dam Nation: How Water Shaped The West And Will Determine Its Future*, though his invocation of the phrase "dam nation" specifically speaks to how the United States, and particularly the West, was able to sustain settlement and eventual growth due to the state implementation and imposition of water control and containment infrastructures.

Three encompasses those living in poverty, but who have "no touch of gross immorality or crime;" and Grade 4 refers to what Du Bois calls "the submerged tenth," or the lowest class of "criminals, prostitutes, and loafers"[7] (Du Bois, 1967 [1899], 310-311; Hartman, 2019, 112-113). Though, as the name suggests, the *submerged tenth*[8] only encompassed a small portion of the Black population, white communities and government entities alike based their perception of all Black people upon the actions of the "submerged" (Baltzell, 1967, xxvi). Du Bois' breakdown is limited in its categorical distribution of Black people, particularly in its attention only to the urban[9] and its reduction of Black people to the external conditions that shaped their lives, such as limited job opportunities, social and spatial segregation, and the enduring legacies of enslavement. However, an attention to this structure is useful for understanding how social perceptions of Black people were shaped not only by racists and power-hungry politicians, but also by the respectability politics that permeated both Du Bois' work[10] and the broader opinion of both Black intellectuals and upper-class white Americans in the early 20th century (Myrdal 1944; Bunche 1940). White societal forces and pressures created the conditions for social submersion in early 20th century America; intellectuals, politicians, and laymen gave names and categories to them, which opened up space for the reproduction of such perceptions.

In *Reservoir Noir*, I argue that swamplands are a locus of Black ecologies, and that Black dam/nation produces co-constitutive processes of ecological and social damnation, including the racialization of landscapes, the equating of Blackness with disease, and, ultimately, environmental destruction. If dam/nation is a praxis of social stratification, the material consequence manifests through condemnation, the legal foreclosure and seizure of private property for public use. This is a framework through which we can understand how the social submersion — or the attempted social submersion — of poor and Black people created the conditions in which the state was able to submerge their communities materially. Social dam/nation makes possible material condemnation. Dam/nation is a project of racial capitalism, one with the intended goal of alienating Black populations from nature, first through alienating their labor and suppressing their psychic and social relationships to nature, then by removing them from the ecological spaces they once called home, and finally by utilizing their former homes for redevelopment projects.

Land transformations are enacted not only through bombing, felling, leveling, and otherwise destroying homes, infrastructures, businesses, and community centers, but also, critically, through ecocide, or the intentional, large-scale destruction of nature by humans

---

[7] While there was little evidence of criminality, strife, or uprisings in the Santee-Cooper Basin amongst the Black population in the 20th century, the dam/ned were held in a position of social submersion.

[8] Macarena Gómez-Barris contends that there exists a 'submerged viewpoint,' or a way of seeing that forces subaltern peoples to organize their social and political lives differently, looking up at the world from a "lower" positionality. This position forces inhabitants to ask, ""Submerged, from below, seeing out from underwater, how do we think about the complexity of ecology, humanity, and the conditions of other beings…?" (Gómez-Barris, 2017, 103)

[9] In his reflections on rural farming communities, Du Bois (1978 [1900-1902]; 1978 [1898]) demonstrates how the submerged tenth manifested in rural areas as the lowest class of family-based social classes, particularly encompassing croppers, "charity recipients," other wage laborers, and the unemployed (Saari 2009). I believe this more capacious definition of the submerged tenth can illuminate how class stratification still created negative perceptions of Blackness despite Black rural residents being more geographically spread out and holding different (land-based) occupations than their urban counterparts.

[10] As Du Bois says later in *The Philadelphia Negro*, "The standards of wages and respectability should be kept up; but when a man reaches those standards in skill, efficiency and decency no question of color should, in a civilized community, debar him from an equal chance with his peers in earning a living" (Du Bois, 1978 [1898], 355)

(Kreike, 2021, 4). The natural spheres most significantly disrupted in the making of the Santee-Cooper Project were the historical agricultural lands and swamplands inhabited largely by Black populations. As biogeographic and political-economic centers of the production of the South, plantation lands — notably those that produced Lowcountry crops including rice, cotton, and indigo — represented not only the violence of forced Black labor, but also the establishment of Black cultural environments in the South (Carney 2002). As liminal ecological spaces to which formerly enslaved Africans fled, possessing "errant" features of both land and water, with a "shape, expanse, and density" that can change over time, swamplands are akin to Tiffany Lethabo King's concept of the *shoal*. As King notes, shoals, like the people who inhabit them, are "liminal, indeterminate, and hard to map" (King, 2019, 3). Utilizing what Tony Ballantyne and Antoinette Burton call the empire's *self-consciously spatializing project*, white settlers defined and uplifted themselves by first defining that which they were not (Asaka, 2017, 7; Ballantyne and Burton 2014). A key step in this process was defining which spaces were white, and which spaces reflected and were inhabited by (but didn't necessarily belong to) the Other.

The production of private landed property necessitated the alienation of the earth (Foster, 2000, 74). Dam/nation produces a "usability of Blackness through capitalist interpolation" not only by white developers and entrepreneurs, but also by politicians (Lewis, 2022, 144). White spatial imaginaries reduced the land to exchange values, "function[ing] as a central mechanism for skewing opportunities and life chances in the United States along racial lines" (Lipsitz, 2007, 13). In the Santee-Cooper Project, the destruction of ecological spaces was designed to simultaneously transform the ecological and economic face of the Lowcountry and the poor Black populations that resided therein. Neil Smith (2010) describes this as the domination of internal nature that follows the domination of external nature, or the control of the psyche and society as a result of the transformation of the environment around them.

As the byproduct of dam/nation, condemnation manifests in several material forms in *Reservoir Noir*, demonstrating how the mythologization of swamplands necessarily leads to condemnation in the form of swamp eradication, land clearance policy, and Black "improvement" measures. Displacement was one tool utilized to exclude Black people from, or contain Black people within, certain geographic boundaries, subsidize local and regional economies, and bolster the local economy with millions of dollars of federal investments (Connolly, 2014, 8). Land condemnation and confiscation devalued Black property to a similar extent as sexual assaults, lynchings, and white terrorism, and, therefore, the natural solution to devalued land was the implementation of white infrastructure to "save" the failing regions (Ibid., 29 & 137). In periods of conflict, such as the Great Depression or the New Deal, "hatred becomes part of national policy and is often expressed in 'racial' terms" (Boas and David, 1940, 1).

To be a Black person existing in a region zoned for infrastructural development is to be dam/ned. Likewise, it mattered little to white settlers the exact race of the people who inhabited the swamps when socially damning the entire ecological region. While clean and visible landscapes like sands or meticulously ordered farmlands were associated with whiteness, white people also inhabited undesirable ecological spaces alongside Black and Indigenous populations. To simultaneously be white and poor and live in disdained ecologies was therefore to be reduced to the social condition of non-white people, who indeed experienced such perceptions and treatment by upper and middle-class white people.

Black people "suffer the predicament wherein the colonizer milks dry the resources and labor of the colonized to develop and improve his own habitat while leaving that of the colonized

starkly 'underdeveloped'" (Hare, 1970, 8). Removal not only separates racialized populations from their communities, but also alienates them from their land, requiring the dispossessed to restart their lives and rebuild their world in new locales. White governments throughout United States history have parceled, leveled, extracted, claimed, and re-territorialized landscapes for the benefit of white development and white progress. The Santee-Cooper Project is not an anomaly but is instead the rule. But, as I will demonstrate in this dissertation, Black life and Black persistence comprise the deluge that naturally follows the deconstruction of the material and social dam.

## Submerging Black Life

Black removal and land confiscation in the early 20th century was an extension of racist violence that extended to lynchings, mobs, sexual assaults, and other forms of terrorism utilized to extract Black property to be transformed and eventually used by white people. Racism and racial segregation were not only permissible during the New Deal, but were, in fact, constitutive of it (Connolly 2014). Racism is the fatal practice of displacement, limitation, and, most critically, abstraction (Gilmore 2022). Henri Lefebvre (2009 [1980]; 1991 [1974]) defines abstract space as one produced not only by forces of relation and property, but also as administrative and repressive tools of domination utilized by the State to maintain order and power. Abstraction produces the conditions through which "lived narratives of difference become singularly dramatized as modalities of antagonism" that are framed as enemy characteristics (Gilmore, 2022, 144). In the Santee-Cooper Project, this manifests in designations like murky, pestilential, unproductive, wasteful or wasted, lazy, unclean, and other dam/ned ascriptions.

Racial capitalism, coined by Cedric Robinson (2000 [1983], 2019) and elucidated by others (Bhattacharyya 2018; Estes 2019; Gilmore, 2007, 2022; Pulido 2016a, 2016b) demonstrates how the material and social formation, organization, and growth of a capitalist society requires differentiation of humans along racial lines. While race and racism are historically and spatially specific, developing across the globe based on territorially, ecologically, politically, and socially distinct practices in any given region, there are shared histories of white domination and territoriality that inform the global Black experience. As Laura Pulido reminds us, racial difference "creates a variegated landscape that cultures and capital can exploit to create enhanced power and profits." She adds, "Just as the spatial fix is fundamental to capitalism, so too is human difference" (Pulido, 2016a: 7). Any analysis of development must centrally attend to the ecological and racial dimensions that form our understanding of space and our movement therein.

Utilizing a case study of the Santee Cooper Project, I demonstrate how the New Deal radically reshaped Black geographies and ecologies in the South by funding and producing infrastructure projects designed to act as social, spatial, environmental, and racial "fixes" by dispossessing Black people and the ecologies they inhabited in the name of American progress and revitalization. In a system of racial capitalism, any attempt to alter the environmental landscapes of racialized populations also shapes the ecologies of white people as well (Pulido, 2016a: 13). Additionally, while this was a state-initiated development scheme, the project was created in response to national and regional political-economic crises, and subsequently had consequences beyond the scale of the rural Black community. Always returning to the question,

"Progress for whom?" I underscore how the lives of Black and poor people are enclosed by white society, limiting their rights to citizenship, their access to protective structures, and their mobility, even within their own communities and lands (McKittrick and Woods 2007).

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There exists a final, epistemological form of dam/nation: historical submersion, or what I call *submerged archives*. It took decades following the completion of the Santee-Cooper Project for scholars to begin to unravel the "progress" narrative of the development scheme. This is, in part, due to the decentralized and often occluded nature of New Deal archives, where government records are housed in hundreds of archives across the United States, and even beyond. My own research took me to archives up and down the Atlantic Seaboard, as well as digital archives, where traces of the Santee-Cooper Project lingered or sat untouched for nearly a century. But other records are intentionally difficult to access, most significant among them being the Santee Cooper archives. To access any record held by the Santee-Cooper company, one must submit a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request. While the Santee Cooper FOIA page begins with the quote, "It is vital in a democratic society that public business be performed in an open and public manner," there exists no index, history of past FOIAs, or even reading rooms that researchers can physically visit (Santee Cooper n.d.; S.C. Code Ann. § 30-4-15). All provided materials are scanned and filtered through the company, and all interested researchers must pay hundreds of dollars to access state history. Critical Santee-Cooper archives are, therefore, submerged, and require specialized skills, knowledge, connections, or, simply, money to access. What does it mean for a government entity's "public" records and histories to be owned, filtered, and gatekept by that same 'authority'?

In illuminating this historical geography, my project is to unsettle the silt on the reservoir floor to illuminate new facets of a space of rural Black inhabitation, sociality, and labor before the construction of Lakes Marion and Moultrie. While I endeavored to find a list of all 901 families removed in the making of the Santee-Cooper Project, to tell their individual stories plot by plot, individual and family names were fleeting, unable to be tracked or pinned down in the archive. Or, at times, lists of names appeared to have been intentionally hidden or made inaccessible — what Michel-Rolph Trouillot (1995) calls *silences*. Trouillot reminds us that "the census taker is always a *censor*" and that "[s]ilences are inherent in the creation of sources, the first moment of historical production" (1995, 51). The Black history of the Santee-Cooper Basin is both narratively and archivally murky and difficult to wade through, especially as Black people were often not deemed significant enough to mark or remark upon in real-time, resulting in errant and fleeting traces of Black life in the historical record, despite Black people encompassing the majority of the population in the region at the time.

Black presence will persist and (re)emerge even when outside forces seek to make them disappear. I think here along Macarena Gómez-Barris, who writes, "The river possesses its own form of memory, as a witness to the dialectic between life and death of damming, as weighing in on the contradictions between converting value and devaluing, and as a source of flow that energizes against its own erasure" (2017, 95). Shifting our narrative framework allows us to analyze Black life beyond containment.

## The New Deal and the South

The South is the nexus of American eco-racial transformation. From the moment white European settlers made contact with the people and the ecologies of the South, they manipulated the material landscape, the biome, the social life, and the racial makeup of the region (Carney 2002).

In 1784, just ten years after the United States gained independence, Scottish-born American loyalist John Ferdinand Dalziel Smyth, traveled through the newly founded United States, documenting demographics, commerce, agricultural life, customs, geography, and agriculture of the known portions of the continent, which he published his two-volume *A Tour in the United States of America*. In his chapter on South Carolina, Smyth bemoans much of his visit through the state, but ultimately concedes that "the climate is healthy, provisions plentiful and cheap, and… [is] the richest" of all the former British colonies (Smyth, 1784, 57 & 64-65).

This region, with its wealth of resources, is the ancestral home of the Santee, Congaree, Wateree, and Sewee tribes (Crediford 2009; Kinzer 2017). While human settlement dates back to the Paleoindian period — roughly 12,000 B.C.E. — tribes began to plant firmer roots in the region during the middle-to-late Woodland Period, approximately between 200 B.C.E. and 1000 B.C.E., and more significant Indigenous societies developed along the fall-lines of the Southeast during the Mississippian Era, around 1300 C.E. Prior to white European contact, Indigenous populations grew maize in the rich soils of the bottomlands of the Congaree, Wateree, and Santee Rivers; erected natural levees to manage floodwaters; and lived amongst bears, panthers, wild cats in the cypress and loblolly pine-field swampland forests (Kinzer 2017).

Despite the overwhelming archaeological evidence, local cultural history, and material record of Indigenous presence in wetlands for centuries, one United States soldier, upon passing through cypress swamps in 1868, believed that "You cannot form the most remote idea of the region we passed through, and which the Indians doubtless thought would prove an impossible barrier" (Grey, 1973, 1-2).[11] Thus, the perceived impossibility of swampland penetration, coupled with the perceived disappearance of Santee people in South Carolina led to a white disbelief in the capacity of anyone, much less Indigenous people who they perceived to be less technologically advanced, to navigate the unruly ecologies. In describing the original inhabitants of the region, white settlers regarded Indigenous people as brutish, unclothed, cannibalistic, and a useless object of study. This sentiment is echoed by Public Service Authority Geologist W. Bernard Cormack, who noted that Indigenous historical sites in the flood path were "rather insignificant" (Cormack, 1940, 1). This perception undoubtedly informed the political policies of the Authority.

As a state "founded upon principles of racial inequality" (Crediford, 2009, 55), South Carolina was always designed to be a slave society (Ferguson 1973; Lockley, 2009, 1; Pressly 2013). Prior to the forced arrival of enslaved Africans, Indigenous people were enslaved and forced to perform agricultural labor for white plantation owners and farmers. By 1708, one-third of the enslaved population of South Carolina was Indigenous, and in 1712, South Carolina passed an act declaring that every "Negro, Mulatto, Mestizo, or Indian" residing in the state was

[11] This white blindness to Indigeneity in the landscape was mirrored by the political disenfranchisement of the tribe until 2006, when the Santee Indian Tribe received official tribal recognition by the South Carolina Commission for Minority Affairs. However, the United States still does not federally recognize the tribe (Indian Affairs Bureau 2023).

a slave unless they could prove they were free or prove they deserved to keep their freedom (Crediford, 2009, 55).[12]

With the forced arrival of enslaved Africans, the South possessed a "competitive advantage" over the rest of the country because it now controlled "a labor force disorganized through terror, and natural resources opened to uncontrolled exploitation" (Woods, 1998, 5). Through a simultaneous manipulation of labor and landscapes, white settlers — particularly rice plantation owners — began to understand soggy swamplands as fertile grounds that could become productive through the implementation of water control measures, violently enforced Black labor, and the theft of knowledge and techniques from enslaved Africans who grew rice in their homelands in West Africa (Pressly 2013; Carney 2002). In the centuries before the Civil War, white plantation owners, citizens, and governments of the South exploited the lives and the labor of Black people through forced manual labor; repeated dispossessions and removals; the denial of access to family, community, or property; terror and racial violence; and other threats to the lives and spirits of Black people (Brown 2010; Smallwood 2008; Hartman 2010; Jones-Rogers 2020). Just as white settlers and enslavers abused Black people to the point of exhaustion or death, so too did they abuse and destroy the soils, with ecocidal effects (Sutter 2015; Biles 1994).

However, Black people and Black geographies in colonial South Carolina were not merely defined by the actions enacted upon them by white settlers. As McKittrick and Ato Sekyi-Otu remind us, "[S]paces of Otherness are 'palpitating with life'" (McKittrick, 2006, 134). Elsewhere, McKittrick, with Clyde Woods, adds, "Black geographies disclose how the racialized production of space is made possible in the explicit demarcations of the spaces of *les damnés* as invisible/forgettable at the same time as the invisible/forgettable is producing space" (McKittrick and Woods, 2007, 4). Black people produced eco-social worlds, in garden plots on the plantation (McKittrick 2013; Roane 2019) or in maroon communities ranging from ten to fifty people who lived in swamplands either adjacent to plantations or in remote areas far away from white surveillance (Lockley 2009). As is evident in archival traces and by reading along the archival grain, Black life was not merely confined to scenes of subjection, but instead was capacious, holding space for community formation, ecological connections, intimate relationships, and critical resistance practices (Hartman 2010, 2019; Stoler 2008). We can therefore regard swamplands here as spaces of interracial solidarity and protection, in which Black people found refuge, Indigenous people built religious and social communities, and poor white people found sustenance. Black people re-spatialized the swamp, transforming and transporting cultures, producing intersectional communities, and building social and material homes in Indigenous lands (Miles and Holland, 2006, 2-3).

In the decade following the Civil War, known as the Reconstruction Era, Black South Carolinians "were in the midst of a mighty social and economic change," gaining access to education, money, and property in ways previously denied to them for centuries — albeit with continued limitations on their mobility, their ability to enter leadership and government positions, and their ability to plant firm roots, among other enclosures (Du Bois, 1935, 405; Foner 2014). Between 1868 and 1876, South Carolina participated in "a great human

[12] While there are documented cases of white slavers co-opting Indigenous people and their labor, particularly that of the Catawba and Notchee people, for slave catching, I follow Lakota scholar Nick Estes, who argues that in these cases we should not turn our anger toward Indigenous people whose survival options are foreclosed by white supremacy and who are therefore forced to act on behalf of the settler state, who often took advantage of their ecological familiarity and extracted their geographical knowledge, and should instead understand this participation as machinations of the racial capitalist plot (Lockley, 2009, 11 & 23; Estes 2022).

experiment," during which Black people and their white allies took up leadership positions, "built schoolhouses, established charitable institutions, built and maintained the penitentiary system, provided for the education of the deaf and dumb, rebuilt the jails and courthouses, rebuilt the bridges and reestablished the ferries. In short, [they] had reconstructed the State and placed it upon the road to prosperity" (Ibid., 383 & 428). This was an era of total economic, social, infrastructural, and political transformation.

To ameliorate the conditions of poverty following the Civil War, South Carolinians turned to guidance from Northerners and even copied large portions of Northern state models in their rewritten constitution of 1868, much to the chagrin of the white elite (Ibid., 400). Black people, some of whom were former slaves, were elected or selected into positions of power (Ibid. 405). Great efforts were made to produce a statewide system of railways, which had lagged in the pre-war period, and which, when successful, functioned as "public highway[s]." However, planters refused public taxation and resisted the government's efforts to fundraise for public services (Ibid., 406-407). The majority of Black people inherited no land, property, or tools, and their avenues towards consistent labor were limited; therefore, some chose to work for the government, namely for the military, in order to purchase property, but the vast majority remained poor and landless laborers (Ibid., 420). Northern capitalists and the federal government attempted to offer support or invest funds in the state, but, ultimately, the Southern oligarchy was more committed to the restoration of power and the subjugation of Black people than to the economic success of South Carolina.

As Du Bois notes, "The emancipation of man is the emancipation of labor and the emancipation of labor is the freeing of that basic majority of workers," particularly racialized laborers (Du Bois, 1935, 16). But so too were poor white people resettled, though their commitments to the resettlement project were different; Du Bois continues, "[White workers] wanted the chance to become capitalists; and they found that chance threatened by the competition of a working class whose status at the bottom of the economic structure seemed permanent and inescapable" (Ibid., 18). White Southerners dreamed of economic and social advancement and were willing to reduce or destroy the opportunities of Black people to achieve that dream. The pendulum swing toward equality and repair was met with an even greater swing in the opposite direction by white Southerners, who turned toward violence, white supremacy, and Black suppression. Building upon centuries of racist and bioessentialist discourse that framed Africans and their descendants as barbaric and savage, white Southerners updated their language and exclusionist policies to align with both their persisting anxieties about changes in the racial order and the needs of the present historical moment (Cooper 2017).

South Carolina was in a financial and social crisis in the fifty years following Reconstruction. As a state explicitly founded upon and succeeding due to enslaved Black labor on the plantation, the abolition of slavery was catastrophic to Southern industry (Lockley 2009). As Du Bois notes, "The grip of poverty was on the South and poverty always is felt most poignantly by those to whom poverty has been unknown" — specifically politicians, businessmen in Charleston and Columbia, and Lowcountry plantation owners (Du Bois, 1935, 409). But, while the economic crisis was most visibly apparent in the fallen elite classes, Black people were "victimized by an omnipotent class system and saddled with the lowest paying jobs," and, as a result, they suffered "disproportionately from the ravages of the economy's collapse" (Biles, 1994, 103). Consequently, race and class stratification only deepened as the South entered the 20th century, bolstered by white supremacists who attempted to clear Southern towns of Black people who "refused to accept 'their place' in the hierarchy of race," and who

stoked tensions between poor and working-class white people and their Black neighbors (Kelley, 2015, 7; Du Bois 1935; Isenberg 2016). Tens of thousands of Black people left the South during the Jim Crow era, searching for safe locales in the North and West to build new communities in the absence of white terror (Slocum 2019; Lewis 2022; Wilkerson 2010).[13] As Woods states plainly, "After two hundred years of censorship, and ten short years of open communication, the resurrected plantation bloc thoroughly demonized all autonomous forms of thought and action for another century" (Woods, 1998, 25).

According to one newspaper, by the time South Carolina entered the New Deal, "In almost every form of human progress, South Carolina has sunk about as far as a state can sink" (Bostick, 2008, 15). Likewise, Roosevelt even described the South as "the Nation's no. 1 economic problem," due, in large part, to the failing state of Southern agriculture (Sutter, 2015, 63). The New Deal was, therefore, a pivotal moment in the remaking of South Carolina and the South, broadly.[14] Through an *ecology of erasure*, what Paul Sutter defines as the environmental and social forces that have obscured the history of human-induced environmental change from our purview, New Dealers submerged or destroyed disdained ecologies to hide traces of shameful eco-racial pasts (Sutter, 2015, 192). To do so, they established new environmental programming designed to simultaneously combat land degradation and rural poverty through policies of "improvement."

*Reservoir Noir* offers a critique of New Deal "progress," honing in on the scale of the rural South, and more specifically the rural Black South, to demonstrate how the ultimate destruction of Black ecological spaces is the culmination and direct result of centuries of dehumanization, disenfranchisement, and dispossession of Black people. In other words, Black dam/nation created the conditions for the material destruction of Black spaces. In 1998, Clyde Woods remarked, "Since it is still lovingly defended by conservatives, moderates, progressives, liberals, and radicals alike, research on the New Deal gutting of rural African American communities is still marginalized" (Woods, 1998, 12). In many ways, this claim still holds true. *Reservoir Noir* therefore seeks to fill this historical gap.

## Reservoir Noir

*Reservoir Noir* is the culmination of four years of in-person and virtual archival work, as well as environmental ethnography, performed in nearly a dozen cities, towns, and rural hamlets in South Carolina, including Columbia, Sumter, Moncks Corner, Orangeburg, Charleston, Eutawville, Santee, Eloree, and more. Additional archival work took me to the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, the Roosevelt Archives, the National Archives and Records Administration in Atlanta and Washington, D.C., and the Santee Cooper Archives between 2020 and 2024. *Reservoir Noir* explores the underdevelopment of modern America through a historical analysis of Black life in rural South Carolina in the New Deal era. I chronicle the destruction and forgetting of the communities that once housed 901 families in the Santee-

[13] We now know that white terror survived and persisted in other regions of the country, as evidenced by the Tulsa Massacre in 1921 and the Red Summer of 1919, among other "Progressive" era violences (Lewis 2022; McWhirter 2011). Unfortunately, despite their attempts, Black people were not always able to escape the violences of the South simply by moving away.

[14] For a comprehensive history of South Carolina New Deal history, see Hayes' (2001) *South Carolina and the New Deal*. For a larger history of Southern New Deal history, see Biles' (1994) *The South and the New Deal*.

Cooper Basin through four compounding processes of racialization, development, dispossession, and ecological destruction. *Reservoir Noir* interrogates the current and future conditions of Black ecological life that manifested as a result of accumulated social, moral, political, and economic co-formations of race and natural environments.

This dissertation is concerned with understanding how race and the environment are coeval, simultaneously produced throughout history by governments and white elites, often to destroy or displace both. While this argument is elucidated through the case study of the Santee-Cooper Project, its conclusions are relevant to other environments and regions inhabited by Black people. South Carolina's ecological and racial history are not historical anomalies, but are instead representative of the larger American project of Black suppression for the benefit of white progress. *Reservoir Noir* demonstrates a commitment to a structural analysis of the processes that constitute America's social, moral, and geographical self-identification. It illuminates the "wasted" environments and inhabitants that have always been regarded as incompatible with progressive futures. Exclusion, destruction, and dispossession are not new or even wholly "modern" projects, but are instead constitutive of American history. This is not to suggest that all development is bad, but rather to heed Wood's call:

> In order to construct societies based on social and economic justice, a new form of consciousness must emerge. Regional planning has always held the promise of creating new social relations based on economic redistribution, environmental sustainability, and the full realization of basic human and cultural rights. Yet, without a thoroughgoing critique of regional power and culture based on indigenous conceptions of development, these efforts often create more repressive social relations (Woods, 1998, 2)

*Reservoir Noir*, therefore, illuminates the inequities of the New Deal project, and its manifestations in rural South Carolina, to offer guidance for how to reckon with the racial, environmental, social, and political-economic crises of our own times — as well as the infrastructures being introduced to "solve" them. *Reservoir Noir* illuminates the history of the creation of the Santee-Cooper Hydroelectric and Navigation Project across four chapters divided into two sections: the first focuses on Moral Formations and Recolonization, and the second contemplates Inundation and Repair.

**Chapter 1** introduces a theory of *swampification*, a social and methodological process whereby governments, corporations, and the press socially (re)invented swamplands as spaces of death, disease, and "uninhabitability" to justify their destruction. Chronicling a history of white settlement and eco-racial dam/nation in South Carolina since the 1500s, this chapter demonstrates how moral condemnations of Black people and the places they inhabited facilitated white efforts to eradicate Black autonomous spaces and ecological connections. Coupling Black ecologies with moral geographies brings attention to the sociospatial imaginaries placed on Black people that forced them to the ecological margins, then later extracted them from those very spaces when the landscapes stood in the way of White progress. Swampification did not merely stagnate Black terraqueous landscapes but further perpetuated racial stereotypes of Blackness as out-of-place and pestilent, and situated the presence of non-White others as antithetical to U.S. progress.

In **Chapter 2**, 'Pushing Back the Darkness,' I interrogate how social dam/nation of Black people and their ecologies manifested laid the foundation for the material destruction of Black communities, the clearance of swamplands and forests, the inundation of hundreds of thousands of acres of fertile land, and the destruction of Lowcountry industries. In constructing the Santee-

Cooper Project, the South Carolina Public Service Authority materially transformed South Carolina based on private and public business interests, settler logics, and a desire for racial order, rather than any existing eco-racial patterns. The state framed itself as stable, objective, and authoritative, while all other forms of governance and organization were disordered and ineffective. Development was therefore bound up in notions of progress and human evolution, framing the "most" developed and technologically advanced peoples as the pinnacle of humanity, and those who did not meet those standards as being less human (or, in some cases, subhuman). The construction of Lakes Marion and Moultrie therefore concretized dam/nation, allowing the Public Service Authority to eliminate races and ecologies of disdain from landscapes of future white inhabitation.

**Chapter 3**, 'Development, Drowned and Reborn,' contends with two key questions, one asked by Santee-Cooper officials when introducing and enacting the hydroelectric project — What do we do with 901 dispossessed families? — and, perhaps more significantly, one asked by dispossessed residents — Where do we go from here? The chapter illuminates the secondary project of the Santee-Cooper Project, that being the relocation of thousands of Black and poor white people from their ancestral homes in the Santee-Cooper Basin to rural homesteads scattered across the state designed to "improve" not only their living conditions but the people themselves. Perceptions of Black rural people as unclean, lazy, and naive population in need of government welfare were born out of centuries of moral dam/nation constructed through processes of swampification, as well as material condemnation, which framed Black homes, ecologies, communities, graveyards, and churches as substandard and improper. Thereafter, these socially, materially, and legally constructed designations facilitated the territorial and administrative expansion of the state of South Carolina into spaces previously unseen, uncontrolled, and uninhabitable to white life. As one journalist noted, the South Carolina Public Service Authority had a "vision of [building] an industrial empire in a virgin land" in which they could "repopulat[e] a vast area" for the benefit of the nation (Biles, 1984, 5). By depriving Black people of their own space, denying them geographic autonomy, and enforcing spatio-moral codes thereupon, South Carolina removed Black families from the Santee-Cooper Basin from their private lives and rendered their living space, their laboring capacity, their community centers, and even their dead kin as state property.

Pivoting from the historical narrative of the Santee-Cooper Project, **Chapter 4** offers a reparative framework in response to the social, racial, material, and spatial violences of the New Deal infrastructural development scheme. Here, I hold space for the possibility of *Black ecological repair*, or the eco-social process of attending to, building upon, and healing relationships between Black people and their environments that white supremacy and racial capitalism sought, unsuccessfully, to disentangle and destroy for centuries. To elaborate upon this concept, this chapter builds upon recent dialogues surrounding a Black commons and decolonial ecologies, critically introducing the notion of a swamp commons. Chapter 4 asks Black ecologists and other scholars to think outside of eco-racial binaries, and outside of binaries of destruction and optimism. It serves as an intervention and an opening, encouraging Black geographers and ecologists to consider legacies of Black ecological repair as a pathway to the material futures we seek.

*Reservoir Noir* concludes with an assessment of the present moment in what is now referred to as "Santee Cooper Country." In this narrative and social redefinition of man-made infrastructures as "natural" havens for recreation and leisure, the Public Service Authority extends their occlusion of Black life into the 21st century and perpetuates the naturalization of

both white ecologies and white infrastructures. I consider how South Carolina and the United States might properly memorialize and recognize the violence of the Santee-Cooper Project by asking: How does a state, a region, or a nation reckon with the fact that their infrastructures, the very systems that make modern life possible, are built upon Indigenous territory and Black lands that were flattened, emptied, submerged, transformed, and even violated in the name of progress? In Santee Cooper Country, memory and memorialization force us to look beyond the horizontal surfaces of the reservoirs, and instead submerge ourselves in this history to unsettle the murky depths. Following Chapter 4, I illuminate how repair and restorative justice extend beyond environmental healing and financial compensation; rather, our present understandings of the ecologies, and our future relationships therein and thereto, require us to think about the built environments around us as being anything other than quotidian, inevitable, or natural.

## Conclusion

I arrived at the title *Reservoir Noir* following nearly a decade of research around drowned Black towns and other submerged spaces. In the early 2000s, crime novelist Peter Robinson noticed an uptick in the publication of "mysteries and other fiction with a featured element of intentional submerging, inundating, and flooding of towns, villages, cities, and other places as a consequence of building dams and reservoirs for water supply, hydroelectric power, irrigation, flood management, and job creation" and dubbed this genre "reservoir noir" (Rudolph 2009; Pollard 2017).[15] The genre has two key requirements: it should include a detective, a police investigation, or some other mystery to be solved; and it should include an intentional drowning of at least one home. The reservoir is not only the setting but the narrative catalyst, serving as a "metaphor for mystery and practical hiding place" (Pollard, 2017, 3). Reservoirs are sites of confusion, grief, and loss. Graves, homes, churches, businesses, community centers, and even, at times, people disappear beneath the surface of the waters, often never to be seen again. Crime writers expanded upon these themes to depict the criminality of spatially transforming communities and ecologies, either through actual committed crimes, such as murders, or moral crimes, including the destruction of homes, villages, human remains, and livelihoods.

In my own *Reservoir Noir*, the Santee-Cooper Hydroelectric and Navigation Project is, likewise, both the narrative setting and a vehicle for the ultimate transformation of Lowcountry South Carolina, and critically the racialized populations and disdained ecologies therein. An illumination of one of the largest infrastructural projects built during one of the most critical political-economic periods of the "long, murderous twentieth century," helps us to understand how "geography has been deeply implicated in the development of inequality" and how race and space have been socially co-produced through environmental determinism and social construction (Gilmore, 2022, 110).

While I hesitate to ascribe language of criminality to the Santee-Cooper Project and those responsible for its uneven construction, I do argue that it aligns with the genre of reservoir noir, in that it demands investigation and repair. I intervene in a long and longstanding field of New Deal history (Kennedy 2001; Katznelson 2013; Brinkley 2002; Biles 1994; Gilbert 2015; Phillips 2007) and the smaller field of New Deal geography (Smith 2004; Gilmore 2011; Cutler 1985;

[15] The concept of reservoir noir can also extend into media beyond mystery novels. Films like *Chinatown* (1974) and *Wild River* (1960) depict the mystery, trauma, and loss surrounding dam creation.

Sutter 2015; Patel 2016) to illuminate how the New Deal respatialized the rural, morally defined conditions of modernity, and both socially and materially transformed the lives of Black, working-class Southerners in service of urban American progress. While we do know that "[g]eography is not destiny," this dissertation reminds us that "it is a powerful context," particularly in helping us understand the rationales behind and the consequences of Southern spatial, racial, economic, and social transformations (Trimble, 2013, vii; Sutter, 2015, 170).

