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The Making of a Waterfront Suburb:  
An Ethnography of Coastal Gentrification in New Jersey

by

Johnelle C. Lamarque

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Bonnie J. McCay

and approved by

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## ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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By Johnelle C. Lamarque

Dissertation Director:  
Bonnie J. McCay

This dissertation is an ethnographic account of place-making in contemporary America. Here I examine and explicate the process of coastal gentrification underway in a New Jersey community and the form that is emerging from it, what I a *waterfront suburb*. The construction of this kind of place combines elements of gentrification and suburbanization. I examine the place-making of Highlands, New Jersey, through the narratives that people created around their own experiences and how they imagined others, and through the values and social relations that emerged from and also shaped the borough's physical environment, economics, and histories. Class was a critical indicator of how informants related to the process, as was informants' tenure and geographic location in the borough. Also contributing to the construction of place were the event of a sewage spill that closed nearby commercial clam beds, the borough's recently revised Master Plan, and the everyday events that contributed to a process of coastal gentrification such as experiences with New York City commuter ferry traffic, local businesses and neighborly interactions.

In this research, I further suburbanization and gentrification studies by examining in one geographic locale the overlap and contrasts between those two processes. This advances a recent call to critique the dichotomization of city and suburb. I suggest that the construction of Highlands as a place of leisure and good views, a vacation spot for year-round living by the privileged classes, is a distinguishing feature of the waterfront suburb. While this aspect of the process underway in Highlands could also occur in any number of places inland, the process of coastal gentrification is further distinguished by the marine locale at which it occurs. This is because property rights regarding common pool resources may be more salient here than in inland areas. By examining how participants in the place-making of Highlands engage the coastal and marine environments in their actions and their rhetoric, this work expands the relatively young body of literature on coastal gentrification and proposes a new analytical lens, the *waterfront suburb*, through which to view the process.

## Acknowledgements

This dissertation has been a long time in coming. I started research in 2001, weeks after the 9-11 attacks on the World Trade Center, not far from where I lived. People in the U.S. were talking about how the world changed that day. The attacks were shocking, but not much more life altering to me than my mother's death a few months earlier. I was personally righting myself, trying to find a new way to be in this world and, in the months following the attacks, it seemed to me that the nation was too.

This dissertation is dedicated to my mother whose generous manner taught me the gift that listening to someone's story can be. I appreciate her listening to me. I'm not sure that I have done any favors to the people of Highlands by writing this dissertation, but I do hope they recognize their stories and the respect with which they were heard.

I must thank the Highlands residents, business owners, commercial clambers and economic developers who took the time to share their experiences with me. Several individuals and families became especially good friends and I thank them for that.

Thanks to Dorothy Hodgson, David Hughes, Tom Rudel and Angelique Haugerud, who are the hardest working dissertation committee at Rutgers, I'm sure! I thank them for the challenges and consistent support. In particular, I thank my chair Bonnie McCay, a kind advisor and friend.

So many other people had a hand in the completion of this work: My dear Aunt Lynn who heard the stories of Highlanders along with me as she transcribed many of the tape recorded interviews; my good friend Rebecca Etz whose generosity in time, spirit and intellect helped me feel like a real anthropologist; Loretta Dibble who kept me

updated on happenings in Highlands after I left the field and shared her cozy waterside home; Ju-chen Chen kept me on-track with our “dissertation updates;” my colleagues at the Utah Department of Health, particularly those who permitted abbreviated work schedules and those who took up the slack; Amy Nelson and Addy Moreno for their technical expertise; and my father, whose stories of his sleepy hometown juxtaposed with the reality of the suburb it had become, first attuned me to how places could be created and re-created by the flows of people who live in them.

My deepest thanks go to my husband Ron for building a life with me full of love, laughter, and kindness. I’m glad we got on with things even though my dissertation lingered. Without his practical support and constant encouragement, I would not have finished. He is an incredible father to our 3-year-old daughter, and I could not imagine enjoying this big adventure without him.

And finally our daughter Avie, who asked regularly at ages 2 and 3 if I had finished this or that “chapter,” I am so looking forward to picking her up early from pre-school next week.

January 1, 2009

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Abstract.....</b>	<b>ii</b>
<b>Acknowledgements .....</b>	<b>iv</b>
<b>List of Tables .....</b>	<b>x</b>
<b>List of Maps .....</b>	<b>xi</b>
<b>Chapter 1 Introduction: An Ethnography of Place-making .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<i>Methodology: Doing Ethnography “At Home” .....</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>Methods.....</i>	<i>11</i>
<i>Strategies for Analysis .....</i>	<i>18</i>
<i>Class.....</i>	<i>21</i>
<i>Interviews .....</i>	<i>26</i>
<i>The Complexities of Setting.....</i>	<i>29</i>
<i>Conclusion.....</i>	<i>35</i>
<b>Chapter 2 Place-Making.....</b>	<b>40</b>
<i>Social Construction of Place.....</i>	<i>41</i>
<i>Storytelling Places .....</i>	<i>43</i>
<i>Place and the Capitalist State .....</i>	<i>47</i>
<i>Property and Class .....</i>	<i>48</i>
<i>Culture and Power in Place-making .....</i>	<i>51</i>
<i>Creative Destruction in the Making of Gentrified and Suburban Space .....</i>	<i>54</i>
<i>Gentrification .....</i>	<i>57</i>
<i>Suburbanization.....</i>	<i>60</i>
<i>The Special Case of Gentrification on the Coast .....</i>	<i>61</i>
<i>Views .....</i>	<i>67</i>
<i>Conclusion.....</i>	<i>69</i>

<b>Chapter 3 The Present and History of Highlands, New Jersey.....</b>	<b>72</b>
<i>Coastal New Jersey and the Bayshore.....</i>	<i>73</i>
<i>Highlands.....</i>	<i>77</i>
<i>History.....</i>	<i>87</i>
<i>Clamming and Other Commercial Fisheries .....</i>	<i>87</i>
<i>Transport, Summer Leisure, and Housing.....</i>	<i>90</i>
<i>Three Places in One.....</i>	<i>94</i>
<i>Reputations and Comparisons.....</i>	<i>96</i>
<i>Reputations and Comparisons – Redux.....</i>	<i>98</i>
<i>Conclusion.....</i>	<i>102</i>
<b>Chapter 4 Thinking about Suburbs and Cities in the Making of Highlands .....</b>	<b>105</b>
<i>In What Ways Was Highlands Becoming a Suburb?.....</i>	<i>107</i>
<i>In What Ways Was Highlands Gentrifying? .....</i>	<i>112</i>
<i>Complicating Gentrifiers .....</i>	<i>121</i>
<i>Property .....</i>	<i>122</i>
<i>Social Ties.....</i>	<i>123</i>
<i>Social Relations in Home Buying.....</i>	<i>130</i>
<i>Keeping a Home in Place.....</i>	<i>132</i>
<i>Serving a Place.....</i>	<i>140</i>
<i>Populating the Frontier with Sobriety, Beauty and Taxes.....</i>	<i>146</i>
<i>Planning in the Frontier .....</i>	<i>149</i>
<i>Conclusion.....</i>	<i>155</i>
<b>Chapter 5 On the Waterfront: The Making of a Waterfront suburb.....</b>	<b>157</b>
<i>Optimal Habitat.....</i>	<i>166</i>
<i>Making a Destination.....</i>	<i>170</i>
<i>Destination Highlands .....</i>	<i>171</i>



<i>Condominiums in the Coastal Frontier</i> .....	174
<i>Grounding Paradise Park</i> .....	177
<i>Social Ties in the Coastal Frontier</i> .....	185
<i>Ferrying “the Right” People</i> .....	188
<i>Conclusion</i> .....	197
<b>Chapter 6 Making Place through Waterfront Views</b> .....	<b>204</b>
<i>Classing a View</i> .....	211
<i>The Value of Views</i> .....	215
<i>“Location, Location, Location”</i> .....	219
<i>Perspective</i> .....	221
<i>Different ‘Pointes’ of View</i> .....	222
The View from Eastpointe .....	224
The View from Sandy Hook .....	226
<i>Views and the Capitalist State</i> .....	229
<i>Real Estate: Selling Highlands Views</i> .....	237
<i>Seeking a View</i> .....	241
<i>Views of 9/11</i> .....	244
<i>Situating Place and Shaping Identity</i> .....	246
Views as vectors of place-making .....	246
Views and class-based identity formation and resistance .....	247
Loomings .....	249
<b>Chapter 7 Public Toilet or Public Trust? Framing Public Waters in a Coastal Sewage Spill</b> .....	<b>253</b>
<i>The Public Trust Doctrine</i> .....	258
<i>Chapter Methodology</i> .....	260
<i>Setting: Contaminations and Revivals</i> .....	261
<i>Groups and Their Responses</i> .....	264
Department of Environmental Protection .....	266

Environmental Organizations .....	269
Middlesex County Utilities Authority .....	274
Clammers .....	282
<i>Public Pressure</i> .....	295
<i>Implications of Sewage Spill and Its Aftermath</i> .....	296
<i>Framing Persuasive Stories</i> .....	301
<b>Chapter 8 Conclusion .....</b>	<b>308</b>
<b>Appendix A – Narrative .....</b>	<b>321</b>
<b>Appendix B – Grid.....</b>	<b>326</b>
<b>Bibliography .....</b>	<b>330</b>
<b>Curriculum Vitae.....</b>	<b>348</b>

## List of Tables

<b>Table 1.....</b>	<b>133</b>
<b>Table 2.....</b>	<b>262</b>

**List of Maps**

**Map 1 .....6**

**Map 2 .....81**

**Map 3 .....222**

**Map 4 .....268**

## Chapter 1

### Introduction: An Ethnography of Place-making

This dissertation research examines the experiences of people involved in shaping the place of Highlands, New Jersey, where commercial clammers and New York City commuters and others engage the borough's coastal environment in very different ways. Within a particular socio-economic context and physical location, I see the experiences of clammers, commuters and others as central to the process of coastal gentrification. The terms "coastal gentrification" and "place" are not used lightly in this work. They are foundational to my analysis: I argue that the place that Highlands becomes is a product of how people value and use its coastal resources. Class power and class-mediated preference are important social dimensions of the transformation of the place named Highlands.

The strength of ethnography is a foundation of this work. I use individual experiences, as expressed through my observations of talk, text, and action, to expand upon and critique scholarship about urban social change. In doing so I compare the separate processes known as gentrification and suburbanization, and I situate the process I am studying in the particulars of both a coastal setting and one that is closely linked to the larger urban metropolis dominated by New York City. As such, this research develops a new concept, "the waterfront suburb,"<sup>1</sup> to depict a place that is an outcome

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<sup>1</sup> Many thanks to committee member David Hughes for coming up with the term "marine suburb" to describe the phenomena he read about in an early draft of this work and to Bonnie McCay for suggesting "coastal suburb," making me think seriously about the term. Its current state, "waterfront suburb" is my own and suggests human interactions in a way the other two do not. "Marine suburb" focuses largely on the

particular and peculiar to the combined processes of suburbanization, coastal development and gentrification. At its most basic, this research asks the question: What does gentrification in Highlands look like and is it really “gentrification” at all? In what ways is it “suburbanization?” Or, more specifically, how does Highlands’ coastal location make this case different from related and as-yet better told stories of gentrification and suburbanization? How have the borough’s commercial fishing enterprises been affected by these processes and what roles have their issues played in them?

Starting with these broad themes, my findings soon led to four main research questions:

1. To what degree is Highlands gentrifying and suburbanizing? What are the economic, physical and cultural indicators of this transformation?
2. What mechanisms of this transformation are salient to Highlands residents?
3. What new, or as yet unspecified, form does this shift in socio-economic, cultural and physical space take?
4. What are some of the cultural, environmental, and economic consequences of this transformation and how do they contribute to the making of place?

The term “gentrification” is used most often by urban planners, urban geographers and others to describe the social, political and economic process in which low-income and wealthy residents struggle over urban space as increasing property values displace poorer residents (e.g. Smith 1982; Harvey 1989; Keating 1985). In processes of gentrification, race and class are expressed in the economic and cultural construction of

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ocean and faces outward, while “coastal suburb” occurs at the seam of land and water. However, neither implies the human dimension of coastal gentrification that “waterfront suburb” does. I prefer this term as it connotes the built environment facing the water, be it ocean, bay, river or marina.

place (Smith 1982, Smith and Williams 1986, Logan and Molotch 1987, Harvey 1989, Keating 1985). This dissertation broadens the discussion of such transformation by examining class-based preferences for and values of a specifically coastal environment, and how those play out in the construction of place.

This dissertation also provides analytical links between cities and suburbs by examining the ways in which coastal gentrification involves processes of both suburbanization and gentrification. In scholarly and popular writing, U.S. suburbs are typically examined in contrast to cities. In some of these dichotomies, suburbs are valorized and cities demonized, in others this is reversed. Suburbs are positioned as private (read: isolated) space, cities public space; suburbs are white space, cities non-white space; suburbs are car dependent; cities are walkable; suburbs are de-centralized, cities are centralized; suburban residents are wealthy, city dwellers are poor (or so wealthy they can insulate themselves from the poor). McDonogh (2006) breaks down these dichotomies by describing suburbs as home to African Americans historically. He, as does Besen (2006), further argues that some of the “private” spaces of suburbs are used in very public ways – ways that provide centers to suburban residents. By analyzing the transformation of Highlands in terms of gentrification and suburbanization, I also break down the false dichotomy between city and suburb which tends to obscure the lived experiences of suburban dwellers and the “connections and similarities” that may help better understand both types of places (McDonogh 2006). I expand the ethnographic and sociological studies of suburbanization over the past 20 years by examining the connections and similarities between the processes of gentrification and suburbanization, and by showing how Highlands incorporates both processes.

*Methodology: Doing Ethnography “At Home”*

This ethnography explores what anthropological methods can reveal when the lens of inquiry is trained on people and a place that seem relatively familiar. As such it contributes to literature in U.S. anthropology and more broadly to the ethics and methodology of conducting research “at-home”. Highlands, New Jersey, is a small coastal town of mostly white U.S.-born residents with incomes that range from public assistance to Wall Street riches. It is neither a village in the remote highlands of Papua, New Guinea, nor an immigrant enclave in New York City, nor a setting for “studying up” to examine the culture of power holders in U.S. society. Before I set foot in the borough, it was familiar to me and to many of my readers in a way that the highlands of Papua, New Guinea are not. In many ways, Highlands is an ordinary American town, undergoing a typical economic and socio-cultural process. As Highlands becomes a commuter suburb of New York City, it in some ways exemplifies the processes of suburbanization and gentrification found elsewhere in New Jersey and throughout the U.S., particularly areas of the coast like Long Island, parts of Massachusetts and south to the Virginia and Maryland suburbs of Washington D.C. This dissertation is a story woven of the values, ideologies and identities that envelop the borough and emerge from its transformation.

Initially, I went to Highlands to study the transformation of a fishing community into a commuter suburb; the changes incurred by long-time commercial fishing residents and the struggles newcomers faced in affecting such a transition. Earlier work I had done for my master’s thesis sparked my interest in that sort of transformation of social and geographic space. My master’s thesis was an ethnographic account of how commercial



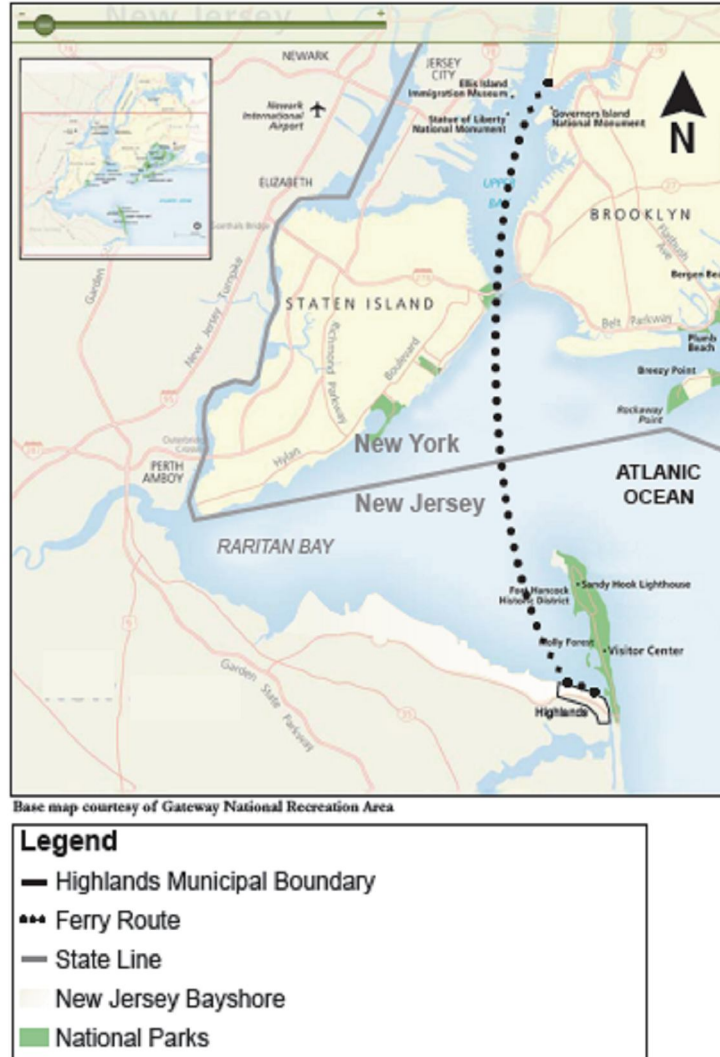
fishing husbands and wives on the north shore of Lake Pontchartrain in Louisiana coped with market, environmental and regulatory changes in their industry. Some of the most compelling parts of our conversations involved the tension these small-scale commercial fishing couples felt as “newcomers” moved into their hometowns, creating larger local markets for their catches but at the same time transforming their small towns into suburbs of New Orleans that seemed unfamiliar to them. Many of the commercial fishing men and women felt displaced, or out of place, to varying degrees in their hometowns. One exasperated fisherman said he used to know the driver of every car that passed in front of his house but now hardly recognized anyone on the street (Lamarque 1996).

I expected my research in Highlands – where high-speed ferries carry well-heeled professionals from New Jersey homes to their jobs on New York City’s Wall Street – to focus on similar concerns: tensions between locals and “newcomers,” feelings of displacement and marginalization, the confluence of these social transformations and attendant physical and economic changes. Instead I found that most people who made their living by clamming in the bays were also commuters. They kept their boats docked in town, dropped their clams at the local purification plant, and spent parts of their paychecks in the local bars, but they – along with most of the ferry riders – tended to commute from other parts of New Jersey. As a result, my focus shifted, from studying the “home” of commercial fishermen to studying a fishing community sans home and more broadly, to class-oriented contestations over coastal space.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Kevin St. Martin (2001) has been developing an understanding of fishing communities around ocean fishing grounds rather than at a residential home-base. Anthropological accounts of U.S. commercial fishing practices and the often more nebulous land-based “fishing communities” have been at the forefront of a growing body of U.S.-based ethnographic work. (Acheson 1981, 1988, and 2003; Durrenberger 1992 and 1996; Gatewood 1984; Garrity-Blake 1994, Griffith 1999, Johnson and Metzger 1983, Maril 1995, Orbach 1977). Much work lately has been in the service of government-funded projects to describe and delineate fishing communities (Gilden 1999; Hall-Arber, et al. 2001; Impact Assessment Inc. 1991; McCay,

**Map 1. Highlands, New Jersey to New York**



While the political boundaries of Highlands helped me mark my object of study, they were complicated by conceptualizations of the cultural, social, and economic borough's borders. The boundaries of Highlands borough were politically stable but culturally fuzzy. Working class residents sometimes spoke of "real Highlands" as the low-lying portion of the borough and outsiders were often unclear about where the borough started and ended in relation to neighboring boroughs and towns, such as

Atlantic Highlands, Seabright, Navesink, and Rumson, all closely situated on this northeastern corner of New Jersey. Of course, any study of a particular place is complicated by that place's position and connections within a larger geographic and economic context. In the case of Highlands, metropolitan New York was especially salient.

During the years of my research, the U.S. became embroiled in a nebulous "War on Terrorism" in which each day bore a color-coded alert about the possibility of another attack. Wars in Afghanistan and Iraq drained the U.S. treasury and armed forces. I arrived in Highlands one month following the September 11, 2001 attacks that preceded these wars and toppled New York City's tallest buildings, the World Trade Center Towers, which on a clear day could be seen from Highlands. During this time nationalism was on the rise and news of these events often overshadowed an emerging economic crisis that would follow several years later. According to the U.S. Census in 2002 about 56 percent of American families could afford to purchase a "modestly priced" home, down from the 1980s when about 60 percent of families could afford such a purchase (U.S. Census Bureau 2007). Later, it would seem that many purchased homes that they could not afford, perhaps without much choice. In September 2002 Monmouth, New Jersey, of which Highlands is a part, was considered to be among the top three overpriced housing markets in the nation, increasing 21 percent since the previous year (Chatzky 2002). Nationwide, late mortgage payments were on the rise (Gongloff 2002) at the same time the Federal Reserve was cutting interest rates and "accounting scams" in corporate America brought to light Wall Street excesses and the vulnerability of investors (infoplease.com 2002, 2003). In New Jersey during the time of my research, open-space

legislation attempted to limit the suburban sprawl that had come to exemplify the state, and efforts to reinvent the Bayshore region focused on reinvigorating downtowns in the nine small towns along it and on improved access to New York City via commuter ferries.

