From Cow Pasture to Cul-de-sac: The Intersection of Rural Values, Memory, and Nostalgia amidst Suburban Development in the American South

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by

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Dedicated to my parents for their unending support,
my grandparents for shaping my love of our farm,
and all those, living and gone, that helped
this project come to life.
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Chapter I  
Introduction: Suburbanization within the United States and the American South

Well, I remember when I was a little girl, my sister and I would go up there and play with your grandmother, and...in the springtime when white clover was blooming, we would make the chains. And I actually remember that we were sitting there, with a chain strung across from one side of the road to the other, just waiting—*waiting*—for a car to come along and break it. And I do not remember who the driver was, but I do actually remember that one came along and stopped. See, he saw the chain and we were sitting there on the side of the road, and he stopped and asked if he should go on and break it.

“Well yes, of course! We’re waiting for it!”

- Helena Mae, July 5, 2010

The excitement of these two young girls, both now in their eighties, at the prospect that a car might finally break their clover chain speaks not only of innocent childhood games and warm late spring days. Behind this memory lies a picture of a small, rural town, where cars came so infrequently that their mere passing provided excitement and a wealth of information about the goings and comings of neighbors, family members, and friends—far more than such a banality might impart in much of contemporary suburban or urban America. Such a story also speaks obliquely to the nature of relationships engendered among members of this community,¹ and to the ways this sense of “belonging” may have helped to shape interactions among its members. An account given by Josie about her childhood in the late 1950s tells much the same story:

I remember as a child there would be maybe three or four cars that passed through during the day. All the people who went to work went early in the morning [returned] home in the afternoon, so...you just didn’t have a stream of cars

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¹ I use the word “community” here because of the frequency with which those with whom I spoke also used the same word to describe the collectivity of inhabitants in this town that they considered neighbors and friends. As anthropological literature has pointed out (see, for example, Gerald Creed’s introduction in *Seductions of Community* (2006, 3-6)), however, this word is not without its problems, the least of which is how one defines “community” and establishes its boundaries. This concept, and the implications for how it is used by those with whom I spoke, will be discussed in greater length at points throughout the thesis. As such, any references to “community” in the interim will draw from its more colloquial sense, with the recognition that the concept is problematic, yet one individuals find meaningful.
coming through on a country road. And you knew everybody that passed. Somebody would pass—they’d blow their horn; they’d wave to you. You knew who it was!

Such stories were told in the service of making a contrast—an attempt to elicit the stark difference for these women between the world in which they grew up and the spaces they inhabit now. As Helena Mae recounted the first story, we sat inside her small 1960s-era brick house, resting on the very last 2.66 acres of her family’s original farm. Her ancestors had occupied this or adjacent land for at least five generations, and she, having never married, is the last. On the very road where, in the 1930s, she and her sister waited eagerly for their flower chain to be broken, cars now whizzed by at a rate of several hundred per minute, stopping only for the traffic light ahead or for the construction crews working busily to widen the existing three-lane road into a five-lane highway. Helena Mae had recently given up a twelve-foot section of right-of-way from her front yard for the widening of the road, bringing it far closer to her house than it had ever been. “I’ve never had much front yard,” she said, laughing, “…but until those two lanes of traffic are whizzing by, I won’t really know how I feel about it.”

The story I am seeking to tell, the place I am seeking to describe, and the tensions I am hoping to map are not new. This is not an unfamiliar story, nor does it pretend to be. Suburbanization has been on the lips of academics for well over a century, and scholarly reactions to suburban development have been sufficiently critical, hailing it as socially

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2 At the time of writing, Helena Mae in fact became the last inhabitant in her family to occupy this land. She has since purchased a unit in an assisted living community. Her house and land sold, currently housing a hair and nail salon.
and environmentally destructive. With a majority of Americans having lived in an environment that could be labeled as either “urban” or “suburban” since 1920 (“United States: 1790 to 1990” 1993), it is no surprise that areas on the margins of development would rapidly transform from a cow pasture into a cul-de-sac. The town I am describing here, Mt. Juliet, sits some twenty miles to the east of Nashville, Tennessee and fits this scenario quite aptly. Yet a study of this town’s development seeks not simply to discuss suburbanization, the nature of life in a planned development, or its effect on the American identity. In fact, it hopes to do very little of that.

It seeks, rather, to look behind the traditional notion of the “suburb” to what came before, and to how residents who inhabited that place in that time understand the changes that often seem to have come in the blink of an eye. Thus, this thesis hopes to detail how long-term residents’ lives are unmade and remade amidst this change, along with the subtle ways in which their movement through everyday life comes to reflect a complex negotiation with values often in tension—growth and progress, pragmatism and nostalgia, development and conservation, individual preference and utilitarian concern, and an affinity for modern convenience and the merit of hard work and self-reliance. An anthropological perspective is particularly fitting to tease out these tensions, and the American South in particular is a site that warrants additional ethnographic exploration.

As Rabinow (1986) states,

We need to anthropologize the West: show how exotic its constitution of reality has been; emphasize those domains taken for granted as universal (this includes epistemology and economics); make them seem as historically peculiar as

———

3 For particularly strong critiques, see, for example, Kunstler (1994) and Duany, Plater-Zyberk, and Speck (2000). However, Jackson (1985), Hayden (2003), and Beauregard (2006) also offer cogent critiques of the social, political, economic, and environmental effects associated with suburbanization.
possible; show how their claims to truth are linked to social practices and hence have become effective forces in the social world. (241)

It is my aim, in part, to begin to exoticize this field site in hope that I can begin to denaturalize the truth claims made surrounding suburbanization and economic growth. Relying in part on critiques of development and suburban growth, this paper seeks to deconstruct the notion expressed by many—from residents to local officials—that growth is ultimately good and reflective of progress, revealing the assumptions behind this and contrasting these with the experiences of those whose way of life or ideals seem threatened by this very growth.  

While I hope not to privilege one side or another expressly, I believe by setting them in conversation with one another, a productive dialogue may be generated, revealing the minute complexities, the good and the bad, that these residents face with respect to rapid growth and suburbanization. In this way, this study seeks to depart from what much of the previous literature on American suburban development has done, focusing ethnographically on individual and collective meaning created amidst these changes, rather than common tropes of life in suburbia.

In privileging details from the everyday lives of landowning residents and their expressed attitudes toward this change, I hope to be able to confront a variety of questions that touch on both the affective and the practical realm. For instance, how do residents react when confronted with the threat of property taken by eminent domain? What strategies do they pursue when proposed projects or zoning changes directly affect

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4 At this point and throughout the rest of the thesis, when I use the term “growth,” I do so in a general manner to refer both to population increases resulting from an influx of new residents and to general economic development resulting in, among other things, sales tax revenue increases. I do so for two reasons: first, population and economic growth in most cases have been parallel, if not intertwined, processes, and second, most of the residents with whom I spoke did not make a distinction between types of growth.
their property or their neighborhoods? Why do certain farm owners choose to sell out to developers, and how do they confront the loss of a family farm and heritage hundreds of years old? What values are implicated when residents talk about the importance of growth, even when the consequences may be undesirable? Are growth and progress conceived of jointly or independently? And, perhaps paradoxically, how is a desire for “nature” being reappropriated and even commodified in the midst of this suburban development? Furthermore, I seek to touch on notions of community echoed both by residents and local officials. Resisting the essentialized implications of such a term, I desire to elicit its use to describe the shifting quality of interpersonal connections as well as idealized understandings of how those connections should function in a world where the notion of “southern hospitality” still has much currency.

This study also seeks to delve further into the realm of the affective, focusing on memory and nostalgia and their place in remembering and memorializing the past. By cataloguing attempts to remember and re-present “Old Mt. Juliet,” I hope to show that both residents and the local government, in vastly different ways, are engaging in an attempt to retain a sense of shared history, sometimes based on a rather essentialized portrait of the past. These efforts range from the very individual to the collective, and reflect the development of micro-communities among the relatively few remaining residents born roughly prior to 1950. These also contrast sharply with city administrators’ plan to tap into an affinity for nostalgia among newer residents by creating a new retail establishment in an “antique” or “quaint” architectural style to draw residents back to the former town center. By looking at recent scholarship on nostalgia and memory, I hope to analyze what the texture and content of the memories residents recount says about the
way they collectively and individually relate to the past, as well as what tendencies to “archive” memories, photos, and experiences might mean.

**Demographic Shifts and Population Growth: From Farms to Suburbs throughout the American South**

One might ask: why here and why now? An appeal to statistics in some ways is sufficient to justify this area as a focus of anthropological enquiry. Much of the southeastern United States, as elsewhere in the country, has seen steady suburban growth since World War II. Yet the South as a whole has also seen some of the most significant growth nationwide since 1900, during which time its overall population has quadrupled; only the western United States has eclipsed its growth rate, although not in absolute numbers. As of 2000, the region labeled “the South” as defined by U.S. census categories contained the largest segment of population in the United States, comprised of some 100 million people and 35.6% of the population. At the same time, the Northeast and Midwest have seen an overall decrease in population, indicating overall demographic movement southward and westward (Hobbs and Stoops 2002, 18).⁵

**Shifting Trends toward Non-Farm Occupations**

Meanwhile, large shifts have taken place, particularly in the South, with respect to occupation. A dramatic drop in the number of small family farms has occurred nationwide, but particularly within the rapidly suburbanizing South. Since 1935, when

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⁵ Since the mid-1900s, both the mean and median centers of population have shifted southwestward, indicating this demographic shift to the South and western regions (Hobbs and Stoops 2002, 16-17).
the number of U.S. farms topped seven million, there has been a steady decrease in the number of smaller, family-owned farms, the sharpest decline taking place following the end of World War II until the mid-1970s, when the number of family farms declined from six to two million. Despite this decline, the overall number of acres in production has not significantly declined even as the overall size of farms has risen sharply since the 1950s, indicating a consolidation of farms into larger holdings ("Agriculture Factbook 2001-2002" 2003, 24), often by family-owned agribusinesses whose annual sales top $1,000,000 (Hoppe, Korb, and Banker 2008, iii).6 While perhaps counter-intuitively, the overall number of acres in decline has not dropped dramatically, but as one might expect, the areas that have lost significant acreage have been those in the midst of suburbanization, particularly in the U.S. South and West.

Both Tennessee and Georgia saw a significant decrease in the number of farms between 2002 and 2007, with Tennessee losing 9% of its farms in this period, resulting in 711,000 acres lost ("Land: 2007 and 2002" 2016). Elsewhere in the South in this same period, Kentucky, Virginia, North Carolina, and Mississippi also saw a decrease, although less drastic, in the number of farms overall, while other parts of the South, the Northeast, most of the Midwest and the West saw increases in the overall number of

6 While until 2010, the USDA defined family farms by sole proprietorship, partnership or family corporation, and divided them by gross annual sales, it recently shifted to a system focusing on a small/medium/large typology defined by annual gross sales, further broken down by primary occupation of the farmer, reflecting the tendency among small farmers to have alternate sources of income (Hoppe and MacDonald 2013, 9-11). In 2011, small-scale farms, those grossing under $350,000, made up 90% of all farms and occupied 52% of the nation’s farmland, but produced only 26% of U.S. food and fiber commodities (Hoppe 2014, 1), although this does not appear to take into account the fact that larger farming units tend to specialize in commodity production, resulting in a higher percentage of small farm food production. Meanwhile, for “million-dollar farms,” 84% of which are still considered “family-owned,” total sales increased by 2002 to some 48% of all agricultural sales in the U.S. (Hoppe, Korb, and Banker 2008, 3). This occurred despite the fact that they only made up 2% of all U.S. farms numerically and 13% of all farms by acreage (9).
farms (“Farm Numbers Overview” 2012, 1). This trend has continued; by 2012, Tennessee had lost an additional 14% of its farms from the 2007 number, even while losing only an additional 101,986 acres in those five years, due to consolidation of larger farms and a moderate loss of small farms (“Land: 2012 and 2007” 2016). Although seemingly small statistical decreases overall, these numbers do point to the overall trend in suburbanization and shift away from farming throughout much of the traditionally agrarian South.

Wilson County, the county adjacent Nashville in which Mt. Juliet lies, presents similar characteristics when it comes to farm loss over the last decade. It lost 397 farms between 2002 and 2007, and an additional 272 between 2007 and 2012, resulting in over 46,000 acres of farmland developed, an almost 10% loss in acreage over the ten-year period. Despite this, the county still retains over 188,000 acres of farmland, some 51.5% of its total land area, most of which lies in its more rural eastern end.7 Adjacent counties, however, have seen more farmland loss. Rutherford County, just south of Wilson, retains only 44% of its area as farmland, while Williamson County, the most developed area just south of Nashville, retains only 37%. Only 10% of the Nashville-Davidson County area was farmland as of 2012 (“Farms, Land in Farms, Value of Land and Buildings, and Land Use: 2012 and 2007” 2014). Just ten years earlier, Wilson County was 64% farmland, Williamson County was 54% farmland, and Rutherford was 53% farmland (“Farms, Land in Farms, Value of Land and Buildings, and Land Use: 2002 and 1997” 2016).

For several major metropolitan areas of the South, population has been on the upsurge since the 1990s. However, it must be noted that this does not extend to all areas of the South, nor does it extend to all major metropolitan areas within states that have seen significant growth. Although neighboring states may not have witnessed such growth, states such as Tennessee, Georgia, and North Carolina have seen a considerable population increase, hovering between 15% and 25% per decade in the last two decades.

During this surge of more recent growth, outlying areas surrounding cities such as Nashville, Tennessee; Charlotte and Wilmington, North Carolina; and Atlanta and Savannah, Georgia have seen the bulk of expansion, as much as 78% between 2000 and 2010 (CNMP 2012). Even in the last five years, these areas have continued to grow, with areas outside Atlanta seeing as much as 22% additional population growth, metropolitan Charlotte seeing 10% to 12% growth (CNMP 2012), and counties adjacent Nashville seeing between 13% to 15% growth (“Population Estimates, 2015: Wilson, Williamson & Rutherford Counties, TN” 2016). This has occurred, sometimes while more rural areas within these states simultaneously saw population declines. Such demographic shifts represents a continuation of the development burgeoning in the early

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8 Some of the counties surrounding the metropolitan Atlanta area have seen the greatest increase in growth over the last decade, including Forsyth (78%), Paulding (74.2%), and Cherokee (51%). Overall, the immediate Atlanta metropolitan area saw a 23.4% increase between the 2000 and 2010 censuses. The Charlotte metropolitan area has seen similarly staggering growth, with Union County, NC seeing a 66% increase, and Mecklenburg County (Charlotte proper) a 35.7% increase. While the Nashville metropolitan area has not seen as dramatic an increase, surrounding counties such as Williamson, Rutherford, and Wilson saw 44.6%, 44.2% and 28.3% growth between 2000 and 2010, respectively. The population of the Nashville metropolitan area as a whole increased 19% between 2000 and 2010, while Nashville-Davidson County population has only increased 9% during that period (CNMP 2012).
twentieth century, but exploding from the 1950s onwards, of the migration of much of the American populace from the rural to metropolitan areas and their surrounding suburbs.  

The Middle Tennessee area is in many ways typical of this trend. In Middle Tennessee, which stretches roughly from the Tennessee River in the west to the Cumberland Plateau in the east, lies Nashville, the state capital and one of the state’s major cities, along with other moderate-sized cities such as Clarksville, Murfreesboro, and Columbia. The areas to the south and east of Nashville, including Williamson, Rutherford, and Wilson counties, have seen the most growth in the last several decades. This has been fueled partly by the growth of Murfreesboro as a university town, the relocation of a Nissan plan in nearby Smyrna, a GM/Saturn plant in Spring Hill, and these areas’ proximity to Nashville.

Nashville itself is a vibrant city with ten colleges and universities, including, among others, Vanderbilt, Belmont, Fisk, Lipscomb, and Tennessee State Universities. It is also a thriving center of commerce, particularly for healthcare, banking, publishing, transportation, and of course, music. Major employers include the Vanderbilt University

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9 Suburban growth has seen several waves, one of the early but larger ones being in the 1920s and 30s, spurred in part by New Deal policies (Sacks 1996, 94). However, suburban expansion has seen its biggest increases since the 1950s, the first decade in which a majority of the U.S. population lived in either a suburb or central city area. From the 1950s as well, there has been a slight downward trend in residents living in cities (Hobbs and Stoops 2002, 33). Often attributed to and labeled “White Flight,” upwardly mobile, middle-class European-Americans moved out of major metropolitan areas in response post-war affordable housing mandated by the FHA, infrastructural development from the National Highway System, and to escape disruptive “urban renewal” projects (Sacks 1996, 95–97). While suburban racial demographics have shifted some over the intervening decades, population residence has jumped from 23.3% of the population in 1950 to 50% in 2000. The South, having had the largest percentage of rural population throughout most of the twentieth century, was a relatively late player to the suburbanization game, only attaining a population that was 50% non-rural between 1960 and 1970 (Hobbs and Stoops 2002, 41; see also, Dietrich 1960). As mentioned above, this has occurred in the context not only of rural outmigration but also a quadrupling of the South’s total population over the course of the twentieth century (adding fifty million residents since 1950 alone), suggesting that the rapid growth seen in the last fifty years has been staggering.
system, HCA Healthcare and its affiliates, Nissan, GM, Gaylord Entertainment, Bridgestone-Firestone, and Ingram Book Group (“Nashville Regional Profile” 2016). It is also home to a NFL and NHL franchise team, as well as a minor league baseball team. Thus, with so-called “southern hospitality” deemed to exist in abundance and many other attractive amenities, Nashville-Davidson County has seen a 25% increase in population over the last two decades (“Historical Population, Tennessee Counties: 1900-2010” 2012).

Aside from the economic opportunities, within the last several years, Nashville has become an increasingly popular tourist destination. Nashville has long been associated with the country music industry and a tourist destination for that element alone. However, a growing group of young urban professionals and those identifying as “hipsters” are flocking to previously underserved areas close to downtown Nashville, reclaiming older houses through intense renovations and converting commercial properties into trendy restaurants and boutiques. Consequently, Nashville has increasingly become known for much more than country music. In the meantime, country music has resurged due to the popularity of country-pop crossover artists such as Taylor Swift and Lady Antebellum. As such, the downtown area is undergoing a dramatic shift in its built environment. Along the riverfront, the construction of a new music amphitheater, a convention and expo center (shaped not-so-ironically like a guitar), and a symphony hall has occurred, while developers constantly gut and renovate nearby former industrial warehouse districts such as “The Gulch” to create trendy condos, boutiques and restaurants run by high-profile chefs and restaurateurs. News stories frequently make note of the city’s rapid growth and the cranes dotting the skyline.
Hailed as the next Austin, Texas, Nashville’s sudden popularity has made it a trendy destination for bachelor and bachelorette parties, intensified by the fact that much of the downtown area is populated by bars and honkytonks where struggling songwriters and musicians look for their “big break.” Rather ironically, one of the most popular bars of recent renown, Acme Feed and Seed, indeed was a feed store during my youth. The rusted tin sign reading “Acme Farm Supply” and the faded red and white checkerboard of the Purina logo still grace the outside of the building, but as a nod to Nashville’s rural roots, an element businesses seem to capitalize upon rather thoroughly. The blending of rural nostalgia, country music, and entertainment is perhaps personified by the popularity of Puckett’s Grocery, a former small grocery store in the bucolic town of Leiper’s Fork, Tennessee about twenty miles south of Nashville. In 2002 the then-owner turned this grocery store, a local gathering spot, into a restaurant and music venue, thenceforth known for its barbeque and appearances by songwriters of some renown. Capitalizing on its quaint roots in “food, music and community,” Puckett’s now has a food truck and five brick-and-mortar locations throughout the area (“About: Puckett’s of Leiper’s Fork” 2016). Nary a tourist seems to leave Nashville without a Puckett’s Grocery souvenir bag in hand, filled with its product whose logos are reproduced in the style of historic Hatch Show Print letterpress posters, also a Nashville legend. The convergence of rural farming past and country music’s present is further reinforced by television dramas such as “Nashville,” whose 2016 ABC network cancellation Nashville Mayor Megan Barry lamented given its enormous success as a “promotional tool for the city” (Tennessean.com, 13 May 2016). Nashville’s rapid growth, however, has not been without its criticisms: alternately hailed as both revitalization and gentrification, many
question if the growth will ever slow, lament the destruction of historic buildings and businesses, and protest the loss of affordable housing and its effect on the city’s African American populations that have long occupied the now popular areas near downtown (The New York Times, 4 December 2014).

Outside of Nashville proper, suburban growth to the south and east has also partially been dictated by geography. While hilly throughout, Nashville sits in what is called the Nashville Basin, an elevation drop of close to five hundred feet that occurs just miles north and west of Nashville, but extends east for some fifty miles and south to the Alabama border. Surrounding the Nashville Basin is the Highland Rim, a much hillier area revealing the exposed limestone or bedrock on which most of Middle Tennessee sits. While growth has occurred in areas to the north and west, particularly around Clarksville due to its proximity to the 101st Airborne Division Army post in Fort Campbell, Kentucky, the majority of growth has spread directionally south and east within the geographical confines of the Nashville Basin. Although Nashville itself extended its municipal reach to include the entirety of Davidson County in 1963 (Van West 2009), the relatively recent spate of rapid suburbanization since the 1990s has exploded first to the south, to Williamson County, then counter-clockwise to the southeast and Rutherford County, and finally to the east, and to Wilson County, where the focus of this ethnography takes place.

Wilson County and Mt. Juliet

Since 1990, Wilson County, the county in which Mt. Juliet lies, has seen a 68.9% increase in population, resting at nearly 129,000 residents as of 2015 (“Population
Estimates, 2015: Wilson, Williamson & Rutherford Counties, TN” 2016). Just as logic would dictate, this growth is moving steadily eastward along primary arteries such as Interstate 40 and U.S. Highway 70. However, the more easterly ends of the county still remain largely rural and comprised of open land and farms. The majority of the population, and the population increase, have been concentrated in the western end of the county, resulting in significantly increased population density. Aside from Lebanon, the county seat located in the geographical center of the county (whose population density is concentrated in a small cluster inside the city center), West Wilson County, in which Mt. Juliet lies, has a population density of up to 1,000 residents per square mile. Extending in a corridor to the east of Mt. Juliet, along Interstate 40 and Highway 70, the population density lessens gradually to between 250 and 500 residents. To the east of Lebanon, however, population density drops off dramatically with the entire southeast corner of the county—the most “rural” area—to around twenty-five inhabitants per square mile (“Wilson County, Tennessee: Population Density” 2016). Mt. Juliet itself has grown from a town of under 2,900 in 1980 to just over 12,000 in 2000 and nearly 30,000 in 2016 (“Tennessee: 2000: Population and Housing Unit Counts” 2003).

While statistics paint a much-expected portrait of the sheer volume of population growth in recent decades around Nashville and in Mt. Juliet in particular, they do not tell the whole story. Changes to the built environment of Mt. Juliet have been staggering and rapid, so much so that some individuals returning after even short periods away report feeling shocked at what has developed in the meantime. In the midst of these rapid changes, individuals that have resided in the area their entire lives, or for significant portions of their lives, see fewer and fewer familiar faces and now spend hours weekly in
Figure 1.1 Map of the geographical boundaries and streets of Mt. Juliet, circa 1978. (Used with permission from Map Sales and Service, Nashville, TN.)
Figure 1.2 Map of the geographical boundaries, streets, and subdivisions of Mt. Juliet, circa 2016. (Used with permission from the City of Mt. Juliet.)
traffic, while well-known vistas and farms become big-box stores. The qualitative changes to residents’ lives point to why an ethnography of Mt. Juliet is warranted at this moment. As their formerly quiet, rural life is unmade, and they are thrust headlong into suburban living, the benefits and disadvantages, and the ways in which they navigate these, are manifold and complex. This thesis, then, attempts to document this before-and-after point in order to more qualitatively understand the process of suburbanization.

**Contextualizing this Milieu in Light of a Critical Anthropology of the U.S.**

It is also important, however, to examine this scenario in light of prior research and issues that scholars have undertaken to examine as part of the critical anthropology of the United States. While an exhaustive review of the literature regarding issues salient to a critical anthropology of the U.S. is not possible here, it is essential at the very least to note the manner in which that which researchers have explored overlaps with the situation I plan to detail here.

One particular area of resonance, which I explore briefly in Chapter Three, is the way in which the displacement of farmers by rising land prices wrought by capital investment in retail developments and subdivisions finds some parallels with the displacement affecting low-income residents in gentrification. Gentrification has been discussed widely in anthropological literature of the U.S., particularly by authors like Neil Smith (1996). Ida Susser, in her revised introduction to *Norman Street* (2012), draws on Smith in detailing the way in which the Greenpoint-Williamsburg neighborhoods of Brooklyn have gentrified in the last several decades since her initial research in the late-1970s, driven by neoliberal economic policies, along with Bloomberg’s massive rezoning
and facilitation of private investment in the area, resulting in what she calls a “wounded city” (4; 11). As Susser discusses, the process of gentrification in Greenpoint and Williamsburg has resulted in the displacement of countless low-income residents, no longer able to afford what only a few decades earlier was dilapidated low-rent housing. Amidst this displacement, she recounts how residents lamented the lost labor they had invested into apartments from which they were being forced by rising rents (22), just as they mourned the loss of community and social ties built over decades (5). For Susser and others, these processes are inseparable from neoliberal economic policies and the present moment of advanced capitalism—policies that she and Jeff Maskovsky elsewhere argue are partially a result of U.S. imperialist policies in the latter decades of the twentieth century, ones that have resulted in significant instabilities and contradictions “at home” (Maskovsky and Susser 2009, 2–3).

In recent years, more analyses have also undertaken the U.S. South as a field site, analyzing the manner in which—particularly in recent decades—it is a “landscape in transition” (Holland et al. 2007, 18), one that is rapidly globalizing, and in whose space the flows of people, capital, goods, and services are increasingly diverse (Byrd 2015, 18–21). These often recognize the manner that the U.S. South has become increasingly intertwined in this moment of advanced capitalism, and the various ways in which this affects an increasingly diverse population.

Examining areas in North Carolina in the midst of transition, for instance, Holland et al. (2007) have focused the way in which local democracy is perceived as a domain of both empowerment and estrangement, particularly in light of the “received wisdom” of neoliberalism as the dominant ethos guiding American political life (2; 4). As such, they
detail transitioning sites between “landscapes of production”—where the phrase “family farmer” has become “contested terrain” given the proliferation of intensive hog and poultry operations in the area and where small farmers that work the land, particularly those that are African-American, face tall odds (19–21)—and “landscapes of consumption”—where in increasingly touristy mountain areas, locals feel overrun by “seasonals” whose political and economic interests they often feel dominate their own viewpoints, options, and job opportunities (24–26).

Focusing on an different topic and part of North Carolina, Samuel Byrd (2015) examines Latina/o musicians in Charlotte, North Carolina, and the manner in which their music production also reveals “issues of politics, labor, community, class, division, and belonging” (3). In the midst of a globalizing city and increasing flows of capital through Charlotte’s burgeoning finance industry, Latino immigrants are thrust into working-class roles that afford little mobility (28). Using the metaphor of a “graying dream,” Byrd explores how the Latina/o musicians he follows struggle in light of anti-immigrant sentiment in the American South in which immigrants are marginalized, labeled, policed, and excluded, yet work to define latinidad and build community while synthesizing disparate nationalities, class backgrounds, and migration experiences, work that he argues is eminently political (5). Byrd is not the first to have explored the struggles that Latinos and other immigrants face in the U.S. South. Steve Striffler’s Chicken (2005) details the transformation of chicken into America’s favorite food, and focuses in part on the working conditions and long hours immigrants face in poultry production plants in Arkansas (130–33), as well as the anti-immigrant sentiment many Mexicans have faced.
in Slier City, North Carolina, as well as elsewhere in Tennessee, Alabama, and Kentucky (144–46).

While the changing South is home to a diversifying population of immigrants, a group that is directly affected by the shape of advanced capitalism as it seeks to restructure labor in the U.S. South, it is also necessary to recognize the longstanding and problematic racial history between Blacks and whites in the South and the way that this continues to impact people of color. In this vein, Melissa Checker in *Polluted Promises* (2005) examines the African American community of Hyde Park in Augusta, Georgia, residents that have variously struggled over the decades to secure county services and fight drug selling and drug-related violence, but who, in the 1990s, became embroiled in a battle for environmental justice as their neighborhood and residents suffered from poisoning by nearby industrial plants. Through the complicated notion of environmental racism, Checker explores the difficulty in meeting scientific and legal standards to build a case, exacerbated by the inexactness of environmental science, and the manner in which discriminatory institutional practices, polities, and procedures have accumulated over decades in this fraught landscape (9). Checker’s analysis helps to broaden the notions of racism beyond that largely experienced in the U.S. South to one in which it is necessary to attend to the structural, institutional, and environmental effects that racism has had on African American populations.

While this diverse set of ethnographies may appear to have little in common with the situation I will detail regarding the suburbanization of a formerly small farming community and the way in which longtime residents address the change, looks can be deceiving. All of these ethnographies point to an area in the throes of a major transition,
one in which global forces, advanced capitalism, and diverse populations play an ever larger role. While immigrants and African Americans make up a relatively small population of Wilson County, as I detail below, they are a growing minority, and their migration, as well as migration of whites from other parts of the country into the area indeed represents Mt. Juliet, and the American South in general, as truly a “landscape in transition.” In the midst of this, whether by looking at “landscapes of production” and “consumption” as Holland et al. do, or by examining the opportunities and struggles immigrants face as Byrd and Striffler do, it is clear that the current stage of advanced capitalism is restructuring the relationships that individuals have to the region, to their local “communities,” and to the land. The population I examine, thus, must be read in light of this fact, as one of many groups amidst the great sea change that, at least for the U.S. South, has been occurring in earnest for the last two decades and shows little signs of stopping. As these populations continue to face change along with, social, political, and economic restructuring, it will become increasingly important to remain attuned to the ways in which these various groups’ narratives begin to interweave and reveal fissures as well as commonalities.

Methodology

The interviews from which I draw my analysis come from forty residents, all but three of whom had lived in the area more than thirty years and most of whom had grown up there. The three relative newcomers to the town I interviewed were tapped for their prominent role in town leadership and/or the community, such as directing the local YMCA or association with the Chamber of Commerce. Four additional interviews
reached out to individuals involved in agriculture, agricultural education, or conservation organizations nearby for their perspective on recent changes in these arenas. Overall, the group from which my interviews came was relatively homogenous from a racial and socio-economic standpoint, although ages varied from thirty to ninety, with most individuals over fifty-five years old. All but two interviewees were white, and while I had hoped for and attempted to reach more African Americans throughout the interview process, I was unsuccessful in finding more African American residents willing to speak who met my criterion of a minimum thirty years’ residence in the area. I also did not set out to measure socio-economic status per-se, but would classify most of my interviewees as “middle-class” or “upper middle-class.”

Although the project was somewhat hampered by the inevitable vicissitudes of fieldwork and willingness or ability of residents to meet, the demographics of my interviewees as a whole were not vastly different from the demographics of the town at present. Wilson County, in which Mt. Juliet resides, is predominantly white, with some 89% of the population identifying by that category; Mt. Juliet’s population identified as 87% white as of the 2010 census. Roughly 6.5% of both Mt. Juliet and Wilson County identified as Black or African American, 3% as Hispanic or Latino, and 2% as Asian (“QuickFacts: Mt. Juliet & Wilson County, TN” 2016). As such, it is clear that, per census categories, individuals in the area define themselves as relatively racially and ethnically homogenous.

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10 I readily acknowledge the problem of applying such a blanket categorization here regarding socio-economic status. However, I did not choose to measure these aspects of those I interviewed or inquire of how they might classify themselves, given the problematic matter of defining social and economic status. That most of those with whom I spoke owned some land, despite any amount of debt they might carry, suggests they have some access to means. However, individuals’ financial health only really plays heavily into my analysis below insofar as personal economic need might drive considerations of selling land.
This in and of itself begs the question of how race and class are constructed historically within the United States, and the historical trajectories of these categories within the American South in particular. Given the relative racial homogeneity of the cohort that I examined and with which I was confronted, I was not able, through ethnographic fieldwork, to address questions regarding the intersecting effects of race and class on rural land ownership, suburban home ownership, and resident reactions as I might have liked. As a result, where relevant, I will make observations regarding race and class as they relate to suburban economic development, but unfortunately I must leave them to future studies. However, the very fact that this community is predominantly white and middle-class speaks to the geographical segregation that continues to varying degrees along lines of race and class, even despite rapid population growth. This certainly calls for additional research into the racial and class makeup of suburbanizing populations, the demographics of farm owners adjacent to growing cities, and the degree to which this phenomenon is circumscribed in terms of class and racial or ethnic background—that is, whites that have historically had greater access and opportunity to own land.

**Positionality**

Mt. Juliet as the focus of this project, however, has a far more personal motivation. This is the town in which I grew up, and the place I lived for the first eighteen years of my life. It is the place I still feel to be “home,” and it has given me a sense of rootedness throughout my last decade and a half of relative transience. Growing up, I had the run of the nearly one hundred acres passed down from my great-grandfather
to my grandmother and father, and I relished running through the fields, playing in the creeks, and leading my childhood friends on wild adventures, all out of earshot of my parents’ call. As one of the ladies I interviewed so aptly stated about her husband’s tie to his own family farm, I, too, have “bumped my foot on every rock” on that place. Only when I was older did I begin to realize that few others had had this kind of childhood, as my suburban friends marveled not only at my family’s more than century of permanence but also the notion of having so much secluded space. In the meantime, what I grew up thinking was our “rural” enclave had suburbia growing up all around it. Apart from our farm and a few other parcels, the frontage lying along State Route 171 has become entirely commercial, while just off the road, subdivisions extend into formerly “virgin” farmland like limbs off of a tree trunk. What was a town of under 3,000 at my birth is in 2016 a city with close to 30,000 residents.

This is no longer a farming community. As for many in our area, my great-grandparents’ and grandparents’ generations were the last to truly make a living at farming, and even many of them became “hobby farmers,” taking full-time jobs in Nashville. Now even those who simply take up hay, have a small truck garden, and own a few head of cattle are dwindling. With each trip home, another strip mall or restaurant seems quite literally to have sprung out of the ground, new roads have been built, and signs advertising new developments or parcels “for sale” have been posted. While the economic conditions following the 2008 housing crisis slowed the rate of growth, robust expansion has rebounded and continues almost unabated.

Amidst all of this, I frequently see names from long ago—members of my grandparents’ generation—posted on the “In Memoriam” sign outside the local funeral
home. Seeing faces I had not set eyes on for decades at my own grandmother’s funeral and hearing them talk about how different things were now set the wheels turning in my head. What does all this change mean to them? How do they navigate new channels of existing in a place that was nothing like the world they knew even thirty years ago? What memories do they hold on to as perhaps most dear? Although this does not attempt to be a project of “salvage anthropology,” in some ways a desire to collect the words and stories of neighbors and community members before they disappeared did play a part in my decision to pursue this research.

The decision to undertake this project in a community so familiar to me has presented both benefits and problems. From this arises the inevitable consideration of the relative benefits of being a “native” anthropologist, already ensconced to varying degrees in the webs of community, schooled in the local vernacular (both linguistically and metaphorically), and familiar with various institutions and ways of being. Yet it also raises the question of the value of the etic—the relative benefits of being able to see the unfamiliar and thus being tasked with the responsibility to make it “familiar” or comprehensible—to the uninitiated. As to the relative merits of each, I invoke the perspective that Kirin Narayan takes, suggesting that a focus on anthropologists “in terms of shifting identifications amid a field of interpenetrating communities and power relations” is perhaps a more fruitful way of mediating this dichotomy (Narayan 1997, 23). As she notes, this involves reframing what is already known, and locating this knowledge “within larger cultural patterns, sociological relations, and historical shifts.” (32). Thus, focusing on my own hybridity and multiple subjectivities can allow me to draw from both the first eighteen years of life spent in the area and living among some of
those whom I interviewed, as well as the time during which I have gained perspective and
experienced life elsewhere. It is my hope that this will thus assist me in framing my
research questions in ways that might complicate the trends and overall power relations
behind processes of suburban growth in this Middle Tennessee town, making this more
than just another analysis of American suburbanization. Nevertheless, it is with a cautious
foot forward that I proceed, recognizing the extent to which my own predispositions and
subjectivities will shape the way in which I understand and present my topic.

Mt. Juliet: A Brief History

Before discussing Mt. Juliet in its current incarnation as an up-and-coming suburb
and, according the hopes of town leadership, eventually an edge city, it is helpful to take
a brief look at the city’s past.

Mt. Juliet’s Beginnings

At the time early explorers arrived to West Wilson County, then part of North
Carolina before the establishment of the state of Tennessee in 1796, historians report the
area to have been uninhabited. Two local histories, drawing on local archaeological finds,
claim that local Native American seem to have left the area some 300 years earlier
(Hailey 1986, 4–5; Burns and Corlew 1983, 1). Long hunters, eighteenth-century hunters
and explorers that made months-long excursions into the American frontier such as
Michael Stoner (after whom many of the local geographic landforms are named), arrived
in the late 1760s, while early settlers arrived just before 1780 (Hailey 1986, 5–6) and
established the first permanent settlement just west of Mt. Juliet in 1794 (Burns and
Corlew 1983, 7). The state of North Carolina gave early residents land grants in Wilson County, beginning in 1780 (8), one of which in Mt. Juliet remains a working farm today on which the original house constructed in 1791 still stands. A number of the longtime residents I spoke with can trace their ancestry to these individuals, and the town has always made robust attempts to document its own history and its citizens’ ancestry.

It is impossible to discuss the history of the town without discussing the uniqueness of its name. Residents tout that, apart from an estate of the same name in County Kilkenny, Ireland, this is the only city named Mt. Juliet in the world. There is also a long-standing controversy over the origins of its name. An old story is that it is a corruption of the name of the alcoholic drink mint julep, served at the famed Eagle Tavern, a local haunt frequented by Andrew Jackson and where Aaron Burr is reputed to have stayed while conferring with the future president on the Natchez intrigue (106). However, the most popular story is that it was named after Julia Gleaves and her home on the “mount” at which she lived in her latter days. Gleaves was known for her compassionate care of the sick during the Civil War, and some think the town’s name a fitting tribute (Hailey 1986, 38–39). Others, though, attribute the name to the Irish estate, an explanation which appears to be gaining traction in recent years (Ferrell 2012).

From its early origins until the city’s incorporation in 1972, Mt. Juliet remained primarily a small farming town and stop along the railroad tracks. The “original” town center lay along tracks once part of the Tennessee and Pacific Railroad line built shortly after the Civil War in 1866 and which, after only eleven years, went bankrupt and was bought by the more profitable Nashville, Chattanooga and St. Louis Railway, locally shortened to the “NC&St.L” (“Nashville, Chattanooga and St. Louis Railway” 2016). In
1901, engineers completed a parallel line of a competing railroad, the Tennessee Central, from Nashville to Lebanon, adding a second east-west rail line through the town (Hicks 2016). The NC&StL railway saw its last train depart in 1935 (Sulzer 1998, 157), and engineers converted the rail bed into a two-lane road locally known as the Old Railroad Bed, the main east-west artery through the then center of town. The other main road, which pre-dated the Civil War, ran two miles further north toward the main east-west artery between Nashville toward the nearby larger city of Lebanon. As such, Mt. Juliet never had a town square like its larger neighbor Lebanon, a fact which has made preserving a historic “center” difficult. Most individuals growing up in the 1940s and 1950s cite this area as the heart of town, consisting in their memories of the First Baptist Church, the Church of Christ, the local elementary and high school, the post office, McCorkle’s store, Castleman’s garage, and a number of houses. While occasional stores dotted the main arteries, especially along the northern boundary of Lebanon Road, in some respects, areas just two miles north or south of town were considered on the fringes and comprised of little other than working farms through the 1950s and into the 1960s.

Apart from the activities of local residents past and present, only a few events seem to have truly touched the town so as to reside within its collective memory, two of which are the military maneuvers during World War II, and when the “firebug” struck. Locals recall soldiers under General Patton coming to the area to practice military exercises, given the similarity to terrain in France. Stories abound about residents who caught soldiers sleeping in barns, fed entire platoons meals of home-cooked food, and made dresses out of the flour sacks dropped from airplanes as makeshift “bombs.” The other memory is that of the “firebug,” who in 1946, notably burned the local high school.
and Baptist church within several weeks of one another (Hailey 1986, 59). Some accounts suggest that an area hotel, post office, lodge, and several businesses also burned at the hand of this same arsonist (Burns and Corlew 1983, 107), although residents primarily attribute the high school and church to the “firebug,” and recall the disruption to their school and church lives.