The Santee-Cooper Project presents an opportunity to illuminate, in clear detail, how Black dam/nation is not simply a South Carolina story or a Southern environmental history, but is instead a deeply American project, one that has consequences on urban policy, infrastructural planning, development, and national belonging. Therefore, this dissertation serves to, as Ira Katznelson urges, "rearrange the geography of New Deal history" by demonstrating how the polices, infrastructures, and moral geographies tested on Black people in the rural South in the 1930s and 40s became central to United States spatial, developmental, and policy practice in the decades that followed (Katznelson, 2013, 9). An assessment of the Santee-Cooper Project holds a mirror up to the South, the United States, and the world, broadly, and asks us to critically consider who is dispossessed in the making of "modern" infrastructures, by what means, and to what end.

As the South Carolina state motto reads, *Dum Spiro Spero* — "While I Breathe, I Hope."[16] In spite of centuries of white private and governmental efforts to materially and socially submerge rural Black life, dispossessed people and their descendants survive, and resistance practices persist. This text takes seriously what it means to "breath[e] in unbreathable circumstances," to combat centuries of moral and social dam/nation, to persist in spite of subsumption (Gumbs, 2020, 21). Black life exceeds dam/nation and resists any effort to anchor it to the reservoir floor. Instead, Black geographical and ecological life is an epistemological opening, demonstrating clearly how to live, how to stay afloat, how to hold one another close, and how to breathe in spite of whatever floods may come.

[16] As Christina Sharpe reminds us, to aspire is both to breathe and to hope (Sharpe 2016).

# Chapter 1:

# Swampification

> "There is another sort of ground, which lies low and wet, upon some of their rivers, this is called swamp, which in some places is in a manner useless, in others it is far the richest of all their grounds; it is a black fat earth, and bears their grate staple rice, which must have in general a very rich soil, in the greatest plenty and perfection."
>
> - John Ferdinand Dalziel Smyth, *A Tour in the United States of America*

> "The uninhabitable — the nonexistent lands and underwater places — were existent, occupied, and above water. But what becomes of the native-occupied "uninhabitable" zones is a geo-racial reorganization."
>
> - Katherine McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds*, 129

## Swampy Encounters

In 1670, English settlers arrived in South Carolina and came upon an "unaltered" and "fruitful" upland landscape (Smith, 2012, 28). Settlers initially emulated the agriculture of their European homelands in the South Carolina uplands, farming English grain, experimenting with cotton and tobacco, and raising cattle (Ibid.). By conservative estimates, over 350 years, Europeans imported more than twelve million Africans to the Americas, tens of thousands of whom were brought to the Carolinas to perform agricultural labor and clear away thousands of trees to facilitate further white settlement (Carney 2001; Edelson 2007). The enslaved Africans were the first to venture into the swampy Lowcountry following European arrival, serving as the "middling" between upland and lowland environments and familiarizing themselves with spaces outside of European knowledge or control (Smith, 2012, 34).

Swamps are areas of low-lying earth filled with slow-moving water that arrives from a high groundwater table, underground springs, or receding tidewaters, distinct from marshes or bogs by the density of their trees (Wilson 2006 & Wilson 2018; Dillon 2021; Hart 2013). They are liminal spaces, possessing both land and water, solid and liquid, vibrant vegetation and dense muck. Swamplands are frequently associated with malaria (literally translating to "bad air"), originally because settlers believed swamplands emitted miasma — noxious vapors that contaminate the lung — which is now understood to come from mosquitoes that live and breed in damp spaces (Wilson 2018; Dusinberre 2000). Early settlers perceived waterlogged areas as wastes in need of reclamation, civilization, and improvement (Dillon 2021; Grunwald 2007; Dusinberre 2000). Thus, 'swamp' became a convenient term to describe social and material states of disorder, disturbance, or sublimity (Allewaert, 2008, 345).

Swamplands occupied a space of tropicality in the settler mind. South Carolina's hot and humid environment was initially an agricultural draw for European settlers. The springtime between March and June was "temperate and agreeable;" the summers, from July through September contained an "exceedingly intense" heat; and the winters were "seldom severe enough

to freeze and considerable water, affecting only the mornings and evenings" (Smyth, 1784, 72). Shortly after arriving, however, some residents began to express concern over the debilitating effects of the tropical, disease-ridden environment (Marrens & Terry, 1984, 534). As one visitor described South Carolina in 1784, "[T]hat part of the country, though rich and fertile, is extremely unhealthy; this, added to the great intemperance of the men, and the excesses of every kind they are perpetually involved in, generate acute bilious disorders which quickly carry them off" (Smyth, 1784, 54). As another writer lamented in 1854, "Utterly valueless in their present state, for tillage purposes as these lands are, the poisonous property which they communicate to the atmosphere is a perpetual source of disease and death." The writer emphasized that by destroying the swamplands, "Health… would probably reign where pestilence now abides" (The Charleston Mercury 1854b). As settlers ran out of land to build new plantations near low-lying coastal swamps, they began to move inland, up the Cooper River, where they quickly encountered long and sticky summers, relentless mosquitoes, and violent and fatal fevers (Ibid., 540-1). White settlers tried to escape the worst of malaria's threats by staying away from rice plantations during the summer (Carney, 2001, 148). But it was of little use — in the 18th century, 73% of males in the state died before their 50th birthday, most as a result of disease (Ibid., 545-7).

Though the population of the central Carolinas was scattered across the high- and lowland landscapes in the 18th through 20th centuries, the swamp conditions of the region produced proportionally high rates of malaria, borne out of heavy mosquito breeding in waterlogged former agricultural lands (Eyles et al., 1945, 1266-7; Shankman & Smith, 2004, 23). Following his journey down the antediluvian Santee River in 1939, New York journalist John C. O'Reilly described the swamps of the Santee floodplain as a "subtropical jungle," in which crews of men were at war with mosquitoes, Black people lived without electricity, and clay-reddened waters roared their way to the coast (O'Reilly, August 29, 1939). The largest of the swamps was the Santee Swamp, once the largest floodplain forest on the east coast (Hart, 2013, 129). The malaria found in the lowlands of South Carolina was lethal, cerebral, and introduced by settlers traveling from West Africa as a consequence of the Atlantic slave trade (Carney, 2001, 148). Yet, the settlers regarded the swamplands as "naturally" diseased spaces that needed to be eradicated to protect the growing white population in the state.

While one might assume that high death rates would encourage lifestyle changes and geographic shifts away from swamps, settlers took few steps to avoid malarial conditions, further exacerbating mortality rates (Ibid., 534). Settlers did not want to abandon rice fields, so they chose to instead build homes on the outer edge of swamps, where they could watch from a short distance away as their slaves toiled in knee-deep waters and exceedingly hot and humid temperatures for hours each day (Ibid., 547). Settlers stubbornly continued to inhabit the environments that possessed the very disease that was killing off the white population and the enslaved Black population at a steady rate.

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, enslaved Africans owned by white Huguenot settlers performed backbreaking labor, draining wetlands to plant cotton and indigo and harnessing natural tides to irrigate rice fields (Ibid., 133-4). But, in 1865, Black slaves across the South were liberated through the Emancipation Proclamation. In this moment, known as Reconstruction, South Carolina plantation owners, who now had little legal control over the Black population of the state, demanded the return of Black people to ecologies to which they were deemed biologically suited. Arguing for the survival of the plantation regime, as well as the biological and social linkages between Blackness and the swamp, one planter wrote,

> Without reliable labor plantations must in time prove failures… Give white men a fair chance to make money on these plantations, and the most of the sugar lands and the cotton lands, except in most sickly and malarious regions, could be leased on time to white men. The negroes prefer the swamps and the richest lands to many others, and there is where the last of the race will probably be found generations hence (Dennett, 1881, 4).

White planters were thus no longer legally able to confine Black people to laboring within plantation ecologies, but they could launch a propaganda campaign bioessentializing Blackness as inextricably linked to tropicality, thereby limiting Black geographical mobility.

By the early 1900s, malaria was still rampant in inland South Carolina, despite the consistently decentralized agrarian population in the region. According to a 1945 survey, even two or more miles from the nearest source of water or blood, there was widespread breeding of malaria-carrying mosquitoes (Eyles et al., 1945, 1266). Because malaria was a constant fixture in the environment since early European contact, generations of settlers sought relief from the pestilent, disease-carrying mosquitoes (Dubisch, 1985). In the 1930s and 40s, New Deal politicians believed they knew better than the people who had lived on and worked the land for centuries, and proposed the damming of the Santee and Cooper rivers to produce a navigable water route from the state capital in Columbia to the port city of Charleston (Dwight 1939). This effort was not ahistorical; rather, it is predicated on a long history of diversions in South Carolina's water history.

Centuries of simultaneous moral, social, racial, and ecological dam/nation of swamplands come together in South Carolina history through a practice that I deem *swampification*. Swampification is a process whereby governments, corporations, and the press socially (re)invented swamplands as uninhabitable spaces of death and disease to justify their destruction. This definition draws upon Katherine McKittrick's definition of the uninhabitable as unimaginable spaces of otherness occupied by people "outside of the Western bourgeois conception of what it means to be human," and as such, their geographies are also rendered inhuman, dead, or dying (McKittrick, 2013, 7). In 1903, forestry scholar J.O. Zellén expressed fears over material swampification (*försumpning*), or the ecological destruction of forests due to anthropogenic land practices and invasive species (Zellén, 1903; Bishop & Seibert, 2015, p. 3445). I expand Zellén's definition to introduce a social definition of swampification, which states that the ecological, social, and cultural destruction of swamplands is caused by invasive white settlers, and their invasiveness is a manifestation of racial capitalism.

In this chapter, I chronicle the material and social making and unmaking of swamplands, the racialization of the inhabitants therein, and the social damnation of these Lowcountry ecologies that ultimately led to the material damming in the Santee-Cooper Project. To do so, I turn to Black ecologies, South Carolina's historical geographies, and racial capitalism. I argue that while the swamplands of central South Carolina experienced dozens of biophysical and human-induced transformations in their history, the greatest transformation seen by the swamplands of the region came with the ultimate enclosure thereof during the creation of the Santee Cooper Hydroelectric and Navigation Project in the 1930s and 40s. The social and material reconstruction of swamplands throughout history, but particularly during the New Deal, had lasting effects on how South Carolina, the South, and the United States as a whole, dictating which environments we perceive as clean and legible, framing which populations we identify as modern and healthy, and informing wetland policy into the 20th and 21st centuries.

## Controlling the Waters

Southern inland swamplands were essential for early colonists and enslaved Africans working on rice plantations because the environment obtained and contained a large volume of water within a high groundwater table, enabling the production of multiple harvests each year (Carney, 2001, 23). Settlers preferred to acquire land within these rich, swampy bottomlands for their nutrient-rich soils and avoided the well-drained pinelands, which were assumed to be nutrient-poor (Sutter, 2015, 124). This fertile terrain offered settlers a landscape in which they could begin to cultivate cash crops on a massive scale.

South Carolinians saw potential in the lowland swamps, particularly in the rich alluvial soils, and spent the next century clearing forests and swamps of trees, and erecting rice plantations that occupied hundreds of acres of reclaimed swampland each (Edelson, 2007, 382; Carney 2001). Settlers sought to make this landscape not only agriculturally productive, but also navigable and economically viable through the creation of a canal between the Santee and Cooper rivers (Edgar, 1984, 3-4; Hart, 2013, 130). Between 1793 and 1800, the General Assembly of South Carolina recruited slaves and contract laborers from Europe to dig a five-mile-long, 35-foot-wide, and 5-and-a-half-foot-deep canal to make the state navigable from the capital in Columbia to the port city of Charleston. Though the canal served the transportation needs of the state for half a century, it regularly dried up due to droughts and poor hydrological planning. Despite this failure, the Santee Canal served as inspiration for the creation of the Santee Cooper Project nearly 150 years later (Ibid.; The Charleston Mercury 1854b).

Over centuries of agricultural use, however, alluvial soils accumulated and stagnated in the South due to upland erosion and deposition. Colonial agricultural practices, and more specifically the widespread creation of rice plantations homogenized the landscape, simplifying the hydrography of the coastal plain, resulting in unpredictable and destructive flooding (Edelson, 2007, 383). Soils eroded at a rapid rate, making streams and rivers turbid, raising stream- and riverbeds, and artificially producing earthen dams through sediment buildup. This resulted in rising water tables, active and constant overbank flooding, waterlogged farmlands, displacement of alluvial soils, and, ultimately, the exacerbation of floodlike conditions (Sutter, 2015, 115). According to Eric Williams,

> From the standpoint of the grower, the greatest deficit of slavery lies in the fact that it quickly exhausts the soil. The labor supply of low social status, docile and cheap, can be maintained in subjection only by systematic degradation and by deliberate efforts to suppress its intelligence. Rotation of crops and scientific farming are therefore alien to slave societies… The serious defect of slavery can be counterbalanced and postponed for a time if fertile soil is practically unlimited. Expansion is a necessity of slave societies; the slave power requires ever fresh conquests (Williams, 2014, 7)

This material transformation played out on a massive scale during the plantation era, resulting in the inundation of alluvial lands with sediment, more frequent flooding, and the creation of a waterlogged landscape that became impossible to drain (Ibid., p. 115). The interactions with soils that once made the Carolinas an ideal site for agriculture ultimately resulted in the deterioration of the landscape. Agricultural production fundamentally and irreversibly changed the ecology of the South over mere decades, making these landscapes *appear* uninhabitable.

Once man extracts all nutrients and resources from a landscape and abandons such terrains in search of new agricultural pastures, nature does not heal itself; rather, "land, once dominated and then abandoned by man, [does] not revert to its primitive condition but [becomes] impoverished" (Marsh, 1965, xxv). The early settlers were thus drawn to these landscapes because of a singular environmental factor: low-lying, flood-prone terrains. Yet, the land-use practices of Carolina farmers in the 17th through early 20th centuries directly contributed to flooding conditions and the constant presence of standing water near rivers, ultimately resulting in the very conditions that repelled settlers from the very same lands.

State and federal officials sought to counter environmental degradation with enforced hydrological control. To conserve agricultural lands, forested areas, and floodplains, the Soil Conservation Service (SCS), founded on April 27, 1935, turned to channelization. The purpose of channelization was to drain and prevent the flooding of valuable agricultural land by increasing channel capacity and flow velocity so that water could move more efficiently downstream (Sutter, 2015, 185; Shankman & Smith, 2004, 23).

Channel morphology appeared logical at first glance: by increasing the depth of the channels upstream, the SCS could increase the velocity of the streams, and prevent soils from becoming stagnant and clogging up the channels, particularly near slow-moving bends in the stream. But this upstream adaptation quickly led to downstream destabilization of the landscape. The SCS realized their errors when alluvial lands further downstream began to flood more frequently (Sutter, 2015, 185; Shankman & Smith 2004). This is because a higher channel velocity causes stream incision, bank instability, and increased sediment delivery downstream. This leads to channel blockages, known as "valley plugs," that create natural damming, pushing water into the surrounding floodplain, even during periods of low flow (Shankman & Smith, 2004, 23). The technique that was intended to prevent flooding became one of the main contributors to swamplike conditions surrounding tributaries in the region.

Settler geomorphology produced "considerable ecological damage to riparian systems," failing to alleviate floods as intended and instead increasing the frequency and duration of the floods (Sutter, 2015, 186; Marsh, 1864, 28; Shankman & Smith, 2004, 32). According to biologist William F. Grey in a survey of the Santee-Cooper floodplain, hydromorphology in the region "marked the initiation of a significant increase of permanent inundation upon certain areas of the floodplain swamp" (Grey, 1973, 3). Settler intervention thus reduced the amount of water in tributary systems, but increased the morphological and ecological impact of the water in those systems. By intervening in water cycles through the implementation and enforcement of channelization, colonizers irreparably and artificially attempted to mold their new environments to meet their social, political, and economic needs. But such modifications backfired, reproducing the exact conditions they sought to eradicate.

## On Swampification

In 1939, a white *New York Herald Tribune* reporter named John O'Reilly spent two weeks in South Carolina surveying the $40,300,000 Santee-Cooper Hydroelectric and Navigation Project and reporting his findings to his New York newspaper and the local *News and Courier* (O'Reilly, September 3, 1939). O'Reilly paddled 100 miles down the Santee River in a cypress dugout canoe to study the soon-to-be-destroyed lowland ecologies. Along the way, he met government officials, businessmen, and citizens (O'Reilly, September 3, 1939). Over six

articles, he reported on the ecological transformation of the region; the opposition of conservationists, hunting clubs, the United States Biological Survey, and the National Association of Audubon Societies; the destruction of historic plantations; and the potential for the generation of cheap electricity upon the completion of the dams (O'Reilly, August 29, 1939; O'Reilly, August 30, 1939; O'Reilly, August 31, 1939; O'Reilly, September 1, 1939; O'Reilly, September 3, 1939).

The final article in O'Reilly's series focused on two issues plaguing the Public Service Authority; as the headline read: "Negro Resettlement, Malaria Control Big Tasks in Santee." In 1939, an estimated 2,500 to 3,000 people, four-fifths of whom were Black, lived in the swamplands of lowland South Carolina. Some owned plots of land, but most worked as sharecroppers, cultivating corn or cotton and raising oxen or mules. They lived in the swamps, fishing in rivers and creeks and hunting in dense forests (O'Reilly, September 3, 1939; Kinzer 2017). The article identifies two key struggles plaguing the Public Service Authority "not usually encountered in the building of power developments": "One of these is the resettlement of hundreds of illiterate negroes, many of whom own no property from which to be resettled. Another one is the control of malaria, which already is widespread in the low, swampy region to be covered by the project" (O'Reilly, September 3, 1939). O'Reilly frames Black inhabitation, disease, and swamplands as interconnected nuisances standing in the path of progress. His argument fits into a larger trend of 20th-century moral damnation of disdained populations, pests, and ecologies that encompasses a process I define as *swampification*.

Swampification was critical to the Santee-Cooper Project. Newspaper articles published in the months leading up to inundation, correspondence between South Carolina Public Service Authority employees, and materials disseminated by the Public Service Authority while the dams were under construction and in the decades after the reservoirs were completed all illuminate both public and private sentiments about swamplands and their inhabitants, and the justifications for their destruction through swampification. Through this process, Blackness, disease, and swampland ecologies were read as the same nuisances that needed to be dispossessed or eradicated to make way for modern America. Swampification offers a theoretical framework with which we can to the oppressive and extractive practices that stripped, and continue to strip, Black people of property and forced them into labor. While making evident the extractive racial capitalist imperatives of American progress through Black dispossession, swampification also opens up space for recognition of Black opposition, fugitivity, liberation, and knowledge-making "at the edges of and outside of the purview of settler domination and capitalist labor extraction" (Roane, 2022, 236).

The notion that swamplands are uninhabitable places devoid of life is a racial capitalist construction tied to myths of Blackness as pestilence and Black landscapes as deficient geographies, or places difficult to access, inhabit, and develop (Robinson 1983; Gilmore 2002; Vergès 2017; Wright, 2019, 5; Dillon 2021). According to Nik Heynen and Megan Ybarra (2021), white supremacy plays a key role in shaping nature-society relations, and nature has always been racialized through relations of empire, settler colonialism, and racial capitalism. I argue that swamplands are a locus of Black ecologies, and that swampification is a Black ecological process that demonstrates how the racialization of landscapes, the equating of Blackness with disease, and environmental destruction are co-constitutive processes of ecological and social damnation.

Swampification is a historical process, accrued through environmental segregation, mythologization, and ecological damnation enforced by hegemonic powers. In 1927, Edward C.

L. Adams, a former physician and self-taught ethnographer published *Congaree Sketches: Scenes from Negro life in the swamps of the Congaree and Tales by Tad and Scip of Heaven and Hell with Other Miscellany* (Adams 1927).[17] In his folkloric account, Adams fictionalized the lives of real local Black people who lived within the Congaree Swamp in order to inform the white reader about the lives of swamp-inhabiting "darkies" (King, 1931, 3). Adams earnestly believed he was humanizing Black swamp people, "presenting his characters in a perfectly natural manner" and providing insight into a population that, if other white people tried to visit or interact with them, "either become like statues or gradually fade out of the picture altogether" (Ibid.). But, in reality, Adam's composites of Black swamp inhabitants flattened Black people, reducing them to "niggers" and "fools" (Adams 1927).

In the first story of the collection, Adams shares a fictionalized conversation between two men, Tad and Voice, the latter of whom says,

> I been down to de Congaree in de big swamps, where de trees is tall an' de moss long an' gray, where de Bullace grow, an' where I hear de tune of de bird in de mornin'; down wey de wild turkey gobbles, way down on de Congaree; wey God's mornin' leads to de devil's night; down on de river, where night make her sign, where owls on a dead limb talks of de dead, talks wid de dead and laughs like de dead, way down in de big swamps of de Congaree; down where de blunt-tailed moccasin crawls in de grass, where de air is stink wid he smell; where de water is green, where de worms is spewed out of de groun', where de groun' is mud, where de trees sweat like a man; down in de home of de varmint an' bugs, down in de slick yallow mud, de black mud an' de brown, way down in de big swamps of de Congaree; down in de land of pizen, where de yallow-fly sting, in de home of de fever an' wey death is de king. Dat wey I been, down in de big swamps. Down in de land of mosquito, way down in de big swamps, down on de Congaree (Adams, 1927, 1).

Notable here is Adams' repeated invocation of the word "down." To be in the swamps of South Carolina was to be literally, ecologically in the depths — deep in the Lowcountry, situated below the fault line, knee- or waist-deep in murky, muddy waters. But to be down was also to occupy a lower position, to be suppressed, to occupy a position of subalternity. It is to be in the depths of the ecology, to gaze upon a horizontal plane at the water's surface, to find presence and belonging with nonhuman species relegated to a position of the earth, or even the submerged. It is to be, to occupy, and to exist within the materiality of darkness, that which whiteness cannot easily claim, illuminate, or transform. Against the bioessentialist practice of swampification, I seek to produce what Sylvia Wynter calls, "a history that can now be projected backward from the contemporary imperative of our global interhuman and environmental situation" of the present (Wynter, 1995, 8).

## Uninhabitability: Producing a Dam/ned Swamp

Swampification manifests through three progressive processes: It originates in fear of and disdain for sublime landscapes and unknown peoples (*terra incognita*), is spread through myths

[17] This book was later republished in 2014 under the name *Tales of the Congaree*.

about the unknown (*terra nullius*), and is concretized with the legalized destruction of landscapes (*res nullius*). I illuminate these processes of swampification to demonstrate how swamps shifted from landscapes of disdain to sites of elimination over time. In the early 20th century, the Santee Swamp was described as "sub-tropical jungle," "utterly impassable… since the beginning of time" and, with its "primeval forest of cypress and thick tangled undergrowth," was deemed to be "uninhabitable to man and all but impenetrable" (Scott, 1944, 198; The State 1922).

The uninhabitable manifests through the production of uneven geographies, what Walter Rodney calls *underdevelopment* or what Neil Smith calls *uneven development* (McKittrick 2006; Rodney 1972; Smith 2010). This unevenness is rooted in the unique social relations, forms of governance, belief systems, and behavioral patterns of societies built in response to the ecological worlds around them (Rodney, 1972, 9). In the sixteenth through eighteenth centuries, European settlers confronted wild spaces in colonial territories that had largely been cleared in their home countries. Literally translating to "unknown or unexplored territory," *terra incognita* defined Europeans' understandings of colonial ecologies, both while exploring the territories and when discussed back at home (Artese, 2002, p. 2). Lacking vocabulary to define marshy landscapes, they invented the words 'swamp' and 'dismal' to describe these unrecognizable spaces (Wilson, 2018, 14). McKittrick argues that "while encounters with the unknown made the uninhabitable a newly available geography for exploration and economic gain, it also translated places that were previously deemed nonexistent (underwater, unlivable) into conquerable and profitable spatial categories" (McKittrick, 2006, 130).

These new spatial categories were mapped onto new and existing racial categories. In the swamps, white settlers encountered Indigenous Others who inhabited these difficult terrains and possessed intricate knowledge of their ecological workings (Wilson 2018; South 1972; Sayers 2015). The swamp was a space beyond white cultural domination, and that lack of control posed a significant threat to white settlers seeking to expand their dominion. Ikuko Asaka describes this process as geographical domination, through which identity and place are naturalized through the inscription and regulation of racialized, gendered, and sexualized humans, and the designation of where they "naturally" belong (Asaka, 2017, 6). McKittrick concurs, "If identity and place are mutually constructed, the uninhabitable spatializes a human Other category of the unimaginable/native/black" (McKittrick, 2006, 130). Swamps were sites of liminality, situated at the edge of the known world and devoid of life; they were spaces that white settlers could move through, around, and against, but could never occupy. Therefore, those who inhabited the swamps were necessarily something outside of white humanity.

Settlers sought to expand their territory through agriculture, cultivation, irrigation, and enclosure of and within the swamps (Wolfe, 2001, 869). But non-white swampland habitation, including that of Indigenous tribes and Black maroons, challenged settlers' abilities to claim territory. Through word-of-mouth, the press, and institutional mythmaking, white people depicted swamplands as empty by invisibilizing the land's inhabitants and vitality (The Manning Times 1921). This practice traces back to nineteenth- and twentieth-century acclimatization practices, wherein the framing of disease, the environment, and race are all the same maneuver with political and social consequences (Anderson, 1996, 63). Settlers turned to *terra nullius*, which, under colonial law, granted European settlers a warrant to deny non-propertied people ownership of the land they occupied (Wolfe, 2001, 869). Under *terra nullius*, the right to belong to and exist within a space is enforced legally, institutionally, and socially (Moreton-Robinson, 2015, p. 18). Because whiteness was the invisible measure of who could hold possession, poor

and racialized populations living in the swamps could neither possess nor belong to the landscape (Ibid., p. 6).

In the mid-19th century, white institutions implemented swamp reclamation policy through *res nullius*, or the doctrine that states only private productive property is deemed legitimate, and in which the failure to produce value justifies dispossession of the previous holder's land rights (Harvey, 2014, p. 40). This concept links, once again, with Goldstein's concept of *terra economica* (Goldstein 2013). *Res nullius* allowed settler governments to deem these lands as being improperly used, and thus worthy of reclamation and destruction. It further opened up space for governments to codify anti-swamp legislation premised on long-standing myths of swamps as sites of disease, unproductivity, and disdain (Harrison et. al. 1947). In a statewide act of 1934, South Carolina granted counties the right to establish housing authorities specifically designed to pursue slum clearance outside of cities (News and Courier 1940a).[18] According to one newspaper, slum-dwellers in the Santee-Cooper Basin were "cabin-dwellers," people living in the absence of "decent houses" who needed to be moved into towns (News and Courier 1939b).

Swampification is enacted through *police power*, or the power of the government to "legislate to protect the health, safety, morals and general welfare of its citizens," as it manifests purportedly to eradicate environmental ills, such as malaria, flooding, and a lack of containment (Paul, 2008, p. 28 & 103; Dillon 2021). As Saidiya Hartman notes, police power "endows the state with the capacity to regulate behavior and enforce order in the service of the public good. Policing blackness was deemed essential to ensuring the health of the social body and minimizing danger" (Hartman, 2019, 248). She continues, "racial segregation was synonymous with the public good, and the imposition of the color line," and, I argue, firm ecological boundaries, was a means of controlling crime, morality, blight, and disease (Ibid.).

In 1943, a Black man named Adam Gates complained to the Public Service Authority about high levels of mosquitoes and standing water near his property, and asked for support in ameliorating the conditions. In a letter from the Senior Technician of Malarial Control to the Director of the Health and Sanitation Division, the Senior Technician noted that the property, located on a rural highway and approximately 300 yards southeast of Halfway Swamp was "not included in our control areas, and, if it were, with the amount of coppice and vegetation present control would be impracticable, if not impossible" (Power 1943). While the conditions were harmful to residents, largely because of mosquitoes, which "have always been prevalent in this locality," and malaria, which had "appeared periodically throughout the years prior to impoundment," the Senior Technician noted that "it is equally obvious that with the clearing of Halfway Swamp and the subsequent impoundment of the waters therein [e.g. the creation of Lakes Marion and Moultrie], mosquito production has increased" (Ibid.). Perceptions of Black spaces as immoral and uninhabitable, and the subsequent attempts to "clean up" those spaces and people therefore directly led to material swampification. In other words, in damming the waters, the Public Service Authority reproduced, and perhaps even exacerbated, the very conditions they sought to eradicate, but only within Black communities, which they deemed uninhabitable, peripheral, and unworthy of protection.

The New Dealers' claim that the destruction of the swamplands would directly lead to the eradication of malaria was not entirely true. In fact, the Public Service Authority, by its own

[18] This law was reified at the federal level in 1937 with the passage of the Wagner-Steagall Housing Act, which had multiple goals, including the "elimination of unsafe and insanitary (sic) housing conditions, … the eradication of slums, … [and] the provision of decent, safe, and sanitary dwellings for families of low income" (H. R. 2617).

admission, proved that malarial conditions of the Santee-Cooper Basin could be eradicated even before the dams were created, if only the government invested enough time and resources into the effort. The preventative methods utilized by the Authority to fight malaria in the region, specifically for the benefit of their contracted laborers, included the spraying of pesticides, oil, or Paris green poison; larvicide; the installation of nets on houses; widespread health education and typhoid fever vaccination clinics; and regular testing in health clinics (The News and Courier 1940b; Heyward 1943). As a result, WPA workers experienced a health equilibrium — what Authority agents called 'a biological balance' — in the swamplands and surrounding areas "such that it [was] no more dangerous for a man to live in one of the swamp-woods camps than to visit a town in this area" (Want 1941). Uninhabitability was therefore a social and moral designation, not a lived condition.[19]

## Blight: Im/moral Geographies and Condemned Ecologies

Given the above history, the New Deal era marks a temporal break in which the ecologies of the nation were required to fit into progressive goals, meet production or recreation needs, or be eliminated (Harrison & Kollmorgen 1947; Dillon 2021). As a scheme of simultaneous geographical, ecological, economic, and social planning projects pursued in the name of American "progress" — what Clyde Woods called "a social-spatial fix" — the New Deal dictated which environments and populations needed to be relocated or destroyed to modernize the United States (Gilbert 2015; Woods, 1998, 9). We can therefore regard swampification as a foundational environmental theory through which we can understand racialized ecologies, infrastructural development, spatial policy, and moral geographies as coeval at a moment of American redefinition and self-identification.

Settlers across the Southeast sought to destroy swamplands since arriving in North America through the General Drainage Act of 1600, the 1849 and 1850 Swamp Land Grant Acts, and subsequent reclamation policies. Perceptions of swamplands as immoral, malarial ecologies persisted well into the 20th century, and, in South Carolina, reached a breaking point in the 1930s and 40s, when settlers' perspectives shifted from South Carolina as Eden to South Carolina as "a death sentence" (Edgar, 1984, 3-4; Smith, 2012, 36). The naming of the swamps reflected the negative perceptions thereof, including Hell Hole Swamp and Scape 'Ore Swamp. The latter is a contraction of 'Escaped Whore Swamp,' and is rumored to have received its name during the Revolutionary War, either when a group of Revolutionary militiamen successfully attacked an encampment of British soldiers who were reportedly distracted while visiting a group of sex workers in the swamp, or when a local woman — also a sex worker — was driven out of

[19] In Hell Hole Swamp, home to a low-income and majority-Black population, the State of South Carolina pursued a eugenics campaign in the 1930s to control "its runaway Negro population through control of disease" (Flamiano, 2011, 72). One nurse described the swamp as "a strange and hard place," and the photographer Hansel Mieth described feeling isolated while photographing for *Life Magazine* in Hell Hole Swamp (Ibid., 72; Ibid., 81). Meith was angry with the editors who sent her to the swamp to produce an article on birth control, not because she had to spend so much time in the wetlands, but rather because of how the magazine dehumanized its Black subjects, implicitly supporting eugenics by arguing that Black people were a burden on social services the health care system (Ibid., 89). Frustrated, Mieth wrote, "I am sick of the whole damned job . . . They can shove their rotten magazine . . . Those people in hell-hole swamp [*sic*] are real people" (Ibid. 72; Mieth n.d.).

the town by locals and was forced to make her home in the swamp (McElveen 2005).[20] Swamps were regarded as loci of immorality and the naming reflected this sentiment.

The practice of synonymizing swamplands and pestilence has its roots in moral geographies, which, according to George Lipsitz, emerge out of a romance with pure spaces and imbue those spaces with implicit ethical assertions about the proper forms of social connection and separation (Lipsitz, 2007, 15). Neil Smith echoes Lipsitz when he invokes Leo Marx, who defines moral geography as the poetic fusion of physical geography and cultural myth, and claims that moral geography is a uniquely American invention, since settlers in the United States experienced a more abrupt contradiction between "civilization" and nature (Smith, 2008, 18). In the late 1990s and early 2000s, geographers turned to moral geographies to understand how the production of space across history has ethical implications, and to determine how to produce a more ethical discipline in the new century (Birdsall 1996; Smith 1997; Smith 2000; Proctor 1998; Lee and Smith 2004; Lipsitz 2007; Massey 2008; Smith 2008). In his 1996 presidential address to the American Association of Geographers, David S. Birdsall defined "moral geography" as the patterns resulting from everyday expressions of good and evil, concerned with the moral expressions of Western culture that play out on a mundane level (Birdsall, 1996, 627).

One of the most influential voices in moral geographies, David Smith, argues that moral geographies function by "imposing order or ugliness on the natural landscape, locating to an economic or social purpose, or imbuing particular places with value according to what they represent" (Smith, 2000, 45). In the unruly space of the swamp, everything that exists therein is rendered valueless and untamed, and thus lacking morality. In 1836, the rectors of the Church of the Epiphany in Pineville, South Carolina deemed the region to be so unhealthy that "families deemed it advisable to make their summer home elsewhere," thereby suspending or heavily reducing church services during the summer months (Carson 1942). Moral geographies, especially in the rural South, were a manifestation of racial capitalism, defining which land was being used properly, which spaces were 'pure' or 'clean', and which bodies belonged in a given location. We see this in the South Carolina Public Service Authority's language; in a promotional pamphlet, they write, "The project's 210 square miles of reservoir will replace malarial-breeding swamps, which are now a constant menace to public health, with beautiful lakes available to the public for swimming, boating, hunting and fishing" (South Carolina Public Service Authority 1939).

Swampification as a project of material and social landscape redefinition can be compared to processes of urban condemnation, whereby "blighted" or economically divested and often Black-inhabited neighborhoods are razed to "clean up" communities and open up space for middle- and upper-income development (Gold et. al. 2011; Paul 2008; Desmond 2016; Teaford 2010; Summers 2019; Thomas 1997; Rothstein 2017). In the early 1930s, at the same moment that the Santee-Cooper Project was created, the United States government founded the Home Owners' Loan Corporation (HOLC), an organization designed to provide self-amortizing mortgages to approximately one million homeowners who previously lost their homes or defaulted on their loans following the Great Depression. Through HOLC, some working- and middle-class families were able to gain equity for the first time.