Highlands was influenced by these broader socio-economic and military events as residents raised American flags and refinanced their mortgages. At the time residents I knew were using increased equity in their homes to borrow for renovations, while others took advantage of low-interest rates and slack borrowing rules to buy their first homes. Moreover, Highlands was one of the nine small towns designated for “development” along New Jersey’s Bayshore region and the site of two relatively new commuter ferry operations. I take Highlands not as a bounded container of culture but as a fluid and moving place under construction. This study recognizes Appadurai’s “problem of place.... [as] the problem of the culturally defined locations to which ethnographies refer” (1988:16) and examines place-making as a process through which we locate discussions of power, meanings and resistance. Rather than simply assert my own “special brand of ventriloquism” (Appadurai 1988: 20) by speaking of and for the people of Highlands, I critically examine the construction of this space and place that at times felt incredibly familiar.

Though familiar to me in many ways, the people and place of Highlands were dissimilar from my personal history in terms of regional geography, the organizational structure of commercial fishing and other ways. For example, I am from southern Louisiana, and the commercial shrimpers I knew growing up had more control over how much they caught and where they sold their catches, than Highlands clammers. Still, Highlands represented a different kind of problem to me than the “otherness” confronting

anthropologists working “far-from home.” A strong pre-existing sense of familiarity, while reducing the sense of otherness that distances author from subject, may inhibit close understandings of some seemingly familiar situations. Researchers may read their own biases into situations, using their own familiar interpretations. The same could be said for readers of the resulting ethnography, viewing situations through an old and well-worn lens. Fortunately, and in many ways, my fieldwork surprised me, causing me to shed some of the sense of familiarity that I, as both a scholar and an insider-outsider, brought to it.

Not a “halfie,” as Abu-Lughod (1993) describes herself, I am nonetheless an insider-outsider. I am a suburban American with familial ties to commercial fishing, yet I am also an academic with the power to observe, analyze, and report. I have the power to create an image of Highlands and its inhabitants for consumption by anyone who picks up this manuscript. As this statement suggests, that power is both limited and fleeting. Once this document is printed and bound, I lose control over the interpretation of this material as much as the people who shared their stories with me relinquished control of the interpretations of their own lives. What is presented here is a snapshot in time and space. The people of Highlands have continued to create and recreate themselves and their community.

U.S.-based ethnography was not always considered acceptable in the discipline of anthropology (Gusterson 1997, Forsythe 1999) though, as Ortner (2003) points out, it was always present. What Forsythe (1999: 6) calls the “traditional fieldwork story” starts away from and unconnected to the fieldworker’s “normal milieu”. However, anthropologists have long responded to the challenge of examining “power, culture and

social movements within the United States” (Susser 2001: 7; see also Hymes 1972), and by the 1980s, anthropology in the home of the ethnographer and in the U.S. had become commonplace. Moffatt (1992) reported a leap in the number of U.S.-based ethnographies from 1980, recording about twice as many book-length ethnographies from 1980-1992 as in the entire history of the discipline. This increase brought with it new questions about how anthropologists working near home perceive and assess their own embedded cultural assumptions. Were there methodological and theoretical costs to conducting near-home anthropology? Could near home anthropologists “reevaluate ethnocentric and atheoretical approaches to society” in the same way they brought that critical anthropological gaze to unfamiliar places (Susser and Patterson 2001:8)?

Like anthropologists working far from home, those whom I call “near home” anthropologists also draw on cultural differences, arguably the main tenet of the discipline used to access tacit features of the group under study. Indeed, Susser and Patterson (2001) argue that because U.S. anthropologists working in the U.S. address what Moffatt (1992:206) has called “lesser but real differences” between themselves and their informants within national bounds – such as class, religion, gender, race, age, career, education, etc. –they are positioned to provide a stronger analysis and critique of power. As Appadurai (1990) notes, it may be more illuminating to study disadvantage and advantage within the same nation than studying a global elite across national borders.

A lot of U.S. anthropology has focused on the less powerful within categories such as class, race, ethnicity, and sexual orientation (see Susser and Patterson 2001). However, much has also addressed structures of power where they sit. Anthropologists working in the U.S. have taken up the challenge issued by Laura Nader (1972) to add

“studying up” to their repertoire of research topics, including technology and science (Forsythe 1999, Gusterson 1997), American “values” (Peacock 1994), political processes (MacLennan 1994), business and industry (Newman 1994, Dubinkas 1994 and 1988) childbirth (Davis-Floyd 2003), the U.S. upper class (Marcus 1992), the white collar unemployed (Ehrenrich 2006), and others. “Anthropologists have a great deal to contribute to our understanding of the processes whereby power and responsibility are exercised in the U.S.” (Nader 1972: 284). It is not an easy undertaking however, given the ability of many in this tier of U.S. society to resist becoming the objects of study, and much of the research that has examined power in the U.S. has been conducted among the less powerful (see Kingslover 1998).

My contribution to the field of U.S. anthropology is in the examination of place-making that draws on a wide variety of qualitative data gathered from a range of residents, business owners, government and quasi-governmental staff engaged in the often contradictory construction of place in Highlands, New Jersey from 2001-2003. I learned from individuals of the upper class, middle classes, and the underclass. I critically reviewed documents of government planning meant to produce an image and plan for Highlands or the larger Bayshore region that engaged middleclass or upper class preferences. My methods are described in detail below.

### *Methods*

Following Bernard (1994) I engaged typical ethnographic methods including participant observation and would use Geertz’s term (2001) “deep hanging out” to describe my associations with several informants. I extensively walked and drove the

streets of the low-lying section and the hillside of Highlands, ate at the restaurants and coffee shops, drank at the bars, sang karaoke at one, washed clothes at the corner laundry, babysat people's children, offered rides, volunteered, snooped, took yoga classes, attended and contributed to fundraisers and other functions, walked in parades, dug my feet in the sand at the summer jazz concerts, walked in the woods, rode the commuter ferry many times, walked back and forth to Sandy Hook, gleaned historic information from park rangers and documents at Fort Hancock, became godmother to an infant resident, and generally became a part of the community for two years.

Again following Bernard (1994), I used data from semi-structured and unstructured interviews to learn from informants what they believed I needed to know about the changes underway in Highlands. I conducted 56 semi-structured and unstructured interviews, including 42 tape-recorded interviews and 14 where I wrote notes only. These interviews involved about 47 people, including three couples interviewed together and individuals who floated in and out of conversations. Additionally, regularly writing fieldnotes helped me capture the many informal conversations that engaged me throughout this fieldwork. Because I was in Highlands for about two years, I was able to speak with people more than once and in a variety of settings, both formally and informally. The interviews elicited my informants' memories of basic facts and experiences – when they moved to Highlands and under what circumstances, for example -- as well as their opinions and understandings of the changes underway in Highlands and the various groups of people they see as comprising the borough. Often their responses hung on their experiences and personal interactions – how they felt walking into Katz's, a lunch counter-newsstand that is an icon of old working-



class Highlands, for the first time as a newcomer in town; how they went about selling or buying a house in Highlands; or how they worried about their children's walk to and from elementary school in the midst of commuter traffic. Such experiences often served to make tangible ideas and opinions they wanted to convey.

I regularly wrote field notes of these activities, transcribed tape-recorded interviews (with help from my aunt who is a professional transcriptionist), edited all the transcripts, and read through them multiple times along with notes of the interviews that were not tape-recorded, my fieldnotes, and the archived minutes of local government meetings that I copied into a laptop. Using computer software for qualitative data analysis, Atlas.ti™, I linked these documents together for easier searching and content analysis. Each research question depended on multiple methods for answers.

To develop a sense of the public space in Highlands, how it was used, and by whom, I paid close attention to special events and daily public life in the borough. I attended public events, such as the Clam Fest, jazz concerts, a beach-side screening of the movie "Jaws," various parades and other staged activities, many of which were intended by organizers to be community-building events, but also to advance their visions for the borough's economic development by trying to construct it in a particular image. Often I attended these events with long-time residents or newcomers and was able to develop a sense of how they fit themselves into the public space created by the event and the degree to which they felt comfortable with that fit. Also, I visited the Highlands properties on the annual "Holiday Home Tour" during Christmastime and, à la Bourdieu's *Distinction*, compared that experience with the more upscale holiday tour of Ocean Grove, another New Jersey shore town. Likewise, I engaged in day-to-day activities and exchanges with

borough businesses, residents and government offices, often joining residents of various class positions and tenures in Highlands.

To gain an overview of issues brought to local government and local government response, I spent a lot of time going to borough council meetings and meetings of the planning and zoning boards.<sup>3</sup> Building heights, parking problems, and ferry-related traffic problems were some of the most persistent issues. The borough's latest master plan was being developed during my field stay and I attended the public meeting where residents and others offered their vision for the future of the borough in broad and detailed strokes. Careful analysis of the master plan and other such documents of local and regional government offered a view of certain power holders' attempts to designate a "consensus" vision for Highlands and the surrounding area's economic and physical development. Perhaps the most controversial feature of the resulting Highlands Borough Master Plan (2004) was the change in zoning suggested for the location where Paradise Mobile Home Park sits. This issue is taken up further in Chapters 5 and 6. To gain a historical perspective of these municipal land-use issues, I reviewed government documents including meeting minutes as far back as 1960 and various planning documents from that period forward.

To get a sense of historical context in general, I read local histories and also studied old documents and film stored by members of the local historical society and others who kept personal records of past events. I also interviewed elderly life-long residents, including one resident who took me on a "tour" through the borough, meticulously describing businesses and amusements he recalled from his childhood.

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<sup>3</sup> Three meetings a week for about a year: The Borough Council, Planning Board, and Zoning Board.

Review of census data from 1970 to 2000 for Highlands, Monmouth County and New Jersey revealed demographic and other trends. I chose 1970 as the early boundary for census data because this shortly preceded the condominium development in the borough that preliminary interviews suggested was an early wave of gentrification. These data provided historical and geographic context for markers of class and gentrification such as income, education and house value.

To get a sense of the built environment and how it had changed, I gathered permit data from the 1970s to the end of my field stay, August 2003, for a randomly selected sample of the 2,598 properties in Highlands. With the help of friends, I gathered photographs of each of the 335 properties in this sample. I also hired a couple of residents to help me pull the sample and help photograph properties.<sup>4</sup> I gleaned general and specific information about Highlands properties from databases of New Jersey property tax records maintained by the Monmouth County Board of Taxation and the County Clerk's Office. The databases linked properties to deeds and maps, and provided sale prices, square footage of many buildings and lots, owners and their addresses, and other useful information about the properties in Highlands. Using this data, I was able to figure averages of various dimensions, such as the square footage of lots and structures. I divided the database into segments reflecting upper and lower Highlands, then averaged these data points for each area and compared them. I used the generally held dividing line of Highway 36 to divide the borough into these segments.

Numerous on-line resources helped me access various goings-on around town, particularly useful for updating me after I left the field. The Lexis/Nexis database helped

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<sup>4</sup> Unfortunately analysis of the photographs remains incomplete and is not discussed in this dissertation.

me fill out my collection of newspaper articles on a sewage spill that occurred while I was there. With trips to the local public libraries, I gathered articles from local publications unavailable in Lexis/Nexis. I also examined websites for various non-profit and governmental organizations as part of this project, and found other publicly accessible government documents.

The Highlands municipal website proved to be a valuable source of business and municipal information, planning and zoning documents, and fertile ground for textual analysis. I coupled my review of the Highlands website with an interview of the person who created and maintained the site, during which he gave me a tour through the site. I consider the analysis of this website, along with analysis of local government and non-governmental efforts (via planning documents and events), as a way to create an image of the borough that would push forward a certain vision of economic development and community.

Regarding the four research questions introduced earlier in this chapter, interviews and observations helped clarify and complicate elements of answers that quantitative data provided.

1. In addition to census and other quantitative data, interviews and observations helped me understand the degree to which Highlands is gentrifying and suburbanizing, the economic, physical and cultural indicators of this transformation, and the meanings of that transformation to residents and others. For example, census data suggests a socio-economic shift toward suburbanization, yet informants complain that ferry commuters were turning Highlands into “a parking lot” and producing high-speed traffic with inconsiderate drivers who lived

elsewhere. The perception of so many drivers leaving town complicates the notion of Highlands as a residential suburb of New York City.

2. Interviews, observations, and review of meeting minutes especially helped me understand the elements of Highlands' transformation that were most salient to borough residents. For example, informants describe how they moved to Highlands because of ferry access to New York City, pointing to the ferry as one mechanism of the transformation underway in town.
3. I argue that this shift of socio-economic, cultural and physical space takes the form of a "waterfront suburb" in which elements of consumer and productive uses for coastal resources overlap or come into competition. Commercial clammers grumble that the borough now is full of "yuppies," however, Highlands is the location of a vital facet of their business, the clam depuration plant, which was established around the same time as the new-style commuter ferries launched. This contrasts with some of those "yuppies" swooning over their waterfront views from upper floor condominiums. Through interviews and observations I examined the place that accommodates both kinds of occupants and their different associations with the environment.
4. Interviews, observations and document reviews, along with existing census and other quantitative data helped me see some of the cultural, environmental, and economic consequences of this transformation and how they contribute to the making of place. For example, qualitative data showed me that while some residents applauded the commuter ferries, others complained that the improved access to New York City was driving up property values and making it impossible

for their grown children to buy a house in the borough. This suggests a social consequence of the transformation that, along with how people talk about those increasing property values, contributes to the construction of place.

### *Strategies for Analysis*

Much of my strategy for analysis revolved around seeking patterns in the text of my interview transcripts, fieldnotes, and archived meeting minutes. I examined the rhetoric of politics in which actors engaged as well as their positions within the context of the changes underway in Highlands. I identified demographic characteristics of informants along with the manner and degree to which they valued certain facets of Highlands' history and transformation. During my field stay, I interviewed people with a wide range of characteristics, including length of time living in the borough, profession, gender, class, age, and civic role in the borough (whether business owner, resident, government official, member of a civic organization, or some combination). I interviewed commercial clammers and real estate agents; people who commuted to New York on the ferries; people who loved the ferries, even if they only sporadically used them, and people who despised the ferries. I spoke with a variety of life-long residents and newcomers: upper class and lower, aged in their 80s and in their 20s, men and women, business owners and consumers, summer residents and year-round residents.

For many people I interviewed, Highlands was a place of residence, recreation and civic involvement. These informants commuted into New York or elsewhere in New Jersey for largely white-collar work. For others, Highlands was both residence and workplace. Among these informants were small business owners, a yoga teacher, a few

commercial fishermen, a sanitation worker, other government employees, and elected officials. For many commercial clammers it was a place of work where they docked their boats and commuted to each morning from other locations in New Jersey. For other informants it was a summer residence.

The preliminary analysis of my qualitative data involved reading and re-reading interview transcripts, fieldnotes, archive data and government documents. Several basic themes emerged from this first level of analysis, including the centrality of both social class and transportation (commuter ferries) to the changes underway in Highlands. A second level of analysis involved a more rigorous development of themes identified in the preliminary analysis. This development of analytical markers culminated in four outcomes. First, I created an informant matrix. Second, I developed an operational definition of “gentrifier”. Third, I described emic and etic notions of class, and fourth, I disaggregated the kinds of “social ties” that connect people to Highlands. In the section that follows, I detail the first and third outcomes and introduce the second in the sections below. Explication of “gentrifier” and “social ties” can be found in Chapter 4.

Defining my unit of analysis in terms of people was difficult. Who would be best to interview regarding the socio-economic transition that the borough is undergoing? So many facets of community life are in play – which would offer the best insights into my research questions? How should I define those involved in Highlands’ gentrification and how should I define those who were not? I approached these questions strategically and opportunistically.

First, following my fieldwork and preliminary analysis, I created a matrix in an Excel spreadsheet (see Appendices A and B), in which each row represented an

informant. Column headings included informants' basic demographic information as well as how they valued items that emerged from preliminary analysis as important generators and products of the changes underway in the borough, such as the commuter ferries, the condominiums, taxes, and water views. Based on what informants told me and their actions I observed, I assigned numbers on a scale of 1 to 5 that indicated how much an informant valued these particular items or issues related to the borough's gentrification. The number 5 meant the informant valued, for example, waterfront views as highly as anyone else I interviewed. The number 1 meant the informant valued waterfront views as minimally as anyone I interviewed. I populated my informant matrix with these valued indicators. This matrix included not only informants I formally interviewed, but also individuals I spoke with informally and who appear in my fieldnotes or whose testimony at public meetings I listened to or read. I included these additional individuals and loosely consider them "informants" when demographic variables and how they valued one or more of the motivators or results of gentrification were clear. Therefore, the number of people included in the matrix totaled about 20 more than the number of informants interviewed. During the course of my analysis, I often sorted the columns to get a sense for how they related to each other. For example, if I wanted to see how people who highly valued access to New York City also valued the commuter ferries, I sorted the database first by the column regarding access to New York and then by the column titled "ferries". I highlighted those two columns and compared them to see whether the codes in the columns matched or if some other pattern emerged. In the same manner, I also checked to see how the values lined up with informants' genders, classes, and the types and lengths of their tenures in Highlands. Data from this matrix informs sections



throughout my dissertation and additional details about the matrix are provided in those sections.

Second, after preliminary analysis of qualitative data, I defined “gentrifier” in terms of a person’s active cognition about the prospects of the borough. Specifically, I use “gentrifier” to describe a person who verbally expressed a desire for new or expanded consumer options in the borough geared toward high-income residents or business patrons. I also posit that gentrifiers are not solitary. Gentrification happens through the actions of multiple people socio-economic forces, and a cultural milieu actually creating the economic and socio-cultural transition known as “gentrification.” I came to an operational definition of gentrifier through my research and analysis rather than starting this work with a pre-determined definition to label individuals who drove gentrification.

### *Class*

I initiated this work with the sense that understanding gentrification requires understanding how class positions and participants’ situations in the productive landscape contribute to place-making. For this research, I take a more Weberian approach to class, coupling Marxist production-oriented notions with Bourdieu’s focus on consumption (Weber 1958, Hartmann 2007, Bourdieu 1984). Thus, the third outcome of my analytic strategy was the need to identify and discuss class and class-based social phenomena as they were grounded in Highlands. At times, my analysis relies on “etic” perspectives, i.e., on traditional scholarly definitions of class that I brought with me to the field, as found in works of Durrenberger (1992, 1996) or Ortner (2003). In particular, I used occupation as the etic indicator of class. However, it was also necessary to rely on “emic” social

categories, or those used by informants themselves, in order to understand how meaning was generated and social significance was produced.

My emphasis on class derives in part from my original interest in gentrification per se but it also reflects the particular histories and social relations of the people living in Highlands and involves an analysis of their consumption preferences and habits, particularly their consumption of coastal real estate and views. As I discovered early in my fieldwork, dichotomizing residents into old-timers and newcomers was not the only, nor the most consistent, marker for understanding how residents went about place-making in Highlands. For some aspects of place-making, class proved to be a more salient category, though even this was often confounded by length and type of residency and was still very fluid when people went about place-making.

People in Highlands thought of class in terms of income, occupation, education, and manners of consumption, including where one lived within the borough, one's type of residence, and the businesses that one frequented. These emic identifiers of class tended to focus more on consumption practices, probably because they were most visible. To many lower income Highlanders, "New Yorker" did not just mean someone who came from or worked in New York City, but in addition someone with a professional occupation who could afford to spend more money on goods and services. People "on the hill" were assumed, from the real estate values involved, to be in a higher class category than people in the low-lying section, except for a few larger homes and most of the condominiums located near the water. The higher class residents tended to distinguish an underclass living in the public housing, mobile home parks and the substandard bungalows scattered throughout the low-lying section of the borough as separate from the

generally more valorized, “hard-working” commercial clammers who were seen as a significant part of the borough’s history. While there were several restaurants in the borough that transcended class boundaries, many were considered solidly working-class or upper-class establishments. This is not to say that residents did not cross class divides to patronize a business that was outside of what they saw as their own class, but they would do so with a class-consciousness that acknowledged the transgression. These emic-defined markers of class comprised many of the indicators I examined in my informant matrix.

I did not ask residents to tell me which class they most identified with, though often people, whatever their occupation, would volunteer that they were middle-class, sometimes specifying that their “middle” was “upper” or “lower”. Several informants seemed to consider themselves as part of the “working class” but the general personal default to the middle class suggests that using an emic view to sort informants into class categories may be unhelpful. Thus, I used etic markers to assign individuals to classes for the purpose of my analysis. Like Ortner (2003), I use occupation as a “reasonable mode of defining and ordering class positions” as it serves to incorporate to some degree other possible indicators of class including prestige, income, and education (2003: 30). While focusing on one class identifier is not ideal, and potentially flattens the complexities of class as experienced in American society (see Gilbert 2003), I found occupational data to be the most consistently accessible and reliable indicator among my informants.

Rather than Ortner’s wording “upper-middle-lower,” I used a similarly common scheme to define a messier class structure with five categories: capitalist, upper-middle,

middle, working class and underclass. I draw the labels from the Gilbert-Kahl model (Gilbert 2003: 17). My informants mostly came from three of these categories: upper-middle class, middle class, and working class. However, members of the capitalist, working poor, and underclass were present in my observations and emerged as characters in stories told by interview subjects.