*Increasing Suburbanization, Rapid Growth*

As the population grew and the developers built the first subdivisions in the early-to mid-1960s, the town grew along the main north-south connector, known as Mt. Juliet Road, and along the east-west U.S. highway locally known as Lebanon Road. The extension of the Interstate Highway System about two miles south of the then-center of town had little effect on the acceleration of growth for several decades. Even through the 1980s, when a local farmer sold the first parcel of land that became part of the Providence and Del-Webb land communities, the parcel remained vacant until 2005. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, as the town added population at a more rapid pace, development took on a leap-frogging character, determined by those that retained their farms versus those that were approached and willing to sell to a developer.

At present, the town center has shifted south. Facilitated by the expanded infrastructure of widened roads and an upgraded interchange off of the interstate, most of the growth is occurring around the Providence area, aided by the annexation of a number of formerly unincorporated parcels south and east of the interstate towards an area called Beckwith. At Beckwith, infrastructurally supported by a new interchange off I-40, the city is heavily encouraging the growth of warehouse and office space. This growth is
having far-reaching consequences. Some with a long history in local government, such as the first mayor, recall that over the years, there has been a long and somewhat contentious history between Mt. Juliet and the neighboring county seat, Lebanon. He remembers, for example, that the vote to incorporate the town only passed narrowly due to “Lebanon sympathizers,” and that since then, Mt. Juliet had often struggled for county resources against its larger neighbor. With 2010 the announcement that Mt. Juliet’s population had eclipsed that of Lebanon, he said, this growth should be a sea change, such that Mt. Juliet, not Lebanon, would now largely drive county affairs.

**Academic Analyses of Suburbanization and Rural-Urban Divide**

In addition to the above record, which situates the ethnographic site within its own particular historical trajectory, it is necessary to examine suburbanization as a larger trend and how authors have dissected the phenomenon within various academic circles. The bulk of literature on suburbanization seeks to historicize the trend, commenting on its origins and effects, both on the built environment and on social relations. Largely absent from this conversation, however, is the rural-urban divide that preoccupied academics until the latter part of the twentieth century, and how suburbanization fits into this schema. Theorists of suburbia typically address the notion of the rural ideal insofar as it propelled mid-nineteenth-century attempts to create suburban developments like that of Llewellyn Park in New Jersey or inspired landscape architecture around ex-urban houses (Jackson 1985, 76–79; Kunstler 1993, 44–48; Hayden 2003, 54–61). However, authors typically fail to address in any meaningful way how suburbanization relates to the agrarian ideal embedded in notions of rurality, and the manner in which that manifests
itself today. In many ways, these categories are co-constitutive and their social and spatial divisions problematic. Thus, while I treat these segments of literature separately below, as scholars largely do, I hope in my own chapters to weave these arenas together.

Suburban Studies

In the last several decades, scholars have generated an abundance of literature on suburbanization. Attitudes toward the phenomenon vary from the positive, to the cautious, to the outright critical, and most works, in some way, seek to identify historical moments or the social and technological antecedents contributing to today’s suburban growth. Many also offer alternatives—espousing the possibility of “good growth” and what that might look like from a planning perspective. Works on suburbanization, particularly those dating to the 1980s and 1990s, take a cautious or negative view of suburbanization and its disintegrating effect on American social life. Even many of the more explicitly historical of the tomes on suburbanization are not entirely uncritical of the trend. Since the new millennium, however, more works have appeared in which authors attempt a more even-handed perspective, examining innovative grounds and previously unexplored consequences of suburbanization. The review below, while by no means exhaustive, aims to give a general sense of the issues and questions at stake in literature on suburbanization.

Academic analyses of suburbanization appear as early as the turn of the twentieth century, addressing, for example, the ways in which distribution of electric power might spur population decentralization and suburbanization (Fisher 1925, 96) or the economic costs and social changes associated with suburban living (Douglass 1925). Polemical
judgments against suburbanization also appeared this early, such as one in the British
Medical Journal calling suburbanization “a word uglier” than urbanization, unleashing
uncontrolled growth and blight on the margins of London (“Suburbanization” 1925,
1011). Academics and laypersons alike recognized the sea change taking place around
suburbanization; even children’s literature had addressed the topic of suburbanization by
the mid-twentieth century.¹¹ Over the decades, academic suburban literature broadened
from primarily descriptions and analyses of the phenomenon to studies that focused on
class in suburbia (Dobriner 1963), and how suburbanization was changing the population
dynamics of the American South (Dietrich 1960).

In the late 1980s, there was an explosion of popular literature on suburbanization,
led by Kenneth Jackson’s Crabgrass Frontier (1985). Jackson’s explicitly historical tome
details the development of what comes to be known as the suburb from its origins in the
United States around 1815, focusing on “transportation revolution” of the steam ferry,
omnibus, commuter railroad, and cable car (24–26); a shift in kinship structure toward
the single-family unit (48–49); automobile popularization (162–63), and Federal Housing
Administration (FHA) policies and redlining practices in the mid-1900s (219). For
Jackson, nineteenth-century ideals of privacy and beauty became, by the mid-twentieth
century, a decentralized “drive-in society” (263), resulting in a distinct loss of “sense of
community” (272). Robert Fishman (1987) also takes a historical perspective, arguing
that the modern suburb is a creation of late-eighteenth-century London bourgeois elite,
who sought to establish a domestic sphere in which a nuclear family could flourish apart

¹¹ For example, Robert McCloskey’s 1943 book Homer Price (1971) describes the excitement and
hopefulness of a quiet town entering the modern world through rapid suburbanization, amazed at
technological processes that permit mass production and quick inhabitation.
from the middle-class work environment (9), creating a new pattern of living Fishman calls the “bourgeois utopia” (12). For Fishman, the twentieth century suburb, seeking to envelope middle- and even working-class people, overturned the suburb’s basic nature, which was built on a principle of exclusion. This has resulted in a new decentralized city he calls the “technoburb,” a peripheral zone that exists as a “viable socioeconomic unit” made possible by communications technologies that render face-to-face interactions unnecessary (184). Like others, Fishman is somewhat critical, calling the suburb a homogenized zone of affluence and the traditional city culturally superior (202).

More recent historical works, such as Dolores Hayden’s *Building Suburbia* (2003), repeat the task Jackson undertook in the 1980s, placing greater focus on the popular attitudes toward and implications of suburbanization. Hayden discusses what she calls “sitcom suburbs,” cookie-cutter examples of modernist principles such as those embodied in Levittown, Long Island, and their effect—in part buoyed by government-subsidized private development—on racial, ethnic, and class divisions (133–35; 151-52), in addition to more recent incarnations of suburbia. She also details individuals’ growing ability to telecommute, “taxi parents” who shuttle children to and from multiple activities (186–87; 193), and what the suburban future might look like (201–2). Robert Beauregard, in *When American Became Suburban* (2006), chooses a different historical moment and focus, analyzing the contradiction between U.S. post-war prosperity and the decline of U.S. and European major industrial cities between the 1940s and 1970s. Beauregard proposes a shift between “distributive urbanization”—characterized by the concentration and expansion of existing industrial cities, even as new cities developed—and “parasitic urbanization,” where, after World War II, these same industrialized cities decayed while
suburbs grew (62–63). Racial animosity and growing urban ambivalence spurred exurban growth and white flight (100), combining with a consumptive suburban lifestyle that reinforced the idea of “American exceptionalism” (11) and forged an American identity based on these notions (124–25). For Beauregard, this shift away from an urban identity was ultimately detrimental, creating a loss of civic virtue, entrenching a moral and racial divide still reflected in the lingering antagonism between the city and suburb (194).

Other works, while also seeking the suburb’s historical origins, take an avowedly more critical perspective of the resulting social changes. James Howard Kunstler’s *The Geography of Nowhere* (1993), for example, functions primarily to comment on the social disintegration he feel results from this trend. Starting as early as the Pilgrims, Kunstler identifies what he calls the “extreme individualism of property ownership” that has shaped American life and been the source of many problems (26). As an example, Kunstler describes his adopted hometown of Saratoga Springs, New York: a “diseased” town emblematic of “everywhere else in the United States” whose development destroyed the civic life and the town’s essential character (135). Loss of community is an obvious consequence, where decaying town centers—“living organism[s] based on a web of interdependencies” (186)—are now merely the object of nostalgia. New urbanists Andrés Duany, Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk, and Jeff Speck, known for their Seaside, Florida mixed-use community, are also highly critical of contemporary planning policies and prevailing wisdom on development in *Suburban Nation: The Rise of Sprawl and the Decline of the American Dream* (2000). Duany, Plater-Zyberk, and Speck argue that the restrictive nature of most suburban zoning ordinances results in either “traditional,” mixed-use, pedestrian-friendly neighborhoods or “suburban sprawl” (4), characterized by
the segregation of zoning types, necessitating car travel (25), and socially isolating people (116–23). The alternative to this is “good growth,” which requires resurrecting mixed-use development, doing away with curb offsets and wide highways, and providing reliable mass transportation (187; 202-4), epitomized by their Seaside development.\textsuperscript{12}

Yet not all recent literature appraises suburbanization negatively. Recognizing that much of the literature on suburban development has been negative, Robert Bruegmann (2005) seeks to turn this tide, deconstructing exactly what sprawl is. He recognizes that it “is not so much an objective reality as a cultural concept” that over the years has “accumulated around it an entire body of ideas and assumptions” (3), galvanizing a group of reformers against sprawl that tend to concur on little else (5).

Bruegmann finds sprawl to have a long history, going as far back as Babylon, Ur, and Rome, and believes it to be reflective of a city’s maturing economy (22–24).

Consequently, precursors typically identified with contemporary sprawl—such as anti-urban sentiment, racism, poor local zoning policies, or automobile and housing subsidies—Bruegmann argues are incorrect; instead, sprawl results from increasing affluence, political democratization, and an individual’s desire for “privacy, mobility and

\textsuperscript{12} It seems new urbanist principles may be catching on. A 2015 newspaper article focuses on “new urban developments” in Franklin, a historic town south of Nashville. These amenity-rich, smaller homes sit in dense communities within walking distance of bars, restaurants and parks, attracting a Millennial population that desires trendy pubs and music venues while escaping the traffic ubiquitous to downtown Nashville and nearby neighborhoods (\textit{The Tennessean}, 8 September 2015). Access to mass transit also appears to be part of this change. An award-winning “transportation-oriented development” planned between Mt. Juliet and neighboring Lebanon will take advantage of an existing commuter rail line into Nashville, capitalizing upon buyers’ desire for community engagement, healthy living, walkability, and proximity to transit by providing homes, a village center, greenway, pocket parks, and boulevard-style streets (“Hamilton Springs” 2014).
choice” (109). In a similarly positive turn, journalist Joel Garreau (1991) outlines a theoretical concept he calls the “Edge City,” a municipality outside a major urban area which “contain[s] all the functions a city ever has, albeit in a spread-out form that few have come to recognize” (4). Garreau defines an Edge City by five characteristics: 1) 5,000,000 square feet or more of leasable office space; 2) 600,000 square feet or more of leasable retail space; 3) more jobs than bedrooms; 4) perception by the population as one place; and 5) the fact that it was nothing like a “city” thirty years prior (6–7). Garreau admits many residents describe these landscapes as sterile, soulless, and plastic (8), but takes an unequivocally positive view of the phenomenon, extolling the Edge City as an example of American individualism and ingenuity, our ability to “jump in and ‘make something happen’” (xiv), reminiscent of our history as pioneers and immigrants (15).

13 Bruegmann’s historical review of sprawl, while praised for its deconstruction of the term and historicization of the phenomenon, has not escaped without criticism, particularly for its positive depiction of sprawl and failure to recognize the environmental impact of low-density development (Kreiger 2006).

14 Despite Garreau’s claim of originality, some contend that his “Edge City” concept is not novel. Several others have attempted to describe a new spatial organization and pattern of living they feel defies the traditional notion of suburb, even before Garreau. Fishman’s idea of the “technoburb” as a self-sustaining entity where individuals look to their immediate surroundings for jobs and “other needs” (1987, 184), appears very similar to Garreau’s while preceding it by four years. Architect Peter Rowe does use the term suburban, but designates it something other—a “middle landscape”—in which suburban development has obliterated any sharp distinction between “city” and “country” (1991, 3). Similarly, Kling, Olin and Poster (2016) document in Orange County, California what they call “postsurbia,” a phenomenon where “traditionally” suburban spaces intermingle with traditional cities and where individuals traverse within and across multiple boundaries for work, shopping, and socializing.

15 Garreau’s concept is not without its critics. Hayden takes issue with the term “Edge City,” and borrows Robert Lang’s concept of the edgeless city—an unbounded sprawling development comprised largely of office space found outside of downtowns (Lang 2003)—to elaborate on what she calls “edge nodes,” a hybrid of the edge and edgeless city (Hayden 2003, 155). For Hayden, edge nodes have originated not from retail and office space following housing to the suburban fringe, but from 1920s roadside gasoline stations and motel strips (159). Blogger John McCrory (2009) also takes issue with Garreau’s concept of the Edge City, contending that Garreau’s notion of real-estate visionaries as enterprising pioneers that succeed by sheer will and determination is a myth that obscures the government’s role in infrastructure development, housing programs, tax subsidies and national defense policies over the last fifty years. Similarly, Kling, Olin, and Poster (2016) find Garreau’s concept too limiting. For them, his commercially defined concept is inappropriate to convey the socially defined reality they observe in Irvine, California and Orange County.
As noted above, most historical works devote some space to the disintegration of “community” attendant with suburbanization. However, several describe and comment specifically on this trend. Drawn from an ethnographic study of a New Jersey suburb, M.P. Baumgartner’s *The Moral Order of a Suburb* (1988) investigates the way suburban residents manage conflict, contending that fluid social relations, a lack of social integration, and indifference among individuals results not in violence and disorder, but rather civility and a peaceable way of life (3). While she does not comment on a loss of “community” per-se, Baumgartner does identify what she calls “moral minimalism” within suburbia, where individuals see conflict as a “social contaminant”—dirty and unpleasant work that is contrasted with a “mature” individual’s tolerance and avoidance (130–31). Robert Putnam’s *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (2000) proposes that in recent decades the United States has suffered from “civic malaise” resulting in weakening community bonds (23). Mobility and suburban sprawl are two of the reasons he identifies, both of which are exacerbated by spatial distances, social segregation, and time spent alone in a car (228–29). Putnam argues that this lack of social capital impacts everything from child development, to safety, productivity, economic prosperity, and overall health and happiness, and the United States desperately needs institutions to reinvigorate its civic life (436).

In the wake of or coinciding with the spate of more popular works on suburbanization, academics have undertaken to reassess the concept from new angles, including popular media, the suburb in the American imaginary, race, class, and gender. Architect and urban planner Oliver Gillham’s *The Limitless City* (2002) undertakes to describe suburbia and the urban sprawl debate in its breadth from as balanced a
perspective as possible, untangling public opinion from policy, and antecedent causes from alternatives (xvi). Anthropology and sociology have also explored the topic of suburbanization from various directions. Setha Low’s *Behind the Gates: Life, Security, and the Pursuit of Happiness in Fortress America* (2003), explores the increasingly frequent phenomenon of gated communities and discourses surrounding fear and crime that drive their popularity. Daniel Rubey’s collection of chapters in *Redefining Suburban Studies: Searching for New Paradigms* (2009) explores topics as wide ranging as the suburb in literature and popular media, auto-dependency in suburbia, working-class motherhood in suburbia, and suburban racial mobility. In *Places of their Own: African American Suburbanization in the Twentieth Century*, Andrew Wiese (2004) also addresses suburbanization and race, documenting the changing place black families have had in suburbia throughout the course of the twentieth century, culminating in an expanding black middle-class residing more and more in traditionally white suburbia.

From the opposite perspective, in *Daughters of Suburbia* (2000), Lorraine Delia Kenny ethnographically explores her Long Island hometown and what it means to be white, middle-class, and female in suburbia, analyzing the contradictory “insider-other” position she claims they occupy, bridging the gap between “good girl” and “bad” (3).

*American Culture and Agriculture: The Rural Ideal*

Within my field site, residents, city leaders, and newcomers alike tended to juxtapose rurality with suburbanization. This reflects a slight adaptation of a binary that long resided in a number of academic disciplines, such as geography, urban studies, and
anthropology that set the rural world against the urban one, the country against the city. As Woods (2011) notes, the separation of the urban and rural persisted to the 1970s in geography, predicated largely upon a positivist attempt to “objectively” define the rural as a unique sphere possessing a distinctive set of characteristics (7). Tacoli (1998) points out that this dichotomy has been deeply imbedded in development theory—predicated on an implicit “urban bias”—where in much of the middle part of the twentieth century theorists and policy makers encouraged outmigration from rural areas to the cities as a means of promoting industrialization and increasing national gross domestic products, which they thought at the same time would propel people out of a mere subsistence-level existence (150). Influenced by modernization theory, anthropology did not escape reliance on this binary within its theory either. An underlying separation and juxtaposition of city and the countryside informed, for example, Redfield’s folk-urban continuum and push-pull theory of migration in the 1940s (Brettell 2000, 102). Criticisms from political economists and Marxists, however, began to successfully undermine this dichotomization by the 1970s in disciplines such as geography (Woods 2011, 8). A parallel trajectory developed at the same time in rural studies, particularly in Latin America, where based on Marxist critiques scholars reformulated questions on the character of the peasantry, rural class structure, and the manner in which agrarian reforms should take place (Kay 2008, 916). In intervening decades, rather than relying on this rural-urban binary, scholars have moved away from broad generalizations seeking to

16 It is important to note at this juncture that relations between “rural” and “urban” or “suburban” areas I discuss here and throughout this thesis are distinctly “American,” and distinctly those of the American South. As Creed and Ching (1997) remind us, rural/urban distinctions and the way individuals and academics elaborate these are inherently relative and place-dependent (14).
define the rural and the urban, taking into account regional particularities and understanding flows of people and goods within these areas as a complex, multidirectional process (Tacoli 1998, 153–56).

Despite the criticisms offered by academia on the problematic nature of the rural-urban dichotomy and attempts to complexify the relationship between areas described as “rural” and those labeled as “urban,” these categories persist in popular and even academic usage. The notion of the “rural” has a deep association with the history of the United States, one that has driven economic and political policy while compelling intense emotional reactions surrounding rural areas’ history, meaning, and preservation. This is typically associated with agrarianism, a concept is generally defined as one in which proponents advance the interests of farming populations, usually predicated upon the notion that the practices and values associated with agricultural live are uniquely well suited to a personal, social, and political good (Beer 2011). Agrarianism as an ideal has a long history in the United States, one of whose main proponents was Thomas Jefferson. Scholars have long noted Jefferson’s penchant for the “virtues” of a farming life, one he felt was particularly well suited to the form of democratic self-governance he advocated for in the newly formed country. As such, he is noted for having cast his lot with “poor, frontier farmers” rather than large-scale estate farming popular among European Physiocrats (Griswold 1946, 667).

Agrarian movements supporting farmers’ interests have risen to the fore at various points in United States history, such as in the late 1800s during the Populist movement. Responding to increased competition, price gouging by railroad operators, and sky-high mortgage prices, farmers banded together in the 1870s and 80s to advocate
for government supports, such as the nationalization of railroads, a graduated income tax, and the monetization of silver to prevent a limited money supply that would keep prices low (MacMath 1995, 44; 48). However, not all agrarian reactions have been primarily political in nature, as the Populist movement was. A number of authors read part of the 1920s conservative backlash against immigration, the recent wave of industrialization, and out-migration from the rural areas as a response in which rural Americans sought to reassert so-called “rural values,” what Danbom (1991) calls a “romantic agrarian” resurgence (2). The result of the conservative drift was the resurgence of Ku Klux Klan, religious fundamentalism borne out in episodes such as the Scopes Monkey Trial, Prohibition, and tightened immigration restrictions via the National Origins Act (Drowne and Huber 2004, xvi).

During this decade, a group of twelve Southern writers associated with Vanderbilt University converged to write *I’ll Take My Stand*, the point at which Danbom argues that romantic agrarianism achieved “intellectual respectability” (1991, 5). A set of essays comprises the book in defense of Southern agrarian traditions and against growing and rampant industrialization in the American South. Industrialization, and the unfettered pursuit of progress, these men felt defied the inherent identity of the South, an identity that should be cherished for its “leisure, tradition, aesthetic and religious impulses” rapidly being lost in the pursuit of economic gain (Twelve Southerners 1962, viii). This economic gain, otherwise called progress, they felt was “a slogan and a philosophy, a device for social control and a belief in the reality of a process of cosmic development toward ‘some far-off divine event’” (122) The teleology of the kind of “progress” these men saw they felt was dehumanizing and disintegrative, and in contrast, held up the
image of the “Old South” as the world to which they wished to return (xiii). For this, and the racist undertones inherent in some of the essays, contributors have been criticized, such as Robert Penn Warren and his defense of segregation (246). Regardless, the defense of agrarian ideals—envisioned here as distinctively Southern—speaks to the manner in which agrarians and others assert that rural environments embody particular religious, economic, and social virtues.

Other scholars have taken on the topic of the agrarian ideal and the supposed virtues of this life. As Danbom argues, recent incarnations of romantic agrarianism, building on a Thoreauvian belief in the importance of connecting with nature, feel that modern agriculture threatens to turn this connection into one approximating that of industrial alienation (1991, 10). Wendell Berry’s *The Unsettling of America: Culture and Agriculture* (1977) follows this trend, functioning as a cultural critique of environmental degradation and corporate agribusiness, while upholding the character-building values of agriculture. Berry believes that all humans’ “biological as well as our cultural roots are in nature,” and as such advocates not only for untouched spaces but for “kindly use” of agricultural land (29–31); in the same way, farmers are not to be businessmen but nurturers, individuals who, over generations, inherit qualities of character as much as a body of knowledge (45). Instead, he contends, contemporary agriculture relies too much on the “machine,” removing human values from our work, from production, and thus from consumption (79). In the same way, he posits humans’ embodied connection to the earth, contending that we have become disconnected and “marginal” from our bodies, just as land has become “marginal” and its fertility waned (108), warranting a hard look from contemporary Americans’ what they have lost.
This sentiment is updated and expanded in *The Essential Agrarian Reader* (2003) by Norman Wirzba, Berry, and others. It examines a variety of topics related to agrarianism, including how to promote agrarian values amidst increasingly suburban populations that have no aspirations towards farming (35), how to define sustainable economic development (62), the global effects agricultural policies have on farmers (122), and the directions agrarianism may and should take in the future. This volume relies on a particular vision of agrarianism, one that Brian Donahue says is “not a ‘myth,’ ascribed to agrarian life only by naïve romantics who were never real farmers themselves” (39). Instead, it is predicated upon “responsibilities that protect, preserve, and celebrate life” through a focus on local communities, economies, and the manner in which our patterns of living affect the natural environment (8). The notion of acting as stewards of the land while reminding others of the importance of these values is the aim of this work.

Wirzba’s *The Essential Agrarian Reader*, however, perhaps begins to bridge what Danbom calls the divide between “rational” and “romantic agrarianism” (1991, 1), working primarily from an ideological viewpoint, but also speaking to agrarian economic and political contributions. As Danbom argues, rational agrarianism is “alive and well” in political arenas, yet its romantic cousin draws far less attention. Indeed, one can observe this fact in rhetoric regarding farmland preservation, where Mariola (2005) argues that proponents have vacated any moral stance for arguments based solely on “economic

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17 Danbom (1991) defines “rational agrarians” as those that “operat[e] in the tradition of the Physiocrats and Jefferson, stress the tangible contributions agriculture and rural people make to a nation’s economic and political well-being. Romantic agrarians, following the path trod by Thoreau, emphasize the moral, emotional, and spiritual benefits agriculture and rural life convey to the individual” (1).
utilitarianism” (213). What remains significant is the fact that romanticization of the rural remains such a compelling ideal, not just for agrarians but for the larger public, despite the hegemonic nature economic arguments that have taken hold in the era of agribusiness.

A number of volumes attempt to dissect this public romanticization of all things rural and pastoral. As Rowe (1991) argues, from the works of Virgil to the paintings of Thomas Cole, individuals have long valorized the pastoral imaginary (222). In The Machine in the Garden, Leo Marx (1964) attempts to understand to ideals central to the American consciousness he believes are held in dialectical tension—the pastoral ideal and drastic changes wrought by industrialization. Marx relies on literature rather than popular culture as a window into the American psyche, emphasizing the contradictions literary works are able to raise about Americans’ aspirations toward an ideal landscape, a contribution he terms a “middle landscape” that helps them move forward (364–65). Raymond Williams’ The Country and the City (1973) undertakes a similar aim, seeking to understand and deconstruct images of the countryside and the city in their “historically varied experience” (2). Through literature and the way authors present these tropes, they retain “great force,” one that has become central to our consciousness (289). From the advent of capitalist agrarian production, and accelerated since the Industrial Revolution, Williams argues that these images “have been ways of responding to a whole social

18 According to Alterman, this is similarly conceived in federal policies encouraging farmland conservation, which rely on economic incentives rather than direct permissions (1997, 222). Bunce (1998), however, argues that in discourse surrounding farmland preservation, the romantic-rational tension remains alive in two ideological streams: environmentalism and agrarianism. What he calls progressive agrarianism he links with environmentalism, arguing that in many regards, both strands leave farmers out of the conversation (243–44).
development” (297), and the rift between these ideas has been dramatically transformed under capitalism and its transformative effects on labor and life (304).

Despite the romantic valorization of the rural and all things pastoral, Gerald Creed and Barbara Ching (1997) provide a helpful corrective to the tendency to assume that power of the rural and of pastoral images are infinite. They point to tendencies within postmodern theorizations of space to assume the ubiquity of the urban and urban subject, some such as Soja even “tacitly assuming the city will engulf the country” (8–9). Reinforcing this division is the fact that so many scholars come from urban environments or are divorced from their own rural roots, while “self-consciously rustic people” often revel in a form of anti-intellectualism, which Creed and Ching see as reflective of the urban hegemony (10–11). The urban bias continues in the way adjectives such as “rustic” and “urbane” reflect low- and high-culture connotations of the subjects they represent (17). As a result, Creed and Ching argue that rural resistance is the result of individuals attempting to “assert their value and place in a world dominated by urban(e) others” (28).

**Conclusion**

It is from this place that I will attempt to weave in the story of those I interviewed. Many expressed, if not explicitly, the desire that their way of life have continued relevance amidst the extraordinary change they have experienced even over the course of just a few decades. While rural ideals, pastoral images, and bucolic vistas retain substantial power not only to shape the American imaginary and identity but also action, beliefs, value systems, and lifeways, an urban bias and the inherent economic assumptions that structure this in part remain in constant tension. These have drastically
reshaped the world, landscape, and environment that longtime residents of Mt. Juliet have inhabited, compelling new ways of acting, understanding, and being in this place. Thus while “the rapid suburbanization of a formerly rural space” is the short answer I give people when I mention the topic of this thesis, it is far more. Suburbanization, in many ways, is not the topic, but the symptom. The topic is how rhetoric regarding the growth and progress takes on a hegemonic dimension, and how, in response, individuals react to this ideology and in turn remake their worlds in a rapidly transforming place. Remaking one’s world is not a simple task. It involves learning how to continue farming practices now alien to suburban neighbors; coming to grips with the cognitive dissonance that results from disliking yet having, intentionally or not, contributed to growth; and seeking to hold onto people, places, and memories that slip through one’s fingers like sand. It is not an easy task, yet it is one these residents navigate daily. Through the lens of ethnography and anthropological theory, it is my hope that what may seem at first glance like a mundane and tired story will reveal the true complexities at stake in this place.
I pulled into the short gravel drive flanked by a dingy grey picket fence. The large maple trees in the front yard of the house had blanketed the grass with colorful leaves, which rustled under my feet as I approached the 120-year-old house. Adele, her work clothes covered in dust from the old boxes through which she had been sifting, opened the spring-hinged back door and came out to meet me. For neither the first nor last time in my project, the social capital of my grandmother’s name and memory became the credential by which I would access the web of inhabitants in my hometown, some of whom knew me last as a little girl playing in her backyard on Sundays, others knowing vaguely of our farm but remembering my grandmother as a well-beloved local teacher. This was the first time Adele and I had met, and although she had initially hesitated in participating, she exuded warmth and hospitality as she took me through the house that had been her parents’ until their death a few years before. Through the spring, she had been taking care of her aunt, and only now was she able to devote time to going through the untold number of boxes on the house’s unelectrified second floor. Containers filled with scraps of paper, pictures for her mother’s classroom bulletin boards, and various knickknacks from her parents’ ninety years were now the object of difficult, emotional decisions as to what items retained sentimental or family value and what simply had to be discarded.

We settled on the front porch of the two-story Victorian house, sitting in the same rocking chairs that had been her family’s place of repose on warm summer nights. The
banisters and porch posts, in varying states of decay, were framed by scrolling gingerbread trim, both marking the house’s age and giving it a distinctly historical feel in contrast to nearby subdivisions. As we looked out at bucolic scene of the large trees in the front yard, the picket fence, and the field beyond, Adele recounted to me the story of her mother’s love for the yard, and particularly of a now dead hickory tree that had stood near the road. Her mother had done all she could to protect that tree, even demanding years ago that the road in front be widened on the other side in order to save the tree. Its loss marked a poignant end to a chapter for Adele, symbolic of the larger changes she had witnessed in recent years.

So here I am, you know, this summer, when the hickory tree comes down. I’m sitting out there at the driveway, saying, ‘Momma, we let it stand as long as we could.’ …But I mean the hickory tree was dead, so there was nothing… And that’s kind of the way it is with our community. Even though it’s not like it was at all when I grew up, things don’t stand still. And they’re going to change, and again, I think you have to look for the positive and not the negative.

Her comment stood out to me, not for its balanced, pragmatic perspective—a perspective I had heard countless times by this point from many of the residents—but for its relationship to the emblematic scene in which we found ourselves. Sitting on the front porch of her childhood home, situated on a 200-year Century Farm19 where her cousin continues to raise cattle, we could hear the constant drone of earth-moving machinery. In the field opposite the house, on a sixty-seven-acre plot, bulldozers worked to raze the landscape and uproot trees for a new subdivision. “When we sit here on this porch two to

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19 The Century Farm program is a program run by the Center for Historic Preservation at Middle Tennessee State University. It recognizes farms that have been in continuous agricultural production for at least 100 years, designating these farms by a sign posted on their land for 100, 150, and 200 years of production, and providing farm owners with recognition in their local papers, a description of the farm on their website, and a bi-annual newsletter. (“About Tennessee Century Farms” 2016)
Figure 2.1 Adele’s parents’ house in 2012. (© Emily Ramsey)

Figure 2.2 The partially completed subdivision in April 2012 on the sixty-seven acres Adele’s family sold. (© Emily Ramsey)
three years from now and look out that way, you know, I don’t know whether I’m going to be looking at that landscaping along the road or whether I’m going to see millions of rooftops or…what…” she said as her voice trailed off.

I asked her whether she thought the benefits outweighed the costs for her to sell the section of land. Her response, again, was a pragmatic one:

It was very beneficial for us to sell sixty-seven acres and all. My sister and I both got laid off from our job. We both worked at the same place. We got laid off last August and the fact that all of this came to pass was a very good thing as far as we were concerned. I really don’t know. I think it’s one of those things that I’m kind of growing with it. I prefer things never change, but I know that’s not reality. So they’re going to change, and I have to just make the best of whatever is going on, and try to look at the positive. I don’t think my parents would have wanted me to sell the land and then think negative thoughts about it, so I have to be positive about it.

While the practical concerns of meeting financial needs, particularly in the wake of an economic downturn, certainly provide justification for selling, Adele's words reveal an emphasis on the need to adopt a positive attitude for herself and the sake of her parents’ memory. Indeed, the promise of the developer to name the development “Ellenwood” after a blend of her parents’ names—Eleanor and Woodrow—she hoped “would make them proud.” Certainly then, the sixty-seven acres function as more than simply equity to be liquidated into cash as circumstances or will dictate. For Adele, they embody memories, family history, and are her patrimony—a gift and means of providing for herself and future generations. The choice to sell is not taken lightly, yet at the same time, it must not be viewed pessimistically. Like many of the residents with whom I spoke, Adele recognizes change as constant, and town growth as a part of this process. In fact, her family has indirectly contributed to it. Part of the largest and most acclaimed
development in Mt. Juliet rests on a one hundred-acre tract that her father had sold in the 1980s.

Now an award-winning “active adult retirement community” for the fifty-five plus demographic by developer Del-Webb, part of their former farm now features “stunning homes with resort-style amenities” including a clubhouse, indoor-outdoor pool and spa, an aerobics studio, fitness center, walking trails, arts and crafts room, social clubs, and a fifteen-acre man-made lake for fishing and paddleboats. The development bills itself as a lifestyle community whose tagline is “love life to the fullest.” Its ads feature young-looking seniors engaged in dancing, shopping, dune buggy races, yoga, or lounging by the side of a pool. Embodying the active adult ideal—an ideal that attempts to re-imagine the notion of “senior” such that “life begins at sixty”—Del-Webb, as the development is locally known, seeks to draw a crowd of middle-class, mostly white retirees into a gated world where community is forged on the basis of a shared vision of active, amenity-infused golden years. Indeed, their online “lifestyle survey” ensures that only those that share a desire for this way of life apply (“Del Webb Lifestyle Advisor Survey” 2016).

The Del-Webb community is not the only development here to have sprung up in an area that was only recently mostly farmland. Rather, it is part of a larger “land community” named Providence, which includes apartment communities and single-family subdivisions at varying price points. The gem of the Providence development is Providence Marketplace, an open-air shopping center anchored by familiar big-box retailers such as Target, JC Penney, Old Navy, and Best Buy as well as restaurants and other national chain stores one might typically find in a mall. These stores are configured
Figure 2.3 Sign advertising the Del Webb community featuring active senior adults. (© Emily Ramsey)

Figure 2.4 The entrance to the gated Del Webb community, featuring walking trails, a man-made lake, and a clubhouse for activities, pools, and spa. (© Emily Ramsey)
Figure 2.5 Walkable shopping environment of Providence Marketplace. (© Emily Ramsey)

Figure 2.6 Urban street-like grid of Providence Marketplace. (© Emily Ramsey)
in a mini-version of the lifestyle center (Blum 2005; O’Connell 2010), a shopping experience in an outdoor, walkable environment with a grid akin to an urban city street. The decision to build the marketplace in this orientation was ostensibly to limit teenagers or gangs from loitering, potentially rendering upscale consumers’ shopping experience unpleasant.

This world was a far cry from the one Adele and I inhabited at that moment, and while age-wise she would fit into the Del-Webb demographic, she seemed happy to stay on the remaining 170 acres of her family’s farm. She counted herself fortunate not to be in a position to sell any more of the land, and while her family hesitated at encumbering the land in a conservation easement, preferring instead to allow successive generations to decide its fate, they had no intentions of selling anything else. Although she loved sewing and initially envisioned herself frequenting the nearby Jo-Ann’s in the Providence shopping center adjacent to Del-Webb, in fact, she recounted that she rarely made the five-minute trip.

**Characterizing the Growth**

Adele’s pragmatism regarding the town’s growth, despite her stated desire for the world she inhabited to remain unchanged, speaks not only to a desire for stasis and constancy. It is reflective of eminently local and specific historical trajectories driving suburbanization, spurred by individual and local government choices to permit or encourage development. Yet it is also reflective of larger national and global trends regarding growth and development, underscored by particular narratives that support the validity of these trends. Change is constant, certainly; however, the form that change...
takes, and the way that individuals react to or are impacted by it, is never a foregone conclusion. As Arjun Appadurai (2000) states regarding globalization:

The various flows we see—of objects, persons, images, and discourses—are not coeval, convergent, isomorphic, or spatially consistent. They are...relations of disjuncture...with different points of origin and termination, and varied relationships to institutional structures in different regions, nations, or societies. Furthermore, these disjunctures themselves precipitate various kinds of problems and frictions in different situations. (5)

While we may certainly understand growth and suburbanization as global phenomena, the frictions occurring here are exceedingly particular. Thus, in coming to understand just how growth is proceeding apace in Mt. Juliet, it is necessary to explore the local trajectories it has taken in order to understand how this impacts longtime residents. Central to this is the local government’s perception of that change and the kind of citizenry they envision and hope to cultivate to populate the city. Reading this against the compelling and powerful image of the rural begins to reveal points of fracture in the narrative of growth; newcomers are compelled by the pastoral beauty advertised to bring them there, and when growth continues and neighboring farms vaporize, they, too, begin to resist the change. It is in these scenarios that understanding exactly how growth and progress function as narratives of capitalist development, and how these narratives intersect and collide with idealized portraits of nature and rurality, becomes vital.

Importance of Infrastructure

While geography or demography might seem obvious phenomena to which to attribute growth, many longtime residents insightfully attributed Mt. Juliet’s growth not only to its proximity to Nashville and larger demographic shifts, but to infrastructural...
upgrades the city made in the past. They described these improvements—such as city water or sewer—as personally beneficial, but also highlighted the degree to which the current pace of growth could not have occurred without them. These improvements, however, were not simply amenities meant to increase property value or the town’s attractiveness. Often, they were a clear matter of need and even health. Older residents recalled the unpleasant taste of sulfur in the area’s water table, but more acutely, the city’s first mayor N.C. Hibbett remembered sewage from local septic tanks seeping into the water table, making residents and school children sick with “yellow jaundice.”

The septic tanks was leaking in to the ground, and it was getting into the crevasses in streams of the water going towards Stoner’s Creek. And [that’s] where the schools were. That’s where the well was, and... when I was a senior, we had to close the school down for two weeks to try to get people straightened out because we were sick. I actually played football—two ball games that I didn’t feel like getting up, much less playing—but we had to go play because we didn’t have the money to go pay the opposing school the money they would make off the football game.

Helena Mae recalled another wave of sickness, noting ironically that one innovation ultimately obliged another: indoor restrooms installed near a well at the school caused sickness, further compelling the need for city water.

When I was still in elementary school, along third, fourth grade, we were so happy because they had finally managed to put in indoor bathrooms—restrooms, there at school... They took a part of that basement and put in restrooms, and there was a nice well up there beside of the school that was used for the drinking water... And I don’t know how long it was after they put in the restrooms that people started getting sick. And they finally found out that it had contaminated the well, and so we had to either go without water during the school day or take our water, because we could not drink the water that was there.

Although the city was not yet incorporated, city water was finally introduced in the 1959 and throughout the early 1960s. Helena Mae and, another lifelong local, Jackson, noted that developers built the first residential subdivision shortly thereafter,
directly linking the infrastructural improvement to the subdivision’s construction. “It was ’59 that they were working along Mt. Juliet Road with the city water,” Helena Mae said. “That’s what enabled those things. I mean development is good, and you have to have the utilities, but still, with growth comes lots of problems.” City water infrastructure developed slowly over time, radiating out from the main town area over more than a decade. Charles, whose house is still located outside of city limits, remembers drawing water from a well for seven years after moving to Mt. Juliet. City water came to him only in the early 1970s. As these individuals recount, infrastructural developments like city water or sewer made significant changes in their lives, yet had far-reaching consequences for the future of the town.

Residents also cited the development of city sewer, for which the newly incorporated city drafted a resolution in 1974, as another important factor driving current growth. Early city leaders, including two mayors and city commissioners, note having a role in the sewer’s development and the succeeding change. Prior to that, Jackson claimed, the town seemed to have changed very little in the six or so preceding decades. N.C. vividly remembered taking a trip to the University of North Carolina in the mid-1970s to inquire how the city could apply for federal grants to fund the sewer. Undeterred by the federal agent’s statement that it would take close to twenty-five years to obtain a federal grant, he and other city leaders began applying, and eventually won a grant to fund the sewer’s construction without having to impose a property tax.

The government was able to commence planning and construction of the sewers in the late 1970s and early 1980s, despite some resistance. The importance of sewer for growth was not lost on city leaders. Bobby, a former councilman who voted for the
measure, directly connected population growth and sewers: “Well, it started, I guess when we put the sewers in, and I’m partly responsible. I was on the city commission [then].” Yet, the reason for city sewers was not to spur growth. “…It was a matter of health,” stated N.C. “It wasn’t a matter of growth, but it also helped it grow. Businesses would start moving out or would start a new one in Mt. Juliet because we had city water and city sewers. We had everything that they needed.”