[20] Today, Scape 'Ore Swamp is still surrounded by rumors and myths. Specifically, some locals believe that Bishopville is home to a Lizard Man. This myth emerged in 1988 when a 17-year-old boy got a flat tire while driving near the swamp, and got out of his car to change it, only to be met by a green, wet, seven-foot-tall lizard with three fingers, red eyes, and scales. The Lizard Man is South Carolina's very own cryptozoological version of Bigfoot (Aldridge 2018).

HOLC appraised real estate risk levels in 239 cities across the United States, producing color-coded security maps that assigned a risk level to residential areas, where the safest and best neighborhoods were coded A and designated green, and the riskiest neighborhoods were ranked D and designated red, in a scheme is now known as redlining (Hillier 2003; Rothstein 2017; Taylor 2014). Redlining is defined as "lending (or insurance) discrimination that bases credit decisions on the location of a property to the exclusion of characteristics of the borrower or property" (Hillier, 2002, 395). Any neighborhood that housed Black families was given a red designation, even if it was a safe, middle-class neighborhood full of single-family homes. In other words, redlining was a systematic institutionalized devaluation that excluded Black populations and undesirable living environments from the benefits of home loans and insurance, deeming each to be risks to both lending entities and communities (Taylor 2014). This codification and boundary-making process produced a system of classification that underlies what we now know as Jim Crow. According to Lewis, "[I]n a system of White supremacy, Black communities only make sense as dangerous and therefore subjugated places" (Lewis, 2022, 44-45). The practices, governance, and emplacement of Black people within urban renewal schemes codified spatial and racial segregation into law.

While HOLC and the South Carolina Public Service Authority were founded within one year of each other, I argue that swampification is a precursor to, and perhaps even a foundation of the practices of urban condemnation and blight. Neighborhoods zoned red and swamplands exist within the same white perceptions of uninhabitability. As Lewis notes, "Margins are full of danger and vulnerability, both of which operate in a variety of ways; margins threaten not only those who exist in them but also the very structure of normative order, always posing a possible threat, an impending breach" (Lewis, 2022, 49). Because swampification is the social construction of disdain and fear of murky ecologies, it is, therefore, the prototypical process of infrastructural development that is invoked as a solution to the crisis of marginal environments, the definition of which later expanded in the mid-20th century to include urban ecologies. As ecological spaces that preceded the existence of the city, swamplands and other terraqueous terrains were contact zones, through which white settlers came to understand blight, disease, underdevelopment, spatial transformation, and racialization. By observing the consolidation and elimination of Black housing in the rural swamplands to produce hydroelectric infrastructure projects, planners learned skills necessary to enact similar removals and renewals in urban contexts — what N. D. B. Connolly deems "serial displacement" and what James Baldwin coined "Negro removal" (Connolly, 2014, 197; Baldwin 1989 [1963]). Just as HOLC policies of the 1930s had consequences in housing policies of the 1950s and 60s, so too did early disdain of swamplands and their racialized inhabitants have on future perceptions of rural, urban, and suburban blight.

Redlining and other exclusionary zoning practices produced conditions in which Black people were unable to access affordable or suitable housing, resulting in high rates of movement, housing insecurity, and homelessness, thereby affecting Black economic, social, and physical environments. In 1970, Nathan Hare introduced his definition of *black ecology* and argued that "black and white environments differ not only in degree but in nature as well," and that "the causes and solutions to ecological problems are fundamentally different in the suburbs and the ghetto (both of which human ecologists regard as 'natural [or ecological] areas'" (Hare, 2, 1970). If we recognize redlined areas as urban Black ecological spaces, then the destruction thereof necessarily follows a historical pattern of swampification.

Just as neighborhoods were zoned red if even one Black family lived in the area, neighborhoods were framed as "blighted," "slums," or "ghettos" if Black families inhabited them, regardless of the condition of the housing or the economic status of the residents (Taylor 2014). Blight is a subjective term and a rhetorical device that allowed urban renewal advocates to deem certain properties and neighborhoods dangerous to the present and future city. Urban planners viewed blight as a public menace, "as if it were an infectious disease which would eventually spread throughout the urban fabric if not consciously and forcefully addressed" (Pritchett 2003; Marty, 2024, 5). This moral designation then allowed renewal advocates to condemn these blighted properties in order to transfer them to developers who they believed would use the space more productively (Pritchett 2003). Because "blighted properties were considered less worthy of the full bundle of rights recognized by American law," owners of blighted properties could be removed from their properties at will, only sometimes with relocation assistance, for the good of the future city and for the opportunity to expand urban development.

Just as the designation "pestilential" or "malarial" was often racialized in discussions around swamplands, blight was an urban racial-spatial designation. While race shaped the formation of the city in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, it became central to urban planning in the wake of the Great Migrations following World War II. Fear of the Black ghetto led to mass slum clearance in the decades that followed (Pritchett 2003). Slum clearance, like swamp clearance, was predicated on the goal of producing "a decent home and suitable living environment for every American family" (Ibid., 36; Gelfand, 1975, 115). Black homes and Black living conditions did not meet this standard of "decent" living and "suitable" environments; blighted areas were indeed framed as dam/ned Black ecologies. This moral designation of blighted urban neighborhoods as diseased directly mirrors the moral geographies of swampification, in which Black swamp residents were deemed malarial and pestilential.

So psychically linked were these ecologies that one 1919 South Carolina reclamation bill called for the appropriation of one hundred million dollars for the "investigation, irrigation, drainage and development of swamp, arid, waste, and undeveloped lands," all of which necessitated disposal "by the settler" (The Columbia Record 1919). While the name 'swampification' implies that this theory is unique to swampy terrains, the processual nature of swampification — from fear of the unknown, to mythologization of landscapes and peoples, to the legal eradication of unwanted places — can be applied to histories of other unwanted and racialized ecologies, including areas of urban blight.[21]

Those who inhabited the antediluvian swamp, notably Black people, were also a "constant menace," whereas those whom the Authority envisioned would be the target visitors to the eventual reservoirs, ideally middle and upper-income white people, embodied all the "beautiful" and leisurely characteristics the reservoirs would soon contain. Swampification, then, is a process of rendering swamplands immoral, and therefore unfit for "civilized" human habitation. In an opinion article in a South Carolina newspaper entitled, "What's The Use Going to Church?" the author contrasts refined churchgoers with "the crowds drawn together out of the mountain hollow, the swamp, [or] the slum," people who possessed "[d]egeneracy, a lowering of the standards of manners and final boorishness." The article illuminates the "difference between

[21] Swampification is therefore linked with theories of desertification and wastelands, as the fate of each respective environment and the racialized people therein are shaped by declensionist narratives, anthropogenic environmental shifts, and efforts toward "productive" use of the landscapes (Davis 2016; Voyles 2015).

the brutal coarseness of barbarism and the refinements of civilization," the former of which was evident in swamplands, and the latter perceptible in a clean, moral society (Bennett, 1929, 1).

The New Deal was a project of what James C. Scott calls high modernism, or a form of modernity characterized by linear progress, rational social design, increased satisfaction of human needs, and "an increasing control over nature (including human nature) commensurate with the scientific understanding of natural laws" (Scott, 1999, 89; Gilbert, 2015, 61). In their modernizing project, New Dealers regarded rural schools and institutions, especially those located in the swamplands, as "pathetically incapable" of civilizing their inhabitants, purportedly failing to teach them proper home management, economics, or how to "properly" structure a community (Mitchell 1936). This belief was only further perpetuated in 1941 when a local Black school in Eutawville reported that the malaria infection rate amongst students was over fifty percent, while the county rate was only about seven percent (Want 1941).

New Dealers also regarded portions of the landscape as unworthy of redemption. Jesse Goldstein calls this *terra economica*, or "a landscape of wasted potential, in which all of the world is potentially, or not yet, capital," the production of which "entails a violence of erasure" (Goldstein, 2013, 2). Central to *terra economica* is the removal of people who are determined to be "wasting" the land, or not making productive use of the landscape. The idea of wasting was a subjective, moral, and capitalist determination, often placed upon Black communities in the South who could not keep up with the parameters of development and progress outlined by white government officials. New Dealers believed rural people held "improper" — or uncontained and non-standardized — relationships with the natural world, and instead needed to learn agricultural skills, soil conservation, reforestation, and proper use of fertilizers, as well as how to clean their own bodies in order to prevent disease and eradicate "eternal pests" (Mitchell 1936). It was the New Deal project, and the project of the South Carolina Public Service Authority, to bring these "wasted" ecologies and "wasting" people up to the standards of society for America to reach its progressive goals (Riley 1939).

Settlers, and eventually state and federal governments, sought to bring these peripheral environments under white American control to be tamed, absorbed by the nation, and transformed into more productive ecological spaces. This ecological control facilitated control of the poor and racialized groups inhabiting the space. Infrastructure and infrastructural power, including the territorial expansion and transformation of South Carolina through the creation of the Santee-Cooper Project, protected and extended the reach of white control (Connolly 2014). The same practice occurred in urban spheres decades later through processes of urban renewal and gentrification, where private developers and governments alike purchased condemned and blighted buildings, redeveloped the land and structures, and made the habitat more livable, usable, and desirable for white visitors and residents (Summers 2019; Rothstein 2017). As Connolly argues, "Black slums… preserved and inspired fresh ties between government and capital, as Negro neighborhoods became a cornerstone for how the New Deal actually worked" (Connolly, 2014, 75).

Moral geographies are established through *emplacement*, or the practice of knowing and remaining in "one's place." This is a racialized process of segregation and a geographic structure of identification, recognition, and belonging. Urban renewal is, therefore, "a violent emplacement of displaced subjects in the margins" (Lewis, 2022, 47-49). This marginality is both a moral-social position and a geographic one. The spatial location and distribution of Black people "not only expose[s] blacks to more devastating and divergent environmental handicaps; they also affect black social and psychological adjustment" (Hare, 1970, 4). At its core, the

condemnation of spaces inhabited by Black people — rural or urban — is about keeping Black people in their place. It is to designate their homes and their lifestyles as unfit for existence in white space, and to further deem their continued presence in the places they have inhabited for generations as incongruous with America's social, spatial, political, and economic futures. Rural planning through swampification demonstrated the possibilities of social-spatial transformation of Black-inhabited spaces through resource extraction, infrastructural development, and community removal; urban planning through the condemnation of blight perfected these practices, making Black exclusion foundational to the development of almost every city across the nation.

## Conclusion

Swampification is a theory of uninhabitable ecologies and the destruction thereof. To inhabit the uninhabitable is to live within "the disavowed geography of the world" (Hartman, 2019, 347). To inhabit such a position is to be dam/ned, wretched, subaltern, and Black. It is to persist, to live in these undesirable ecologies in spite of state and private endeavors to contain and transform them for infrastructural and capitalist development.

To make the uninhabitable habitable, "the land must become a site of… regulation, a geography that maps 'a normal way of life' through measuring different degrees of inhabitability" (McKittrick, 2006, 131). The swamplands of South Carolina were long uninhabitable to white people, who saw the economic value and potential in the previously "unproductive" and pestilential terrains. Presciently, one opinion writer noted in 1854 that,

> More and more the attention of intelligent men is turned to the subject of reclaiming the vast tracts of waste lands in the low country, and converting them into productive fields. It cannot well be the work of individual proprietors… The work demands a systematic plan on a grand scale, and an authority capable of enforcing such a plan… Moreover, when the works are finished, they require the guardianship and control of an unquestionable public authority (The Charleston Mercury 1854a).

Eighty years later, the South Carolina Public Service Authority answered the call.

In Chapter 2, I will demonstrate how the moral, political, social, and economic dam/nation of swamplands through swampification produced the very conditions through which the Authority was able to destroy those same ecologies. Moral condemnation begets material destruction, and racial condemnation begets removal, and swampification establishes the moral and programmatic imperative of the New Deal. The urbanization of the rural as demonstrated in the infrastructural development of the Santee-Cooper Project demonstrates this plainly.

# Chapter 2:

# "Pushing Back the Darkness": Recolonizing South Carolina

> "Nature is man's best friend, and yet man, as soon as he's civilized, as we quaintly express it, wages relentless and successful war against her. He's laid waste empires of beautiful and productive landscape, blindly rushing ahead in a short-sighted, suicidal policy of exploitation and in promoting cock-eyed, unsound, and unnecessary projects labeled 'water-power conservation,' 'drainage,' 'reclamation,' and 'flood control, destroying more than he's produced. Follow the path of civilization and the farther you go the more nearly you approach a desert. Now we are clumsily setting up billion-dollar projects labeled 'relief.' It can be proved that if our resources hadn't been wasted so prodigally, we'd not now find it necessary to support millions of unemployed by the artificial, round-about, and demoralizing handing out of money."
>
> - J. N. "Ding" Darling, Former Chief of the U.S. Biological Survey, 1936

> "This is the tale of entrepreneurship of a few white men transforming the world with their ingenuous creations or of a political economy that is aggressively sutured to the earth's processes…"
>
> - Kathryn Yusoff, *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None*, 39

## Introduction

Three days before Thanksgiving, on November 20, 1939, the South Carolina Public Service Authority hosted a day of celebration in honor of the start of the construction of the Pinopolis Dam. Elite members of South Carolina society, including Governor Burnet R. Maybank, Charleston Mayor Henry R. Lockwood, and Public Service Authority officials, among others, spent the day with Public Works Administration (PWA) and Works Progress Administration (WPA) representatives and interested members of the community. Police escorted the distinguished guests from Charleston, where they had a luncheon and met with soldiers at the Citadel, to Pinopolis, where they inspected the dam site, watched a parade, and listened to music played by the United States Marine Band of Parris Island (South Carolina Public Service Authority 1939).

The day ended with a symbolic gesture. Rather than cutting a ribbon or digging a shovel into the ground, John M. Carmody, Administrator of the Federal Works Agency, pressed a button and started the mixer to pour the first concrete into the power house foundation (Ibid.). This gesture followed a 30-minute speech, where Carmody emphasized the need for federal expansion into all parts of the nation, as well as the improvement and standardization of modernity in the 20th century:

> Bitter experience has taught us that prosperity in one part of the country is short-lived if depression impoverishes the rest of the country. More than ever before in our history, we have come to realize that the various regions of the United States are interdependent and vitally bound together. To be prosperous as a nation, we must have prosperity

> everywhere. We cannot have a rich East, a poor South and a foreclosed West. One section will not long remain rich if others are bankrupt (Carmody 1939).

Carmody believed that infrastructural and developmental progress would inherently lead to cultural progress (Lovern, 1996, 87). Even more, he believed that the development of the South necessitated its full incorporation into the American project. That this argument was proudly proclaimed just moments before pouring the concrete foundations of the Santee-Cooper Project was significant.

In total, the construction of the dams, 380-foot-long powerhouse, eight-mile diversion canal, locks, and even portions of the lake required over 3 million cubic yards of concrete (Slater and Humphreys 2008; South Carolina Public Service Authority 1939). Historian Nathan B. D. Connolly (2014) and geographer Christopher Sneddon (2015) both illuminate how concrete possesses both material and social properties, solidifying itself in in the landscape once it is poured, and making firmer existing or desired social structures. Twentieth-century dams, and the concrete therein, demonstrate "complex networks of altered hydrologies, technical expertise, financial circuits, political desires, displaced communities, and hegemonic ideologies" and "generate and hold together assemblages of geopolitical and technological networks… that linger" (Sneddon, 2015, 2 & 125). In concluding the day with the pouring of concrete and the declaration of a singular American identity, the Authority laid the foundation for the absorption of the formerly isolated, rural South into the progress story of the Nation.

In 1988, South Carolina Educational Television produced a documentary to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the construction of the Santee-Cooper Project, entitled "Pushing Back the Darkness" (SCETV 1988). While the documentary invokes the phrase to celebrate the history of the construction of the reservoirs, I argue here that the project of "pushing back the darkness," was not merely about the illumination of rural regions previously without power, but also about opening up space for federal territorialization, the state's seizure of resources and assets, and the elimination of opacity, which Édouard Glissant defines as the West's attempts to render the Other as knowable by making their lives ontologically and materially transparent, and therefore legible, through reduction and classification (Glissant 1997; Diawara 2009). Through a process I call *recolonization*, the South Carolina Public Service Authority permanently transformed the material landscape while simultaneously concretizing the federal government's place in the lives of rural Black Southerners. This government intervention both opened up space for white settlement and rendered Black people as pawns to be (re)moved, conscripted into labor, "improved," or even abandoned in the making of the "progressive" New Deal project. To "push back the darkness" was therefore not only to use the sweeping hand of infrastructural development to bring illumination to a region, but also to remove the darker race from the landscape, to remove Black people to create space for white life.

Recolonization is the material and social transformation of lands already legally held by a nation or a state, but previously hidden or undeveloped by the government due to regional, local, or private possession and stewardship. These are not lands newly claimed or territories absorbed in the geographic expansion of a nation, as in internal colonization (Sabol 2017), but, rather, they are lands already possessed by the nation that are materially and socially transformed in modernizing and development schemes. Recolonization is a 20th-century version of what Katherine McKittrick calls rational spatial colonization and domination, or "the profitable erasure and objectification of subaltern subjectivities, stories, and lands" (McKittrick, 2013, x). As a continuation and manifestation of swampification, particularly the subjugation of unproductive lands and peoples for the purpose of national development, recolonization is the

process of rural development that has consequences that operate at the urban and suburban scales. Processes of rural condemnation and transformation using the justification of "development" and "progress" from settlement through the New Deal demonstrated the potential for similar removals in more urban locales in the decades that followed.

Recolonization functions through the formal spatial integration of previously uncontainable territories and the geographical incorporation of people previously accounted only by private companies and plantation owners. This is not to say that residents of the Santee-Cooper Basin were not recognized as South Carolinians or Americans prior to the New Deal, but rather to suggest that poor and Black people in the rural South retained an opacity to the state and nation prior to the 1930s that was intentionally destroyed in the New Dealers' drive to incorporate their lands and lives into the American project. This incorporation is a tragedy, marked by "the uncovering of what had gone unnoticed" and ultimately leading to the dissolution of communities (Glissant, 1997 [1990], 52). Making the unnoticed visible required the material transformation of regional ecologies and the social transformation of rural people.

Land becomes legible and therefore controllable through spatial organization (Scott 1998). The central 20th century spatializing process was through the development of infrastructure schemes. According to Walter Rodney (1972), a society's ability to develop is contingent upon its ability to increase its capacity to understand the laws of nature, and therefore transform that nature. All social, infrastructural, and economic development therefore begins with the acquisition of land and the transformation of the natural resources thereupon. Necessarily, following the enclosure of land and the transformation of the natural environment, communities participated in the production of social relations, governance structures, behavioral patterns, and belief systems. To transform the land is to transform the material, and therefore the social, world.

The Public Service Authority, in assessing the land and the use thereof, determined that the state could make better and more efficient use of the hundreds of acres of farm and swampland than the current residents were at the time. This land assessment critically obfuscated the economic value of the land for individual families, but also overlooked the non-monetary value associated with the land, such as intergenerational ties, personal memories, community connections, and more. As historian Peter Read argues in his history of the consequences of forced relocation, "Capitalism holds that land, like labour, is a commodity to be bought and sold; emotional attachment is irrelevant" (Read, 1998, 22).

Colonial regimes are sites of experiments in social engineering, enacted through spatial and racial ordering, the transformation of nature, and the generation of wealth for the colonizer (Scott 1998). As Patrick Wolfe notes, colonization is a structure and a social formation rather than a singular event, as colonizers enter a space with the intention of staying there in the long term (Wolfe, 2006, 388-390). Colonization is therefore not only about top-down domination, but also about imposing order on the ways we inhabit the world, shaping environments and peoples simultaneously (Ferdinand and Lambert 2021). Fanon adds, "The colonial world is a world divided into compartments" (1963, 37), what James C. Scott might call, "an agency of homogenization, uniformity, grids, and heroic simplification as the state" (2010, 7-8). For Aimé Césaire, colonization is simply "thingification" (1950). By this, he means, "societies drained of their essence, cultures trampled underfoot, institutions undermined, lands confiscated, religions smashed, magnificent artistic creations destroyed, [and] extraordinary possibilities wiped out" (Césaire, 1950, 42-43). In the proud narrative of the colonizer, these acts of violence are obfuscated by the settler's claim of progress, achievements, cures, infrastructural prowess, and

improved standards of living (Ibid.). In the Santee-Cooper Project, Black people were (re)moved "in an effort to improve their economic condition and social customs," to transform them as a people (Sumter Item 1939). To be colonized or re-colonized, therefore, is to be made consistent, legible, orderly, and ordered.

My theory of recolonization is supported by literature on internal colonialism — or domestic colonialism, as it is referred to in the United States context — is a theory of subordination and racial domination established by Black and Chicanx activists in North America in the 1960s and 70s.[22] Internal colonialism explained how racialized populations in the United States were territorially and spatially segregated, had differential administration, possessed disparities between legal citizenship and second-class positionalities, were disproportionately brutalized by agents of the state, and experienced higher levels of material and social toxicity in their lives (Gutiérrez, 2004, 281-282; González Casanova 1963; Cruse 1968).[23]

Internal colonialism, like recolonization, is a theory of underdevelopment at the scale of the nation and the region. This point was widely illuminated by scholars, journalists, and activists alike in the late 1960s, but this conceptualization was solidified over a century of organizing and theorizing, by scholars and activists, including Martin Delany, W. E. B. Du Bois, Malcolm X, Stokely Carmichael (Kwame Ture), and the Black Panther Party, among many others (Allen 2005).[24] In 1966, one investigative reporter noted that "it may be fruitful to regard the problem of the American Negro as a unique case of colonialism, an instance of internal imperialism, an underdeveloped people in our very midst" (Stone, 1966, 10; in Gutiérrez 2004). One year later, Martin Luther King, Jr. noted that "[t]he problem that we face is that the ghetto is a domestic colony that's constantly drained without being replenished" (King 1967). In 1968, Harold Cruse famously concurred that "the Negro is the American problem of underdevelopment," reflected, in large part, by "hunger, illiteracy, disease, ties to the land, urban and semi-urban slums, cultural starvation, and the psychological reactions to being ruled over by others not of his kind" (Cruse, 1968, 74-76). Whereas internal colonialism as a concept emerged out of the brutal conditions Black and other racialized populations experienced in urban contexts, recolonization gestures toward the remaking of rurality, in which forced conditions of agricultural labor, environmental dispossession, and reduced opportunity re-spatialized the lives of Black and poor white people who had worked the rural agrarian lands for over a century.

Recolonization is also, critically, the project of incorporating rural Black people into the broader society. Society, as Saidiya Hartman tells us, is "the regularities of human action," the homogenization and corralling of people who were previously or are presently regarded as errant, deviant, or nonconforming (Hartman, 2019, 110). Incorporation was not only social, but

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[22] The term "recolonization" has been taken up by several scholars, including Chandra Talpade Mohanty (2003), who defines the term simply as new modes of colonization, particularly through the globalization of capitalism, Indigenous suppression, and exploitation. Famously, and controversially, Ali A. Mazrui (1995) proposed the recolonization of Africa at the end of the 20th century, suggesting that a "benevolent" colonization of the continent by the non-African nations, the United Nations, or other African states; in the same bulletin, Archie Mafeje (1995) vehemently refuted the possibility of benevolent (re)colonization, defining such a proposal as preposterous, racist, and imperialist.

[23] Scholars and activists (Gutiérrez 2004; González Casanova 1963; Cruse 1968) who defined internal colonialism identified how their domestic experiences related to, or in some cases mirrored, the experiences of the dam/ned across the globe who were equally subjected to limited opportunities and poor material conditions.

[24] In 1852, Delany noted that "We are a nation within a nation;" In 1945, Du Bois described Black people as living under a "colonial status;" and in the late 1960s, the Black Power Movement "contended that black people are a domestic colony within the US and that a national liberation struggle… was required to change this relationship" (Allen, 2005, 1-3).

also economic. Black people were compelled to work and produce sustenance for the region and the nation, while being granted limited economic opportunity outside of the very agricultural system that held them in bondage and later in debt peonage for centuries.

In this chapter I investigate what one newspaper called "the spaciousness of the Santee-Cooper project," and, more specifically, the spatial enactments of the land acquisition and resettlement programs of the South Carolina Public Service Authority (The Item 1940). This designation is false, however, as spaciousness implies freedom, autonomy, and room to breathe (Tuan, 1977, 52). While Santee-Cooper Project expanded the territory and the administrative reach of state and federal governments, it deprived rural Black residents of their own space, stripping them of geographic autonomy, and enforcing spatio-moral codes thereupon.

In the twentieth century, state-driven, hegemonic, and developmentalist frameworks determined sovereignty and citizenship. The state was the harbinger of spatial consolidation, "plan[ning] and organiz[ing] society 'rationally,' with the help of knowledge and technology, imposing analogous, if not homologous, measures irrespective of political ideology, historical background, or the class origins of those in power" (Lefebvre, 1991, 23). The state framed itself as stable, objective, and authoritative, while all other forms of governance and organization were disordered and ineffective. New Dealers believed federal intervention into the lives of rural Black Southerners would allow them to restore cotton profitability, generate electric power through the construction of hydroelectric projects and power plants, and further exploit natural resources through the construction of more advanced transportation and communication networks. Development was therefore bound up in notions of progress and human evolution, framing the "most" developed and technologically advanced peoples as the pinnacle of humanity, and those who did not meet those standards as being less human (or, in some cases, subhuman) (Thomas, 2019, 124).

Planning is future-building, and to plan a development project necessarily requires deciding who or what belongs and who or what to leave behind. Therefore, underdevelopment is by planned and racialized (Rodney 1972). Danielle M. Purifoy and Louise Seamster introduce the concept of *creative extraction*, or "the process of race-relational development" that utilizes white governance structures at multiple scales to reclaim control of white spatial hegemony through three processes: "theft of land and resources, erosion of environmental and economic conditions, and exclusion of Black people as entitled participants in the social contract" (Purifoy and Seamster, 2021, 50). Such a pattern creates a vicious cycle, wherein communities are deemed in capable of developing their own neighborhoods, which local governments used as a rationale for disinvesting in the development of these regions (including failing to maintain infrastructure and withholding services), by consequence leaving these communities structurally undeveloped (Lewis, 2022, 37). Because Black communities are perceived as underdeveloped and blighted, they become so through white governmental abandonment. Consequently, Black relationships to the land were arrested as a result of exclusionary and racist political, social, and legal practices (Smith, 2007, 6).

In the planned displacement of 901 rural, agrarian, and majority Black families, the state determined that the existence of these populations within the region was incompatible with the futures the state desired. As Jovan Scott Lewis notes, "In a system of White supremacy, Black communities only make sense as dangerous and therefore subjugated places," and their perception of being underdeveloped, blighted, and unproductive made them unworthy of preservation (Lewis, 2022, 45). This framing of spaces of Black life as erroneous and dangerous was a utilitarian tool, as I demonstrated in Chapter 1; to frame Blackness as pestilent is to make

Black people and the spaces they inhabit removable. The ordering of white life is therefore the disordering of Black life; to establish white capitalist futures was to define the alternative (Ibid., 132). And these transformations are fundamentally in service of racial capitalism. The making and ordering of white life "seems to require and demand the disordering of Black life" (Lewis, 2022, 132). Who wealthy white South Carolinians were and what they wanted their state to look like required producing infrastructures to contain, hide, and control Black populations. Because development is "premised on systemic and legally sanctioned extraction of resources and value from one place to grow another," all development is inherently unequal (Purifoy and Seamster, 2021, 50).

The absence of state protection has been a lived reality of Black people in the United States throughout national history, but critically since in the wake of slavery (Sharpe 2016; Bruno 2023). Sylvia Wynter describes the inferior Human Other, notably the racialized "Indians" and "Negroes" as peoples "dysselected-by-Evolution," a socially constructed, biologically and evolutionarily determined ordering of humanity that determined one's success or failure in life (Wynter 2003). As Tianna Bruno notes, Black people have always "*lived* and struggled within and against state-sanctioned oppression" (2023, 7). In the 20th century, this struggle manifested in a differential experience of modernity, one in which the industrial exploitation of nature required the dispossession and continued exploitation of Black labor (Smith, 2007, 5). I therefore take up Deborah Thomas' invocation, "What does it mean to be human within developmentalist frames?" She answers: "To be perfectible and therefore always measured against the ideals of Western liberalism" (Thomas, 2019, 129).

In this chapter, I argue that the material transformation of and Black dispossession within South Carolina was driven not by existing ecological patterns nor social welfare, but rather by private and public business interests, settler logics, and a desire for racial order. In the early 20th century, "nature as wilderness posed a frontier that had to be conquered and colonized" (Caprotti and Kaika, 2008, 618). State and federal governments therefore possessed a neocolonial imperative, wherein development was a project of making the people, ecologies, and economies of the state perfectible through the incorporation of the periphery (rural South Carolina) into the center (the project of the United States). To develop Black was not merely to transform, but to territorialize, to claim, and to extract for the benefit of white progress. Rural South Carolina became an American territory through the New Deal modernist project.

## The Public Service 'Authority'

The Santee-Cooper Project was the first project in the nation to be owned and operated by a single state-produced authority (O'Reilly 1939). Signed into law by South Carolina Governor Ibra Blackwood on May 19, 1934 and approved by President Roosevelt on July 15, 1935, the Public Service Authority was granted a federal allocation of $37 million, with the Public Works Administration as the financing agency, the largest budget ever granted to a project constructed on the East Coast at the time (Lovern 1996; South Carolina Public Service Authority 1939).

Public authorities were quasi-public agencies that operate largely independently of the governments that create them, particularly within their administration, finances, and legal

structures.[25] These authorities operate with minimal public awareness or citizen participation, often being referred to as "shadow governments" or "government corporations" (Radford, 2013, 1-3). With the creation of the South Carolina Public Service Authority, South Carolina entered the power business with the backing of federal funding (O'Reilly, 1939). Even more, the public authority "represents a model or template… that is supported by federal and state laws, the practices of financial institutions and markets, and perceptions of what is normal and acceptable held by politicians, citizens, and judges," which make it easier to duplicate agencies that fit the same mold (Radford, 2013, 1-3).[26]

In 1937, two years prior to the construction of the Santee-Cooper Project, Roosevelt asked Congress to establish seven "Little TVAs" across the country, which would each administer power projects and establish safeguards against floods, droughts, and dust storms. He instructed one such authority to be established on the Atlantic Seaboard, likely alluding to the Santee-Cooper Project, which was still under litigation at the time. Described as a "reorganization program," the Little TVAs proposal would give power to Congress to determine what projects should be undertaken across the nation, but the financing and construction of the projects selected by Congress was the responsibility of local and regional entities, including the public corporations. Ironically, Roosevelt's proposed septuple duplication of the TVA was intended to protect the water-power resources of the nation from private monopoly and instead return the power to the public (The Columbia Record 1937).

While the New Deal was a scheme of social and spatial engineering, the 'alphabet soup' of New Deal agencies, which often overlapped responsibilities and obligations at multiple scales, demonstrated a lack of planning surrounding the organization of public authorities at the federal level. It was the goal of New Dealers to tackle problems as quickly as possible with little regard for bureaucratic apparatuses. This led to the creation of dozens of heterogeneous public corporations at the state and federal scales that often overlapped responsibilities, geographic regions, organizations, and rights (Radford, 2013, 101-103). Roosevelt and his contemporaries standardized and popularized this multiscalar model, producing a template that "combined the funding strategy of revenue bonds with the organizational device of special districts" (Ibid., 13).

This proposed expansion of public authorities nationwide demonstrates how the New Deal government participated in what James C. Scott calls *high modernism*:

> a supreme self-confidence about continued linear progress, the development of scientific and technical knowledge, the expansion of production, the rational design of social order, the growing satisfaction of human needs, and, not least, an increasing control over nature (including human nature) commensurate with the scientific understanding of natural law (Scott, 1998, 89).

High modernists produced public authorities, what Jess C. Gilbert calls "super-agencies," to plan and develop infrastructure projects (Gilbert, 2015, 62). The projects required the large-scale infusion of capital through increased taxes, credit, or bonds; the condemnation of private property, the relocation of people against their will, and the cooperation of many state agencies to complete the projects — all of which were most easily achievable under the ownership or leadership of a single authority (Scott, 1998, 95).

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[25] Public authorities still exist today, and many of the public authorities created in the twentieth century, including the South Carolina Public Service Authority and the TVA, still exist today, albeit in different forms and with different stakes (Radford 2013). Here, I use the past tense to describe public authorities as they functioned in the New Deal.

[26] Perhaps most famous among them is the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA).

Public authorities were vehicles of economic and spatial (re)organization. According to Henri Lefebvre, space is "manipulated by all kinds of 'authorities' of which it is the locus and milieu" (Lefebvre, 1991, 51). Critically, high modernists ordered space using scientific techniques and rational design, resulting in spatial homogeneity (Scott 1998). To establish homogenous spaces, New Dealers, using public authorities, excluded those whom they determined to be deficient, different, non-normative, or otherwise harmful to the development project both within the policies and the spatial enactment thereof. A nation's capacity for freedom, virtue, and harmony was contingent upon the establishment of a properly ordered material world (Lipsitz, 2007, 15). The development projects of public authorities of the New Deal, and most specifically of the South Carolina Public Service Authority, functioned to change the social conditions of the world by ordering the materiality of it.

The widespread adoption of public authorities was not without protest, however. At the federal level, Roosevelt expressed concern with the proliferation of corporate agencies, particularly ones that existed outside of standard departmental structures (Radford, 2013, 106). In South Carolina, discontent brewed as well. As one writer opined in 1939, "What do these Santee-Cooper people know of the anguish, the sleepless nights and sorrowful days through which these people, white and negro, are passing? Taking refuge behind the high sounding title 'South Carolina Public Service [A]uthority,' they rise superior to such sentimental and unbusinesslike attitudes" (Kirk 1939). Another bemoaned the simultaneous economic and environmental waste of the Public Service Authority: "We're giving away, then, for the sake of the fetish of fighting public-service corporations, $25,000,000 plus 500 square miles of natural resources which can never be restored, once that supply of fresh water is diverted" (Darling, 1936, 122) Public authorities claimed scientific and political expertise, while denying feedback from the very taxpayers who funded their projects. They were publicly funded social, economic, political, and infrastructural experiments that emerged at a moment during which state and federal governments searched for creative solutions to the nation's most pressing problems. And, critically, they were invented and adopted nationwide because they were "the path of least resistance" — a tool through which the government could "provide" for its citizens without citizen consent or input (Radford, 2013, 15).[27]

Once the Federal government approved the Authority's right to exist, and its additional right to geographically transform South Carolina, the state prepared to break ground.