The appropriate class category for a few occupations and the specific occupational situation of individual informants was not always obvious. I used Ortner's list of occupations in class categories (2003: 30) as a guide for all but 8 of the 66 informants listed in my informant matrix. In six of those eight cases, I knew a broad occupation category and noted the informant's class category by following the more abstract "typical occupations" listed in the Gilbert-Kahl model (Gilbert 2003). I left the occupation-based class column blank for the remaining two.

Of the people I interviewed or for whom I had enough information to include in my informant matrix (n=64), 34 percent were in the upper-middle class. These included five attorneys, a musician/yoga teacher, four mid-sized business owners, two small-scale developers, three people in upper-levels of large businesses, one head of a non-profit, one regional economic development director, one architect, four professionals, and one retiree of a similar occupation. Another 39 percent were in the middle class, including 8 individuals in management-level positions of local government, 10 small business owners, 1 retired school teacher, 2 upper-level administrative office workers, 1 real estate agent (though two other real estate agents were placed in the upper-middle class because of accompanying occupational activities), a local journalist, a retired graphic artist and spouse. The working class comprised 27 percent of my informants, including 7

commercial fishermen and clam plant or wholesale employees (four others employed in the commercial fishing industry and three others in recreational fishing are included in other classes), 1 factory worker, 1 skilled craftsman, 1 municipal laborer, 1 truck driver, 1 hairstylist, 1 retail worker, 1 office worker, 1 housecleaner, two elderly widows whose husbands had been working class. This list is detailed only to show the range of people I interviewed and how I populated class categories. It in no way suggests that this breakdown reflects the occupational breakdown of Highlands residents. Indeed several informants lived elsewhere. Likewise, this list does not reflect the amount of time I spent with informants or the quality of data gleaned from them. Though the working class informants only make up about a quarter of interviews, I spent the vast majority of my time with working class key informants. Upper-middle and middle-class informants were often more vocal in public settings and were in positions of local government from which I needed information and opinions.

In this analysis, I address class as a social construction, one that must be performed and enacted (see Ortner 2003, Yodanis 2006). Does the simple categorization of class based on occupation contradict this? No. I use data regarding consumption to develop nuance in my analysis. Rather than simply let it stand that a person who is of a particular occupation is of a particular class category, I examine how different groups engage with and value the various aspects of Highlands' transformation into a waterfront suburb. Through my analysis, I define and describe that manner of engagement as a class-based performance, Bourdieu's "brand" (1984) that marks one as part of a particular social class. Though occupation serves as a good indicator of class, Ortner (2003:13-14) sees the performance of class -- "classing" or the "class project" -- as active. Later,

Yodanis (2006) adds that “doing” class is a way to impose class boundaries on others, and to solidify or expand one’s own class standing. Ortner writes, “We may think of class as something people are or have or possess, or as a place in which people find themselves or are assigned, but we may also think of it as a project, as something that is always being made or kept or defended” (2003: 14). While I relied on occupation as a class indicator, I also considered other variables such as property ownership when comparing informants’ etic-identified classes with how those informants valued motivators of gentrification, such as views and the commuter ferry services.

This dissertation does not attempt to determine whether and to what degree a person’s consumption habits shift his or her occupation-based class status. Rather, I look at occupation-based class and relatively concordant consumption habits to argue that the place-making of the borough, particularly its coastal gentrification, is motivated and advanced by the consumption preferences and habits of the upper-middle and middle-class stakeholders. Working-class stakeholders created place in Highlands as well, but those efforts were more conservative in that they aimed to maintain the functions of the borough that they saw as closer to their own working-class preferences and expectations.

### *Interviews*

Generally in interviews, I asked residents about their tenure in the borough, what brought them to Highlands either to live or work (or both), and how they used the space around them. I asked what they considered to be the three best things about living/working in Highlands and the three worst things. Depending on how long they had been in town, I asked what they thought about some of the changes people were talking

about around town, including the commuter ferries and the condominiums, and about the commercial clammers. I did not ask all informants these questions because some interviews were designed to address specific topics for which the informant had special expertise. Realtors and fishermen got modified versions of these questions and various experts who lived outside of Highlands but had a stake in its development got very different questions.

The stories that informants told about Highlands and the context in which they told those stories were important to understanding the informants' positions within this place-making process. It is helpful to note which stories of Highlands' past were invoked to lend support for particular economic development strategies or by particular groups of residents. Whose renditions of Highlands' history were heard as the borough moved into future development? The place-making in Highlands drew on stories of the past to promote a certain kind of future. These stories engaged individuals and also worked to place Highlands within a broader socio-economic context.

The recent past, the past that long-time residents experienced and recalled, was one of a close-knit and caring small town with a depressed economy based on a floundering commercial fishing industry, lots of bars and barroom brawls, and an influx of summer visitors who returned each season to stay in owned or rented bungalows or to go out on one of the half dozen recreational fishing boats that docked in the borough. Some gentrifiers were committed to Highlands because they had spent childhood summers there, and memories of a close-knit summer community were strong. Others recounted the more distant past they had heard or read about of an elaborate summertime shift in which thousands of visitors descended on the tiny borough to stay in bungalows

or one of several large hotels.

One newcomer to the borough, an upper-middle class man I identify as a gentrifier, invoked these different histories of Highlands when he discussed what he thought worried long-time residents about its current changes:

Well one of the big concerns among those who've been here for half a thousand years is changes in the town. It seems that they don't particularly care for progress. They want the town to remain as it has been for the past twenty years. Whereas, there is a faction in town that wants the town to go back the way it was a hundred years ago, which is actually a good thing. Because a hundred years ago Highlands was a thriving destination for summer folks coming in from New York.

I consider the “faction” he mentions to be gentrifiers and further discuss the links between place-making and these histories in Chapter 3. The quote illustrates the sort of “conjuring” (Tsing 2000) in which many gentrifiers engaged as they supported and justified certain kinds of economic development, including the commuter ferry services. The man continued, “There used to be regular passenger vessel service from New York to Highlands. A lot of different vessels. We used to have two railroad stations right here in town -- the Waterwitch station and there used to be one over by the bridge.”

The commuter ferries harkened to a period when Highlands was a bustling resort town, and steamboats and other kinds of vessels carried well-heeled New York families to the borough for summer stays. Gentrifiers often used this history to justify the changes they sought. As illustrated in the quote above, they argued that the link to New York City, particularly for leisure purposes and particularly over the water, was simply consistent with Highlands’ past. According to this history, the borough experienced an anomalous interlude in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century during which it was cut off from New York City, when Highlands was an insular place of modest means that took care of its own.



### *The Complexities of Setting*

Though my research setting was Highlands, this dissertation is also informed by ancillary work in a broader geographic region. During my fieldwork, October 2001-August 2003, I participated in two additional projects, beyond the purview of my doctoral research, as a member of the Rutgers University Human Ecology Department<sup>5</sup>. Not only did this work provide a salary on which I lived, it also provided a community of scholars engaged in questions of relevance to my dissertation research. As part of what we loosely termed “the Fisheries Project,” I helped document fishing communities along the mid-Atlantic coast. Highlands was one of the communities that I studied for the Fisheries Project. The Fisheries Project team grappled with notions of “fishing community” and how to define such an entity. As I was doing my field research, our Fisheries Project team was also learning some of the ways that gentrification affected coastal communities and constrained working waterfronts. Because of Highlands’ long history as a clamming community, it was appropriate to examine how the resurging clamming industry fit in with the gentrification of the borough. So, the interviews that I conducted in Highlands for the Fisheries Project became part of my dissertation research data as well.

Also as part of my research assistantship, I briefly worked on a project to document current waterfront uses and changes over time on the New Jersey side of the Raritan Bay estuary system (specifically from the Arthur Kill to the Shrewsbury River). This project focused on working waterfronts and public access to waterfronts. It began just before I left New Jersey. In the summer of 2003, I joined project members in an expedition along the entire length of the study area, including Highlands, to videotape

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<sup>5</sup> McCay, et al. (2002a,2002b,2002c) and McCay, et al. (2005)

and document the current uses of the waterfront. Accompanying interviews also helped give shape to changes in waterfront access and uses.

Given the cultural divide in Highlands between the low-lying section and the hillside, where I would actually locate within Highlands was of major importance. I opted to live in the low-lying section of the borough and, coincidentally, rented a home in Highlands from a woman who had documented the commercial fishing industry for a Rutgers University report in the 1980s. She proved to be a valuable source of information about the fishing industry and other happenings in the borough from the 1980s and even managed to find the report and give me a copy. She and her husband used their home in the summers, but rented out a second floor apartment year-round to an elderly man who used to be a lifeguard on Sandy Hook and a Flying Tiger in World War II. His rent and mine paid for the property's yearly taxes and maintenance.

The home was in the low-lying part of the borough in an area once populated by commercial fishing families. The neighbors on my block were very friendly to me, once they knew my story, and toward each other. The able-bodied shoveled snow from sidewalks for the more infirm and young parents looked after each other's children. We had water-balloon fights on the front sidewalks and visited on front stoops. Stray cats lingered outside and dogs barked behind fences. Cars jammed the sides of the streets because there were few driveways. Teenagers and pre-teen kids sauntered up and down the street in packs, often with smaller children in tow. Some nights the wind howled down our street from the bay and rattled our windows and flung open doors. There was a visceral memory of the 1992 nor'easter that flooded this section of the borough, and tidal flooding regularly seeped up from storm drains. There was disappointment at the federal

government's response to the flooding – a large black metal bulkhead that replaced a wooden dock at the end of the street to keep storm surges at bay. Several houses along my four-block street were renovated and went up for sale during my field stay.

This was a good location to settle in the borough because it afforded me access to the people most affected by gentrification and those who, research shows, were the ones in danger of being displaced by the process as property values increased and taxes rose. Also, my immediate neighbors were involved in the commercial clamming industry. I got to know them well and because of them gained access to others involved in various facets of commercial fishing that remained in the borough.

Because my landlords returned to their home each summer, I had to find another place to live for three months of each year. My first summer in Highlands, I moved a few blocks away to an efficiency apartment behind a larger house. I sublet this apartment from a commercial clammer who was living with his girlfriend. My second summer, I rented a trailer from a friend and fellow anthropology graduate student who discovered Highlands when she helped me move the previous summer. The trailer is situated in Paradise Park, a small mobile home park on the bay between a marina and an undeveloped beach. Living here gave me entrée into a community with complicated notions of property rights and place and which would become the site of struggle against zoning changes, a struggle led by my friend, the woman to whom I introduced the area. Parts of Chapters 5 and 6 examine how the park fits into Highlands' current transformation. Though property rights and notions of place played into the struggle against the rezoning of the park that my friend led, thus far very successfully, it is not taken up fully in this dissertation because much of the action occurred long after I had left

the field.<sup>6</sup>

During my field stay, a sewer pipe ruptured in an inland suburban community, spilling untreated wastewater along city streets, into the adjacent river and eventually into the Raritan Bay where Highlands clammers worked. The event closed clam beds for six weeks during a peak market period and produced multiple narratives that appealed to environmentalism, tradition and work, technical innovation, and “acts of God”. The spill was a place-making event that happened during my field stay. It physically changed the environment for a period, until the Atlantic Ocean cleaned the bay, and it had lingering market repercussions for the local clamming industry. It also raised questions of property rights and proper use of the bay waters. Examination of narratives that emerge from this event reveals different agendas and strategies for persuasion. How did the spill feed into these agendas or create them? I attended press conferences and public meetings regarding the spill and its associated consequences and consolations. I interviewed some key players, including lawyers, commercial clammers, environmentalists and news reporters covering the event. Chapter 7 is based on these experiences and on careful analysis of the interviews, meeting minutes, and press releases, as well as newspaper articles that ran from May 3, 2003 to July 12, 2003 in local newspapers including *The Star-Ledger*, *The Asbury Park Press*, *Two River Times*, *The Courier*, *Home News Tribune*, as well as the *New York Times* and Associated Press articles, some picked up by other New Jersey papers. I studied how people talked about the event because the spill represents an unintended consequence of suburban development and gave voice to people typically

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<sup>6</sup> Many thanks to my fellow graduate student Loretta Dibble for keeping me well-informed of the situation in Paradise Mobile Home Park after I left the field. As I write this dissertation, Lori has received a \$100,000 grant to assist mobile home park ownership efforts throughout the state of New Jersey. My future work in Highlands will likely involve her, as co-author and also key informant.

silent in the process of development, commercial clammers, while forcing regular actors to confront the real environmental and economic costs of such development.

During my fieldwork from September 2001 to August 2003, I spent much of my time with one family in particular and especially befriended the young mother, Melanie<sup>7</sup> and her child. Melanie proved to be an excellent informant. During my field stay she married a man born and raised in Highlands but she herself had come to the borough years earlier from a different town along the Bayshore (the coastal stretch of New Jersey along Raritan Bay). She worked as a house cleaner initially and then helped with her husband's various business ventures. She had special insights about the insularity of the borough's working-class because of her own insider-outsider status among that group – insights that she shared with me. She was well-liked by most of the people who knew her and was considered to be a generally helpful and thoughtful person. She also articulately shared with me her opinions about the changes she saw happening around town and how she thought those changes would impact working-class residents. These opinions were often complex, and sometimes contradictory, and turned my attention to issues that I had not yet considered.

In these ways, I learned a lot from her about the borough and the people who lived there. Plus, she was quick witted and smarter than she thought, and I enjoyed spending time with her. I appreciated how she shared her day-to-day life with me. We would often walk together around the borough to pick up her child from school, to get coffee at Katz's, and a few times just for exercise and conversation. We ran errands together and shared meals. She would keep me informed about happenings around town that she thought would help with my research. These day-to-day experiences were vital to

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<sup>7</sup> I have provided pseudonyms for informants quoted and described in this research.

my understanding of social relations in the borough.

Later, through her, I became involved in a local political campaign and gained access to some of the strategies of the local Democratic Party. In the process of working as a Democratic verifier at the polling station on Election Day, next to Republican verifiers, I learned that although several middle/upper-class newcomers considered themselves Democrats for state and national politics, they joined the local Republican Party because of the perceived insularity of the local-level Democratic Party. Conversely, a couple of leaders in the local Democratic Party voted Republican for state and particularly national-level issues.

Sometimes life became complicated in my fieldwork, as I am sure it does for most anthropologists. Relationships, particularly among my more blue-collar informants and their friends were complicated and combustible. Occasionally I found that I had tacitly and unknowing developed an allegiance with one group of people that restricted my interactions with another. And when I then breached that allegiance by interacting with the forbidden group, I faced suspicion and mild rebukes from my original allies. I found myself at times involved in situations that sometimes were simply uncomfortable and other times conjured up fear of physical harm (for myself or others) or internal struggles about ethical research and personal behavior.

So far, I have discussed the more working-class of my informants and interactions. I accessed people in the upper-middle and middle classes by requesting interviews with people with professional jobs in the borough or who regularly rode the ferry to their jobs or leisure activities in New York City. I often traveled to and from Manhattan on the ferry myself. I frequented some of the newer service-oriented businesses that catered to

middle-class and upper-class tastes. Often I wrote fieldnotes or did some other work sitting at a newly opened coffee shop in a strip mall that bordered Highlands and Atlantic Highlands. This place sometimes became a respite for me when I occasionally felt like I needed to break out of my blue-collar entanglements. Two recent residents of the area became key informants on the gentrifying population. Separately, they were regular dinner companions and beach-going buddies. With many of my informants, of all classes, I joked that anything fun we did together counted as work for me, “research,” going for ice cream or for a drink at a waterfront bar or to the beach at Sandy Hook. And often it was true.

### *Conclusion*

I spent much of my time in Highlands gathering data that would help me understand whether Highlands was actually gentrifying and if so, what the differences were between typical stories of gentrification and this story of a coastal community undergoing a related change.

What struggles over gentrification everywhere...share in common...is the formal equality of the exchange relationship. If in debates over gentrification and neighborhood change the particular desires of gentrifiers win out over others, it is because they are willing and able to pay more for the privilege. (Lees 2000: 394)

I approached my research with much of this same sense that people with money wielded more power to direct the social and physical development of Highlands, and I found that to be the case to a certain degree. However, as I hope to show in this dissertation, it was not just economic power at play, but also ideology. In various ways, the “power holders” did not have as much control over the space as in many cases of

gentrification but depended on ideologies to shape a hegemonic control. Highlands is a place where most people considered themselves to be middle-class, and defined class categories in ways that fit themselves into an “upper” or “lower” middle-class, while putting others in the class categories of “rich” or “poor” as they performed class for self-identification and the identification of their neighbors. Within parts of these emic definitions of classes, ideologies about the coastal environment – whether for production, consumption, or some combination of uses – come into play as the following chapters will elucidate.

Harvey posits that although capitalist production separates work place from living place, it also reintegrates those places through struggles around labor’s consumption. This struggle involves certain interests trying to make a profit over labor’s market activities, and labor trying to counter these “secondary forms of exploitation” (1985a: 61). While these struggles typify productive landscapes more than consumption landscapes, the concept remains relevant in Highlands as the socially constructed meanings and values of the borough are contested and shifting. Highlands becomes a site for consumption, particularly upper-middle and middle-class consumption, and thus a site for Harvey’s secondary forms of exploitation. The ferries, housing, and restaurants for the upper-middle and middle-classes are all profit-oriented enterprises. Likewise, aside from subsidized housing and the community recreation center, consumption by the working class and underclass also produce profits. As the consumer preferences of the upper-middle and middle classes become more highly valued from a profit-making standpoint, the consumer options for lower classes diminish. As I will show, for some the borough has always been the consumption landscape of a summer community, and they now see it



becoming a bedroom community of New York. For others it has always been a clamming community, with summer visitors, which is now becoming largely a transit center and parking lot for New York commuters. Others have different and differently nuanced conceptualizations of what the borough is, how it is valued and what it could be.

Harvey continues:

[T]he manner and form of such everyday overt conflicts are a reflection of a much deeper tension with less easily identifiable manifestations – a struggle over the definition and meaning of use values, of the standard of living of labor, of the quality of life, of consciousness, and even of human nature itself. (Harvey 1985a: 61)

Setting this dissertation research in Highlands and using ethnographic methods is an attempt to identify some of the manifestations of the tensions that emerge in a place during the process of coastal gentrification: How are people defining home and work, what uses and meanings do they have for the coastal environment that surrounds them, how does identity confront, conflict and conflate the economic, social and physical changes inherent in this process? The following chapters approach answers to these questions and more. They describe the processes and events underway in Highlands during my field stay and examine how various kinds of storytelling or narratives engender them as vectors of place-making. These processes and events comprise the economic, environmental, and regulatory context of Highlands' current place-making process. They are not only markers of place-making, but vectors through which place-making happens.

Chapter 2 establishes the theoretical framework that supports closer ethnographic examination of place-making as it relates to the process underway in Highlands.

Following that, Chapter 3 outlines the setting of Highlands and the borough's history.

This chapter provides both geographic and historical context, but also shows the histories and reputations of the borough as avenues for place-making and for creating visions of the borough's future. These geographies and histories are important to the current construction of place.

Chapters 4 through 6 identify particular contemporary vectors of the borough's place construction and begin to develop a notion of coastal gentrification that uniquely situates this dissertation in the broader literatures of place-making as well as gentrification and the urban fringe. Chapter 4 examines place-making in Highlands from the lenses of two of the most quintessentially American land-use processes: gentrification and suburbanization. In this chapter, I interrogate the standard academic and urban planning notions of these two processes and how these standard definitions compare with what is happening in Highlands and how concepts about these standards are an important part of the place-making of the borough. Chapter 5 follows with an assertion that Highlands was undergoing a unique process called coastal gentrification that was transforming the place into what I call a waterfront suburb. Chapter 6 examines the value and meaning of "water views" to Highlands residents, business people and the local real estate industry, including the controversy over a trailer park and zoning that would remove it from an idyllic vantage point.

Chapter 7 examines an event through which actors produced meanings of the bays around Highlands and positioned themselves in relation to each other, the marine resources, and the broader geographic region. It outlines the narratives that emerged surrounding a sewage spill that closed clam beds for a month and a half and put most local clammers out of work for that time. I show how different groups of people used

stories to shape the public opinion and tangible responses in the aftermath of the sewer spill. These stories varied in how they framed the spill's causes and its effects on the larger estuary environment and commercial clammers who plied the waters, and on the market for Highlands clams. Thus, this chapter looks beyond the place-making of Highlands to the place-making of the bodies of water that surround and shape the borough.

All of these vectors of place-making occur within – and at times reproduce -- a context of coastal gentrification, in which class orients transformations of the built environment and the social dynamics of the borough. Because of the leisure-oriented ideals of the upper-middle class that push this transformation, it creates Highlands as a waterfront suburb. Other vectors of place-making are the borough's access to New York City, provided and represented by commuter ferries; access to ocean and bay beaches; and the borough's potential for increasing real estate values, or its "hot" housing market. Some less appealing aspects of the borough that contribute to place-making include flooding, parking problems, high taxes and its reputation as a tough town. The borough's history is in contention as a vector of place-making, as people assert different stories from the past to shape Highland's future. Residents and visitors alike see Highlands as a beautiful location. The people who I consider to be gentrifiers – some newcomers to Highlands and some long-time residents – also saw lots of potential in the borough, meaning it was not yet the place they wanted it to be. They had more place-making work to do.