Current city leaders like Andrew, who works with the local Chamber of Commerce, also underscored the economic importance of sewers:

Basically growth follows sewers. Not electric, not gas, not cable, not cell phone. It follows where you can put the sewers in. And in Tennessee—specifically Middle Tennessee—it’s extremely expensive because you just don’t go out and start digging a hole and digging a trench. You have to blast. It’s a lot of rock and putting sewer in is an extremely expensive proposition, and you need the masses. You have got to have a lot of people that pitch in to pay for that sewer line.

Andrew predicted the city’s development would continue because of recent sewer extensions to new commercial developments, begetting more retail development and, in turn, meaning the ability to extend the sewer further. For Andrew, the economic impact of sewers could not be understated: it would help “reverse that trend of all of our sales tax dollars—or a significant portion of our sales tax dollars—going out of Wilson County.”

“If You Build It…”

City water and sewer are not the only reasons for the city’s growing population. Shopping, restaurants, and opulent homes are big draws. In Mt. Juliet, the Providence Marketplace shopping center has become the paradigmatic example, along with adjacent subdivisions, apartment complexes, and developments such as Del-Webb. The reason for
this development’s popularity, in part, is geographic: it lies just south of the interstate along a state road, providing easy access by car. In this way, it is little different from any suburban shopping center one might see throughout the United States along a major thoroughfare. Prior to Providence’s construction, however, some described the city as “underserved” with regard to retail shopping and entertainment opportunities (as cited in The Tennessean, 5 May 2010a, 6S), due, in part, to a prohibition against liquor-by-the-drink overturned only in 2000 (Amons 2012). Since that point, in conjunction with increasing population growth, retail development has increased dramatically. Providence, Mt. Juliet’s “crown jewel” according to its city manager, reached 99% of its capacity early in 2010 despite the economic downturn, resulting in record sales tax revenues and helping to enable the city’s long-standing zero percent property tax rate (as cited in The Tennessean, 5 May 2010, 6S).20

Despite the housing crisis and economic downturn of 2008, the development in Mt. Juliet area rebounded quickly. Officials reported housing permit requests to have increased dramatically as early as 2010. Home sales in subdivisions, including the senior-adult community of Del-Webb, also soared, spurred in part by a federal tax credit on new home purchases (The Tennessean, 14 July 2010, 1S). This trend continued into 2011 not only for the Mt. Juliet area, but for counties adjacent to Nashville such as Williamson, Sumner, and elsewhere in Wilson County (The Tennessean, 6 January 2012, 1A). As the city’s southern area near the Providence Marketplace has exploded with new developments and grown by annexation, developers and businesses have begun to turn

20 The zero percent property tax rate, long touted as one of the major draws to the area, was repealed in late 2011, replaced with a property tax of $0.20 per $100 of assessed value, earmarked specifically to fund fire and emergency services (Mt. Juliet News, 25 January 2012, 1).
further east to undeveloped land along the interstate and also to the northern part of the city for “‘better parking, better visibility, less rent and the [lower] traffic’ volume” (as cited in The Tennessean, 2 November 2011, 1S). Housing developments have followed. Off the northern main artery of town, city officials approved a new subdivision, Nichols Vale, which is in the process of building 380 new homes on 143 acres, despite concerns from residents regarding subdivision outlets onto existing residential streets (The Wilson Post, 29 January 2014). The local planning commission welcomed the development with “open arms,” though, contending that this would infuse life into the stagnating north end (as cited in The Wilson Post, 27 November 2013). The local city manager also shared this vision, calling in 2010 for a “‘national fast-casual eatery’” and “‘additional better-suited retail’” in the city’s northern fringe (as cited in Mt. Juliet News, 8 May 2010, 1).

What is drawing residents and businesses as such a rapid pace? The city cites many attributes. By its tagline “The City between the Lakes,” Mt. Juliet highlights natural and recreational features given its location between two reservoir lakes. But natural features are only one side of the coin; city leaders tout the town’s reputation for fast growth, small-town charm, and southern hospitality (“City of Mt. Juliet, Tennessee” 2016) as key factors in helping to preserve the town’s “unique” identity (The Chronicle of Mt. Juliet, 14 January 2015, 1). In local and regional newspaper articles discussing the growth, new residents frequently implicate incentives like low property taxes (The Tennessean, 6 January 2012, 1), value comparative to other Nashville suburbs, the convenience of nearby shopping and entertainment, proximity to the airport and nearby lakes, and “resort-style amenities” in subdivisions (as cited in The Tennessean, 4 May 2014, 1F). Young professionals also appear to appreciate the local increase in relatively
affordable properties following the housing market collapse (*The Tennessean*, 21 June 2010, 1A). As a result, Executive Director of the county Joint Economic & Community Development Board recently dubbed the city an “economic Mecca” because of a “trifecta” of strong public schools; transportation options and proximity to main traffic arteries; and “quality-of-life resources” such as healthcare, recreation, and higher education (as cited in *The Chronicle of Mt. Juliet*, 14 January 2015, 1).

The word that most often advertises the features that city officials tout and new residents seek is amenities. Features characterized as amenities range from those within a particular housing development—such as the clubhouse, pool, spa, fitness center, and walking trails of Del-Webb—to spaces within the town for shopping, dining, recreation, and other community activities. As such, the city’s Office of Economic Development has focused its efforts squarely on attracting developments that include similar features, and merchants that will provide specific types of retail and dining experiences, advertising their frequent successes in local papers. In so doing, local leaders appeal to a particular step-wise logic that will ensure these amenities come to fruition. “‘More rooftops will mean more retail businesses will be locating here and that of course will mean more jobs, more sales tax dollars to be captured by local government, and more conveniences with respect to shopping to be enjoyed by those who live here,’” stated a Joint Economic and Community Development Board member in a 2015 article (as cited in *The Chronicle of Mt. Juliet*, 14 January 2015, 2).

Attracting these amenities, however, requires the involvement of the local public, according to city manager Ken Martin. Martin exhorted residents with an economic call to action as a result. “‘…Please support local businesses,’” he appealed in a local paper.
“‘As our community grows, so does the need for retailers like Sam’s, Costco, PF Chang’s, Macaroni Grille and other big names. Our population is sure to rise. With that will come more recognition and attention from white collar job providers, upper-end retailers and high-end restaurants’” (as cited in Mt. Juliet News, 8 May 2013, 1). Martin’s statement is interesting for two reasons. Not only does it put the onus on the citizen to make retail growth occur by compelling them to vote with their wallets, it also reflects an implicit hierarchy of retail stores and dining, one aligned closely with socio-economic class. City leaders implicitly appear to want a particular kind of resident, one that can afford “upper-end retailers” and “high-end restaurants,” so that there will be further attraction for additional “big name” retailers to come. The production and reconfiguration of space through the medium of capital investment appears, for city leaders, to be an almost cyclical process comprised by initial residential development, residents’ support of existing local businesses, and local government efforts to attract new businesses, resulting in higher-end retail and more rooftops, permitting the cycle to begin anew.

The call for additional amenities has not been solely from city leaders. A grassroots campaign to lure grocery store chain Trader Joe’s to the area began in 2013 via a Facebook page by residents tired of the thirty-minute trek to the nearest store south of Nashville (Mt. Juliet News, 8 May 2013, 3). The page, last reflecting activity in late 2014, garnered over 2,000 followers. A similar Facebook page, “Bring an Organic Grocery Store to Mt. Juliet,” currently has 1,300 followers and continues to lobby for a Whole Foods or Sprouts location in the area (“Facebook” 2016).

21 Grassroots campaigns for retail, particularly grocery stores, are not uncommon, and rely on social media sites like Facebook for support. Residents have launched similar campaigns near Albany, New York (B.
store or Trader Joe’s has materialized, but city leaders constantly reassure residents in local papers that it and other requested stores like Costco are in the works.

With Growth Come Accolades

For its rapid growth, organizations have recognized Mt. Juliet with a number of titles and awards over the last several years. The city won the designation of Tennessee’s “Most Business-Friendly City” of 2010 by the Tennessee Center for Policy Research (The Chronicle of Mt. Juliet, 1 December 2010, 1), a title to which it was named third runner up in 2013 (“Mt. Juliet, TN” 2016). This accolade is based on rankings in economic vitality, business tax burden, and community allure, embodying the neoliberal ideal of “certain cities’ commitment to creating a business-friendly environment free of stifling taxes and restrictive regulatory burdens” (“Business-Friendly Cities Report” 2016). The Mt. Juliet area has also received recognition from popular online sites such as Nerdwallet.com, which in 2014 ranked it the third-best place to purchase a home in Tennessee, based on population growth, proximity to three major interstates, access to two recreational lakes, access to shopping and restaurants, and the moderate of cost home ownership (The Chronicle of Mt. Juliet, 26 March 2014, 1). The city touts these and other awards—a recent designation of Mt. Juliet as Tennessee’s fourth-safest city (“These Are The 10 Safest Places In Tennessee” 2016), seven-time recognition as a “Playful City USA” (“Playful City USA Communities” 2016), and the state’s third most family-friendly (Mt. Juliet News, 13 August 2013)—on its website. The growth and its praise

Jones 2009); Dallas, Texas (Robertson 2016); and Charleston, West Virginia (“Grassroots Campaigns Try to Attract Business to West Virginia” 2016) for Trader Joe’s alone, sometimes successfully.
continue. In April 2016, Realtor Magazine declared Mt. Juliet number sixteen on a list of America’s Top “Boom Towns,” an appellation that city management took as the highest of accolades and as reflective of a strong market for job growth, household formation, and housing starts. Reflecting on the nomination, head of the local Realtors’ association called the area “special,” reflective of the fact that residents had access to “the big city” nearby, but are able to revel in “the town feeling” (The Chronicle of Mt. Juliet, 27 April 2016, 7).

Aside from the honors themselves, these awards advertise Mt. Juliet not only on the respective websites of those giving the accolades, but more broadly as well. Each award typically generates a number of local newspaper articles, and often a brief story on local television outlets. The city advertises these on its official website, as well as in a color brochure for prospective residents and businesses labeled a “city résumé” (“City Resume” 2016). While city growth may appear to be as simple as residents choosing a home and retail setting down roots, the award fever leaders display speaks to the extent to which cities feel the need to and do in fact capitalize upon media attention in order to cultivate a résumé of accomplishments. This résumé, like any individual’s, is used to apply for grants or woo businesses to the area. Competition for rooftops, residents, and retail among city governments then appears little different than competition among consumers and businesses in the contemporary capitalist realm.

Growing Pains

The rapid growth has brought headaches as well. Residents frequently report traffic as the chief problem, resulting in part from lagging infrastructural upgrades to
existing roads following retail spaces and subdivision construction. Helena Mae, Josie, and Charles—like many others—stated they felt that city government had acted “backwards,” permitting retail development first and choosing to widen roads almost as an afterthought. As a result, the city had not planned enough for the growth, and local sales tax was insufficient to fund these improvements, placing an unfair tax burden on lower-income residents while exempting new retail businesses and residents from paying for the change they, in part, have caused. Charles suggested a fee on every house that is sold to support strengthening existing infrastructure. “Of course,” he remarked, “that would go over like a lead balloon in a bucket of water.”

Traffic has not been the only problem resulting from the rapid growth. Until the city finally imposed a property tax in 2012 to fund additional fire and emergency services, residents and county leaders alike criticized the fact that Mt. Juliet did not have its own fire protection, relying on county-wide emergency management services, a situation many deemed dangerous given the rising population and the size of the county (WKRN.com 2011). As of 2013, the city built two permanently staffed fire stations to meet the population’s needs. City services are not all that the city appears to lack. Student populations have risen dramatically, posing problems for existing school and necessitating the construction of new ones. In 2010, the local high school relocated to a new facility and the middle school relocated to the old high school building to alleviate space concerns. Shortly after, however, both schools exceeded these buildings’ capacities, nearing 1,500 to 2,000 students in each building and necessitating schedule juggling just to find classroom space for teachers and students (Mt. Juliet News, 11
August 2010, 1; 5). Consequently, the city continues to plan additional schools to meet the growing needs.

Aside from the need for roads and schools, some residents complained that the city had devoted too little space to spaces for recreation and community building, particularly when considering the needs of future generations. Michael reflected on this:

Where is someone going to interact in the community here? Where is the ball field? Where is the giant park? …We have Charlie Daniels’ Park. One pavilion, two picnic tables there. [T]here’s one Pee-wee Football field for everyone to come play on. So as you grow, you’ve got to give people a place to have a sense of community. Because if [you] don’t have a place to have a sense of community, how can they?

Without these kinds of “amenities,” he recounted, “growth for growth alone just strangles the community.”

Growth has also brought along with it an increase in crime. In late 2011, local newspapers reported four recent officer-involved shootings, drug busts, and a drastic rise in thefts—a 61% increase in just one year, including four stolen four wheelers worth over $100,000. At this same time, Providence Marketplace crimes doubled in just six months (Mt. Juliet News, 19 October 2011, 1). By the end of 2013, shoplifting had increased an additional 37% at Providence, spurring police to take a “zero tolerance approach” by issuing felony citations (The Chronicle of Mt. Juliet, 5 March 2014, 1; 7). Clashes between residents and police have become more common, especially at apartment complexes populated by lower-income residents (The Chronicle of Mt. Juliet, 12 June 2013). Illicit drug use and production has been on the rise as well, including the discovery of two methamphetamine labs in local businesses in 2015 (The Chronicle of Mt. Juliet, 14 January 2015, 1).
Many are cautious about the pace of growth, including newer residents near Providence concerned about rising population densities from new apartment construction (The Wilson Post, 23 July 2014, A1). A response from the first mayor N.C. Hibbett summarizes this concern, perhaps not-so-ironically positioned beneath a newspaper article touting the popularity of Providence shopping with local residents. He contends that in 1971, following the extension of the interstate and advent of city water, the city was incorporated out of “‘necessity,’” permitting the city to plan so that “‘the growth [would] be progress.’” The unchecked growth of Atlanta he calls a cautionary tale, however, and cautions newer residents who seek amenities like those in areas from which they have come to be aware that they carry with them a tax burden on citizens (as cited in The Tennessean, 5 May 2010b, 6S). Some current city officials have also voiced concerns with the rate of development. In 2014, a city commissioner sponsored a resolution for a moratorium on development given the numerous “growing pains” the city has been encountering. “‘I am nervous,’” he was quoted as saying. “‘Growth is a great thing, but it’s the rate, the pace, and all those kinds of things I want to look at. We’ve been blessed, but we have to be consistent.’” City leaders hope new apartment construction will attract young professionals, a “missing” demographic, but residents fear more traffic, population saturation, falling housing prices, and higher crime. In response, one developer remarked, “‘Do you run from growth, or do you embrace it? That’s the question Mt. Juliet has’” (as cited in The Tennessean, 11 August 2014).
The Local Government’s Take on Growth

As is perhaps rather apparent from the account above, even despite the city’s growing pains, the local city government does not view growth as an unwanted visitor. It continues to permit and encourage new housing developments while taking an active role in recruiting businesses to the area. The shape that growth is taking—and the way that city leaders describe the mechanism of growth—reveal much about how they understand economic expansion to occur, in addition to how they hope to enact “growth” and “progress.” These ideals and the actions that follow them are significant for the way that portray economic development as both autonomous and contingent, for how they contribute to the ideal citizen the city seeks to cultivate, and ultimately, for how they inextricably alter the lives of life-long residents.

The Ultimate Goal of City Growth

The local government, somewhat explicitly, espouses growth as an imperative and focuses many of its decisions on facilitating immediate economic development and stimulating future growth. Indivisible from this is the attempt to make Mt. Juliet a more “attractive” place to live through the construction of “amenities” like shopping, restaurants, and spaces for recreational activities. Behind these decisions is the city’s belief that, when facilitated by smart policies and decisions at present, growth ultimately begets more growth. As I mentioned earlier, growth appears almost to be a cyclical process where an initial spate of rooftops will draw retail, which will draw more residential development, bigger “name-brand” retail, and more jobs to the area. This may have effects with which residents are unhappy, as when development of adjacent
farmland occurs; however, the government appears to have adopted a somewhat utilitarian perspective on how they should act in such cases. In one such example, responding to resident protests, a city commissioner stated, “‘You want to do right for the majority of the amount of people…We want to please everyone, but in a situation like this, there’s just absolutely no way to please everyone.’” (as cited in The Lebanon Democrat, 13 May 2015, 3). In this case, the city commission voted to allow the development, deciding that the landowner’s right to sell and the potential for the city to gain 1,000 to 1,500 jobs outweighed neighboring residents’ displeasure. Despite problems associated with population growth city leaders have viewed continued growth as the greater good. In addressing residents’ concerns about increasing traffic, City Manager Martin stated, “‘I don’t like any traffic…But the last thing you want to do is to stop growth’” (as cited in Mt. Juliet News, 3 September 2014, 5). This attitude that permitting or facilitating growth is the ultimate good for residents, present and future, permeates the public message the city sends to citizens.

This is not to say that residents are not involved in the city growth. In what the then City Manager billed as “‘the first of its kind in Middle Tennessee,’” the city held an interactive “Community Conversation” in June 2011 where residents provided opinions about city issues, particularly their willingness to subsidize fire protection by paying the city’s first ever property tax (as cited in The Tennessean, 22 June 2011, 1). In order to encourage attendance, the city provided electronic clickers for anonymous and instantaneous answers, and local businesses gave away door prizes, such as a handmade quilt, lawnmower, and flat-screen TV (The Chronicle of Mt. Juliet, 22 June 2011, 1-2). One local resident that attended the night described it as a “dog and pony show,” feeling
it accomplished little; however, the most significant result was that residents attending, primarily comprised of those living at Del-Webb and near Providence, overwhelmingly supported a property tax to fund local fire protection (*The Chronicle of Mt. Juliet*, 29 June 2011, 1; 10).

In considering the kind of growth described here, it is important to ask what the city’s ultimate goal is. Is growth here a telos in and of itself? What benefit, aside from additional amenities, does continued growth provide residents? And what role does the city see itself playing in encouraging growth, and what power does it have to limit growth? From the rhetoric above, I would argue that the city’s immediate goal appears in many ways to be to provide a foundation upon which additional growth can occur. There are, of course, intervening factors the city cannot control. Economic recessions—often the result of global market and capital flows—do occur. Trends shift, and tastes change; Nashville may not always be the hot spot to which individuals flock. And perhaps most importantly, land does not materialize out of nowhere as a blank canvas upon which to paint. Mt. Juliet exists within a private property system where the available source of “virgin” land is the farms or acreage that existing residents own. Only by residents choosing to sell, or by demolishing and rebuilding existing developments, can the city continue to grow. Such is the nature of the Schumpeterian concept of creative destruction.22

22 Following Marx, Schumpeter (1994) calls capitalism an “evolutionary process,” one that by nature is never stationary, but whose continuance is predicated upon “new consumers’ goods, the new methods of production or transportation, the new markets, the new forms of industrial organization that capitalist enterprise creates.” For a history characterized by change, Schumpeter argues that capitalism inherently engages in a process of “industrial mutation… that incessantly revolutionizes the economic structure from within, incessantly destroying the old one, incessantly creating a new one” (83). This is how he understands the process of capitalistic creative destruction, a “perennial gale” that requires the destruction of the old for the continuance in building the new (87).
Members of the local government like Scott rely on the inevitability that farm owners will sell, given their “right to develop their property.” Like Scott, Chamber of Commerce official Andrew, also focuses on the primacy of private property rights in the context of a favorable economic climate in which to sell:

You get part of the family wants to sell of the family farm. Grandpa and grandma die, they hand it down. The kids aren’t really attached to it. They don’t want to be farmers...Well, how do you tell somebody that, ‘Well, no, you’re not allowed to change your family tree or reap the benefits of that?’ I think you have to let the marketplace determine, to some degree, when enough is too much. I’m not going to tell Marriott that we don’t want them in Mt. Juliet. Marriott is smarter than [Andrew]. If the marketplace says we can afford [it]…

Andrew’s statement addresses two things of note. First, in the U.S., outside of legal encumbrances such as conservation easements, those that have property largely have the right to determine its use and disposition. For Andrew, this is an eminently personal decision, one he describes as made at the “kitchen table.” Second, and in contrast to the first, Andrew speaks to the “marketplace” as an almost anthropomorphic entity, capable of decision making. This becomes concretized in the hypothetical decision tree of a Marriott executive; however, these market forces seem to supersede the strategic decisions of business executives. As a result, he speaks of market forces—economic impetuses to make decisions—as almost autonomous. This reflects an interesting interplay between individual agentive moments and the assumed existence of free market system believed to regulate itself and perpetuate growth. As a result, the local government’s primary task becomes to create the infrastructure, policies, and conditions that will facilitate this growth best. The supposition is that individuals will continue to sell, and the market will continue to function largely unabated.
For Andrew and Scott, limitations to this self-perpetuating cycle are few. Scott believes that setting growth on the right course initially will ensure its self-perpetuation, but to “miss the moment” means missing the opportunity to grow altogether. Andrew cites geography and watershed rights rather than land as the only limiting factors in Mt. Juliet’s growth. “There’s probably a generation or two’s worth of development between here and Lebanon,” he states. The assumption behind this statement, however, is that Mt. Juliet and Lebanon’s farming population will disappear, and that most landowning residents will choose to sell out.

I inquired from him of those that might not want to sell, but who were forced due to rising property taxes:

I do think they have a seat at the table and we ought to consider their perspective. I would feel a real sense of personal disappointment if anything that we did forced someone like my ninety-six-year old grandmother-in-law down here at the end of the street to have to move because we brought in neighborhoods, retail, jobs, and forced them out of their house. But I don’t know enough about it yet—what the impact is. It is a unique perspective that a county commissioner brought to my attention, and I had never really thought about it. I thought we were doing great. Property values are going up. This is fantastic! Look at this, crime’s going down, property values are going up. This is great!

Downsides to growth are not something that Andrew appears really to have considered. And within the logic of the capitalist economic system, it does seem counterintuitive that someone might be unhappy when their own property values rise from external factors like neighborhood or city improvements. Yet, as is evident in literature regarding gentrification, without intervention—institutional or otherwise—the processes by which real estate value increases often mean that rising costs force those
without financial means to move elsewhere.²³ Having not considered such a scenario, Andrew mentions feeling discomfort at taking any kind of position regarding how to accommodate individuals who may be forced to move due to rising property values and taxes.

In addressing residents unhappy with the growth, Scott and Andrew focus not on disadvantages, but to the likely emotional reactions of the residents. Scott states, “What I try to explain to them is we’re trying to do it in the right way, something that’ll make you proud.” For Scott, the way to please unhappy citizens is through being “sympathetic” and “respectful,” and including aesthetic elements like landscaping, brick, and stone facades. However, growth is “inevitable” due to the city’s proximity to Nashville. “We’re trying to do it the right way, but it’s going to come,” he concludes. Andrew also focuses on the individuals’ assumed emotional reactions to the growth, asserting that the most effective strategy is to “engage those people in the process.” Both contend that residents wishing the growth to slow or reverse are holding onto nostalgia for the past, but, with careful civic planning and maintenance of a strict aesthetic code, these residents will come to appreciate the change.

**Becoming an Edge City**

Aside from additional growth, one stated goal several city leaders cite is to become an “edge city.” Scott and others never directly reference Joel Garreau’s 1991 book or the specific characteristics Garreau defines; however, city leaders do reference

²³ I will take up this discussion again later in this chapter when analyzing growth in light of literature regarding economic development and the capitalist production of space.
the confluence of homes, retail, and jobs and the goal of the city to become a self-sufficient entity no longer dependent on Nashville emblematic of Garreau’s concept.

Again, for Scott, the city can accomplish this according to a step-wise logic:

The focus in Mt. Juliet isn’t so much economic development; it’s providing all the services that you want, need, and deserve. That’s what draws people to your community, because rooftops are what drive retail. And retail’s what drives revenue and additional retail. Because if they’re not doing well, they don’t stay and nobody else comes. And then you’re residents end up moving away as well because they don’t have the services, so it’s about providing services for folks where they don’t feel like they have to leave their own communities.

Implicit in this is the need not only for retail and local service-sector or manufacturing jobs, but for social services as well. Social services enable economic development in this schema, and precede rooftops and retail, a somewhat differently nuanced expression of the city’s growth logic. Most importantly, these services prevent the need to ever leave the city. Scott envisions a local hospital and university in the area, so that one only has to go “down the road” to school or receive medical care.

Mayor Ed Hagerty, elected in 2011, concurs regarding such a future for Mt. Juliet. Hagerty, before assuming the office, stated that his plan for the city would be to target job creation, given that the city has done well to establish places for people to live and shop. Rather than being a mere “bedroom community” to Nashville, he feels the city can be “more. I think Mt. Juliet can be a true edge city of Nashville. People wouldn’t only sleep here and work in Nashville. They would live here and work here” (as cited in The Tennessean, 22 February 2011). Not even a year later, Hagerty declared that Mt. Juliet’s “destiny is to be more than an edge city” (as cited in Tennessean.com, 24 January 2012). It is uncertain exactly what reaching this goal will accomplish, or what the future
might be after reaching such a level. However, it is consistent with the city’s focus on economic and population growth.

**Growth and the Aesthetics of Curb Appeal**

Aesthetics are a central building block in the foundation of economic growth. To this end, the city places importance on its role in business recruitment and retention, seeking to aid small businesses in maintaining thriving trade. Scott takes a two-pronged approach to aiding underperforming businesses: establishing rapport with owners and calling attention to aesthetic inadequacies that limit “curb appeal.”

If I see something, I need to establish such a relationship with people to where I’m on a first name basis …like, ‘Hey bud, how you doing?’ …And the reason is, it’s easier to be brutally honest with somebody. Like if I walk into a business and the grass has grown up in the parking lot and the sidewalk hasn’t been washed, there’s gum right there, the front door is nasty, there’s bulbs out—I need to come in and say, ‘Just be between you and I, just from a curb appeal, you’ve got to fix these things, because folks won’t stop. Some will, but you’re not going to get nearly the customers you could.’

Scott tries to limit the number of empty storefronts as well, feeling that unfilled retail space invites crime. In this, he directly references the “broken windows theory” well known within criminology and urban sociology literature. The 1982 theory—built off a 1969 sociology experiment in which cars were purposely abandoned in Palo Alto, California to examine vandalizing behaviors—states that untended possessions in areas where it seems “no one cares” lead to the breakdown of community controls, and crime often follows (Wilson and Kelling 1982).24 Typically, this theory and subsequent

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24 The original 1982 article, published in The Atlantic magazine, describes the descent into lawlessness in this manner: “A stable neighborhood of families who care for their homes, mind each other’s children, and confidently frown on unwanted intruders can change, in a few years or even a few months, to an inhospitable and frightening jungle. A piece of property is abandoned, weeds grow up, a window is
literature on the topic have been used to modify police behavior and policing techniques; interestingly, though, Scott—who has a background in law enforcement—uses it as support for the importance of economic development. “[With] blank storefronts, broken windows—then you tend to have more crime…It makes you look like you’re slovenly…I’m not going to buy a house if it’s sitting next to a vacant, run-down, dilapidated, burned down house. Because it makes mine look bad and the property values [lower]. It’s the same with business.” Accordingly, he goes to great lengths not only to keep storefronts clean and retail space filled, but to keep business owners engaged in the aesthetic maintenance of their own stores, proposing a Build-a-Block program where storeowners should spruce up their storefronts with paint, flower planters, and gum and oil stain removal. Rather than such maintenance perhaps being the responsibility of the local government or the property owner, Scott calls upon storeowners, who likely rent their spaces, to invest time and money into aesthetic renewal, on the utilitarian premise that one individual’s actions (or lack thereof) impact the livelihood and property value of others.

Scott feels that the interest storeowners have in their business should also extend to the professionalism they convey. He recounted his advice to a local storeowner whom he felt needed to portray a more professional image, encouraging him to tuck in his shirt and wear dress slacks rather than blue jeans. Scott’s encouragement was predicated on his smashed. Adults stop scolding rowdy children; the children, emboldened, become more rowdy. Families move out, unattached adults move in. Teenagers gather in front of the corner store. The merchant asks them to move; they refuse. Fights occur. Litter accumulates. People start drinking in front of the grocery; in time, an inebriate slumps to the sidewalk and is allowed to sleep it off. Pedestrians are approached by panhandlers…. Such an area is vulnerable to criminal invasion. Though it is not inevitable, it is more likely that here, rather than in places where people are confident they can regulate public behavior by informal controls, drugs will change hands, prostitutes will solicit, and cars will be stripped” (Wilson and Kelling 1982).
“ability to be honest to him as a friend, because I felt like that could get him to the next level.” In both of these examples, the local government seems to view its role in small business retention as one of dispensing advice and shaping businesses’ awareness of their moral obligation to neighbors and community.

This moral obligation extends in the opposite direction. Just as storeowners should invest in the image of their community, Scott believes residents have an obligation to support local businesses. As a city employee, he feels a particular obligation to shop locally, even claiming that if anyone were to offer to take him out to lunch across the county line, he would refuse. He explains his belief thusly:

To me, the most important thing about economic development in any community—and this is no offense to anybody that borders Wilson County or Mt. Juliet—is if you spend a penny that you could spend in this community outside of here, shame on you. And I say that to people not to be offensive. I feel that way. You have to be passionate about your community and say, ‘You know what, when I put a penny into it, that goes back into my community.’ Somehow I know that it trickles back down to me, my kids, my schools, my roads, my infrastructure.

Scott invokes a particular logic, whereby one’s individual purchases support city and county services from which he and others, in turn, will benefit. The “trickle-down” image is powerful for many of his constituents, one that recognizes the way that residents benefit from purchasing locally. To buttress this campaign, the city has erected a number of metal signs at key intersections reading “Shop Mt. Juliet First.”

What the details above establish is that not only is economic development a primary goal of city leadership, but economic development defines much of the role the government believes itself to have. In so doing, the city appeals to a certain understanding of economic growth: one that, under the right conditions, is self-
Figure 2.7 “Shop Mt. Juliet First” signs erected at key intersections. (© Emily Ramsey)

Figure 2.8 Electronic sign erected in 2012 advertising local businesses and the “Shop Mt. Juliet First” campaign. (Used with permission of Thomas Ramsey)
perpetuating and semi-autonomous, yet relies heavily on the primacy of private property, such that landowners selling to developers becomes a *fait accompli*. While economic growth appears to be a natural, unstoppable force, at the same time, the onus lies on residents and business owners to maximize its productivity and success based on very individual actions. The aestheticization of curb appeal supports this logic by tasking business owners with duties that the city claims will not only help them but their neighbors and larger community, while the logic that sales tax will “trickle-down” to benefit residents supports the dictum to shop locally. In the end, both of these appeal to a utilitarian logic that residents and business owners should consider the greater good in their actions to improve others’ property values, business success, community, and ultimately the city’s growth. This narrative assumes almost a hegemonic status such that those that reject it—whether from an assumedly emotional vantage or because it infringes on their ability to remain landowners amidst rising property taxes—are not easily incorporated into city leaders’ account. The question thus becomes: what power lies behind how the city describes and understands economic growth? How does this logic fit with longtime residents’ understanding of economic growth and the mechanisms that propel it?

**Southern Hospitality, Community, and God and Country: Instilling Values in the Citizenry**

Aside from the duty city leaders verbalize having in encouraging and maintaining economic growth and development, the city has also taken steps to define explicitly the kind of “community” they envision and the moral values they want citizens to embody.
The explicit articulation of these goals is not unlike the prescriptive, almost paternalistic, manner in which the city encourages citizens and business owners to participate in local economic growth. This is important not only for the rhetoric the city espouses about what constitutes productive, moral citizens and a vibrant “community,” but for how this fits into the vision of growth city leaders articulated above. The “small-town feel” and community-centered orientation are one of the main ways by which it markets itself, contending that it is competitively superior to other local and national locations for the three Rs: rooftops, retail, and revenue.

The city’s mission statement is perhaps one of the clearest examples of its values:

Mt. Juliet, a city of southern hospitality, will remain a wholesome community. The city will plan growth to maintain the values of a close-knit community that provides for the needs of its people first. We will develop a core business district with vibrancy and stability. Our goal is to provide a safe environment, be responsive to citizens, and encourage educational, recreational and cultural opportunities.

It is helpful to break apart the first part of the statement, deconstructing what these concepts may mean within this particular context. The notion of “southern hospitality,” mentioned first, is one that carries much currency within the South, appealing to a certain identity that Southerners feel sets them apart in a particularly positive manner. As Tara McPherson discusses in *Reconstructing Dixie* (2003), the tradition and manners embodied in the notion of southern hospitality are a “glue that binds the South together, distinguishing it from other regions.” However, one should not interpret this sense of decorum as a natural cultural inheritance, she warns. McPherson calls the aura of tranquility and transparency attributed to southern hospitality a performance, one whose articulation with “good taste” recalls Bourdieu’s analysis of the way taste upholds social
distinction and “knowing ‘one’s place’” within the social system. For McPherson, this inherently articulates with a notion of femininity and whiteness, refinement and grace (150-1).\textsuperscript{25} In the city’s mission statement, however, “southern hospitality” is left entirely undefined, with little more than a sense of its positive connotation—a value that residents should strive to embody. The fact that, as McPherson reminds us, this concept recalls a complex gendered and racialized history and set of behaviors associated with the “good taste” of the southern social elite means the city, intentionally or not, implicitly defines itself in this tradition and seeks the same from its residents.

Scott too relies upon the concept of southern hospitality to describe city values. For him, southern hospitality and small-town charm go hand in hand, and the actions of local residents personify this value and attitude. He cites numerous examples: residents lining the streets during the funeral procession of a local soldier killed in action, “speaking to folks, waving at them when we go down the street, just going that extra mile. We haven’t gotten too big for our britches, I guess is what it is.” He sees embodying “southern charm” as an intimate part of his job as well. Rather than emailing local businesses to offer help, as one might do “out in California,” he calls or stops in to visit. In his sense, southern hospitality seems to take on a more superficial signification somewhat akin to friendliness, yet is something the rest of the country does not embody,

\textsuperscript{25} For McPherson (2003), Southern hospitality inherently is a feminized concept encompassing both strength and fragility, and contemporary Southern women, black and white, embrace popular constructions to varying degrees. This concept, however, is one that is highly romanticized, particularly in literature and contemporary regional magazines (158). Not all perceive “Southern values” so positively, though. James Cobb, in \textit{Away Down South: A History of Southern Identity} (2007), points out that Southern hospitality and gentility are the only values for which this region are known. He chronicles a number of writers at the end of the twentieth century who claimed that Southern values were shaping America “in a decidedly negative way.” Whether for elements more universally deemed negative, such as racism and poverty, or those with a more complicated popular history, such as religious fundamentalism and politically conservative agendas, the South has been characterized and even “exoticized” as inherently provincial (322).
setting the South apart. Despite the growth, Scott feels that establishing relationships with local individuals should not begin to wane, and the emphasis locals and city leaders put on this has helped to maintain the “small-town charm.” Consequently, for Scott, growth, southern hospitality, and small-town charm are not mutually exclusive; rather, this is an attitude that individuals can choose to embody despite the town’s size.

Andrew echoed a similar sentiment regarding local residents’ attitudes.

We’re very blessed, actually. I think one of the things that we have in Mt. Juliet, really, maybe even in all of Middle Tennessee, are genuinely nice people. And I think nice people attract nice people. If you’re not nice, you don’t fit in real well…I like hearing people say, ‘Everybody around here is so nice.’ And I think that leads to an enhanced quality of life.

Andrew even recounted an experience where an individual in front of him at the McDonald’s drive-thru paid for his meal; to him, this embodied the sense of community that the city possesses and that the city mission statement implicates.

*Defining “Community”*

Connections of southern hospitality and residents’ “niceness” to “small-town charm” provide perhaps an incipient sense of how the town hopes to achieve the “wholesome community” it mentions in the mission statement. Despite McPherson’s discussion of southern hospitality in connection to good taste, it seems likely that, in popular usage, individuals are beginning to divorce the concept of southern hospitality from its complex history and imply rather a generic set of behaviors associated with “friendliness.” That city leaders equate southern hospitality, small-town charm, and niceness with the existence of a sense of “community” is telling for the way in which they understand this notion. Whether from a popular or academic standpoint, the concept
of “community” implicates a broad set of social relations among individuals and implicitly the establishment of boundaries of inclusion and exclusion. The frequency with which city leaders deploy this word thus requires that this abstract concept briefly be unpacked and analyzed in light of anthropological scholarship.

Whether intentional or not, what is undeniable within a review of local newspaper sources as well as the interviews with town leaders, is the frequency with which individuals use the term “community” to refer to the city of Mt. Juliet and its residents. It is important here to note the way city leadership employs the term. Scott uses the word “community” thirty-four times in his interview, just three fewer times than he uses the word “city.” However, in Scott’s interview the word “city” appears almost exclusively to refer to institutional functions and often appears adjectivally, modifying “employee” or “government.” The word “community” however, has almost no reference to institutions or functions, and while never concretely defined seems to reference a collectivity of residents within the geographic bounds of Mt. Juliet. Phrases such as “feel like there’s a community,” “people in this community,” and “supporting the community” are common and also reflective of the ambiguity with which this term is laden. Andrew’s interview manifests similar uses: he employs the term “community” thirty-nine times and with similar connotation, compared to only eight uses of the word “city.” A superficial review of a number of newspaper articles over the past several years referencing local growth and development reveals similar frequency and usage. There seems to be a rather

26 At this point, I will focus primarily on the fuzzy way this concept is used, often with a positive valence. I will take the topic of community up again in chapter three, where long-term residents’ perspectives will help to nuance a somewhat different understanding of the word in light of historical interpretations of the term such as that of Ferdinand Tönnies.
consistent if not intentional demarcation between the use of the word “city” to refer to the institutional entity or structural functions, and the use of the word “community” to refer to groups of individuals lumped together based on a particular characteristic, such as the “retail community” referencing storeowners large and small.

Why is this significant? As Gerald Creed notes in The Seductions of Community (2006b), scholars offer few definitions of community, and often eschew them entirely, although the term has become such a part of everyday vocabulary. Consequently, many feel “community does not need defining, and this is precisely why scholars need to pay attention to it” (4, emphasis his). As Ann Grodzins Gold discusses in a 2005 working paper entitled “Conceptualizing Community: Anthropological Reflections,” anthropologists have long bristled at the term given its “fuzziness, slipperiness, denseness and thickness,” and the inability to hit upon a non-essentializing and thus non-limiting term. Drawing on criticisms by Michael Watts and Arun Agrawal, she notes that many scholars feel the term to assert a claim of univocality rather than acknowledging a “heterogeneity of interests that the term may mask;” and indeed, this issue is only exacerbated by the globalizing nature of fieldwork sites no longer “bounded” in the way that anthropologists once conceived them to be (Grodzins Gold 2005, 4-5). Despite its undefined quality and scholarly criticism of the concept, it has remained widely used both in popular circles and within academia, the latter arising in part due to 1980s critiques of the concept of “culture” as essentializing (Creed 2006b, 7).