## "Might as Well Go Fishing in a Desert"

Thomas Clay "T. C." Williams was not an engineer. In fact, he was famously referred to by South Carolinians and national publications alike as a "nut" (Derieux 1932). Still, his reputation of being a man with lofty, unachievable ideas did not stop him from achieving his dream of transforming the state's geography. He was "a man of vision, who spent his life

[27] The greatest opponents to the Public Service Authority were private power companies, who believed the federal and state governments were encroaching on their rights and businesses. Private power companies, notably the Carolina Power & Light Company, the South Carolina Power Company, and the Broad River Power Company, filed a lawsuit in December of 1935, arguing that the Santee-Cooper Project would "do irreparable injury to the majority of the people of SC" (Bostick, 2008, 16). In 1937, Federal Judge J. Lyles Glenn ruled in favor of the Authority, and on May 24, 1939, the United States Supreme Court upheld the decision. Because of the four-year delay in the groundbreaking of the Project, costs rose considerably, requiring an additional federal grant totaling a combined $31 million — a number over two times as large as the entire South Carolina state budget in 1939 (Stone 2003; Lovern 1996; Bostick 2008).

dreaming, and having his dreams come true" (The State 1941a). Despite his technical deficiencies, he somehow managed to always get his way.

Williams was a real estate developer, owner of the Columbia Railway and Navigation Co., president of the Lexington Power Company, and an entrepreneur who owned a steam-powered paddlewheel boat company that took passengers from Columbia to Georgetown, South Carolina along the Santee River. His vision for the Santee-Cooper Project emerged not out of a need for hydroelectricity or job creation in South Carolina, but rather out of his own business desire for a direct navigation route from Columbia to Charleston. The difference in elevation between the Santee and Cooper rivers was only thirty-five feet across twenty-one miles, a slope so small that when Williams proposed the construction of the reservoirs in the Lowcountry swamps, one engineer responded that he "might as well go fishing in a desert as power hunting on level land" (Derieux, 1932, 52; South Carolina Public Service Authority 1944). It was only after realizing that the reservoir project would require dams and locks to move boats between lakes of differing elevations that he proposed including a hydroelectric plant (The State 1941a; Montgomery 2008).[28]

The site of Lakes Marion and Moultrie was chosen due, in part, to its long history of settler engineering of the Lowcountry riparian systems. Early settlers proposed connecting the Santee and Cooper rivers by canal as early as 1770, but the plan was delayed due to the onset of the Revolutionary War. In 1792, the General Assembly of South Carolina incorporated the Company for Inland Navigation from Santee to Cooper River, which was granted a million dollars and tasked with the "patriotic" project of opening a navigation and cotton export pathway between the interior and the seaboard, or Columbia and Charleston, respectively. Notably, the canal served Berkeley County plantations, for whom several feeder canals were built so that cotton could be shipped directly from each plantation's wharf directly to market (South Carolina General Assembly 1849; Waterman 1939). Not only were the crops harvested by Black men, women, and children, but they were also transported by Black boatmen (Zeigler 1953).

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[28] This was not Williams' first hydroelectric project, however. In the late 1920s, Williams and engineer William S. Murray championed the creation of the Saluda Dam (officially known as the Dreher Shoals Dam), which in 1930 was the largest man-made reservoir in the world and was located upstream from the eventual Santee-Cooper Project, west of Columbia. While Williams was the local dreamer, who was often declared a 'nut' and met with resistance in South Carolina, Murray was an outsider from New York who saw the benefit of developing a wooded region he had never even visited. When Murray finally visited South Carolina, the two men covertly surveyed the terrain, where they inadvertently interacted with Black farmers who would eventually be displaced from the land. At the time, Williams only dreamed of a single power plant with approximately sixty thousand horsepower to support his boating dreams, while Murray's visioned mushroomed into a plan for a vast dam across the Saluda River that would generate approximately four hundred thousand horsepower. Where Murray was responsible for designing and engineering the dam, Williams took on the resettlement of five thousand people, driving from door-to-door, convincing every family to accept cash for their property (Derieux, 1932, 82).

The creation of the Saluda Dam resulted in the impoundment of Lake Murray, the naming of which indicated that the majority of the credit for the creation of the project was granted to the engineer over the businessman (Leader 2007; The State 1941). While Williams claimed that the landowners in the region appreciated the water power, the value of the lake in 1930 only amounted to approximately fifteen dollars per acre, and the impoundment of the region's waters resulted in the curtailment, rather than the increased capacity of, the hydroelectric energy in the region, particularly during dry seasons, leading several businesses to leave the region or the state entirely to find consistent power (The State 1930). Still, despite his failure to live up to his promises of increased energy capacity for the state, Williams was granted yet another hydroelectric contract in 1933 with his proposed Santee-Cooper Project (Leader 2007).

Additionally, to build the twenty-one-mile-long canal, between 700 and 1000 enslaved laborers worked every day for seven years using only picks, shovels, and wheelbarrows to excavate the swampy landscape. Local plantation owners leased out their slaves at a rate of $120 for men and $75 for women, and each slave, regardless of gender, was required to remove two cubic yards, or approximately 54 wheelbarrows of dirt each day. By the time the canal was completed in 1800, it was thirty-five feet wide and five-and-a-half feet deep (South Carolina Public Service Authority 1944; Bostick 2008).

Although man believed he had conquered the natural flow of the state's rivers, the chosen canal route was subject to the region's seasonal droughts, ultimately drying up portions of the canal for weeks or months at a time. Additionally, the canal company almost immediately experienced a loss in revenue due not only to the droughts, but also to the creation of the railway, which was more reliable and more efficient, as well as the cost-saving measures invented by plantation owners, such as stacking boats on top of each other during return trips to avoid paying tolls on empty boats. The General Assembly revoked the charter for the canal company in 1850, and after the Civil War, the canal fell into disuse and disrepair (South Carolina Public Service Authority 1944; Bostick 2008).

Though the Santee Canal materially dried up, it never evaporated as an idea, but instead laid dormant, "resting as it were from its long struggle against insurmountable odds" (South Carolina Public Service Authority 1944). Materially, the placement of Lakes Marion and Moultrie was modeled after and placed adjacent to the Old Santee Canal.[29] Economically and politically, elite South Carolinians like Williams never gave up on the dream of economically benefiting from connecting the state's rivers.

In 1923, Charleston Mayor John Grace expressed interest in the creation of a hydroelectric project to revitalize Charleston's depressed economy. In 1926, Williams and his business partner Gabriel A. Guignard proposed the creation of a hydroelectric project connecting the Santee River via Ferguson and the Cooper River via Monck's Corner, for which they were granted a fifty-year license by the Federal Power Commission.[30] Though the project was halted in the late 1920s due to the Great Depression, it was taken up once more, this time as a government-owned project, in 1933 following the 1932 election of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, who sought to make America more "dam-minded" (Bostick 2008; Roosevelt 1934). This project is what we now know to be the Santee-Cooper Project.

Riparian development in South Carolina from settlement through World War I was rarely proposed with the public in mind, but rather for the benefit of a few private businesses and plantation owners. Then, when the state and federal governments took over in the 1930s, their goal was similarly to preserve the economy of the state and revitalize capitalism in the region. Capitalism is not only a political-economic system, but also a social relation, a way of structuring time and place, and a tool for planning the material and social future of a society (Estes 2018; Lewis, 2022, 64). It is a geographic project that attempts to develop and urbanize the countryside under the guise of rural progress (Smith, 2010, 49). While Williams claimed he was an advocate of "more industries, more taxable wealth, more homes, [and] more people in the Southeast, rivers were transformed and swamps were destroyed with state and federal dollars,

[29] The lakes bear the names of General Francis "Swamp Fox" Marion, a Revolutionary War General who resided at nearby Pond Bluff Plantation, and William Moultrie, the original president of the Santee Canal company and the 35th Governor of South Carolina (South Carolina Public Service Authority 1944; Zeigler 1957).

[30] Ironically, Williams never lived to see the benefits of the Santee-Cooper Project, passing away in May of 1941 before the opening day of the reservoirs (The State 1941a).

and with the backing of white elites (The State 1941a). To publicly justify the erection of these projects and the subsequent transformation of the geological face of the state, the creators needed to manufacture consent by inventing rationales that would purportedly benefit the entirety of the state. But not all were convinced that they would ever see the benefits of the Project.

## Conservation, Preservation, and Resistance

In a 1936 article entitled, 'Man's Blind Attack on Nature,' J. N. "Ding" Darling, the Acting President of the General Wildlife Federation and the Former Chief of the U.S. Biological Survey, criticized the Santee-Cooper Project, stating that the premises upon which it was proposed and being built were "characteristic of the methods followed thruout [sic] all generations that white men have occupied America" (Darling, 1936, 121). Darling, an artist and political cartoonist, was appointed to Roosevelt's presidential advisory committee in 1933 with environmentalist Aldo Leopold, where the duo was tasked with developing wildlife programs for marginal lands newly acquired by the federal government (Hart, 2013, 141). Though he accepted the position, Darling remained privately and publicly skeptical of Roosevelt's New Deal programs, notably the nation's hydroelectric projects and especially the Santee-Cooper Project, which he believed demonstrated "short-sighted, suicidal polic[ies] of exploitation" that subsequently produced "cock-eyed, unsound, and unnecessary projects" (Ibid.; Darling, 1936, 31). Darling even wrote a letter directly to Roosevelt, in which he argued that the Santee-Cooper Project was the clearest demonstration of fiscal and ecological waste (Hart, 2013, 141).

Though Darling served as a political agent working on behalf of the New Deal government, he lamented the incorporation of politics in the sphere of nature and wildlife, writing, "When politics gets into such a situation the whole problem becomes even more complicated and difficult to handle" (Ibid., 121). As a result, around the time this article was published, Darling resigned from public office to dedicate his full attention to public condemnations of public works projects like Santee-Cooper, which he believed would "destroy one of the finest game preserves on the Atlantic seaboard and lay waste vast tracts of hardwood timber" (Public Service Magazine, 1942, 11-12).

Two years prior, James H. Hammond, Chairman of the South Carolina Delegation on the Santee-Cooper Project argued before Congress in February of 1934 that the creation of the Santee-Cooper Project would result in "the development of the natural resources of the Santee and Cooper River Valleys and for the economic rehabilitation of a large portion of the State," notably emphasizing that the creation of two dams would result in the "salvaging of thousands of acres of land on the lower Santee with their rich timber resources and future agricultural possibilities which are now made useless by repeated inundations" (Jahnz et. al., 1934, 7-8). But, ecological reform, including the transformation of soils and regional agriculture, was never a high priority for the Authority, and there was little evidence to suggest that the inundation of the Basin would result in the salvaging of any land or timber (Hart 2013).

A distinction should be made here between conservation and preservation. Conservation is not explicitly about environmental protection, but rather is grounded in the belief that natural resources should be rationally and scientifically managed for the public good. As historian Sarah T. Phillips notes, "Conservationists thought natural resources should be used, developed, and even commodified, just not wasted" (Phillips, 2007, 7-8). Samuel P. Hays puts it another way: conservation is "the rational planning to promote efficient development and use of all natural

resources" (Hays, 1959, 2). In short, to conserve is to extract, but only for capital gain. Conversely, preservation is the belief in the intrinsic value and maintenance of natural, scenic, and significant places, often protected through park status, state or federal recognition, and environmentalist movements (Phillips, 2007, 7-8). While preservation was indeed a factor in resistance to New Deal governance, conservation held primacy in New Deal policies, linking together nature and culture, with a particular focus on the impoverished economies and ecologies of rural areas (Ibid., 9). Resistance to the creation of the dam emerged from conservationists and preservationists alike.

Most vocal and powerful among the dissenters included the extant planter class, who resisted the creation of the Santee-Cooper Project on the grounds of preservation. Inspired by Lost Cause memorialization, local white elites "assuaged their own ambivalence about modernization" by advocating for the preservation of "historic" plantations (Hart, 2013, 130). As "repositories of white elite values and supremacy," plantations enabled the monopolization of agriculture (notably cotton), manufacturing, banking, property, and resources in the hands of a few white families (Ibid., 131; Woods, 1998, 5). But, as I discussed in Chapter 1, the New Dealers did not see the value in preserving the "wasted" swampland ecologies or the structures therein, not even the plantation houses, believing instead that the transformation of the landscape, the downward flow of water from the Santee to the Cooper rivers, and the subsequent generation of hydroelectricity would do more for the economy than any plantation was capable of contributing at the time (Hart 2013).

This, of course, angered what Clyde Woods calls the *plantation bloc*, "a Southern ethno-class grouping engaged in the monopolization of resources, power, historical explanation, and social action" (Woods, 1998, 29). The plantation bloc positioned plantation owners as masters not only of their plantation but also of the racial, political, economic, and environmental system of the South. Federal development fundamentally challenged Southern values of individuality and autonomy (Hart, 2013, 144). One white resident, Joseph P. Simons, refused to sell Pond Bluff Plantation, which had been in his family for over a century, and which was once owned by Francis Marion, for whom Lake Marion is named. The Public Service Authority attempted to seize the property through eminent domain, but Simons fought back. Swearing that he would rather die than see Pond Bluff taken by the Authority, Simons elected to commit suicide rather than be bought out by the state. On July 7, 1939, Simons shot himself in the head, ending his own life (Bostick, 2008, 78). Seventeen months after his death, the Public Service Authority put a two-column public notice of condemnation and seizure of Simons' property and all riparian rights, roads, and structures therein (The Times and Democrat 1940).

The plantation bloc demonstrated how "unabated individualism had yielded an overinvestment in agriculture but an underinvestment in agriculturalists" (Phillips, 2007, 9). For New Dealers to assert authority — or the Authority — over the perceived and real supremacy of the plantation bloc was to challenge the racial and social order of the region, which had remained steadfast since white settler arrival. But there would be no New Deal without the South, and more specifically without the buy-in of Southern white elites (Katznelson 2013). Therefore, the Public Service Authority assuaged their fears by dedicating time and resources to the preservation of as many plantation structures as possible, and the memorialization of others when preservation was not feasible (Waterman 1939; Carson 1942; Zeigler 1957; Bostick 2008).[31]

[31] Anthropologists surveyed the plantation structures in 1939, documenting their findings in reports, speeches, and theses that were eventually used as source material for Sunken Plantations: The Santee-Cooper Project, one of the only existing books about the Santee-Cooper Project. One plantation home, which American Historic Buildings

Conservation initiatives were also spearheaded by white elites, though the organizing was led not by Southern plantation owners, and rather by Northern sport hunters, opinion writers, and environmentalists who occasionally spent time in South Carolina. Environmentalists, including the National Audubon Society, and the South Carolina Garden Club, sought to appeal to both the conservationists and the preservationists of the era by demonstrating both the potential loss of animal life and the potential loss of agricultural and timber economies (Hart 2013).[32]

Despite their protests, plantation owners, landlords, and absentee owners of seasonal hunting property were among the greatest financial beneficiaries of eminent domain in the Project (Stone, 2003, 71-72). Still, when comparing the potential benefits of the Santee-Cooper Project with the protestations of environmentalists, plantation owners, and, as I will discuss in detail in Chapter 3, poor Black residents, the Public Service Authority elected to transform the landscape for industrial gain. Murky swamplands, "lazy" rural farmers, and a plantocracy were incompatible with the industrial and progressive future New Dealers at the state and federal level desired.

## Malarial Control

In August of 1943, Adam Gates, a Black resident of Calhoun County made yet another call to the South Carolina Public Service Authority, complaining about the increased prevalence of mosquitoes on his property following the clearing of Halfway Swamp. While mosquitoes were present in the region long before the inundation of Lakes Marion and Moultrie due to swampy ecological conditions, the impoundment of Lake Marion directly caused an increase in mosquito production, by the Authority's own admission (Power 1943). This was cause for concern for Gates, who lived in his unprotected home with his wife and four children under the age of ten (U.S. Census Bureau 1940).

Still, despite his many complaints, Gates made little headway. Halfway Swamp was not considered part of the Authority's control areas, and, even if it were, a Senior Technician reported that "with the amount of coppice and vegetation present control would be impractcable, if not impossible" (Power 1943). Even after years of coppice clearing, the construction of regional catching stations, and the introduction of mosquito control measures by the Public Service Authority, Gates's family was one of only three or four homes in the area that did not have mosquito nets installed on his home. Given that nearly every neighbor listed in the 1940 census was Black, we can assume that these four unprotected homes in the region were occupied by Black families (U.S. Census Bureau 1940).

Malaria control was among dozens of concerns of Lowcountry citizens, before and after the creation of the reservoirs. The malaria found in Lowcountry South Carolina (*falciparum* and *Anopheles quadrimaculatus*) was lethal and cerebral, and was introduced from West Africa as a consequence of the Atlantic slave trade (Carney, 2001, p. 148; Rice 1940b). Yet, as I describe in Chapter 1, early settlers regarded the swamplands as "naturally" diseased spaces that needed to be eradicated to protect the growing white population in the state. South Carolina's humid

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Survey Architect Thomas Waterman described as "the only house in the proposed region of inundation the loss of which can be considered of national importance," was even relocated across the state to Clemson University, where it rested on the property of the state's architecture school (Clemson University n.d.).

[32] T. Robert Hart's (2013) article provides an excellent breakdown of the key actors and preservationist mentalities of national, state, and local organizations in the 1930s.

environment was initially an agricultural draw for European settlers. Shortly after arriving, however, residents began to express concern over the debilitating effects of the tropical, disease-ridden environment (Marrens & Terry, 1984, p. 534). As settlers ran out of land to build new plantations near low-lying coastal swamps, they began to move inland, up the Cooper River, where they quickly encountered long and sticky summers, relentless mosquitoes, and violent and fatal fevers (Ibid., p. 540-1).

Generations of settlers sought relief from disease-carrying mosquitoes. By the early 1900s, malaria was still rampant in inland South Carolina, despite the consistently decentralized agrarian population in the region. According to a 1945 survey, even two or more miles from the nearest source of water or blood, there was widespread breeding of malaria-carrying mosquitoes (Eyles et al., 1945, p. 1266). Still, the Public Service Authority was more concerned about the cost of "bringing rural electrification to negroes who have not been taught to screen their houses," suggesting that Black people who lacked the technical skills, intellect, or materials to protect their own homes did not deserve federal assistance (O'Reilly, 1939).

Malaria control and mosquito eradication were representative of the 20th Century global colonial project.[33] According to Frantz Fanon,

> Hostile nature, obstinate and fundamentally rebellious, is in fact represented in the colonies by the bush, by mosquitoes, natives, and fever, and colonization is a success when all this indocile nature has finally been tamed. Railways across the bush, the draining of swamps and a native population which is non-existent politically and economically are in fact one and the same thing (Fanon, 1963, 251).

Nations built entire policies around the intersecting development projects of hydroelectric engineering, rural reconstruction, the generation of power, and technical engineering, with the belief that rural electrification, economic growth, industrial development, and agricultural boom would follow. But the mosquito persisted, not in spite of the Public Service Authority, but perhaps because of it.

In October of 1940, Clarence Cottam, head of the Food Habits Division of the United States Biological Survey, cautioned the Health and Sanitation at the South Carolina Public Service Authority that the impoundment of Taw Quaw Creek would increase the volume of water near one of the densest human populations in the region, who, following impoundment, would be within the one-mile known-flight range of malaria-carrying and vector mosquitoes. Critically, Cottam warned that such a large human population nearby would provide mosquitoes with "blood feeds" that would give them enough energy to fly longer distances, thereby infecting people further away from water sources (Rice 1940b). Scientists also possessed decades-long knowledge that the method laborers were using to "wire down" timber and abstain from removing debris directly produced breeding grounds for anopheline mosquito larvae; despite this knowledge, the WPA continued their hasty clearance path (Hassel 1940; Slater and Humphreys 2008). To abate these potential crises, Cottom suggested two critical solutions: do not impound the region around the Town of Summerton, near Taw Quaw Creek, or more generously provide screens to houses in the area, specifically within the one-mile flight range of any body of water.

[33] Egypt in the exact same historical moment suffered from an increase in mosquito production, and as a result, an increase in cases of malaria, in large part due to poor infrastructural planning. By linking together two previously separate rivers, engineers enabled mosquitos to travel between rivers, migrating across former land barriers and entering into regions where some residents lived closer to water than ever before (Mitchell, 2002, 23). The same was true in South Carolina.

The Director Health and Sanitation of the Public Service Authority plainly responded, "[B]ecause the financial obligation for screening such an area would be considerable, I do not think that the Authority should be saddled with this undue expenditure" (Rice 1940b). The Public Service Authority was aware of the risks but chose instead to advance their development agenda while actively imperiling rural Black lives.[34]

Then, on June 27, 1941, President Roosevelt declared the Santee-Cooper Project a national defense project. In December of that year, following the bombing of Pearl Harbor, Roosevelt ordered that the Public Service Authority immediately cease the land-clearing process — despite thousands of trees, stumps, building foundations, and more remaining in the flood path — to immediately fill the land and begin the generation of hydroelectric power in support of the war effort (Martin, 1984, 1-D). As the United States prepared to enter the global conflict, malaria control became not only a public health project, but also a militaristic one. One of the greatest threats to troop effectiveness on the warfront was malaria, and the U. S. government needed a rapid solution to the disease to win the global war. To its arsenal of malaria-fighting tools, including impoundment, quinine, drainage systems, larvicidal techniques, and home screening, the Public Service Authority and WPA added the testing of dichloro-diphenyl-trichloroethane (DDT) (Slater and Humphreys 2008).

The Santee-Cooper development area represented one of the last and largest populations of people infected with malaria, and while this resembled an epidemic, for the U.S. government, this was a key opportunity. In 1945, Louis L. Williams, Medical Director of the United States Public Health Service (USPHS),[35] wrote in a letter to the Malaria Control in War Areas (MCWA) agency, "The Santee-Cooper offers what may be the last opportunity in this country to see active malaria. I suspect that a month down there this summer… would be worth a great deal to you."[36] He noted that the only other opportunities the MCWA might have to test malaria control, and more specifically DDT, would be through small epidemics across the nation, or otherwise abroad (Williams 1945; Slater and Humphreys, 2008, 108).

Still, despite the insufficient evidence in support of the usage and testing of DDT, the Center for Disease Control continued to back the chemical, disapproving the right of physicians in the region to administer antimalarial drugs around Lake Marion. More concerned about the results of their DDT studies than of the suffering of poor Black populations, who the all-white physicians and government officials likely did not view as human subjects, but instead, as one researcher called them in 1946, "parasite reservoirs" or "parasitemia reservoirs." Specifically, the scientist worried about upsetting the reservoirs within children ages 10 and younger, who were infected at significantly higher rates than teenagers and adults (Ibid., 112; Yeager 1946).

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[34] As I will demonstrate in Chapter 3, the mosquito and its accompanying diseases influenced the development and implementation of public health programs in rural spheres, addressing concerns surrounding morality, hygiene, housing, parenting, and more (Mitchell, 2002, 50; Caprotti and Kaika 2008).

[35] This is the same organization that designed and implemented the Tuskegee syphilis study (Slater and Humphreys, 2008, 114).

[36] Whereas downstream Lake Moultrie, closest to Charleston, was almost entirely cleared and produced little malaria, the upstream Lake Marion was filled with dense debris that produced the ideal malaria reproduction conditions, leading to about 39% of the population on the north shore having malaria in the summer of 1944. In June of 1945, the South Carolina Board of Health began testing DDT in the region, spraying two areas totaling 1,807 people and using two control areas of 2,307 people as control regions. By November, the difference between the test and control areas was marginal, ranging between 2% and less than 1% rate in infectiousness. But in 1945, the infection rate was down across all communities to less than 4.5%, suggesting that a combination of other prevention methods was equally or more successful in reducing cases of malaria (Slater and Humphreys 2008).

Running counter to Timothy Mitchell's claim that the mosquito is a wholly subaltern subject, one that belongs to nature and cannot speak for itself, the Santee-Cooper Malaria Study demonstrates how there was an overrepresentation of mosquitoes in the region, at the expense of the Black humans in the region and the occlusion of their suffering (Mitchell, 2002, 50; Slater and Humphreys, 2008, 113). As medical historians Leo B. Slater and Margaret Humphreys write plainly: "Once the researchers had decided on a plan that involved environmental manipulation, the human population involved went from *being* the study population to becoming one aspect of the landscape that influenced the actual study population, which was made up of infected mosquitoes" (Slater and Humphreys, 2008, 114-115).[37] Black people, then, were the ideal government test subject, on whom chemical weapons could be tested in the purest form.

## Destruction and Deluge

The South Carolina Public Service Authority began land clearance and construction in 1939 (Stone, 2003, 71-72). Pivotal to the rapid construction of the Santee-Cooper Project was the use of heavy machinery to fell millions of trees and break through the limestone marl. In the proposed flood zone, there existed an estimated three to four hundred thousand feet of virgin cypress and hardwood timber.[38] In a 1939 article in the *Southeastern Lumberman*, the writer noted that the proposed hydroelectric system necessitated either the destruction and waste of timber, or the "hurried marketing [of timber] to nearby mills with a consequent glutting of the hardwood market" (Southeastern Lumberman, 1939). Fearful of the prospect of such waste, the *Southeastern Lumberman* sent a representative to South Carolina to thoroughly examine the potential timber loss. The *Lumberman* learned that the Authority put forth two plans: the first was to permanently flood the land, making minimal effort to salvage timber, an inconceivable proposition to a region that relied so heavily on timber production; the second was to make timber available to nearby mills within eighteen to twenty-four months, but requiring the mills to haul the lumber themselves — an unfeasible proposal, given that the amount of labor required and the small amount of timber offered to each lumber manufacturer, which "would not be of sufficient quantity to justify the expense of building expensive logging railroads and of buying equipment necessary to successfully log the timber."

Upon learning this news, the *Lumberman* advised the Authority to put sawn lumber on the market "gradually over a considerable length of time without disorganizing the hardwood and cypress market not only in the Virginia-Carolina consuming sections but probably everywhere in America. In 1939, there was already an over-supply of timber in the national market; adding the lumber from the Santee-Cooper Basin all at once into the market would collapse the hardwood and cypress industry (Ibid.). Virgin stands of bald cypress trees average between 400 and 600 years old, and some even live up to 1200 years old (Devall, 1998, 7).[39] To remove all of the old-growth trees in the region was not merely to decimate the timber economy in the region; it was also to destroy ecologies that would take centuries, if not millennia, to

[37] For an in-depth study of the Santee-Cooper Malaria Study, see: Slater, L. B. and Humphreys, M. (2008). Parasites and Progress: Ethical Decision-Making and the Santee-Cooper Malaria Study, 1944-1949. *Perspectives in Biology and Medicine*, 51(1), 103-120. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1353/pbm.2008.0011

[38] This number does not include the timber located on the land below the two dams, which would be significantly deprived of water following impoundment (Kauffman 1939).

[39] In the nearby Beidler Forest, the oldest living tree has cores dating back to 1391 (Evans 2023).

restore. This ecological transformation would also have consequences on the thriving timber market of South Carolina, which led some residents to believe that the creation of a project of this scale "may be almost as disastrous as the Civil War" (O'Reilly 1939).

Still, thirty lumber companies did take up the Public Service Authority's call to clear and log lumber from the floodplain forests. To accomplish this feat, the companies first needed to construct logging railroads, some of which were 20 miles long in total, to run into the center of Santee Swamp. Thereafter, the companies removed approximately 155 square miles of trees log-by-log, most of which were made of virgin timber from historic hardwoods, gums (red, black, and tupelo), cypress, sycamore, ash, red oak, and water oak (Wright 1941; News and Courier, August 1937). The removed trees included Cypress trees measuring up to 13.5 feet in circumference (Zeigler, 1945, 198 & 232).

To construct the reservoirs "machine-age giants… roar[ed] through the swamps" and "mechanical monsters with metal feet… tread[ed] clay into dams where only the placid mule moved before" (O'Reilly 1939). Many of these machines were originally developed for cultivation and creating life out of the earth — to ease the workload on large-scale farms and in agricultural centers in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. These were later adapted into tools of destruction, as earth-moving heavy machinery following the Great Depression in response to a need for labor-intensive construction and infrastructural development projects, like the Santee-Cooper Project (Tatum et. al., 2006, 989).

Explosions rang out throughout the day and into the night as workers ignited dynamite to blast through the limestone marl. Unlike previous South Carolina projects, the Santee-Cooper Project required laborers to participate in night work and Sunday shifts (News and Courier 1939a). Laborers were segregated on both racial and class-based lines. The Public Service Authority constructed separate barracks and mess halls for white and Black workers, and further produced smaller, more comfortable units for engineers while laborers of both races lived in large barracks (Bostick, 2008, 24). Pay rates varied on the project based on the class of work but averaged at about ninety cents an hour for a forty-hour work week. But work was grueling, particularly for Black men who were tasked with felling trees by hand in the swamps, resulting in at least one strike in 1939 (News and Courier 1939b; O'Reilly 1939). While the Authority initially proposed having more than 10,000 men on payroll, at most they only had about 7,300 laborers at a time, thereby requiring men to work more intensely to complete the timeline within the proposed timeline (Stone, 2003, 71-72).[40]

The Santee-Cooper Project was record-breaking: it was the largest PWA project; contained the largest single-lift lock in the world at 60 feet wide, 180 feet long, and 75 feet in height; moved water through 62 gates; held back waters with an eight-mile long, 78-foot high earthen dam; and, at the time of its construction, it was the largest land-clearing project in U. S. history (The Berkeley County Museum 1992). In just under four years, the South Carolina Public Service Authority removed two percent of the hardwood stand of the entire state of South Carolina, amounting to over 204 million board feet of timber, approximately 132 million of

[40] The South Carolina press boasted that, when compared to the work of a single man in an average year, the combined mechanical innovations and massive workforce would rapidly transform the face of South Carolina in just a few years. One newspaper reported that "A man, hand-filling a one cubic yard truck with dirt and dumping excavation would require upward of 3,200 years of successive work in one mile beyond the point of days in which to move the amount of dirt already disturbed in construction of the project" (News and Courier, December 1940). The same newspaper reported that it would require 55,122,000 hours to complete the project, estimating that it would take a single man working forty hours a week 26,480 years to complete the job (News and Courier, April 1935).

which were estimated to be virgin hardwood and old-growth cypress (Kauffman 1939).[41] While the federal government granted $64 million to the Authority for the completion of the project, most of the money left the state through contracts with outside materials, engineering, and construction companies, including Illinois-based Harza Engineering Company and New York-based Murray and Flood engineering organization, both of which designed and oversaw the construction of the reservoirs (Stone, 2003, 71-72; Cooper 1941; Kauffman 1939).

Because the planned inundation date for the reservoirs was June 28, 1941, the "armies of workers" eventually had to abandon the remaining trees and stumps, leaving some in the earth or submerging felled trees by tying them to cables and anchoring them to the reservoir bed (Riley 1939; O'Reilly 1939). Nearly out of time, the Authority turned, literally, to a scorched-earth policy, dynamiting and igniting enormous piles of logs and tree stumps and leaving them to smolder (O'Reilly 1939). As historian Thomas D. Clark notes, in the Santee-Cooper Basin, "The cycle of forest growth was broken, some of it forever. In an unbelievably short time, in light of the time it took to grow mature trees, the South was forced to depend upon second-growth timber in the place of the great virgin stands" (Clark, 1972, 141-143).

After two years, two months, and twenty-two days of intensive labor, clearance, and earthmoving, the Public Service Authority began impoundment of the Santee River on November 12, 1941 after closing the spillway gates. Water rushed from the Santee River, through Lake Marion, through the diversion canal, and into Lake Moultrie. The Authority began testing power generation at the Pinopolis Dam on December 26, 1941, and officially began power generation on February 17, 1942 (Lovern 1996; Herbert, 1941, 12). Once inundation began, floodwaters filled the reservoir at a rate of over one foot, or approximately 324 million gallons across 160,000 acres per day (The Columbia Record, 1941a, 6; The Columbia Record, 1941b, 5; The News and Courier 1941). The creation of the two reservoirs produced 415 new miles of shoreline in the state. Because the upper lake could not be cleared in time for impoundment, it is much shallower and contains much more debris than the lower lake[42] (Lovern 1996).

In just over two years, as one magazine article noted, T. C. Williams and the Public Service Authority single-handedly "changed the map of a state" (Derieux 1932). Stand on the shore of either of the reservoirs and you will feel like you're staring out into an inland sea. As Williams dreamed in the 1920s, the sheer volume of water in the reservoirs made new forms of intrastate navigation possible, albeit still not at a rapid pace. In 1941, it was estimated that a round trip between Charleston and Columbia would take 49 hours, 87 percent less than the time it took to traverse the former rivers and canals, but still not nearly as fast as it would take to travel by rail or by car (The State, 1941b, 7A). The success of the Santee-Cooper Project was

[41] This logging was not completed without resistance, however. In October of 1939, the Public Service Authority settled with the Brooklyn Cooperage Company over one million dollars for an estimated 104 million board feet of timber. This settlement came in response to a failed condemnation suit brought forth by the Authority against Brooklyn Cooperage. Though it was unable to condemn the land, the Authority still acquired hundreds of thousands of trees, which they promptly put into the open market. The Authority claimed there was a need for a mass introduction of timber to the global market due to the escalating Second World War, but assured the public that the sales would be done in an "orderly manner to the end that the market would not be flooded with lumber to such an extent as to lower the normal price of lumber in the market." Even more, the Authority made the vague promise that for every tree felled and sold, "a tree will be left standing in some other territory" — a territory not specifically or geographically defined. They claimed that the conservation of a tree in another territory would ensure the balance and survival of the timber industry (The Greenville News 1939).

[42] This, as I note in the following section, will have major consequences on the increased presence of malaria in and around Lake Marion, when compared to the mostly cleared Lake Moultrie.

therefore not in the innovative transportation technologies, or even in the expansion of electricity, but rather in the state's capacity to redesign a state's geography and rewrite its cartographies in less than a decade. The Santee-Cooper Project is emblematic of the state's capacity to rapidly manipulate nature, widely implement control measures, and both materially and economically develop the countryside for capital gain and urban expansion (Smith 2010). But to rehabilitate the economy of South Carolina through infrastructural development, the Public Service Authority needed to be willing to sacrifice rural economies in the name of modernization.

## Conclusion

Compelling previously independent rural Southerners into the American project through the illumination of their lives meant that these populations were even more affected by the inequalities of American policy enactments. As Neil Smith (2010, 155) notes, uneven development is "social inequality blazoned onto the geographical landscape, and it is simultaneously the exploitation of that geographical unevenness for certain socially determined ends." The Santee-Cooper Project was pre-determined, always designed to revitalize the state's economy and support the financial agendas of a few men. Spatial transformation was imagined before rationales for such transformations were even invented. T. C. Williams planned for the redesign of a riparian system for the benefit of his boating business and invented a hydroelectric project to justify the development project (The State 1941a). The Public Service Authority sought to modernize and spatially integrate the previously uncontrollable rural South into modern America, and it invoked rural electrification as its justification. In both cases, the citizens of rural South Carolina, who paid taxes and provided labor to support the construction of the dams and reservoirs, were advertised as the key public beneficiaries of the Project but did not receive the promised benefits for years following completion.