## Chapter 2

### Place-Making

This dissertation seeks to contribute to the understanding of place-making by examining processes of place-making in Highlands, New Jersey, and this chapter provides the theoretical context for such examination. Gupta and Ferguson argue that anthropologists must take spatial relations as the focus of investigation and *not* “a given ground that one takes as a point of departure” (Gupta and Ferguson 1997: 4). Over the past two decades anthropologists have challenged the discipline’s notions of territorialized, bounded units of culture (Wolf 1982, Appadurai 1988, Gupta and Ferguson 1997, Hastrup and Olwig 1997, Marcus 1991). This ethnography refers to Highlands as a place, but critically examines the boundaries and meanings of this place and recognizes their fluidity. Like culture, place and space are dynamic and fluctuating processes. I suggest that the specific place of Highlands offers insights into an urban form, or a space, that I call a “waterfront suburb”.

In this chapter, I first articulate what I mean by place as a social construction. I do not view Highlands as an ordered, bounded political and ecological unit of analysis. I am instead interested in the processes that created (and continue to create) the space of a waterfront suburb and the place known as Highlands, as well as what that meant for the people who engaged in this construction. Next I discuss the ways place is made generally, including the economics of capitalism, property relations, class and class-oriented preferences, storytelling, and ideology. Later, I describe more specific ways of place-

making that are relevant to my research in Highlands, namely gentrification, suburbanization and what I am calling coastal gentrification.

### *Social Construction of Place*

Places do not just exist; they are made, maintained and manipulated.

Anthropologists suggest that how people construct place reflects power relations and meanings (Gupta and Ferguson 1997, Low 2000, Olwig 1999, Pigg 1992, Feld and Basso 1996, Maldonado, Valdes-Pizzini and Latoni 1999) and may serve as points of entry for understanding the general organizing principles of a culture (Rodman 1985, Bourdieu 1973, Ortiz 1973, Rapoport 1976). My focus in this dissertation is the former, although I also follow Low (1996) who argues that ethnographic approaches to the contestation of values and meanings in the spatial arrangements of societies permit anthropologists to connect local processes with a broader political economy.

As this suggests, places are also constructed and engaged with at multiple scales. Brenner (1998) points out that territories, through a history of political, economic and cultural processes, organize into scales, such as metropolitan, regional, national and global; and these scales are associated with different kinds and degrees of power. The scale of territorial organization in Highlands was changing during my field work as the borough's association with New York City strengthened. Urban geographer David Harvey has engaged with questions of scale and linked the construction of place with both individual and institutional longings.

Places are constructed and experienced as material ecological artifacts and intricate networks of social relations. They are the focus of the imaginary, of beliefs, longings, and desires... they are an intense focus of discursive activity filled with symbolic and representational meanings, and they are a distinctive

product of institutionalized social and political-economic power. (Harvey 1990: 314)

My master's thesis about how Louisiana fishing couples coped with changes in their industry sparked my interest in place-making, particularly the ways informants expressed and acted upon their own longings for place and how they comprised, reflected, and resisted institutionalized social and political-economic power (Lamarque 1996). This ethnography of Highlands focuses on individual experiences at a local scale, keeping in mind the larger political economic forces that contextualize those experiences and also suggesting how individual experiences contribute to that political economic context.

Following Gupta and Ferguson (1997), I am working with the concept of place as a social construction that combines the material and symbolic. Place is a geographic locale imbued with meaning largely from the social interactions that occur within and regarding it, as well as those external social relations that affect it unintentionally. Through social relations and material conditions, people make places that are important to them -- for memory, for identity, for economy, etc. Like Brett Williams in her study of gentrification in a Washington, D.C. neighborhood, I tell the story of the transformation of place both through geographically based social relations and "how people attach different meanings to objects such as gardens, houses, sidewalks, stores, and streets -- objects that anchor their everyday lives" (Williams 1988: 2). Spatial relations in the everyday lived experiences of people remain a crucial aspect in understanding their lives and in understanding the articulation of local connections with broader political economic influences.

Through ethnography this dissertation explores how stories and money combine to not only create reputations (themselves kinds of stories) of places but also to affect the

physical environmental and the social interactions that make up a place. As the borough of Highlands underwent changes in its built environment and economic valuation, the “positionings” (Hodgson nd) of residents and others invested in the borough became an important component of place-making. Hodgson uses *positionings* to describe the multiple and sometimes contradictory relations one person or group of people can have with others at various scales and times under varying situations. Such relations are vehicles of agency within specific, but fluid, political economic contexts. They articulate with this context, and can transform it, through the “cultural domains of meaning, signification and representation” (Hodgson nd: 4). While places are not absolutes, not static and bounded locales, they are real nonetheless. The political and social processes involved in place-making are “embodied practices that shape identities and enable resistances” (Gupta and Ferguson 1997:6). Like Gilroy’s (1996) assertion of race, with no biological significance as a category, place remains real only, but importantly, in how people experience it and in attendant manifestations of culture and power therein reproduced and challenged.

### *Storytelling Places*

Storytelling is a part of creating place in the capitalist state, turning spaces into places by employing the symbolic as a means of resistance and identity production. The process of storytelling is a way to create and maintain identities (Tilly 2002), and, I suggest in the process of place-making, is a way to resist socio-economic change or pursue it.

Anthropology provides a local-scale perspective that makes larger-scale political

economic structures comprehensible. Place-making phenomena like gentrification occur both at the level of individual experience and the larger political economy. I suggest that is one reason stories are so important to the process.

Storytelling is an old and powerful practice, one that, Carol Rose (1995) argues, produced dominant Western property narratives that describe private property as natural. She shows that stories are embedded in otherwise scientific, predictive analyses aimed at proving that private property is the most effective system for human relationships regarding material goods. Storytelling can be a mechanism that employs language to promulgate ideology. Stories can be viewed as cultural artifacts, though these artifacts transform in meaning and purpose as they flow along an ever-changing stream of culture. In the study of coastal gentrification in Highlands, I examine ideology through narratives and stories told by and about the various place-makers I encountered during my two-year field stay.

Using Tsing's notion of "conjuring," I suggest that the creation and enunciation of discourses<sup>8</sup> can simplify reality and justify certain political economic actions (Tsing 2000). If stories create dominant forms of social institutions like property, as Rose argues, they also shape and shift the economics that flow through such institutions. In cases of gentrification, the shifting image of a place contributes to the speed in which change occurs. "Capital can flow into and out of a city quickly," writes Feagin (1987: 423), adding that small changes in the economic image of a city can greatly affect the flow of real estate capital. This economic image is part of the story that emerges about a

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<sup>8</sup> Foucault (1984) rejects the term ideology as ambiguous and unhelpful. Yet Eagleton argues that the concept of discourse loses the reference to "power struggles...central to a whole form of social life (1991:8)" that ideology provides. Ideology, like discourse, involves social context and interests, but ideology goes further in that the interests it distinguishes are central to a social order.



place, and the story-telling, in turn, is also part of place-making. In the case of coastal gentrification, the natural environment is a part of the image of the place and one feature that attracts capital. However, the combination of capital and topography cannot construct place without an imposition of meaning. Places are constructed as much through stories as they are through capital flows and landscapes.

Environmental historian William Cronon (2002) notes that stories create places because stories contain lessons about the memories and meanings people have of particular spots of land. “[N]atural ecosystems and abstract geographical spaces become human places precisely through the accumulation of narratives that record and pass on to other people the living memory of what those places mean. Stories create places by teaching us why any given patch of earth matters to the people who care for it” (Cronon 2002:88).

In addition to helping create places, stories also reveal and at the same time create community among the storytellers (see Leonard 2006; Tilly 2002). As Watts notes, community is an ambiguous term used in myriad ways for myriad aims:

The community is important because it is typically seen as a locus of *knowledge*; a site of *regulation* and management; a source of *identity* and a repository of “tradition”; the embodiment of various institutions (say, property rights), which necessarily turn on questions of representation, power, authority, governance, and accountability; an object of *state control*; and a theater of resistance and struggle (...and potentially of *alternate visions of development*). ... Communities are of course nothing of the sort (Watts 2000: 36-37, italics in original).

Communities are histories laid out over territory and naturalized (Watts 2000).

This is what communities are, but they are indeed used in the ways Watts dismisses previously. They do not naturally embody an institution of property, for example, but the geographically embedded history that becomes a community does so in relation to

property narratives of one sort or another. Rather than asking how to define a community, a better sort of question is: why is the notion of “community,” or a particular construction of community, invoked, by whom and to what ends? The term wields significant power in American mythology and can be harnessed to work for lots of different interests.

Stories create identity at various scales, or what Tilly (2002) calls “social sites,” for example, the individual, the household, the neighborhood. Identities are formed through transactions between social sites, such as individual to individual or individual to neighborhood. The sum of all their transactions over time comprises the social relation between two sites. Tilly (2002) argues that the construction of boundaries between two sites is crucial to identity formation. This relates to place-making as described by Gupta and Ferguson (1997) in that stories are a symbolic processing of events that shape identities of individuals and other social sites, such as the borough of Highlands and various sections within it. Contestation about boundaries and identities occurs at every level and the boundaries and identities change as people in various social sites make new claims on each other. Likewise, claim making changes as social relations change (Tilly 2002). As these social relations and claims change, so do the places that they create. “[C]ommunities themselves are not static but likely to change and as they change this may pave the way for more dissenting stories to emerge. Indeed it is possible that dissenting stories themselves may encourage community change” (Leonard 2006: 1129).

The political ecology literature lately has been complicating simple notions of community (DuPuis and Vandergeest 1996; Peet and Watts 1996; Agrawal and Gibson 2001). Agrawal and Gibson (2001) challenge typical assumptions of communities as small, territorially fixed, homogenous groups with shared norms -- a romanticized

“mythic” community. Rather than adopting a mythic, almost primordial, notion of community, the authors call for a notion of community as intersected with multiple actors and divergent interests, and “the institutions that influence the outcomes of political processes” (Agrawal and Gibson 2001: 20). Geographically bound communities engage in the construction of place. The very existence of a certain kind of community is tied up with the existence, construction, or deconstruction of a certain kind of place.

### *Place and the Capitalist State*

This section examines theories around how place-making happens specifically in the context of the capitalist state. Capitalism depends on expansion -- both geographically and through new forms of consumption. Lefebvre (1997: 53-65) argues that each kind of society produces its own kind of space, that the urban landscape is conducive to capitalist modes of production and attendant reproduction, and the state contributes to this expansion of capitalist space (1974).

Harvey brings Lefebvre’s notion of real estate as part of capital’s second circuit<sup>9</sup> into the analysis of American cities (Gottdiener 2000). The separation of places for work and places for living in industrial capitalism spawns what Harvey (1985a, 1985b) calls “consumption fund” items within the built environment, which labor uses for its reproduction. For example, the housing market comprises part of the consumption fund. Within the circulation of capital, the consumption fund emerges in the second circuit, which absorbs into the built environment some of the capital produced within the primary

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<sup>9</sup> Lefebvre describes two separate circuits of capital in his analysis of the built environment: the primary circuit of industrial production, and a second circuit of real estate, of most interest in this work. The second circuit involves both elements of structure and agency, including banks and mortgage companies as well as individual investors and homeowners -- “anyone acting to make money off land” (Gottdiener 2000:1995).

circuit. The built environment, then, becomes what Harvey calls a “coercive force” (1985a: passim) that serves to sustain capitalist accumulation, as it “becomes an artifact of human labor that subsequently returns to dominate daily life” (Harvey 1985a: 48). In other words, at my level of investigation and analysis, keeping up a home requires additional purchases and draws people into additional market activities, besides just the purchase of the home itself. To specify the analysis for a coastal setting, one would consider marine expenditures such as recreational boats and all their accoutrements.

Though the consumption fund may be a vehicle for capitalist expansion, the manner of that consumption is another matter. Pierre Bourdieu’s *Distinction* shows that while income constrains working class possessions and behaviors, life-style or taste accounts for differences as well. For Marx, “the division of labor brands the manufacturing worker as the property of capital” (cited in Bourdieu 1984: 179). Bourdieu explains, “The brand which Marx speaks of is nothing other than life-style” (1984: 179). He argues that the working class’s preferences and tastes are the brand -- their “everyday choices of everyday life” (1984: 5). These choices become part of the consumption fund. Bourdieu adds the element of social power to the discussion of class by introducing the notion of cultural capital, as a form of social power – a way to sort individuals in class-based categories of inferiority or superiority.

### *Property and Class*

Control over space can reflect, reproduce, and deepen class distinctions in newly emerging economic structures (Burke 1991, Urry 1990, 1995, Zukin 1982, 1991). It is therefore important to examine property and class as these social relations engage in the

construction of place. I suggest that place-making is constrained by both legal and practiced property rights in that who has access to particular spaces affects the places they become. The social relations that create property rights also create places.

Property rights are not relations between people and things, but are relations among people about things. Furobotn and Pejovich refer to property rights as “sanctioned behavioral relations among men that arise from the existence of things and pertain to their use” (1972:1139, removed italics from original). Thus, property is not only social relations but institutionally sanctioned social relations, reflective of Marx’s identification of property relations as the “legal expression” of the social relations of production (Hann 1998:24). McCay (2000) has shown how property is a social institution that shapes and also reflects other social institutions and cultural values in which it is embedded, such as the institution of law.

Property rights have been imagined to exert a civilizing force among human beings who face resource scarcity (see Demsetz 1967). The thinking goes that without property, and particularly private property, people will use common resources to their extinction as in the classic “tragedy of the commons” theory popularized by Garrett Hardin (1968)<sup>10</sup>. Private property discourses about individual owners and “tightly bundled” rights are deployed to exclude certain people or categories of people from access. Property laws restrict and afford access to places, though they may always be looser than the law requires (Geisler and Daneker 2000).

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<sup>10</sup> In the past decades, critique of Hardin’s theory has been of central concern to McCay, Acheson and other anthropologists and social scientists trying to understand complex social interactions that involve environmental resource use. (see McCay 2000; Hunt and Gilman 1998; McCay and Jentoft 1998; McCay 1998; Rose 1994; Feeny, et al. 1990; Acheson 1988). With their seminal work, McCay and Acheson (1987) provide an excellent critique of Hardin’s theory and its influence from 19<sup>th</sup> century economic thinker William Lloyd.

My interest in class is how it relates to people's abilities and preferences in creating place. I view class as "groupings of people according to their economic position" (Gilbert 2003:8), though deciding which factors contribute to a person's "economic position" becomes complex. As discussed in the previous chapter, I settled on occupation as a way to place informants in class positions. Though I used an etic indicator for this, it follows emic descriptions of class, and I take seriously the problem that how class and inequality is perceived is a social construction (Harris 2006) embedded in a cultural system. People of different classes have different ways of creating class categories, determining how people fall within the stratification system and why they are there (Gilbert 2003, Yodanis 2006, Davis et al. 1941). In other words, emic understandings of class are diverse and often class-based.

More than two decades ago Harrison and Bluestone (1988) identified an increase in U.S. class disparities that they called "the Great U-turn". Economic indicators showed a narrowing (the bottom of the "u") of disparities in the 1940s and then a widening again in the 1970s. Along with this increasing disparity, comes an increase in differential control over the economic vehicles for place-making. This affects what Weber refers to as the "life chances" (see Gilbert 2003) of long-time working-class residents in a situation of gentrification, for example, by limiting their opportunity to continue residing in a place. Economic ability constrains the kinds of things people can buy or control in other ways, but as Bourdieu might have argued class-based preferences also serve as a constraint on place-making. An examination of property shows that social relations that exclude certain people or groups of people from vehicles of place-making based on class behaviors or capacities may occur both in legal and hegemonic ways. The preceding

section has specified some legal ways, though the creation of the institution of property, and the next section describes how ideology contributes to hegemonies.

### *Culture and Power in Place-making*

Class is in part reproduced through ideologies, particularly in the U.S. where social stratification is based on potentially fluid variables such as education, income, and prestige (see Gilbert 2003). There are numerous useful, albeit often incompatible, meanings of ideology (Eagleton 1991; Friedrich 1989). Although steeped in political economic theory, I see ideology as less illusory than how it is defined in early Marxism and more “with the function of ideas within social life than with their reality or unreality” (Eagleton 1991: 3). Here I am less concerned with whether an ideology is “true” or “false” and more concerned with how different groups deploy ideologies in their attempts to control space and other resources.

Power relations based on socially constructed concepts develop and persist, in part, through the reification of those concepts. Much of this process occurs through language (Gal 1989; Gal 1998; Ahearn 2001). This project sees language and semiotics as one link between ideology, as a way of producing meanings and ideas (Williams 1977), and action. By providing a system of meanings through which people accept, cope with or transform their social condition, ideology serves an essential role in social change. People interpret and act within “meaningful contexts” that both come from and constitute the interpretations and actions that preceeded and follow (Roseberry 1989: 42). With Woolard and the contributors to *Language Ideologies* (1998), I view ideology and social relations as mutually constitutive. Social relations and the meanings and value of

materiality (even in many cases its very existence) emerge through the ways that people talk about them and ascribe significance to them (Woolard 1998). Property institutions, for example, can persist through force and outright coercion but often persist most successfully in culturally embedded hegemonic processes hidden in ideology. Through these hegemonic processes, property becomes reified. The strength of property as an institution depends on how convinced people are about the concepts that support the institution (see Rose 1995).

Ideologies support hegemonies and economic systems (Willis 1981, Berman-Santana 1996). Drawing on Gramsci, Durrenberger and Doukas (2008:216) write, “Hegemonic ideas include notions of the legitimacy of state power, understandings of wealth and why some have more than others, concepts of social categories and the rankings among them, and other ideas that inspire and reinforce compliance with power.” Althusser {(Althusser 1971)} posits that civil society transmits ideology, and ideology functions beneath the level of consciousness, at the level of “common sense.” This explains the maintenance of static power structure, yet, shifting power dynamics also require explanation. Gramsci (1971) inserts agency into theories about ideological structure and introduces the concept of hegemony, embraced and elaborated by Williams (1977). Following Roseberry (1989), I suggest that hegemony uses the experiences and understandings of subordinate classes to link those classes with power, but often in a way that reinforces their subordination. However, it is subordinated classes which produce counter hegemonies (Durrenberger and Doukas 2008, Bourdieu 1984, Gramsci 1971, Roseberry 1989) – or the “something new” that Roseberry (1989) sees people creating



despite structural constraints. Foucault (1977), Lefebvre (1997), and Gramsci (1971) make clear that sites of resistance occur at the margins.

Neither dominant nor oppositional ideologies are homogenous: both incorporate multiple interests. Even dominant ideologies must engage other interests, particularly when those interests incorporate dominant ideological notions in their reasoning (Eagleton 1991). For example, an ideology of “the law” as “regulator of human conflicts of interest” offers equality to its subjects, and this promise of equality mediates the power of the ruling class (Thompson 1975). Under an ideology of “law” the power of the ruling class is legitimized by the body of law. Rather than dismantle or discredit their rule, the ruling class must submit to the law. This opens some room for the powerless to use the law in their favor. Indeed this ideology about the law is one frequently found in America, even among the lower classes. It is also an ideology long held by shellfishermen in the bayshore region (McCay 1998). Use of law is evident in events of the sewer spill, which I describe in depth in Chapter 6, and in the dispute over zoning in Paradise Park, discussed in Chapters 4 and 5.

Williams’ (1977) discussion of “dominant,” “residual,” and “emergent” features of culture is directly relevant to understanding the heterogeneity of interests engaged in an ideology and the multiple layers of social relations that contribute to place-making. As William argues, “[I]t is a fact about the modes of domination, that they select from and consequently exclude the full range of human practice” (1977:125). The exclusions inevitably assert themselves as “residual” or “emergent” features. For Williams, the three features occur simultaneously and shift and shape one another in a complex cultural system. The “dominant” cultural process refers to the hegemonic power that propels a

cultural system. This aspect however must include “a reaching back” to past social relationships “which still seem to have significance because they represent areas of human experience, aspiration, and achievement which the dominant culture neglects, undervalues, opposes, represses, or even cannot recognize” (Williams 1977: 124). This reaching back touches the “residual” facet of a cultural system – the memories and enactments of those past social relationships. Williams defines “emergent” as new meanings values and relationships. By way of example, Williams describes the emergence of a new class, the working class, as a new alternative or oppositional element. He argues that while a “new class is always a source of emergent cultural practice,” its subordinate class position keeps its hegemonic power incomplete and uneven. I suggest, then, that the process of place-making must engage these cultural layers. In cases of gentrification and suburbanization it may be that “transition” is the dominant facet of culture for a while. The long-time residents embody residual culture and newcomers embody emergent culture.

### *Creative Destruction in the Making of Gentrified and Suburban Space*

A form of consumption called “creative destruction”<sup>11</sup>, elaborated by Harvey to describe the processes of gentrification and suburbanization (1985a: 28), creates new economic and spatial environments in which people use stories to create meaning for their actions and circumstances. Urban processes like these satisfy capitalism’s expansionary requirement through the destruction of an existing place to create

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<sup>11</sup> This term was coined by economist Joseph Schumpeter (1946) to describe what he considered a central component of capitalism. Sociologist Marshall Berman (1982) developed the concept as “innovative self-destruction” to describe the capacity of modernist bourgeoisie to create and destroy its own work.

something new. In particular, the capitalist expansion most at work in Highlands included restaurant development, the purposeful creation of Highlands as a destination, and changes in the real estate industry, expanding in terms of new condominium and townhouse developments and individual investment property renovations.