Historically, the term “community” has connoted anything from actual social groups to qualities of relationships (Williams 1985, 75), and, as Creed argues, “people who deploy the term in one sense may unavoidably, if not intentionally, invoke other
qualities popularly associated with it. All references, then, may conjure to some degree qualities of harmony, homogeneity, autonomy, immediacy, locality, morality, solidarity, and identity, as well as the idea of shared knowledge, interests, and meanings” (Creed 2006b, 5). Regardless of the exact meaning deployed, Grodzins Gold (2005, 2), and Creed (2006b, 5), following Raymond Williams, both underscore the positive sense the term is assumed to indicate. As Williams (1985) states, “unlike all other terms of social organization (state, nation, society, etc.) it seems never to be used unfavourably” (76). It is the fact that it is rarely used unfavorably that is important here. City leaders, local newspaper reports, and the like seem to capitalize upon this positive connotation to describe an ambiguous collectivity of residents bound together by positive social relations. Whether intentionally or unconsciously used, as Creed argues, this term frequently implies a sense of solidarity, shared knowledge, and common interests among group members, requiring a degree of homogeneity, whether in background, moral or political views, or both. Consequently, when city leaders describe developing “wholesome community” as the city’s mission, they implicitly invoke a set of shared behaviors, morals, and beliefs, that—vague as they may be—could further homogenize an already primarily white middle-class demographic, or at least prevent it from diversifying. Thus, “wholesome community” has an abidingly positive connotation that only further connects it to the Bourdieuan sense of “good taste” that McPherson aligns with southern hospitality. Whose wholesome taste it is we are left to interpret ourselves; however, as I will argue below, the members of the local government make considerable efforts at defining these values publicly through regular editorial columns.
Furthermore, as Creed argues in his article “Community as Modern Pastoral,” contemporary use of the word community has deeply romantic element to it, one he finds fits well within in the rural-urban opposition. It came to represent “what was apparently lost” for nineteenth century theorists and retroactively came to be associated with “living embodiments of the past—the rural countryside and village” (Creed 2006a, 24-5). To remove the romantic notion, Creed contends, means the term becomes little more than a synonym for “group” (40). And while in interviews and local media sources “community” often stands in for the word “group,” recognition of its romantic essence—of a group of individuals bound together by common geography and common values—cannot be forgotten. In this context, this becomes infinitely more important when considering the rapid local growth. In popular usage, community is often predicated upon not only inclusion in (or exclusion from) a group with a shared common bond, but also a group implicitly demarcated in size such that individuals feel connected a whole that is not too large, lest anonymity and detachment result. Rapid growth can threaten that bond. Continued use of the word community insists upon maintaining a connection to one’s rural foundation—a foundation that many longtime residents remember and a history upon which the city frequently capitalizes. To use the term “community” frequently conjures the romantic notion that residents—new and old—participate in this shared

27 The concept of “community” is most famously associated with Ferdinand Tönnies and his distinction between gemeinschaft and gesellschaft, often translated as “community” and “civil society” respectively. Reacting against a modernizing and industrializing world, Tönnies established a dichotomy between a detached, individualistic set of social relations and a family-like set of duties and values he saw rooted in the natural world (Grodzins Gold 2005, 6–7). This is not unlike the binaries Durkheim articulated in his “mechanical” and “organic” solidarity (Creed 2006a, 25) or Weber suggested in his “communal” versus “associative” social relations (Grodzins Gold 2005, 7). While scholars in recent decades have deviated from the way that Tönnies himself defined the notion of “civil society,” they often point to him as the foundational for work on theorizing the idea of community.
God and Country: Core Values in the American South

Southern hospitality, niceness, and community are not the only values espoused by city leadership. The city explicitly invokes civic and national pride as well as the Christian faith as values it wants to express to the world. In 2012, newly elected mayor Ed Hagerty proposed the idea of physically manifesting the symbolic values of “God and country” on land adjacent to the main Mt. Juliet interstate exchange by erecting a “gigantic” cross. He wished this to complement a nearby massive American flag already atop a cell phone tower. In his inaugural State of the City speech, Hagerty declared that “‘God and country’ would be a very positive image for Mt. Juliet to project.” His ostensible reasoning was that he sought to balance the image of commerce evoked by nearby shopping centers with “‘other things that are important’” (as cited in Tennessean.com, 24 January 2012), so that those traveling through the area would know “‘that we stand first and foremost for God and country’” (as cited in Mt. Juliet News, 25 January 2012). Yet in the same speech, the mayor also mentioned his desire for a mega-church “‘that could draw large crowds to the city on Sundays and benefit local businesses’” (as cited in Tennessean.com, 24 January 2012). A serious plan, the proposal met with questioning by locals and even derision on a website devoted to mocking and satirizing “bizarre and amusing stories” (“FARK.com” 2016).

While he makes the connection among commerce, support of one’s country, and Christian values explicit, the Hagerty overlooks the manner in which this implicitly
commodifies the very values the city seeks to espouse. Hagerty’s desire for a mega-church in the area underscores this fact; he wishes for a mega-church not to serve the religious needs of citizens, but instrumentally for the commercial benefits it would bring local businesses in the after-church lunch rush. In the same way, even though a cross adjacent to an American flag may imply that city espouses these values, it simultaneously acts as symbolic capital for values highly esteemed by many in the American South, giving the city more credence with potential shoppers and new residents. With the city’s often stated desire for economic growth, the financial advantage that a cross and flag convey is likely not lost on city leadership.28

Defining Public Values “Publicly”

City leaders seek to define public values in other ways as well. City Manager Kenny Martin has a regular column in The Chronicle entitled “Reflections from an Old Friend,” as well as a “local government” column in the Mt. Juliet News. In this, he writes public service announcements on everything from how to recognize suicidal tendencies in others, to domestic abuse during the holidays, helping senior citizens recognize scams, and the importance of valuing one’s fleeting time on earth. Frequently, these editorials address ongoing changes within the city and how Martin believes that residents should react. These city-oriented public service announcements focus on topics that the city holds dear, such as the trickle-down effect that “buying Mt. Juliet first” and funneling

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28 This appears in some ways to ignore the constitutional issue of the separation of church and state. While there was no statement from the city specifically on this issue, interestingly, the newspaper did consult a local resident and pastor for their opinions, who both state they appreciated the stance the city was taking and given the predominant faith of the community, it seemed appropriate (Tennessean.com, 24 January 2012).
sales tax dollars into city coffers has \( (The \ Chronicle, 19 \ September \ 2012; \ Mt. \ Juliet \ News, \ 23 \ September \ 2015). \) In one column, Martin decries recent local acts of vandalism as a form of “terrorism on the local level.” “Vandals apparently fail to see or care what their senseless acts of vandalism and destruction committed against the victims does to innocent lives and the costs that eventually gets passed on to innocent citizens and taxpayers,” he continues, focusing throughout the article on the assumed entitled attitude of vandals and the mental and financial costs to victims, and imploring the vandals to stop \( (Mt. \ Juliet \ News, \ 15 \ June \ 2014). \)

Some editorials seek to persuade residents to be “good” citizens through language and imagery meant to flatter and inspire. At the death of two “community icons,” Chamber of Commerce President Mark Hinesley exhorts residents to contribute to their communities for future generations so that, just as they enjoy the shade from “the mighty oak we call Mt. Juliet” planted by these men, others can continue to do the same years from now. This, he argues, requires a “steep price” now: planning, investment, maintenance, and upgrade. However, without due planning, he cautions, towns risk death “with little hope of ever returning to a vibrant and growing community” \( (Mt. \ Juliet \ News, \ 15 \ June \ 2014) \) \ In a similar column, using flattering and saccharine language, Martin ultimately calls for residents to support one another and embody the values of the city motto:

Every corner I turn in Mt. Juliet finds yet another reason to love Mt. Juliet and its residents even more…The wonderful thing about Mt. Juliet is that it only gets better with time…Many others are now coming to learn and love what others have known for years that Mt. Juliet is the greatest place to live in the world.

Let’s continue to build upon our wonderful heritage by supporting each other and our business community…Like an old house in a subdivision, if we let one
window get and stay broken in one house, then before you know it all of the windows will be broken. We must maintain our image and core values, character, integrity, charm, southern hospitality, support for one another, and loving hearts to keep Mt. Juliet on the right course for ourselves, our kids, our grandchildren and our great grandchildren.

Mt. Juliet’s in store for some wonderful things if we work together as a team. Our team is Mt. Juliet. This is our backyard, our front porch and our home, and we must support our team and all of its players to stay on the course of victory and a wonderful and prosperous future. What an awesome place to call home and share with my family, friends, neighbors and visitors. (*Mt. Juliet News*, 25 September 2013)

Interestingly, rather than applying it to the built environment, Martin figuratively invokes the broken windows theory, extending to attitudes and values that the citizenry should embody. If individuals relinquish these values for more inferior ones, the house of cards will begin to tumble and the “community” will deteriorate. Rather, residents should maintain pride in the wonderful place they live and neighbors they have, creating a rosy future for all.

There is little context as to whether a particular negative incident provoked Martin to publish this column. However, from this and other examples, the government’s belief in their duty to instill a particular set of values and behaviors among citizens is unmistakable. This includes behaviors that seek to sustain and promote future city growth. These values feed into the larger narrative shaping the city’s public identity—the “story they tell themselves about themselves” (Geertz 1973, 448). This story is also one that city leaders advertise highly, telling others why they should come to Mt. Juliet to live, work, or shop. Ultimately, these values support the narrative compelling the growth machine.
The Beauty of Development: The Modern Suburban Aesthetic

As underscored by city leaders’ attitudes regarding the aesthetics of curb appeal, they perceive suburban development—housing, commercial space, public spaces—to be beautiful. These developments are to evoke a feeling of civic pride for residents occupying these spaces, and a feeling of personal pride for those that have sold land or farms to developers once they see the end result. Adele’s statement, then, that she hoped her parents would be proud of the development bearing their name fits within this scheme, just as Scott believed that once unhappy residents saw the landscaping and architectural elements incorporated into the new developments, they would feel pride as well. Local developer Harry also mentioned the pride he felt in being able to make both sellers and homebuyers happy with the kind of development he created.

Much of this pride is tied to the notion that what was created from undeveloped land was “beautiful,” in contrast to the much reviled strip malls for which suburbia is famous. To that end, the government has created strict codes regarding the architectural style, landscaping, and decorative elements used in new developments. Scott highlighted this in our interview, saying, “You’ll never see again the days of where you can just come and slap up an old vinyl-siding building or aluminum-siding building.” As a result, business owners often complain about “tough” sign ordinances, and are required to provide landscape buffers adjacent to residential land. Businesses must follow these policies even when they defy logic; when the coffee shop adjacent my parents’ farm installed a drive-thru lane, for example, the city planning commission required them to plant trees along its edge, despite the fact that the property line backed up to dense woods nearly a quarter of a mile from our house.
Harry recounted how strict the planning commission had become with regulations in recent years and number of revisions the city might require:

By then the planning commission was beginning to get more involved...I think they made me change the engineering drawings and everything and the layout of the subdivision four or five times. It was time, time, and more money to apply. So the night we finished it, they said, ‘Well, are you happy with everything?’ And I said, ‘You know, we’ve come a long way.’...Now, I said, ‘No, change the name.’ And they said, ‘What are you going to change it [to]?’ And I said, ‘You folks have ridden me like a horse for about a year, so I’m going to have “saddle” in the name.’ So I named it Saddlebrook.

In contrast, he remembered drawing plans for his first venture—a pizza parlor—on a brown paper bag.

Among those examining suburban development, architects have taken a special interest in the topic of suburban aesthetics and individuals’ reactions to elements deemed distinctly “suburban.” Gillham ties the controversy over unattractive nature of suburban

Figure 2.9 Coffeehouse’s landscape buffer adjacent dense woods on residential property. (© Emily Ramsey)
development to Americans’ idealization of their inherited cultural landscape, namely pastoral areas, small villages, and large cities, all dubbed “quintessentially American,” but which Gillham (2002) argues are “archetypal realms” idealized as free from any attendant drawbacks. Instead, he argues, detractors depict sprawl as “new and garish” because “‘the patina of age’” has not yet had time to develop. Indeed, Gillham notes, many of the remedies for sprawl—such as adding trees or moving parking behind developments—are aesthetic as well (144–48). Duany, Plater-Zyberk, and Speck (2000) criticize many of the aesthetic elements placed in contemporary subdivisions for the fact that they rarely accomplish what developers intend them to. Townhouses built on a zig-zag angle; wide, serpentine streets; and clusters of landscaping—while attractive on paper—in practice look cluttered, waste space and resources, and are uncomfortable for pedestrians (74–75).

One can frequently find these elements and others, typically billed as amenities, within new suburban developments within Mt. Juliet. Even the most basic subdivisions include wide, winding streets and cul-de-sacs, houses with brick fronts, and an ornate sign designating the subdivision entrance, surrounded by sumptuous landscaping. Higher-end, more expensive subdivisions include additional aesthetic elements or amenities: brick or stone on three or all four sides of a house, gas lampposts, wrought-iron signposts, brick mailbox enclosures, walking trails, and purposely undeveloped wooded areas or open spaces. The choice of which of these elements to include frequently derives from conversation between the local planning commission and the developer, mediated by considerations of location, cost, and the kind of development envisioned for that site. Sometimes, city government highly restricts what developers can place on a particular
site, such as the developing “old town center” on the site of the old elementary and high school near the railroad tracks. Other times, developers self-restrict, as Harry recounted regarding a new subdivision he helped develop; with the decision to include houses enveloped entirely in brick or stone, gas lampposts, and aggregate driveways, the subdivision “turned out real, real nice.” These aesthetic elements, however, come with a cost, passed off to consumers in higher house purchasing prices, homeowner association fees, and requirements that homeowners abide by a certain set of aesthetic regulations like frequent yard mowing.

Scott plans on investing city funds in aesthetic elements meant to contribute to an overall city “ambience.” Following the widening of the main north-south thoroughfare in town, he proposed building sidewalks, something the town had never had before. Along these sidewalks would sit “antique street lamps or the antique little benches and garbage containers.” Following the five-lane road’s completion, the city did carry out its project, and now, flat cedar benches sit along the road at quarter-mile intervals. Adjacent these benches are antique-style wrought-iron sign posts holding a banner bearing a picture of Mt. Juliet resident and country music singer Charlie Daniels along with the phrases “Welcome to Mt. Juliet” and “God Bless America.”

As with the above theory of curb appeal, for city leaders, aesthetic touches contribute to everyone’s experience of the town—whether that of residents or those passing through. Scott encapsulates this well, stating, “To me, every stretch of road that you travel through in Mt. Juliet ought to be mowed meticulously...Because it’s all about the experience. The ambiance.” Aesthetics matter, and they contribute to the city’s overall image and ultimately to its future growth.
The Power of the Rural

Intimately tied to the aesthetic in Mt. Juliet, and indeed much of the South in general, is the notion of the rural. Not only do individuals typically associate the idea of the rural with American heritage, farming, agrarian values, and a quiet, simple lifestyle, but it becomes aligned with nature itself—often identified as untouched, virgin land that possesses inherent value from its beauty. The aesthetic power of the rural, natural world is deeply influential, driving individuals to make choices about how they live and connect to the natural world, their own land, the location of a house or farm they might choose to buy, consumptive practices, and even the way they relate to products or commodities. A

Figure 2.10 Bench and sign adjacent completed five-lane highway. (Used with permission of Thomas Ramsey.)
particularly powerful example of this is the recent trend of constructing “agrihoods,” in which developers build a subdivision around a small, professionally run farm, something residents appreciate for the access to fresh produce, convenience, community-building space it provides, and of course, the bucolic views (Strassman 2016). It is this last part that points to the phenomenon of commodifying the rural or nature, capitalizing off of the affective power these categories have either to invoke a certain set of ideals and values, or ultimately for capitalistic gain.

In the context of my field site, I most palpably experienced the power of the rural through residents who expressed a tie to their farmland, its beauty, and agrarian values, as well as vicariously through the eyes of new residents, who landowners said flocked to the margins of their farms to drink in view of bucolic grassy fields, trees, and livestock. Yet many of the newcomers desire the views, but not the work. Holly, a teacher and young mother, who had come from a farming background was happy she had married into another farm family. Despite the hard work, she said, the labor was satisfying and living on and connecting to the land was “peaceful.” “I like the openness…the whole nature part. The trees, the grass, the quiet” she mused, sitting at her kitchen table and looking out at the back field. Rose, with the county agriculture extension agency, expressed a similar sentiment, while reflecting on the power she saw the image of the rural possessing: “Who does not love the cowboy? Who does not want to wear a pair of cowboy boots? Getting into the jeans and…it’s amazing to me that those things just naturally appeal. Being on the farm—people coming to your farm and visiting and them saying, ‘Man I’d love to live this way.’ They love the rural life.” Like Wendell Berry and
other agrarian authors, Rose expresses that there is something innate about human ties to the natural, rural world—a sentiment upon which many capitalize.

This carries over into how organizations and businesses structure the services they provide for local citizens. Maria, who had been helping to plan an expanded YMCA in the area, mentioned that a large portion of the chosen site would be left “green” because “you don’t try to mess with what’s already there.” Patrons appreciated the sense of being “in nature,” she explained. “You don’t want to see telephone poles and electrical poles. That has too much of a large city feel to it. As long as you can keep nature as close to [what] nature is, then people appreciate it. That’s where the small town comes in.” Jacob, who farms and owns a barn restoration business, expressed that affection for the rural drove a moderate portion of his new construction work. Rather than building metal barns, which were far less expensive to construct and maintain, some individuals requested new wooden barns, seeking an authentic look that appeals to a longstanding image of Americana. In both these examples, the rural becomes connected with other powerful notions, such as authenticity and small-town charm.

Appreciation for aesthetic rural beauty can structure not just individual feelings, but collective responses. Audra Ladd, a coordinator for the Land Trust for Tennessee, gave an example of Nashville neighbors who collectively determined to preserve their lands in a continuous block of conservation easements. The central motivation here, Ladd explained, was that neighbors would be able to rest knowing that the scenic view they enjoyed of their own and neighbors’ property would be preserved in perpetuity. “That was one or two people saying, ‘Alright, I’m going to do this,’ and rallying five or six neighbors to basically preserve a valley…It’s on a ridge, and so when a neighbor looks
out their window at a neighbor’s land, that’s preserved. So it was like this shared scenic benefit of everyone getting together and collectively saying, ‘This is our neighborhood, this is what we want to do.’” Indeed, Ladd stated that much of what motivated people to conserve property was their attachment to bucolic vistas and personal ties to that site.

These images and ideals indeed are powerful tools, and are used liberally with respect to advertising Mt. Juliet’s rural heritage. On the city’s website homepage, despite statistics touting the growth, four of the five photos are of “natural” amenities germane to the area: two of the lakeshore, one of a shady park lane, and one a fencerow adjacent a verdant field (“City of Mt. Juliet, Tennessee” 2016). The website for the upcoming development Nichols Vale capitalizes on similar images, featuring a child on his father’s shoulders gazing into leafy trees, a table of farm-fresh tomatoes, and a laughing mother and children lying in grass. The background banner shows a field of uncut hay and trees, perhaps one of the very ones being developed into the subdivision itself. Subdivisions and street names also appeal to a rustic natural setting, sometimes combined with references to a generic sense of heritage. Local suburban street names like Sterling Woods, Arbor Springs, Legacy Park, Sunnymeade, Rolling Meadow, Meadow Glen, Rolling Creek, Stonehollow, Greystone, and Park Knoll abound.29 In contrast, many of the older local streets are informative in nature, named after families had lived on them—the Basses, Westons, Curds, Pages—or for features defining the road, such as proximity to a ferry, railroad, or city.

29 Jackson (1985) mentions this trend, noting that from the construction of Llewellyn Park in New Jersey in the mid-1800s, “residential developers began to name streets after the bucolic and the peaceful” (273). Duany, Plater-Zyberk, and Speck (2000) call these names “contrived” stating that they “pay tribute to the natural or historic resources they have displaced” (5).
Sometimes rural symbols and references lack context except for those that knew what came before. At a retail center called The Paddocks, developers made reference to the fact that the land used to be a horse farm through its name and a white paddock fence with two jumping gates next to a drainage basin. While the paddock has since been removed, the white fences along the medians remain as decorative elements calling upon a rural past. In these examples, developers explicitly use these images to invoke values and symbols popularly associated with rurality and nature, which they assume to retain their power, even if the locally specific reference is inaccessible.

**NIMBYism and Rural-Suburban Junctures**

Even if images or vistas of the rural and nature seduce newcomers, it is impossible for their growing presence not to leave a mark on the built environment. This is why, when Josie’s Nashville family mentions coming to visit her “in the country,” she scoffs, saying that “Mt. Juliet’s not the country anymore.” Suburban development is affecting not only the farmland vistas, but the wildlife that had lived in the woods and fields as well. Because of growing fox, hawk, and coyote populations, William explained that he was unable any longer to keep chickens outside, remarking to those that request “free-range eggs” that if he did that, “I won’t have no damn chickens.” Coyotes, which were virtually unseen two decades ago, have become increasingly brazen, venturing out in daylight, while wild turkey flocks, deer sightings, and deer-vehicle accidents are now everyday.

As retail and affordable home prices attract newcomers to the area, junctures between the “suburban” and the “rural” are increasingly sites of resistance to the
Figure 2.11 Decorative horse paddock and jumps adjacent The Paddocks shopping center in 2010. The area now lies vacant. (© Emily Ramsey)

Figure 2.12 Decorative horse fence at The Paddocks shopping center as a nod to the Thurman farm’s past. (© Emily Ramsey)
unstoppable freight train of growth, and yet sometimes confusion remains when the “rural” collides with the suburban. During a recent neighborhood barbeque in Mt. Juliet, nearby cattle escaped their field due to a downed fence from nearby blasting. Neighbors marveled at the site and size of the herd. One woman called them “beautiful, majestic animals,” but followed up by saying, “but this is a residential neighborhood. Where did they come from?” Eventually, one man tried to wave them off with a bat and broom, but it took a call to local police and over an hour to get them corralled again (Langley 2016).

Situations that once might have been unremarkable, such as wandering cattle out of their fence, now make the Nashville evening news.

Despite the confusion, newcomers desperately want to hold on to the rural ideal that in part attracted them. One of the ironies many of longtime residents I interviewed pointed out is that newcomers tend to want growth to stop at the point they enter an area. Such an attitude, sometimes highlighted by the pejorative acronym NIMBY, or “not in my backyard,” references those against a particular change to the nearby built environment, even though they may perceive the development as good overall—just elsewhere. This is perfectly encapsulated in Del-Webb resident’s concern about a 2011 addition to Lake Providence, where residents complained that community amenities, such as the clubhouse, were already overcrowded and to add more houses would make things untenable (The Chronicle of Mt. Juliet, 22 June 2011, 1). Yet NIMBYism is frowned upon for more than individuals’ ironic self-preservationist attitudes; it is often also castigated as a “drag on America’s economic growth” (Capps 2015).

The trouble with NIMBYism is that typically those protesting the change typically have little recourse except hoping that their objections will sway those making
decisions. Mayor Hagerty addressed this attitude in his 2015 State of the City address, noting that he heard the argument “quite frequently that people don’t want the open field behind them developed. ‘If you like the deer and turkey in the field behind you, you need to buy that field,’” he quipped, stating that growth was inevitable (as cited in The Chronicle of Mt. Juliet, 28 January 2015, 3). Just a few months later, the planning commission heard similar complaints from neighbors adjacent a proposed new industrial development following the sale of the farm. Appealing again to the rural, neighbors claimed that the “area would lose its rural character” and would no longer be able to hear frogs, crickets, and birds or see a starry sky at night, calling it a “win-win-win-lose situation,” with all but the neighbors winning. Citing the right of the property owner to sell his property to whomever he chose, the council passed the measure (Mt. Juliet News, 13 May 2015, 3).

Landowning and other longtime residents often responded with frustration at newer residents’ desire for things to remain the same as at their time of entry. Such an attitude, they felt, was short-sighted in that it failed to recognize the continuity of change that residents present in the town sixty or eighty years had seen. Helena Mae’s words are exemplary of this:

Helena Mae: And really what irks me about the development recently is people who have been here, oh, maybe twelve, fifteen years—maybe even as much as twenty years now—when they see something else coming in, ‘Oh, we don’t want anything changing! We want it just like it was when we moved to Mt. Juliet!’ What do they think about the few of us still left that were here all along and saw all of it! But no, ‘We want it just like we found it. We don’t consider that we messed up other people.’

ER: Do you feel kind of invaded on sometimes?

Helena Mae: When I hear some of these—to me, they’re newcomers—complain about another development going in, yes. I resent it. I do. I really do.
Similarly, Adele recounted the irony that, despite her status as a private landowner who could choose to sell her property, if she were to do so, she imagined she would have seventy-five complaining neighbors protesting her decision:

And you know that’s one thing…one of the fields behind this house now that does back up to Providence. There’re like seventy-five neighbors if you count all of the lots that back up to that field, so that field now has seventy-five different homeowners that will be affected if we ever do anything with that property. And I can just see it now, if we decide to sell that field at some point in the future, and we go back out here to our little Mt. Juliet Planning Commission, there’re going to be seventy-five people wanting to stand there and tell me why I shouldn’t do something. And I’m going to say, ‘I was here first!’

Interestingly, although Adele imagines asserting her agency and rights as a private property owner should she choose to sell, she recognizes her neighbors’ affective connection to her own land, in some ways establishing her neighbors as a collectivity to which she must answer. This gives an interesting twist to the way that the government has deployed utilitarianism in relation to growth. What happens if a group of neighbors use a utilitarian argument on which the government often relies against a private property owner planning to sell? As in the case of the Beckwith industrial development, will private property rights and the potential for growth continue to trump affective connections to land, even if mobilized on a large scale?

Some recognize their indirect contribution to or maintenance of the growth. For example, when thinking about the farm backing up to her parents’ house, Jennifer, a thirty year old that had grown up in Mt. Juliet, recognized the irony of her affinity for bucolic rural views:

I think Tennessee is so beautiful, and it might be because I grew up in a farming family, but I hate seeing the farms disappear. And I think we’re losing so many farms, so many historic structures just lost—neat little places—to development.
Right now my parents, they have a huge farm behind their house, and so we used to look at it every day. In the evening, you’d see the sun set, and I’d just think—‘What if somebody went back and developed this?’ Just how sad I would be, but at the same time, it’s kind of a NIMBY thought, because here it is, my parents live in this 1970s subdivision!

Yet, from longtime residents, their perception is that the majority of newcomers are not this perceptive regarding the ongoing change to which they contribute.

**Contextualizing Growth and Rurality: The Hegemony of Naturalized Logics**

How does one read together the propensity toward growth alongside the affinity toward the rural and the desire to see rural spaces remain as they were when one entered? What is the result when these two desires collide? The unyielding growth and the preservation of the rural in many ways are contradictory values that the city and its residents hold in tension. Thus, when responding to the complaints of residents protesting the Beckwith industrial warehouse, Mayor Hagerty stated “‘My preference, if I could have [it] would be that somebody would come along and buy fifty-five acres and want to live in that house that exists right there today and have a horse farm, cows, whatever they want to do. I would personally love that. I don’t control that property. The person who does has every right to sell it,’” he was expressing a desire that is in many ways contradictory to the values he and the town have elsewhere espoused regarding the primacy of growth (as cited in *The Lebanon Democrat*, 13 May 2015, 3). My aim below is to try to set these conflicting values in conversation with one another, and come to understand, in part, how they both appear to act as naturalized discourses legitimating their own, contradictory logics.
The Aestheticization and Consumption of Nature

As discussed above, the idea of the rural as a repository of value and identity, particularly for Americans, has proven powerful across the centuries. Agrarians and contemporary suburbanites alike appeal to the domain of the rural as a seat of ideological power that has an explicitly affective component. Thus, it is unsurprising when Linda recounts her satisfaction that the land behind her might be in a land trust, preventing its development:

We’re hoping, from what we had heard it was...what is that—in a land trust? We’re hoping that’s true, because we’ve lived here—moved in this house in ’77 and it has never sold, so I’m hoping and praying it is. It’s just such a beautiful view. And you would hate to think...you can go out your back and see the cow back there. Of course, I don’t have to feed the cows. That’s a wonderful thing. I can look out and enjoy the serenity and peacefulness of the scene.

In many ways tied in with these notions of rurality is that undeveloped land and all it is thought to represent hearkens to a certain “authentic,” primordial, or natural state that one is able to perceive and experience. As Sharon Zukin (2008) says in her analysis of how authenticity relates to gentrifying spaces in Manhattan and Brooklyn, “we can only see spaces as authentic from outside them. Mobility gives us the distance to see a neighborhood in terms of the way it looks, enables us to hold it to an absolute standard of urbanity or cosmopolitanism, and encourages us to judge its character apart from any personal history or intimate social relationships we have there” (728). In positing this, Zukin draws on Lefebvre’s notion of a “space of representation rather than a lived experience born of the conflicts and solidarities that develop when different groups share space” (728). Zukin’s analysis of authenticity is helpful in that it reminds us that, despite the persistent connection between rural spaces and a universal human connection to
nature, this perception is a social construction, although it can be particularly compelling for those from “outside” (and within) the rural sphere.

Following Zukin, it is beneficial briefly to touch on Lefebvre’s contribution. Rather than focusing on space as a mental construct, Lefebvre centers his aim on social space, which he argues “is a social product” comprised of three intersecting relations that tend to subsume power relations: spatial practice, closely associated with how individuals perceive space in their daily or urban reality; representations of space, which are comprised of quantitative measures of space such as maps; and representational space, “space as directly lived through its associated images and symbols” (Lefebvre 1991, 26; 38–39). Lefebvre argues this latter portion of the triad is the “dominated—and hence passively experienced—space which the imagination seeks to change and appropriate,” overlaying physical space and rendering its objects as symbols (39). Thus, the ideological role these spaces play, such as the rural vistas on which newcomers look, is unmistakable, and these spaces indeed seem to resonate the symbolic inheritance that the rural has collected through its intimate association with American identity and values over the centuries. As Lefebvre notes, an implication of the social production of space, particularly in the capitalist realm from which he works, is that “natural space is disappearing...Everyone wants to protect and save nature; nobody wants to stand in the way of an attempt to retrieve its authenticity. Yet at the same time everything conspires to harm it” (30–31). Imbuing rural space with authenticity and ideological weight as a representational space, then, appears ultimately to do little to protect it. Just as he states that representational space is a “dominated” sphere, one passively experienced, through
its interweaving with spatial practice and representations of space in a capitalist society, he argues that “nature...now waits only for its ultimate voidance and destruction” (31).

Whether or not we accept Lefebvre’s dire warning of nature’s ultimate demise, coming to understand exactly how nature came to occupy this kind of an ideological position and how it came to relate to capitalism in a dynamic that often results in its destruction is helpful. Neil Smith in Uneven Development: Nature, Capital, and the Production of Space (2008) examines the history of the ideology of nature, suggesting that treatment of nature as external to humans exists philosophically as far back as the writings of Francis Bacon (14). Yet in Newton and other early scientific conceptions, nature was also universal—an essence that comprises all things (16). This external-universal dichotomy received greater ideological nuance during nineteenth-century romantic movements which imagined a universal connection within humans to nature, something that was juxtaposed to the civilized human world that increasingly took nature under control through industrialization. Indeed, “the romanticism of nineteenth-century America was a direct response to the successful objectification of nature in the labor process,” Smith argues (25). Had nature not already been “substantially subdued,” romanticism would have been “insane, even suicidal” (26). It is thus because humans gained increasing control over the natural world through technology, Smith argues, that universal nature—and thus the power of the rural imaginary—even came to be.

Smith makes a further relevant point here. While nature as external and subjugated has come to be taken for granted, even seen as “natural,” universal nature, too, has taken on this sense. “The overriding function of the universal conception today is to invest certain social behaviors with the status of natural events by which is meant that
these behaviors and characteristics are normal, God-given, unchangeable” (29). Although it relies on the separate existence of external nature, Smith argues that universal nature is one of the most powerful tools in the capitalist arsenal, one which naturalizes ideologies such as private property, profit, competition, and the like. Under this logic, “capitalism is natural; to fight it is to fight human nature” (29). For Smith, following his own reading of Marx, this ultimately leads to the production of nature, in which no part of the earth is immune from transformation by capital. This takes its most extreme form in supposedly unproduced environments such as national parks. “From the management of the wildlife to the alteration of the landscape by human occupancy, the material environment bears the stamp of human labor,” Smith states (80). In these instances, I would also argue, nature becomes a commodity whose exchange value is easily packaged and sold.

How does this relate to the present scenario of suburbanization and the rural? Just as Smith argues that nature is produced, so too are the environments and landscapes that newcomers find so compelling and that the local government advertises as reflective of the city’s heritage and backdrop. The production of nature, which relies on a dichotomization between nature as something external to us and yet universal, facilitates the scenario in which residents come to consume these bucolic views. Given the universal bond posited between humans and nature, our desire to connect to rural vistas become naturalized and unquestioned. This resides on the long and complex romantic agrarian history and ideological separation of the rural sphere from that of the urban/suburban, shaped in large part by industrialization. As Wendell Berry states, “with the rise of industry, we begin to romanticize the wilderness—which is to say we begin to institutionalize it within the concept of the ‘scenic’” (1977, 100). As we institutionalize
the concept of the scenic, it becomes aestheticized, further enabling its commodification given its deep connection with an idealistic and ideological past. This is not to say that land and “nature” are not commodified in other ways, such as through the naturalization of a system of private property, and indeed, this age-old commodification enables as we have seen above, city government to support the logic of continued growth. But in this space, residents are not only consuming goods through retail purchases; they are consuming the rustic images the local government and developer websites present, as well as the vista outside their back door. Rurality thus becomes a commodity, one that is aestheticized, “chang[ing] the object's function: we do not look at it any longer in terms of its referential representativeness but regard it as a form of representation that has the freedom to redefine and transform reality or even to invent it anew” (Fluck 2005, 26). By transforming scenic views or images and connecting them with rural ideology, nature is further externalized and becomes wholly produced, making it ripe for consumption.

The Hegemony of Rhetoric on Growth

In many ways, while the growth bias in economics is rooted in a myriad of attitudes and assumptions, in this context, rhetoric on growth and progress as inherently necessary often rests on the commodification of rustic views described above, not simply in, as Smith suggests, the way that nature becomes subjugated to capital and is fodder for additional capitalist production (or distribution through sale of goods in constructed retail space). Rather, pastoral views and their aestheticization on websites and in symbols of a rustic past are key elements in facilitating the continued growth given their formative nature in the narrative of the town’s history and its current constructed identity. Yet with
continued growth as it is currently constructed, where no ostensible plan exists to
preserve green spaces or encourage residents to hold onto their farms, destruction of these
rural spaces appears imminent. How, then, do we read the power of the rural into a
situation where growth appears hegemonic? Is it, as Ching and Creed suggest, another
situation in which urban hegemony reigns (1997, 10–11)? Is it, as others like Harvey,
Lefebvre, and Schumpeter suggest in various theoretical incarnations, largely the path of
contemporary capitalism (Harvey 1989, 106–7; Lefebvre 1991, 30–31; Schumpeter 1994,
83)? How, then, are we to understand the various trajectories residing within the city’s
rhetoric on growth?

I would like to break down first the archival and ethnographic material I presented
earlier in the chapter. City leaders appear to construct a highly nuanced understanding of
growth and progress, predicated on a particular logical framework. The city, I argue, feels
that growth is best facilitated when it functions in a recruiting and regulatory fashion.
Through a carefully constructed image in résumés and brochures, the city recruits new
developers and retail to the area, providing the foundation for additional growth. The
regulatory function ensures that growth continues, both through making local businesses
the best they can be, and through publicly defining the kind of happy, moral citizens the
city desires. These conditions should present the optimal medium for continued growth
and economic development.

Yet aside from the regulatory and recruiting role the city government plays, they
construct their agentive capacity to control or shape growth as highly limited. In this
manner, individual private property rights appear sacrosanct, and the government is at a
loss to do anything other than permit development. This logic appears time and again in
newspaper articles quoting city officials, from Hagerty’s statement that he had no control
over what the property owner chose to do, to a recent situation in which City Manager
Kenny Martin responded to residents’ complaints at the proposed subdivision
construction on the city’s only golf course. Martin further responded that, given
population growth, the city needed more houses, and that “the growth is going to come
regardless. It’s one of those things that we need to embrace and make the most of it” (as
cited in Royster 2016). While the private property system is one on which American legal
rights rest, it is worth noting that appealing to this logic, while it absolves the government
of any responsibility, also functions to facilitate further growth.

Martin’s second statement is interesting for the way that it portrays growth as an
unstoppable, almost anthropomorphic force. Here and elsewhere, city leaders appear to
use the inability to stop growth as an implicit justification to dismiss those that are critical
of the pace at which the growth is occurring and bothered by the spaces sacrificed as a
result of the demand for more rooftops. By appealing to the primacy of private property
and growth and market demand as themselves agentive forces, Martin’s and others’
statements obscure decision-making processes, setting themselves up on the powerless
side of the agency-structure continuum. While historical antecedents to growth and other
conditions are indeed external factors, growth also would not have occurred at this pace
without specific decisions to encourage it. Low property taxes, grants sought for city
projects, and business relocation incentives, including incentive proposals to counter
offers submitted by other cities,30 are intentional choices made to spur economic and

30 For example, one newspaper article detailed the city’s bidding procedures in order to lure a logistics
company to the area, which it did so successfully the following year (The Tennessean, 21 November 2012,
1A; 4A).
population growth. In fact, other nearby towns such as Leiper’s Fork have, with public input, established plans in the opposite direction—to ensure that development is “compatible in size, scale, and character” with its existing historical buildings and the bucolic, rural character of surrounding farms (Williamson County Planning Department 2012).

Why, then, do city leaders speak of growth and market demand as ineluctable forces that deprive residents and local government of any agency to shape the city’s growth? How might this be representative of larger rhetoric surrounding the necessity of growth and progress typical of the current stage of capitalism? I would like to argue here that “growth”—comprised by population increases and economic development—and the notion of growth as inseparable from progress, is hegemonic in character. In this, I am drawing on the Gramscian notion of cultural hegemony as a system of "attitudes, beliefs, and values that—through ideological control of the dominated classes, that is, through their manufactured consent—supports ruling-class domination” (Goldstein 2003, 36). Gramsci himself defines this as “the ‘spontaneous’ consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life caused by the dominant fundamental group” (1985, 12). The effect of this consent is widespread. Lefebvre states that, “hegemony implies more than an influence…it is exercised over society as a whole, culture and nature included, and generally via human mediation…over both institutions and ideals” (1991, 10). Goldstein weaves this together with Bourdieuan notions of taste as a means of embedding inequality, difference, and privilege in one’s habitus, “naturalizing schemes of perception” (2003, 36). In all of these elaborations, divisions are predicated upon a ruling class and dominated class. While I am not suggesting that a
specific kind of class division and domination occurs within my field site, particularly
given that most of the residents I spoke with are ostensibly middle-class, what I do want
to draw attention to is the way that hegemony and taste both imbue a particular
ideological schema with power such that alternate ways of being become alien. Thus, the
publicly defined morals that the city projects through newspaper columns reflect a certain
set of tastes that in their own right become hegemonic for how they seek to shape social
behavior, just as the assumptions regarding the primacy of growth and growth as progress
assume a hegemonic dimension among city leaders and for residents. Indeed, if we read
growth as a locally hegemonic discourse, it supports the work of city leaders to maintain
the path on which the city is currently set.

Yet I would argue more is at stake than just the simple work of locally hegemonic
rhetoric surrounding growth. In fact, growth as an economic imperative and as a global
pattern is playing an ever greater role. As David Harvey argues, “urbanization has
increasingly constituted a primary site of endless capital accumulation that visits its own
forms of barbarism and violence on whole populations in the name of profit.
Urbanization has become the center of overwhelming economic activity on a planetary
scale never before seen in human history.” He cites the frenzied pace with which the
Chinese are laying cement, where between 2011 and 2012, they produced more than the
United States did in the entire twentieth century (Harvey 2014). Growth and economic
development, however, are not new sets of ideals. According to Arturo Escobar, it is
necessary to historicize “the discourse of development,” in order to understand the set of
beliefs framing current understandings of economic development worldwide. To this end,
Escobar cites belief in the role of modernization during the 1950s “as the only force
capable of destroying archaic superstitions and relations,” implicitly leaving industrialization and urbanization as the only valid routes out of poverty (Escobar 1995, 39). Despite the fact that by the 1980s, in practice, development economics had followed a myriad of trajectories worldwide, falling short of the universal science practitioners assumed it to be (94), the potential of affluence for the Third World promised by development economics had already exerted deep economic and social consequences (58).

While both of these contexts are external to the United States, I bring them up for two reasons. First, although most scholars that address crises of capitalism or spheres of development do so from an urban or Global South perspective, one must remember that the American South, too, has been perceived as an underdeveloped space throughout much of its history. Because until half a century ago the South was primarily non-urban, its “undeveloped” land is ripe for suburban development. Second, imperatives toward growth and development are indeed global, and although most literature focuses explicitly on urbanization, I would argue that suburbanization follows many of the same patterns and is just as important of a space for reproducing these ideologies and patterns. One can see logic of the growth imperative and “need” for economic development everywhere, from building frenzies worldwide to the near necessity to maintain a bull market and pad one’s 401K.

It then perhaps begins to make sense why the city government speaks of growth as almost anthropomorphic. This is not to say, however, that city leaders are correct and that they have no control. It is, however, to point out the hegemonic nature of the idea of growth, and the extent to which this appears to work at a global scale. In such a way,
particularly when individuals associate markets with invisible hands that move flows of capital across oceans instantaneously and self-correct when necessary, it makes sense that individuals might appeal to structural forces as primary and see their own agency as limited. However, such a perspective only lends more power to the hegemonic nature of rhetoric on growth, shaping decisions and actions from large scale to individual.