It is difficult to say whether the Santee-Cooper Project alone contributed to the increase of electricity in South Carolina. In fact, it is difficult to discern whether many of the Public Service Authority's success stories (rural electrification, the elimination of malaria, the "cleaning" of the landscape) were in fact due to the Santee-Cooper Project alone, in large part due to the overlap in administrative responsibilities and the existence of contemporaneous improvement projects at multiple scales. Still, the Authority claims the successes of South Carolina in 1942 and the decades that followed as a direct result of the creation of the Santee-Cooper Project. What is clear is that Santee-Cooper development was never evenly enacted.[43]

Ultimately, the South Carolina Public Service Authority, in collaboration with state and federal New Deal agencies, sacrificed the health, homes, electricity, and lives of poor and Black residents of South Carolina for the benefit of the military regime. The Santee-Cooper Project was a battle against nature, including both the physical environment and the social nature of Southern

[43] For example, by 1942, the year the Santee-Cooper Project first began to generate electricity, the Rural Electrification Administration (REA) had already built nearly ten thousand miles of electrical lines across South Carolina, providing about 36 percent of the farms across 35 of the state's 46 counties electricity, up from just three percent of all farms in the state in 1929 (Brown, 1998, 84; Edgar, 1984; 11; Hart 2013). While the Authority was tied up in litigation and eventually building the earthen dams, the REA was enacting what the Authority promised and failed to achieve on their own.

agrarian life. And few wars could be won without the cooperation and incorporation of the entire population.

As the United States entered the Second World War, not only did domestic infrastructures transform into military technologies, but so too did New Deal development policies. The production of modern landscapes and infrastructures in the early 20th century was the concretization of national ideologies in the built environment (Caprotti and Kaika 2008). The New Deal functioned as a template that could be duplicated both internally and beyond the United States. This duplication manifested not only in the United States' active fights to impose capitalism and "democracy" throughout the world, but also in the postwar era as a global project of conquering nature and imposing humanity upon those deemed less than human (Katznelson 2013).

The development of the Santee-Cooper project materially transformed the state and set the stage for rapid social transformations of rural life. Engineering and development were civilizing projects, wherein governments sought to conquer nature in the name of progress (Teisch 2011). In the 1930s and 40s, wild nature and wild peoples needed to be conquered, colonized, and transformed to bring the nation and the world up to modern Western standards (Caprotti and Kaika, 2008, 618). Critically occluded in this chapter is the dispossession of 901 families, the homes they once inhabited, and the lands they stewarded. This dispossessive project and resettlement scheme was a project that demanded not only its own design, but its own administration and enactment. In the next chapter, I will explore the project of dispossession and resettlement, illuminating how civilizing projects extended beyond engineered infrastructures into the sphere of the community, the farm, and the home.

# Chapter 3:

# Development, Drowned and Reborn

> "I ask you, how would you like to be torn from your moorings, separated from your friends, and forced into a new community among strangers, carrying as best you might, into your exile, the contents of a once happy home, the agricultural implements adapted to your locality and the livestock and feed to begin life anew on unfamiliar soil in strange surroundings? Finding it necessary even to disturb the ashes of loved one[s], interred by sympathetic and understanding friends and relatives in plots, set apart and consecrated by divine services; where every rock and tree brings back a memory, and every flower and shrub seems to breathe from its perfume the spirit of one departed; and to remove them to some soil and distant — perhaps to be far removed from the new home of the living; either that or a watery grave! I tell you that no dollar was ever made that was big enough, shiny enough, or new enough to compensate for this!"
>
> - John J. Riley, 'Why Santee-Cooper Project May Not Benefit South Carolina'

> I once asked an older gentleman where his original home was located, and he pointed out over the lake. I thought he was talking about one of the communities on the far shore, but he actually meant in the middle of the lake itself. He told me stories about how whole communities had to take up and leave, and how they could never visit their old homes again, because those homes were underwater. It was heart-rending.
>
> - J. Douglas Allen-Taylor, *Sugaree Rising*

## Introduction

In November of 1939, residents of the Santee-Cooper Basin whose property was located in the flood path received a letter from the South Carolina Public Service Authority that began,

> The South Carolina Public Service Authority may find it necessary to acquire your land or some part thereof in connection with the construction of the Santee-Cooper Project… The Board of Directors fully realize that a number of citizens who now have their homes on lands which must be acquired to develop this public project are being asked to undergo the hardship of removing therefrom and locating themselves elsewhere. The Board feels its responsibility both to these citizens and to the general public, and it desires to acquire these lands at prices which will enable the owners to relocate and reestablish themselves in a manner that will afford them contentment at least equal to that which they now enjoy (Cooper, 1939, 1).

In the span of a four-page letter, the Authority promises the reader that, after a "careful" survey of land and timber on each property, the Land Acquisition Department will provide each property owner with an appraisal and a contract established by an "impersonal, impartial" field representative. They also remind the landowners that "the ultimate aim and purpose of the Authority's program is to benefit and aid those living in the State of South Carolina," and that the dispossession of each landowner is "compatible with this objective" (Ibid., 3-4). In other words, to personally sacrifice one's own home, property, and way of life was to be in service of *everyone* in the state. To be against this process, therefore, was to be against South Carolina.

Within a year of the residents receiving the letter, the Santee-Cooper Basin was a stump town. As described in Chapter 2, thousands of laborers cleared the landscape of trees using hand tools and heavy machinery, pulling logs out by train or by mule. Where trees could not be removed — particularly in the case of Lake Marion, which was not able to be entirely cleared in time for inundation — entire tree trunks were tied to the earth, left on the ground, or lit on fire (Hassel 1940; Slater and Humphreys 2008). According to dispossessed residents, the Basin in the period between clearance and inundation looked "torn up," like the site of a bomb detonation or the aftermath of a tornado (Lovern, 1996, 256).

Prior to inundation, the waters of the Santee and Cooper rivers were held back by temporary dams as the workers completed clearance. On November 12, 1941, the Public Service Authority closed the locks of the Pinopolis and Santee dams, removed the temporary dams along the two rivers, and let the waters rush into the Basin (Lovern 1996; Herbert, 1941, 12). Floodwaters filled the reservoir at a rate of over one foot, or approximately 324 million gallons across 160,000 acres per day (The Columbia Record, 1941a, 6; The Columbia Record, 1941b, 5; The News and Courier 1941).

While this volume was significant, the flooding of Black towns is not always instantaneous or Biblical in scale.[44] Instead, displaced residents were able to watch the waters "trickle in," almost as if watching an immense bathtub fill up over the span of weeks. As one former resident noted,

> It was all over this place here. See, this is kind of flat country. And if the water rose that much, it might spread for two or three miles. I don't think it took but several months to fill up. It looked just like a river, coming through the diversion canal. It just came on down there (Lovern, 1996, 257).[45]

While there were no tidal waves or explosions, the floodwaters did carry with them debris, tree stumps, branches, and artifacts of past lives. The swirling, rising waters contained the material traces of past life, and all residents could do was look on with grief, anger, resentment, and a desire to make it all stop. As one resident noted, "It was sorta like you were being invaded, if you can understand what I mean, and here we were just sittin' nice and quiet and everything, you know, and then this thing just comes through and it's *big*, you know?" (Ibid., 261; emphasis original). The waters, like the Public Service Authority, were unstoppable, and both were guaranteed to transform Black life in the Basin.

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[44] As my grand aunt once said to describe the slow rise of the floodwaters during Hurricane Ida, "It don't rush in, it flood up" (Vickers, 2023, 32).

[45] For more ethnographic excerpts, see Elizabeth Marie Harvey Lovern's 1996 dissertation, entitled 'Cultural Models, Landscapes, and Large Dams: An Ethnographic and Environmental History of the Santee-Cooper Project, 1938-1942.'

As the water rose, it not only pushed out humans, but animals too. Deer, turkey, rabbits, squirrels, partridges, skunks, wild hogs, alligators, and snakes sought higher, dryer ground outside of the floodwaters by searching for higher ground on hills or tree stumps, or scrambled to float atop logs and debris. Thousands drowned with the slow rise, and many more were forced into "strange territory where [they would] be prey to enemies" (Grier 1939; Lovern 1996). Mammals and birds, forced out of their homes, burrows, and hiding places became easy targets, and were slaughtered by hunters and predators en masse. Migratory patterns of birds were also negatively impacted, since the birds no longer had stable and familiar places to land.[46] Other animals became predators in new landscapes. Dead snakes "washed up against the rocks, like earthworms." Living, venomous snakes and alligators took refuge on paved portions of the dike, so many that residents visited the slowly inundating Basin after school and work just to kill the animals and keep the predators away from their homes. One resident even recalled catching seventy-six rattlesnakes in a single afternoon (Lovern, 1996, 257-258). The Santee-Cooper Project not only transformed the spaces in which Black people lived, but also forced them to learn and adapt to new ecological relations.

Imagery of drowned Black people dominates the Black geographic imagination, from the Middle Passage (Gilroy 1993; Glissant 1997 [1990]; Smallwood 2008; Tinsley 2008), to the 1927 Flood (Barry 1998; Mizelle 2014), to the Caribbean (Allewaert 2013), and finally to Hurricane Katrina (Woods 2017). Scholars and artists alike historicize and theorize about Black submarine life (Drexciya 2002; Gallagher 2017-8; Glover and Murai 2022; Philip 2008; Solomon 2019) and Black life as a "wake" (Sharpe 2016) or a "shoal" (King 2019) — particularly in the Atlantic, in swamplands, in hurricanes, and in acts of torture and other violences. There is also a significant body of literature that focuses on the intentional inundation of Indigenous communities, particularly in the American West (Estes 2019; Leslie 2006; Munzer 2019; Pisani 2002; Randell and Curley 2023; Worster 1992; among many others), as well as on global projects of dam creation and the dispossession of poor or subaltern populations (Gómez-Barris 2019; Hay et. al. 2020; Read 1998; Sneddon 2015; Teisch 2011; among many others). But none have sufficiently attended to the intentional inundation of Black towns, in spite of the prevalence thereof, particularly throughout the 20th century, including towns like Oscarville, Georgia, which now sits under Lake Lanier (Enjeti 2021; Phillips 2016); Vanport, Oregon, which was destroyed in a 1948 flood and is now a park in North Portland (Skovgaard 2007); Pinhook, Missouri, which was intentionally inundated to protect the predominantly white town of Cairo, Illinois (Lawrence and Lawless 2018); and Kowaliga, Alabama, which now sits beneath Lake Martin (Sznajderman and Atkins 2005); among many others. This chapter intervenes in the fields of Black Geographies and environmental history to demonstrate how the creation of drowned Black towns is a racial capitalist project of Black dam/nation in the name of white progress, one that manifested as a result of centuries of framing Black spaces and ecologies as sites of waste, disease, and a lack of productivity.

The inundation of Lakes Marion and Moultrie constitutes what Rob Nixon calls *slow violence*, "a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence" that is "neither spectacular nor instantaneous, but rather incremental and accretive, its calamitous repercussions playing out across a range of scales" (Nixon, 2011, 2). Because dispossession takes place over weeks, months, or even years, the suffering of the dispossessed does not start at the moment of

[46] Among the few animals that not only survived but thrived were fish, particularly bass. Today, Lakes Marion and Moultrie are famous for bass fishing.

resettlement, but instead begins right when resettlement projects are announced (Leslie, 2006, 56). As a result, the removal of 901 families constituted a slow violence. Peter Reed deems this phenomenon a "journey to nothing," through which residents who are losing their communities, homes, and ways of life experience a prolonged and collective sense of grief, loneliness, and homesickness (Read, 1998, 198).

In a 1939 article, a writer for the *News and Courier* newspaper noted that, while there are cases in which suffering is unavoidable when projects are implemented for "the good of the public," it is worth asking "whether or not the public good will be sufficiently served by the Santee-Cooper Project to justify the damage that is bound to follow from it" (News and Courier 1939b). Because legislation for the Santee-Cooper Project passed in 1934, removal from homelands did not begin until 1939, and the project was not completed until 1941, dispossessed residents had nearly a decade to journey to nothing (Hart 2013). During this time, Basin residents watched the Authority clear-cut parcels of land around their property, witnessed Land Acquisition agents remove neighbors and loved ones from their homes, and listened to politicians and opinion writers debate their fate in the press, as though they were just pawns in a political game. As one white man, the owner of the multi-generational Sinkler Plantation, noted, "I'd rather they'd just go ahead and floor it than to go through all this trouble of taking our land away from us" (O'Reilly 1939).

While one historian referred to the floodwaters as "the rising waters of progress," for the Black people in the Basin, this ultimate submersion of their worlds was neither novel nor surprising. (Zeigler, 1957, 1). Rather, as demonstrated in Chapters 1 and 2, it was the logical outcome of centuries of moral, social, ecological, and racial dam/nation of Black life and Black space. White elites perceived the eco-racial restructuring of the Santee-Cooper Basin through the creation of the Project as "an opportunity to displace and dispossess the Black poor and working class in order to build a… whiter and sanitized" Lowcountry, once and for all (Camp and Pulido, 2017, 294). In *Development Drowned and Reborn*, from which this chapter adopts its title, Woods critically illuminates this dynamic in the context of New Orleans:

> The politics surrounding death by submersion… stretch back at least three centuries, and during most of this history Black residents were forced to live in the city's swamps and other flood-prone areas. Throughout the history of the region, race, wealth, and power determined where levees were built, how they were built, and how they were maintained. This history, when combined with the multidimensional nature of flood control and the reality of "massive resistance," should give us pause before we randomly dismiss claims of intentional malice (Woods, 2017, 185).

The specter of inundation — produced and maintained by white elites and government agencies — haunted Black communities for centuries before it eventually pulled them under. The development of Lowcountry South Carolina for the infrastructural and recreational benefit of white people was the ultimate goal of the Santee-Cooper Project; the dispossession and arrested of Black communities was the necessary step to bring this "progressive" project to life.

## Land Acquisition

On May 31, 1939, the South Carolina General Assembly passed the "State Authorities Eminent Domain Act," paving the way for the legal condemnation of lands standing in the flood path (Spruill, 1997, 26). In its founding Congressional Act of 1934, the Public Service Authority was granted the explicit right to eminent domain, giving it the power and privilege to condemn and seize any property deemed necessary to the construction of the Project (H. 1186 1934). Eminent domain is a legal process that endows the government and other agencies the right to seize property for public use without the consent of the owner (Paul, 2008, 28). In the Santee-Cooper Project, eminent domain was practiced under the auspices of the Land Acquisition Department of the Public Service Authority, which was responsible for acquiring land title, resettling families, securing and allocating timber rights, and removing graves (Cooper 1941).

Eminent domain is a tool of the state, often invoked to contain and control racialized groups (Lewis, 2022, 40; Connolly 2014). For Black people, eminent domain was yet another violent tool of "feverish development" utilized by white people to strip them of their property, their community, and their lives (Connolly, 2014, 144). As Saidiya Hartman writes,

> One day a white man could ride up to your front porch with a piece of paper in his hand that said none of this belonged to you; it was not yours and never had been, and what a fraudulent deed failed to accomplish, a torch and rifle surely would. When that day came you had no choice but to fight and die or pick up and move on (Hartman, 2019, 143).

Eminent domain is not only a means through which the state acquires private property for public works projects, but also a way of protecting white property owners and "keep[ing] the racial peace" (Connolly, 2014, 6).

Significantly omitted from the list of people being compensated for their losses were renters and non-propertied farmers, those who made up a critical mass of all residents of the Basin, and the vast majority of whom were Black. Fifteen white landowners owned approximately 85 percent of the land in the floodplain, but 95 percent of the families in the Basin were Black. Of these 901 families, 435 families were compensated for the destruction of the only homes and land they had ever owned, some of which had land titles dating back to the Reconstruction era (News and Courier 1941).

While the Authority emphasized that "we will not attempt to take advantage of distressed conditions or acquire property at less than its fair value," landowners were offered, on average, between $12.19 and $13.30 per acre (Cooper, 1939, 3-4; News and Courier 1940a; The Land Owners' Association of the Santee-Cooper Basin 1939). For those who did not own property, the Authority claimed it could "do little except attempt to have them placed on lands where they can resume or start a satisfactory owner-tenant relationship" — in other words, financing owners in order to reproduce or continue sharecropping in a new location (News and Courier 1940f). In some cases, the Authority purchased small plots of land, built homes thereupon, and leased it to dispossessed people who could not afford their own homes, therefore making the Authority itself both the landlord and the boss of the tenant croppers (News and Courier 1940).

In a 1936 article in the nationally circulated *Better Homes and Gardens* opposing the creation of the Santee-Cooper Project, J. N. "Ding" Darling, former Chief of the U.S. Biological Survey, described the Project as a "short-sighted, suicidal policy of exploitation" (Darling, 1936, 31; Hart, 2013, 141). The South Carolina Public Service Authority took advantage of the fact

that most Black people who lived in the intended flood zone were not privy to, and had little knowledge of, the political-economic system that was to dispossess them. For example, upon hearing that the Santee–Cooper dams would eventually bring rising waters to his front steps, William Britton, a Black man who had lived in the floodplain for more than fifty years, appeared unmoved. He did not believe the water would ever cover his home. Instead, he imagined that the waters would rise toward his property but leave his house intact. When asked what he thought about the potential inundation, Britton simply said, "It might bring the fish a little closer to home" (Neilson 1939). This reaction was not a result of ignorance, but rather the consequence of an intentional state obfuscation of the impacts of the Santee-Cooper Project, particularly as it pertained to the local Black community.

Across American history, there are deep ties between Blackness and property, and more specifically Blackness as being propertied, a subaltern position connoting objecthood (Hartman 2019; Du Bois 1920; Williams 1988). Conversely, W.E.B. Du Bois famously described Whiteness as "the ownership of the earth forever and ever, Amen!" (Du Bois, 1920, 18). Black people have long been denied the right to own or possess — even themselves. Thus, the ability to possess land, and the ability to pass that land on to a future generation, is an economic and a political concern, bound up in both class and citizenship (Smith, 2007, 9; Connolly 2014). It is a privilege to be able to turn a space into a place — a possibility that implies permanence and stability, a "pause makes it possible for a locality to become a center of felt value" (Tuan, 1977, 138). This is perhaps why Black people in the United States still say, "Where do you stay?" rather than, "Where do you live?" indicating a "deeply embedded sense of impermanence of residence and the absence of a tradition of home ownership," or, I would argue, a longstanding denial thereof (Little, 1997, 270-271).

As Frantz Fanon argues, "For a colonized people, the most essential value, because it is the most meaningful, is first and foremost the land: the land, which must provide bread and, naturally, dignity" (Fanon, 1963, 9). To have a property of one's own, to own the legal title to land in a region that denied Black people access to property for centuries, was world-altering. And, even when Black people did not legally possess their home, they formed connections to, made life within, and built community in place. Thus, to destroy one's connection to the land, to deprive Black people of the right to inhabit a place of their own, was to obliterate that world, to arrest their development. I am reminded here of Achille Mbembe, who writes,

> for a large share of humanity, the end of the world has already occurred. The question is no longer how to live life while awaiting it; instead it is to know how living will be possible the day after the end, that is to say, how to live with loss, with separation. How can the world be re-created in the wake of the world's destruction? (Mbembe, 2019, 29)

Or, as Jovan Scott Lewis cogently asks when thinking about the possibility of Black repair in Tulsa, "[I]n this context of stolen land and desecrated ancestors, what could be rebuilt while merely 'renting?'" (Lewis, 2022, 141).

In the field of dam and displacement studies (Scudder 1973; Sneddon 2015; Leslie 2006; Pisani 2002; Wittfogel 1955), resettlement is understood to take place over four distinct stages: *recruitment*, or the period during which the government decides upon the development site, and therefore decides who will be resettled; *transition*, when the community learns about and reacts to the impending resettlement project, the period during which the government stops providing funding and resources to the resettlement area; potential development, or the period during which the community members survive resettlement and move toward making new life elsewhere; and

finally *handing over*, during which resettlers feel at home and are embedded in their new communities. It is critical to note that most resettlement scholars understand that those affected by dam resettlement projects never reach the latter two stages (Leslie, 2006, 142).

Ironically, according to one Santee-Cooper Annual Report, the Land Acquisition Department was to abide by the "Golden Rule": treat others the way you want to be treated (South Carolina Public Service Authority Board of Directors, 1941, 20). In their view, this meant to grant some families additional time to gather up personal property before being removed from their homes. It did not, however, mean that the Land Acquisition agents should abandon their dispossessive project and allow homeowners and tenants to remain on their property, even if that is how the agents would want to be treated. Rather, it meant that agents should work to appease disgruntled residents, "so as to disturb the course of their lives no more than is necessary," in order to convince the dispossessed that their removal was in the best interest of their future, and of the future of the nation (News and Courier 1941a).

## Resistance

Resistance to the creation of the Santee-Cooper Project manifested across racial lines, though the majority of those who would be affected by the creation of the reservoir were indeed Black. In a January 1939 letter condemning the creation of the Santee-Cooper Project, written just ten months before the beginning of the removal of Basin families, the letter writer noted, "So far I have yet to meet a single landowner, white or colored, who wants to sell their lands and be exiled" (Dwight 1939a). Whereas the white elites would lose economic value in the inundation of their property, the Black, Indigenous, and poor white residents removed from the land would lose their material and social lives, a process Read (1998) calls *returning to nothing*.

Some of the most vocal and visible opponents to the Santee-Cooper Project, though writing under the moniker, 'The Land Owners' Association of the Santee-Cooper Basin' (1939), were organized by politicians with clear interests (News and Courier 1940a). Joseph Norman Walsh, a physician from Moncks Corner, wrote a letter to Wyndham Manning, an aspiring gubernatorial candidate who ran on an anti-Santee-Cooper platform, strategizing a campaign to destroy the reputation of the Project (Manning 1934; Cann, 1971, 140-143). In the letter, Walsh introduced a plan to "blast the whole project and the bill in the newspapers" in the week leading up to a public hearing, where "Our theme is going to be: Why should people be deprived of their homes and all they possess, communities destroyed, churches destroyed and graveyards desecrated to fatten the purses and enrich the hopes of a few politicians?" (Walsh 1939). This is not to suggest that landowners were incapable of feeling or expressing anti-Santee-Cooper sentiment on their own, but rather to indicate that organized opposition was not exclusively for the benefit of the landowners.

Letters including similar language circulated in the months prior to the start of family removal. It is unclear whether the authors and families believed they could fight relocation on their own, or if they were driven by a desire to change public sentiment and the broader narrative about the Santee-Cooper Project to force a public veto. A letter published in the *News and Courier* by The Land Owners' Association in April of 1939 makes a plea to the public, asking them to empathize with the families who were being removed from their homes:

> In setting the price for the land the Authority has not considered that these are to be forced sales. They have not considered that we do not wish to have our homes destroyed; our communities wiped out; and our churches and graveyards desecrated. They have not considered the loss of income and inconvenience associated with giving up one's home and means of livelihood, and finding and purchasing a new place… the loss associated with learning to farm new land… [or] the taxes which must be paid to the government after the sale of the land…
>
> Home owners [sic] of South Carolina, would you be willing to give up your homes and all of your property for a project such as this appears to be? (The Land Owners' Association of the Santee-Cooper Basin 1939).

The Authority was "faced with changing the social and economic life of a people who didn't want to be changed and who at first openly resented every effort to evacuate them from the soil in which they and their families had been rooted for generations" (News and Courier 1941b). This emplacement and ancestral connection to South Carolina was a tool white people could wield to pull at the heartstrings of other South Carolinians, many of whom, in the seventy years since the end of the Civil War, maintained a disdain for the overreaching hand of the Federal government, a disdain that was only strengthened with the encroaching Santee-Cooper Project (Katznelson 2013).

Black people, many of whom did not own landed property and therefore had less legal power to fight removal, resisted inundation through both passive and refusals to help the cause of the agents who were trying to dispossess them, what Hartman calls improvising through the space of constraint (Hartman, 2019, 302). Black residents, whose words were often misconstrued within Public Service Authority publicity and in newspaper articles, were reluctant to talk to officials who came to document the "success" of resettlement schemes. According to one Public Service Authority Health Agent, in Eutawville, a major town south of the planned Lake Marion, "there [was] much opposition to the Authority," forcing Authority agents to scramble to figure out methods to sway residents toward their cause[47] (Rice 1940). According to the project manager of another resettlement community, "As to whether or not the individual families appreciate what is being done for them or not is hard to say. The low-country (sic) Negro is a reticent and undemonstrative type and in the presence of strangers, he shuts up like a clam" (Major 1940).

Black people refusing to leave a space or allow one's home to be destroyed is "a means of creating a future they want to see now and leaving space for access to collective memory, even within limited resources and with tremendous odds against them" (Bruno, 2023, 13). As one opinion writer argued,

> [T]he vast majority of the people, white and colored, in these two basins, do not want to sell their homes and be exiled, at even what may be a good price for their property. And if the members of the authority want to know my reason for such an opinion, I believe that I can give the answer in one word, and that word has been in all ages, in all countries,

[47] One proposed method was to give residents of Eutawville additional doses of quinine to make them more resistant to the malaria, the rate of which was increasing in the region at the time due to the Authority's manipulation of the trees and water systems, as discussed in Chapter 2 (Rice 1940).

> and in all languages, the most potent, the most appealing and the most loved, and that one word is HOME (Dwight 1939b; emphasis original).

For Black people who had resided in the same homes or on the same lands since their ancestors were enslaved — or, in some cases, since they were enslaved, "these places are made sacred by ties of inheritance and association [and] the contemplation of destruction is a tragedy of the first magnitude" (Dwight 1939a). While most residents of the Basin were farmers, some men, especially those who lived closer to Charleston in the basin of Lake Moultrie, worked in mills, in the timber industry, or in other non-agricultural positions. In these cases, their homes did not necessarily act as large-scale farms, but instead offered Black families space to build home gardens and sustain themselves off their own land (Sumter Item 1939). This emplacement of roots through family gardens acts as what Sylvia Wynter calls the "*plot* system" (1971, 99).[48]

If, as Tuan tells us, home is the stable world (1977, 180), then Black placemaking, and the resistance to any spatialization that forecloses Black geographic life, is therefore an assertion of the right to Black life, Black space, and Black stability in the future. As Katherine McKittrick argues, "[S]pace is relational to praxis of black human life, black geographies are therefore not nouns but rather are verbs that are ongoing and never resolved" (McKittrick, 2017, 99). Black residents of the Santee-Cooper Basin refusing to be moved is a refutation of the material and social foreclosure of their land and the rights thereto. As I will describe shortly, it is a refusal of the creation of abstract space.

While some landowners were propped up by aspiring politicians and businessmen who sought to receive business and votes from the hundreds of people in the floodplain and those whose businesses would be affected by it, rural dissidents were largely framed in the media and by pro-Santee-Cooper politicians as standing in the way of progress. As Read identified in his own studies of dispossession projects, "public relations exercise[s] implied that those who stood in the way of national progress [the creation of a dam] were selfish or unpatriotic" (Read, 1998, 82). Perhaps anticipating this logic, the Landowners' Association rebutted, "The landowners of the Santee-Cooper basin do not wish to stand in the way of progress or anything that will be of benefit to the State of South Carolina. However, they see no reason why they should be sacrificed for South Carolina and they do not intend to be" (The Land Owners' Association of the Santee-Cooper Basin 1939). National belonging was not merely about where one was born or where one migrated, but also was rooted in choice. Blackness and Americanness do not always logically or materially connect, and often remain both spatially and socially distinct; just because Black residents of the Basin were born in America did not make them inherently belong (Slocum, 2019, 67). To be American, therefore, was to actively *choose* to participate in the American project, to assert one's loyalty to the nation and its progress by demonstrating selflessness and cohesion (Mbembe, 2019, 13). It was a process that insisted that residents of the Santee-Cooper Basin stop thinking about themselves as rural community members and instead as members of modern South Carolinian and American society. Residents of South Carolina, recognizing this tension, wanted to maintain their land while affirming their commitment to becoming fully American.

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[48] The notion of the plot has been taken up by several Black geographies and ecologies scholars, such as Katherine McKittrick (2013) and more recently by J.T. Roane, who defines it as "actions of enslaved, free, and emancipated communities to create a distinctive and often furtive social architecture rivaling, threatening, and challenging the infrastructures of abstraction, commodification, and social control developed by white elites before and after the formal abolition of slavery" (Roane, 2018, 242).

Therefore, after much debate, Santee-Cooper Landowners compromised on certain provisions with the South Carolina Senate regarding the "trade" of their property into the hands of the state. The concessions were outlined in a bill that was designed to hasten the acquisition of the property of "not… wholly happy" landowners. Landowners originally opposed the fee simple condemnation of their property and the Public Service Authority's right to broad powers to condemn land, and further requested clearly defined specifications regarding the removal from their land. But in the revised Bill of May 1939, the Authority was granted the right to fee simple condemnation with the caveat that if the construction was not completed in five years, the original owners could re-acquire the land at the original purchase price; the Authority was only allowed to condemn in fee simple lands that would explicitly be inundated; former owners of lands outside of the high-water mark had the right to utilize this space to access the waterfront; and no landowner would be forced to leave their property before January 1, 1940, and would only be forced to leave after being given a 90-day notice (News and Courier 1939c).

## Drowning the Dead

The issue deemed to be "delicate and yet imperative necessary," and of the "most sympathetic nature" in the Santee-Cooper Project was the removal of the graves, cemeteries, and tombs in the floodpath (South Carolina Public Service Authority Board of Directors, 1941, 21 & 15). Among the displaced and drowned included not only 901 living families, but also the remains of between 8000 and 10,000 people from approximately 700 cemeteries located in church yards, plantations, private property, and unmarked sites in the Basin (Grier 1939; The State 1943; The Index-Journal 1941). This issue was enormous not only due to the scale of resettlement, but also because it required the cooperation of descendants, the Legal Department, grave diggers, and even nature.

To remove thousands of graves from the floodpath, the Land Acquisition Department of the South Carolina Public Service Authority needed to locate and map the site of every grave within the basin or adjacent to the planned shorelines of the reservoirs (Cooper 1941). To identify each grave, some of which were unmarked, the Land Acquisition Department, spearheaded by Chief Cemetery Investigator Samuel Lord Hyde, contacted the heirs of individuals buried in the flood zone to determine what the descendants wanted to do with the remains.[49] In this "colossal" and "delica[te]" undertaking performed, cemetery investigators went house to house, requesting information and relaying information to the Authority's legal offices in Charleston (Staff Correspondent 1939; News and Courier 1940a). In other cases, the Authority placed full-page spreads in newspapers across the state, listing hundreds of names of deceased persons who needed to be claimed by local families, or otherwise be inundated (The Times and Democrat 1941). The disinterment of Black remains was yet another extractivist maneuver in the project of racial capitalist acquisition and transformation. As one newspaper stated plainly: "The dead who rest in the area must also be investigated" (Staff Correspondent 1939).[50]

On-the-ground crews of more than 50 men made itemized lists of every stone marker and estimated the number of unmarked graves based on conversations with family members and

[49] An amateur photographer, Hyde also took photos of graveyards as part of the removal process, which are now preserved in the archives of the College of Charleston and the Lowcountry Digital Library (Lowcountry Digital Library n.d.).

[50] We might here reiterate Hartman's inquiry, "*Why are you studying us?* Wouldn't it be better to study white folks, since they are the ones who need changing?" (Hartman, 2019, 99).

local residents, as well as genealogical records stored in family bibles, ancient books, and other family papers (Staff Correspondent 1939; News and Courier 1940a; The Index-Journal 1941). Black cemeteries were frequently described as "no fence, badly neglected, overgrown grass and bush" (Moore 2023). As Kelsey A. Moore notes, the descriptor was used so frequently to describe Black graveyards that the Authority designed and created a stamp to indicate the condition on documents more easily (Moore 2023).

Some effort was undertaken both to abide by legal requirements and to align with the desires of living kin, "within reason" (News and Courier 1939a). Therefore, bodies and headstones were only removed if explicitly requested by family members. But poor Black residents, many of whom were unable to read or write, were at a disadvantage. Unless Authority agents arrived at their home or in their church, descendants were expected to locate the names of their ancestors in the newspaper, provide a written statement expressing their desires for the reinterment of their kin, sign the letter, and provide a postal address at which they could be contacted (The Times and Democrat 1941). For residents who were unable to read and write, who held no permanent property, or who were already in the process of being dispossessed and therefore had no stable address, this foreclosed their ability to have autonomy over the remains of their loved ones.

Upon relocating the graves, the Land Acquisition Department was required to construct new cemeteries that mirrored the old cemeteries, reinterring the remains in a new location out of the flood path. Some graves were not relocated, however. Over 3000 graves, or more than 30 Black cemeteries, now lie beneath the surface of the reservoirs (Moore 2023). If all families of the deceased in a single cemetery agreed, or if no kin could be found, the Authority elected to flood entire cemeteries, but promised to mark the inundation with the erection of a memorial elsewhere that listed the names of all submerged persons (News and Courier 1939a). Legally, the Authority had the right to dispose of or inundate any remains as they saw fit. As such, the Director of Engineering, the Chief Cemetery Investigator, and the Land Acquisition Department determined that all graves located below 67 feet in elevation in the Lake Moultrie floodplain would be inundated in the making of Lake Moultrie (Moore 2023).

A proposed alternative offered by the Authority was to "erect suitable memorials to the dead outside of the reservoir area" (News and Courier 1939d). It is unclear if or where any memorials were erected for the unmarked and unremarked dead. It is also unclear how much effort the Authority was willing to put into the search for surviving kin before determining the opinions of the collective. After all, what was a suitable way to honor the lives of those whose bodies were pulled from the earth, dislodging them from the place where they were promised permanent landed rest? Where a gravestone, headstone, or tombstone marks the location of interment on land, there is no material marker for subaquatic death.

In his study of African spirits in the Lowcountry, Ras Michael Brown argues that a land absent of emplaced ancestors meant the deprivation of access to the land of the dead, thereby producing Black spiritual crisis. He notes that "the interment of ancestors in the soil provided sacred sites that served as shrines for their descendants as markers of the spiritual sanction for the living to inhabit the territory" (Brown, 2012, 91). While Black people, particularly formerly enslaved Black people, were deprived of the right to own themselves, much less any landed property, death at least afforded them a permanent place to call their own, a property to which their descendants could return and materially mark the belonging of their kin. According to Achille Mbembe, this material and social destruction of Black people inverts life and death, abolishing the distinction therebetween (Mbembe, 2019, 38). To disinter Black bodies, therefore,

was to produce both spiritual and material placelessness in life and death. It is to blur the lines of the living and the dead, to make it impossible for Black people to find a material home, even in the afterlife.

This was not a uniquely Black experience, however. In 1940, the Cemetery Division of the Public Service Authority located and mapped Indigenous remains at the Fort Watson Indian mound, Wampee Plantation, Pond Bluff Plantation, Ophir Plantation, and Wirley Tract, many of which contained the remains of Indigenous people killed in battle, with the exception of Pond Bluff Plantation, which held the remains of an Indigenous village — burial sites the author described as being "insignificant superficially" (Taber 1940).