In the process of capital expansion, it is only a matter of time before creative destruction moves into an area. For Harvey (1985a: 28), the relevant question was: “How much more time in this relative space?” Of course some spaces and places are more stable than others in the face of this expansionary demand. The manner and speed of the flow of capital into a gentrifying community depends on cultural endeavors accomplished in the relatively small confines of individuals’ daily lives and in local boosterism.

From the standpoint of the communities of money and capital, such places are no more than relative spaces to be built up, torn down or abandoned as profitability dictates. But from the standpoint of the people who live there, such places [have] particular qualities that can be the focus of particular place-based loyalties. (Harvey 1985a: 254-255)

The push for creative destruction is met with resistance by people for whom existing places have value. The destruction of place -- through economic neglect, outright demolition, or the transformation of the built environment to attract more capital and make way for new classes of people -- affects the people who live there, not just as economic actors shifted out of a housing market, but often at the level of personal and cultural identity. A stark example of this is the destruction of New Orleans wrought by Hurricane Katrina and the failure of that city’s levee system. “Experts often measure the costs of disasters in loss of life and property. But they can put no dollar amount on the toll that a catastrophe has on the individuals who have experienced the event and then struggle to restore their homes, their families, their senses of self and community” (Birch

and Wachter 2006:1). For some residents, the loss of their city had thrown them into an identity crisis. Not only were pre-Katrina weaknesses exposed and exacerbated – racism, corruption, poverty – but the cultural resources that gave identity to New Orleans were shaken or gone. The stories that residents have of the city were not gone but, with the physical destruction and loss of community, were homeless. Gone were the objects that Williams (1988) writes about that anchor people's everyday lives. There was a loss of anchor for these identity-affirming stories of place. The people, community events, landmarks and way of life that make up the community were different. The same can be said for the processes of gentrification and suburbanization, though at a more creeping pace. But often those economic forces are seen to be as natural as the force of a hurricane (Lamarque 1996).

Understanding shifts in everyday anchors to place and the changing meaning of place require a focus on the cultural in what is largely considered an economic process. Harvey's flexible accumulation gives way to Anna Tsing's economy of appearances (2000). In "the self-conscious making of a spectacle" (Tsing 2000:118), which in the case I studied functioned as a means to garner support from local government for particular forms and modes of economic development. What Tsing half-jokingly calls "spectacular accumulation" in opposition to Harvey's "flexible accumulation" (1990) does not reject all notions of the past, but rather "its power is...its ability to keep this old legacy untarnished" (2000: 42). Gentrifiers embrace parts of the history of a place but only the parts that legitimize current economic development efforts. It is this legacy – these stories about the past -- that gentrifiers invoke in their efforts to generate enthusiasm for particular development projects and real estate ventures, often couched as economic

development.

### *Gentrification*

The rest of this chapter articulates specific forms of place-making: gentrification, suburbanization, and coastal gentrification which combines elements of both and which I believe to be occurring in Highlands. Gentrification harkens to the bit-by-bit enclosure of English countryside by the gentry. Its etymological roots suggest that gentrification has to do with privatizing public space – enclosing the commons. In cases of gentrification and suburbanization one must consider space itself as scarce and a valuable, contested resource. The term gentrification is a construction born of academia and urban planning and used since the 1960s to most often describe the social, political and economic process in which wealthy newcomers displace low-income residents, often home-by-home, block-by-block, bit-by-bit, as they “rehabilitate” disinvested city neighborhoods. Describing social and physical displacement, the gentrification literature is replete with examples of how economic forces express racial and class power in the transformation of city landscapes (Smith 1982; Gregory and Urry 1985; Keating 1985; Smith and Peter Williams 1986; Logan and Molotch 1987; Harvey 1989; Fainstein 1991).

As neighborhood revitalization plans increase property values, this “free market” activity makes it harder and sometimes impossible for some low-income residents to remain in the area, reminiscent of the enclosure of the commons by the gentry.

Gentrification occurs, in part, because existing properties are valued in new ways by new people, such as the appeal to an in-migrating upper-middle class of a bucolic setting or historic and well-crafted housing stock combined with easy access to centers of

professional employment and less expensive residential property costs than in established upper-class areas. While some existing residents may benefit from these changes, others, those who sometimes resist displacement in one way or another, to varying degrees of success (Muniz 1998).

Scholars write about gentrification from different perspectives. Some take a humanistic approach and view gentrification as the spatial manifestation of new cultural values (Ley 1996; Butler 1997; Lees 2000). For others, gentrification is about sweeping macro-economic forces (Gregory and Urry 1985; Smith and Peter Williams 1986; Harvey 1989; Fainstein 1991; Badcock 2001) such as the flexible accumulation of post-Fordism (Harvey 1990) in which powerful political and economic interests operate at regional, national and international scales to constrain local processes and individual control (Brenner 1998). Ethnographic approaches to gentrification examine the microprocesses, the human agency and the values and meanings at work (Abu-Lughod 1994; Low 1996; Butler 1997).

Consumer power is at play in gentrification. Economist Charles Tiebout (1956) developed a theory of “the consumer-voter” who would select a community that best satisfied his preferences for spending on public goods. Tiebout argued that residents of local municipal governments, and state governments to a degree, can signal their desires for government expenditures by moving from one place to another. In other words, residents will “vote with their feet” and relocate to an area with lower taxes or different emphases on amenities and services (Goetz [www.rri.wvu.edu/WebBook/Goetz/Migx2.htm#3.2](http://www.rri.wvu.edu/WebBook/Goetz/Migx2.htm#3.2), accessed March 28, 2008).

While consumer power is one defining characteristic of the process,

“[g]entrification is not the same everywhere” (Lees 2000: 397). The process varies over time and place (Butler 1997). Some kinds of gentrification result from “community choice,” such as when middle-class families moved into Park Slope Brooklyn and when gay men moved into San Francisco’s Castro District. Others occur through the “logic of capital” as financiers develop places like the London Docklands (Fainstein 1991; Lees 2000).

Geographer David Ley points to the central role of culture in the repopulation of the inner city by the middle-class, or what he calls the *embourgeoisement* of the inner city. “[I]t is important to see middle-class movement into the inner city not simply as the production of a submarket in a restructuring economy, but also as the self-production of a social identity in an ever more plural society” (Ley 1996: 362). Such culturally active transformations could prove fertile ground for anthropological inquiry.

Though the process of gentrification offers a good example of how some people construct place and how others resist that construction and assert their own, gentrification is a cultural concept not well explored at the level of individual experience.<sup>12</sup>

Gentrification studies have rarely incorporated ethnographic methods, such as long-term participant observation and semi-structured interviews to access individual experiences within this social phenomenon. Likewise, few anthropologists have studied facets of gentrification,<sup>13</sup> particularly what one anthropologist has called “coastal gentrification.”<sup>14</sup>

This ethnography offers a new approach to gentrification studies by examining 1)

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<sup>12</sup> Lila Abu-Lughod (1993) suggests that the exploring and foregrounding of individual experiences will work to reduce the “distancing discourses” of social science generalizations that tidy up the messy complexities of real life.

<sup>13</sup> See Setha Low (1996), Janet Abu-Lughod (1994) and Loretta Lees (2000), for examples of micro-processes foregrounded in studies of public space and/or gentrification.

<sup>14</sup> See Valdes-Pizzini, Guitierrez-Sanchez, and Chapparo 1988, for a nascent description of the term and phenomenon.

individual experiences of both gentrifiers and non-gentrifiers and 2) the added factor of contestation over environmental resources in a coastal setting.

### *Suburbanization*

The myth of the suburb is often countered against the myth of the city (McDonogh 2006). This dissertation attempts to demystify the “waterfront suburb” of Highlands and describe the ways in which it engages both analytical categories of city and the typical inland suburb. Mattingly (1997) and McDonogh (2006) argue that much scholarship, particularly that of the New Urbanism, criticizing the U.S. suburb in favor of the city has ignored the voices of suburbanites themselves. Early exceptions of sympathetic views of suburbs that incorporate the voices of suburbanites include Horwitz’s 1985 ethnographic monograph, John Stilgoe’s *Borderland* (1988) and M.P. Baumgartner’s *The Moral Order of a Suburb* (1988). Later works include Mattingly’s 2001 historiography of one specific New Jersey town, and Salamon’s *Newcomers to Old Towns: Suburbanization of the Heartland* (2003). McDonogh (2006) and Besen (2006) as part of a special issue of the *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* dealing with the socially constructed meanings of class and social inequality, grapple specifically with the meanings of class in suburban America. Yodanis (2006) in that same issue examines class as constructed in a rural U.S. fishing community.

Aside from this genre, studies of suburbanization tend to offer political, economic and architectural insights into how this form developed (Beauregard 2006, Mattingly 1997 and 2001), what it looks like (Gottdiender 1977, Ullman 1977), and remedies to what is generally considered the wasteful and inefficient landscape of the suburbs



(Bender et al. 1994). This dissertation hones in on the particular facets of suburbanization at play in the coastal town of Highlands and on the suburban experiences of its residents, expanding the existing literature by examining suburbanization in a coastal setting and the individual experiences of people in different class positions, and with different relationships to and evaluations of the coastal environment.

In the United States, the term “suburb” traditionally has described a non-farm residential area surrounding a core city to which residents tend to commute for work. U.S. suburbs are characterized by low population densities when compared to the older cities around which they developed and are populated by upper- and middle-income residents (Jackson 1985). Suburbs tend to encroach into farmland or previously undeveloped land displacing some residents and disconcerting others (Jackson 1985, Martin 1953, Stansfield 1998). Such encroachment, often called “suburban sprawl,” tends to blur boundaries between countryside and city and also distinguishes suburbanization from gentrification, which typically reuses existing built space (Saunders 2005). Coastal processes are not adequately encompassed in these understandings.

### *The Special Case of Gentrification on the Coast*

Coastal gentrification describes the shift in control of space and resources in a coastal ecosystem. These kinds of shifts result from and produce new kinds of spaces and associated class distinctions (Zukin 1992). New capitalist economies, which I argue advance processes like coastal gentrification, are characterized by their dependence on consumption over production (Urry 1990; 1995). Vacation spots with new access to centers of professional employment via some transportation innovation become highly

valued by upper and middle classes who have brought the “tourist ethic” into their daily lives (Urry 1990, 1995). As others have seen elsewhere, influxes of residents to places with pleasing environments comprise “hedonistic” migrations. These migrations increase income levels of U.S. counties that rank high in environmental amenities (Goetz: [www.rri.wvu.edu/WebBook/Goetz/Migx2.htm#3.2](http://www.rri.wvu.edu/WebBook/Goetz/Migx2.htm#3.2) accessed March 28, 2008). As places in such regions gentrify they also suburbanize in that they are becoming bedroom communities of metropolitan areas. “Work” becomes an occupation at a distance, “home” becomes more associated with leisure, and as Urry (1990) argues, the tourist ethic spreads into people’s everyday lives.

Household economies spatially, temporally and socially integrate work and home, production and consumption. In small-scale commercial fishing communities and other types of household economies, family members participate in productive activities in household settings (Leacock 1981; Nash 1981). The bourgeoisie removes production from consumption activities, distinguishing between work and home. “The bourgeoisie has established the opposition between...place of work and place of residence, working days and holidays” (Bourdieu 1984: 55).

The bourgeoisie creates a land-use standard that excludes incompatible productive activities, such as many aspects of commercial fishing. Places undergoing coastal gentrification may find productive activities, such as commercial fishing, being displaced by expressive activities, like pleasure boating and waterfront dining, as new residents with competing conceptualizations of the environment impel a particular kind of development (Johnson and Metzger 1983; Valdes-Pizzini, Gutierrez-Sanchez and Gonzalez-Velez n.d., Valdes-Pizzini, Gutierrez-Sanchez, and Chapparo 1988, Hall-

Arber, et al. 2001; McCay, et al. 2005). Scholars studying the influx of non-farmers into farming areas have documented similar land-use transformations at the urban-rural fringe in what anthropologist Solon Kimball much earlier referred to as the “new frontier” (cited in Lisansky 1986). Anthropologist Judith Lisansky examines right-to-farm policies in this urban-rural fringe. She notes that changes from rural to urban land-uses are preceded by several other transitions, including land speculation that increased property values in these areas and the dwindling numbers of farms so that an area is no longer able to support farm-related services, making it more difficult for remaining farmers to manage the transition (Lisansky 1986). Environmental and market fluctuations are a typical uncertainty that commercial fishermen expect (Lamarque 1996). However, in the cases of coastal gentrification, a temporary downturn in the commercial fishing industry may become more permanent. The commercial fishing industry suffers from changes in services, such as when upscale boating and other leisure-oriented waterfront uses crowd out commercial fishing services or gobble up coastal space and literally leave no room for recovery. Gentrification is a class-based physical, economic and social transformation that is significantly increasing the vulnerability of the fishing component of coastal communities in the U.S. (Hall-Arber et al. 2001).

Coastal gentrification is a process that should be of great interest to anthropologists because it involves values and meanings, the construction, maintenance and negotiations of community and property, as well as notions about the environment and its use. In cases of rural gentrification, for example, Daphne Spain (1993) writes, “Community identities eventually change in response to the struggle and negotiation accompanying a reallocation of resources; seldom do communities retain their former

resource distributions and identities.” What happens when the process of coastal gentrification dramatically changes who the community is? How do notions of property relate to community maintenance, destruction, and creation?

Cases of coastal gentrification, like what is going on in Highlands, demonstrate the links between coastal resources and the ideologies and economic processes concerning them. The ways people think about the environment, who owns it and in what manner are all cultural constructions that influence human interactions with coastal resources. In cases of rural gentrification, the transition limits the activities of working farms to what is acceptable to tourists or newcomer residents who hold picturesque views of farming and impose demands for an idealized country life (Lowenthal 1991; Spain 1993). Similar issues come into play in a situation of coastal gentrification, as newcomers or vacationers bring and attempt to impose new meanings and value of the marine and coastal environment (Valdes-Pizzini 1990; Valdes-Pizzini et al. nd; Valdes-Pizzini, et al. 1988.). This sort of development, rural gentrification, coastal gentrification or the development of suburbs and exurbs, often is accompanied by cultural clashes among newcomers and long-time residents (cf. Spain 1993), except in cases of coastal gentrification common property rights may be more important.

Coastal regions, made up as they are of multiple forms of “land”—terrestrial land, marine spaces, and the shifting sands and bluffs of the “littoral”—are overlain with complex traditions of property relations and governance (Cicin-Sain and Knecht 1998). In the United States this complexity is reflected in and sometimes shaped by the Public Trust Doctrine, a common law tradition granting ownership of tidal, navigable waters and subtidal lands to the states on behalf of their citizens, protecting public rights of

navigation, fishing, and access to beaches and the sea (McCay 1998). Its history very clearly shows the complex and shifting ideologies and social relationships engaged in the place-making of Highlands. The power of the Public Trust Doctrine comes from its status as a “residual” facet of culture (see Williams 1977) being currently engaged by environmentalists and others to restore and protect coastal resources and to expand access to those resources. Through court cases, it has been broadened to include dry beach areas as well as tidal zones, to govern privately owned as well as publicly owned dry sand beaches and to include recreational uses in addition to commercial or subsistence fishing (c.f. *Raleigh Avenue Beach Association v. Atlantis Beach Club, Inc.*, 2004; *Matthews v. Bay Head Improvement Ass’n*, 1984; and *Borough of Neptune City v. Borough of Avon-by-the-Sea*, 1972). Past social relations regarding the common coastal resources linger and are to some extent revived in the use of the Public Trust Doctrine as well as more recent laws in legal claims for compensation from damage to the marine environment, as will be shown in Chapter 6. In addition, in New Jersey several administrative law tools, including the Coastal Area Facilities Review Act (CAFRA), were enacted in the early 1970s to help protect public interest in and access to the coasts. CAFRA restricts private development on the coast and provides for some access to the water via building height limitations and requirements for pathways through private developments to the waterfront. Still, the use of these laws is constrained by the politics and economics of “development,” especially with rising home prices in newly valued coastal areas.

Some exclusivity of property rights generally accompanies physical development on the coastal zone. In the coastal zone, gentrification excludes traditional resource users through the legal or de facto privatization for leisure or recreational use of waterfront

access and other resources (Johnson and Metzger 1983). “When working harbors are transformed to address the demand of the middle class for upscale housing, recreation, and entertainment rather than maintained in support of the productive activities associated with the commercial fishing industry, they may be said to be undergoing gentrification” (Hall-Arber et al. 2001): 35.

Waterfront access, for dockage as well as marine services, is a key element to strong, supportive infrastructure for fishing communities. In New Jersey, fishing cooperatives formed in part to increase fishermen’s control over waterfront access, what McCay calls a “scarce critical resource” (2001: 261). Gentrification threatens waterfront access by increasing land value and diminishing the overall significance of commercial fishing to the local economy (Hall-Arber et al. 2001). “Gentrification, then, of a fishing community implies a shift in power from the working men and women of the fishing industry to ‘those from away’, those in white-collar jobs, or tourist (service) industries, and/or those who do not value the reality of a working waterfront” (Hall-Arber et al. 2001: 35). As this new population of residents grows, productive activities based on the environment, such as commercial fishing or farming, become threatened in at least three ways 1) by a shift in governmental and residential support of the expressive activities of new residents and business people with different ideas about and interests in the environment and property valuation, 2) by increasing restrictions on the commercial activities that are aesthetically unappealing to the new consumer class, and 3) by increasing property values that strain the ability of farmers or fishers to hold onto homes or dock space (Johnson and Metzger 1983; Spain 1993; Ramsay 1996; Wasserman, et al. 1997; Valdes-Pizzini, et al. 1988; Valdes-Pizzini, et al. n.d.).

As in any case of gentrification, increasing property values on coastal land makes it harder for lower income residents and small-scale commercial operations to continue living and working in the area. As property rises in value so do rents and property taxes, making it difficult for long-time residents to pay rent increases or increasing property taxes on their homes or waterfront businesses. As in any type of gentrification, struggles are resolved often by consumer power, ending in the displacement of lower income residents and businesses (Lees 2000). In waterfront areas, these battles also include the privatization of access to public goods, such as beaches, dockage, or ocean views. The human and social costs of gentrification to a working waterfront are steep and the results are often irreversible.

### *Views*

In addition and related to property, access to views is another form of economic and social power at work in coastal gentrification.<sup>15</sup> Chapter 6 specifically interrogates the preferences for and accesses to views as one component of cultural capital wielded in the coastal gentrification of the borough. Urban geographer Neil Smith (1996) argues that the bourgeois ideology of nature is contradictory in that it conceptualizes the natural world as separate and superior to the social, but at the same time assumes the existence of a universal nature. I suggest that the social construction of water views dialectically supports and emerges from this contradictory ideology. Alexander Wilson critiques the contradiction when he writes, “Humans and nature construct one another” (Wilson 1992: 13). Likewise, I argue, humans construct views but are also created by them.

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<sup>15</sup> I do not suggest that this is exclusive to coastal gentrification, for many other inland views are also highly valued and motivate similar processes.

Understanding how views are a vector of place-making requires looking at the social meanings imbued in scenery and in access to views.

Bourdieu notes that cultural practices are linked to education and social origin, and one learns the ability to discern quality and value in objects of art, culture and nature. Waterviews are cultural constructs of nature that can foster and underscore class difference, and that difference privileges some people over others.<sup>16</sup> Bourdieu (1984) argues that the bourgeoisie distinguish themselves by suppressing what he calls “natural” enjoyment, pleasures that they would “naturally” prefer but consider common. They justify their elevated status, Bourdieu argues, through their preference for refined pleasures (Bourdieu 1984: 7).

For Bourdieu, members of the bourgeoisie draw attention to their ability to consume certain “legitimate” forms of culture. Through their consumption of the sacred, they separate themselves from the profane -- both profane consumers and objects. “That is why art and cultural consumption are predisposed, consciously and deliberately or not, to fulfill a social function of legitimating social differences” (Bourdieu 1984: 7). This is the crux of Bourdieu’s argument in *Distinction*, and it helps set the stage for understanding the power of views in Highlands and the power of views in the place-making of Highlands.

In *Distinction*, Bourdieu is interested in tastes for home décor, entertaining and other ways that the “everyday choices of everyday life” (1984: 5) link to preferences for “high culture” and distinguish classes of people from each other. This ability develops

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<sup>16</sup> As Neil Smith notes, “Access to nature, and cultural constructions of nature, are centrally questions of class and race as well as gender and other dimensions of social difference” (Smith 1996: 43). Smith draws on Marcuse who posits that the domination of nature is a means by which some people dominate other people (Smith 1996: 47).



both “the eye” and one’s identity – the “I”<sup>17</sup>.

The ‘eye’ is a product of history reproduced by education. This is true of ... the capacity to consider in and for themselves, ... not only the works designated for such apprehension, i.e., legitimate works of art, but everything in the world, including cultural objects ... and natural objects. (Bourdieu 1984: 3)

For example, the signs or symbols of art create levels of accessibility to a painting that someone versed in art history can interpret but that someone without such training cannot. The preference for views, then, and not only the access to them, is a means for learning something about a person’s class status. Though I depend on occupation to assign informants to social classes in this dissertation, I suggest that people perform classes as well and such performance can hinge on class-based preferences.