**Conclusion**

Will growth continue unabated, or will incoming residents call for a middle path, one that begins to preserve green space? The answer to this question remains to be seen. However, drawing on Harvey and Marx, I believe one could read the intent to mobilize population growth on the basis of appealing to a rural past and the subsequent destruction of remaining “rural” spaces in the town as a “contradiction of capitalism” (see Harvey 1989, 189). Indeed, as Beauregard states in his analysis of suburbanization as parasitic urbanization, “growth with decline is unavoidable in a political economy always flirting with internal contradictions” (2006, 9). In order for the contradictions of capitalism to be “contained,” at least for some time, as Harvey argues, alternative modalities must arise or temporary fixes must be set in place. This necessitates new innovations that, in effect, destroy the past. Harvey (1989) states:

The effect of continuous innovation, however, is to devalue, if not destroy, past investments and labour skills. *Creative destruction* is embedded within the circulation of capital itself. Innovation exacerbates instability, insecurity, and in the end, becomes the prime force pushing capitalism into periodic paroxysms of crisis…The struggle to maintain profitability sends capitalists racing off to explore all kinds of other possibilities…New spaces are necessarily opened up as capitalists seek new markets, new sources of raw materials, fresh labour power, and new and more profitable sites for production operations. (106–7, emphasis his)
While Harvey continues to explain the process of creative destruction in its increasingly global scale, creating revolutions in space and time along with it, I see Mt. Juliet as one of these new spaces that has opened up.

In facilitating the opening of this space, the city government has worked out a logic related to the continuation of growth, one which it recognizes as unpalatable to residents directly affected by farm loss and pastoral views, but which it describes as an unstoppable anthropomorphic force. Indeed, given the way scholars and policy makers have framed and pursued economic development over the last half century, this description makes some sense, yet it functions hegemonically to obscure the power that nation-states, local governments, and individuals do have and the role they play in continuing that narrative. In the next chapter, I will move forward to nuance this picture a bit further, examining how this growth and these narratives have shaped the lives of longtime residents, and the way they in turn reinterpret or hold onto the lives and world they once knew.
Chapter III
Remaking a Life Transformed by Growth

The preceding chapter sought to elucidate the trajectory the growth has taken in Mt. Juliet, the way that the government perceives and promotes the notion of “growth” for the city, the kind of citizenry they hope to cultivate, and the way in which the idealized rural heritage the city promotes a tenuous connection with the suburban. I have also attempted to exhibit the manner in which residents, new and old, valorize categories such as “rural” and “nature,” and how this enables commodification of elements perceived as “natural,” hastening the transition along what might be a continuum between what might perceived as “rural” and “suburban.” As I argue, discourse surrounding the beauty and primacy of nature and beliefs in the imperative to grow—nations many theorists perceive to be incompatible—together seem to strengthen local economic processes promoting growth and suburban development. Unsurprisingly, these appear largely compatible with the larger processes of growth within the global South, and fit squarely within the direction capitalism has evolved over the last several decades.

In this chapter, rather than focusing on the importance city government appears to place on cultivating growth, I move in a different direction to examine how longtime residents understand the growth surrounding them, how they choose to respond to it, and how their lives and relationships have drastically changed in its wake. In this, I hope to examine the way that longtime residents’ lives are unmade and remade amidst these changes, and the way in which they address these changes. As you will see, there is no unified consensus as to how residents chose to react to these changes; yet, despite the
individuality in reactions, we begin to see how residents cling to certain familiar beliefs and memories, despite a fairly consistent declaration that the processes of growth surrounding them are unstoppable. Some express feeling a way of life threatened or even destroyed, an irreversible process in which future generations will lose the values of hard work and self-sufficiency that farming instills, while others try to “look on the bright side” at the conveniences, even as they express frustration at the numerous inconveniences growth has brought. The tendency, then, to look to memory for comfort and memorialization as a means of reasserting the importance of an earlier way of life, as I will discuss in Chapter Four, begins to make some sense.

This chapter will first establish how longtime residents talk about some of the changes around them that they see, and the ways in which these diverge drastically from the rural way of life that existed not so long ago. It will then explore how these older residents view the notions of growth and progress—that which the government so often touts as both inevitable and ideal—and the way in which they deal with the loss of their own farms or other familiar places around them. In examining options for farmland preservation, such as land trusts, I will discuss residents’ hesitancy to pursue these possibilities, and then return to the thread of values and community mentioned in Chapter Two, juxtaposing the government’s perspective with that of longtime residents. In so doing, I hope to elicit the ways in which these residents’ lives represent a complex negotiation with values perceived as in tension—individual preference versus utilitarian concern, pragmatism versus nostalgia, growth versus progress, development versus conservation—and yet for residents, how the binaries posed above are not simple “either-or” choices. Rather, they are part of a complex web of situations large and small, daily
choices and life-changing decisions, which remake the world in which they grew up. While many ultimately feel thrown headlong and upside down into a new world, they make-do as best they can with the options they feel are at their disposal.

**Life Remade amidst Suburban Growth**

Although a number of residents cited positive changes that came along with suburbanization—for instance, the proximity of shopping and new dining opportunities, and infrastructural developments such as better roads, newer schools, and sewers—as frequently as residents mentioned the good they juxtaposed it to the bad. Frustrations with the sheer volume of traffic, neighbors unfamiliar with farming practices, and incoming residents who seem insular and unfriendly punctuated older residents’ description of the growth.

**Lost in Translation: The Farming Life within Suburbia**

Part of the reason that many who grew up in this town, whether associated with farming peripherally or intimately, feel thrown so headlong into a new world is that, while many of those moving in possess an affection for the rural, they have little to no experience with it. Such is the case with the story mentioned in Chapter Two where cattle out of their fence that invaded a recent neighborhood barbecue elicited shock, amazement, and confusion from subdivision residents, while local police more took more than an hour to corral the cattle back in their field (Langley 2016). As a result, land-owning individuals feel their worlds and way of life have been lost in translation—that they are interacting with individuals speaking in an almost alien tongue. This often
happens between land owners and the multitude of neighbors adjacent to their fence row. Often well-meaning individuals create costly problems for farmers, simply because of a lack of familiarity with livestock and their needs.

William and Hale discussed the way that well-meaning neighbors often called, thinking they had spotted a problem with livestock. “There’s people call me about, ‘you’ve got a sheep hung in the fence. You’ve got a hog out. You’ve got a cow laying down; we think she’s sick,’” William said. Although their intention is to help, neighbors often identify situations that aren’t problems. Hale mentioned other costly predicaments neighbors created. Once, in winter, a neighbor had pruned some green yew bushes and threw them across the fence onto a field where he kept his cattle; several animals ate the poisonous shrubs, and four cattle died. He also recounted how his donkey Buster got loose once, wandered into a woman’s yard, and began drinking from her pool. She then called the county animal control department, which transported the hapless donkey to the nearby town of Lebanon. After several hours and paying animal control for the trailer ride and the bale of hay Buster consumed, they were able to bring him back home.

Jimmy and Robert reflected both on the difference that not having neighbors who knew about farming presented in the event either one of them needed help. “I can’t go to Del-Webb if I was to get sick and ask them to watch my cattle and farm,” Jimmy remarked. Jimmy also expressed frustration about neighbors’ refusal to take responsibility for their pets, linking three calves’ recent deaths by a pack of dogs to the anthropomorphic rationalities suburbanites attribute to their pets. “‘My dog wouldn’t do that!’” he envisioned a neighbor saying. “[They] just don’t understand. That’s our livelihood.”
Relationships with suburban neighbors can often take far more hostile and problematic forms. William recounted the number of times neighbors had used his fields for personal recreation—from flying kites in his wheat field, to erecting deer stands for unauthorized hunting, even to growing marijuana on his aunt’s adjacent farm. He also described a particularly antagonistic encounter with a neighbor over herbicide:

One man back there, he was taking a chemical, which I assume was Round-up, and he was spraying on my side of the fence and killing all my grass. And finally, I caught him back up there one day. And I confronted him. I said, ‘What gives you the right to spray four feet on my side of the fence with a chemical that, if my sheep come down here and graze it right after you spray it, you’ll kill my sheep?’ He says, ‘Well, your weed seed is blowing over in my yard.’ I said, ‘I don’t give a damn; you don’t have the right to kill the grass on my side of the fence.’ But he thought he had that right. And of course, I said a few four letter words and bottom line was, you do it again, and I’m going to spray four feet on your side of the fence, which means I’ll get all your shrubs…He hadn’t sprayed it since.

Even if situations with neighbors do not escalate to a hostile level, often farm-owning residents feel that they must adapt the way they use their land because of their unknowledgeable neighbors. Jackson lamented having to fill in his pond because of his many neighbors, a pond out of which, as a six-year-old he remembered catching a “world’s record fish.” “You can’t have a pond because kids is going to get on it. Kids is going to drown,” he explained. In situations like these, land-owning residents expressed that their neighbors seemed either not to understand or not to care about the implications of their actions on a farming way of life, and felt threatened as a result.

Traffic

In addition to the differences residents reported in farm life in suburbia, the rapid changes to the built environment resulted in inconveniences that residents found
anywhere from annoying to dangerous. Traffic was perhaps the single most reported change among the ways that residents described how their lives were altered. Charles recounted the drastic difference on his road:

When I moved out here, I lived on a two-lane road, which is still two lanes, going to the lake. And from about six o’clock in the morning to about eight or nine, it was a car now and then, somebody going to work… [Laughs] I mean, I could sit down in the road and tie my shoe back then. There just wasn’t no traffic unless it was fishermen. Just local people lived there. Now, there’s subdivisions going in. You just can’t hardly get out of your driveway. You have to wait and see. And you better not walk along the side of the road, because somebody’ll hit you.

Similarly Stephen reminisced about the times in which he could drive from one end of the county to another in fifteen minutes, if he happened to see the town’s only police officer. “As long as he was going the other direction, you could go as fast as you wanted,” he laughed.

The increased volume of cars has led to more than just time wasted in traffic. In 2014, the local paper declared “history covered up” when a Mt. Juliet man, on whose property a nationally registered historical landmark stone wall sat, had to erected a concrete barrier in front of the wall. The increased traffic volume had led to fourteen accidents in a three-year period, forcing him to rebuild the wall each time. Although the city was discussing plans to address the problem, he indicated he had grown tired of waiting and elected to erect the barrier (The Chronicle of Mt. Juliet, 5 March 2014). Two years later, the barrier remains. Josie mentioned that, despite the benefit of paved roads over gravel after a hard rain, the increased tractor-trailer traffic near her elderly mother’s house has meant re-erecting her mailboxes several times. “And when…you haven’t grown up with some of these things, it takes a little while to adjust to it,” Josie commented. Farmers also expressed frustration with the traffic and residents that became
**Figure 3.1** Barrier erected to protect historic stone wall. (Used with permission of Thomas Ramsey.)

**Figure 3.2** Increased traffic volume during road widening. (© Emily Ramsey)
frustrated at sharing a road with a tractor. Robert mentioned getting “four or five cussings a day” and traffic lines behind him that seemed two miles long when he had to take his tractor on local roads.

Persistent Developers: Specialized Knowledge, an Imbalance of Power

Not only do farm owners struggle with neighbors and with the significant changes to the environment around them, but they also frequently have to learn to navigate the world of commercial real estate and zoning restrictions placed on their land. Residents often reported inquiries from developers, sometimes aggressively so, despite their lack of intention to sell. While this might be considered a boon—the ability to convert real estate into liquid capital—many landowners express dismay at the temporary nature of cash in relation to the eternal nature of land. As such, land owners may view interactions with developers’ anywhere from an annoyance to underhanded. Adele, for instance, mentioned how in the early 2000s, developers called her family constantly. Despite her attempt to take a middle ground between her neighbors, who she described as “fighting mad” against development, and the developers, whose side she tried to see, sometimes the developers’ persistence and entitled attitude tried her patience. “They make me mad when they act like they’re doing me a favor…Uh-uh. No. If I want to sell it to you, I’ll sell it to you, but you’re not doing me a favor, not really.’”

The same persistence can come at inopportune times. Shortly after my grandmother’s death, my father recounted a conversation he had with a developer that had cold-called him, inquiring if he was interested in selling the farm. The developer expressed her condolences at our loss, but quickly jumped in to her pitch, asking first if
he was considering selling the farm, if they could set up a meeting, if he would be willing to give them right of first refusal on any sale, if he would be willing to sell only sixty acres, and finally, if he would simply keep them in mind. Despite my father’s repeated “no” responses, the agent remained persistent. He counted himself lucky to have spent three decades working in corporate real estate to know the repercussions of any encumbrances to the land the agent suggested. Cold calls like this or letters of intent to purchase mailed out of the blue contain legal language that can require specialized knowledge to understand the ramifications. Many times, a knowledge and power imbalance exists between the developer and owner surrounding legal concepts, processes, and property valuation, requiring the owner to navigate channels with which he or she may not be familiar. Because of this power imbalance, developers may take advantage of individuals. Harry recounted a situation where a gentleman he knew sold his property to out-of-town developers unknowingly for far less than its assessed value; the developers quickly flipped the property for a much greater value, upsetting the man greatly. On the flip side, knowledge of legal options at one’s disposal can also provide peace of mind. Jess counted himself lucky that his father had put the family farm in a living trust until Jess’ death. Despite developers’ sometimes insistence that courts could terminate the trust so that he could sell, he felt it a convenient excuse against developers’ inquiries. “Anyway, it’s secure for a while,” he stated. “But it may not be secure forever.”

Knowledge is not only required when dealing with developers, but when dealing with the city as well. Floyd gave several instances in which, only by virtue of his connections to city government as a commissioner did he learn about rezoning plans directly impacting him and his neighbors. He recalled fighting a zoning appeal in his own
neighborhood that would have tripled the density of nearby lots, while later struggling to rezone his own land and other local farmers from “residential” to “agricultural” so that the city could not eventually prevent farmers from using the land for livestock and farming. He described zoning restrictions as like a “cancer” for farmers, restricting them little by little from being able to use their land as they desired. Equally problematic to Floyd was that landowners not embedded within the city government were at a disadvantage to know when and how the city was changing zoning laws. Particularly as the city has changed and farmers’ interests have been represented less in city government, it has become far more difficult for farmers to obtain information without connections or constant vigilance.

_Letting Go: Loss and the Sale of Property_

Several of the individuals I spoke with had actually made collective decisions with their family to sell some of the property. Most recalled this decision with sadness, or with a complex mixture of regret and equanimity over the benefits the sale provided the family. Only a few, such as Helena Mae, expressed little emotional connection to her family farm. Despite this, however, she knew that her lack of sentiment was somewhat uncommon: “I never have had the relationship with it that some people develop with their property. I did feel that to the farm, but when I knew that the farm was being sold, I went way down there in the back of the lot and I sat down on the ground, and I had me a big cry. And it hasn’t bothered me since then.”

For others, consequences of the sale linger in their memory. As Adele mentioned at the beginning of Chapter Two, the decision was a hard one for her and her sister, but
one they felt economically necessary and the results of which she hoped her family would be proud. Not only did she have an emotional tie to the land on which she was born and her family had been for more than 200 years, she felt the farm represented her family’s legacy. The decision to let some of it go, despite the fact that both her grandfather and father knew she would never farm, she termed a “big responsibility.” Recalling her childhood affection for the book *The Secret Garden* and the protagonists’ care for the small plot of land, she explained feeling that she and her family had a responsibility to act as stewards to other land, which included how they farmed it or to whom they ultimately sold it. For her grandfather, “there was no investment like the land,” and although she was “OK” with the group to whom they had sold it, she expressed feeling as if she were still “answering” to her family through the choices she made. As such, she hoped to hold onto the rest for the next generation.

Adele articulates well a common notion many individuals recalled when talking about land: themes of stewardship, responsibility, and legacy. Few took for granted the gift they felt they had to reside on more than the half-acre that many suburban homes occupy, and because being that close to neighbors seemed unimaginable, they counted themselves fortunate not to have to do so. Not surprisingly, though, feelings of loss extended beyond one’s own homestead to familiar farms and landmarks in the area, such as the old elementary and high school in the center of town whose destruction grieved many residents. This was particularly heightened for those that had specific connections to these places, such as Josie, who had taught in the building for nearly thirty years.

And I’d go by and there’d be one building, one part, room gone. And I’d watch and say, ‘There goes the last room I was in. There goes the first room I was in. There goes the second room I was in. They’ve torn down all the rooms I’ve been
in!’ It was sad to watch the building go, because it had its problems. It had a lot of character. It had a lot of memories. All of them weren’t good memories, but they were still memories and it was sad to watch something that had been such a part of the community to suddenly be totally gone…When you’ve seen something your whole life and then all of a sudden it’s gone, it’s…it’s like a little piece of you is missing when it’s no longer there.

For others like Dale, these feelings of loss were only heightened when thinking of his own family’s property, part of which his father and uncles sold in 1988 for a subdivision. Even with the distance of time, he mentioned that driving past the subdivision was still difficult. The only way he was able to “offset” these feelings, he stated, was by knowing that his father and uncles were able to enjoy retirement rather than working until their death.

The Specter of Eminent Domain

For landowners that choose not to sell, eminent domain—a legal process by which a local, state, or federal government can expropriate private property for public use—looms like a specter. This law rests again on a utilitarian notion that for projects deemed for the ultimate public good, such that a private landowner, despite any legal encumbrances on the property such as a conservation easement, must relinquish her or his right to it. Several individuals mentioned having faced this, or expecting to face it in the future. William, for instance, spoke with disgust when he pointed out his kitchen window to the water tank up the hill that sat on land taken by eminent domain. “I don’t know if you can see it through that window back there,” he remarked, “but there’s a five million gallon water tank on top of the hill back here. That was condemned and taken away to build…my land was taken away for that to be built so they could supply water to Mt.
because the population exploded.” The adjacent subdivision, on some of the highest elevated land in the city, had complained about a lack of water pressure, and without any available land in the subdivision on which to build a pumping station, the city chose to condemn eight acres, compensating him only half of the $50,000 he requested. This was particularly maddening to William given the fact that this took land that had been in his family since before 1796. He had recently buried his father here and plans to be buried here as well. For him, this farm is a legacy, and he fights to remain one of the few full-time farmers in the area. To have his land be “condemned” because “growth” necessitated additional utilities sickened him.

Others expressed similar dismay when eminent domain took their property for a utility easement. Leonard and his relatives recalled how their family land was taken by several easements of eminent domain over the course of nearly a decade, with the final one taking the entire property in the early 2000s. This left an exceedingly “bitter taste” in their mouths. While they felt the money was a blessing, it was a “temporary” one: “You know money comes in your hand and goes right out,” one family member said. The bitterness they felt was only compounded by what they felt was somewhat an act of discrimination against them as African Americans. The land, also used for a water utility, was highly valuable for its elevation; they recalled, however, how much hardship their family had endured to retain that piece of property, and to lose their legacy to eminent domain was a bitter pill to swallow.

Josie, also African American, discussed the impending easement she expects the city to take by eminent domain for a road. She did not, however, cite her race as a factor, only the inevitability of “progress.” She initially learned of the situation only by
observing surveyors on her land, who referred her to a regional architecture firm. Despite multiple calls to the city and firm, no one had returned her inquiries, potentially due to funding problems with the road. She expected that at some point in the future, the road would take at least two of her family’s seven acres. Josie expressed a desire to be proactive about the matter, retaining some autonomy in decision making. Otherwise, she states, “it will come to eminent domain. It will be taken and so…you don’t want to feel like somebody’s taking something from you. Hopefully, if it comes to that, we will be able to sit down and talk with them and I’m sure we’ll work out something, because you can’t stop progress, no matter how hard you try.” It is clear that she wishes to retain some degree of agency in the decision-making process surrounding her family property; the very idea of eminent domain for her and others suggests the loss of agency in the situation.

The Importance of Heritage and Family Legacy

Most of the landowners with whom I spoke hoped to pass down what land they could to future generations and most intended not to develop it within their lifetimes. They linked these intentions intimately with the sense of heritage they felt knowing that their family had occupied the same piece of land for several generations, if not multiple centuries. A number of individuals, such as Floyd, beamed with pride knowing that their “little spot of ground that’s left, it’ll never be developed in my lifetime.” In some cases, the sense of heritage and ties to the past are all that kept individuals in the area, as Jess expressed: “I’d leave if it wasn’t for the farm. If it wasn’t for my heritage and my home and I’ve got no other place to go. I’ve got a little property in Kansas sitting …[Here] it’s
not like…I’d like it to be, but then, it’s just the way it is and there’s nothing you can do about progress.” For others, as Adele described, feeling a great sense of responsibility to her forebears shaped how she felt about her decision to sell sixty-seven acres and solidified her decision to retain the rest. Several individuals had manifested their pride in a farming heritage by enrolling in the Century Farm program, a local university program recognizing a family’s continuous agricultural production for more than a century. Adele, Jess, William, and Holly all mentioned participating in this program. Similarly, Rose, an official at the county agricultural extension office, mentioned the role the extension played in encouraging local families with a farming history to enroll with the service, and

![Figure 3.3 Sign displaying Century Farm status and 200 years of agricultural production. (© Emily Ramsey)](image-url)
the significant response within Wilson County, which currently has eighty-six registered farms.

As to the legacy of land that individuals hoped to leave their children and grandchildren, many individuals expressed uncertainty as to how future generations would address the responsibility of caring for a piece of land. Some knew that their children or grandchildren felt affection toward the farm, even if they were not farmers, and expected them to try to hold on. Floyd doubted his daughters would sell, and Bobby knew his daughters hated the growth and would likely stand against it by holding onto the land as long as they could. Adele mentioned that she felt it rather ironic that her nephew, only twenty-five years old, felt extremely nostalgic regarding the farm, and was extremely resistant to the sixty-seven acres that the family had sold. She hoped that he and her other nephews, one of whom has a degree in business agriculture, would be able to inherit the property someday.

Jess, like many others, expressed more ambivalence as to how future generations might address the responsibility of owning a farm. He mentioned doing what he could now to “get things situated” so that his children at his death would not be overly burdened by estate taxes and so that they could try to keep the farm. However, he recognized that none of his children or grandchildren had taken an express interest in farming, and that he could not enforce his wishes that the farm be maintained as one tract after his death. “You know, that’s only as good as the paper it’s written on,” he stated. “It’s not enforceable after I’m dead. It’s just my wishes is about all you can say it is. They’d have to go through a rigmarole to get it out—you know, to back it out. So I don’t know if they’d take it that far or not. Maybe not. I hope not, because then they would
keep it up otherwise.” He hoped, however, to interest his daughter in farming after she moved up from Florida later in the year, expressing the sentiment that there might be a day coming for his children and grandchildren when having family land, a place to return in difficult times, might be useful.

**Growth is Good, or At Least Inevitable**

Despite these and other frustrations, residents overwhelmingly viewed the growth in two ways: as a force that is ultimately “good,” or as a force that, while problematic, is unstoppable. Regarding growth’s positive impacts, the most frequently discussed elements were the benefit of having shopping and dining options nearby, obviating the need to travel a half hour to the next nearest shopping mall or downtown Nashville. Others, though, spoke positively of general technological and infrastructural advancements, such as electricity, air conditioning, running water, and even cell phones, and linked those innovations to the inevitability of population and economic growth. Older residents did not take these creature comforts for granted, but saw them as germane to Mt. Juliet’s “development” in general, sustaining growth’s inevitability. Helena Mae mentioned this very issue when recounting a conversation long ago with my grandmother, who had expressed her dislike of growth and wish that the town could be as it had been fifty years earlier. “I said, ‘Well, I don’t! Dirt roads, no water.’ I don’t want things to be like they had been fifty years prior to when she was saying that, and she didn’t either, if she would’ve thought,” exclaimed Helena Mae. Aside from the individual benefits that nearby commercial development and technological advancements have provided, most residents seemed to tread a fine line between speaking positively about
the benefits to themselves and their new neighbors, and expressing regret at the loss and changes they were witnessing.

A few longtime residents felt generally positive about the growth, appealing to various reasons for their satisfaction. Michael, for instance, mentioned that his own family had “trickled in” some two hundred years earlier, as had everyone else—even American Indians had done so at one point. As such, he said, “it’s a little bothersome to me that once you trickle in, you want to shut the door. But you don’t want the door shut till you trickle in. So, I am for the land of opportunity.” The only caveats he expressed to growth being good were his belief that the city was not doing enough to help residents “build community,” such as creating spaces for recreational activities, and his hope that new residents would contribute in kind to the community rather than only taking from it. Similarly, Beth Jo appealed to the growth as part of a larger divine plan when she stated that, “Everything’s a good thing. I think the Lord has a plan in everything. I know that.” These attitudes, while seated in vastly different logics, appear similar to the perspective the city advocates on growth. Some of the new residents seem to express the same attitude to growth. Maria, whom I interviewed for her association with the local YMCA, expressed that she didn’t see any negativity with the growth whatsoever; rather, she enjoyed the convenience and felt that the area would retain its “small-town feel” despite the growth, because being a small town was an inalienable part of the city’s identity.

Others expressed astonishment regarding the pace of growth, and sometimes degrees of sadness, but a sense of having come to terms with it. When Holly’s husband was bush hogging a local horse farm for the last time, she remembers pausing and discussing with him that it would soon house a Wal-Mart and Lowe’s. “And this was just
a few years ago. And there it is! It’s all grown up!” she remarked. Holly expressed feeling sad at first that familiar farms were disappearing, including land to which her own and her husband’s family had once been connected at Providence. However, the pragmatism of needing to buy a pair of pants or the convenience of being able to eat at a nice restaurant often overrode the emotional reaction that she initially had. Her husband, she recounted, had not warmed to the growth at all and hated to see any land developed. This fact, along with the fact that both prefer a farming life meant that, should the day come, they planned to buy a farm and move to more rural areas further east so that they could continue to raise their son on the land.

Many expressed a sense of inevitability. Macon, although nearing ninety, longed for the days he could still hunt; although he still lived on his family farm, nearby houses made shooting a firearm an impossibility now. However, when I asked Macon and his wife Lenore if they preferred the area as it had been several decades ago, she stated, “Well, we’ve just grown up with the change. We just accept the change and go ahead.” Corbin made a similar statement when musing about the town’s growth: “You know, I’ve come to the conclusion: not much you can say about it. Things are going to change.” Bobby stated that in many ways he did not linger on memories but instead tended to forget about the way things used to be, “because it’s hard to stop progress. You can sort of control it, but it’s hard to stop it. And Mt. Juliet…it’s close to Nashville, but especially being close to the airport [and] the interstate where it is, it more or less had to grow.” Many others equate change and growth with progress. Barbara, editor of a county-oriented lifestyle magazine, felt this way. “I think that if you look at change as
inevitable—it’s part of progress; it’s part of growth—it can balance each other out,” she stated.

Behind much of longtime residents’ discussions on growth lay several fairly consistent perspectives. First is that growth and change are indivisible elements within the same process, and that if change is inevitable, because of the geographic proximity to Nashville, so is the growth. The effects seen presently were the results of processes that previous leaders had set in place, both long ago and recently, and were at present unstoppable. Longtime city councilman Floyd spoke to this when he described the initial construction of rooftops as having a “snowball” effect that self-perpetuates. Robert and Dale expressed the same notion, and discussed the effect that this cyclical growth has on their ability to continue farming:

Robert: And too, the land value’s got so high, you can’t afford to farm. And the value goes up, and that makes your taxes go up, and so it’s…

Dale: A vicious cycle. A vicious cycle. The more growth you get, the more kids you have to educate, the more schools you have to have, the more roads you have to have. Then you know, you can look at somebody that owns, say a one hundred-acre farm, and their property taxes continue to skyrocket. It pretty well forces us out.

This perspective equating growth and change—defining them as indivisible, continual, and part of a natural order—is perhaps best encapsulated by an analogy that two separate individuals made. In this analogy, both described a town like a church: a community of individuals never in stasis. “A church is either growing, or it’s dying.” Michael stated. “It’s never staying the same. And everyone always wants the church to stay the same. They want the community to stay the same. But it can’t, because the people that made the community the way it was age and die.” Separately, Leonard
appealed to the same analogy, mentioning the necessity of incorporating young people into a church or town to continue its legacy. As a result, Leonard declared, “growth is always good.” For both, growth enables a town to continue living, and without growth, the only alternative is to “[go] backwards” and ultimately to die.

Why is this analogy significant? Context helps to illuminate this. Both men expressed, throughout their interviews, the degree to which their Christian faith shaped their worldview, and repeatedly spoke of the importance of maintaining a foundation in a church—the model for the kind of community the city should seek to build. As a result, linking a town to a church in many ways is the ultimate rationalization of this growth: the church’s natural order, one they believe to be ordained by God, is to continue growing with the addition of new members over time, not only to curtail population losses, but to “grow the kingdom of God.” To describe a town via the same binary of growth or death presents it as an almost incontrovertible truth. Growth is part of the natural order of things, and without growth, there is only death. There is no option in which a kind of middle-ground or stasis might exist.

While others might not always share such a positive perspective on the growth, their tendency to link growth to change, and describe change as ubiquitous is not incompatible with the binary presented above. Indeed, it fits within the pattern of describing the growth with a sense of pragmatism or even resignation, or as many say, to “look on the bright side” or to the number of people it will help. Hollis, a gentleman in his early eighties, characterized himself as a “survivor” based on his attitude of tolerance and composure. “I’ve learned to tolerate a lot of things,” he said. “A lot of things you can’t change. A lot of things you change with them, alright? But like I said a while ago,
I’m a survivor. I am. I don’t like to stir up muddy waters. Like at the boat dock, they’ve got a sign on there, ‘no wake.’ I keep things as quiet as possible.” Several mentioned a kind of utilitarian perspective as something that helped them look at the growth more positively. Josie, for instance, described her sadness that part of her family’s property might be taken by eminent domain for a new road; however, she stated, “if the road is going to help the community, you have to see the positive side of that as well.” Floyd, the city councilman, similarly mentioned feeling a need to be fair to both newcomers and longtime residents in his council decisions: “I’m sitting on the board, and I have to make decisions. It’s really unfair in a way, but you have to equalize it out. Because you’ve got…you don’t want to be unfair to the people that’s been here longer. But you don’t want to be unfair to the people that’s just moved in either.”

This pragmatism regarding growth, despite many individuals’ preference for a different outcome, was common. Taking the good with the bad—the positive with the negative—was a common refrain. Again Josie, frustrated with the construction and dismayed that individuals with a long history on the same farm are “having to give up that land simply because progress is coming,” ultimately sought to end her thought on a positive note: “but if we can keep the attitude that better days are coming once this is built, we’ll have something here [so] that we’ll forget the negative parts of it.” For Floyd and Adele, this also meant trying to strike a balance between permitting growth and stewardship of the local environment. Floyd, a longtime farmer who regretted not having the foresight as a young man to buy and preserve the land adjacent his family home before it was subdivided, described the pragmatic approach he often felt he had to take on the city council. “You don’t want to be a scrooge and yet you don’t want to see nature
destroyed,” he mused. “It’s not an easy deal, but it’s coming. It’s going to change, and you’ve got to deal with it. You’ve got to make the best of it.”

Not all took such a pragmatic approach. N.C. Hibbett, the town’s first mayor, was somewhat critical of the direction the growth has taken and many city leaders’ actions. In so doing, he describes what he feels is an important distinction: the difference between “growth” and “progress.” Emphatically, and pausing at each word, N.C. stated, “All-growth-is-not-progress. I say that all the time. But it can be progress if it’s handled properly and if it’s planned properly… So I have mixed emotions, my dear, when you ask me, ‘What do you think about the growth?’” Few others made this distinction between growth and progress this overt; however, for N.C., there was a vital difference. Growth does not equate to progress, nor is the reverse true. Proper planning and consideration for the direction residents might collectively want the city to take is key. The then-current city government, he declared, were hindering progress with their policies.

As is evident with the statements from residents above, the growth has significantly altered their lives, whether through how they interact with the built environment around them—one they have watched remain relatively unchanged for decades—or through the altered ways they interact with neighbors unfamiliar with a rural way of life. Adapting to these changes, remaking their own worlds, often consists of adopting narratives or attitudes that make sense of the growth around them, whether through looking for the positives amidst the negatives, or equating growth with progress and change, forces viewed as inevitable. Pragmatism permits them to confront changes that might be emotionally difficult, but which they understand as part of a larger “natural” process inherent within life. Thus, one is able, with a mixture of irony and
nostalgia, to remember fishing on a pond or bush hogging a field on the very site where they now eat at Olive Garden. I will explore the tenor of these reactions and the function of memories in the next chapter; however, for now, it is necessary to examine alternate reactions to the growth: negative responses that I argue attempt, in small ways, to take a stand against or undermine its inevitability, in addition to movements for land preservation that seek to offer another path.

*Reacting Negatively to the Growth*

In the examples that follow, very few reactions are overt. Many bear a mark of resignation similar to the above examples, the primary difference being that these individuals appeared not to soften their reactions or speak with as pragmatic a tone. A number of these individuals also felt closer to farming as a way of life. Most of the individuals with whom I spoke had some connection to farming, whether at some point in their own life or in their youth assisting a parent or grandparent. However, a good number of these, particularly the ones that had moved to the area in the 1950s and 60s, admitted only having a peripheral connection to the land. Moving to a small farming community had attracted them, and as such they had “fooled with cattle” here and there, some maintaining even a dozen head now. However, as I discussed in the introduction, farming for many was not the primary occupation. Those that continued to farm substantially, such as Jimmy and William, may have had parallel careers to supplement, but they still considered farming to be their primary profession, and their reactions were considerably more negative and considered their way of life threatened.
Dale, a local agriculture teacher who continued to maintain a hand in farming, expressed a mixture of sadness and resignation. “I guess driving down the road now and seeing so many subdivisions and so little farmland left, I guess I get discouraged in a way, but...I guess I’ve kind of grown accustomed to it,” he mentioned, continuing on to reminisce about the days when traffic lights were a rarity. Dairy farmer Robert also mentioned his sadness at what happens to farms when the older generation passes away: “When the old ones pass away, [their] kids, why, they’re just developing, cutting these farms up in tracts, lots, and it’s sad.” Charles, despite his frustration, attributes the trend to the vicissitudes of progress and people desiring a “country” life. He stated:

I moved out here for two reasons. One of them was to raise my children in a country-type environment. And, of course I did, thank goodness. And the other one was to get away from the crowd. And the crowd followed me. And you can’t blame them, in one sense of the word. You can’t fight city hall when it comes to something like this. You can’t fight progress either.

As Charles’s statement implies, many here also feel that there is little that they can do to combat the growth or preserve a farming way of life. For many, this manifests itself in an almost pervasive sense of resignation, and that these farmers’ values are somehow simply different from the rest of Americans’. With this difference, where they acutely sense they are in the minority, a number of farming residents like Jimmy expressed that their opinions on the growth did not matter because nothing could be done.

ER: Are you planning on holding on or selling?

Jimmy: Well, I have two daughters...and granddaughters. And no, I don’t expect them to hold it. Because it’s so high now, it’s ridiculous. Just this right here, it’s ridiculous what I’ve been offered.

ER: How do you feel about that? It is what it is, or are you upset about it?
Jimmy: Well, my personal feeling doesn’t matter because you can’t hold back progress. You can’t do it.

ER: So your personal feelings are not for it?

Jimmy: You know, I’m not against it. Sure…I’m country inside. I like the way it used to be. But it’s not gonna be.

Jimmy mentioned that, despite feeling politically outnumbered at the local and federal level, along with developers’ and neighbors’ suggestions that he sell and “quit all this,” he has no intention of giving up farming; it was "in his blood," just as it was in his brother's and nephews' blood. He recounted that he had watched others fight the growth, always to no avail. "And you know I found out…I’ve watched a lot of these people that have fought it and fought it and fought it. It doesn’t do any good," he said resignedly.

Ultimately, though, he expressed that did not blame those moving in, feeling that if they had an opportunity to better themselves they should, even if it harmed his way of life. "It’s doing that," he said. “But I just know there’s…I can’t do anything about it." As a result, he, like Holly and a few others, mentioned the strategy of buying farms further east just so they could continue their farming lifestyle, even if Jimmy did not plan to leave his home with his granddaughters just down the road.

Jimmy’s, Dale’s, and others’ sense of resignation, despite the frustration or sadness a way of life they felt was quickly dying, was palpable. In contrast to the individuals mentioned in the last section, one does not see quite the degree of pragmatism—the attempts to view the good with the bad—that were the hallmarks of many longtime residents’ strategies in addressing the growth. However, unlike N.C., many of these individuals do equate growth and progress. The strategy, instead, for many was try to continue farming as long as they could given their health, finances, and family
situation, and in spite of external pressures from living in a rapidly suburbanizing area. This must be read alongside the fact that many of them recounted that farming, despite their love for it, was no longer a profitable enterprise. Many stated that they farmed just enough to be able to pay the taxes on land or to qualify for the Tennessee Greenbelt tax break, but had no illusions that they would be able to subsist off a farming income. Thus, in these responses, residents reflect an interesting interplay between moments in which they appear agentive and yet buffeted by forces they deem external and entirely out of their control. The strategies, then, for addressing a growth many felt threatened a quiet, rural, cherished way of life appear to be the ways that residents address these changes as their lives are remade amidst the growth.

Aside from the pervasive sense of resignation discussed above, a few revealed very personal means of resisting the growth, however small. Worth considering as part of this are the verbally negative reactions I heard from individuals—farmers or no—to the growth. In contrast to those residents who chose to take the good with the bad, a significant number saw the growth as unequivocally negative, and had no compunction about saying so. In doing so, they often implicated these changes with declining moral values in comparison to the ways of life they had known. Brian, for instance, lamented that he could no longer leave his door unlocked or his keys in the car. Working at a local firearms store, he said he was often confronted now with “crackheads” that made him uncomfortable. He summed up his view of the growth by saying, “When you bring in population and growth and progress like that, you’re going to bring everything negative with it.” Brian and Randall, men only in their forties, felt that the identity of the town they had known growing up was completely gone. Both had moved away for some time
during their early adult years and returned, and the interim changes for them had spelled the death of the once-small town’s essence, both in its built environment and to the sense of “community.” Others like Neal expressed sadness at the loss of “gentleness” in Mt. Juliet and the U.S. more broadly, calling it “a price for progression.” Moreover, Stephen stated that he read some of the rapid development as political maneuvers to make money quickly, often at the expense of others.

In a few cases, individuals did more than just speak negatively about the growth. In one such example, William discussed his deliberate choice to alter the way he traversed the space of his hometown so that he did not have to see developed farms he once knew.

William: I do my darndest never to cross Interstate 40 where Providence is…it turns my stomach to see all the farms destroyed and that way of life gone.

ER: Like the Thurman farm?

William: I will not go in Wal-Mart over there because they destroyed that farm. Me and daddy, when Mrs. Bingham used to live there, we used to go over there and castrate her pigs for her. They lived in that old house right there. And now, I won’t go to Wal-Mart. I’ll go down here, even though I didn’t go down here for several years because that there used to be one of the best dairy farms in this area right down here, where Wal-Mart is now.

ER: Where they had that big white house?

William: Where they had that big white house…Now look what’s planted on them.

ER: Are you one of those people that wants to take a stand and will not, while you’re living, see this change? Or do you see yourself moving further out?

William: I will kill anybody that tries to take this away from me. I will kill anybody that messes my family. That’s the only two things I care about.
It is impossible to talk about negative reactions to the growth without recounting the story of the Thurman farm at its sale. Although I was not able to speak with the Thurman family personally, local papers widely followed the situation leading up to the property’s sale. In 2005, 188 acres on the north side of the interstate comprised the farm once known for its cutting horses (The Chronicle of Mt. Juliet, 27 July 2005, 1), and the site remained one of the “most coveted and valuable undeveloped land in West Wilson County” (The Chronicle of Mt. Juliet, 23 March 2005, 1). What made the story of the farm’s development so salacious were the actions of one of the Thurman sons and heirs, Robert, to attempt to prevent its development. In March 2005, local authorities arrested Thurman after an eight-hour standoff, in which Thurman remained inside the family home with mattresses stacked against the doors, iron slabs across the windows, several weapons, a video security system, and two pit bulls at his side. To end the standoff, the police used tear gas and explosives to force their way in, and found Thurman holed up in the attic with a pistol, shotgun, and two dogs. Police had been to the Thurman home four months earlier during which they removed his eighty-six-year-old mother from Robert’s care and moved her into a nursing home. At that time, a judge ordered that Mrs. Thurman’s daughter replace her mother as head of the family partnership due to being “unduly influenced by her son” (The Chronicle of Mt. Juliet, 23 March 2005, 10). Family disagreements had long plagued the family regarding the land’s sale, but legal battles began in earnest when the family trust, then headed by the family matriarch, refused to answer condemnation suits by city utility departments associated with road widening (The Chronicle of Mt. Juliet, 30 November 2005, 5). In conjunction with the standoff, a judge ordered a mental evaluation for Robert; authorities took him into custody again two
months later after finding him again at the family home, asleep on the couch. This was after two treatment facilities tasked with mentally evaluating him released Thurman due to unruly behavior, and he subsequently evaded a mental health facility escort waiting for him at the Nashville airport upon his release from the second facility (The Chronicle of Mt. Juliet, 8 June 2005, 6). Little else populates the papers regarding the final disposition of the Thurman family disagreement over the decision to develop the property; however, the fact that the 188-acre farm now houses The Paddocks retail center, including anchor stores Wal-Mart and Lowe’s, reveals the ultimate outcome, despite Robert’s stand.