In a 1940 op-ed in the *News and Courier*, a writer noted that soon "dank, scummy water will flow over the defendants' loved ones" and their "sacred dust," attaching "no sentiment to that dust," paying "only for the value of the dirt" (Upcountrymen 1940). This echoes Read's illustration of dispossession projects, writing that "environmental impact assessments had considered the usual criteria of dust, noise, vibration and environmental damage. They had not, however, assessed the impact of loss of home, community, and countryside" (Read, 1998, 198). The letter writer added that the Public Service Authority sought to "[l]eave only the gray moss, waving its banners of mourning on the ghost-like trunks of ancient trees as scum and mosquitoes and malaria take their places" (Upcountryman 1940). This warning proved prescient.

In 2007 and 2008, South Carolina experienced drought levels so severe that the lake beds of the reservoirs emerged, revealing an "expanded shoreline" that residents, tourists, and treasure hunters alike explored. After sixty-five years of reservoir currents flowing over them, an estimated four feet of silt was displaced resulting in some graves being unsettled or exposed by the waters entirely. When exploring the Basin, one visitor took a human bone from an uncovered grave and brought it to a local official to have it dated (Rheney 2008). Another visitor stole a skull from an exposed casket (Singletary 2008). In response, another Santee Cooper official said simply, "They are robbing us blind." The Santee-Cooper utility company was forced to release several statements in state newspapers, emphasizing the protection of the graves that have been "peacefully buried there for many decades." Ironically, Santee Cooper emphasized that "grave tampering… [is] a violation of state law" (Rheney 2008). As one opinion writer noted,

> [T]he state in its great wisdom left thousands of bodies under the lake when they started flooding it in hasty preparation for World War II… In many cases when a family member didn't claim a body, the state simply took the tombstone and a shovel-full of dirt and transported it uphill, leaving the body and their consciences to be covered by the flood waters. I think it is somewhat hypocritical at this juncture for the state to suddenly decide it is the savior coming to rescue these poor people who have so badly been wronged (Ibid.).

Santee Cooper dispatched agents of their law enforcement division to guard the lakes and the remains (Ibid.; Singletary 2008). But officials and opinion writers alike still encouraged residents to hunt for arrowheads, visit the exposed Basin, and enjoy the "bricks, rocks, and other artifacts" that would otherwise "erode and waste away" (Baxley 2008; Singletary 2008; Rheney 2008). Where stealing bones and raiding graves was criminal to Santee Cooper, they and residents of the state had no problem allowing amateur treasure hunters and tourists to walk all over the bodies and final resting places of dead Black people.

M. NourbeSe Philip asks us, "What is the word for bringing bodies back from water? From a 'liquid grave'?" (Philip, 2008, 201). In this case, the only word that comes to mind is violence.

## "Solving" Black Poverty

During the Great Depression and the years that followed, residents of Orangeburg County reported that more than 1,400 county families were starving, unemployed, and "practically naked" (Hayes, 2001, 8). Singer and actress Eartha Kitt, born on a cotton plantation in Orangeburg County in 1927, recalled that her family "didn't have anything to eat for what seemed like an insurmountable amount of time, and we had to rely on the forest and whatever we could dig out of the ground, such as weeds or a kind of grass… that had a kind of onion growing at the bottom of it. And when we could find things like that to eat, we were all right" (Williams 1971). It is impossible, and it would be unwise, to overstate the levels of abject poverty that plagued the nation in the Great Depression and the years that followed, particularly in rural portions of the nation. Starvation, high levels of unemployment, and poor crop seasons, among other economic crises, killed thousands of people (Agee and Evans 1941). For this reason, a critical aim of the New Deal was to solve Southern poverty, and more specifically rural Black poverty. As South Carolina Governor Burnet R. Maybank noted in November of 1939, his commitment was to push for the necessary resettlement of "poor people," not "rich people who own homes in the area primarily for hunting and fishing" (The Columbia Record 1939). Poor people needed to be (re)moved.

In a 1935 letter to President Roosevelt, Donald Comer, a cotton manufacturing magnate, urged the President to consider developing the Black South and improving the material condition of the Black tenant farmer. He emphasized that most tenant homes did not even have windows, and few had kerosine lamps, creating "cold… dreary" conditions. He also added that most tenant farmers were offered few recreational opportunities, besides going to church, "standing around the streets of some nearby town," or walking "up and down the big road." This sentiment painted a picture of Black people as a lazy, loitering mass,[51] but also illuminated how the plantation owners and local governments alike did not invest into the lives of Black people outside of their laboring capacity. He concludes by arguing that the lives of Black tenant farmers could be easily improved to provide "the most pleasure and enjoyment to the greatest number of people with the least amount of expense" (Comer 1935). Comer, like many other white Southern businessmen and politicians, sought to fix the crisis of Black poverty by implementing inexpensive governmental programs designed to embed the government into the daily lives and homes of Black people.

While the nation was aware of the economic crises plaguing urban and rural regions alike in the Depression and the years that followed, a Farm Security Administration photographer's autobiography describes the ignorance of Northerners and New Dealers to the daily lives of rural Southerners, even while implementing policy in those same regions:

> It never occurred to me to think of the farmers and their wives and children who produced these things… Land and the soil were, to me, just 'dirt,' not something that had

[51] This fits into a long pattern of white individuals and leaders painting Black people as idle, vagrant, shiftless, lazy, etc. (Du Bois 1967 [1899]; McConnell 1910; Hartman 2019).

> to be nourished, protected, and revered… But now, driving through the Southern states, past gangs of farmhands, their backs bent as they toiled under the broiling sun in fields of tobacco, cotton, corn, and vegetables, I began to understand how much human effort went into agricultural production and how much the land meant to the people whose lives depended on its care and cultivation. And when I saw so many abandoned, gutted fields scarred and bleeding from erosion, I understood the meaning of the old Mexican proverb, 'God forgives always, / Man sometimes, / Nature never" (Delano, 1997, 33-34).

As one social scientist noted in his 1947 study of the Santee-Cooper Project, "Perhaps nowhere else in the South has caste been more clearly defined, more rigidly applied, and more consistently observed" than in the Santee-Cooper Basin" (Collins, 1947, 49). To ameliorate the eco-racial conditions of the Santee-Cooper Basin, to solve the crisis of Black poverty, the Public Service Authority and other New Deal administrations turned to what Paul S. Sutter calls "a comprehensive program of rural improvement" (Sutter, 2015, 203). Improvement is a moral geographic project, designed to transform poor people into "better" citizens, laborers, and community members by transforming the conditions of their life and their relationship to the land. Efforts to relocate distressed farmers to new agricultural land were driven by a need to achieve "permanent stabilization, on the few remaining lands available, of those who have been uprooted but are genuinely competent to continue as farmers" (Evans, 1939, 7).

Resettlement was not merely about moving one family to a new location and improving their condition, but also about improving the social and economic conditions of an entire community. The community here refers not only to those living within the geographical boundaries of the resettlement area — what the Resettlement Administration (RA) referred to as both 'resettlers' and 'colonists' — but also to those living adjacent to the colony, those who would benefit from the increase in economic and social activity, as well as the programming and resources that would be brought to the area by state and Federal governments (Resettlement Administration n.d.).

Inspired by the back-to-the-land movement that "captured the popular imagination in the early [D]epression," the New Deal resettlement program reflected a desire to abandon the city and enter "a personal utopia where [Americans] could get away from the materialism of industrial society" through the re-adoption of subsistence farming and agrarian lifestyles (Holley, 1971, 181). Notions of community embedded in New Deal programming were based on a nostalgia for pastoral, communal living, in which communities independently sustained themselves. Tapping into this increasing desire to re-enter rural life, the RA designed resettlement colonies to be replicable, hoping to eventually introduce them on a national scale. South Carolina's resettlement colonies were models that were constructed not merely to rehouse hundreds of displaced persons, but also to be "studied and… adopted as a national pattern" (News and Courier 1941).

The RA was founded on April 30, 1935, and was subsequently granted control over FERA's land program on May 1st under Title II of the National Industrial Recovery Act.[52] The RA directly addressed the social, ecological, and economic entanglements of rehabilitation: to resettle destitute or low-income families from rural and urban areas, and establish and maintain

[52] In 1937, Congress passed the Bankhead-Jones Farm Tenant Act, appropriating ten million dollars in the first year for tenant purchase loans, twenty-five million dollars in the second year, and fifty million dollars in all subsequent years. Two months after the legislation passed, the RA was transformed into the Farm Security Administration (FSA) (Baldwin 2018).

the surrounding communities; to administer a program of projects combating soil erosion, stream pollution, coastal erosion, and deforestation, as well as the creation of flood control projects; and to make loans to farmers, tenants, croppers, and laborers (Roosevelt 1935a). The RA was designed to improve rural people, rural ecologies, and rural economies simultaneously — to help "families now helpless in their present locations" by relocating and refinancing them "to make them self-sustaining, to give them incomes that will provide incomes sufficient for reasonably good living conditions, and to adjust social and economic factors to permit and promote a more wholesome family and community life" (Resettlement Administration, n.d., 1). But such fruits of resettlement were not offered to all and were not offered equally.

Crucial to the formation of the RA was the explicit right of the Administration to seize property they deemed unproductive or in need of improvement. This was done through direct purchase and, where necessary, the legal power of eminent domain, after which the government had the power to improve, develop, grant, sell, lease, or dispose of any property as they saw fit (Roosevelt 1935a). Just as it was up to the discretion of the RA and the Public Service Authority to determine which sites needed improvement, it was also their job to determine how to make such lands and people responsible. As Clyde Woods notes, government intervention created the conditions in which "the working-class constituency was jettisoned while Northern corporate blocs and the dominant blocs of regional capital reaped the primary benefits" (Woods, 1998, 21). The needs and desires of peasant farmers, especially the tenant farmers who did not own land of their own but many of whom lived on the same land for generations, were overlooked in the name of improvement of the region and the nation.

Administrators and those who worked beneath them were evangelical, preaching the gospel of resettlement. But they were not always forthright about their motives and their political-economic aims. Instead, they tried to guide resettlers to the "natural" community structure of independent operation with minimal government support and bind them to a system of self-sustenance and community reliance rather than one of external aid. In one letter to administrators, an RA official urged resettlement administrators to only suggest, and not enforce ideals, allowing farmers to "catch the vision" and believe they are arriving at a position of self-sufficiency on their own. Critically, the official emphasized the necessity of "their idea, their need, their responsibility, their obligation, their service, and their profit or loss in operation" — in other words, total personal accountability (Resettlement Administration, n.d., 3-4). Hays notes that this "emphasis on self-sufficiency to supplement commercial farming not only reduced each tenant's overhead but also aimed to re-create an America of Jeffersonian yeomen" (Hays, 2001, 133). The critical aim of Resettlement, then, was to foster a contagious spirit of self-reliance, one which would eventually be adopted by rural communities across the state, region, and nation that would exceed the temporal bounds of the New Deal.

As agents of resettlement, home economics advisors were individuals who combined technical training, practical knowledge, and charisma — "with a spirit akin to that which a church missionary carries into foreign fields" — who were ultimately responsible for maintaining the "broad experiment to determine the living factors in agricultural improvement" (Long, 1915, 3-5). It was their job not only to transform the agriculture and ecologies of the colonies into which they journeyed; it was also their job to carry the gospel of improvement to the masses. Home economics advisors participated in what Connolly deems *spatial uplift*, a form of racial uplift enacted by Black actors who participate in state-sanctioned white supremacist spatial logics by prioritizing profits, upholding segregation, and continuing to devalue Black communities in the process (Connolly, 2014, 89; Rodriguez, 2021, 42). By supporting the spatial

containment and purported uplift of Black communities, home economics advisors taught Black people, and women in particular, skills necessary to be self-sufficient, in order to make them less reliant on the state, allowing the government to extract labor and economic benefit from the same communities without having to invest social services, money, or other resources into the community in the future.

While improvement policies were implemented at the federal level, such policies were not enacted equally within each respective community, especially across racial lines (Domosh, 2023, 28). This trend emerged out of Progressive-era home demonstration work, where white home demonstration work focused on making white people better citizen-consumers, whereas Black home demonstration work had a "strong emphasis on helping women to fulfill their families' basic needs, those of social reproduction: food production and preservation, health, childcare, and home sanitation" (Ibid.). Improvement was thus a loaded concept; to improve white people in the 1910s and 1920s was to instill values of capitalist consumption and the circulation of white dollars, whereas to improve Black people was then to make them more palatable to whiteness by making them more visible, containable, and moral.

This system of racialized enactments of the same federal policy persisted into the New Deal. The idea of Black "improvement" was critical to the American modernizing project in the 1930s and 40s, when there was an expectation that Black people — and more specifically Black women — would bear the weight of improving the race. Whereas white agents were tasked with dispensing scientific advice on farming, Black agents were crucial to rural Black improvement because they were able to get closer, literally, to black bodies, where they could demonstrate "life-work" skills to Black people within their own homes (Domosh, 2023, 54). As Carmen V. Harris notes in her study of home demonstration work in rural South Carolina, "African American home demonstration agents carved out a professional space based on the intersection of race and gender that permitted them to provide valuable services to women and families in the African American community" (Harris, 219, 497). The language of "submarginality" or inadequacy was placed upon Black people and communities during this period; thus, rural development introduced by Federal agencies and implemented on the ground by Black individuals and Black organizations on a day-to-day basis, functioned to make Blackness more palatable or more useful in a moment of critical racial capitalist transformation (Domosh, 2023, 80).

According to Henri Lefebvre, the state and the agents thereof flatten social and cultural spheres, enforcing a logic "that puts an end to conflicts and contradictions" and neutralizing anything that resists it "by castration or crushing" (Lefebvre, 1991, 23). Here, Lefebvre speaks generally, taking a race-neutral approach to the consequences of state power and imposition. Eugene J. McCann suggests, however, that Lefebvre's conceptual frame, particularly his theorization of abstract space, lends itself to discussions of race and racialization, particularly in urban settings of the United States (McCann, 1999, 164). I extend this geographic framework into the rural Black South, where New Dealers abstracted Black space through the implementation of rigid moral standards and the creation of neatly parceled homesteads to make it containable, legible, and easily replicable. As Lefebvre argues,

> Abstract space is not defined only by the disappearance of trees, or by the receding of nature… It has nothing of a 'subject' about it, yet it acts like a subject in that it transports and maintains specific social relations, dissolves others and stands opposed to yet others. It functions positively vis-a-vis its own implications: technology, applied sciences, and

> knowledge bound to power… [I]t dissolves and incorporates such former 'subjects' as the village and the town; it is also true that it replaces them. It sets itself up as the space of power… (Lefebvre, 1991, 50-51).

The abstraction of spaces formerly owned, occupied, or formed by Black people, was to impose the hand of the state into the lives of people who previously had partial or total autonomy over their own lives. As Smith argues, "To be black was, in part, to be confined to a particular space, a black world created through and as a means of racial oppression" (Smith, 2007, 102). Therefore, the abstraction of space is to transform Black relationships to the land, and to "improve" Black people by incorporating them into the homogenous or homogenizing nation, rather than allowing them to exist in independent towns and communities. It is to replace the lives they once lived in order to bring them into abstract lives that could be reproduced or achieved anywhere else. White domination redraws maps and mediates the world through a unitary vantage point, "naturaliz[ing] both identity and place, repetitively spatializing where nondominant groups 'naturally' belong" (McKittrick, 2013, xv). The abstraction of Black space is the elimination of racial, spatial, regional, or social specificity. It is to make Black people and Black space flat.

For this reason, some Black residents opted out of state-sanctioned measures to "solve" Black poverty. Despite the limited job opportunities and poor economic condition of the state following the Depression, Black residents of Barnwell County, in western South Carolina, refused Santee-Cooper construction jobs (The State, August 1939). They would not be complicit in the destruction of the lives of rural Black people in their state. In the late 1930s, photographer Dorothea Lange and her husband, economist Paul Taylor, traveled through the South, interviewing tenant farmers and sharecroppers. One Black sharecropper in Mississippi lamented, "Tractors are against the black man. Every time you kill a mule you kill a black man. You've heard about the machine picker? That's against the black man too" (Natanson, 1992, 262; Holley, 2019, 65). To replace Black labor with machinery was not only to produce a more uniform output and establish a more productive system but was further to exclude Black workers from the economic benefits of agricultural work. Concerned about the prospect of widespread economic, ecological, and thereby social, transformation in the region, one newspaper inquired, "The labor supply of the Coastal region is in the main negro. Are the negroes of the Coastal region to be 'industrialized'?" (News and Courier 1939e). Just as the environment was materially produced over centuries, so too was the perception of Black rural laborers, with the same eroding effects (Sutter 2015).

## Who Resettled Lucinda Warring?

On February 20, 1940, the South Carolina Public Service Authority publicly boasted that they had removed their first resident from the Basin: Lucinda Waring, a sixty-nine-year-old Black woman (News and Courier 1941b; News and Courier). Deemed the "vanguard" or the "pioneer" of the exodus, Lucinda represented the hope of "successful" and "happy" resettlement for over 3000 people who would "start life anew" in homes and communities dozens of miles away from their homelands (News and Courier 1940f; News and Courier 1940d).

Prior to the creation of the Santee-Cooper Project, Lucinda lived at the Buckhill Settlement in Saint Stephen, near what is now Lake Moultrie. Upon resettlement, she was moved further east to a property on a newly paved highway near Harris Town (U.S. Census Bureau

1930, 1950). Lucinda was removed from a 3.7-acre property to a 20-acre home and owned $140 worth of timber rather than $4 on her previous property (News and Courier 1941). This perceived upgrade does not account for the fact that Lucinda owned her new home but was unable to purchase the property outright and instead leased it for five hundred dollars from a white man named P. P. Gourdin (News and Courier 1940).

Lucinda lived alone with her nineteen-year-old son Henry as of 1930, and a 3.7-acre property was likely more manageable for a young adult farm hand and an elderly woman working full-time as farmers (U.S. Census Bureau, 1930).[53] While the newspaper articles focused on the resettlement of Lucinda, many of the interviews were done through Henry, who managed to relay that, in spite of reports of Lucinda being happily resettled in her new home, "his mother disliked leaving her old home" and even fell ill once being settled in her new property, perhaps due to the long delays in her resettlement due to the rainy weather and muddy, inaccessible roads between her former and new home sites (News and Courier 1940e; News and Courier 1940c). A decade after moving into her new home, Lucinda was no longer able to work, and Henry became the primary laborer on the property, with no evidence of farm hands to assist (U.S. Census Bureau 1950).

Curiously, nearly every case study of "successful" rehabilitation featured elderly Black people, including Lucinda, eighty-three-year-old Grace Pickney, and Anderson Warren, all of whom were moved from rural, tucked-away properties in swamplands or on plantations to main streets, like the Summerville-Moncks Corner Highway or King Street near downtown Charleston. According to one newspaper, 199 out of 229 Black families in the basin of Lake Moultrie consented to resettlement, while thirty families opposed. Of these families, fifteen had one or more family members who were disabled by semi-permanent or permanent illnesses, and fifty-six had family members above the age of 60 living in their home (News and Courier 1940b). Black elders, though community stalwarts who had lived on the same property their entire lives, were perhaps a more easily movable and manipulable group. They were less reliant on the land to provide them income and sustenance as they could no longer work. Their attachments to the land were therefore perceived as being largely sentimental (News and Courier 1940f).

The Black landowner who previously owned the most property of any Black person in the Basin, Joe Cooper, resettled onto 600-acres north of St. Stephen on Highway 52, where he paid to bring 45 laboring families with him to live and work on his new land. While Joe Cooper was used in the local newspapers as an example of the success of Black resettlement, his story instead demonstrates how the state did not sufficiently compensate non-propertied Black people, instead forcing an independently wealthy Black man to take responsibility for caring for and keeping together his community (News and Courier 1941b).

In an article entitled, 'Story of Santee Resettlement is Told by Public Service Authority,' a Charleston-based newspaper presented a tale of the "comfortable" and "proud" resettlement of 901 families (The News and Courier 1941b). As the first Director of Resettlement with the Public Service Authority, Dr. Ralph K. Foster "faced a real sociological problem" and "evolved a plan to solve this intricate human equation" (News and Courier 1941b). By this, the Public Service Authority meant the "negro land-owning class" who were direct descendants of enslaved laborers who worked on early rice and indigo plantations, and whose families held land titles in the region since Reconstruction. According to the newspaper, the rural Black population stayed

[53] Lucinda was married to her husband, James Warring, at the time, but he was not listed as a resident of their home in the 1930 United States Census, or any census records thereafter (U.S. Census Bureau 1930, 1950).

in this region for so long because they and their ancestors "preferred remaining with their former masters to wandering forth on the uncertain path of emancipation," and, because of their purported loyalty, they "earned" small acreages from their former masters on the condition that they stay there and work the same land in perpetuity (Ibid.).

In an effort to find a "human equation" for the problem of the Black population, the Authority's directors of resettlement secured new plots of land to which Black people could be removed; appointed escrow agents to hold money from the sale of the basin sites in order to pay for the new sites; hired engineers to tear down and rebuild the homes of Black community members elsewhere; offered dispossessed people former slave quarters or tenant houses in lieu of their own former buildings; and gave each dispossessed adult 100 chickens and seed loans as compensation (Ibid.). While at first glance, several of these opportunities might have been welcome additions to the lives of rural Black people in the region, the article mythologizes Black responses to dispossession and presents a portrait of Black rural Southerners as not only amenable to changes in their life, but also actively complicit in and eager about the destruction of their ancestral homes. As I argued in Chapter 1, the Public Service Authority did not arrive at this belief ahistorically, but rather based their perceptions of Black and Indigenous people, notably Santee Indians, upon accumulated and socially produced mythologies of landless racialized populations who lacked history.

Aside from the eminent domain costs, the Authority did not offer any money to support the resettlement of any family. They did, in some cases, help place families in new homes or properties. Once the Authority and these landowners, including Lucinda, agreed on a property upon which to resettle the family, the Authority handled all transactions and legal proceedings, claiming authority and expertise over the Black residents who they believed to be ill-informed and living on "meager farm income[s]" (News and Courier 1940e). However, in Lucinda's case, the Authority deemed it unnecessary to help her build a new home on her new twenty-acre property, instead deeming the existing, twenty-five-year-old house suitable for Lucinda, Henry, and his new wife. Despite this decision, Lucinda still had to move a small kitchen shack and even two doors from her old property to the new home on the back of a truck, since the new home did not have a livable kitchen to meet even the cooking needs of three people (Ibid.; News and Courier 1940d; News and Courier 1940).

Other families were placed in portable, prefabricated homes which one Public Service Authority official said were constructed so hastily that they "thr[e]w together one home every hour" (News and Courier 1941a). The Authority claimed they improved the lives of rehabilitants, but instead simply relocated them with very little financial or material support, believing that any life lived closer to 'civilization' "will enable them to live longer to enjoy the new world of the Santee-Cooper transformation" (News and Courier 1941b). Assessing Lucinda's living conditions following resettlement, one engineer believed her life had been improved from "poor" to "fair" (News and Courier 1940). The purported "good life" was nowhere to be found for resettled Black residents. In fact, one newspaper speculated that within one year of resettlement, Lucinda Warring would be on state relief, and within several years, "At least 2,000 of the 3,500 w[ould] go on relief," particularly those who had little or no property prior to resettlement" (News and Courier 1940).

Families who were not moved onto main roads were relocated into resettlement communities, including Farm Security Administration model developments, such as the 2,100-acre former Wiggins Estate, and the resettlement colonies of Orangeburg Farms, Allendale Farms, Tiverton Farms, and Ashwood Plantation. Of all the resettlement sites, the 6,400-acre

government-planned Orangeburg Farms property housed the most Santee-Cooper rehabilitants moved together to a single development project — approximately fifteen families (News and Courier 1940f). However, the creation of the resettlement colony was not without controversy.

When the FSA purchased the land for Orangeburg Farms in November of 1937 and began to subdivide it into individual farms for Black families starting in December of that year, a group of more than 350 white families from surrounding towns wrote a petition protesting "any black belt being created and established in the midst of white farmers who own and live on their property." Specifically, the white community members believed that allowing the FSA to build a 7,000 "Black Belt'" within or adjacent to these towns would be "to invade a territory occupied by substantial white farmers." In reality, Orangeburg County had a population of approximately 37,000 people in 1937, 25,000 of whom were Black (Leased Wire, 1937, 8; The Greenville News, 1937, 2). In response to the FSA's proposal, a group of white citizens hired an attorney to protest the project at the federal level (Holley, 1971, 191). Just days later, the FSA announced that they would continue with the creation of Orangeburg Farms, but, based on the feedback of local representatives and community meetings with "interested" families, decided that nineteen of the units would be shifted to white clients (The Times and Democrat, 1937, 1). Additionally, the FSA promised to keep the Black and white tenants, as well as Black families and surrounding white community members, separate by adding a protective belt of land on which no Black people could live (Holley, 1971, 191).

These anti-Black sentiments mirrored the structural and interpersonal violence that dominated Orangeburg County in the early 20th century. As Jack Shuler notes, "[N]o amount of editorializing could change the reality in South Carolina: if you were black, you were always in danger of horrible violence perpetrated by whites without due process of law" (Shuler, 2012, 53). While the Federal government had the authority to build a new community within the geographical boundaries of Orangeburg County, white residents had the power to physically keep Black residents within specified geographic areas, and keep them socially in a state of second-class citizenship.

While the FSA offered some Black families alternative housing in Orangeburg Farms, picking up an entire community with ancestral ties to a space, intimate understandings of the land, and economic roots in a single location, only to haphazardly relocate them elsewhere, was an act of violence. Any attempt on the part of the state to build new towns to replace the old, inundated communities, contributed to what Read describes as "a phenomenon of creeping… sameness, the victory of 'universal civilization.'" (Read 1998). The making of drowned towns is a homogenizing project on the part of state and federal governments, in which purportedly unruly spaces are destroyed and undesirable peoples are extracted from the land to be placed into meticulously planned, government-regulated spaces.

As the soon-to-be relocated Black families quickly realized, just as they were not wanted by New Dealers in the Santee-Cooper Basin, their presence was despised by white residents before they even arrived at the Farms. The "progress" that was offered to dispossessed Black families forcibly moved to Orangeburg Farms was thus still limited by the burdens of a lack of physical and social mobility, repeated denials of advancement and opportunity, and, ultimately, white supremacy. Black places like Tiverton Farms, Allendale Farms, or the majority of Orangeburg Farms, are "critical sites not only for understanding the nuances of Black spatial imaginaries and governance, but also to understand how whiteness is inherent to the structure and function of the town" (Purifoy and Seamster, 2021, 48).

On December 13, 1941, the South Carolina Public Service Authority announced that they had successfully resettled all 901 families, boasting that they had "made countless friends in an area that once teemed with enemies." By the time the article was published, most of the former homes and properties were already inundated, with an estimated twelve billion gallons of water filling the reservoirs each day (News and Courier 1941).

## Conclusion

In the 1950s, Reverend J. A. De Laine, a Methodist minister and civil rights leader from Clarendon County, South Carolina organized plaintiffs in the Briggs v. Elliott school desegregation lawsuit, one of the five cases that culminated in Brown vs. Board of Education. In his prelude, De Laine described what brought him to a life of activism, writing, "I was settled at Summerton for life, I thought, for my ambition was to stimulate a more progressive attitude in the colored people of Clarendon County, S.C. but the Santee-Hydro-Electric-Dam [sic] created an added injustice to the already overburdened and underprivileged[d] Negro Children" (De Laine n.d.). The Santee-Cooper Project and the drowning of Black social and material life in Summerton catalyzed his lifelong interest in and activism in support of educational opportunities for Black people. While the Authority claimed they aimed to "soften the sentimental worries occasioned by moving, by making the new surroundings more livable, attractive and remunerative," the Resettlement Division of the South Carolina Public Service Authority irrevocably disrupted Black ties to ancestral lands, submerging the places they once called home beneath the surface of two man-made reservoirs (News and Courier 1940f).

Reflecting on the project of resettlement, a South Carolina Public Service Authority agent noted, "If the movement is gradually extended by the government over the [S]outh there will be a great change in the economic worth of this section and in the character and temperament of its inhabitants" (Major 1940). This statement reflects the ultimate goal of New Deal resettlement: to control the lives of Black people by (re)shaping their laboring capacity, their self-sufficiency, and their temperament. Improvement was thus ultimately about transforming the people of South Carolina by reorganizing the geography. This geographic transformation included the hydrologic makeup of the state, most significantly through the inundation of hundreds of thousands of acres of land. But it also, critically, necessitated the transformation of the lived spatial realities of poor and racialized populations, from independent, scattered, self-sustaining homesteads, to communities that were visible, quantifiable, containable, and productive to the state.

As demonstrated, this racial capitalist practice follows a centuries-long pattern of American territorial, cultural, and colonial expansion across the North American continent and beyond. What is significant here, however, is the desire to incorporate poor Black people, who were denied access to or resources from the state for so long, into the American socio-spatial project, in order to render them removable. Black access to purportedly "full" citizenship was predicated on their ability to provide *something* to the state, whether their laboring capacity, land, loyalty, or lives. Because their lives, their property, and their destiny were now owned by the government, the state had the right to determine where they could and could not exist, what they could and could not do with their lives in the future — a position of being everywhere and nowhere simultaneously that McKittrick calls a Black absented presence (McKittrick, 2006, 33). To be re-colonized, therefore, was to gain nominal access to the government and select

resources, while being stripped of independence, autonomy, place, and property in turn. It is to be the central focus in the short term, to be made periphery in the future.

# Chapter 4:

# The Case for Black Ecological Repair

> Every generation confronts the task of choosing its past. Inheritances are chosen as much as they are passed on. The past depends less on 'what happened then' than on the desires and discontents of the present. Strivings and failures shape the stories we tell. What we recall has as much to do with the terrible things we hope to avoid as with the good life for which we yearn. But when does one decide to stop looking to the past and instead conceive of a new order? When is it time to dream of another country or to embrace other strangers as allies or to make an opening, an overture, where there is none? When is it clear that the old life is over, a new one has begun, and there is no looking back? … [I]s it possible to see beyond the end of the world and to imagine living and breathing again?
>
> - Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother*

> The real solution to the environmental crisis is the decolonization of the black race… To do so, blacks must challenge and confront the very foundations of American society. In so doing we shall correct that majority which appears to believe that the solution lies in decorating the earth's landscape and in shooting at the moon.
>
> - Nathan Hare, *Black Ecology*

## Introduction

In 1972, thirty years after the floodwaters consumed the Santee-Cooper Basin, after which the South Carolina Public Service Authority believed they successfully conquered ecological and moral pests, swamplands and swamp inhabitation survived. Despite the state's attempt to eradicate the swamplands of the region in the clearing of nearly 200,000 acres of land, several historical swamplands remained surrounding the two reservoirs decades after the completion of the Project. In a 1975 annual report, the Wildlife and Marine Resources Department and the Public Service Authority noted that they discovered nearly fifty "illegal squatters shacks," cabins, duck blinds, and houseboats hidden within the swampland ecologies, where individuals lived alongside and adapted to their ecologies, built community with others hidden in the wetlands, and surviving outside of the gaze of the state (Nelson, 1975, 10; The Columbia Record, 1972, 6C).

At risk with the existence of previously unidentified and undeterred populations in the swamps well into the 20th century was a loss of white state control in the region, a space previously determined to be in desperate need of law and order. The communities who lived outside of the state's law and control sustained themselves through landed relations — by fishing and hunting, building their own adaptive homes and structures, and embracing opacity. Most of

the shacks were simple, most resembling houseboats, lean-to structures, and simple hunting shacks affixed self-fashioned flotation devices, such as oil barrels underneath, to help homes navigate the terraqueous terrains. Some homes were mostly used for weekend hunting, housing men who lived around the state for recreational activity over short periods. Many homes contained electric generators, refrigerators, freezers, beds, and electric water pumps, and "maybe even a water bed," suggesting long-term habitation. One such hut, referred to as the "Remini Hilton" due to its proximity to the town of Remini, could house up to 30 people (Nelson, 1975, 10; The Greenville News, 1972, 48; The State, 1972, 10A).[54]

The state saw inhabitants as not simply a nuisance to protected forestlands, but rather "Santee-Cooper swamp rats," "squatters," "looters," and "nesters" who "go in and shoot anything that walks, moves or crawls" (The Greenville News, 1972, 48). While the Authority originally signed a contract with the state for timber rights in the region, they canceled the contract after their 1972 tour through the swamps, electing to keep the region "undeveloped" to prevent the potential "spoilation of the extensive game and fowl habitat" (The Columbia Record, 1973A, 1B; The Greenville News, 1972, 48). The report made clear the state's position: "[F]orest land is not fully serving the people if it is used exclusively for a [single] purpose" here referring to timbering, "which could also be achieved in combination with several other uses," (Nelson, 1975, 11). Even more, the Authority claimed their ultimate goal was to "maintain the undeveloped nature of this area" (The Columbia Record, 1973B, 1B). The irony here is plain: The Public Service Authority destroyed hundreds of thousands of acres of swampland to develop the Santee-Cooper Project, thereby eradicating swampland ecologies in the floodplain, eliminating fowl and game habitats across approximately 200,000 acres, and privatizing the surrounding landscape. Thereafter, when displaced peoples with no other land to turn to, or with no desire to leave the ecologies they called home, continue to hunt, fish, and sustain themselves on a fraction of the acreage using traditional hunting methods, those populations were deemed criminals and threats to native ecologies.

The homes were ultimately torn down not to protect the environment, but rather because the remaining Santee swamplands were set to be clear-cut in a timber sale, and the remainder of the land would be filled with directional signs "which would allow sightseers to tour one of South Carolina's most beautiful wilderness areas" (Aiken Standard, 1972, 2A). The swamplands residents who formerly survived, in part, due to their ecological opacity were visibilized to the state when they needed to be displaced in the name of ecological extraction, white recreation, and capital gain (Nelson 1975, 10; Glissant 1990). Following the expulsion of swamp residents, the Public Service Authority assigned Authority personnel, game wardens and South Carolina Law Enforcement to regularly patrol the swamp, thereby enclosing swamplands and enforcing the privatization of land through policing (Anderson Independent-Mail, 1973, 3; The State, 1972, 10A; Nelson, 1975, 10).