### *Conclusion*

The analysis presented in the following chapters draws on and expands the theoretical framework outlined above. Methodologically, I use place-making stories to understand underlying ideologies and values and to examine how informants use stories to develop and assert their own identities in the changing borough. I use the concept of “positionings” to examine the social relations among newcomers and long-time residents, residents of varying classes and geographic locations within the borough.

Notions of property and class are especially important to the analysis presented in Chapters 4 and 5 regarding the changes in land-use and access to coastal resources that occur in cases of coastal gentrification. In coastal gentrification, the manner of consumption or, drawing on Bourdieu, the “brand” of consumption, is in flux (and contested) within a particular geographic space, as new residents try to prettify areas

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<sup>17</sup> Thanks to Rebecca Etz who drew out this “I” / “eye” connection in an earlier draft.

valued by fishermen for other purposes . The manners of consumption contributed to/were part of the place-making in Highlands and attendant shifts in community. Chapter 6, for example, focuses on water views as one brand of consumption that contributes to place-making.

As Roseberry argues, the way people interpret changes in their circumstances depends on their cultural understandings. Continuing the same activities and “talking about new events with old language” stretches language and creates new meanings (1989:43). As the circumstances in Highlands change for long-time working-class residents due to factors of gentrification and suburbanization, they may go about life in the same way but they may see themselves and their environment in new ways, ways that they compare with new events and new residents that populate the borough. This concept is important in interpreting the ways long-time residents reacted to some of the circumstances of coastal gentrification and the vehicles that advanced it (see Chapters 4 and 5 especially).

The analysis in Chapter 7 of narratives surrounding a negative environmental event investigates the links between ideology, language and other semiotics, and materiality. In that chapter residual facets of the borough’s cultural system come to the fore as working-class baymen clamored for compensation for temporary loss of access to the common waters of the Raritan and Sandy Hook bays. They represented themselves in a particular way to describe their political economic situation and to justify their claims for compensation. Likewise, I examined the ways all of my informants represented themselves and their positions within Highlands at the time of my research. Throughout, this dissertation examines how different Highlanders represented the borough (visually,

verbally, and in their social interactions) to themselves, to their neighbors, friends, outsiders, municipal government, external funding agents, and to a visiting anthropologist as a means to affect place-making.

## **Chapter 3**

### **The Present and History of Highlands, New Jersey**

Highlands, New Jersey is a U.S. coastal community just over a half-mile square. It once hosted a thriving commercial fishing industry and vibrant summer resort activity that was largely based on its proximity to the New York metropolis and its topography. The borough lies along a bayside waterfront and sweeps up to a coastal bluff that marks the highest point on the eastern U.S. seaboard. Highly valued drinking water once percolated out of the hills. The different elevations of Highlands are segmented by an east-west highway (NJ 36), which also marks an historic division of social classes. In its low-lying area, tidal flooding is a major concern. Traditionally the coastal bluff, or “the hill,” has been home to wealthier families. The borough’s low-lying section is densely populated with small lots.

One part of lower Highlands was traditionally home to the commercial clamming industry and families who engaged in it. Another section was long-valued as a summer getaway by New Yorkers and others from the more populated New York City metropolitan area. Now the lower section of the little borough is also a major commuter hub from New Jersey to Manhattan via the water. Most borough officials and residents attribute increasing property values and coastal gentrification to the commuter ferries docking in town.

As this dissertation is about place-making, I examine how stories gleaned from the borough’s history are presently engaged to explain the borough’s present condition

and to justify plans for its future. Stories about Highlands' past play into the gentrification of its present. This chapter contextualizes Highlands in coastal New Jersey and the Bayshore and provides a version of the borough's history as it relates to issues involved in the particular kind of social, physical and economic changes underway in the borough during the time of my research.

### *Coastal New Jersey and the Bayshore*

Highlands sits on the eastern corner of New Jersey where the state bends southward in its beach-lined Atlantic Coast. A sandy strip of land, now a national park, separates the 3/4 -square mile borough from pounding Atlantic Ocean waves. Protected by this "Sandy Hook," the little borough is a sort of small peninsula, ringed by water on three sides. The Navesink River makes its southern border. On its east are the fast-moving waters of the Navesink and Shrewsbury Rivers as they meet and push through the bottleneck between Highlands and Sandy Hook. The borough's northern boundary is the triangle where those rivers spill into the Sandy Hook Bay. Sandy Hook Bay opens into the larger Raritan Bay, all part of the Hudson River estuary, and mingles with the Atlantic Ocean (see Map 1).

Social scientists are studying the effects of tourist, residential, and industrial development on coastal environments and attendant shifts in access to resources (Cumiskey 2001; Griffith 1999, Kullenburg 2001, Suman 2001). In some areas the legal privatization of coastal land is a major part of these shifts (Griffith and Valdes-Pizzini 2002), in others *de facto* privatization is a continuing concern. In the state of New Jersey, the Public Trust Doctrine as well as the Coastal Area Facilities Review Act limit

but do not eliminate the enclosure of coastal waters and waterfronts. While development in general has gained scholarly attention, the particular process of coastal gentrification has only recently received scholarly attention (Hall-Arber et al. 2001, Griffith and Valdes-Pizzini 2002; Ramsay 1996; Valdes-Pizzini, et al. 1988; Wasserman, et al. 1997.) As urban areas expand along U.S. coastlines for purposes of leisure and industry, the physical impacts on coastal environments and the cultural effects on coastal communities become a key concern of academics, governmental agencies<sup>18</sup> and non-profit groups<sup>19</sup>. Of particular interest to this research is the situation in northern coastal New Jersey, much of which has long served as a “commuter shed” for the New York metropolitan region and more recently for New Jersey’s own “Wealth Belt” region (Hughes and Seneca 1999).

Most of the state of New Jersey falls within the consolidated metropolitan statistical area (CMSA) of either New York or Philadelphia and is “functionally and statistically a city” (Stansfield 1998: 9), albeit a different kind of city, one long-decentralized from older urban cores in a fashion that Stansfield (1998) argues other areas across the U.S. have followed. The state’s growth pattern mirrors a national trend beginning in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century -- the development of “metropolitan districts” as urban centers reached beyond their political boundaries to affect and incorporate outlying areas. The enlarged metropolitan area absorbs the political, economic and social relations of formerly independent towns (Chudacoff and Smith 1994). New Jersey as “city” is a densely, though unevenly, populated space laced with highways that connect broadly dispersed commercial, industrial, and residential areas, sprinkled with stretches of farmed and forested landscape (Stansfield 1998). According to Rutgers economists Hughes and

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<sup>18</sup>[http://state-of-coast.noaa.gov/bulletins/html/mcwq\\_12/regional.html](http://state-of-coast.noaa.gov/bulletins/html/mcwq_12/regional.html) and [www.usgcrp.gov/usgcrp/nacc/s\\_atlantic.html](http://www.usgcrp.gov/usgcrp/nacc/s_atlantic.html)

<sup>19</sup> [www.nynjbaykeeper.org/](http://www.nynjbaykeeper.org/) and American Littoral Society and others

Seneca (1999) the motor-vehicle-inspired suburban sprawl that has characterized New Jersey spatial development since the early 1900s has culminated in “large homes, large cars, and large commutes,” mega-malls and “big box” stores, and decline in environmental quality. “The realization that the old city-countryside dichotomy is gone – that the city’s functions and people have melded into the countryside and created a new urban-suburban-countryside mosaic – is the beginning of wisdom in understanding the geography of New Jersey” (Stansfield 1998: 9).

Hughes and Seneca (1999) have clustered this mosaic to describe the state as several segments based on economic and transportation factors. From north to south, the New Jersey coastline includes: “The Mature Core,” the wealthiest counties adjacent to Manhattan, New York City; portions of two “Wealth Belt” counties with increasing access to Manhattan via water and rail; the “South Shore” counties which also serve as bedroom and vacation communities for the Wealth Belt and the Philadelphia/Camden urban area, and two counties that make up New Jersey’s “Rural South Region,” an agricultural area outside of the commuter shed (Hughes and Seneca 1999).

I suggest Highlands is taking a new, or as yet-undescribed, form within this mosaic, the “waterfront suburb.” As the roads in New Jersey have become commuter nightmares in the past 20 years (Hughes and Seneca 1999, Cullinane 2002), travel by waterway has recently increased in availability and popularity (Hepp and Jordan 2002, Hepp 2002). Ferry services offer weekday trips from New Jersey across the Hudson River and across the bays from various coastal towns in Middlesex and Monmouth Counties, the coastal part of the Wealth Belt. Here, ferry services cater to affluent Manhattan-bound workers by operating on a workday schedule and offering a fast

commute along with various amenities. Many local officials and realtors predict or credit increased population and property values on the improved transportation to New York (Rafei 2002, Carmody 2002).

The Raritan Bay links Highlands with industrial, economic and residential development in New York City and the proliferation of municipalities surrounding it. The New Jersey Bayshore, a 12-mile stretch of land along the Raritan and Sandy Hook Bays, lies on the northern tier of Monmouth County between Route 36 and the waterfront. Since the 1600s, boats have crossed the bay ferrying passengers and goods to and from New York (King 2001). One of the earliest European settlements in the New York/New Jersey area, the Bayshore hosted a thriving summer tourist industry (King 2001) and a commercial fishing industry, which has seen battles both in the courtroom and on the water over property rights claims in the commercial shellfisheries (McCay 1998). The physical aspects of the bay and its location make it an ideal habitat for fish and shellfish (MacKenzie 1992). The coastal bluffs of the Highlands of Navesink rise a dramatic 276 feet above sea level from a comparatively low shoreline (Stansfield 1998: 21). The views from this elevation proved valuable to military strategies of the American Revolution and were later enjoyed in leisure (Leonard 1923, King 2001).

The Bayshore is one of the poorer sections of the Wealth Belt. While minimal commuter rail access and some ferry operations link parts of the Bayshore to New York City, two parallel highways (35 and 36) link the little towns along the Bayshore and connect the area to other parts of New Jersey. Steamboat, trolley and rail transportation contributed to the development of tourism, and the absence or decline of those transit systems is blamed in part for the Bayshore's eventual decline (Able 1984). Industrial



water pollution in the Raritan Bay and pollution from New York and northern New Jersey municipal sewage have also damaged the area as a tourist destination and have closed shellfish harvesting in the area on and off since the 1920s (Abel 1984, MacKenzie 1992). Because of lost transit access and water pollution, “[t]he Bayshore has largely been ignored” for any type of economic development initiative (Abel 1984:1).

In recent decades, however, water quality has improved and areas for restricted shellfish harvesting have opened at the same time commuter ferry services have increased access to and from Manhattan for working professionals. These overlapping maritime uses are enacted daily on the bays and the Highlands shore. A ferry passenger on her way to a Wall Street job smoking a cigarette outside the warm cabin one winter morning noticed clammers at work on the bay with New York’s Verazzano Bridge in the background. Commercial clammers use the Verazzano Bridge and other features of the metropolis’s built environment as landmarks to guide them to clamming grounds and back home. Commercial and recreational fishermen often fish in channels dug for the commuter ferry.

### *Highlands*

Highlands, with a population of about 5,000 residents, is part of the New Jersey Bayshore but is unique among Bayshore towns in its geographic and cultural proximity to the state’s beach-lined Atlantic coast, the Jersey Shore. Some of my informants considered Highlands potentially like tourist-oriented towns on the ocean that harkened to a Victorian era, disappointed that the borough had not retained the part of its built environment that linked it to what they considered a more elegant past. Like other

Bayshore towns, Highlands offered bayside beaches rather than ocean beaches. The borough, also like other Bayshore towns, was historically a tourist “bungalow colony” and commercial fishing port. Its land-use pattern reflects a densely built pre-World War II waterfront area that has more of a neighborhood feel than the sprawling post-war suburban development found elsewhere in New Jersey. Also like other towns of the Bayshore, most of Highlands’ built environment is residential rather than commercial or industrial (BEDIS 1997). The U.S. Census identifies Highlands as a densely populated urban area, but that description belies the borough’s association with the wooded hillside, the bays, the ocean, and their beaches and expansive water views. Still, the tightly packed and modest housing of the low-lying section of town suggest the urban-ness identified by the census and also reveal the town’s blue-collar roots.

Today, the waters of the bay are cleaner than they have been in decades and the borough’s economic fortunes seem to be improving. The J.T. White Clam Depuration Plant opened in 1995 and purifies between \$4 and \$5 million worth of the locally caught shellfish annually. It employs about 100 people as harvesters, laborers and office staff. The Highlands Baymen’s Association owns the plant and associated wholesale business, Certified Clam Inc. The plant is one of only two on the Bayshore and in New Jersey. Other forms of commercial fishing have dwindled. Only one resident I know of continued to fish a variety of species throughout the year. Several others fished for lobster and one for recreational bait fish (mostly running pots for “killies” or killifish). All of the commercial clammers and commercial fishermen operating out of Highlands were men, though women did work in retail and wholesale aspects of the industry. Commercial fishermen called the relationship between themselves and the rest of the borough poor or

neutral. While, admittedly, Borough Hall supported the clamming industry through a reduced rent on its depuration plant property, other sorts of support were seen as lacking, expressed in regulations that outlawed the storage of traps on residential property and in complaints from condominium residents about noise and odors emanating from the clam depuration plant. Fishermen generally blamed “development” for these troubles.

The material construction of Highlands occurs through the movement of the water around the terrestrial borough, as well as to home building and other construction, or demolition and neglect, occurring within its boundaries. The rumbling machinery of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers smoothes and fortifies beaches on nearby Sandy Hook, part of Gateway National Recreational Area. It seeks to replenish the beaches and the ocean floor to protect waterfront and beachfront property in Highlands and along the Jersey Shore from Sea Bright south. Such fortification increases property values of beachfront property (Pompe and Rinehart 1995). This also affects the borough, as sand moving actions that fortify Sandy Hook keep Highlands protected from ocean waves but they can also affect fishing grounds. One lobsterman living in Highlands decried a 1995 beach replenishment project that dumped 100 barges of sand onto the Shrewsbury Rocks, prime lobster habitat in the Atlantic Ocean off of the Jersey Shore. From his perspective, lobster habitat was destroyed in favor of oceanfront homeowners and beachgoers because “there are more votes on that strip”. This quote reveals a common feeling among commercial fishermen that their priorities were marginalized and they increasingly competed with values and uses that others had for the coastal zone.

At the time of my fieldwork, recreational fishing opportunities in the borough were increasing in cost and exclusivity. There remained one business in the borough that

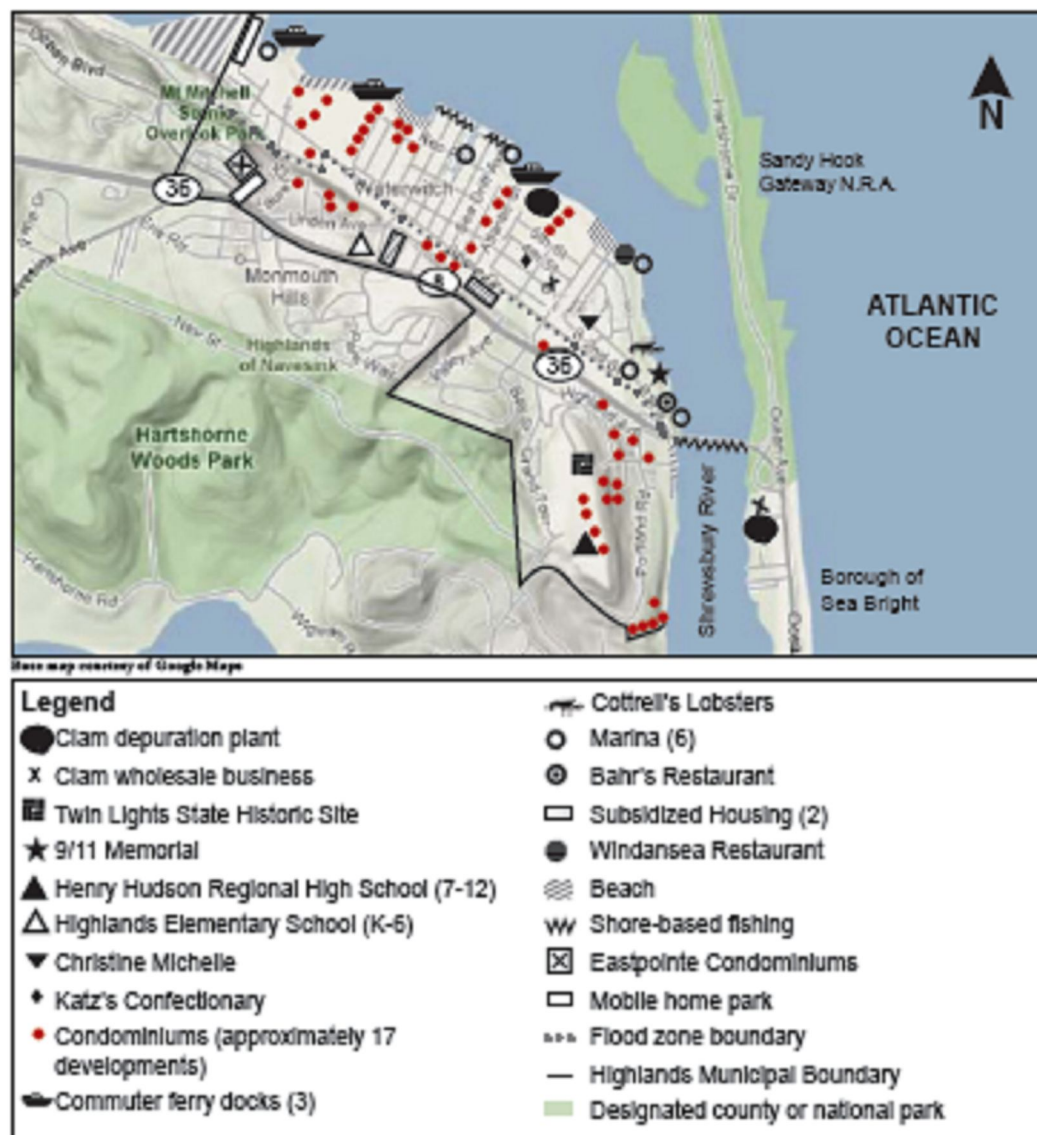
continued to rent small motor boats for recreational fishing and sell bait and fuel at a weather-worn dock and one “party boat” or head boat where individuals could pay a flat fee to join others on a recreational fishing excursion. The trend was toward more costly fishing and boating. During my fieldstay about a half dozen charter boats, which were for hire by private parties for recreational fishing, docked in the borough. Charter boat excursions tend to be more expensive and exclusive than party boats. The typically sleek and well-kept charter boats also blended into up-scale marinas a bit better than the larger workhorse type party boats, most of which are docked instead in nearby Atlantic Highlands. There were several recreationally oriented marinas for individuals to dock and store their own fishing and pleasure boats.

The borough’s mayor and its governing council provide the basic municipal services and tax collection. In addition to the mayor, the borough council is made up of four elected residents who meet in public sessions twice a month. The borough’s administrative staff includes an administrator, a clerk and deputy clerk, a code enforcement officer, and several other staff. There is no borough planner. Revisions to the borough’s master plan were undertaken in 2003 by a New Jersey firm the borough hired. The borough supports a public works department and police department, a court, a housing authority, a tax office, a recreation department, appointed planning and zoning boards and a volunteer fire department. The Highlands Business Partnership (HBP) is a non-governmental agency that supplements the functions of local government through economic development strategies. One of the more controversial of these strategies during my fieldstay was the collection of mandatory fees from borough businesses for group advertising and other marketing efforts. Some said business owners were getting

used to the fee and seeing the value in it. Other community and economic development strategies include organizing multiple events in the borough and sponsoring the borough's website.

Much of the borough's commercial district lies in a flood zone and is interspersed with clumps of modest older housing in the densely packed lower Highlands, which stretches from the waterfront to the foot of the coastal bluff.

**Map 2. Select businesses and land-uses in Highlands, NJ, 2001-2003.**



More expensive residences sweep up the coastal bluff to upper Highlands or “the hill” along winding shady roads. In upper Highlands, a few large old homes have been converted into “bed and breakfast” inns. Local historian John King notes that the borough is a town “built on two geographic levels,” which over time have become “synonymous ... with two economic levels as well” (King 2001: 110). Highway 36 segments Highlands into the hillside and the low-lying flood zone; respectively, “goat-hillers” and “clammeys” or “clam diggers” as each group has derogatorily called one another; but also the wealthy and the lower-income; and now the traffic-producing commuters, some of whom live on the hill, and the low-lying residents who that traffic affects.

The public high school that serves youth from Highlands and neighboring Atlantic Highlands sits atop the hill near an entrance to Hartshorne Woods Park, a nearly 800-acre wooded area about the size of the borough itself with trails for hiking, biking and horseback riding. The park is county-owned and not part of Highlands, but lies adjacent to it and has several access points from the borough. The Twinlights Lighthouse, built in 1862, faces the ocean atop the coastal bluff and offers dramatic views from its brownstone towers where two beacons aid navigation of coastal and ocean waters. One of Highlands’ first condominiums, Twinlights Terrace, was built on the hill below the lighthouse in 1973. Condominiums sprouted first in the 1970s on the hillside to take advantage of water views, then along the waterfront. Condominium developments averaged a higher property value than the borough’s older housing. At 14-stories, Eastpointe is the tallest condominium in Highlands and overlooks the Atlantic Ocean on the coastal bluff on the eastern edge of the borough. One of Highlands’ two mobile home

parks sits on the hill at the foot of Eastpointe. The second lies in Eastpointe's shadow on the waterfront below.