Theorizing Reactions to the Growth

As the Thurman story reveals, outright stands against development are few. Most reactions fit somewhere between complete resignation to a fate individuals deem unavoidable and small means of rejecting the growth, whether by verbal or subtle actions of resistance. When these appear to accomplish little, how should one understand and evaluate negative reactions as well as attempts to “make the best” of the growth? Are these reflective of anything more than personal opinions? As James Scott aptly states, “The relationship between thought and action is, to put it very mildly, a complicated issue” (1985, 38). I would argue that it is best to read reactions to growth—positive or negative—as a complex web in which individuals appear to feel limited by structures they deem external to their control, and yet choose to exercise individual agency or resist in small, often personal means. The degree to which individuals truly are unable to overturn processes of growth they often describe as autonomous and anthropomorphic in nature—particularly when examples exist locally, such as Leiper’s Fork, Tennessee,
where citizens and local government have banded together intentionally to control growth and economic development—is another question altogether. Nevertheless, it is perhaps helpful to examine a few of the many directions that anthropologists have attempted to understand actions of resistance and their relationship to individual agency and structure, and the ways in which people choose to exercise these.

James Scott (1985) has posited what he calls “everyday forms of resistance” as an overlooked aspect of resistance over and against more outright forms of peasant rebellion. These “weapons of the weak,” as he calls them, should not be overly romanticized, he warns, but are “ordinary weapons of relatively powerless groups” such as malingering, foot dragging, pilfering, sabotage, and more, the benefit of which is that they take little forethought or planning and function to help the individual yet confront authority in ways that avoid direct confrontation (29, emphasis his). Scott frames these everyday forms of resistance particularly in terms of peasant struggles against superordinate classes in a Malaysian context, yet he cites wide-ranging examples of everyday resistance, even to Confederate desertion in the Civil War (30–31). These acts of resistance, he argues, are largely covert, and appear concerned with “immediate, de facto gains” rather than larger public or symbolic goals (33). However, Scott warns, these are not actions without meaning, and to ignore individuals’ consciousness would be a problem, given that acts and thoughts regarding resistance are in “constant communication” (38, emphasis his). He contrasts this with a situation in which due to a hegemonic ideology, individuals appear accepting of a situation or set of conditions, which, following Marxists, he labels “false consciousness” or “mystification,” something
Scott says one should be able to determine through conversations with members of the group in question.

I detail Scott’s work for the importance it conveys on small means of resistance to hegemonic power structures. Certainly, given Scott’s focus on peasants, it is worth asking the manner in which his analysis relates to this scenario of largely middle-class U.S. farmers and landowners. In many ways, this would seem to subvert the very subordinate-superordinate power structures he describes. Yet, I would argue that notions of everyday resistance function wherever power differentials exist, and as Lila Abu-Lughod states, these can be read as a “diagnostic of power” (1990, 42). As I stated in the last chapter, given the degree to which growth and development paradigms have had a global impact on policies and individuals in addition to the way the local government deploys them, they appear to function hegemonically within this field site. If this is the case, then how do we read everyday resistant behaviors that occur here, particularly in light of the high degree to which residents appear resigned to the growth? What happens when individuals speak of the growth positively, or at least speak of growth as something they not are explicitly against, yet constantly pepper their speech with frustrations and discontentment regarding the way life has become?

I believe we can read these actions and statements as forms of everyday resistance. These verbally negative reactions may appear not to accomplish much. Yet for those that made these statements, taking a verbal stand against the growth was important, even if this resistance was mixed with resignation. In most cases, like William avoiding Wal-Mart and Providence, aside from the potential loss of sales tax dollars, these modes of resistance do not do much to hurt the economic vitality of the city. However, these
small modes of resistance seemed to provide peace to residents who felt that they were not implicitly condoning these changes, or at least complexifying the dynamics and the manners in which this has affected their lives. As indicated in the sections below on eroding value systems and community ties coinciding with the loss of farms, individuals most explicitly registered their disaffection with the growth by reflecting that, although growth and “progress” might be generally “good”—or at least natural, inevitable, or unstoppable processes—longtime residents felt that the coinciding changes in social relations and social knowledge were causing irreparable damage. Thus, while not every action was as outright defiant as Robert Thurman’s, nor was everyone as outspoken against the growth as William, very few spoke of the growth as unequivocally “good,” and endeavored to paint a complex portrait of the attendance changes over the course of the last two decades.

For this reason, I believe Lila Abu-Lughod’s notion of a “diagnostic of power” is particularly helpful. Drawing on Foucault, she reminds us that just as he discusses that where there is power, there is resistance, he also states the corollary: where there is resistance, there is power (1990, 42). Thus, reading resistance—however small—as a diagnostic of power allows us to attend to the small ways in which individuals resist, and the fact that “power relations take many forms, have many aspects, and interweave” (48). Like in Abu-Lughod’s context, where she states that her Bedouin women appear both to resist and support existing systems of power, most of the individuals I spoke with appeared to do the same. They wove back and forth between discussing growth as a natural corollary to technological advancements that made their lives easier; wanting to be accepting of their new neighbors, recognizing that implicitly, it was not their fault;
speaking of growth and progress as tied to change and as inevitable, natural processes; and complaining about the changes to their way of life, loss of ties to neighbors, the demise of farming as a way of life and body of knowledge, and looking to life several decades ago as a sweeter, gentler time.

This leads to a theoretical area closely aligned with resistance, that of agency. As I mentioned earlier, at various points, individuals and even city leaders speak of growth as an autonomous, anthropomorphic force against which they appear to have little recourse. For city leaders, in many ways, this lack of agency supports their rhetoric regarding the importance and necessity of the growth, while delegitimizing those with alternate conceptions or frustrations with the current course of events. However, when so many individuals speak of growth with resignation or pragmatism, saying there is little they can do about it, they appear to be giving up any so-called “agency” they might have. When Jimmy mentioned the futility that others had encountered when they tried to fight the growth, he took this as prescriptive for how he should choose to structure his resistance—or not, in this case. Instead, he, like others, chooses to “hunker down” and focus on that over which he feels he has control: his attitude, time, and farm—while he has it.

Rather than risk imputing a false consciousness to these individuals—suggesting that they are wholly embedded in and thus fail to perceive the true nature of social relations and the material, ideological, and institutional processes around them—I believe it is better to complexify the meanings they attribute to the change going on around them and the efficacy of their actions and mental attitudes. In conceptualizing agency among Middle Eastern women, Saba Mahmood comments on the limitations she feels reside in
existing articulations of feminist agency, all of which seem to rely on a notion of freedom closely aligned with resistance to male domination out of one’s own “free will” (2001, 206–7). Mahmood finds the Western notion of “individual liberty as the political ideal” as limiting to other contexts, particularly those mediated by a variety of competing interests (208). Instead, drawing on Judith Butler and Michel Foucault, she examines the paradox of “subjectification:” the situation in which the processes of one’s subordination also become the processes by which one becomes a self-conscious agent (210).

Intertwined, she argues, is the notion of docility, which is not a situation in which one lacks agency, but one where a person’s malleability permits him or her to acquire a skill or knowledge, recognizing the “practical ways in which individuals work on themselves to become the willing subjects of a particular discourse” (211). This is a complex scenario in which different interests, “pursuits, projects, cultural and historical conditions” can intervene, placing subjects in situations in which they may not choose to subvert norms at all times. In these situations—which, I would argue, are most situations—she believes that the ability to effect change in the world is culturally and historically specific, and one whose “meaning and sense cannot be fixed a priori, but allowed to emerge through an analysis of the particular networks of concepts that enable specific modes of being, responsibility, and effectivity” (212). She then draws on theorists such as Veena Das, who discusses the idea that enduring hardship can be agentive, particularly in the midst of “‘doing little things’” that constitute an active engagement for that individual (217).

This idea of enduring in the midst of “doing little things,” I believe is helpful to understand how individuals in this context have responded to the notion of growth.
Mahmood’s point about the fact that individuals may not choose to subvert norms or power structures constantly, but whose actions must be read in light of their own cultural and historical particularity is particularly apt here. The hegemony of rhetoric on growth that I posited in Chapter Two is thus not incompatible with the nexus of pragmatism and small means of resistance I am suggesting reside in longtime residents’ comments here, attitudes that in some ways are both “agentive” moments. While Josie “consents” to the hegemony of growth through utilitarian arguments about the potential loss of part of her family’s land through eminent domain as justified, in the same breath, she deconstructs the notion of progress as unfair to those with long histories that simply happen to be in its way, while turning in the end to paint a rosy picture, saying better days are coming. As she weaves among loss, frustration, and hope, she is establishing a narrative by which she can endure—one that allows her to be critical of trends she finds unfair, and yet hopeful that some good will come out of it. Adele’s narrative appears to function in much the same way; she laments the loss of sixty-seven acres, but looks to her desire to have made her parents proud and to what she can do to protect her remaining acreage. In this same way, one should read Jimmy’s patently resigned response to the growth in light of his determination to continue farming despite the hardships—to continue doing what is “in his blood.” Even eighty-two-year old Hollis’s contention that he chooses an attitude of equanimity in spite of it all can fall into this paradigm. Thus, each of these situations and responses are eminently individual, and all reflect a complex negotiation with personal and cultural values they find meaningful, amidst a narrative of growth and progress that appears to have assumed a decidedly hegemonic status.
Despite the validity of the small moments of resistance I detail above, the reality of these agentive moments, most of which are attitudinal, is that materially, they do little to actually change the course of growth. What, then, are the realities of these processes? Farm loss and changes to the landscape and natural environment are certainly clear, as are the considerable changes to social relations among neighbors. However, I would like to argue that we need to be attentive to deeper processes in the way that the private capital of developers is at work and the way this fundamentally changes the value of land. When developers purchase large tracts of land from landowners, they do so in anticipation that developing it will exponentially increase its value once subdivided into hundreds of tracts or commercial retail is constructed. However, the landowner, while he or she may receive a significant sum, even into the millions of dollars, ultimately derives only a small portion from what that land after development would actually be worth. Development, thus, implicitly connotes a value that “undeveloped” land does not have. Due to that imputed value, in most traditional “subdivision” settings, individuals are often no longer able to afford large tracts, but only a fraction of what the original landowner possessed for a moderately significant cost relative to the price the landowner received. If someone, for instance, receives one million dollars for eighty acres, and the land is subdivided into 160 lots with houses costing $250,000 each (a cost typical for Mt. Juliet), after improvements, the land plus “improvements” may be worth forty times what it was when the farm owner possessed it.

Harvey states that “land is not a commodity in the ordinary sense. It is a fictitious form of capital that derives from the expectation of future rents. Maximizing its yield has driven low- or even moderate-income households out of Manhattan and central London.
over the last few years, with catastrophic effects on class disparities and the well-being of underprivileged populations” (Harvey 2016, 273).\footnote{In this, Harvey appears to be relying somewhat on Karl Polyani’s distinction between “fictitious” and “real” commodities. Polyani argues that land, labor and money are fictitious commodities because they were not produced to be sold on a market but that modern economics treats them that way, with harmful consequences (Block 2001).} It is this latter part I would like to focus on briefly. Harvey appears to be referring to the phenomenon of gentrification, which Neil Smith defines as the process “by which poor and working-class neighborhoods in the inner city are refurbished via an influx of private capital and middle-class homebuyers and renters—neighborhoods that had previously experienced disinvestment and a middle-class exodus” (Smith 1996, 32).\footnote{Ida Susser, in her updated introduction to \textit{Norman Street} (2012), notes the effect that gentrification has on local low-income populations, not only in forcing residents out but in the loss of community ties. As she discusses, in New York these have largely resulted from city fiscal policies and district rezoning which facilitate private investment in areas previously characterized by affordable housing (11).} In no way am I considering the process of gentrification and suburbanization as one in the same; the key point of gentrification is the effect that private development and middle-class influx has in displacing poor and working-class populations due to sky high rents concomitant with “upgrades.”

However, with the upgrades to urban inner cities, just as with the upgrades to virgin farmland, the value rises dramatically. Robert Bruegmann states that “gentrification at the center and sprawl at the edge have been flipsides of the same coin” (Bruegmann 2005, 4), and while he is arguing that the kind of amenities that the middle-class seek in a newly gentrified environment are similar to those in suburbia, I would like to argue that they are also flipsides of the same coin because of the similarities in the process of value accretion through the mechanism of private investment. As I noted in
Chapter Two, many farm owners feel chased off of their land due to rising taxes. As Jimmy stated, “Naturally when it gets so high, you can’t afford to keep your land. Taxes are eating us alive…You cannot buy a farm and farm it to make a living.” Without economic support through property tax relief for farmers, with rising land values from neighboring development, it becomes nearly impossible to hold on. This is only exacerbated for farmers that are “land rich and cash poor” and whose funds may be invested in farming equipment. As a result, farmers may feel forced or even desire to “sell out.” Even in gentrification, though, “selling out” exists. In New York City, developers and landlords have begun buying out their rent-regulated tenants in efforts to demolish older buildings in favor of high-rise, high-cost condominiums (New York Times, 24 December 2015). Thus, while the target populations and environments are drastically different, capital appears to operate similarly in both these domains.

Are there any alternatives to growth, given its seeming hegemony? While I will explore conservation trends in the next section, it is important to mention that there are movements afoot to challenge traditional development and growth narratives. In both North American and Latin American contexts, frameworks such as degrowth, postdevelopment, along with projects such as Buen Vivir, seek to articulate alternative agendas for how humans can relate to one another and the environment in constructive ways (Escobar 2015). As these gain hold, the possibilities for alternatives to the rhetoric of growth may expand.
Protecting and Conserving the Land

As is evidenced by the above, reactions from longtime residents to the growth are many. Like William, Adele, Jess, Floyd and others, many espoused a desire and plan to preserve the land around them, often communicating with other landowning neighbors to ensure that “blocks” of undeveloped land remained so, and that all were aware of any news related to potential nearby developments that might threaten it. Adele described a kind of tacit agreement with some of her neighbors to the south:

Adele: The Griffins don’t want to sell a foot of anything to the Providence development. They want Providence to stay as far away as they can. And yet, Providence is touching them on that side too, you know…And that’s what keeps my community together, you know—we still have our little core group that hasn’t gone anywhere…Out here, we don’t have a break; we’ve still got a good solid block. [Laughs]

ER: Is there a sense among them that, ‘we want to hold on and preserve?’

Adele: Yes, yes. Very much. Very much. And we don’t want…you know, I don’t really want anything to come any closer to me.

Apart from individual and small collective decisions toward land preservation, there are more permanent legal options individuals can explore, such as placing a conservation easement on a plot of land with the help of a land trust organization. I spoke with Audra Ladd, a coordinator for the Land Trust for Tennessee, a statewide organization founded in 1999 that seeks to “preserve the character of Tennessee’s sites and landscapes for future generations.” In so doing, the organization takes on a wide mission of protecting historic sites in context, farmland, open urban space, recreational land for public use, and ecologically important wildlife habitats and watersheds (“About Us” 2016). By 2010, they had protected 51,000 acres, and by 2015, over 96,000 acres.
For farmland, Ladd mentioned that the organization worked primarily with donated conservation easements, in which a landowner voluntarily restricts development rights to their land, such as the number of houses built on the land. This results in a significant federal tax break for those that donate the easement; however, Ladd stated, “99.9% of the landowners that I’ve met and worked with do this not for the money. They do it for the principle…Some of it is nostalgia, or wanting their children or grandchildren to have a place. It’s been the family farm for so long that they just want it to remain the family farm, whether or not they’re farming it or not.”

The choice to establish a conservation easement, though, is not solely the decision of the landowner; rather, it comes as a result of a long conversation between the land trust’s projects committee and the landowner regarding characteristics of the land worth conserving, how the landowner intends to continue using the land, while determining if that is in line with the land trust’s standards, ultimately a decision the board makes. Ladd also mentions that while they broadly support conservation by those that want to do so, land with historical value or bearing certain natural features—such as supporting old-growth trees, endangered species, or ecological diversity—is particularly valued. Thus, despite the fact that many choose to preserve land for sentimental reasons, the need to establish that the land has demonstrable conservation value remains a crucial part of the process.

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33 The tax incentives to establish a conservation easement, now permanent, have been expanded by a 2015 bill permitting an increased deduction from a donor’s annual income, the ability to carry that deduction forward for fifteen years, and the ability for farmers and ranchers to deduct up to 100% of their income during that period (“Tax Incentives” 2015).

34 This is not unlike what Mariola argues when he states that farmland preservationist rhetoric tends to focus on “economic utilitarianism” over any kind of romantic reasons for preservation (2005, 213). Although emotion may drive the farm owner to consider preservation, ultimately the decision rests with the Land Trust board and their understanding of land use plans and the parcel’s features.
Perpetuity is perhaps the most notable feature of conservation easements. As Ladd stated, only eminent domain can amend a conservation easement. As such, she considers it a “powerful tool,” and one in which landowners must take into consideration the needs and desires of present and future generations. Ladd described difficult situations in which some might desire conservation, but the family farm was a “financial legacy” and all that “land rich, cash poor” individuals had to pass down to their children. In some cases, however, those raised on the land, or who she described as more “socially conscious” might ignore the financial benefits of selling, wanting to preserve the land as a place to which future generations can come back. When different opinions existed within and among generations, estate planning often becomes “really complicated.” As Ladd summed up, “It’s just a very emotional thing to do. You’re deciding the future of a piece of property for your children, your grandchildren, whoever your heirs are, and even for yourself. I think it’s just a really big decision because it is not irreversible.”

The permanence of conservation easements is the element that gave pause to most residents with whom I spoke who hoped to retain and pass down the family farm. Adele stated that, despite her nephew’s stated affection for the farm, she hesitated from “mak[ing] decisions for what may be here fifty years from now and how it could affect my nieces and nephews.” Despite his vow to defend his farm to his death, William expressed a similar discomfort at encumbering his family farm with a conservation easement:

I’ve thought about it and checked into it deeply, until I found out they can still take your land by eminent domain if you put it under there. If they run a road bypass right down the middle of this, then what’s my son got left? ... I’m leaving it to him for him to do as he chooses. I don’t want to tie his hands, because I just
don’t think there’s going to be a future in this farm. I mean, I hope I’m wrong, but I’ve seen everybody else leave and we’re the only ones left.

For William, Adele, and others, the benefit of leaving their children with flexibility given an unpredictable future outweighed the peace of mind a conservation easement might provide.35 Given the tax burden that many like Jess feared, few wanted the family farm to become an albatross around their children’s or grandchildren’s necks.

Ladd recognized that many shied away from the permanence of a conservation easement, and admitted that Wilson County had been a “challenge”—with no easements yet secured—partly because of city leaders’ “pro-economic development” attitude and the difficulty in “offer[ing] an alternative.” Nevertheless, she offered that individuals were, over time, “getting used” to the idea of land trusts, particularly given the 2008 economic downturn. Rose, with the county agriculture extension agency, also remained positive. She felt that the county population was “much more aware of what conservation means” and they sought to connect individuals with federal programs with tax incentives to promote conservation, including land trusts. To publicize these and other options, Rose helps to host a yearly “Farmland Legacy Conference,” giving landowners details on succession, estate, and retirement planning; property assessment; business structure; greenbelt issues; and linking aging landowners with services or individuals interested in

35 In The Geography of Nowhere, James Kunstler (1993) addresses land trusts as means of conserving rural farmland in rapidly developing, such as Vermont in the 1980s. While land trusts did not work out as well in practice as they might in theory, given the “abstruse and confusing” legal intricacies and the ability to bid up “estate value” on land near popular mountain resort towns, Kunstler calls it an “effective strategy,” particularly “when little else was being done to challenge the hegemony of realtors, or to change land-use laws, or bad zoning.” As a result, Kunstler argues that land trust help places preserve their rural character, a necessary element for places like Vermont (170–71). This context, however, and attempts to maintain the rural character of Vermont differs from markedly from the way preservation efforts appear to be playing out in Tennessee.
renting farmland (The Tennessean, 14 July 2010, 1S; The Tennessean, 11 April 2012, 3S).

The one program many farming individuals took advantage of was Tennessee’s Agricultural, Forest, and Open Space Act of 1976, commonly known as the Greenbelt Law. This law “provides for the assessment of agriculture, forest, and open space lands for tax purposes based on present use value rather than on market value,” drastically reducing many farmers’ tax burden (“Greenbelt” 2016). Jimmy commented that, “Ninety percent of farmers would totally get out if they didn’t have Greenbelt….What if we had to pay the taxes for what this was really valued at? You couldn’t. There’s no way.” In suburbanizing areas with rising high property values, this was a saving grace for those that farmed; however, the need to meet an annual minimum income in agricultural sales to qualify limited those that simply held family land, given that the open space qualification requires a conservation easement.

**Farming Loss, Eroding Values**

Along with the loss of farms in the area, longtime residents reported feeling that moral values had eroded along with it. When examined in the context of the kind of community and public moral values that city leaders espoused, attempted to promote, and proudly assert exists, it would appear that a disconnect perhaps exists. What, exactly, do longtime residents feel has changed, and why does this differ so from the description of the community city leaders promote?

In general, most residents discussed disintegrating “traditional” values, including changing family structures that have had repercussions into schools and the “community”
at large. Many felt this stemmed from parents’ tendency not to discipline, in addition to the lack of responsibility and hard work teaching children self-regulating behaviors. The erosion extended into acquisitive tendencies that Americans today seemed to possess, such that most consumer goods are easily purchased, disposable, and quickly replaced. The bulk of residents with whom I spoke either themselves lived through the Great Depression as young children or their consciousness was formed by parents who did, while a subsistence farming lifestyle meant the need to make items last. Furthermore, longtime residents implicated the fact that individuals worked more and lived more transient lives as one of the reasons they perceived a loss of community and the ability to build relations with their neighbors. Many felt these eroding values were taking place not only in Mt. Juliet specifically, but within America at large. This characterization of eroding moral values is not new certainly, and here widely correlates to values associated with a conservative Christian perspective common in this part of the American South. What is important, though, is the fact that not only do residents link these views to their faith and a “traditional” family life, but they connect these to a farming lifestyle as well. They associate resulting changes, then, with suburban growth, progress, and convenience.

Some implicated an erosion of morals both within the population at large and Mt. Juliet as well. Neal stated that people were less “gentle” than they used to be, a price Mt. Juliet and Americans had paid for “progression.” Speaking broadly to a loss of moral values, Stephen felt that traditionally local schools and churches had played a significant role in orienting the “community,” providing places for individuals to meet and interweave themselves into the town’s fabric. This resulted in less crime, better education, and more sharing. However, as Americans had moved away from the church,
he felt that value systems had “weathered away and diluted.” For him, communities could make positive or negative shifts, but changes were rarely neutral. The current shift in declining values thus he felt was a hard one to reverse.

These declining value systems many also linked to the disintegration of the family structure and parental discipline. Residents lamented that parents and children spent less time together, whether because both parents must work or because children resided in single-parent homes. Stephen again felt this spelled moral decline, only reinforced by the content with which children come in contact on television, promoting similar values. Not only do parents expect less of children, but Floyd felt children went unsupervised too often with both parents at work, while schools had no recourse to discipline children anymore because of tighter restrictions on punishment. All of these spelled changes for the social and moral development of the current generation of suburban children. Others, such as Charles, focused less on “non-traditional” family structure, but did note their dismay at the disrespectful way in which they often witnessed children talk to parents: “My dad would have boxed me halfway across the room and then wore my fanny out if I had talked back to him like that. And I think the parents are the cause of this. The younger generations are saying, ‘I’m going to treat my child better than I was treated. I’m not going to make him work.’ We had chores to do when I grew up.”

Many linked disintegrating child discipline to Mt. Juliet’s suburbanization and shift away from farming culture. Jimmy stated that his daughter, who works in the high school, had seen a marked difference over the course of fifteen years in children that were products of subdivision life as opposed to those that came off a farm. William, a former agriculture teacher, observed the same: “I could tell within five days which kids grew up
working and which kids grew up having to do nothing. I mean, it’s just as plain as day. You don’t see many kids that grow up working, whether it be on a farm or anywhere else, that get in trouble.” Work, and particularly farm work, was a valuable yet missing tool in teaching children and teenagers responsibility, self-regulating behaviors, and to help them develop common sense. Both William and Charles noted that their parents had expected them to take care of farm chores, and felt it taught them responsibility while leaving little time for delinquency. Thus, the adage William cites that “idle hands are the devil’s workshop” rang particularly true. Robert and Dale also expressed the same perspective:

Robert: And when you’re dealing with livestock, you’re up all hours of the night: a cow having a calf, a sick cow, something like that. When I got off from high school, I knew I had cows to milk, hogs to feed, mules to feed. And children don’t have that now. They go home and watch TV, or do something like that. They ain’t got no responsibilities.

Dale: I think I had one kid that say, ‘I really don’t do anything other than school, except go home and play video games and that sort of thing.’ …Momma and daddy do everything for them—if they still have a momma and daddy.

Were children now to work as they had, they would learn the value and satisfaction of hard work rather than laziness and a lack of self-discipline.

In addition to hard work, residents cited the importance of the stewardship of resources taught by a farming life, a value undone by American materialism. Neal implicated individuals’ acquisitiveness, facilitated in part by easy access to credit, as part of the reason for the 2008 housing crisis and recession. He felt early predecessors to the credit card, like layaway, taught more positive lessons regarding acquiring possessions. Floyd expressed similar views, remembering that his family produced most everything they needed and bought very little; the only things they purchased at the local store came from merchandise credit they earned by selling flour made from wheat they grew. If they
needed something, they waited until they could afford it; credit, however, was too easy to obtain today, and put many individuals in “a bad situation.” Even younger residents like Randall recalled his family purchasing as little as they could and relying on themselves for what they needed. For a farming family like his, he described it as a “no-no” to buy groceries, except for the occasional loaf of bread or milk in an “emergency situation.” Almost everyone, Randall remembered, grew their own food. As a child, when developers were building one of the first subdivisions, he recalled church members’ astonished conversations on the houses’ proximity and the fact that this would hamper newcomers’ ability to put in a garden. Thus many felt they had a different relationship to material possessions and even food than contemporary suburban families might, a tendency that left suburbanites at risk for high debt.

Ability to form connections with neighbors had changed as well. Residents described people as busier and more transient, leaving little time to form connections with neighbors. Helena Mae mentioned remembering her pastor once tying the death of “community” to the invention of garage door openers, a statement that, while she found it amusing, rang true in some ways. “People come in from work, they press a button, and a garage door goes up. They drive in, they press a button and the door goes down, and they stay in the house the rest of the evening. They don’t get out and mix,” she explained. When her brother had moved into the first subdivision less than a mile from their natal home, she remembered how disappointed she felt in the lack of “community” and that proximity seemed inversely correlated to one’s connection to neighbors, a tendency she connected to fatigue and busyness.
“Chocolate Milk Comes from a Brown Cow:” Farming as Essential Knowledge Lost

One of the most often cited losses amongst suburban residents was that of knowledge how to produce one’s own food. Residents described current and future generations of children, who only knew to go to their local grocery store, as the most harmed by this change. Jimmy declared knowing where one’s food comes from as essential to any educational system. “That’s like one and one is two,” he summarized. Holly, an elementary school teacher, mentioned how fortunate she felt that her son was growing up around cattle, in comparison to the Lebanon schoolchildren she taught, who think milk comes only from the grocery store. She felt a particular responsibility to expose her students as she could to farming knowledge. Robert seconded the value of farms for children, saying it was “the best place to raise a kid.” Not only do many view such knowledge as basic, but as something that may be a saving grace one day in hard times:

Dale: I don’t know whether you or I’ll see it, but there may come a time where that kid’s going to have to depend on that—the ability to grow his own vegetables, to help make ends meet.

Robert: Exactly. Children that come out of high school nowadays, they don’t know how to grow a garden. Try to plant a seed, and they’d plant it too deep. They don’t know. They need somebody to show them.

As a result of this essential loss, a number of educational programs exist to fill this gap. As Rose conveyed, the local agricultural extension office ran a number of programs for both children and adults to provide useful knowledge and marketable skills related to agricultural production. This included local 4-H programs available in local classrooms as well as extracurricular programs in caring for horses, goats, sheep, poultry, and beef cattle, learning about horticulture, and personal development and leadership
series such as public speaking (“4-H Projects” 2016). Rose and the extension also ran adult-oriented Master Beef, Master Goat, and Master Gardener classes, among others, all of which she expressed had enough interest for a waiting list. One popular county-wide event is the popular, mostly volunteer-led “Farm Days,” an annual field trip for second graders to the fairgrounds where they see as many as twenty-six educational stations including sheep shearing, cow milking, seed planting, food preservation, and an underground soil tunnel (The Tennessean, 15 April 2015). Rose spoke highly of the program’s popularity with teachers, as well as the wide array of topics to which it exposes children. Josie, a second-grade teacher appreciated Farm Days as a helpful corrective against students’ ignorance, something she did not see thirty years ago:

These children—they don’t understand the farm life. We take the children on the field trip every spring. It’s called Farm Day, where they see a sheep being sheared...A lot of these children, when you say, ‘Where does bacon come from?’ the answer is: ‘Kroger.’ ‘Which animal?’ ‘Kroger.’ ‘No, remember it’s got to come from something before it gets to Kroger.’ ‘I don’t know.’ Children thirty years ago could tell you that bacon comes from the pig. These children tell you it comes from Kroger. So they’re not exposed to the same things.

Also central to this effort to disseminate agricultural knowledge is the annual Wilson County Fair in neighboring Lebanon, which has become one of the biggest in the nation, boasting attendance of nearly 485,000 in 2015 over an eight-day period (“Official Top 50 Fair & Carnival Ranking” 2016). Hale Moss, fair president and owner of a garden center in Mt. Juliet, mentioned his aim in a local paper for the fair to correct an imbalance of agricultural knowledge in children: “‘We feel that we’ve got to make sure that youngsters who are growing up in urban and suburban settings understand that chocolate milk doesn’t come from a brown cow’” (as cited in The Tennessean, 14 July 2010) In a conversation with me, Hale relayed that while the fair’s original role was dissemination
of new knowledge and techniques to farmers, as well as displaying the best of the best, today, the competitions had in many ways taken a back seat to carnival entertainment, an element employed to keep it “relevant.” Regardless, he felt that “the fair has a responsibility to really teach the story of the food chain. Yes, I mean these animals are here, and yes, they’re pretty, but they have a purpose.” Apart from education, Hale also mentioned a nostalgic component, embodied by an 1800s village on the fair site called Fiddler’s Grove. Vestiges of a rural heritage, combined with an insistence on the continuing relevance of agricultural knowledge, become crucial elements of the fair, despite the popularity of the rides, concerts, and shows.

The residents with whom I spoke are not the only that value the uncertain toil of farming life for constructing a moral person. As Anand Pandian writes in *Crooked Stalks* (2009), the Kallars, a South Indian caste described as “criminal” in the early part of the
twentieth century, have come to view farming in this manner. Pandian thus sets out to understand the construction of virtue as an ideological framework—“how do people come to live as they ought?” (12)—and the way in which the narratives that framed that were part of an early twentieth century colonial project to “reclaim” the Kallars into a hardworking, moral people. Through the efforts of Christian missionaries, this reclamation largely took place in the context of agriculture, an “experiment in agrarian pedagogy” (144–46) framing virtue through toil. Thus, through missionary work, cultivation took on a double meaning, one in which agrarian toil cultivated both the land and the spirit (152). According to Pandian, this became intertwined with, and in many ways reinterpreted Tamil devotional literature on toil from that of hardship and suffering to that of an “object of veneration,” providing a soteriological path to a future reward (162–63). Yet as Pandian notes, the doctrine of toil has not taken a ubiquitous hold; rather agricultural toil, unpredictable and hard, is still tied up with karma, and something the Kallars hope their children can avoid (164).

This parallel, I believe, finds significance with my field site on a number of levels. Not only do both the Kallars and my informants speak of agricultural labor as a means of cultivating moral virtue, but both are rooted in a Christian interpretation of labor—and in this context, agricultural labor—as particularly valuable in cultivating a moral individual. Just as Pandian notes that Kallars suffuse Tamil devotional literature and karma doctrines with a new understanding of the value of toil, so too do we see William specifically cite wisdom literature in Proverbs (“idle hands are the devil’s workshop”) to support the value of agricultural labor for a child’s moral formation.
It is here that Saba Mahmood’s understanding of the notion of *habitus*, one she derives not from Bourdieu but earlier conceptions, is helpful to elaborate this context:

Aristotelian in origin and adopted by the three monotheistic traditions, habitus in this older meaning refers to a specific pedagogical process by which moral virtues are acquired through a coordination of outward behavior (e.g. bodily acts, social demeanor) with inward dispositions (e.g. emotional states, thoughts, intentions). Thus habitus in this usage refers to a conscious effort at reorienting desires, brought about by the concordance of inward motives, outward actions, inclinations, and emotional states through the repeated practice of virtuous deeds. (2001, 215)

In this sense, and in perhaps both the Kallar context and my own, it is possible to call agricultural toil a form of *habitus*, in which external behaviors coordinate with inward dispositions to create a moral subject, one that values hard farm labor despite its difficulty and unpredictability for what it contributes to his or her overall sense of being.

Two things must be said about this comparison between the Kallars and my own farming population. First, in the South Indian context, “the public rhetoric of development presents toil as a dependable means of advancement” (Pandian 2009, 166). While it appears the Kallars question this themselves somewhat, most of those with whom I spoke would wholly disagree on agriculture as a means to financial solvency in the U.S. context. Rather, many see farming as a dying industry, at least for the small farmer, which only serves to underscore its importance as a site of moral cultivation. Rather than derive the pedagogical lessons of toil through other means, farmers present agriculture as a particularly serviceable means of moral formation. Second is the fact that in this context toil does not function as a colonial project of development; in fact, in some ways one could view the fear of knowledges lost that residents detailed as anti-development rhetoric. They represent disaffection with a rapidly changing world in which
knowledges once central to everyday life are now entirely foreign, and the fact that residents view these skills and facts not just as essential to basic knowledge but also to moral formation suffuses them with a far deeper importance.

“Aunt Bea and Mayberry:” The Changing Nature of “Community”

Far as I’m concerned, the quality of life in Mt. Juliet has drastically dropped in quality. This place used to be kind of like Mayberry. I knew every farm from the Davidson County line to way past Mt. Juliet Road. I knew everybody that lived there. I’ve got umpteen number of people that live along my fence line. I don’t even know their names. They know me because they know I own this land, but I don’t know who they are.

- William, July 10, 2010

When I got my driver’s license in the early 70s, I could drive down the road, and if I met ten cars, I probably knew five or six of them. I’m lucky if I know one out of one thousand that I see on the road today in this area.

- Dale, July 9, 2010

Just as residents felt that morals and values associated with a farming life had eroded, they also expressed a drastic shift in how they experienced “community.” I believe this must be read against how city leadership and newer residents express their understandings of what constitutes “community,” and the degree to which this currently exists in Mt. Juliet. As I argued in Chapter Two, the city leadership appears to use the term “community” primarily to refer to the collectivity of residents who embody an idealized set of wholesome values. In line with the term’s almost ubiquitously positive valence, city leadership also appears somewhat abstractly to associate community with a pervasive sense of friendliness and niceness among residents, not unlike how it defines the sense of southern hospitality it strives for its residents to embody.

This is not qualitatively different from how some of the newer residents described the sense of “community” in the city, linking it to the friendliness and a small-town feel that it still seems to possess for newer residents. As Maria stated, she felt the city would
retain its “small-town feel, no matter how big it gets” because people act as if they
“genuinely care about you as an individual. They care enough to know your name. That’s
a huge thing.” Barbara echoed a similar view of the importance of friendliness, saying it
was a draw to people from other areas of the country. “Well, the people I know that have
come here from a different state, that’s exactly what they wanted. They get here, and
people here are friendly. You’ve got a lot of friendly people here, and when people move
from out of state, especially from the Northeast or the West Coast, they’re amazed that
people are friendly,” she stated. Important in her statement here—something echoed by
others—is that the South has retained a friendly attitude that sets it apart from attitudes
embodied other areas in the country, making it an attractive place to live. In some cases,
though, longtime residents felt this very influx of residents from elsewhere in the country
was diluting this very sense.

In contrast to friendliness, most of the longtime residents with whom I spoke
defined community, in short, as “knowing everyone.” Like the sentiment William
expressed in the quote beginning this section, one of the most frequently lamented facts
was that individuals that had grown no longer knew everyone in town. Crucial in
estimating this kind of community, certainly, was its small size; in such situations, it
was far more possible to know most everyone around. Also essential, however, were
institutions such as churches and schools where bonds more easily formed. Michael
mentioned meeting his childhood best friend in Sunday school at the age of four and
remarked that building “community” takes time; people’s transience limits the degree to
which they can build close bonds today. Josie and Randall both mentioned the extent to
which their churches had anchored them throughout their lives. Josie described the
church as “the glue within most communities,” and saw school performing a similar function, perhaps now more so for parents and children new to the area. For longtime residents, with the addition of more people, relationships had fundamentally changed. Leonard summarized this, stating, “People are not as nice. People are not as trusting. But that comes along with growth. That comes along with people.” Others mentioned how, growing up, playing with neighborhood children or schoolmates without supervision was never a problem because parents knew and trusted other parents or community members to keep an eye on their children or to report a child’s misbehavior. Today’s children, however, did not have that freedom.

Safety was also a factor many felt they had to take into consideration because of the growth. Adele mentioned having prized her relative solitude and the safety it had imparted. Staying in the old house with her father just before his death, however, she felt a sudden discomfort in raising the windows at night to sleep, despite the record high temperatures that summer. Knowing that traffic was now common on the two-lane road that once saw just two cars a day—her grandfather’s and the mailman’s—she slept less soundly. Reflective of Setha Low’s analysis on fear talk among residents of gated communities (Low 2003), such discomfort persisted for Adele when cars would pass as she locked and unlocked the gate to her own driveway, just down the hill from her parents’ house. The “token” car, as she used to call it, that might pass had now become five or six in a row, and she only hoped that were someone to accost her, a Good Samaritan also passing might assist with any trouble.36 While a gate gave Adele a sense

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36 Setha Low discusses the appeal to fear of crime as one of the driving forces behind fencing and gated communities. As she states, “living in a gated community represents a new version of the middle-class American dream precisely because it temporarily suppresses and masks, even denies and fuses, the inherent
of safety, Jimmy noted that Del-Webb’s gate represented exclusivity; although he might go to a nearby country store to talk about the weather or find out who was sick in the community, he had no opportunity to get to know these residents.

Differences spilled over into other parts of everyday life. Longtime residents felt that road rage was little seen when the town was smaller, not simply because of traffic volume but because, as one resident stated, it was easier to yell at a stranger you do not know than at someone you might see at church on Sunday. Relationships with the police differed drastically as well. Some residents felt that they could no longer go to the police for support or assistance, such as when during a local Easter Egg Hunt at a nearby park, attendees began parking in and blocking the driveway of a resident living adjacent. She went to the police officer directing traffic nearby, who claimed he could do nothing since they were parked on private property, albeit hers. Similarly, Brian noted the way that local police used to watch after him and his friends as teenagers, although he felt local police actions today engendered a relationship of suspicion and antagonism with teenagers.