To understand the present eco-social condition, and to determine what to do with it in the future, we must interrogate the spatial history, Black geographies, and Black ecologies of the past. Here, I think with Clyde Woods, who notes that "there are multiple systems of geography, multiple traditions of geography," and, therefore, "there will be an African-American tradition in geography that is old" (Heynen 2021). Likewise, there are multiple systems of ecology, and therefore there is necessarily a Black ecology that predates white supremacy and racial

[54] It is important to note, however, that most of these houses "bore a Registration Number as issued by the Boating Division of the S.C. Wildlife and Marine Resources Department," meaning they were legally allowed to exist within and move through the waters of the state (Nelson, 1975, 10).

capitalism, one we can learn from in our reparative projects. In this chapter, I return to and hone in on the swamp, that space that was and is "accessible only to those long familiar with it," to illuminate how ecological emplacement and enduring relations between subaltern people and their environments can offer us pathways toward simultaneous eco-racial repair (The Times and Democrat, 1972, 3A). Examining the "underlife" of our past eco-racial spheres — such as the plantation, the sharecropping system, the swamp, and other ecologies — "reveals the raciological-ecological systems of… life and affirms a revolutionary praxis of kinship" (Davis et. al., 2019, 6).

The construction of Santee-Cooper Project resulted in material, social, and epistemic violences. The inundation of 200,000 acres of swampland and farmland dislocated Black people from their ecological worlds, in which they previously sustained themselves, raised livestock, worked in mills, built communities, harvested resources, and found refuge. Not only did the dispossessed have to establish new homes and garner new incomes in unfamiliar places, but they also had to find new ways to relate to the world around them, including learning new migration patterns of birds and fish, learning which plants grew best in the soils of their new homes, discovering which routes provided safe and speedy passage, and more. The leveling and submersion of the Basin dislocated and scattered families, in some cases creating a body of water that literally split roads and properties in two. Students could no longer attend schools, families could no longer attend churches, and neighbors now needed a boat to visit one another (De Laine n.d.). In short, the South Carolina Public Service Authority forever changed the eco-social worlds of former Basin residents — for many of whom, for the worse.

What would it mean for ecological and racial reparation to be part of the same process? How can we heal from and abolish racial capitalism? I want to make the case here for *ecological repair*. More specifically I demand a *Black ecological repair*, the eco-social process of attending to, building upon, and healing relationships between Black people and their environments that white supremacy and racial capitalism sought, unsuccessfully to disentangle and destroy for centuries. As I argued in Chapter 1, Black ecologies illuminate the complex conditions and relations Black people have with/in ecological and social worlds that comprise struggles for existence, conditions of persistence, and legacies of world building. Black ecological repair contends with and produces space for the epistemological and material remediation of centuries of racial capitalism, which simultaneously subject racialized people and environmental resources as equally exploitable, manipulatable, and capable of being destroyed (Vickers, Forthcoming; Robinson 2000 [1983], 2019; Pulido, 2016a, 2016b; Gilmore, 2002, 2007, 2022; Bhattacharyya, 2018). But it also encourages us to move beyond narratives of injury to look to the mutualism of Black people and their environments that allow communities to heal and build *outside of* systems of racial capitalism.

I intentionally invoke repair here rather than reparations. Whereas *reparation/s* are acts of reconciliation, acknowledgment, and remediation, often in the form of monetary compensation, provided by entities complicit in the injury of harmed communities in remediation of war, slavery, human rights violations, *repair* is when those same injured parties "make themselves whole and create terms of living beyond the injuries experienced" (Lewis, 2023, 1392; see also Tacchetti et. al. 2023). Deborah Thomas notes that the adoption of repair rather than reparation/s marks a shift in orientation, an uneventful, quotidian, relational, and historical process that demands mutual aid, active listening, and illumination of multiple scales of entanglement (Thomas, 2019, 212). Reparation/s are therefore material or immaterial transactions granted at one time or granted over a period of time. These reparation/s "seek[] justice through the naming

of names, the exposure of public secrets, and the articulation of chains of causality" (Ibid.). Repair is an active, ever-evolving, transitional state that does not require external reparations to justify Black people's fugitive pursuit of belonging, justice, and new worldings (Lewis 2023).

Repair is not measured explicitly based on numbers of people killed, communities dispossessed, or homes razed, but instead through "the structural, qualitative, and affective dimensions of experience in order to challenge the ontological notions of temporality, causality, and mutual responsibility that have become naturalized" (Thomas, 2019, 64). It is a project that is never complete, never existing in the past tense. Communities, political systems, and nations are never repair*ed*, but instead exist in a perpetual state of repair*ing*, working daily to counter past, present, and future harms.[55] Repair can never be fully adequate or complete. But this is not to suggest that we should not work toward it; rather, it is to remind us that we can and should not ever give up on the struggle for justice (Nelson, 2015, 103).

In this chapter, I intervene in the field of Black Ecologies to make a case for Black ecological repair. Critically, I illuminate decolonization and commoning, as potential reparative techniques, through which Black communities can break away from repressive systems of racial capitalism. As Clyde Woods argues, "Any real and fundamental progress must be based on the rural development agenda carved out of a rocky and unyielding landscape by previous generations of working-class African Americans" (Woods, 1998, 12). Sylvia Wynter echoes this sentiment, arguing that the struggle of Black people demands "another structure of values, an alternative and opposed consciousness" that allows them to "rehumanize themselves by the creation of a counter-culture through the transplantation their old cultures onto a strange soil, its reinvention in new and alien conditions" (Wynter, n.d., 46-47). This chapter asks us to think outside of eco-racial binaries, and outside of binaries of destruction and utopia. It serves as an intervention and an opening, encouraging Black geographers and ecologists to consider legacies of Black ecological repair as a pathway to the material futures we seek.

## Ecological Succession

On a hot, early April morning in the spring of 2023, I walked along the boardwalk trail of the Francis Beidler Forest in Harleyville, South Carolina. As the largest remaining old-growth cypress-tupelo swamp forest in the world, the 18,000-acre Beidler Forest is the closest remnant of the antediluvian ecological world of the Santee-Cooper floodplain (Audubon Society of South Carolina 2018). I came to Beidler forest looking for traces and biophysical memories of the world before inundation; I came to understand how Black people made life in, with, against, and perhaps even in spite of the swamp.

My tour was led by Tim Evans, director of land conservation of the Audubon Society of South Carolina (Evans 2023). As we meandered along the boardwalk trail, he pointed out birdcalls and differentiated between venomous and non-venomous snakes that slithered through the waters; noted the bare treetops caused not by cold temperatures but by hungry eastern tent caterpillars (*Malacosoma Americanum*); and identified the oldest trees in the park, some of

[55] I am reminded here of the oft-articulated phrase from 2020, which, roughly, goes like this: "If you are not *anti-racist*, then you are racist." In other words, if you are not actively working to dismantle systemic racism on a daily basis, then you are complicit in or benefitting from racism. To be anti-racist, therefore, is to participate in a quotidian, active, perpetual struggle against racism (Kendi 2019). Likewise, to be someone on the path toward repair, you are never quite at a destination, but are instead engaged in an active pursuit.

which had cores dating back to 1391. While Beidler is referred to as a cypress-tupelo swamp, it is also home to dozens of other species of trees beyond the Bald Cypress (*Taxodium distichum*), including Loblolly Pine (*Pinus taeda*), Longleaf Pine (*Pinus palustris*), Spruce Pine (*Pinus galbra*), Red Cedar (*Juniperis virginiana*), as well as more than three dozen species of flowering trees and over twenty species of shrub (National Audubon Society 2021). Though this is not the historic ecology of the Santee-Cooper Project — the majority of those swamps now lie beneath the waters of two reservoirs — Evans said the Beidler Forest, along with the Congaree National Park, Hellhole Swamp, Scape 'Ore Swamp, and other extant swamp ecologies in central South Carolina can offer useful insights into how the antediluvian Santee-Cooper Basin might have looked.

As we walked atop the boardwalk that separated us from the swamp waters, Evans noted how all the plants, animals, waters, and geological formations that we saw before us emerged during different historical epochs and evolved together to produce our modern-day experience of the swampland.

"Everything is happening here on different time scales," he said. "This isn't a monolithic forest. This is multiple forests occupying the same space at the same time."

He paused beside one of the oldest trees in the park, patted the trunk, and looked up. Then he asked, simply and curiously, "What has this tree seen?"

Evans' question is reminiscent of those asked by Tianna Bruno, who posits, "What archives of the entanglement of anti-Blackness and ecological degradation in the afterlife of slavery might the biophysical landscape hold? What has the surrounding environment witnessed? What memories does it hold within it? How might we access those memories?" (Bruno, 2022, 5). To be in and of the swamp is to exist within and between multiple temporalities, to see remnants of what life was like in the exact same place at another time. I think here alongside what L. Allan James defines as *legacy sediment*, or "sedimentary deposits generated episodically by human activities," particularly alluvium or colluvium "post-European floodplain sediment" (James 2013). Likewise, Bruno argues that "environmental records can be used to understand what Black ecologies can remember as they witnessed and mutually experienced anti-Black environmental violence" (Bruno, 2022, 7).

This Black biological compost is best documented within the plantation, wherein several scholars have illuminated how the plantation contains the blood, sweat, and tears of enslaved Black people (Bruno 2022; King 2019; Moulton 2021; Sharpe 2018; Reese 2019; Jones 2019; McCutcheon 2019). As a space historically absorbed and transformed by, or rendered adjacent to, but outside of, the plantation due to its function as a space of rice production and eventual fugitivity, swamplands, too, possess this materiality. Tiffany Lethabo King describes the sweat and other liquids inadvertently expelled from the body as "Black errant kinetics" (King, 2019, 140). Like King, I think of the plantation and the swamp both as "living and porous social organism[s]," shaped by multispecies interactions and entanglements (Ibid.).[56] But I move beyond thinking of soils as connected to Black people and Black life simply through enslaved labor and the materiality of capitalist accumulation.

The field of ecology can help us better understand how environments and their inhabitants are materially and socially produced over time. In 1916, Frederick E. Clements introduced the concept of *ecological succession*, defined as "how biological communities re-assemble and change over time following natural or anthropogenic disturbance" (Clements 1916;

[56] Unlike King, however, I stray away from the invocation of the "Black body," which functions to reduce Black people to their corporeality.

Chang and Turner, 2019, 503). Disturbances can be large (e.g. fires, earthquakes, floods, the construction of a canal) or small (felling a tree, gardening a single plot of land, harvesting crops), but each disturbance, regardless of size, results in adaptive biological responses. Take, for example, the 1886 Charleston earthquake, after which South Carolina residents lived with precarious terrains as aftershocks regularly rocked the state for days, months, and years after the initial quake; or the 1893 Sea Islands Hurricane, which struck Gullah Geechee homelands with 115 mile per hour winds and 15-to-20-foot-high tides, killing more than 2,000 of the over 31,400 Black people in Beaufort County (Grego 2022; Taber 1934). While both ecological disasters "fomented crisis, [they] introduced a set of alterations in what was possible in the Lowcountry" (Grego, 2022, 2). Ecologically, landscapes were transformed, rivers flooded, garden plots and agricultural fields destroyed, and soils and roads were displaced. But socially, these ecological events became "force[s] of contingency, in which the subsequent constraints, opportunities, and scars shaped the paths of the people, communities, and politics caught up in the storm's aftermath." (Ibid.). Though each catastrophic event had epicenters tens of miles away from the Santee-Cooper basin, the forces of the hurricane and earthquake were felt in the swamps (Evans 2023).

Just as we can identify swampification as a theory with roots in ecological scholarship, but having consequences on social and racial life, I argue that so too can we better understand the socio-racial dynamics of ecological succession by attending to the large-scale ecological disturbances of settler colonialism, white supremacy, and the plantation. Caroline Grego describes Jim Crow as "a second disaster birthed from the first [slavery], albeit one contingent on a particular set of not only material but also environmental circumstances" (Ibid.). Sutter echoes this sentiment, directly addressing the responsibility of the social conditions of the South: "Jim Crow segregation itself must bear some of the blame for the region's ravaged landscape" (Sutter, 2015, 155). Consequently, we can think of the clearing of the landscape and the creation of the Santee-Cooper Project as the ultimate disturbance, the ultimate disaster, which forced the destroyed environment and the dispossessed people to ecologically and socially adapt.

Ecological succession is, above all, a "universal law" that "all bare places give rise to new communities except those which present the most extreme conditions of water, temperature, light, or soil" (Clements, 1916, 33). We can think of the ecology of the South in the post-plantation moment as being a bare place, out of which adaptation and new life could emerge. Likewise, we can regard the clearing of the land, the felling of the trees, and the inundation of the Santee-Cooper basin as the ultimate anthropogenic disturbance — "a significant recent modification exerted upon the swamp [that] has been effected by man," requiring not only plants and animals, but also humans to change their material and social realities in the wake (Grey, 1973, 2).

## Black Ecologies of the Swamp

In 1970, Nathan Hare introduced the concept of 'black ecology,' arguing that Black and white environments differ in degree and nature, and that any solutions for the "ecological crisis" necessitate Black environmental correction (Hare 1970). Recent scholarship (Roane 2019 & 2022; Roane & Hosbey 2019; Purifoy & Seamster 2020; Frazier 2016; White 2018; Murphy et al. 2021) attends to historic ecological violences perpetrated against Black people, while also illuminating ecological possibilities for those same communities (Roane & Hosbey 2019; Roane 2022). Behind acts of swampification that dispossess rural Black communities, there are

purported contradictions between "civilization" and "nature" that led settlers to believe that certain spaces are "moral," or valuable and worthy of human habitation, and others are "immoral," or unruly, uncontainable, and undesirable (Smith 2008). A Black ecological analysis attuned to moral geographies (Birdsall 1996; Smith 1997 & 2000; Lipsitz 2007; Massey 2008; Smith 2008) demonstrates how the same conditions that made swamplands undesirable for white inhabitation were also the "difficult terrains that marginalized, hunted, and exploited people have made habitable" and in which Black people found autonomy (Wright, 2019, 2).

The swampland acts as what King and others have deemed an *ecotone*: "a region of transition between distinct ecological, social, and ontological systems" which can be used as "a metaphor for mapping power and systems of representation in postcolonial contexts" (King 2019; Roane 2019; McArthur & Sanderson 1999). Swamps are terraqueous terrains possessing both firm land and murky waters, and, in the 20th century, functioned as landscapes upon which the state projected its disdain. Swamps possess an unpredictability that "exceeds full knowability/mappability" and while this envisaged fear in New Dealers and preceding white settlers, such indeterminacy allowed swamps to function as spaces of becoming for Black inhabitants (King, 2019, p. 3). In the seventeenth through nineteenth centuries, Black maroon communities established independent or semi-independent societies, which consisted of "dynamic and flexible structuring principles, ideational systems, labor relations, kinship rules, and social relation systems through which residents lived day-to-day" (Sayers, 2015, 107). The number of escaped slaves was so large in the 1760s that South Carolinians feared a general rebellion, one soldier noting that Charleston and local planters remained in persistent conflict with "a numerous collection of outcast mulattoes, mustees, and free negroes" (Aptheker, 1939, 169). Maroons built new worlds, erected community structures, and lived in commensalism with the swamps, adopting the swampland as a part of their identity, culture, and ways of life (Sayers, 2015; Wright 2019). In the twentieth century, Black swamp inhabitants found continued safety, community, nourishment, and economic stability in the swamplands (Hart 2013).

Black ecological scholarship offers new potentials to critically engage Black community relationships with ecological formations, ranging from ecocidal and extractivist practices that directly affect Black people, to the mutualism and resistance that ecologies offer Black communities (Allewaert 2008; King 2019; Murphy et. al. 2021; Roane 2022 & 2019; Roane & Hosbey 2019; Wright 2018). I define ecology here as systems of cooperation, symbiosis, mutualism, commensalism, predation, and competition between and within species (Raerinne 2020; Boucher et al. 1982). Roane and Hosbey argue that Black ecologies name "a corpus of insurgent knowledge" produced by Black communities who tell us how to historicize current crises and conceive of futures outside of destruction (Roane & Hosbey 2019). Black ecologies as a field seeks to illuminate the complex conditions and relations Black people have with/in ecological and social worlds that comprise struggles for existence, conditions of persistence, and legacies of worldbuilding. In tracking those conditions and relations, I draw upon what Heynen calls an abolition ecology, which refutes white supremacist land ethics through emancipatory land politics (Heynen, 2021, 99). As a Black ecological process, swampification reveals how white people severed ties between Black people and their eco-social worlds, removing them from geographical, economic, and ancestral homes, and further attacking rural Black knowledge systems, kinship networks, and ways of life in the process.

Despite public myths of the swamplands as "untamed interiors," New Dealers privately admitted that Black swamp communities in South Carolina stewarded the landscape using coppicing methods and were able to contain malaria levels without outside or government aid,

despite the large number of mosquitoes in the region. But, when New Dealers sought to clear-cut and impound the swamplands, malaria levels began to rise once more due to the high volume of standing water (King, 2019, 95; Power 1943). This tension between Black ecological relations, land stewardship, and alternative uses of the swamplands in direct opposition to the New Dealers' practices of extraction, mastery, and enclosure demonstrates what Roane calls the Black Commons (Roane 2019). As Woods argues, a commons is not just a pre-capitalist formation, but is rather created by racialized people who are displaced into the social and ecological margins due to the enclosures and "chaotic nature" of capitalism (Woods 2009; see also Heynen 2021). In the Black commons of the swamp, Black people lived symbiotically with the environment, "melting" into the thick, vegetative landscape outside of white society, and establishing a politics of refusal in their socio-spatial renegotiations (Kinzer, 2017, 112; Roane, 2019, 256).

But these liberatory geographies did not exist in absence of great struggle. Swamps exceeded containment precisely because of the murky terrains, the innumerable human and nonhuman predators, the perpetual walks through knee- or even chest-deep waters, and the dense foliage and treetop coverage which prevented easy navigation or wayfinding, among dozens of other threats to the health and safety of fleeing Black people. Stand still for long enough in the swamp and you begin to feel as though you are surrounded, birdcalls mimicking human voices, tree stumps appearing as humans rising out of the waters, the crunching of leaves that sounds like a human or animal approaching. The swamp contains the threat of real and imagined attacks, creating a sense that you are never actually alone. In his *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave*, Douglass recounted the multitude of threats fugitive slaves faced when choosing to navigate the swamps en route to freedom:

> Upon either side we saw grim death, assuming the most horrid shapes. Now it was starvation, causing us to eat our own flesh;—now we were contending with the waves, and were drowned;—now we were overtaken, and torn to pieces by the fangs of the terrible bloodhound. We were stung by scorpions, chased by wild beasts, bitten by snakes, and finally, after having nearly reached the desired spot,—after swimming rivers, encountering wild beasts, sleeping in the woods, suffering hunger and nakedness,—we were overtaken by our pursuers, and, in our resistance, we were shot dead upon the spot! I say, this picture sometimes appalled us, and made us 'rather bear those ills we had, Than fly to others, that we knew not of' (Douglass, 1849, 84-85).

To reduce swamplands and other fugitive ecologies to simply spaces of liberatory becoming is to ignore the material and psychological horrors Black people endured within those geographies. Even more, it is to ignore the brutality and torture of the plantation and the plantation owners. Simply put, Black people actively chose to endure risks, threats, and terrains of the swamp to escape the plantation, demonstrating the lengths enslaved people were willing to go to survive. Or, they were forced to endure such risks, as it was the only way they could survive.[57]

Paying homage to Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang (2012), I argue that fugitivity is not a metaphor. Living, surviving, and building in the swamps was not merely a refusal, a break, or a "more tender relationality" between Black people and the environment (Zellars, 2020, 485). To reduce marronage to a "beautiful experiment," as Zellars suggests, quoting Saidiya Hartman, is

[57] Famously, Harriet Tubman guided a group of twenty-five people through the Lowcountry swamps carrying a pistol for protection. When one man, exhausted, scared, and starving, decided that freedom was not worth surviving the swamps, Tubman pointed her gun at the man and simply said, "Move or die." He moved (Abu-Jamal 2007).

to ignore the labor, toiling, abjection, and precarity inherent to fugitive life in the commons (Ibid.; Hartman 2019). After all, fugitivity and liberation are not destinations, but are instead active states, requiring round-the-clock labor and maintenance to uphold the precarious state of being. In the swamp, surrounded by the eco-social threat of slave hunters, alligators, snakes, rising waters, uneven terrains, dogs, lynch mobs, and encroaching white society, Black people were relegated to "the social and human garbage pit," the ecological space no one else dared touch. As Anne Allison (2013, 16) notes, to live in that space of precarity, to occupy the affective and material experience of precarious living, is to live with permanent pain and unease (The Greenville News 1932).

Because of their difficult terrain, the swamplands were nearly impenetrable to white plantation owners and U.S. military forces. As Governor David R. Williams wrote in 1816,

> A few runaway negroes, concealing themselves in the swamps and marshes…, not having been interrupted in their petty plunderings for a long time, formed the nucleus, round which all the ill-disposed and audacious near them gathered, until at length their robberies became too serious to be suffered with impunity. Attempts were then made to disperse them, which either from insufficiency of numbers or bad arrangement, served by their failure only to encourage a wanton destruction of property… The peculiar situation of the whole of that portion of our coast, rendered access to them difficult, while the numerous creeks and water courses through the marshes around the islands, furnished them easy opportunities to plunder, not only the planters in open day, but the inland coasting trade also without leaving a trace of their movements by which they could be pursued (Aptheker, 1939, 174).

These communities established independent or semi-independent societies, which consisted of dynamic, flexible social systems, shared ideologies, divisions of labor, kinship rules, and webs of interconnection that defined daily life (Sayers, 2015, 107). Maroons adopted the swampland as a part of their identity, culture, and ways of life, wherein they built lives, erected homes and community structures, and lived in commensalism with the swamp ecosystem (Sayers, 2015; Wright 2019).

Once they found semi-stable footing, Black people banded together to form communities in the swamps. The people who chose to remain in the swamps often located just miles away from their plantations instead of continuing on to the North, to Canada, or to other locations a safe distance away were often those with families and loved ones who could not yet escape themselves, but who the auto-emancipated people wanted to visit and hoped to eventually liberate (Aptheker 1939; Lockley 2009; Sayers 2015). There existed varying scales of marronage in South Carolina. Most common were communities of approximately ten people who were highly mobile and could easily move between camps and survive by accessing resources from and communication with nearby plantations. The Santee River, for example, acted as a highway through the region, allowing maroons to cut through the swamps with ease, and the tributaries, which often connected directly to plantation lands, allowed maroons to stealthily access tools, weapons, food, and new recruits. However, there were a few larger groups of up to fifty people, and even one documented case of about one hundred people, which were more settled, established agricultural systems, and built permanent structures, but lived further away from plantations to stay out of the gaze of white society (Lockley 2009).

As Katherine McKittrick argues, "The geographies of slavery, postslavery, and black dispossession provide opportunities to notice that the right to be human carries in it a history of

racial encounters and innovative black diaspora practices that, in fact, spatialize acts of survival" (McKittrick, 2013, 2). For centuries Black people hid, fought, evaded, made life, found freedom, and survived in the swamps. It is with this knowledge that I consider the bioessentialist and necropolitical imperative of white settlers, and eventually New Dealers, who bound the humanity (or lack thereof) of racialized populations to their ecological homes.

## Black Ecological Repair

Black ecological relations do not emerge merely in response to or in spite of white supremacy and racial capitalism. As Carrie Freshour and Brian Williams (2022, 2) write, "Rejecting the politics of domination that undergirds colonial-racist environments, while centering generative and innovative Black ecological engagements, Black ecologies, and parallel work in abolition ecologies, seek to restore, repair, and chart an agenda for freedom." Therefore, it is essential to regard Black Ecologies, like Black Geographies, as an intellectual *and* political engagement. Just as Black Geographies "yields an understanding that more comprehensively positions Blackness as not just a subjectivity… that is impacted by external means of definition and manipulation," Black Ecologies likewise broadens our understanding of Black ecological relations and environmental placemaking not merely as reactionary to white violence. The Black in Black Ecologies and Geographies is instead a "place-making apparatus that in every geographic context makes its location more meaningful, more substantial, more human," (Hawthorne and Lewis, 2023, 5).

Bruno (2023) argues that environmental justice as a field historically frames Black living as overemphasizing two experiences — Black living as dying and Black living as activism. Instead, she gestures toward a third framework outside of this binary, to illuminate the "myriad of modalities of Black life and living that occur between spectacular activism and dying, such as quotidian, everyday acts for Black life and futurity (Ibid., 6). I take up Lewis' call to consider repair as an ecological framework that "can facilitate repair by determining the systems, relations, and commitments that should make it up" (Lewis, 2024, 6). Lewis argues that ecological repair is not merely "a modality of resistance to white supremacy, in which the result of reparation is primarily to work towards a life absent racism" (Lewis, 2024, 8). Rather, theorizations of Black repair, ecological or otherwise, must "fully disaggregate Black harm and the practice of Black worldmaking" to "discursively liberate Black being from suffering" (Lewis, 2024, 8).

Here, then, we can and must work toward a reparative Black ecologies, one founded upon principles of both ecological restoration and return, and narrative repair.[58] As scholars of Black Ecologies, it is not sufficient to illuminate how Black people lived within, cared for, and knew ecologies in contradistinction to the land use practices of white people. To do so would be to further enclose the capacity, agency, and goals of Black people within our historical record and narrative accounts. Instead, we must historicize and theorize beyond Black suffering, and we must consider Blackness as more than fleeting. Because, if we return to the lived experience of Black ecologies as it is materially documented in the land, and as is present in our historical record, Black people are indeed grounded and do indeed produce life for the sake of living.

[58] I differentiate between the field of Black Ecologies and the lived experience of Black ecologies, though I note that within both we must commit ourselves to a political and intellectual pursuit of repair.

In 2023, Maddalena Tacchetti, Maria Puig de la Bellacasa, and Dimitris Papadopoulos published a co-edited volume entitled *Ecological Reparation: Repair, Remediation and Resurgence in Social and Environmental Conflict*. In their introduction, Tacchetti et. al. note that coupling ecology and reparation "brings attention to the interconnectedness between ecological and reparative obligations," with particular attention to lands destroyed through colonization and environmental racism, lands forcibly taken, and lands that have been turned into sites of waste or wasting[59] (Tacchetti et. al, 2023, 2-3). The authors note that ecological reparation (singular) requires solidarity, cooperation, and trusting, vaguely, the leadership of "those who have remained guardians of ecological relations with non-humans at the peril of their own lives and the safety of their communities" (Ibid.). *Ecological Reparation* frames reparation as "direct repair of human nonhuman relations," but what is obfuscated in this framework is a remediation of the human-on-human violence, dispossessions, and exclusions that produce the very conditions that require repair. Critically absent in their theorization of ecological reparation, and most of the subsequent chapters in the edited volume, is attention to race and the compounded harms of racial capitalism (Silva 2023).[60] I diverge from Tacchetti et. al. not only nominally, but also in my attention to repair rather than reparations, as I center the progressive, quotidian acts of Black people who persist, rather than the remedial, compensation-based offerings of governments or other entities who caused the harms they seek to repair.

Recent developments in racial ecologies gesture toward an abolitionist framework of repair. Notably, Heynen and Ybarra (2020, 2) theorize *abolition ecology*, which calls for the liberation of the environment — making what Ruth Wilson Gilmore calls "freedom as a place" — to "build intuitions and processes that are explicitly focused on the political ecological imperatives of access to fresh air, clean water, sufficient land, amelioration of toxic chemicals, and beyond." Unlike Tacchetti et. al.'s definition of reparation, Heynen and Ybarra's conceptual attention to place-based solidarities and reparative frameworks is rooted principally in political ecology and Environmental Justice (EJ). This is because, as Gilmore tells us,

> [A]bolition has to be "green." It has to take seriously the problem of environmental harm, environmental racism, and environmental degradation… It has to figure out ways to generalize the resources needed for [the] well-being [of] the most vulnerable people in our community, which then will extend to all people… It has to stretch across borders so that we can consolidate our strength, our experience, and our vision for a better world (Kumanyika 2020).

Repair, therefore, takes seriously the relations people hold to the land, but also the relationships of the land itself (Lewis, 2022, 192).

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[59] These "wasted" sites include landfills, military bases, and industrial hubs, among others.

[60] The chapter that focuses most explicitly on 'Building an Anti-Racist Food Movement' vaguely states that reparations are about "supporting BIPOC [Black, Indigenous, and People of Color] organizations and institutions" and "dedicating time to learning more about the histories and cultures of racialized people," but does not call for material reparative solutions (Silva, 2023, 163). Perhaps aware of their literary omission of critical discussions of race, the editors of Ecological Reparation published a series of videos on their YouTube channel of the same name. On the channel, the collective interviews scholars and activists focusing on eco-racial justice, including Kim Tallbear, and produces documentary-style videos illuminating lived praxes of ecological reparations in the current moment, including the Land in Our Names grassroots organization, which focuses on land reparations (Ecological Reparation 2022, 2023).

To do so, it is useful to look to Black pasts to shape Black reparative futures. Thomas posits that conditions — and I would argue geographies — of marronage offer the possibility of repair (Thomas, 2019, 214). Marronage is not merely a historical act, but a social, psychological, political, and metaphysical ontology, through which we gain freedom and build material and social realities not bound to finite geographies (Roberts, 2015, 10). As one white man lamented to the South Carolina General Assembly in 1820 after venturing in the swamps along the Santee River, "[T]he negroes were found embodied and measurably in a state of rebellion, against the peace and welfare of the neighborhood. They manifested in their conduct no pacifick [sic] disposition to surrender, when ordered to give up; but endured as far as possible to effect their escape" (Rodgers 1820; in Lockley, 2009, 91). While several scholars have argued that marronage is bound up in particular environmental properties, such as impenetrable ecologies or semi-permanent settlements within difficult terrains (Wright 2019; Roberts 2015; Bledsoe 2017; Aptheker 1939), the central tenant of liberation for maroons was the existence of special spaces that enabled subversive acts and praxis of fugitivity. Maroon eco-social practices therefore point us toward reparative ontologies and epistemologies.

There are limits to a maroon ecologies or abolitionist ecologies framework, however. Lewis (2023) argues that the current state of Black ecologies (Barra 2023; Bruno 2022; Freshour and Williams 2022; Hosbey, Llorens, and Roane 2022; Moulton and Salo 2022; Purifoy 2020; Roane 2022; Roane and Hosbey 2019) is bound up in framing Blackness and Black ecological relations as always existing counter to white supremacy and its tools of discrimination, dispossession, and death. After all, white supremacy and racial capitalism are tools of the settler, and white violence against racialized people and their environments tells us more about white life than it does about ourselves. Therefore, I take seriously Lewis' call to question if Black ecologies can "theorize a reparative model that affirms Black life and relations rather than simply, or always, accounting for its harm and desecration" (Lewis, 2024, 4). Rather than illuminating suffering as a fixture of Black life, beginning our theorizations with Black suffering, we might instead illuminate "divergent and different and relational voices of unfreedom" that can serve as "analytical and intellectual sites that can tell us something new about our academic concerns and anti-colonial futures" (McKittrick, 2016, 5). As Bruno et. al. note, "Black ecological knowledges can transgress certain limitations inherent in harm framework" (Bruno et. al. 2024). Reparative Black ecologies, therefore, can allow us to break out of frameworks of harm and destruction, to allow us to ontologically and epistemologically get more free.

Histories of dispossession force targeted and uprooted communities to (re-)imagine, re-spatialize, and reconstitute themselves in the wake (Estes 2018). Rather than relying on the state to provide reparations and to grant Black people the right to (re)claim, inhabit, and steward landscapes they once called home, they might instead turn to an autonomous practice of sovereignty, or a "commitment to place, irrespective of the violence, the dispossession, and the attempts to fracture a semiotic or material sense of belonging" (Lewis, 2022, 196). The historical memory of violence against Black communities pushes us toward reparative, rather than reparation-centered, inquiries: What does it mean to be a Black person existing, living, thriving, and building in spaces deemed uninhabitable? What does it mean for your existence and persistence to defy the common belief, the historical account, or the law? Ecological repair, with its critical attention to both material and epistemological transformations, might offer a framework for answering these questions.

## Undamming: Against Enclosure

Rather than thinking of dam/nation as a fear of the suppressed, the hidden, the occluded, we might think of it as a fear of the excess, the uncontrollable, the uncontainable. While white agents sought to suppress marginalized populations through dam/nation, Black people have always "exceeded the limited and impoverished imaginations of those that have attempted to make [Blackness] productive" (Lewis, 2022, 156). Therefore, in interrogating this tension between white submersive tactics and Black fugitive resistance, I follow Hartman, who asks, "What [does] it mean to be a surplus human?" (2019, 187).

Dam/nation is an endeavor, a pursuit, and not an endpoint. While the South Carolina Public Service Authority sought to exert white control over all aspects of Black life, they were only partially able to do so. Modalities of Black life survived, offering us frameworks for relationalities, practices, and reparative models that can guide us toward new infrastructural possibilities, interracial solidarities, and more. Despite state-sanctioned efforts to submerge Black communities and transform their enduring ways of life, the Santee-Cooper Project also gestures toward "a geography of possibility" and a "geography of freedom," if we consider the longevity of the project and the potential for repair in the wake of the project's creation (Lewis, 2022, 199 & 196). Emplacement — the capacity to plant roots and an enduring sense of belonging — is a project with no endpoint, but rather an endeavor toward sociospatial liberation (Read 1998; McKittrick 2006). What might it mean for Black people of the Basin to plant social, spatial, and ecological roots in the region that held and nourished their families for generations, from which they were so violently removed? What would it mean to repair, to return? Here we might revisit the vignette presented in the introduction, in which swampland inhabitants emplaced themselves, planted roots, or otherwise buoyed themselves in the waters, insisting that they indeed belonged in spite of white efforts to enclose the ecologies. Challenging dam/nation — what I call *undamming* — is, therefore, a project not only of charting processes of removal, subjugation, and submersion but also of "working toward more just conceptualizations of space and place" (McKittrick, 2006, xxvi).

As a Black geographic response to dam/nation, undamming is the process of refuting the designations long ascribed to Black people and the places they inhabit. After all, white settlers and government agencies are not the only ones making place. While geography is "implicated in the elaboration of racial theories that perpetuate the production of difference," theorizations of Black life through geographies demonstrate how Blackness is not simply a subaltern position, but instead "a situating force, place-making apparatus that in every geographic context makes its location more meaningful, more substantial, more human" (Hawthorne and Lewis, 2023, 2 & 5). As Ruth Wilson Gilmore (by way of Karl Marx) reminds us, "[B]y mixing our labor with the earth, we change the external world and thereby change our own nature… [T]hat's what geography is: making history, making worlds" (Gilmore, 2022, 28). As a worldmaking practice, Black Geographies offers an analytical frame and tangible empirical examples of how we might begin to reaffirm Gilmore's (2007) assertion that freedom is a place.

Centering the complex conditions and relations Black people have with/in ecological and social worlds that comprise struggles for existence, conditions of persistence, and legacies of world-building, Black Ecologies bring into sharp focus how Black life is not only made within particular locations, but using specific materials, and through exact relations (Vickers 2022). Nathan Hare argues that,

> The real solution to the environmental crisis is the decolonization of the black race… To do so, blacks must challenge and confront the very foundations of American society. In so doing we shall correct that majority which appears to believe that the solution lies in decorating the earth's landscape and in shooting at the moon (Hare, 1970, 8).