Current travelers access and bypass Highlands on state Highway 36, a four-lane road divided by a wide median of grass and bushes. The highway runs along the Bayshore to the Atlantic Ocean and turns south to the beaches of the Jersey Shore. Highway 36 allowed traffic to by-pass town as tourists make their way to ocean beaches at Sandy Hook or the Jersey Shore. Or travelers can turn north to enter the Gateway National Recreation Area at Sandy Hook. In contrast, for 66 years from 1892, trains brought summer tourists directly into the borough (King 2001). Early travelers entered Highlands by train or steamboat, stopping in the borough for their summer leisure or on their way to Sandy Hook where summer events spilled back into the little town. By the 1930s Highway 36 was completed and bisected Highlands as tourists often by-passed the borough. Even hillside residents during my field stay were able to zip back and forth along the highway to other towns for shopping and other services without crossing the highway to go into the low-lying part of the borough. Because of this easy by-pass, one economic development focus was on drawing visitors into the low-lying part of Highlands and making out-of-town commuters linger – a “destination” strategy described in Chapter 5.

As previously mentioned, Highway 36 segments upper Highlands from lower Highlands, east-west across the upsweep of the hill. The couple of bed and breakfasts and the many residences that flank the road have nice water views over tree tops and rooftops a bit further down the steep slope. The elementary school for Highlands children sits along the highway, adjacent to the borough's public housing apartment complex, Jennie

Parker Manor. Railroad tracks once ran along the foot of the slope, but a paved road, Shore Drive, lies there now. Stretching from the east and west ends of the low-lying section of the borough, Shore Drive is lined with a few single family homes, condominiums, small businesses, a small park with playground equipment and a gazebo, and a five-story building for subsidized senior citizens housing.

On the most western edge of the borough's waterfront, adjacent to a small secluded county-owned beach, sits a 60-odd unit mobile home park. At one time most of the park's trailers were for summer use, but now the park is filled with year-round residents with a range of occupations including professionals, craftsmen, retirees, unskilled laborers and unemployed residents. The park fronts the place where the mouth of the river meets the Sandy Hook Bay, the site of strong currents known as "the gauntlet" which is the location where commercial clammers were believed to have lost control of their small boat and drowned in early 2001. The Shrewsbury River moves eastward down the Highlands waterfront, between the borough and Sandy Hook to spill into the Sandy Hook Bay.

Along the waterfront, heading eastward upriver, are a variety of land uses: Single-family homes, both large and small, including many converted summer homes; condominiums, most for year-round use, but a few for summer and weekend getaways; several marinas, most for recreational boats including some charter fishing businesses, though one houses most of the 15- to 25-foot commercial clam boats that dock in town; restaurants, both old and new, upscale and modest, all taking advantage of the waterfront view; small boat slips associated with homes, some recreational, some rented by commercial clammers; a marine tow service; the clam depuration plant; a few little spots



for throwing in a fishing line, including “the bulkhead;” a small boat rental business and bait shop; a family-owned and operated lobster wholesale business and boat dock; little beaches scattered here and there, including one associated with the borough’s recreation center for children; and three docks for commuter ferries, one with an expansive parking lot.

A draw bridge crosses the river near the eastern edge of the borough. Despite posted no-fishing signs, people often drop a line off the bridge into the water below, and people in their 30s and older recall the tradition of high school kids jumping off the bridge and popping up yards down the river pulled by the fast moving current. Traffic on Highway 36 backs up frequently in warm weather as the bridge opens to accommodate the tall masts of sailboats from more upscale areas farther upstream.

Moving toward the bluff from the waterfront, the street layout is dense and mostly square or rectangular blocks. Parked cars line most of the streets because the closely built housing affords few driveways. The main traffic artery through the low-lying section is Bay Avenue, where most of the commercial business is scattered, interspersed with single family homes, duplexes and condominiums. The wholesale business associated with the clam depuration plant sits on the corner of Bay Avenue and a small side street. The types of businesses in the borough include some basic services like a gas station and convenience store, but no grocery store (though there is a seafood retail shop that advertises Maine lobsters), a car repair shop, a hair salon and a hardware store. There are also a couple of shops for buying gifts and souvenirs, a real estate business and a few professional services including a law office. Restaurants are by far the most prevalent business in the borough, offering a range of dining experiences and prices. There are

diners, pizza joints and sandwich shops along with one highly rated expensive restaurant, and several more middle-range options for seafood and various cuisines.

At the start of my field stay two companies operated commuter ferry services from Highlands to New York City but by the end only one remained, running all three docks in the borough. In one ferry location, a vast parking lot sat on the waterfront surrounded by condominiums, built on the site of a former beloved beach club called Connors whose main clubhouse, then vacant, was razed in 1999 to make way for ferry parking (Frielinghaus and Tomasulo 2000).<sup>20</sup>

The ferries provide quick and relatively smooth transport with plush indoor seating in a climate-controlled cabin where business news broadcasts from televisions suspended from the ceiling and coffee is sold in the mornings and alcoholic beverages for the evening commute home. Many in Highlands credit or blame the transformation of the borough in recent years on these new-style commuter ferries that have run from town since the mid-1990s.

The per capita income in Highlands is increasing but despite that there are still significant numbers of people living in poverty. According to the 2000 US census, in 1999, there were 625 residents living in poverty, over 12 percent of the population. Unemployment hovered at around 4 percent. The median house value in 2000 was \$139,000. The residential population of Highlands has fluctuated over the years, from about 3,500 in 1960 to a peak of 5,187 in 1980, dropping to about 4,800 in 1990 and hopping over 5,000 in the year 2000 (U.S. census). During my field stay, it seems the population was actually stagnating or declining. Data from 2006 show a loss of about 100

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<sup>20</sup> The business started as a hotel in 1870, grew into a large beach club and resort through the 1900s, started to scale back in the 1960s, and was finally sold in 1998 (Frielinghaus and Tomasulo 2000: 94-95).

residents from 2000 ([www.city-data.com/city/Highlands-New-Jersey.html](http://www.city-data.com/city/Highlands-New-Jersey.html), accessed August 9, 2009). The causes of these population shifts were unclear. Interviews suggest that new residents as well as summer residents making the area their year-round home comprised much of the increase in Highlands population from 1990 to 2000 and that current declines may result from a skyrocketing real estate market that is reducing affordable rental properties as well as opportunities for home ownership for some families.

### *History*

By 1665, the area that is now Highlands had become one of the first permanent European settlements in New Jersey (Wacker 1975: 127). Like New Jersey in general, Highlands' economy grew in relation to nearby large urban markets for fresh seafood, produce, and summer tourism. For a time, the borough economy also benefited from the transitory but consistent population of military bases located across the river on Sandy Hook. Highlands was particularly renowned for the harvesting of soft clams.

### *Clamming and Other Commercial Fisheries*

The subsistence and commercial harvest of shellfish has a long history in Highlands. When Henry Hudson and his crew arrived on their ship the Half Moon in 1609, they encountered the Lenape, an American Indian tribe with affiliates through the New York area and also what seems to have been a village in Highlands. The Lenape called the area "Navesink" or "place of good fishing" (King 2001: passim). Most among the early waves of European immigrants to Highlands, Dutch and English in the 17<sup>th</sup>

century and largely Irish in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as well as the un-landed “American” population supported themselves and their families by harvesting clams, shucking clams or in some other employment or subsistence associated with local seafood harvest (King 2001, MacKenzie 1992). The town became known for its association with soft clams (*Mya arenaria*), retrieved by tongers in small owner-operated boats, processed by local women in shucking houses and given away like peanuts in bars and waterside restaurants up until the late twentieth century. From the 1800s to the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, the primary occupation of most bayside residents was commercial fishing and in particular commercial clamming. In 1900, clammers made up 34 percent of the Highlands workforce (King 2001: 93). Farmers joined clammers on the bay for winter incomes (MacKenzie 1992). The following quote from an 1889 guidebook describes the pervasive culture of clamming in Parkertown, part of Highlands’ bayside section:

The soul of this ... community is wrapped up in clams. They are to it what the whales once were to Nantucket. Parkertown is clamming, shelling, stringing or canning clams; devouring them, or dreaming of one or another of these acts... ‘Clam’ is said to be the first word lisped by its babies. (Kobbe 1889)

The force of the Atlantic Ocean powers into the Raritan and Sandy Hook Bays at each high tide and sweeps clean some of the industrial and municipal pollutants they receive surrounded by such a large population base. In what economists refer to as “negative externalities” of development, the bays became dumping grounds for wastes produced by the great factories that built industrial empires in New York City and its surroundings. They also absorbed human wastes flowing from municipalities growing around the metropolis.

Over the last few centuries, facets of the shellfish industry in the Raritan Bay flourished and fell periodically. Harvesters supplied burgeoning residential populations

that in turn produced municipal wastes, and along with industrial wastes, rendered area shellfish unsafe for human consumption (McCay 1998, McKenzie 1992). The once lucrative industry of oyster harvesting ceased completely in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, while other forms of commercial shellfishing continued, including clamming and lobstering (MacKenzie 1992).

In 1961 after several people developed infectious hepatitis from eating bay clams, New Jersey authorities banned the commercial harvest of both soft and hard clams (*Mercenaria mercenaria*) in the Raritan Bay. The modern commercial harvest of bay clams came to a jerky halt over the next two decades, as authorities re-opened and then condemned certain areas to direct market harvest. Three depuration plants opened for a few years and purified either soft or hard clams for human consumption and kept some harvesters in business for a while. The first opened in 1974 to purify soft clams (MacKenzie 1992: 222). By 1988 all three had closed. At about the same time, clambers started to relay clams from the polluted yet fecund bay to cleaner waters in southern New Jersey where the shellfish were able to purge biological contaminants. Still, the numbers of people in Highlands who made their living clamming had plummeted. Only about 30 New Jersey clambers who participated in the relay dug clams in the southeastern Raritan Bay (MacKenzie 1992) and it is unclear how many of those were Highlands residents. The town's population and infrastructure had changed dramatically with the decline of commercial clamming. Many clamming families relocated or moved into other kinds of work, and processing operations went out of business. The latest depuration system, established in 1995, resurrected local commercial clamming.

*Transport, Summer Leisure, and Housing*

The availability of transportation to New York City has long influenced the fortunes of the borough and its residents, as it has influenced the economic development of much of New Jersey. Proximity to New York City and Philadelphia meant New Jersey farmers and commercial fishermen had major markets in which to sell fresh, perishable produce and seafood (Stansfield 1998). During the 1800s, internal transportation throughout New Jersey remained secondary to the main through routes linking New York and Philadelphia. The arrival of steamboats made it possible for Bayshore and seaside places on coastal New Jersey to become the state's first Jersey Shore resorts (Kelland and Kelland 1978). Steamboats came to Monmouth County in 1820 (Cunningham 1978: 223), and a steamboat line first linked Highlands to New York City in 1830, regularly bringing goods, services, and visiting tourists to the area, which was then well-known as a critical focal point during previous wars (King 2001). The railroads opened Monmouth County and Highlands even more. "[By the 1870s], the New York and Long Branch Railroad...changed Monmouth County's character from an off-the-beaten-tract place for a select few to an area open to nearly all people" (Cunningham 1978: 224). Two train stations in Highlands ensured visitors would stop in the borough as their final destination or in route to summer entertainment on Sandy Hook.

With its coastal bluff and dramatic ocean views and its bayside beaches and the swift moving river that sweeps along its coastline, Highlands was a popular summer resort for people of many different classes coming from places like Manhattan, Brooklyn, Newark and Jersey City. By the late 1700s, Monmouth County residents in nearby

Rumson and Long Branch were renting out their homes to wealthy Philadelphia families (Cunningham 1978: 222). In Highlands, private clubs emerged by the mid-1800s where New York gentlemen and their families summered. In the following century, many others found summer accommodation in tents, grand hotels, houseboats, cottages, boarding houses, and bungalows. There were amusement areas in Highlands over the years, including a carousel with a brass ring, movie theaters, and a casino. The borough's 1900 residential population of 1,200 would swell up to 15,000 as summer tourists packed hotels or just stayed for the day (King 2001).

By the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the borough was also home to a summer-time actor's colony, where the stars of New York City stages "built regal summer get-away 'cottages'" (King 2001: 80). Later it became the set for many early films. "The excitement, popularity, and fame of Highlands and the area in summer was a natural draw...for...pioneer filmmakers.... They went where transportation to the sets was fast, easy, and cheap...and thus they came to Highlands" (King 2001: 101).

Throughout the 1800s and early 1900s, steamboats made daily roundtrips between New York and Highlands and brought enough visitors to support a large tourist industry.

Hotels, merry go-rounds, picnic groves and dancing pavilions lined the shores of the Shrewsbury River at Highlands and Sandy Hook; but the big attraction was the floating theater on the Shrewsbury, which performed Gilbert and Sullivan operettas and musical comedies to audiences of over two thousand (Frielinghaus and Tomasulo 2000: 19).

The description above comes from a short history compiled by Highlands residents for the borough's 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary, which says that during the steamboat era, "Highlands was considered America's foremost elegant watering place." Walt Whitman, "one of America's most famous poets" as the local history notes, even made it to Highlands and "celebrated his excursions" in journals and through a group of poems he titled "Fancies at Navesink" (Frielinghaus and Tomasulo 2000:19).

Drawing on the stories of Highlands' celebrated past, gentrifiers refer to a time long before their arrival when "elegant ladies" strolled along borough streets, and Highlands was busy resort town. Yet one long-time resident laughed as she relayed a story that her uncle used to tell of Highlands ladies wearing elegant dresses strolling through town in their barefeet. "They were clammers, you see." Such stories show the complexity of place-making in Highlands. Gentrifiers, particularly newcomers, referred to an elegant past, while life-long residents noted that prosperity but grounded it in commercial fishing. Long-time residents, including those who I considered to be gentrifiers, also recalled the raucousness and conviviality of an amusement area for military folks from nearby Fort Hancock and summer tourists of a wide range of classes.

The construction of Highway 36 was announced in the late 1920s and was completed in the early 1930s. The steamboats stopped running in 1932. Highlands' train stations closed, the last in 1958 (King 2001). The loss of the trains followed a decline in summer tourist activities in the borough. The highway bisected and by-passed Highlands rather than drawing tourists to it, and a shift in leisure preferences from bayside waterfronts to the "white, glaring sand...(and) browning sun" (Leonard 1923: 167) of ocean front beaches also likely contributed to the fall in tourist traffic.

Soon after tourist traffic declined, however, commuter traffic seems to have increased. The Monmouth County stretch of the Garden State Parkway, completed in 1954, "brought in swarms of people, all of them eager to live near the Jersey Shore while they held their jobs in the industrial counties to the north" (Cunningham 1978: 228). Some suggest that New Jersey suburbanization began even earlier, as early as the mid-1800s when commuter patterns emerged around steamboat and railroad lines. By the turn



of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, “higher incomes meant that larger numbers of people could get out of the city to sleep in the suburbs even if they had to return in the morning to work” (Kelland and Kelland 1978: 100).

However, this increase in commuter traffic meant little to Highlands, which reeled from the dramatic decline in the military population at Fort Hancock on Sandy Hook. By the end of World War II, Fort Hancock’s population peaked at 12,000 men and women. From 1955-1970, the residential population at Fort Hancock was between 500 and 700. In the mid-2000s, the Fort had a daytime population of about 200 employees. With the decline in summer tourism to Highlands and year-round residents on Fort Hancock, the population base that supported the variety of businesses in the borough had disappeared.

During the 1930s Depression, many owners of summer bungalows made Highlands their year-round home. One informant who was in the borough then described the migration:

Now during the Depression, '29, '30, '31, and so on, the people who had summer bungalows lost their jobs in New York and they came down from New York and put heat in those houses and lived in them. They gave up their apartments in New York because they couldn't afford them.

The trend continued even after the Depression ended. Returning World War II veterans speeded the conversion of summer bungalows into year-round homes (King 2001). The housing shortage prompted construction in the 1950s of Highlands’ federally subsidized housing development Jennie Parker Manor and two trailer parks in town, Shadow Lawn on the hillside and Paradise Park on the Atlantic Highland border in the low-lying waterfront. The next wave of housing transition came with the construction of condominiums in the 1970s and 1980s, along with continued “winterizing” of summer

bungalows. Now, individual home renovations and in-fill condominium development are the norm.

### *Three Places in One*

As best as I can tell, before Highlands incorporated in 1900 it was three distinct areas: Waterwitch, the bathing club/resort area along the bay (actually annexed in 1914); Parkertown, the commercial clamming area with shucking shanties and clam boats along the river, and the Highlands hills, sometimes called the Highlands of Navesink, or Neversink, where the wealthy lived in tree-shaded manors with dramatic ocean views. Each area offered its own charm to turn of the century writers. The making of these distinct areas and of the early borough from them incorporates stories, storytelling and the contested construction of place.

- *Waterwitch*: Working class people from northern New Jersey and New York pitched tents and set up camps in the tree-shaded waterfront (see photo King 2001: 100). In 1907 a real estate venture advertised lots in the area for sale.

[T]he Waterwitch Development Company has selected historic Water Witch, NJ, on the banks of the picturesque Shrewsbury River in full view of the Atlantic Ocean, at the foot of the highest land on the Atlantic Coast, from Maine to Florida. A place made memorable by the revolutionary hero, Captain Joshua Huddy, who gave up his life for his country, and also a place made famous by J. Fenimore Cooper's book *The Water Witch*, the scene of which was laid on this property. (Waterwitch Development Company: 1907)

One resident knowledgeable of the borough's real estate history said that this company was responsible for cutting part of lower Highlands into 25-foot lots, likely for the real estate scheme mentioned above. This left the borough with small lots and densely packed housing in the Water Witch area. Many of the street names

in this area come from the James Fenimore Cooper novel: *Waterwitch*, *Seadrift*, *Barberie*.

- *Parkertown*: This low-lying waterfront area was also known as Seaside and was described in 1923 as an area whose people were “distinct in occupation and habits” (Leonard 1923: 74). “The tract is level and low, the high tides covering at times a large part of the habited portion of the property” (Leonard 1923:74). This was the commercial fishing settlement. An article in one of the most popular New York magazines of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century describes this part of Highlands in a way meant to charm city dwellers to the area for a summer’s respite:

As we strolled through the quiet street to the beach, groups of sunburned, yellow-haired women gazed at us from the doorways, hiding themselves behind the fences, whence they peered forth cautiously. Finding we were harmless, they followed us to the beach, looking more like kelpies than human beings, with their bleached locks and nut-brown faces. (*Harper’s New Monthly Magazine* c. 1880)

In contrast, a neighbor of Highlands recounts a very human image of the settlement’s founder Charles Parker, a clammer and merchant “with his mild and Quaker-like manners and face” (1923: 74). Local historian John King (2001) marks the boundaries of this section as the river, Cedar Street, Bay Avenue and North Street, while Leonard, writing in 1923 extends the boundary a bit further back to the foot of the bluff, now Shore Drive.

- *The Highlands of Navesink*: Leonard described this area in 1923 as one of high elevation and old wealth, occupied by “sound-principled tillers of the soil ... such old established families as the Hartshornes, Schencks, Woodwardes, Hoopers, Joneses, Swans, Thompsons, Sears” (Leonard 1923: 30). This part of the coastal bluff is ringed by the Navesink River and the bay. Grand hotels and palatial

summer homes sat atop the bluff. Timber harvesting and small cottage industries were undertaken there as well. As previously noted, the elevation of the Highlands of Navesink reaches about 280 feet above sea level. Such elevation, very unusual on the Atlantic Coast south of Cape Cod, has been important in military operations, commercial and military communications, and coastal navigation. The Twin Lights Lighthouse is a double beacon structure set on the hills. Wireless radio pioneer, inventor, and eventual Nobel Prize winner Guglielmo Marconi broadcast commercially from the Highlands hills in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The following is an 1857 tourist-oriented newspaper account of the area, this one focusing on the hills.

The Highlands of Nevesink [sic] are extremely romantic and as we glided along a panoramic succession of lovely views met our eyes, such as are witnessed in few other localities. The fine light-houses at a short distance from the beach, the cottages scattered along the shores, and the long line of purple woods, which we could just distinguish along the background in the evening twilight, which was beginning to close around the scene, gave a life and animation to the whole picture, which was all it needed to be one of the finest prospects in the United States. (*Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* 1857)

### *Reputations and Comparisons*

From the late 1800s, the state of New Jersey was already a well-known “butt for the sarcasm and wit of those who live outside her borders” (Bryant 1874: 47). However, keen to see the better side of this “gallant little state,” 19th century poet William Cullen Bryant reportedly goes on to describe the history, people, and landscape of which New Jersey should be proud, including its “famous and fashionable seaside resorts.” Like New Jersey, Highlands has had its own challenges of reputation. When the Highlands of Navesink and Parkertown combined to form Highlands in 1900, a March 31 editorial in

*The Monmouth County Press* expressed doubt about the ability of residents to self-govern: “The present voting majority ... do not rank high as taxpayers or moralists. They pretend scarcely ordinary educational qualifications.” The editorial went on to assert that “Sunday liquor selling and everyday drunkenness are perennial complaints” and to wonder if the new unsteady borough would lure vices from New York City (cited in King 1996: 102-103). It is no wonder that founders chose Highlands as the new borough’s name, after the coastal bluffs that distinguish it and for the part of town where the more widely respected residents lived.