You know, we was teenagers hanging out and drinking and carrying on, doing whatever we wanted. We could sit down at the parking lot at Mt. Juliet Road and Lebanon Road that’s Publix and all that now. There used to be a little strip mall there when they first built it and a gas station, which the gas station is Mapco still there. We was out there every Friday, Saturday and Sunday night. And I mean just doing whatever we wanted. No cops and local law enforcement. They’d stop in and harass us and play, and we knew ‘em all. And nobody was hurting nobody, wasn’t hurting a thing even if we was drunk and, you know, carrying on drinking beer and just having a good time. We wasn’t out running up and down the road. We wasn’t out hurting nothing. And I mean, the law knew that. The cops knew

anxieties and conflicting social values of modern urban and suburban life.” This, she states, is particularly true in a world where everyday events and news media “exacerbate fears of violence and terrorism” (2003, 11). While Adele does not live in a gated community, suburbanization and fear definitely seem to have driven her discomfort and reliance on her own gate.
that. They didn’t bother us. I had one of the old cops…he would follow me home, make sure I got home. That, you can forget…My son had to go pull a friend out on a farm on Benders Ferry one night, and they stopped at 10:30pm down at the car wash to wash their trailer truck off. And they got searched! And harassed! I mean, I had to go to the sheriff and talk to him about it! That’s ridiculous! These kids ain’t into nothing like we was.

Here, in Brian's story, for earlier police, there was a sense that “kids will be kids” yet the wellbeing of the teenager was central. Instead, police suspect youth of illicit behavior, creating, for Brian, an unnecessary antagonism. Brian wished that his children had the kind of relationship to Mt. Juliet he did growing up, and mentioned that they too expressed an inherited nostalgia for the way it “used to be.”

Not only were relationships different between law enforcement and residents, but in the past, residents relied on a sort of “moral economy” in which they undertook to ensure that they provided for those in need, and self-policing residents who deviated from a path that ensured they took care of their own families. On this subject, Jackson relayed a story he once heard of a resident back in the 1930s or 40s:

There used to be an old man that lived right down the road here, and I cannot call his name. He…stayed drunk all the time. The town had [had] it…because they jumped him. Some of the men in town jumped him about the church over here, and beat this guy within an inch of his life. They taught him right then and there, ‘You’re going to go to work for a living. You’re not going to find a job at a bar. You’re going to take care of your wife and family, and you’re not going to beat your wife no more. And you’re not going to beat your children no more.’ And daddy would not tell me the man’s name. He said he’d tell me before he died and he didn’t. He said the man ended up being one of the best people around here. But he said that’s how they handled. If you was a widowed person, you didn’t go without.

Those that beat up the man seem to have been acting on a particular understanding of community and morality, such that as community members it was their duty to intervene on behalf of the suffering family so that this man negligent in his role as a provider would
get back on track. This deviates drastically from the “friendly” notion with which city leaders seem to imbue the notion of community here today.

**Shifting Notions of the Public-Private Divide**

In addition to residents noting a difference in how they perceived “community” relations prior to rapid growth and at present, the way residents spoke of public and private spaces and the respect accorded to private property appeared to shift as well. While not explicitly on the subject, one story N.C. recounted to me of a memory he had of my great-grandfather struck me as reflective of an altogether different set of social relations:

One day…and this is about your [great-]grandfather, Burkett. I was in high school and three, I think three, of the boys went out hunting that night, and I guess they were coon hunting, because their pelts were bringing pretty good money. And they came back through the Burkett Everett farm, and your [great-]grandfather was out there in his garden, with a coal oil lantern for his light. Sun hadn’t come up yet, and he was hoeing in his garden. And one of the boy said, ‘Mr. Everett?’ Mr. Burkett…I reckon they called him Mr. Burkett. ‘Mr. Burkett, you sure are making it a long day today, aren’t you?’ He said, ‘What do you mean? I’ve had my sleep. I’m starting a new day.’ The sun hadn’t come up yet!

While on a personal note, this story speaks directly to my great-grandfather’s locally renowned work ethic, constantly stooped over with garden hoe in hand, it revealed to me a significant contrast to how contemporary farm owners spoke about their neighbors in relation to their land. In this story, there’s an implicit sense that traversing through others’ farms was not unheard of, perhaps revealing a less restrictive notion of private space. Particularly in the context of a farming community, knowing someone means trusting them to use your property in a responsible means. Thus when individuals went hunting, or youth started up an impromptu football game, the assumption was that they would do
so responsibly, and were they to not, they would feel the social repercussions of misuse
given the modest size of the community.

This contrasts sharply from how landowners spoke of their neighbors and
trespassers now. William reported frequent instances where neighbors misused his land,
from constructing deer stands, to tearing down his hog shed in order to build a lean-to
near his pond for camping, to growing marijuana and having sexual relations in his aunt’s
field across the street. “You have these people that just think—because you have got an
open field, it’s their playground. Two years ago, I caught four people flying kites in my
wheat field up yonder. Now when you knock wheat down, it don’t come back up. And
they thought that was fine and dandy. It’s just like a park.” For the hog shed, fortunately
another neighbor called William to alert him to the destruction, but the damage had
already partly been done. “They don’t think there’s anything wrong to it. I mean, you
approach them, and they don’t think that that’s wrong. ‘Well, we back up to your
property, so it should be our use.’ …Standards have [plummeted] from what country
people used to be and what’s moved in here,” William elaborated. My own family has
suffered its fair share of unwanted visitors as well. From teenage neighbors holding a
bonfire drinking party just feet from one of our wooden barns, to discovering a group
taking family photos in one of our fields, to my mother catching a woman picking our
heirloom daffodils—something the woman admitted she had done for seventeen years
thinking our farm was a “park”—the examples mount.

What this reveals, though, is a difference in understandings of the public and
private divide of land, particularly on the part of the landowner. In the hunting party
story, N.C. relayed that interactions were friendly and respectful, and that “trespassers,”
because known, were not unwelcome. These other stories, however, reflect that most newcomers appear to believe “undeveloped” farmland is not only for their visual consumption, but for their recreational consumption as well. When there is no certainty that the person trespassing has respect for land or knowledge of their actions’ implications—such as trampling down wheat, tearing up a hog shed, or potentially burning down a sixty-year-old barn—animosity is certain to develop. As a result, I would posit that most landowners feel far more guarded about the multiplicity of neighbors and passersby, reflecting a stark shift in social relations surrounding public and private space.

Theorizing Conflicting Notions of Community

As I noted above, it appears longtime residents subscribe to a drastically different version of “community” than city leaders and newcomers do. In short, “friendliness” and “southern hospitality” in the new idiom becomes contrasted with “knowing everyone” in the old, a connection that meant keeping an eye on neighbors’ children, using common sense as to when to police illicit drinking, and banding together to check bad behavior when a community member went astray. This is not to say that longtime residents expressed “community” as entirely homogenous; those that lived further from the “center” of town, even just two miles away, reported being less involved and thus feeling less connected. However, the overriding sense remained that most who were alive during the 1940s and 50s remember the town as one in which knowing everyone created an undeniable bond and connection, one that looking back provided a great deal of comfort.

Mentioned briefly in Chapter Two, theorists discussing notion of community typically look to Ferdinand Tönnies and his notions of *gemeinschaft* and *gesellschaft*,
typically translated as “community” and “civil society,” for one of the earlier and better
known conceptualizations. While others like Durkheim and Weber also posit that forces
of industrialization had begun to eradicate community (Creed 2006b, 9), Grodzins Gold
points out that Tönnies conception of gemeinschaft as deriving from the natural world
relies in part on his rural and upbringing and family life (2005, 5–6). Indeed, as Tönnies
writes, gemeinschaft “is based on the idea that in the natural state there is a complete
unity of human wills” (Tönnies 2001, 22). This “real organic life,” the essence of which
is community (17), is characterized most often by familial relationships, but can also
comprise relationships with neighbors within a town. “Continuous proximity and
frequency of contact imply not just mutual encouragement and support but also the
possibility, indeed probability, of some degree of restriction and negativity; and only as
long as the positive side predominates can a relationship claim to display genuine
community,” Tönnies states (30). On the other hand, he defines gesellschaft as
characterized by individuals living in proximity, but whose relationships are marked by
detachment, individualism, opportunism, and even hostility. In these domains, actions
approaching something like generalized reciprocity do not exist, and individuals do not
recognize the “common good” (52–53).

I detail Tönnies theory here for the way that it relates to the shift in social
relations and “community” many of the longtime residents reported feeling. In many
ways, the “natural” bonds deriving from close proximity and similar occupations and
interests appear to parallel the notion of gemeinschaft, while the sometimes hostile
neighbor-farmholder relations certainly seem to echo Tönnies’ definition of gesellschaft.
As Creed elaborates on this binary, “consensus, conformity, and solidarity constitute part
of a disappearing past,” something into which the rural-urban opposition easily fits (2006a, 25). It is important, however, not to take these divisions too far, as they are neither a perfect fit to this situation nor are they unproblematic theoretically. For instance, the fact that newcomers, longtime residents, and city leaders describe each other as generally “friendly” and “nice” undermines the way in which we might apply gesellschaft in its original conception, while the same would go for the degree to which individuals stress the importance of supporting the “common good” in attitudes and actions toward growth. Nevertheless, because longtime residents inherently make divisions between past and present forms of “community” and that these in some ways parallel the more bonded and detached set of relations Tönnies formulated, it is important to recognize how and why they articulate this shift.

One can make a further point here, drawing further upon Creed in his analysis of community in relation to contemporary statecraft. Creed argues that, although they initially appear at odds, the view that Tönnies, Weber, Durkheim, and others express about modernity’s eradication of community fits with communities’ connections to the modern state and capitalism. He argues that as states become “politically eviscerated and transformed into mere units of consumption and representation,” community becomes more useful, particularly as a means of promoting unity and governance (2006b, 9). If we take it as true, how might Creed’s statement on the evisceration of states parallel the way in which the local city government relies on the formation of a friendly community in the construction of its identity? Given the manner in which the city encourages citizens to think of other residents in purchasing locally and maintaining the town’s physical and social ambience, it would seem that this might be at work here. This may all the more be
true given the way I describe that city leadership sees its primary governing role as that of recruitment and retention, eminently economic rather than political roles. Thus, building cohesion on the basis of a shared “community” bond, however imagined, takes on an ever more important role. If this is the case, then the way that longtime residents describe their own notion of the community bonds that have come and gone, however romanticized, become recognizable as qualitatively different from what is at play now.

**Conclusion**

As I have sought to detail in this chapter, residents’ reactions to the growth are manifold, and range from positive, to guarded, to negative and resistant. Regardless of how they articulate their attitudes toward the growth, most express disaffection with the world that now exists around them, particularly for the way that “community bonds” have changed and for the farming values that are eroding. Although longtime residents are not making overtly resistant stands against these changes, in most cases, they do complicate the sunny picture of growth city leadership presents, actions that in some ways can be read as resistant and agentive, even when residents express resignation and construct growth as an unstoppable force as well.

Intimately tied with this, I would argue are the articulation of community bonds and farming values. Could emphasis on the validity of small community bonds, forms of knowledge, and farming skills function as an example of small forms of resistance? While they may not fit Scott’s notion of everyday resistance as inherently individual actions that capitalize upon available opportunities to take back power without direct confrontation, they do continue to resist and deconstruct the effects of growth and
development, even if they do not subvert the hegemony of the growth rhetoric as inexorable. Yet residents and local organizations are making concerted and material efforts to educate children and adults in livestock and agricultural skills, continue farming, and joining together to preserve continuous blocks of land as they are able. These movements, however small in contrast to the tidal wave of growth, do, in some small ways, attempt to articulate an alternate path.
Chapter IV
Keeping the Past in the Present: The Uses of Memory and Nostalgia

It is an unseasonably warm Saturday in early October, and slight bits of orange streak the leaves of the trees flanking the gravel drive. Across a footbridge that strides a creek named for one of the area’s first explorers, Michael Stoner, the Mt. Juliet Homecoming is beginning to take shape. The annual homecoming festival, which now hosts over 1,000 visitors and is in its sixteenth year, lies in the several-acre side yard of one of the festival’s founders, Rufus’s farm, framed by several turn-of-the-century town buildings he had purchased and moved onto his land to save from destruction. On the front porch of one of these rescued “treasures” as he calls them—the former rail depot—a bluegrass musicians’ stage has been set up. A small crowd has gathered in front, seated on square hay bales, awaiting the next act. Along the side porch of the depot, many of the “old-timers” have gathered, sitting in the shade, laughing, and talking about days gone by. Another familiar face walks up, and among the hugs, hearty laughter, and friendly back slaps, each one remarks that it has been far too long. An assortment of seventy-five to one hundred individuals mills about the festival at this late morning hour, both young and old, some knowing each other from long ago, others there for the music or out of mere curiosity.

In the shady back part of the yard, along the creek, lies an odd collection of canvas tents representing reenactments of Civil War-era domestic life. There are campfire cooking demonstrations, a mock infirmary, mortuary, and quilting and basket-weaving stations, all manned by costumed re-enactors, proudly displaying their “old-fashioned”
skills. A middle school-aged girl in a calico cotton dress is a perfect example; carding wool next to her spinning wheel, she describes how she fell in love with the hobby and the various local outlets at which she demonstrates her craft. In one finished shed opposite the depot, one of the founders’ sisters has set up a small shop selling Pashminas. Adjacent, a blacksmith and his wife lead a demonstration, making wrought-iron candleholders and other items for sale. Just in front a man leads children around on horseback for a small fee. The rest of the yard is dotted with other mementos of the past: antique John Deere tractors, a late-1960s model Ford Mustang, a Civil War-era reproduction cannon, a covered wagon, and a stagecoach. The tractors and cannon belong to Jackson, the latter of which he explained was a way to connect with his daughters after his divorce once he discovered their fascination with Civil War re-enactments.

The festival’s original purpose was to provide a space for older residents to reminisce and revive connections with one another. The first Homecoming began in 1999, when several men convened at a local park to reminisce over the time in the late 1940s and early 1950s that, fueled by images of Roy Rogers and Hopalong Cassidy, they left the sleepy farming community to seek their fortunes in the wheat harvests of the West. Many returned to live their lives in the community, but lost touch to varying degrees. This reunion of sorts thus became a yearly affair, first with families, and eventually expanding to anyone interested in attending. Rufus, not part of the original six and younger by about ten years, offered his farm as a place to hold the ever-growing gathering. He described feeling his role in keeping the bringing the older residents together and history of the town to lie as what he was “sent here to do.” A taciturn person, he let Jackson describe the festival’s name and necessity:
Figure 4.1 Old Rail Depot used as the music stage at the 2010 Mt. Juliet Homecoming. (© Emily Ramsey)

Figure 4.2 Civil War-era campsite with domestic life reenactments at each tent. (© Emily Ramsey)
Figure 4.3 Longtime residents gathering to reminisce at the Homecoming. (© Emily Ramsey)

Figure 4.4 Jackson’s Civil War reproduction cannon on display at the Homecoming. (© Emily Ramsey)
Jackson: And he moved that little building…Basically, just when he started that, they brought the guys down there and they brought their wives. Then they brought their family, and it ended up being fifty. And it ended up being one hundred. Then I reckon, just like them old boys, just bring some local guys to sit around here and play and then it grew from there, and everybody just said, ‘Well, let’s call Frank from California, or Ronnie from Texas. Let’s get them.’ Well, they come, you’ve got to have more and more…It just seemed like it grew and grew and grew. And I got to thinking, yesterday, I said, ‘Well, I didn’t see so-and-so.’ And last night I went home and I called. ‘Why wasn’t [Melvin] here?’ And his daughter said, ‘He’s in bad shape…’ We had a lady that died that was ninety-something, Miss [Myra]. And her husband came for years. Well, they were both gone within the last two years…I think, to me, the answer for him, is [that] there is no other place for the older people. You know, they had the ten year class reunion the other day up at the school, which is probably, well, everybody that graduated from the 60s, which was Tommy and I. I seen the videos and I’m sitting there, going, at that time, I probably knew everybody. I probably went through 200 people and know ten now because so many people change, you know, so much. But I think, you know, and I’ve met, why yesterday, there was so many people yesterday. One girl, we grew up within four houses of each other, still live in this town, and I’ve probably not seen here in twenty-something years…But like he said a while ago, it’s not a money maker.

Rufus: Trust me.

Jackson: You know, it’s nice but…

Rufus: One day, I will break even!

Jackson: But it’s just the fact that…if he don’t do it…if he doesn’t get [Bonnie’s] and mine and other people’s help to do this thing, then nobody’s going to do it. And then it’s going to die, you know, and we…we want to do the old men, the old women, the history. Because if we don’t do it, it’s not going to get done.

The need they feel to preserve the connections, memory, and history of individuals, along with the way of life that used to be central to Mt. Juliet, is palpable. This is only heightened by the disconnection individuals describe and the looming specter of death, where if not captured, memories and life stories vanish along with the deceased. Each year, the festival puts out a glossy color magazine with an abundance of historical photos from residents’ and Rufus’s personal collections, intermingled with short stories of town
life as it used to be and profiles of residents alive and dead. As Rufus was quoted in a local paper regarding the 2011 homecoming festival, “‘Mt. Juliet is getting to be big time city-like; we don’t want to lose sight that Mt. Juliet is an old farming community’” (as cited in Mt. Juliet News Extra, 19 October 2011, 1).

With the focus on maintaining the town history and residents’ memory, the admixture of elements at the festival may seem a bit strange. These elements, many emblematic of “traditional” Southern culture, partly function to attract the city’s relative newcomers to the festival by drawing on the same qualities the local government uses to advertise the locale as an ideal place to live—quaintness, rurality, and heritage. However, I would argue that these reflect the importance organizers feel performing public history becomes a learning tool for newer residents, one in which didactic and memorializing purpose weighs heavily. While the Civil War may be an easy focal point for history—something most, even the influx of Northerners, associate with the area—the skills and lifeways communicated there extend far past the 1860s and are expertise that reside in the memory of many of the longtime residents, either through their own practice or the memory of their parents and grandparents. In this way, performing this public history becomes not only a learning tool but a means of going back to familiar memories and reestablishing their place in the world for a time, however fleeting. Yet this extends past the reenactments. Prior festivals have hosted mule-powered sorghum press demonstrations, and in 2008, older residents, extended families, and children gathered on a nearby field for a wheat harvest using antique machinery. History and memory, particularly surrounding farm life, emerge as central. Although his family has only been in Mt. Juliet since 1939, relative newcomers by some older residents’ standards, Rufus
feels a duty to collect and preserve the memories and history of others there before him. He mentions that he hopes someday to transform his farm—part of an original Revolutionary War land grant to one of the first families in the area—into a living museum: “an 1800s working farm” for school children to visit. Part of his house is even constructed from the first Presbyterian Church in the area, built in 1795 on this property. A perusal through his collection of local historical photographs and items further illustrates his acquisitiveness at estate sales and auctions over the years.

The didactic purpose of the fair thus seems to have arisen organically as the target demographic expanded, and the pieces of “history” displayed are somewhat determined by access, like Jackson’s Civil War cannon and the antique John Deere tractors he collects. Nevertheless, watching interactions among attendees, it is clear that the attempt to revive the bonds of yesteryear is the primary concern. Like photographs or buildings, residents’ memories are a valuable repository of knowledge, not only of names, places, and events, but of skills once essential for daily life. These people, in effect, become living archives. The setting itself also facilitates recall, whereby the presence of mementos and others’ memories jog one’s own and function collaboratively to reproduce an era gone by. Preserving these is critical. I was even asked to provide a copy of my group interview including Rufus’s seventy-eight-year-old brother George, so that the stories and memories he told could be maintained in perpetuity. Thus, in the same manner that they lament the loss of friends and the memories they carried with them, they celebrate the continuing effort and skill that then ninety-two-year old Mr. Underwood volunteered, cooking corn cakes for the festival. The technical know-how he and others
possess, the smells and tastes of yesteryear, and the practice of farming methods now obsolete are all function as form of memory practiced as living history here.

**Recording History and Memory in Mt. Juliet**

Why is the Homecoming and its aim significant? What can it and other attempts to memorialize the “old Mt. Juliet” tell us about the role that memory and history play for longtime residents? This and similar practices of capturing, reviving, and reproducing memory—whether individual or collective—of course must be read in light of the city’s rapid development over the last decade. Several of the men attending this festival have had a hand, if not been instrumental in, creating the growth. Jackson and Bill have both been builders, constructing many of the houses in the area, while Harry and George are real estate developers whose names have long graced signs announcing new subdivisions. “I’ve kind of maybe made a lot of this necessary evil. [I’ve] probably built one hundred houses in this end of the county, and at certain times it just broke my heart,” laments Jackson. “Sometimes I feel like, growing up here, and I say [this] even being in the construction business, I still almost go to tears seeing certain things…You ride down a road and your childhood friend’s house now is Hardee’s, you know?” Jackson is a self-described lay-historian, seeking to maintain not only town history but to uncover his family’s roots as they came to the area in 1786. One cannot help but wonder if his penchant for history is perhaps related to his own contribution to the growth, something he, like many others, feels it is inevitable. Speaking to me, he states, “You know, y’all’s farm, one of these days, is going to be a something different. I don’t care. You may say it won’t be. You won’t want to farm there with a Wal-Mart right next to you, a Lowe’s, a
Home Depot right next to you. It’ll eventually be so. And I’m sure your grandmother
never cared for it. Your daddy probably doesn’t.” The notion that change is inevitable
pervades how he views his own and even Rufus’s farm; he feels that, were they not here
to collect and document the history and maintain these historic farms, their children
would not do so in their place, at least to the extent and with the vision they do. Thus,
Rufus and Jackson speak of their attempt to keep the history of the town and its residents
alive almost as a labor of love, a necessity, and a vocation, particularly in light of the
ongoing growth—change that Jackson says “kind of, you know, hurts.”

Others have taken on a similar mantle to collect and maintain the town’s history
and personal memories. Ron Castleman, a Mt. Juliet native now living in Texas, self-
published a memoir of his youth in Mt. Juliet, capturing the town through the perspective
of, among other things, its connection to the service station his father ran in the center of
town (Castleman 2000). Memoires and historical records often appear proceed in parallel
directions; however, tendencies to amass historical mementos sometimes took competing
aims. While a generally amicable one, I sensed there was a slight rivalry between the
collecting activities of Rufus and his friends and that of N.C. Hibbett and his connections
at the historical society. N.C., longtime president of the West Wilson Historical Society,
was known for his exhaustive knowledge of town history, a history he sought to preserve
throughout his years as society president. Indeed, a 2014 book on Mt. Juliet—part of the
Images of America series—includes pictures almost exclusively from the historical
society archives and N.C.’s private collection (Conger 2014, 6; back cover). Sadly, the
book came out just about a year after his death, although his name, image, and legacy live
on in the book along with a myriad of others. N.C., a lifelong lover of all things railroad,
was perhaps proudest of his handmade model train layout occupying an entire room in his basement. As a nod to the town’s rail history, he constructed the scenery to depict Mt. Juliet as it had stood when he was four or five years old, and while he did not describe himself as much of an artist, he took great pains to carve the buildings out of lumber based on photographs he had or sourced of town structures during that era. In an almost literal sense, N.C. had mapped his memories onto the railroad layout, creating a unique historical record.

What is the tenor of these attempts to memorialize the past? In many ways it ranges between a more researched, fact-based history and those elements that derive from and attempt to collect and publish the memories of those that remember the town “way back when.” Somewhere in between, and comprising both, is an archiving tendency, through the collection (and sometimes publication) of pictures, newspaper clippings, memories, and personal mementos. The widely popular magazine published along with the yearly Mt. Juliet Homecoming fits within this trajectory, populated by a myriad of photos from local individuals’ personal collections, along with articles Rufus asks them to write about their own family history, relations, and recollections. One could describe the *Images of America: Mt. Juliet* book in a similar manner; it consists only of a two-page introduction, followed by nearly 130 pages of photographs and captions, organized by topics such as the “early days,” “hitting the books and balls,” and “faith and farming.” Ron Castleman’s book, too, follows this route in many ways, meandering among personal memories of his family, his father’s Gulf station and garage, and the ways their lives wove into the fabric of the town in the late 1940s and early 1950s. However, Castleman takes a step further, embarking on occasion upon an archivally-researched
history of events touching the town, such as the “nine fiery years” of conflagrations that
touched the town from the late-1930s to the mid-1940s culminating with the “firebug’s”
arson spree in 1946, burning the school and Baptist church (Castleman 2000, 58–79).
Interestingly, even in comparison to more complete “histories” of the town based on
“facts” assumedly from also archival research, Castleman’s is the most complete account
of the numerous fires that plagued the town during that decade I encountered, details
that—from the oral history accounts I collected—were never particularly clear as to the
etiology, date, or actors involved.

Collective Memory, History, and Archive

The above paragraph invokes a somewhat visceral delineation between memory
and history, and the way that archives might fit into this categorization. The difference
between what constitutes memory and history, how collective memory functions, the
increasing proliferation of archives, and memory as an analytical construct, however, is
the object of significant scholarly analysis. Examining this theory can be helpful to
understand the role that these memories might play for residents, the manner in which
they access them, and the power structures behind this. I will thus proceed in a tentative
fashion to attempt to understand better the lengths to which I saw individuals go to
remember their past. Theorizing these very individual trajectories and the collective
memory to which many appealed can help to explain why, in addition to the values that
longtime residents articulate as important, attempts to memorialize their past also
constitute means of reasserting their validity and importance amidst a vast degree of rapid
change.
As Andreas Huyssen says, “Human memory may well be an anthropological given, but closely tied as it is to the ways a culture constructs and lives its temporality, the forms memory will take are invariably contingent and subject to change,” something that, he finds, is ultimately itself based on “representation” (1995, 2–3). In the domains of memory, archive, and even nostalgia, these have a representative functions, and a number of authors agree on the degree to which this dovetails with power dynamics, and the ways in which these can variously function toward politically emancipatory or repressive ends (Naqvi 2007, 5; Huyssen 2000, 26; Nora 1989, 9). Indeed, as Huyssen states, “The fault line between mythic past and real past is not always easy to draw—one of the conundrums of any politics of memory anywhere” (2000, 26).

Leaving aside political questions for the moment, it is helpful to go back earlier conceptions of collective or public memory in relation to history to understand how scholars have theorized their separation. Halbwachs and Nora are best known for their conceptualizations of memory versus history, and most cite Maurice Halbwachs as one of the earliest scholars to have theorized collective memory and its relationship to history (Assmann 1995, 125; Berliner 2005, 204; Rossington, Whitehead, and Anderson 2007, 134). For Halbwachs, one must separate collective memory and history, as history begins only as social memory begins to fade and the need to write things down begins, the point

\[37 \text{ I include Nora in this grouping because, although he does not speak directly to memories or archives as eminently political projects, Nora does posit a differentiation between memory and history that recognizes history, or rather historiography, as eminently critical of memory in history’s claim to validity in the search for “truth.” While Nora does not go as far, he sets up the same kind of distinction that others make recognizing the fact that memory and the construction of archives is not an objective exercise, but rather one that is a construction, and by necessity, subjective and representative. For Nora, this appears not to be much of a problem, however, and indeed, scholars have criticized him for the limited nature of inherently political project to detail the national memory of France, one that appears to ignore France’s colonial lieu de mémoire and their effects on the colonized (Rossington, Whitehead, and Anderson 2007, 136).} \]
at which “when the subject is already too distant in the past to allow for the testimony of those who preserve some remembrance of it.” Thus, history acts as a bridge between past and present, poignantly reminding us of how distant we are from those moments (1980, 79). Collective memory, on the other hand, is a “current of continuous thought” that resides within the borders of a group (80). This thought is marked by “irregular and uncertain boundaries,” unlike history which seeks to capitalize upon moments of periodization and contrast (82). Collective memory for Halbwachs is also multiple and focused on resemblances—a “self-portrait that unfolds through time”—in contrast to history, which attempts to be unitary in its construction of solitary record of changes over time (84–86). Setting up this distinction, Halbwachs appears to see collective memory, which he argues is preserved and easily recalled in groups as opposed to individual memories, as something that only spans the life of members of the group, while history comes after. Furthermore, individual memories are never truly individual because they recall membership in a group, even if that membership is distant. The difficulties lies in the fact that “the groups that carry them are more remote and intermittent in contact with us” (46–47). On the basis of such a conceptualization, memory acts as an inherently social construction.

Jan Assmann (1995) takes Halbwachs’ distinction between collective memory and history a step further, arguing that collective memory is not transformed into history as the group’s memory fades; rather, objectivized culture—“texts, images, rites, buildings, monuments, cities, or even landscapes”—are crucial in producing a “concretion of identity” related to knowledge around which individuals consciously unify themselves, allowing for the reproduction of identity (128). In this manner, through
repetition and visual images, among other things, meanings can “become accessible again across millennia” (129). In envisioning this kind of cultural memory, as Assmann labels it, he stresses that this results in a distinct construction of identity that rests on the ability to reconstruct the past within a contemporary frame of reference, as well as an formalized means of communicating these memories, a particular set of values that structure cultural knowledge, and a kind of self-reflexivity that “draws on itself to explain, distinguish, reinterpret, criticize, censure, control, surpass, and receive ” (130–32). Thus, according to Assmann, collective memory can carry on through the formation of a kind of inherited identity that is consciously constructed and reproduced long past the death of its initial members.

For Nora (1989), memory and history “appear in fundamental opposition” (8) due to the recent acceleration of history which he believes is characterized by “an increasingly rapid slippage of the present into the historical past that is gone for good” (7). Given this “acceleration of history,” he sets memory—or rather, real memory, which for Nora is inherently social and is  how societies recorded and remembered themselves until just about a century ago—apart from history, the modern way of organizing the past. Nora appears critical of history for its representative nature, one that requires analysis and criticism. On the other hand, memory is “life,” a “perpetually actual phenomenon, a bond tying us to the eternal present” (8). Because of the recent reliance upon history over memory, Nora argues that there are no longer milieux de mémoire, environments of memory, necessitating lieux de mémoire, or sites of memory (7). Inherent in this formulation is the fact that, because of a fundamental shift away from history as memory to history of history—a historiographical consciousness and a criticism of the truth of
memory, museums, and monuments—individuals feel there is no spontaneous memory, spurring a need to create archives, maintain anniversaries, and hold celebrations (9; 12). In this function, the demand to capture memory and construct an identity becomes inherently an individual mandate, resulting from the fact that memory is less experienced collectively (16). *Lieux de mémoire*, then, function to stem the disappearance of memory, but Nora argues we must remember these as inherently self-referential and lacking a orientation in reality; charged with symbolic meaning, they “escape from history” (23–24).

These formulations of memory and history have not escaped criticism. Huyssen is critical of Halbwachs for his notion that collective memories are “relatively stable formations of social and group memories,” something he claims is no longer adequate given “current dynamics in media and in temporality” (Huyssen 2000, 28). This is a criticism I would imagine he might also apply to Assmann’s conception of cultural memory, which does not treat the way that cultural memory might change over time or address the way change-inducing mechanisms like technology might function. Given the fact that Assmann is associated with the “memory boom” of the 1990s, something intimately linked to the postmodern turn (Berliner 2005, 199), this is a bit surprising. Huyssen also applies a similar critique to Nora, stating that *lieux de mémoire*, like archives, increasingly recognize their own fragmentation, and are not, therefore, the stable means of addressing loss he posits them to be (Huyssen 2000, 33). John Frow is also critical of Nora’s definition of memory for the failure to identify “technological” underpinnings along with the “immediacy” his depiction suggests—its focus on spirituality and independence from materiality, its lack of self-reflexivity, and its auratic
nature. In contrast, he proposes instead to understand memory as meditation and writing (Frow 1997, 222–23). Berliner and others are critical of the “memory boom” in general, though, stating that the popularity of memory as a critical concept risks its overextension, such that boundaries of what is and is not memory become overly fuzzy and the concept too broad. He argues—following Klein, who states that memory is “‘replacing old favorites’ such as ‘nature, culture, language’”—that anthropology has focused on memory in its attempt to understand continuity, and the persistence of “representations, practices, emotions, and institutions” (as cited in Berliner 2005, 205), yet using memory as a critical category requires careful attention so as not to overextend it.

What do the above theorizations and criticisms of memory—individual and collective—suggest for this field site? The desire to posit a difference between memory and history appears to be fairly fundamental among works memorializing Mt. Juliet, which loosely appear to define history as something more “fact-based” and archivally researched and memory as narrative deriving from an individual’s recollections of events. Even a preference for “history” over “memory” is evident in the work of the Mt. Juliet-West Wilson Historical Society, which in the 1986 West Wilson County Neighbors account, reveals a reliance of archival data where possible over that of memory and personal history (Hailey 1986). Unlike what Nora posits, none of the written local “histories” I reviewed above appear to be particularly self-conscious in relation to their own historiography. Rather, like local books of memory, these all appear somewhat more self-reflexive, and in that way for Nora might serve as lieux de mémoire. Regardless, many do seem to try to take memory and history as separate enterprises and pursuits, whether explicitly so or simply in their constitution.
Is it possible, then, according to what Halbwachs, Assmann, and Nora variously discuss, to talk about collective memory versus history in this place? If so, how might collective memory function? The Homecoming festival appears to be the most fruitful example to which these theories might be applied. First, however, it is important to recognize the Homecoming as a reconstruction of lifeways and pasts, both in its didactic function and in residents’ attempts to relive the past. Yet as theorists from Halbwachs to Nora to Huyssen offer, the point of memory is not ultimately a search for truth or authenticity—this, instead, would verge on the domain of history in its modern conception (Halbwachs 1980, 78; Nora 1989, 8; Huyssen 1995, 5). With this in mind, obviating the need to critique the Homecoming for its lack of historicity and authenticity, it is possible to focus solely on what the Homecoming seeks to provide to residents both old and new, and how exactly it accomplishes it.

Insofar as collective memory is thought of as comprised by the social memory of a group, whose access is facilitated by not only objects and sites but individuals coming together, the Homecoming appears to create a site for the construction and exercise of collective memory. If we take Halbwachs’ differentiation between history and collective memory as valid, the remaining residents that come, connect, and reminisce do seem to function more in a state of collective memory than that certainly of history, at least as long as they are alive to do so. However, the festival appears to go further than merely acting as a space for collective memory formation. It is impossible to deny the fact, however, as Jackson and Rufus say, the past is rapidly disappearing, both amidst the growth and in the deaths of older residents. In some ways, thus, the anxiety that Nora locates in the attempt to define lieux de mémoire also exists. In this manner, and for the
fact that “the most fundamental purpose of the lieu de mémoire is to stop time, to block the work of forgetting, to establish a state of things, to immortalize death, to materialize the immaterial” (Nora 1989, 19), the Homecoming festival certainly appears to accomplish—or attempt to accomplish—this task. It strives to do more, though. It is an organized celebration that endeavors to communicate the past, the heritage of farming practices, and a sense of local pride to new residents to carry on with them. In this way, whether or not it is indeed possible to form cultural memories over the course of millennia in the manner that Assmann posits, Homecoming organizers’ explicitly didactic reenactment of past lifeways amidst a reconstructed setting of historical town buildings, seeks to do that very thing. The hope and aim is, even after (following Halbwachs) the collective memories of older residents pass into “history,” newer residents—even those without a farming heritage—will be able to appreciate and understand the history of the town, continuing to celebrate it as the built environment continues to change and farming perhaps becomes even more a lifestyle and vocation confined to the past.

None of the theoretical attempts to address history or memory (in its general or “collective” forms) do so without problems. Moreover, as theorists like Huyssen and Frow argue, with the changing social and technological landscape, the way that individuals relate to memory appears to be changing, particularly if we interpret globalization and increases in access to media as leading to a kind of postmodern fragmentation. Nevertheless, these theoretical conceptualizations on history and various types of memory do draw attention to the importance that celebrations like the Homecoming have as sites for the formation and continuance of memory, whether or not one can call them historical yet or ever. Thus, while these Nora and Assmann approach
and extend Halbwachs’ collective memory-history division in different directions, and although all these conceptions of memory and history have their problems, each of these theorists’ work appears to parallel in some small way Homecoming organizers’ desire to accomplish in this yearly festival.

On Archiving Tendencies: A Why of Memorialization

Just as the Homecoming attempts to reenact and call forth the past, a number of other behaviors have sought to collect the past, begging the question of how these function in this site. In a similar vein to Nora, focusing on what he calls a “culture of amnesia” amidst an increasing tendency toward “museummania,” “self-musealization,” and archiving, Andreas Huyssen attempts to understand the proliferation of memory discourses in contemporary scholarship and popularity of museums among North Atlantic societies. As opposed to earlier formulations of memory, like that of Nietzsche, which posited memory as “alternative to the discourses of objectifying and legitimizing history, and as cure to the pathologies of modern life,” (Huyssen 1995, 6). Huyssen locates the scholarly and popular focus on memory as a reaction against a contemporary world where the time in which we live is increasingly accelerated and unstable, and the space we inhabit is increasingly fractured. This is not unlike what Nora posited just a few years earlier, stating that “modern memory is, above all, archival,” resting on the materiality of the trace and deriving from a pervasive fear of loss and anxiety about meaning at the present (1989, 13). With digital technological advances permitting the increasing ability to archive data, individuals risk forgetting the voluminous amount of information they must remember; this, Huyssen argues, results in a “fear, even a terror, of forgetting”
In this “culture of amnesia” in which individuals are ever more reliant on media such as from “print and television to CD-ROM”—or since Huyssen’s 2000 article, technologies like smart phones, social media sites, and “the cloud”—a secondary problem arises: determining what precisely to remember, and what is worth forgetting. With the increasingly dizzying pace of technological advancements and information technologies, “memory and musealization are enlisted as bulwarks against obsolescence and disappearance, to counter our deep anxiety about the speed of change and the ever shrinking horizons of time and space” (33).

In this description, Huyssen relies on rift between modernity and postmodernity, categories which, while he does not define them concretely, seem to echo shifts similar to those Harvey posits in *The Condition of Postmodernity* (1989)—the acceleration of time and space, a destabilized sense of self and boundaries, a rejection of meta-narratives, indeterminacy, and distrust of universal or totalizing discourses (7-9). The traditional museum, according to Huyssen is an inherently modern institution, predicated on a teleological view of history and frequently described as culturally ossifying (1995, 15). He contends, however, that the museum—and memory—function differently, preserving that which “has fallen to the ravages of modernization,” while addressing a wider set of interests, voices, and tools, all while shifting away from the search for a totalizing vision towards a more fragmentary one. Consequently, he feels a crisis has emerged that “undermines the very tenets on which the ideology of modernization was built, with its strong subject, its notion of linear continuous time, and its belief in the superiority of the modern over the premodern and primitive” (28). As a result, he finds theorists that posit the shift toward museummania (such as Hermann Lübbe) and the memory boom (Pierre
Nora) as compensating for this loss of stability are incorrect, as they rely on musealization and memory as stable compensatory mechanisms, failing to recognize the way that these themselves have become destabilized (2000, 33).

What does Huyssen’s analysis say to the propensity among residents to document their memories, their history, and to preserve them for themselves and others? Do their actions fit within the self-musealizing tendencies he identifies among contemporary North Americans and Europeans? To certain degrees, I would argue yes. With increasing access to a wide range of technologies and digital data storage, the ability to “self-musealize” becomes, in some ways, democratized—as is obvious with the popularity of social media sites and the “selfie” craze. Furthermore, just as he argues that museums have taken on wider ranges of activities in amassing, preserving, and displaying their collections, so too here do we see a wide range of behaviors to catalogue and preserve the past. Whether through the efforts of historical societies, publishing of photographic collections, the recording of memories, or the yearly enactment of a festival bringing together aging residents and farming reenactments, a wide variety of ways exist in which “archiving,” in a broadly defined sense, is taking place. As to the latter, the Homecoming occupies an interesting niche, in which conversations among older residents and the skills that they still possess become a living, embodied archive on display for newer residents for whom such lifeways are now foreign. That this is set against the backdrop of a farm dating to the late 1700s on which actual buildings from Mt. Juliet’s “rural” past sit—salvaged from the ravages of growth and development—only strengthens the way in which this very site itself becomes an archive. Further supporting this archiving frenzy is the fact that organizers have variously preserved photographic memories from older
Homecomings on Facebook and a website, in addition to the magazine published annually.

Ironically, just as Huyssen raises the issue of digitalized archives’ reliability (2000, 36), I have fallen victim to this problem. At one point, I was able to locate the Homecoming’s primary website, one that contained a wealth of pictures from years past, including the 2008 wheat harvest using antique machinery. In intervening years, however, I can no longer locate the website, and evidence of those pictures only resides in my memory, as well as assumedly that of those who were there and the owner of that digital archive. This points to the fact that archives can function both personally and publicly, for one’s own memory banking or for the edification and pleasure of the greater public. But without continued access to an archive, especially for those for whom the archive does not reference a lived history, our connection to it transforms and is limited to the strength of our own memory. I remember fondly Rufus’s personal collection of town pictures he loaned my family, over which I poured one evening with nostalgic joy for a world before my time. However, these photos’ details have faded into the misty and fuzzy recess of my mind, compelling me to question my own remembrance and fostering a desire to see them again—a reliance on the archive.