The remediation of dam/nation necessitates a simultaneous repair of both the destroyed ecologies and the tarnished perception of racialized peoples. After all, "waste" or "wasting" are not biological designations, but social ones, often ascribed to people and places that white society longs to remove or destroy. Waste, therefore, does not exist naturally, but is instead produced; we are what George Perkins Marsh calls "architects of our own abiding place," and, I would argue, simultaneously designers of the spaces we do *not* abide (Marsh, 1864, 14). Because it is constructed, waste can, too, be deconstructed. It can be materially and socially composted.

Dam/nation, like conquest, is a living, quotidian, and ever-present moment that actors can interact with and interrupt; it is "a milieu or active set of relations that we can push on, move around in, and redo from moment to moment" (King, 2019, 40). It is a force in the world, through which Black life is mediated; but we must remember that it is not the world itself. Undamming, then, is a process of repair and restoration — of the material *and* the social ecologies. Toni Morrison argued that flooding is a form of remembering where water used to be, and "[a]ll water has a perfect memory and is forever trying to get back to where it was" (Amirkhani 2023). But while water has a way of returning to its former flood paths, undamming is not about returning to a previous state, but is instead about establishing new material and social pathways, inspired by the persistence of waters and the endurance of Black community life. This dissertation wades through the material, social, archival, and political-economic waters of the Santee-Cooper Project, using the currents to locate new flood paths and new openings for Black ecological life in the wake.

I raise the example of the afterlives of swampland inhabitation and the refutation of state enclosure in the introduction of this chapter as an example of the *Black commons*, a concept increasingly proposed by Black ecologies and legal scholars in recent years. This concept utilizes the modifier 'Black' to demonstrate "the strain Blackness has placed on notions of 'the people'" while simultaneously attending to the unique land practices and alternative land stewardship utilized by Black people "in the face of unending enclosure and expropriation" (Roane, 2019, 258). Roane argues that plotting a Black Commons is to produce "possibilities for survival, connection, and insurgency through the strategic renegotiation of the landscapes of captivity and dominion" (Ibid., 242).

In recent years, Black geographies and ecologies scholars (Roane 2019; Hosbey & Roane 2021; Roane 2022; Purifoy 2022), legal scholars (Hayat 2021; Zellars 2020; Kerins 2013), and others (Sheller 2022) have illuminated examples of Black commons — either self-identified commons, or spaces that qualify as commons. Danielle Purifoy and Louise Seamster describe Tamina, Texas is described as embodying the characteristics of a commons: "an independent place with its own development agenda," and a town striving to defend "its legal rights to manage its own water and sewer utility." Indeed, the authors note that the town possesses a familial commons model, in which all heirs of a deceased person hold land in common, unless otherwise divided, transferred, or sold (Purifoy & Seamster, 2020, 48). In the context of the Potomac and the Virginia Tidewater, Roane describes the Black commons as "indigenized relationality," a reciprocal and intimate relationship with the water cultivated at the edges of settler corporate interests and its codification of life in the waterways as a profitable industry" (Roane, 2022, 229).

Against the material and social submersions of swamplands, I recontextualize the Black commons, imagined here as a *swamp commons*, as a tool of Black land-use practices founded upon principles of collectively agreed-upon land-use practices, governance structures, outside recognition, and ecological stewardship. Ostrom (1990) identified rules for the management of the commons, or common pool resources (CPRs), rooted in eight key principles: the definition of clear group boundaries; the establishment of rules around the use of common goods; the establishment of governance structures to ensure every individual affected by community rules can participate in the modification of such rules; the assurance of outside recognition of internal governance structures; the establishment of a system to monitor the behavior and CPR use by community members; the implementation of sanctions and consequences for rule violators; the establishment of a conflict-resolution system; and the creation of a system of responsibility for the governance of CPRs throughout the interconnected commons system (Heynen, 2018, 12).

As Heynen notes, the achievement of these parameters is impossible under the conditions of the plantation and slavery, broadly. But, he continues, "[R]eading the sophisticated geographies of marronage post-emancipation…, it is hard to imagine the uptake and adherence to these principles of governance for freed people living forms of racial capitalism amidst the structuring of Black Codes and Jim Crow" (Heynen, 2018, 12-13). Still, if we look at the lived material realities of auto-emancipated people in the Great Dismal Swamp, for example, fugitive Black people did indeed create structured societies that paralleled the aspirational commons described by Ostrom:

> The archaeological residues of this long-vanished mode of communitization… have yielded unassailable direct evidence, and much more additional indirect evidence, for a Diasporic community of individuals who followed rules of their own making and acceptance; who maintained community organization and coherence by generating custom and tradition; who labored for themselves and their fellow scissioners; and who existed as beings possessed of true consciousness, in the Marxian sense of truthful or accurate comprehension of the world around them derived from critical awareness of its real social conditions (Sayers, 2015, 114).

While they perhaps did not invoke the name "commoners" to describe themselves, the maroons did indeed embody the majority of the qualities necessary for us to identify them as such, including the existence of community rules, community buy-in, collective laboring for the benefit of the entire group, and accountability structures. The communities were even formally acknowledged in the press and by government authorities, even if that acknowledgment served to call for the dissolution of such communities.

In his theorizations of a Black commons, Roane and Justin Hosbey gestured toward the ways formerly enslaved Black people formed "a fleeing Black commons" in swamps and forests, "whereby they used their unique knowledge of the landscapes and waterscapes to extend a fugitive and transient freedom" (Hosbey and Roane, 2021, 70). But, while I believe Black and Indigenous commoning was successful precisely due to the Indigenous knowledges of those existing therein, I resist the urge and tendency to identify Black placemaking practices as being *only* fugitive, or existing *only* in response or contradistinction to white settlement, land-use, and territorialization. While it is necessary to document the attempted and successful enclosures enforced by white presence in the swamplands, Black and Indigenous presence and placemaking practices are not exclusively responsive to white violence. For example, in his expansion of his definition of the Black commons, Roane, notes that "Black communities cultivated *alternative*

relations to the region's waterscapes intimately intertwining Black sociality and the geological and biological processes of the subaquatic" (Roane, 2022, 236; emphasis mine). To describe Black land relations as alternative is to frame them as non-normative, exotic, and oppositional, and is therefore to reproduce the settler logic of framing racialized populations and their ecologies as diverging from what is normal, which is to say what is "correct."

This oppositional framing of the Black commons breaks down when we consider how swamp commons did not only exist before Emancipation, but rather could be found afterward as well. In 1869, four years after the abolition of slavery, a private seller, presumably a former plantation owner, listed over one thousand acres of land for sale. This sale included 550 acres of swampland that was home to three Black settlements, including "one of the largest and best Negro settlements on the North Santee," which included "a resident force of 70 laborers" and buildings fit to house over 200 Black people (DeSaussure, 1869, 3). In the two decades following Emancipation Black community members regularly held private meetings where they established a collective refusal to pick cotton on white plantation lands and discussed how to block the efforts of white people to enforce Black labor (The Fairfield News and Herald, 1893, 4). Returning to the swamp inhabitants who were evicted from their dwellings in the 1970s, many of the individuals discovered living in the region were living in structures that were passed down from generation to generation, caring for the land, fishing, and hunting for their families, and collectively maintaining the opacity of the swampland communities (The State, 1972, 10A).

Here I differentiate between the lived experience of the commons and the academic structuring of the commons. As Heynen argues, "[I]t is necessary to clearly situate whose ideas about common property rights and the commons have most loudly resonated and informed how the politics of the commons within political ecology and beyond have unfolded" (Heynen, 2018, 12). Here, he traces the genealogy of commons scholarship from Marx (1887), Karl Polanyi (1944), E.P. Thompson (1963), Ostrom (1990), and Sylvia Federici (2004), all of whom established a history and a theory of the commons through the enclosures of British, Swiss, and German landscapes. (Notably absent here is Garrett Hardin's (1968) 'The Tragedy of the Commons,' against which Ostrom builds her central argument.) Heynen's critical intervention lies in his assessment that

> the most contemporary prominent discussions of the commons are based in Eurocentric frameworks that do not take seriously either the uneven power-relations of colonial history, white supremacy or patriarchy as defining societal characteristics of property relations, law or any of the interconnected institutions of society in between (Heynen, 2018, 12).

Heynen argues that the Eurocentric conceptions of the commons are limited and "fail[] to capture the misogyny and patriarchy bound up in this history" (Ibid., 12). I think alongside Heynen's argument to critically note that the European notion of the commons is ignorant of histories of race and racialization that crucially made European commons possible. At present, the scholarly notion of the commons does not sufficiently attend to race or racialization. But I also note that to posit global Black commons as existing against historical white, and more specifically European commons is to frame Black land use as always oppositional and to once again judge Black people based on the standards of white European life.

I further diverge from poetic and abstract notions of the commons. Thomas F. DeFrantz, for example, describes a Black commons as "a theoretical social space that emerges somewhat in relation to white systems of structural domination, but as a space that cares for the possibilities of

Black life," attempting to disentangle the commons from the material reality of land tenure, material production, and economic (re)structuring of Black life (DeFrantz, 2021, 101). In a celebration of the 25th Anniversary of Neil Smith's *Uneven Development* at the 2009 American Association of Geographers Annual Meeting, Clyde Woods argued,

> The commons is not just a pre-capitalist formation. It's creating the idea, by the people who are displaced by this process, its creating the idea that there are new alliances to create new commons, but it's also creating new commons themselves, on the margins, in the swamps…
>
> New commons were created based on enclosures but also the understanding of the rationality of capitalist and chaotic nature of capitalism itself particularly for racialized communities there is this constant search for a new common and because they are also enclosed, you know spatially enclosed, even within these enclosures created by capital, they create commons within these enclosures (Woods 2009).

Woods suggests that commoning, and specifically Black commoning, is reactionary, responding to racial capitalism, and predicated upon conditions of Black inhabitation within and reactions to spaces of white domination. Against this tendency, I take up Lewis' call to consider if we can "theorize a reparative model that affirms Black life and relations rather than simply, or always, accounting for its harm and desecration" (Lewis, 2023, 7). I argue that we must consider commoning as a modality of land-based and community-based relations through which Black, Indigenous, and poor white people converged, established governing and social structures, cared for one another, and lived consciously and non-extractively within swampland ecologies. Thus, I break from the poetic invocation of the commons toward a material and political understanding of the commons to demonstrate how the capaciousness of Black life affords place-based land practices built on reciprocity, ecological stewardship, and the mutual care of lands held in common.

## Conclusion

We are living in and contributing to what Lewis calls an "Age of Repair" (Lewis, 2024, 2). Black geographies scholars and I recognize this moment as one of racial, social, and ecological reckoning, both on the part of the government and other collectives who are beginning to acknowledge a need for reparations, and from within Black communities working toward their own notion of repair (Lewis 2024; Bruno et. al. 2024). Black ecological repair is a project of presence and of futurity, one that pushes back against the historical, social, economic, and ecological constraints of colonialism, white supremacy, and racial capitalism.

As Black ecologists responding to this historical moment, we must interrogate, theorize, and embody repair in our scholarship and in our understanding of the Black lived experience. As Clyde Woods reminds us, and as I quote in in the epigraph of this dissertation,

> If we are to build a society where working-class knowledge and participatory democracy are truly treasured, we must understand that the South is the center of African American culture… Future political and economic movements must view African American folk

> culture as a central, and necessary, element in the construction of new institutions and new regional relationalities. The 'civilizing' activity of providing 'nondeviant' role models for the creation of new men and women must come to an end. Instead, an all-out effort must be undertaken to celebrate and valorize the millions upon millions, living and dead, who met the regimes of daily destruction with unshakable dignity. In the same vein, the lands, rivers, streams, air, plants, and animals of the region must be restored to their sacred status. Until then, 'every hill and molehill,' every blade of grass, every flutter of the flag, and every note that is played must be contested (Woods, 1998, 290).

Black ecologies and Black ecological repair are not only praxes of refusal, but also processes of recognition. To recognize the enduring relations Black people hold with and within their ecologies, as well as their inexhaustible resistance to oppressive systems and structures, is to understand how repair is practicable and possible. As previously noted, repair is not an end goal, and is certainly not a novel concept, but is instead a process, a model of which has been demonstrated by generations of Black Americans who persist, steward, nurture, and survive in spite of white efforts to contain, enclose, destroy, and dispossess, among other violences.

Any material transformation of our world must necessarily be accompanied by an intellectual and social transformation as well. As the late environmentalist Chico Mendes reminds us, "Ecology without class struggle" — or decolonization — "is gardening" (Lambert 2021). Likewise, Black Ecology without a critical attention to eco-racial repair reproduces narratives and legacies of Black dam/nation. Black ecological thinkers *must* take up repair in our theorizations, and to look to lived Black ecological experiences as material and epistemological guides. Just as the multiplicity of Black life cannot be situated within binaries, neither can our theorizations of the potential pathways out of our present eco-racial condition.

# Conclusion

## Historical Submersions

In the summer of 2022, I drove a loop around the perimeter of Lakes Marion and Moultrie, craning my neck to the left to catch glimpses of the reservoirs between pine trees and curtains of Spanish moss. As I rounded the southern banks of Lake Marion, somewhere between Santee and Eutaw Springs, I passed a billboard that proudly boasted, "This is Santee Cooper Country." If the enormity of the reservoirs did not already depict this fact, the billboards, in three dimensions, demonstrated how this region was indeed transformed, claimed, and consumed by Santee Cooper.

In 1962, twenty years after the completion of the Lakes Marion and Moultrie, the Parks, Recreation, and Tourism division of South Carolina created the Santee-Cooper Counties Promotion Commission, a body corporate and politic specifically designed to increase, implement, and enhance recreation and development in the area around the reservoirs (South Carolina Code of Laws 1962). More than just a tourism board, Santee Cooper Country today represents a lifestyle of water-based recreation, 21st-century Lowcountry values, and the South Carolina Public Service Authority's successful recolonization of the region.

Nestled in the pages of the official Santee Cooper Country Visitor's Guide is a page featuring a L. L. Bean-clad Black family walking on the marshy banks of a pond, framed by a dense forest of trees. Above them, in bold text, is a simple statement: "Make the forest part of your family's story." The image features four of the fewer than ten Black people depicted in the guide.[61] And, unlike all of the other pages that specifically advertise companies, excursions, boating and fishing experiences, or otherwise feature maps of Santee Cooper Country, this image stands alone, apparently only selling a return to nature, and more specifically a return to the forests — the majority of which were destroyed by the very company from which Santee Cooper Country gets its name (Santee Cooper Country 2023).

The promotional materials critically occlude attention to the fact that, for hundreds of families who once inhabited the Santee-Cooper Basin, the swampland forest was and is already part of their family story. So, too, is the inundation thereof — a fact that the promotional materials also ignore. This intentional forgetting — what I deem historical submersion — not only ignores longstanding Black ecological relations, but also implicitly suggests that Black people belong in the region only as visitors, not as people who are intended to stay. Silencing, erasure, and suppressing are tools used by colonial and imperial states to bolster their power and control. Submersion is both material (Denson 2017; Fullilove 2004; Read 1996), as with the inundation of the Santee-Cooper Basin, and social (Ramirez 2018; Sharpe 2020; Trouillot 1995), as with the historical submersion of the spatial history of what preceded the creation of the reservoirs.

In recent years, Black artists and news outlets have dedicated increased, albeit still limited, attention to the history of drowned Black towns. In the late-night comedy show, *The Amber Ruffin Show*, Ruffin illuminates the violent history of drowned towns across America, an erasure that she compares to the history of the Tulsa Race Massacre, during which Black

[61] As a point of comparison, more than 30 white people are featured in the guide across 70 pages.

residents were stalked, detained, expelled, or killed by white community members who then burnt the Black neighborhood to the ground after a Black teenage boy inadvertently touched a white teenage girl in an elevator (Lewis 2022). She notes that the violences that occurred in the burning of Tulsa and the inundation of towns like Oscarville, Georgia mirror one another in scale and consequences. Significantly, Ruffin remarks how material destruction coupled with historical suppression results in the effacement of Black history and Black life in the landscapes we move through daily. She adds, "I work a few blocks away from where the government disappeared two Black communities and, until recently, I didn't know about any of it. You know why? Because it worked" (Ibid.).[62] Efforts to submerge Black life have been successful not only in the inundation of the lands, but also in the submersion of the traces of their existence in the wake. Submersion is by design.

In some ways, the South Carolina Public Service Authority achieved its goals. Today, the reservoirs remain mostly full. However, water levels have precipitously dropped over the past several decades during the droughts of 1951, 1987, 1999-2002, 2007-2008, and 2011, which brought water levels so low that residents and tourists could walk, excavate, and play in the murky earth that once held Black life (Baxley 2008; Petersen 2007; Rheney 2008; SC State Climate Office 2019; Singletary 2008). Affluent, wrought-iron gated neighborhoods and private vacation homes line the banks of Lakes Marion and Moultrie, creating an atmosphere marked by "deafening" silence (Surette 2020). Santee Cooper Country is a haven for white recreation, including, but not limited to bass fishing, golf, country clubs, and more. As was always the goal, Black life is absented for the benefit of white pleasure.

Considering the successful material and social submersions of the Santee-Cooper Project, I wonder: What would it look like to properly memorialize and recognize the violence of the Santee-Cooper Project?[63] How does a state, a region, or a nation reckon with the fact that their infrastructures, the very systems that make modern life possible, are built upon Indigenous territory and Black lands that were flattened, emptied, submerged, transformed, and even violated in the name of progress? In spite of material transformations, dislocations, and attempted effacements of Black geographies, what can we carry forward, how can we persist?

## Reserving Black Life

Reservoirs are not only artificial lakes, but also spaces to store something necessary to retain for future use. We might think of reserving as a process of undamming. As Macarena Gómez-Barris reminds us, "In Spanish, the word *represa* is used for 'to dam,' and also for 'to repress.' A represa literally contains the river's natural flow as well as signifying… political repression" (Gómez-Barris, 2017, 96). Likewise, for the South Carolina Public Service Authority, water was the necessary good to retain. I argue, however, that we might consider the essential reserve that we must carry with us into the future is the memory of the inundated towns and the ecologies that preceded the flood. This is especially critical as the changing climates of

[62] Ruffin argues that "These drowned towns are part of the Black American history they don't want to teach you. It's ugly and it's gross and we don't even know all of it. And the more we find out, the harder it is to love this place that would do those things to so many people. If you're feeling this way, which I often do, you could try loving what this country could become instead. Our history may be full of pain, but our future has limitless possibilities" (The Amber Ruffin Show 2021).

[63] As Saidiya Hartman asks, "How do we find life where only the traces of destruction remain?" (2016, 208).

the region are producing intensified storms and floods that threaten to consume the remaining swamplands, forests, communities, lands, and homes of the Lowcountry. Without tools to remember and memorialize past floods, how can we attend to future subsumptions?

At risk are not only the memories of former residents, which indeed began to fade and recede as former residents passed away and their descendants held fewer ties to the disappeared lands. Dispossessed people never forgot the hurt of the injury, but, for some, memories of what life was like in the rural towns grew fuzzy over time. As one anonymous former resident noted,

> If you lived through [Santee Cooper], you could never forget. I was filled with rebellion and disgust, and I could see my parents suffer and I was too young to do anything. My daddy hated it and never had anything good to say about it… And many an old person is in their grave today because of it. My husband's uncle died worrying over it. He didn't live six months after they condemned that property (Day 1997).

Perhaps more significantly and insidiously, what is further at risk is the suppression and disappearance of public memory surrounding Lakes Marion and Moultrie, the historical suppression of the narrative of the 901 dispossessed families, and the naturalization thereof — a process that Paul Sutter defines as an *ecology of erasure*. While Sutter illuminates how "environmental forces have, with much human encouragement, obscured the South's history of human-induced erosion from view," I argue that erasures are likewise materialized in the Santee-Cooper Project and other hydroelectric projects through the social and material submersion of landscapes of disdain, and the subsequent naturalization of human-constructed ecologies (Sutter, 2015, 192).

This is already at play in how Santee Cooper frames its lakes as a natural wonder. On its website, Santee Cooper notes that "[w]hat was the largest earth-moving project in history resulted in the creation of lakes Marion and Moultrie, 160,000 acres of *natural* paradise," and that "[n]ature can take full credit for the region's intrinsic beauty, but man also deserves credit for the efforts to protect and preserve the Santee Cooper Lakes' environment and maintain these areas as *natural* habitats" (Santee Cooper n.d.; emphasis mine). Elsewhere on their website, in a small, two-paragraph page titled 'Wetlands Restoration,' the company boasts that they have restored 780 acres of wetlands across two parks but notes that the majority of this restoration is due to past logging and industrial impacts, particularly in former ash ponds and industrial cooling ponds, contaminated ecologies likely produced by Santee Cooper themselves (Santee Cooper n.d.). In short, there is nothing natural about Lakes Marion and Moultrie, despite Santee Cooper's continued efforts to frame them as such.

Likewise, as Melissa L. Cooper noted about downstream Gullah Geechee people, so much of Lowcountry Black history in South Carolina "has been sanitized and reimagined so that it is easily digested and attractive to those who nurture a nostalgic view of the region and the people who live there" (2017, 4). As Black people were being removed from their homes in the Santee-Cooper Basin, they were framed as content with the destruction of their own community. And in histories that have been written in the past 40 years, Black people have been described as entirely satisfied with their transformed worlds (Bostick 2008; Edgar 1984). Just as the destruction of the material ecologies was bolstered by the assertion that new environments are "natural," so too does Santee-Cooper and its paid historians assert that Black resettlement was inevitable, necessary, and pure.

But Black people remember and rearticulate the history of the spaces and the lives the state wants us to forget. In *Beloved*, Toni Morrison, through the character of Sethe, describes

*rememory* as a place-based renegotiation of trauma, collapsing space and time to bring memories, disappeared places, and the ghosts of harmed peoples into our present realities. Morrison writes,

> Some things you forget. Other things you never do... Places, places are still there. If a house burns down, it's gone, but the place — the picture of it — stays, and not just in my rememory, but out there, in the world. What I remember is a picture floating around out there outside my head. I mean, even if I don't think it, even if I die, the picture of what I did, or knew, or saw is still out there. Right in the place where it happened (Morrison, 1987, 38).

Just as a burnt-down house still exists in Sethe's rememory, the spiritual and emotional home where the family lived and made life still exists long after the foundation stops smoldering. Likewise, the antediluvian towns still exist in the minds of those who inhabited them and those who descend from the dispossessed. Even when the towns were leveled, trees felled, and graves relocated in the process of inundation, the location of the towns did not disappear; the earth that once brought these Black communities life still exists beneath the waters, and the people who made up the community still live on despite traumatic removals.

This continuity, this refutation, keeps places alive. Jovan Scott Lewis tells us that "geography is the basis of freedom," and that through placemaking, "Black people developed a lexicon of freedom that is as varied as the sites that Black people have made freedom and worked toward what lies beyond" (Lewis, 2022, 5). To remember a place, to keep it alive through memory even when outside forces try to submerge or eradicate the materiality, is to carry it on, to tell younger generations about "the home [they] never knew, the place where we once enjoyed freedom before we were forcibly [removed]" (Kelley, 2002, 15).

Because of the passage of this generational knowledge and enduring memory, Black life, Black ways of living, and Black resistance indeed persist in the Lowcountry today. In the historically Black neighborhood of Sandridge, located fewer than ten miles west of Lake Moultrie, Black residents are fighting the development of a proposed four-lane highway that would cut directly through the community, displacing at least six families and requiring the removal of a centuries-old cemetery. The highway, which is intended to bring additional tourists from inland South Carolina to Myrtle Beach, was originally proposed to be erected along separate routes, but were struck-down because they would have affected or displaced majority-white communities. The proposed Sandridge route not only involves the displacement of Black communities, however, it also necessitates removing or filling in wetlands, which environmental experts believe will only exacerbate flooding in the community previously caused by nearby white development projects, including a majority-white subdivision (Sax 2023; NYU Law News 2024).

Residents, some of whom likely descend from people who were displaced from or witnessed the displacement of Black people living in the Santee-Cooper Basin, refuse to move. As one resident noted, "We're here because they're our ancestors, and there would be no us if it weren't for them. So we're left to protect them and their legacy and their resting spot" (NYU Law News 2024). Celeste Winston describes this spatial endurance as a *holding ground*, or a "geographic practice of making and sustaining place, and a refusal to yield, bend, or compromise in the face of attack or affront;" it is "a care-filled practice of placemaking that transgresses dominant geographies" (Winston, 2023, 2-3). To simultaneously materially and socially refuse

submersion is to care for a place, to ensure its survival, to keep a place alive. It is to swim through, resist, and push back against the waters that attempt to drown Black life.

Black resistance and persistence are borne out of the swamps of South Carolina. From the swamps of South Carolina, particularly the Stono River in which a group of slaves "struck a violent but abortive blow for liberation," Cedric Robinson argued that the Black radical tradition, including marronage, inspired "the continuing development of a collective consciousness informed by the historical struggles for liberation and motivated by the shared sense of obligation to preserve the collective being, the ontological totality" (2000 [1983], 141 and 170-171).[64] Likewise, the Black, lesbian, and socialist Combahee River Collective (CRC) was named after and inspired by the fugitive acts of Harriet Tubman, who guided dozens of formerly enslaved, auto-emancipated people off of the plantation, through the dense swamps, past slave catchers and nascent police forces to liberation (Combahee River Collective 1977). Tubman possessed "a miraculous geographical instinct, never forgetting any detail of a route she had once traversed" (Fields-Black, 2024, 93). By returning, again and again, to the swamplands, she began to understand the contours of the swamps, where to locate the high ground and the deep waters, how to identify red onions or spruce pine that she could rub on her the soles of her feet to lose the bloodhounds (Ibid.). It is from the belly of the swamps, from that murky material and theoretical starting point, where scholars and activists imagine the futurity, resistance, and endurance of Black people. It is through the swamps and alongside the abolitionists who traversed them that the CRC formed their Collective Statement, in which they write: "[T]he liberation of all oppressed peoples necessitates the destruction of the political-economic systems of capitalism and imperialism" (The Combahee River Collective, 19).

Swamps are still "accessible only to those long familiar with [them]," or accessible only to those who can afford or access a guide, and that familiarity is borne out of emplacement, enduring relations, and return (The Times and Democrat, 1972, 3A). To learn from the swamps, to reserve the waters, to find our way back to the source is to follow the paths marked by the original inhabitants, who cared for, stewarded, and made life in their ecological spheres. It is to learn from geographies and ecologies — as well as geographers and ecologists — of liberation, even when treading unstable grounds.

## Laying Waste

While land clearance and the removal of 901 families was completed more than 80 years ago, on November 12, 1941, inundation was not a singular historical moment, but is instead ongoing (Lovern 1996; Herbert, 1941, 12). Following the construction of a new Santee Cooper hydroelectric plant in 1985 in St. Stephen, South Carolina, residents of 60 downstream homes across 4,000 acres in Georgetown suffered catastrophic flooding as the new canal that accompanied the plant diverted waters past their homes and into the Santee River (Wise, 2011, 3C). According to one newspaper account, "[h]ouses and cabins floated away, vegetable gardens were ruined, nearly 3,000 boar drowned and timber rotted and toppled over" (Parks 2009). Long after the reservoirs were filled, waters continued to rise, threatening to consume even more life and land in the Basin.

[64] About the Black experience in early America, Robinson notes that "Separation, the trauma of realization that one had neither the right nor the power to resist what must have seemed so often to be the arbitrary or cruel removal from those who really mattered" (Robinson, 1983, 133).

The flooding did not cease following the flood in the 1980s. According to Attorney J. Edward Bell, who represented seven of the 60 families in court,[65] "At that time, everyone thought this was an anomaly that would go away once they learned to operate the system. It just didn't go away" (Staff Writer 2009). As recently as 2020, following heavy rainfall, rural residents were flooded out of their homes by spillwater released from the Santee Dam down the canal by Santee Cooper and the Army Corps of Engineers. Flooding in the region happens so frequently that "[i]t's not a question of if the water is coming, it's when" (Emerson 2020). Most of the flooding takes place in Santee, South Carolina, which is significant because, as of 2021, 81 percent of the population was Black and nearly 51 percent of the community lived below the poverty line (Chard 2015; Emerson 2020; U.S. Census Bureau 2021). As David Todd Lawrence and Elaine J. Lawless wrote about Pinhook, Missouri — an all-Black town intentionally inundated by the Army Corps of Engineers to protect the whiter, more affluent Cairo, Illinois — "living in water became a way of life" (2018, 27). To live in the region shaped by the Santee-Cooper Project is to live in the wake of the flood, or otherwise live with the constant threat of experiencing another. As John M. Barry wrote about the Mississippi Flood of 1927, "So the story ends as it began, with man determined to assert his will over the river" (Barry, 1997, 426).[66]

But submersion is not the only catastrophic infrastructural and policy failure experienced by those living in the wake of the Santee-Cooper Project. In 2009 the South Carolina Public Service Commission approved the construction of two nuclear reactors at Virgil C. Summer Nuclear Station in Jenkinsville, South Carolina, northwest of Columbia. The project was set to be constructed in a collaborative effort by South Carolina Electric & Gas (SCE&G) and the South Carolina Public Service Authority (now Santee Cooper). In a scandal now referred to as Nukegate or a "Nuclear Boondoggle," the project was delayed several times over eight years, in large part due to mismanagement, poor oversight, and fraud subsequently ballooning the price of the project to over $9 billion. Critically, while only 48 percent of South Carolinians were aware of the project, all residents paid for the failed project through their taxes (Lacy 2019; Wilks and Brown 2020).

In 2023, only 2.36 percent of the energy produced by Santee Cooper was from hydroelectricity; the remainder is derived from coal power (56.34%), nuclear energy (12.69%), natural gas (28.38%), and renewables (0.23%) (Santee Cooper 2023).[67] Though it was the resource that the South Carolina Public Service Authority was willing to "change[] the map of a state" to reserve and use for hydroelectricity, water has become nearly insignificant in the scheme of Santee Cooper's present energy portfolio (Derieux 1932). For a variety of reasons, including the abundance of noxious weeds on the water's surface that inhibit clear passage and choke boat motors, the existence of stumps that the Public Service Authority failed to clear in the making of the reservoirs, the widespread expansion of roads and bridges across the state since World War II, and strict limitations on boat sizes in the Pinopolis Lock (only motorized boats between 10 and 150 feet in length are allowed to pass),[68] the Authority also failed to achieve their goals of creating a useful, navigable waterway from Columbia to Charleston for anything larger than a fishing or pleasure boat (Edgar 1984; SCDOT 2004).

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[65] It is important to note, however, that while Bell successfully won compensation for the 60 families whose lands were destroyed, he attempted to take 40 percent of the $219.4 million for "fees and costs" (Wise, 2011, 3C).

[66] Or, as Ed Bell put it in his lawsuit against Santee Cooper: "When men try to take over God's work, they don't seem to get it right" (Parks 2009)

[67] Santee-Cooper has not yet broken into or participated in the solar market.

[68] There is also a ban on any commercial fishing, air-thrust boats, hovercraft, airboats, and personal watercraft (U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service 2023).

In his 1984 corporate history of Santee Cooper, Walter B. Edgar noted that the Santee-Cooper Project "was a project of breathtaking magnitude that captured the imagination of large segments of the state's population. And, for a variety of reasons, it is a kind of project that will not occur again." (Edgar, 1984, x). The Santee-Cooper Project did not produce an enduring source of energy or an economically viable navigation system for South Carolinians; instead, it absorbed tens of millions of dollars of public funding,[69] violently uprooted the lives of thousands of people, and destroyed native ecologies to bolster the establishment of what is now one of the largest power providers in the state. The Public Service Authority may have succeeded in transforming the geography and the social conditions of the Lowcountry, but they ultimately failed at the hydroelectric and navigation projects from which the Santee-Cooper Hydroelectric and Navigation Project bears its name and central mission.

Herein lies the contradiction of development. Though dispossession was framed as a necessary and progressive project, designed to bring hydroelectric power and commercial navigation to the state of South Carolina, today we can understand this project as one of waste — ironically the very byproduct New Dealers and South Carolina settlers throughout history claimed to destroy in the making of the Santee-Cooper Project. It is a waste to separate families and communities to build unproductive infrastructures. It is a waste to destroy native ecologies only produce new ecological spheres filled with water hazards and invasive species. It is a waste to transform the material and cartographical face of a state to achieve social exclusions and racialized removals. Infrastructure projects in the United States like the Santee-Cooper Project are designed not with progress, productivity, or public utility in mind, but instead are constructed to spatialize the moral and social desires of white elites into the landscape. Consequently, communities are vacated, ecologies are constructed and therefore require constant maintenance, and landscapes are devoid of meaning or memory.

The racial capitalism inherent in American infrastructural development produces built and "natural" environments that act only as resource pools that can be used to line the pockets of and create spaces of belonging for white people. This was evident in Lowcountry South Carolina as early as the 16th through 19th centuries, when early European settlers imposed their Western morality standards on swamplands and their Indigenous and Black inhabitants — colonizing the swamplands to make the environment visible, legible, productive, and orderly. The social designation of blighted ecologies led to the material production of waste. To designate a space as being improperly used is to create the conditions for its removal; to frame people as dam/ned is to produce the conditions for their destruction.

As a former member of Franklin D. Roosevelt's presidential advisory committee cautioned in 1936, humans have "laid waste empires of beautiful and productive landscape, blindly rushing ahead in a short-sighted, suicidal policy of exploitation and in promoting cock-eyed, unsound, and unnecessary projects…, destroying more than [they have] produced" (Darling, 1936, 31). While the Santee-Cooper Hydroelectric and Navigation Project was founded on the idea that the New Deal government would intervene and save the state from wasted ecologies, wasting people, and wasted futures, in the end, the South Carolina Public Service Authority was responsible for producing one of the greatest ecological, social, material, economic, and infrastructural wastes in South Carolina, and likely Southern, history.

Land, labor, race, ecologies, economics, politics, and social life coalesce in the proposition, legalization, construction, and utilization of infrastructure projects. The history and the future of American infrastructure demands the following questions: What are infrastructures

[69] In 1930s-40s currency.

designed to *do*? Who are they *for*? What must they fix? And who must be involved in future infrastructural planning?

If we are to erect material worlds that exist to bolster, sustain, and enrich Black life, we must prioritize not human wants and political-economic interests, but, above all, human and nonhuman livingness. After all, swamps, rivers, cypress trees, plants, animals, and other biophysical materialities make life possible, keep balance in our ecologies, and nourish our worlds. Therefore, we must interrogate, illuminate, and, when the time comes, tear down every unevenly developed, materially and socially submersive, and wasteful infrastructure across the nation and around the world.

Black people and their ecologies persist in places they once called or continue to call home. Because, after all, Black life is always present, always foundational to our lived realities, in spite of state-sanctioned efforts to keep Black people submerged.

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