In part, I believe this “fear of forgetting” I myself experienced, even for a time before my birth, explains the archiving tendencies at work in Mt. Juliet. However, for Huyssen, this cannot be divorced from the destabilizing world in which we live and the disruption to space and time that characterizes much of contemporary life. Disruption—to a way of life, to the town’s spatial organization, to its slow pace, to its sense of “community,” and even its identity—certainly pervades most of the accounts I have
compiled in this thesis. That this disruption is intimately tied with capitalist expansion and specific schemas regarding the hegemony of growth and progress is also undeniable, and for some, would place this town and its citizens in a transition between modernity and postmodernity—between a stable, predictable world and a fragmenting one. I would argue, however, that many of the individuals with whom I spoke would not consider themselves entirely postmodern citizens; many still subscribe to a relatively stable and morally non-relativistic worldview, a view that largely dovetails with Christian values many in the American South espouse. In addition, the teleology that most embrace regarding growth, from residents to city officials, itself recalls a linear modernist vision. Even within an area that has experienced profound disruption, and one in which residents express dismay at accelerating time and space and atrophying tradition—something that he believes characterizes present attempts to “claim a sense of time and memory” (1995, 28)—the ideology of growth as good proceeds unabated. How, then, do we understand tendencies to capture memories and create archives when it not just destabilization and fragmentation, but a stable vision of growth as inexorable, that is driving the sense of loss?

It is against this loss and destabilization that Nora posits the importance of *lieux de mémoire* and Lübbe the compensatory role of museums, as mentioned earlier, something Huyssen finds limiting given the manner in which archives and museums themselves increasingly recognize their own fragmentary and fleeting nature. While I accept Huyssen’s criticism of the “discourse on loss,” I believe we must acknowledge how individuals talk about their own memories and the need to capture them. Pervasive in discussions on town growth and change was reference to *loss*—of a way of life, of
essential farming knowledge, and of connections with friends and neighbors. Whether or not these archives “make up for” the losses or are themselves unstable—as I learned they indeed are digitally—their existence or their yearly reenactment, even as individuals die or move on, are productive for those that engage in them. As Ron Castleman states in the epilogue of his book, writing it has provided him “some inner peace” (Castleman 2000, 118), just as Adele described photographs of her farm before development and memories of how she “knew it when…before all of that happened” as a comfort. Residents return time and again to the Homecoming and to people and a space that feels familiar. Regardless of their fragmentary and fleeting nature, these memories and reunions continue to do productive work and appear at least somewhat to mitigate the feeling of loss many described.

The capture and preservation of these memories often take on a particularly personal character. Adele recounted the lengths to which she went in order to capture her surroundings photographically before any impending changes:

Listen I’ve got so many pictures from so many different angles of the field. You know when it was the hayfield and everything. Because I don’t want to forget either… Before they widened this road back in the 90s, I drove the pickup truck around the road and my husband stood up in the back end of the pickup truck with the camera and made pictures all along the way so it would be just as though when you were still driving down the road if you took photo, photo, photo in everything. [Laughs] Because, you know, I said, ‘Even though we remember, there’ll be a time when you don’t remember it as vividly.’ You think, ‘I’ll never forget this.’ Well you do. You do. There was an old garage that sat across the road right out there. I’ve got so many pictures of that old garage. Now I can still see, but if I got my pictures out, I could really, really see it… I try to make pictures of anything and everything like that before they tear it down. I made pictures of the fencerow before they pushed it down. [Laughs] Oh dear. And my mother always kept a diary, kept a journal, and I do too. So I’ve got, you know, August the…whatever that first Monday was in August of this year when they started working over here. [I have] those first couple of weeks almost in detail what they
did, [when] they did; now I’ve backed off and just as the major things are happening now.

Facing an unknown world of change and an altered landscape, Adele relies on photos as a means of jogging her memory, something that appears to provide her with a sense of comfort and security, knowing that even as her memories fade, she can revive them with a mere glance. William’s refusal to traverse commercial spaces near local Wal-Marts that used to be familiar and beloved farms, which I mentioned in Chapter Two, might also be read in a similar vein. While I argued there that it functioned as a means of everyday resistance, I believe it also has a dual purpose of trying to preserve the spatial memory of the farms there before, lest the new image replace the old one. I, myself, refused to look at the Thurman farm for over a year after its development, endeavoring to retain the memory of how it once looked over and against how it had changed.

Lastly, regarding archives, it is worth addressing the looming threat of death mentioned earlier. Not only are these individuals facing a “brave new world” unlike the time and place in which they grew up, these residents are aging. Sadly, at least seven of the individuals I interviewed have since passed away. As Jackson stated, the looming reality of death compels need to collect residents’ stories and memories—something that, in many ways, is a race against time. As Derrida (2008) states, applying a Freudian framework of analysis to what he calls “archive fever,” states, “there would indeed be no archive desire without the radical finitude, without the possibility of a forgetfulness which does not limit itself to repression. Above all, and this is the most serious, beyond or within this simple limit called finiteness or finitude, there is no archive fever without the threat of this death drive, this aggression and destruction drive” (19). While I am not
interested in pursuing further here the Freudian analysis of the “pleasure principle” as it relates to the “death drive,” I do believe that the fear of death in its “radical finitude” compels much of the archiving individuals seek to do.

*The Texture of Individual Memories*

With the more “official” means of celebrating the town’s past, such as books, collections of stories and memories, and even the Homecoming festival, it is helpful to contrast these with the tenor of individual memories that those with whom I spoke relayed to me. Nora (1989) claims that as more individuals are unable to access collective memory, the onus begins to reside within themselves to become “memory-individuals,” something that, for him, becomes intimately tied up with the construction of their identity (16). Thus, when I reached out to many of these people for interviews on the growth, they set about explicitly to convey the things that best characterized the vast degree of change to which they had been witness. In this sense, many of the memories I collected were instrumental, they were told in the service of making a point, just as Helena Mae’s story of the car breaking the clover chain introducing his topic was. The instrumentality of these memories makes them no less valuable, but instead infuses them with a purpose apart from the comfort or enjoyment they might provide the owner.

As familiar landscapes change, memories also seemed to possess a particularly spatial dimension, mapped onto the area of the town as it had been in a seemingly primordial past. Knowledge of whose farm was next to whose or the juxtaposition buildings and houses making up the center of town was a body of knowledge from which most drew. Furthermore, except for certain memories with clear historical references—
for instance, the military maneuvers during World War II when one might find a soldier-to-be sleeping in his or her barn or run across an infantryman playing “dead” in a field from a flour bomb dropped overhead—most memories never appeared to have a clear place in time. The focus, then, shifts to individuals and places. Putting a buggy on top of the school roof as a practical joke, buying a six-cent Coke from Mr. Castleman’s garage, selling the flour you’d had milled in Lebanon at McCorkle’s store—all these emerged as central ways of talking about the past.

One memory Charles relays is particularly telling for the manner in which older residents attempted to convey the meaning of the past, particularly in relation to the present. The way that he weaves back and forth between now and then, often settling on “then,” reveals again the instrumental nature of these memories: how they represent a degree of disaffection with the present, and how, in contrast, the difficult times of the past appear somehow sweet. In discussing why he felt he would like to return to the past, taking only pieces of the present with him, he mused on why he maintained such a preference:

Charles: Remembrance. You know, it’s easy to forget the hard times and just think of the great times. I guess that’s what really we do—you forget about—I was raised in a house with a fireplace, and then had a stove. And it had an upstairs to it and the upstairs was two to three big rooms. But in one of those rooms was a ventilator, a heater open where you could open and close it over that big stove downstairs. So when you went upstairs to sleep on a cold night—it was cold!—you ran and stood over that vent, got your pajamas, robe, whatever you was going to sleep in warm and then you’d jump into bed, and you was alright. But you forget about those things. You think that was fun when you stop and think, but it wasn’t one bit funny back then. Because it was cold! It’d be snow, and if it had snowed, around the windowpanes you’d have a little snow seep in if the wind was blowing. We didn’t know what insulation was. There wasn’t nothing. So everything’s gotten easier to live, more convenience, no dishwashers and old washing machine had a motor on it. Put-put-put-put and all. And so many things change and made it so more convenient, and yet give us more time and in place
taking that time to relax, we make more money. More money. More money. More money. So… I never was smart enough to make very much.

ER: What new things do you appreciate the most?

Charles: Well, it’s good to know what’s going on in the world in one way, and in another way, it’s not. Used to, you know, you could have—like my brothers—I had five brothers in the service at one time in World War II. They wrote home every one to two weeks. No telephone calls, no nothing. Now, they’ve got instant contact from Iraq and Afghanistan and so on and so forth. Those are great, but it also creates problems… But, when you asked me what things? Oh, there’s convenience of television, air conditioning—those are wonderful, there’s no question about it. Telephones, cell phones. What you’ve got in your hand you can do just about everything except comb your hair with it. They’ll put a toothbrush on the side of it one of these days. But everything’s so—like lawn mowers—everything is so far advanced from what it was years back. The old push mower, now you ride it in—zero-turn stuff, cut fifty to seventy-two inches at a time wide. Just so much; so many things that have made life easier. Women, especially. Bless their hearts. The old saying was, ‘A man works from sunup to sundown, and a woman’s work is never done.’ And that’s true. Now, they’ve got so many conveniences that make it so much easier for them then what they used to do. They started dinner just when you got through with breakfast. And then go to the field a lot of times, gardens. People put out a big garden, canned stuff. We had about an acre garden and we would put it out full, every year. Had those half-a-gallon green fruit jars. Mason fruit jars. It was greenish tint. In an old cellar under the house, and a kraut jar, we had a twenty-gallon jar—two of them I believe—and they cut the kraut up and put it in there and cover in there and let it ferment and so on and so forth. Green beans the same way—pickled beans. And those jars, we’d fill them full. Every two years, mom would dump them out into the hog pen, feed the hogs, and rewash those doggone things and fill them up again. And they canned sausage. They canned just about everything, and so. We had country ham. We lived on a pretty good-sized farm and I’ve cut the heart of a country ham and put it in beans. Now, somebody’d shoot you for doing that now, I guess. But we had plenty of it. We didn’t have no money, no clothes. You wore hand-me-downs, but you ate good. But you worked hard. When they died, I don’t know, my dad was eighty-something; my mother was eighty-something. That’s a pretty good life. A lot of people worked themselves to death. Didn’t go to the doctor; there wasn’t… My first job, and I got my driver’s license, by a doctor that had a deformative in his left hand, I believe. And he had to have somebody to drive him. And he asked me if I’d drive him, [he’d] help me get my driver’s license and he’d pay me. He didn’t pay much; I don’t know what it was, and I did. He was a country doctor. Great big guy. And he took that little black bag, and I’d take him to the house and he’d go in and administer whatever it was. He’d make their pills out of what he had. And people just didn’t get sick like they do now, as much. They died quicker, though, in a lot of ways. I don’t know, unless you go to one of
these hospitals now, I’ve got two buddies that’ve had staph infections from being in the hospital.

Winding narratives like Charles’s were by no means uncommon. Even as Charles moves through to discuss the conveniences of modern technologies, he seems almost to flow into the past without realizing it. Jumping from speaking of labor-saving advancements in the household to his family garden, canning, the satisfying difficulty of farm life, and his first job as a driver, we see him review his memories with a fondness and nostalgia for the way things used to be might not have been “funny back then.” As he reverts between past and present, he ties together small pieces of his life into a narrative of the things that retain a salience for him. Particularly in the context of this rapid growth, these words reveal a considerable amount about how individuals appear to understand and value the past, and how they relate it to the present.

**The Town Center: A Site of Memory and Consumption**

One of the most iconic spaces in which residents appeal and in which the town’s memory seems to reside is the former elementary and high school at the town’s main crossroads. This building, constructed to replace the school torched by the firebug in 1946, was torn down in 2007 because its floors were replete with asbestos and its condition warranted significant repair. Rather than overhaul the building, which many older residents claimed would have made a nice community center, the city chose to demolish it in favor of other land use projects. Many residents lamented its destruction as one of the most poignant changes in the recent collective history of the town. The school had seen some six decades of children pass through its doors, and to preserve its memory,
many took a brick from its exterior as it was being demolished. Even now, most still refer to the lot as the “old school” site.

With the school lot vacant, the city set about to determine what they envisioned for the site at the former heart of once small town. The result of much cogitation was the idea of a “town center,” which “would make downtown Mt. Juliet. It would recreate what we’ve lost. Or what we never had,” Scott, the city official, relayed. At the time of my interview with Scott, the local government had struggled to find a developer at the right price willing to improve the site with the vision they had in mind; those they had found whose plan embodied the city’s vision were not willing to pay upwards of three million dollars for the several acre site. Scott, however, expressed that they were close; a gentleman had put forth a “gorgeous” proposal—his “vision” or “dream”—and they were within $500,000 of negotiating a workable deal. Scott elaborated on what he envisioned for the space, and how it would replace what had been lost years ago:

A lot of those old buildings went away. [With] the widening of Mt. Juliet Road, it won’t be as quaint as it used to be with a two-lane road, but even though we’re putting in a five-lane highway that’s going to be busier, doesn’t mean that as you drive through it, that it can’t have the streetscape with the antique street lamps or the antique little benches and the garbage containers. Does that make sense? I think we can bring the old Mt. Juliet back… It’s gorgeous. It looks like a downtown district, like if you’re going to the square in Lebanon. It would bring that back and so much more, including that courtyard area. A sense of being downtown; a reason for people to gather. The sandwich shops and the little coffee shop and you’d have all the synergy going, if that makes sense. It’s so close.

In Scott’s ideal estimation, this space should include “historical” elements like a train engine and caboose—a nod to the town’s rail history unknown to most new residents today—along with a clock tower, an open amphitheater and grassy knoll for impromptu gatherings and concerts. This space was to embody a “family-oriented” feel
amidst “old-style” buildings, yet anchored primarily by a commercial space “where you just go from shop to shop to shop.” This vision to recreate “old Mt. Juliet” as a quasi-historical commercial district was not shared by everyone, though; Mark with the Chamber of Commerce felt it was an “insurmountable task” and a “missed opportunity” with a now five-lane highway running through the middle of town.

In an attempt to concretize this vision of reviving “old Mt. Juliet” and creating a quaint space for commerce and community-building, the city turned to its past in order to inform the present. For the sum of $8,000, the city contracted a consulting firm to advise on how the town center’s should look and how to draw from the city’s past. Rather than solely examining photographs, the city sent the consulting firm to N.C.’s house, in order to view and draw from his model railroad of the town as he remembered it during his childhood. Consequently, N.C.’s memory and labor of love was to be the basis for designing the town center. Ever outspoken, N.C. recounted his exchange with the consulting firm:

The city manager wanted this group from Nashville—these planners—to come to my house and see the Mt. Juliet that I have built around the railroad tracks. It looks something like Mt. Juliet did. I’m not an artist by…and I know I’m not. But I had done this and he knew about it and he wanted this committee to come in and see this because they wanted it to be a part of the new Mt. Juliet. OK. So they came, and I carried them all down in my basement room, and turned all the lights on so they could see everything, and they said, ‘You did all this by hand?’ And I said, ‘Yeah. I took crap lumber and built the buildings that progress has torn down and done away with and changed the looks of and so forth. This is the way Mt. Juliet looked when I was, oh, four or five years old.’ And I said, ‘Now, you’ve seen it, and you know what the mayor has asked you to do, and I want to ask you: how in the devil are you all going to design the middle of the city to look new and to look old at the same time?’

From his acerbic response, the irony he perceives of making the new look old is unmistakable. Yet, I believe N.C. was not only reacting to the difficulty of making the
new look old, but to the attempt to capitalize upon a personal project done as a labor of love to enshrine the memory of his youth. He was always proud to show it off to any interested in the history of the town, but their purposes were in some ways opposite his. They hoped to draw from his memory, commodifying it in a sense, in order to give the center of town a quaint, country feel once again.

To understand how this verges on commodification of memory, it is important to read this in light of the city’s well-explored commercial aims. First, one must note that the space is not to function as a park or public plaza, solely for the purpose of community building. Underlying it is an explicitly commercial aim, one in line with the commerce-building activities in which the city has engaged. Employing memories of the past to recreate an “old” feel to the center of town in some ways makes memory a commodity to

Figure 4.5 Handmade train layout of Mt. Juliet by N.C. Hibbett. (© Emily Ramsey)
exploit in the attempt to resurrect an image of quaintness and tradition that has disappeared with the town’s growth. As discussed in the section on the power of the rural, this image of the charming small town is appealing to many newcomers, a selling point on the town’s website and among real estate developers. In the town’s quest to get back what, with the growth, it has jettisoned, it was forced to rely on the memories of older residents—memories that elsewhere have had didactic and memorializing purposes to teach newcomers about the past they missed, but here would be totally divorced from their attempt to build cultural memory in the pursuit of creating a town center seeking to capitalize upon an essentialized past that never was. While both of these pasts are ultimately constructions, the aims of older residents and city officials appear drastically different, the city’s with an ultimately commercial aim and residents’ as largely didactic.

Andreas Huyssen comments on the way in which capitalism intersects with memory, mentioning that even events like the Holocaust are now “linked to commodification and spectactularization in films, museums, docudramas…and even fairy tales” (2000, 29). He raises the paradox that, as traditions appear to atrophy more and more, “the present of advanced consumer capitalism prevails over past and future, sucking both into an expanding synchronous space” (1995, 26). In these moments, Mt. Juliet’s past and the future of the town center site appear indeed to be sucked into synchronous space, one in which memories of the past become means of constructing the future. Important behind this, though, is the double sense of consumption, one similar to what John Dorst (1989) describes in his ethnography of the suburbanization of his Pennsylvania hometown and its celebration of Chadds Ford Days. The festival, originally set to celebrate a Revolutionary War battle has now become “primarily a crafts fair”
(138) and with the vignetting of craft booths at the site, Dorst argues that it “renders almost invisible the actual exchange of goods for money” (166). As such, he argues that, consumption proceeds in two fashions: that of the environment itself as it appeals to those attending the fair, and that of the goods booth operators sell. The former consumption must reign, however, because to let the exchange of money for craft objects would “threaten the mythological foundation of the event” (167).

With the creation of a town center as the city envisioned, this kind of double consumption would most certainly be at work. Operating on the “marking of pasts that never existed” (Huyssen 2000, 30), residents would likely occupy the space primarily for its quaint image, one that capitalizes on an attraction to small-town charm, rurality, Americana, and a rustic past. The purchase of ice cream, coffee, sandwiches, books, and clothes, while important for city leaders as a source of sales tax revenue and continued growth, relies on its secondary status to the production and subsequent consumption of an image of what the town’s early center “must have been like.” In this sense, as Kathleen Stewart argues regarding nostalgia for the country life, “even consumption is a production—a production of class, privilege, the power to model reality, or a production of relationships” (1988, 234). Suffused with symbols of the past and reflective of a slower, simpler time, the town center—ultimately a space for consumption—relies upon memory and the nostalgia for the rural and a past that newcomers never knew.

**Understanding Nostalgia amidst Change**

As I have argued above, memory—whether collective or individual—and attempts to “archive,” collect, and preserve memories for oneself and for those interested
in the town’s past, are a significant part of how longtime residents appear to address and even stand against the change. By offering newcomers a taste of the past and by preserving photos and stories publicly through magazines and books, residents involved in these pursuits hope to capitalize upon interest in rural life to communicate a bit of what many feel is being lost. At the same time, though, memory can become linked to future pursuits to (re)construct spaces that appeal to a sense of what the past might have been like, but ultimately reinforce the city’s aim for growth and commerce.

Usually when one focuses on memory, particularly memories that one imbues with positive emotion and attachment, it is impossible not to mention nostalgia. How does nostalgia function amidst all of these trajectories? What can it reveal about the memory projects on which I have elaborated above? Whether among scholars or in popular usage, nostalgia is a complicated topic, one that individuals view as extremely powerful for calling forth emotion and engendering action, and one that is divisive for its perceived connections to a world that no longer does, and in fact, truly never did exist.

Nauman Naqvi takes up this subject in a working paper in which he traces the “genealogy of the ‘critique of nostalgia,’” attempting to understand “how it accumulated the authority that it carries as a critical category in the human and social sciences today” (2007, 4). Naqvi ultimately argues that using nostalgia as a critical category is dangerous because it risks:

succumbing to the arrogance of cosmopolitan, forward-looking modernity that regards those who look to their vanishing local pasts—repositories of that mysterious form of freedom that Hofer called ‘native liberty’ (the deprivation of which generations of commentators regarded as key to the etiology of nostalgia)—with fondness and longing as inadequately modern subjects, if not inferior and savage beings. (47)
Naqvi arrives at this conclusion through a thorough historical review of the concept detailing the way that, in the past and present, nostalgia becomes tied to everything from mental illness to a manipulation of the past serving potentially “oppressive political projects” (5). Nostalgia, in its earliest conceptualization by German scholar Johannes Hofer in 1688, represented a wish to return to one’s native land (11). However, its semantic meaning expanded, and it quickly became established as a medical illness, one that early physicians posited to damage and lesions in the brain. Military leaders and criminologists also borrowed the concept in the nineteenth century, describing nostalgia as a contagious condition among soldiers, particularly peasants and those from rural backgrounds (16–17), as well as arsonists and child-murderers (34), groups both thought to resist modernization. By the middle of the twentieth century, the nosological element of nostalgia had largely disappeared, but Naqvi argues, it continues to retain its connotation for contrasting with progress and the modern, making it an easy criticism at scholars’ disposal. “The moment [one] has categorized something as ‘nostalgia’, or some orientation, outlook or, indeed, someone as ‘nostalgic’, half (if not all) his critical work is done, half the battle against her opponent won,” Naqvi states (47).

Some psychological research has recently attempted to rescue nostalgia from its negative evaluation, arguing that nostalgic thoughts can “counteract loneliness, boredom and anxiety” and make individuals more tolerant of and generous to others. Researchers have also found nostalgia to ebb and flow with age, being higher among young adults (in the form of anticipatory nostalgia), low among middle-aged adults, and higher again with older adults (New York Times, 8 July 2013). Nevertheless, even those I spoke with hesitated at using the term, sometimes calling reveling in nostalgia “wishful thinking”
given that “things change and we must change with them.” Audra Ladd, with the Land
Trust for Tennessee, even hesitated to use the word when she described the tendencies
among farming families to try to preserve their land:

A lot of times, aging families, especially farming families are leasing more land to
other farmers who are actually farming themselves. But it’s that history of
farming that people want to keep. So you have this older generation…I mean, the
word nostalgia is…I feel weird using that word, because I don’t want it to be that
everyone’s emotional and misty, but they’re really like, ‘Farming is important to
Middle Tennessee’ and to the family history and they want that land to be a farm.

The idea of nostalgia as simply “wishful thinking,” something implicitly unproductive
because it is not rooted in reality is rather telling. With this, in conjunction with Audra’s
hesitation to overlay emotion onto others’ decisions regarding the preservation of
property, the importance of pragmatism again begins to emerge. It may be possible to
conceive of nostalgia and pragmatism as two points along a continuum, where nostalgia
become conflated with emotion and contrasted that with pragmatism—logical, planned
thought. Just as emotion should not drive decisions regarding the permanent future of
one’s farm, neither should one wallow in the past too long or hold onto wishful thinking
when reality extends in a different direction.

In On Longing (1984), Susan Stewart’s analysis on nostalgia perhaps helps
elucidate on a deeper level what residents and Ladd appear to resist above. Stewart
criticizes nostalgia as a “social disease,” one that is negative for its attempt to recreate a
past that never existed, ultimately producing “the desire for desire.” Inherently, she ties
nostalgia to a pervasive sadness and longing for that which “of necessity is inauthentic
because it does not take part in lived experience” (23). As a result, she states:

Nostalgia, like any form of narrative, is always ideological: the past it seeks has
never existed except as narrative, and hence, always absent, that past continually
threatens to reproduce itself as a felt lack. Hostile to history and its invisible origins, and yet longing for an impossibly pure context of lived experience at a place of origin, nostalgia wears a distinctly utopian face, a face that turns toward a future-past, a past which only has ideological reality. (23)

Drawing on Stewart as well as Mikhail Bakhtin’s notion of “historical inversion,” Linda Hutcheon argues that “nostalgia is less about the past than about the present;” rather, it focuses on projecting an ideal not lived now into the past, memorializing it into precious memories at the same time it distorts it through reorganization and forgetting. As a result, “nostalgic distancing sanitizes as it selects, making the past feel complete” (Hutcheon 1998). Calling nostalgia a “cultural practice,” Kathleen Stewart similarly argues that nostalgia creates a frame of meaning in positing a “‘once was’” to “now,” revealing nostalgia’s temporally organizing and dramatizing functions (1988, 227). In the same way, Michael Herzfeld, as he delineates his concept of “structural nostalgia” as a frequently state-legitimated collective representation of an “edenic order,” focuses on both its replicability in succeeding generations and its rhetorical longing that reflects a sense of “damaged reciprocity” in which the mutuality that once existed has been destroyed by modern times (2005, 149). In all of their various forms, each of these scholars point to a comparison between the past and the present, reflecting disaffection with present conditions and a revaluation of the past—a past that most scholars recognize not ever to have truly existed. Indeed, like many others, Kathleen Stewart and Linda Hutcheon root the rise in nostalgia, both academically and as a “cultural practice” in realm of “all pervasive economy of late capitalism” and the disorganizing transition to postmodern times (K. Stewart 1988, 228; see also Hutcheon 1998).
Like with outright resistance to the growth, it seems with the recognition of “wishful thinking”—both in recognition of the impossibility to go back in time and in the constructed reality that takes root in the mind—that many seek to adopt a pragmatic attitude. Just as growth and progress are unavoidable according to most, necessitating a pragmatic attitude, so too is it a waste of time to look back to a past to which one cannot return, even if it seems better. In this way, many residents appear to exalt logic and rationality over the domain of emotion and nostalgia, fearing nostalgia’s work unproductive and limiting. So if, like many scholars argue and conversations with residents reveal, nostalgia is a maligned and contrived sentiment, why is it important to talk about nostalgia at all in this context? I would like to argue that even though individuals resist the idea of nostalgia and reveling in memory, they frequently did so, perhaps without realization. In fact, one of the same individuals that described nostalgia as “wishful thinking” was Charles, who in the memory I included above, wove back and forth seamlessly among speaking of the value of technological advances, exalting a simpler past, and criticizing problems he saw with the present. Despite the aversion to nostalgia as a category or emotional filter through which actions and thought are fed, there are a number of points at which nostalgia appears to exist in residents’ sentiment, not the least of which is the frustration with loss of community and farming values I discussed in Chapter Three.

There remain three theoretical characterizations of nostalgia that I believe are, in part, salient to the present context: Herzfeld’s structural nostalgia, Arjun Appadurai’s notion of “ersatz nostalgia,” and Narcis Tulbure’s “liminal nostalgia.” Tying all of these together highlights an inherently politicized context in which these various forms of
nostalgia reside among power dynamics of the state, capitalism, and those individuals caught in the middle. Speaking to nostalgia’s and irony’s eminently political tendencies, Hutcheon states “what irony and nostalgia share, therefore, is a perhaps unexpected twin evocation of both affect and agency—or, emotion and politics.” Important here for Hutcheon is the fact that the focus is on the “attribution of a quality or RESPONSE” (1998, emphasis hers). Kathleen Stewart similarly argues that we can read nostalgic practices in the same way that scholars read cultural hegemony and resistance—as signs that point to the production of meaning (1988, 233). Nostalgic responses, thus, are signs that point to sets of ideas and frameworks of meaning outside of themselves, many of which have inherently politicized contexts filtered through a screen of emotion.

In the town center situation, described above, I believe there are two partial strains of nostalgia at work here. In the city’s attempt to create a town center—a center that truly never was given the fact that wooden houses and building sprung up as necessary adjacent the railroad tracks—it is possible to see the city both capitalizing on and using nostalgia in the ideal it constructs. Although Herzfeld stresses that structural nostalgia from the state’s perspective focuses on a return to an edenic, formerly perfect social order, he also focuses on the fact that in such situations, groups and individuals often fall into the trap of exoticizing their own past while pointing to it as a source of national character (2005, 148). The notion of return to a formerly perfect social order is not applicable here, given the fact that most city leaders appeal to Mt. Juliet’s present as an exemplary moment; however, appealing to nostalgia and its subsequent exoticization of the past in its characterization of the town’s inalienable rural identity, one that nearly all seem to idealize, the political work of nostalgia begins. This easily pairs this with
Appadurai’s notion of “ersatz nostalgia,” one he intimately ties with consumption, where one “need only bring the faculty of nostalgia to an image that will supply the memory of a loss he or she has never suffered” (2000, 78). This “nostalgia without memory,” as Appadurai elsewhere calls it (82), permits those who never new Mt. Juliet’s former town center or its rural past to consume an idealized place where residents can create (and recreate) the bonds of community amidst shopping, recreation, and a landscape infused with symbols like the historic engine for which they impute an imagined historical context.

On the other hand, the nostalgia at work in the memory activities of older residents—the Homecoming festival, the books and magazines, and the maintenance and utterance of personal memories—appears to parallel what Tulbure (2006) calls “liminal nostalgia.” Drawing on and extending Herzfeld’s structural nostalgia to a postsocialist context, he seeks to tease out longing and loss amidst social change. Tulbure elaborates, stating:

The concept of liminal nostalgia is centered on the idea that what drives the dialectic play between lived experience and social imagination is the longing for what could have been better, the sense of irretrievable loss that is the counterpart of the teleology of social change and economic improvement consecrated by the various ideologies of transition. At the same time, the mandatory reading of transition as progress or improvement, consecrated by state discourses, has a counterbalance in the loss of status and resources that was experienced by the group of people I worked with most closely. (87–88)

Like Herzfeld, he focuses on longing for an idealized past, yet he attends to the power dynamics at work among a people subordinate to state discourses on progress and improvement that follow a teleological aim toward social and economic improvement. Similar power dynamics, as I have argued throughout, appear to be at work here, given
the hegemony of rhetoric on growth and development, an ideology that suffuses city leaders’ vision of the future, while shaping older residents’ understanding of the processes of growth as inevitable. As a result, residents appear to resist by focusing on critical evaluations of contemporary community relations and a decaying system of values, while concentrating significant efforts on memorializing a past that is idealized yet also reinforces the validity of the values threatened by the change. The irony is that in the city’s construction of a town center and in the memorializing activities of older residents, both groups seek to capitalize upon an affinity for nostalgia and the rural—as well as that of rural nostalgia—yet to vastly different ends. With these constructions, one aims for preservation, the other for growth.

Conclusion

In detailing the various uses of memory, I have attempted to reveal that for older residents, providing spaces to reproduce collective memories as well as to teach others about the past which they so value yet feel to be deeply threatened and indeed, nearly gone, is vital. Amidst this also appears an “archive fever,” one that appears intimately linked to fears of irreparable loss of memory with the death of aging residents. It appears in many cases that the fragmentation of worlds and fear of loss that Nora and Huysen identify in archiving tendencies may be indeed at work, at least to some degree, given the vast degree of change that residents have observed in the last two decades. The personal memories residents recounted time and again reflect this recognition of the change, and although they often appear hesitant to speak of nostalgia as anything but unproductive,
longtime residents reflect nostalgic tendencies in the way that they speak of the past, and particularly community values and farming practices, as ideal ways to live and work.

The use of memory, however, is not solely the domain of older witnesses to innumerable changes. The city’s attempt to establish a town center on the old school site reflects a reliance upon memory that seeks to capitalize upon new residents’ attraction to a small-town setting suffused with rustic charm. In this quaint idealized space, I argue that consumption would act doubly: first of the town center environment itself, and secondarily of the goods, the second profoundly reliant on the first. Both the town center and most memorializing functions, including that of the Homecoming, in some way appeal to and capitalize upon various manifestations of nostalgia—including that of individuals for whom the past they seek was not their own. This “ersatz nostalgia,” as Appadurai labels it, appears to be a powerful sentiment, such that both Homecoming organizers and city leaders seek to take advantage of it, shaping similarly romantic visions of the past with but with rather different aims.
Chapter V
Conclusion: Tying the Threads Together

Since my initial fieldwork and interviews with residents, some things have changed, but many have remained the same. Sadly, at least seven of the individuals with whom I spoke have passed away: N.C., Bobby, Corbin, Hollis, Floyd, George, and Macon. Rufus's and Jackson's fear of the loss of stories and knowledge, as expected, is coming to pass more and more each year. The names of older residents continue to populate the signs outside funeral homes; however, the names I recognize are less frequent, replaced by family names of which I have never heard, indicative still of the growth. The town continues expand, having added nearly five thousand additional residents in the last five years. Town leadership has not changed much, though, and the growth appears to continue its march, led by the imperatives the city leaders project.

The town center project, so touted by city leaders at the time of my interview, appears not to have materialized in quite the fashion they initially envisioned it. Occupying the space now is a commercial strip just about where the auditorium and my third- and fourth-grade classrooms stood; a pasta restaurant, barbeque restaurant, bar and grill, and a pizza parlor now stand in their place. Where my second-grade classroom once sat, in which I fondly remember my teacher Miss Josie standing at the long green chalkboards or lining us up for recess, a two-story medical office building rests. The buildings, constructed of red or brown brick with white brick trim, to me look nothing like the quaint town center I envisioned city leaders building when I heard of the plans, and their architectural style resembles that of Providence, Faulkner Landing, and most
other new commercial developments in the area. The quaint wooden houses and buildings of yesteryear—which made it so look like a small western town that, according to N.C., Burl Ives chose to purchase some property in the area when he was recording in Nashville at one point—appear relegated now exclusively to the past. The Chamber of Commerce, which until now has occupied a small turn-of-the-century house on one of the few streets near the old “downtown” to retain its aesthetic character, has recently begun to construct a new, much larger home, heralded by its 229Leap campaign, referencing the date of groundbreaking—February 29, 2016—and the leap of faith they are taking to help guide Mt. Juliet’s future (“Mt. Juliet Chamber of Commerce - 229Leap” 2016). So far, the amphitheater, clock tower, train car, and walkable area populated by coffee shops and small cafes have yet to materialize, and I am uncertain if plans remain to develop these.

The road widening was long ago completed, and a wide black ribbon of highway now stretches from Providence to Lebanon Road, with many of the former residential houses and open parcels of land now zoned commercial and advertising “For Sale” signs on the front lawns. Some have materialized into something new—perhaps a doctor’s office or a nail and hair salon; many others rest like caterpillars in chrysalises, undetermined as to what they will yet be. As I mentioned, Scott’s sidewalks and benches have indeed materialized, yet along a five-lane road, they remain largely unused. While functional for pedestrians, the distance between most destinations is prohibitively far enough for a car-dependent population to avoid walking. In fact, those that do walk them often instill caution in my parents and others; with the infrequency with which one sees pedestrians, many often wonder exactly why someone would be walking down the road in the heat of summer or cold of winter and just what they might be up to.
Figure 5.1 Town Center site as development began in 2012. (© Emily Ramsey)

Figure 5.2 The Town Center site in 2016, with the 229Leap construction at the left. (Used with permission of Thomas Ramsey.)
Figure 5.3 “For Sale” sign along the city’s main highway. (© Emily Ramsey)

Figure 5.4 Sign advertising 104-acre site available for development. (© Emily Ramsey)
I have endeavored throughout this project to tie together a number of strands I believe to be at work, creating what I feel is a complex portrait of suburban growth and the way that it dramatically shapes the lives, built environment, and identity of a formerly rural farming town and its residents. In this, I have tried to draw from two somewhat different theoretical strands—a political economy of growth and development, and realms of memory, nostalgia, values, and meaning—as I believe these intertwine so intimately that to focus on one as primary is to neglect the near-certain effect the other seems to have and the impossibility of teasing out which one’s effects were prior. In the midst of this scenario, by foregrounding residents’ reactions to and perceptions of the growth, it is possible to observe a number of values in tension—growth and progress, pragmatism and nostalgia, development and conservation, individual preference and utilitarian concern, and an affinity for modern convenience and the merit of hard work and self-reliance—and how longtime, landowning residents attempt to navigate these in their everyday life as the city around them drastically changes.

Memories and nostalgic reactions, along with tangible attempts to revive memories and collect photographs, stories, and even historic buildings, appear significant means of addressing and in some ways fighting the loss, even though residents often speak of the growth pragmatically or as a natural path to which they are resigned. Longtime residents also return to conceptions of a “purer,” more bonded sense of community, one into whose fabric the satisfying and morally instructive labor of agriculture is woven, and raise this as a paradigm of better living in comparison to a local and global world with which many are increasingly dissatisfied. In these small ways, I believe there are moments of resistance, even if not always very palpable or seemingly
productive, that oppose the changes they have seen and the hegemony of growth. Even if many tend to naturalize ideas surrounding growth and development, they still refuse to accept them as unquestionably positive. Rather, residents’ reactions reveal just how complex the issues at stake are for their lives, ways of being, and for agricultural practice as a whole. This becomes particularly striking when read in the context of the American affection for bucolic rural environments, and the degree to which, undeconstructed, this vision appears to motivate wide-ranging responses from a vast number of actors—old and new—in this domain.

As I mentioned in the introduction, however, it is important to continue to read these individuals’ stories in light of other work on the critical anthropology of the U.S. and the ethnographic work done elsewhere in the American South. These reveal that the situation I have attempted to delineate above fits well within the trajectory of a region very much in transition, one that—as I have argued—is dramatically impacted by the stage of advanced capitalism in which we find ourselves, and the hegemonic ways in which this can drive rhetoric regarding growth and progress. Like those experienced by immigrant populations throughout the South, among African Americans in Augusta, Georgia, or native mountain residents in North Carolina, the situations my residents and farmers face are inherently local and specific, rooted in the economic, political, and racial history of the American South as it has played out in these areas over centuries and in recent decades. Yet whether in how to build or maintain “community” or in fighting for recognition of minority interests, these populations share similar concerns and occupy overlapping space. It is thus crucial to remain attuned to the ways in which these stories will increasingly weave together and produce a portrait of the U.S. South in transition.
This project has been an extremely personal one to me, given my connection to many of those I interviewed—from cousins, to elementary school teachers and principals, to friends of my grandparents who were able to recount wonderful memories of their lives and the mid-century small town of which my father speaks so fondly. At the same time, delving into this subject has permitted me to explore questions with which I have long struggled regarding the implicit “natural” way many treat growth and development. There were many other questions I encountered along the way that I wished I had had time to explore. How residents’ words reflect an attachment to place, and how to theorize these anthropologically, is a potential further direction of analysis and one I had hoped to pursue here more. In addition, although I did not find a way to measure and address issues of race, class, and socio-economic status among those with whom I spoke, I am convinced that this project could have benefitted from a more nuanced analysis of these elements. Class and race intimately structure access to land, just as they still structure choices to live in subdivisions—although less so than in the past. Nevertheless, the fact that “agrihoods”—subdivisions built around small, private working farms—are often considered “luxury living,” commanding house prices upwards of $700,000, reveals just how much socio-economic status is driving in many of these trends (Strassman 2016). While Mt. Juliet appeals to a more eminently middle-class demographic—particularly in comparison to areas in Williamson County like Franklin and Leiper’s Fork, which are attracting the upper economic strata of residents—it appears that the city more and more seeks a population that can support higher-end retail and restaurants. These situations point to the way in which considerations of class, race, and socio-economic status are necessary to better nuance the many strands at work here.
With the increasing popularity of organic and “natural” foods, it appears that small farming may, at least in some circles, experience a resurgence in the coming years. Thus, the fears that many residents raised about the younger generations lack of farming knowledge may not entirely be realized, and a parallel path to one in which totalizing growth is the only option may begin to form. While longtime landowners in Mt. Juliet feel their lives mostly upended by the processes of the last two decades, the story is not yet over. Residents like Rufus have and continue to make efforts to keep the memory of what the town was like alive, so that while it may not be a direct cultural inheritance for many newcomers, it may begin to impart an appreciation for a portrait—however constructed—of the town and world that came before. The town’s cultural memory may indeed then carry forward into the future, and the voices and memories of its residents, even as they pass away, may not be silenced.
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