Some argue that the bad reputation that continues to plague Highlands comes from its rum-running days during the 1920s Prohibition Era when fast-moving lobster boats met Canadian ships with bootlegged liquor just beyond the U.S. boundary three miles offshore and ferried it back to waiting sedans headed for New York speakeasies. Though Highlands was known as a rum-running town, other commercial fishing ports along the Bayshore were also involved in running bootlegged liquor (MacKenzie 1992). The most respectable of citizens participated in this illegal endeavor:

While the buyers were all men from the cities with associations to a tougher criminal element in organized crime, the men who ran the boats were all locals, good seamen, hard-working lobstermen, and clammers who saw nothing wrong with their participation in a victimless crime, who struggled to make ends meet even before the Depression hit, and who were legitimized in their unlawfulness by the senselessness of the law that no one ever wanted, that no one respected. (King 2001: 114)

When another constitutional amendment repealed Prohibition in 1933, “The lobstermen returned to their lobster pots, the clammers to their boats, bushels, and rakes, and people returned to the 26 taverns licensed in the little borough” (King 2001: 115).

Informants recounted a more recent past of “bench-clearing” barroom brawls,

brothers beating each other in the streets, and in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, military men from Fort Hancock on Sandy Hook picking up local women and fighting with local men. By 1990, commercial fishermen around the Bayshore were hardly recognized as such, except in Highlands and the nearby commercial fishing port of Belford (MacKenzie 1992: 243). The borough had maintained an identity associated with commercial fishing while most of the Bayshore had not. At the time of this research in 2001-2003, Highlands was known for its easy access to New York City via high-speed commuter ferry boats, its views of both the water and the New York skyline, as well as for a few popular restaurants in the borough and some elements of commercial fishing.

#### *Reputations and Comparisons – Redux*

Highlands borough lies on the northern coast of Monmouth County, just north of Middletown Township, from which it seceded in 1900. Borough residents have continued to fight various unfavorable descriptions and comparisons with neighboring areas. In the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it was considered a drug running town, a town of barroom brawls and racists. It was known as an insular, low-class place that parents in neighboring towns told their children to avoid.

One informant traced the borough's reputation in part to Highlands' proximity to military installations on Sandy Hook. She said:

Sandy Hook was an Army base, Fort Hancock, and the soldiers, they came from all over the country. ... On payday, which was the 30th of the month, they used to come to Highlands and get drunk, carouse, and then they would go out with the young ladies who were available and some of them they married and some they just planted children.

She argued that the reputation unfairly stuck. The more genteel of the life-long (or

more than 50 years) residents with whom I spoke rejected the “bad” reputation of Highlands. They saw the borough as having faced some rough times because of fires and particularly flooding and because of fluctuations in the commercial fishing industry and in summer tourism. They did not consider the borough to be one of questionable moral character as it had been described both at its founding and during my field stay.

Even so the residents who otherwise objected to the unseemly vision of the borough point to the oft-cited distinction between Highlands and its neighbor Atlantic Highlands. While I was interviewing a local real estate agent who was familiar with the borough’s history, a colleague of hers joined us and they discussed Highlands’ bad reputation, concluding that it was unfairly bestowed. Half jokingly, they blamed residents or realtors from neighboring towns -- Rumson, or most likely, Atlantic Highlands -- for the misinformation:.

Patty [pseudo.]: When I lived in Atlantic Highlands, I used to tell my children, that they better not go to Highlands. ... I myself had never been close to the town having lived in Atlantic Highlands for years, and I just knew it was just bad but I didn't know why.

Ella [pseudo]: But it isn't. It isn't bad.

Patty: It's just like when somebody gets a reputation, and it's so hard to get it erased. It isn't that there is really anything bad at all. I have been working here [now] for 22 years. There is nothing bad at all.

She went on to describe an “on-going feud” between Highlands and Atlantic Highlands as somewhat ironic because most outsiders do not know the difference between the two towns.

On my first trip to Highlands to look for housing in September 2001, I experienced the Highlands/Atlantic Highlands distinction. Directions from an on-line mapping service, Mapquest.com, sent me along Bayside Drive, which had been closed

years earlier (since the spring of 1999) because of landslide concerns. I came to a roadblock in Atlantic Highlands where a couple of men were working and asked if they knew how to get to Sea Drift Avenue in Highlands. One of them laughed and asked if I was looking for Highlands or Atlantic Highlands. I said, "Well, Highlands." The man said, "Oh that's the poor man's Highlands," and directed me out of town, back to Highway 36.

One informant, a woman in her 80s who had lived in Highlands since the 1920s, delighted in telling the following joke:

We used to have a railroad station here, and this Chinese gentleman wanted to go to Beijing, so the ticket man said, "Well I can't give you a ticket to Beijing, but I can give you a ticket to New York." So he went to New York. Then he went to the ticket agent and said I want a ticket to Beijing. "Well, I can't give you a ticket to Beijing. I can give you a ticket to Chicago," and so on and so on... until he got to Beijing. So then in Beijing [when he wanted a return ticket] he said, "I want a ticket to Highlands," and the fellow said, "Highlands or Atlantic Highlands?"

The joke uses China as the most distant location -- geographically, racially, and culturally -- from Highlands. According to this joke, the differences between Highlands and Atlantic Highlands are greater than the differences between Highlands and Beijing.

My informants compared and contrasted Highlands not just to Atlantic Highlands, but also to other communities along the Jersey Shore. One long-time summer resident, an upper-middleclass woman involved in her hometown's historic and environmental preservation activities but who avoided such work in her summer home, still worried that Highlands would go the way of neighboring Sea Bright, on the ocean coast. "There's nothing left in Sea Bright. The elegant old country mansion, summer cottage mansions ... are all given way to one condo development after another." Not only did the condominiums replace more appealing forms of architecture, they represented to her an



unhinging of community, specifically the kind of comfortable and low-key summer getaway that she believed Highlands to be. In part, her fear was that condominiums would fill the borough with young professionals interested in making money in New York and partying in Highlands, comparing the potential to what she saw happening in towns like Hoboken, across the Hudson River from Manhattan, and neighboring Sea Bright.

Others presented visions for Highlands that were more hopeful, though edged with disappointment. One artist I interviewed thought the borough's narrow streets and small bungalows downtown should become an artists' colony. This same informant lamented some of the non-standard renovations as well as the disrepair that she saw in the borough and would have liked to have seen Highlands be more like the restored Victorian-style images she held of Cape May at the southern tip of New Jersey or Ocean Grove about a 40 minute drive away. Gentrifiers typically contrasted Highlands with other small expensive towns along the Atlantic Coast and the two rivers than finger their way inland. These places were imagined by gentrifiers as pinnacles of community revitalization and they hoped that Highlands could model.

Interestingly, most informants considered Highlands' oceanfront neighbor Sea Bright to be more in the same family as the bayside borough. It hosted a clam depuration plant and wholesale businesses, and both suffered traffic snarls when the Shrewsbury drawbridge rose or, worse yet, stuck. Both abutted the national park at Sandy Hook but Sea Bright suffered at times with overflow traffic when the parks' beaches reached capacity and were closed, while Highlands pondered how to draw beach traffic to its restaurants and bay shores. Several long-time residents said they could see themselves

living in Sea Bright and favorably compared the two boroughs. A few mentioned enjoying regular bicycle rides from Highlands through Sea Bright. Highlands and Sea Bright both had a “little home town” feel but Sea Bright was considered the much wealthier relative.

Lately Highlands’ reputation seems to have improved. One working-class informant with a child in the local high school said she worried about the discrimination her daughter might face from other students. “Ill, you’re from Highlands? Ill,” she heard as a high school student. “Ill, ill, ill. It’s all clammies down there.” But no one ever said anything like that to her freshman daughter, so she suspects the borough’s reputation is changing. She suspected this change had to do with new condominium developments and the people they brought to Highlands and the surrounding towns – not because of who those new residents were but because of what they knew (or rather did not know) about the borough’s past. She also credits HBP beautification efforts with tidying up and prettifying the borough. “I work in Atlantic [Highlands]. All my people I work for are there,” she said, “Now I have them saying, ‘Wow. They really did a nice job. That’s looking better than Atlantic.’ And that’s really nice to hear, for a change.”

### *Conclusion*

My aim in this research was not to confirm or debunk the borough’s various reputations, or chart their origins, but to understand how people draw on those to frame the borough in its current fluctuations, where they position themselves in this transformation, and what kind of place they are creating. I offer this chapter as a cluster of stories that people tell about Highlands – from local histories and the U.S. census to

individual residents and business owners describing the borough as they see it and its relationship to other places.

Stories create places by imbuing “any given patch of earth” with meaning (Cronon 2002:8). I suggest the same story-telling creation of place was true for bodies of water that surround Highlands. These bodies of water physically and metaphorically shape the borough, both in the action of waves and tides moving particles along the coastline and in the stories about the water told on its shores. There were stories of death at “the gauntlet,” a particularly rough area where currents collide and believed to be the location where two clambers lost control of their boat and drowned the year before I arrived. There were everyday stories of boarding the ferry and commuting across the water to Manhattan, and other everyday stories of digging clams in Area 11 or whichever was the latest location thick with hard clams. Then there were wintertime stories of a frozen bay and ice clogged river that refused both commuter ferries and clam boats.

Stories about Highlands’ recent history as a “roughneck area” supported the gentrification of the borough as a means to civilize it. Stories about a sewage outflow pipe along the bottom of the bay that kept a radius around it closed to commercial clamming supported more rigorous restrictions on such activity. Residents of Paradise Park sat on the porches in front of their mobile homes and watched boat traffic cruise along the channel and told class-oriented stories of when they saw errant sailboats and when once a commuter ferry got stuck on sandbars at low tide. Life-long Highlanders talked about the daring and strength of local youth who in a traditional right of passage jumped off the Highlands drawbridge into the river’s fast moving current. They liked to tell of how Gertrude Ederle, the first woman to swim the English Channel, learned to

swim in Highlands and trained in the Shrewsbury River. An old man told a story about the freedom of youth and unheeded warnings when he recounted stripping off his clothes as he ran to the end of a pier, despite the outcry from bystanders, and jumping off to belly flop on the soggy river bottom at low tide.

These stories described the borough's long-time residents as strong – made so by their connection with the water. All these stories also created places from the bodies of water surrounding Highlands – the river that spilled from inland to the open water, the bays that linked Highlands to the Atlantic Ocean and to the metropolis, the strong tide that pushed intermittent pollutants out to sea and made the bay worthy of “saving.” Those who recounted and recalled stories about Highlands and the water surrounding it revealed and reinforced their social groups and, in some stories, the larger community of place. The following chapters focus on other stories of people's experiences with the land and sea in this geographic location, as well as their power and preferences in the place-making of Highlands.

## Chapter 4

### Thinking about Suburbs and Cities in the Making of Highlands

Shortly after I moved to Highlands October 1, 2001, I stopped in at one of the new retail businesses in town. The place smelled like lavender. The owner, a woman in her 30s, brightened when she talked about how fast Highlands was changing. I asked her why it was changing so fast. She said because “people,” meaning people who did not yet live or work in Highlands, were just starting to find out about the ferries and the easy commute to New York City. In a later interview she would tell me that Highlands was becoming a place she would want to raise children. It was not that kind of place when she first arrived because, she said, too many “drunks were roaming on the streets” and, Highlands had been “a roughneck sort of area”.

This chapter describes place-making in Highlands in terms of suburbanization and gentrification. As a suburb, Highlands is seen as a place primarily for consumption rather than production, and gentrification was an effort to increase the borough’s tax base via recruitment of new higher-income residents. I examine these two concepts because, though informants did not typically use these labels, the concepts are in the forefront of the minds of people employed in economic development and municipal and regional planning. The development stories that emerge in documents of local government such as land-use plans and in real estate narratives, for example, are often infused with reference to and preference for the basic components of one or the other concept. Others tell stories of displacement reflective of the stories that emerge from suburbanized or gentrified

settings.

The place-making underway in Highlands included material and symbolic elements of both suburbanization and gentrification. As noted earlier, these processes operate in the context of the capitalist state, satisfying the expansionary needs of capitalism. Elaborating on the concept of “creative destruction” described in Chapter 2, I examine the expression and interpretation of ways that gentrification and suburbanization create a new place by destroying an old one and to what degree that is actually happening in Highlands. Though some gentrifiers embraced the destruction of what they considered undesirable aspects of the borough (mostly deteriorating and unkempt buildings), many did not want to claim such wholesale destruction of place. Those gentrifiers preferred analogies to melting pots and hoped to retain what they considered the borough’s quaint and quirky charm. The built environment that anchored long-time residents to this place was being uprooted (see Williams 1988), though parts had been lost previously to economic deprivation and the borough’s persistent trouble with flooding.

While including elements of both these trends, Highlands’ experience was neither the proto-typical suburbanization nor the proto-typical gentrification. *Gentrification* implies displacement of low-income minorities by a white upper-middleclass in an urban setting relatively removed from environmental resources. *Suburbanization* suggests sprawl development with lawns and soccer fields that gobble up woodlands or farmlands on the outskirts of a city. In the following sections I discuss both suburbanization and gentrification and aspects of the changes in Highlands that described and defied both categories. Following, I describe the process underway in Highlands as one of “coastal gentrification,” which is motivated by elements of both suburbanization and

gentrification. The newcomers to Highlands moved there to savor some of the same residential elements that motivate people to move to the suburbs, such as more living space at a lower cost and in a more bucolic setting than was accessible to them in the larger urban core. However, these newcomers were not occupying homes built on former farmland or woodlands but a pre-existing urban community of blue-collar residents and with a history of commercial fishing. In the displacement of residents that accompanies such an overlay, the process underway in Highlands reflects elements of gentrification. Simultaneously, the overlay displaces the productive activities of a working waterfront and thereby reflects “right to farm” (Lisansky 1986) issues caused by some suburbanization. As we see in Chapters 5 and 6, Highlands’ waterfront location lends an element of tourism to the mix. The following section examines the facets of Highlands place-making that involve lower density, residential land-uses, and other elements of suburbanization.

### *In What Ways Was Highlands Becoming a Suburb?*

Kenneth Jackson (1985) offers four defining components of the U.S. suburb: 1) serves non-farm residential land-uses; 2) is populated by middle- and upper-class residents; 3) many residents undertake a daily journey to work, separating work and home; and 4) supports low population density relative to older areas.

In some ways Highlands fell short, lacking the expansive space required to support suburbs with their characteristic single-family detached homes. It was a completely “built-out” area that the U.S. Census categorized as urban. With more than 5,000 residents in about  $\frac{3}{4}$  square mile, Highlands had been among the most densely

populated areas of Monmouth County in recent decades<sup>21</sup>. However if Highlands is considered a suburb of New York City, it may be more appropriate to compare the density of Highlands to that metropolis,<sup>22</sup> to consider New York City as the “older area” opposite to Highlands’ suburban growth. While Highlands did not offer large backyards or even driveways for many housing units, the space available for residential living was larger than for many million-dollar accommodations in Manhattan (Contreras and Flynn Vencat 2007). Though the U.S. census reported Highlands as quite dense, relative to the rest of Monmouth County, the density calculation includes only land areas and not water areas. The borough’s categorization as urban also belied the borough’s association with commercial fishing and its expansive views of bays and the Atlantic Ocean.

Like the first component of suburbs listed above, Highlands was largely residential. When asked about the borough’s motto, “A good place to live, work, and play,” informants often pointed to a lack of job opportunities in Highlands. One life-long resident, trying to make sense of the motto, said in a 2002 interview, “So when they say work, I guess they mean...because you can get to work easy on the ferry – or, you know, waitressing?”

Aside from employment at borough hall or one of the schools in town, the jobs in Highlands tended to be related to the restaurant industry and more than a hundred associated with recreational and commercial fishing. The restaurant industry and clamming industry were the only local job options mentioned by informants, though the census (as is typical in many places) listed local government as the largest employer.

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<sup>21</sup> The census reports density by square mile to make densities comparable. Highlands’ density is nearly 6,700 residents per square mile. The density for Monmouth County is nearly 1,304 residents per square mile.

<sup>22</sup> New York City’s density is nearly 26,403 residents per square mile.



When asked about the contribution of the clamming industry to the borough, people often wondered what other occupations were available locally. Clammers and others also mentioned the multiplier effects of the commercial clamming industry. However many residents who focused on the historical and cultural significance of commercial clamming relegated its economic impact to the past.

More than half of employed Highlands residents commuted 30 minutes or more to work. As already noted, some of those residents took a commuter ferry though a smaller percent than most suspected. Most of the ferry passengers were out-of-towners. In the 2000 census, only 55 Highlands residents reported using a ferry to commute to work. More recent data was unavailable, but anecdotal evidence suggested that more residents rode the ferries to work in recent years. This “journey to work” is a product of the separation of home and work that characterizes the suburbs and bourgeois society (Bourdieu 1984). This separation is often expressed in land use restrictions that divide residential uses from industrial and other uses (Jackson 1985).

The standard view of class distinctions and the separation of work and home must be complicated a bit for the situation in Highlands because some newcomer professionals worked out of their homes for the most part and wanted easy access to New York City for work occasionally and also for play. Further complicating the situation in Highlands is that some gentrifiers move to the borough and leave city jobs to open their own small businesses and others do some telecommuting. Those with businesses in the borough compared their work as more personally meaningful or less stressful than jobs they held in the city, aligning more with the sense of Highlands as a place of leisure (elaborated in Chapter 5).

Despite some exceptions, in Highlands the distinction between a place of home/leisure and a place of work remain. The work that some gentrifiers did at home was typically not expressed in major land-use categories as in Jackson's (1985) suburbs. In Highlands, such work often happened in home offices or studios or in offices that converted existing residential or small-scale commercial structures rather than being reflected in the construction of large office buildings or industrial parks. The land-use categories that most acutely marked the distinction between consumption and production in Highlands were the ferry docks and associated parking lots, signifying departure from Highlands for work, and the condominiums that often surrounded them.

The borough did not have the class homogeneity described as part of typical suburbanization. One informant who lived in and owned property in the borough said, "Because of the hills, you always had a diversity of income. You had people up there who had anywhere from lower-middle class to the upper-middle class and people down here [in the low-lying section] who edged into the lower middle and down from there." It seemed that class diversity was increasing in Highlands' waterfront area with the immigration of new upper-middle class residents. Census data showed that the home values were certainly increasing.

In the renovation of single-family homes and duplexes as well as the development of new condominiums and town houses, Highlands seemed to be shifting the residential population toward more privileged classes as the lower class residents became priced out of the area. However, the trailer parks and particularly the subsidized housing in the borough offered a stable source of affordable housing in the borough, more stable than the individually owned homes that might be renovated and sold or rented to higher-

income newcomers. The gentrification dimensions of these changes are discussed at length later.

Despite the borough's lack of open space and the low population density described in typical suburbanization, its comparison to and coupling with the much higher density of New York City offered relatively suburban-style space. Though Highlands was an older, urban area, most important to understanding the tenor of the transformation underway in Highlands was that, for many residents, Highlands represented part of what Jackson (1985) calls "the suburban ideal" – "the desire to combine the best of both farm and city." Frederick Law Olmstead, notable landscape architect of New York's Central Park, thought of suburbs not as an escape from the city but as a "delicate synthesis of town and wilderness," sylvan surroundings coupled with urban convenience (quoted in Jackson 1985:79). In this sense, Highlands could have been considered an ideal suburb. The borough's coastal location contributes to this sense, and situates Highlands in a U.S. settlement pattern that has drawn increasing populations to coastal space (Kullenberg 2001, Suman 2001).

Some of the classic generators of suburbanization were at work, specifically innovative transportation linking an outlying area with an older city. This transportation innovation in Highlands was the commuter ferry service that brought professionals to and from Wall Street jobs. It will be discussed at length in the following chapter. Also, the overall tenor of the social and economic changes in the borough reflected the suburban ideal. Middle- and upper-class people were moving to Highlands to combine a leisure setting with access to the city. It was this facet of the process as expressed in a coastal setting that was most indicative of "coastal gentrification" and which most properly

defined the transition of the borough. Defining Highlands as a place of leisure relies on the borough's waterfront setting: its water views and marine access. The shifts in Highlands that reflect typical suburbanization in an inland community, such as shifts in land-uses from production to consumption as some farming communities have experienced, are experienced in Highlands on the waterfront and will be discussed in the following chapter. The chapter that follows is a discussion of how the standard definitions of suburbanization and gentrification inform the transformation of Highlands but must be reformulated in light of its coastal setting. The next section of this chapter explores Highlands' transformation in the context of standard definitions of gentrification.

### *In What Ways Was Highlands Gentrifying?*

Traditional markers of gentrification are 1) transition of race, 2) transition of class, 3) increasing rents and home values, along with housing and building renovations that suit new middle- and upper-class residents, and 4) attendant shifts in services (Ley 1996; Butler 1997; Lees 2000, Gregory and Urry 1985; Smith and Peter Williams 1986; Harvey 1989; Fainstein 1991; Badcock 2001). How does the process underway in Highlands meet these traditional markers? This chapter considers each in turn.

In Highlands nearly the entire population had been racially white, though early in the last century many European immigrants, including those who would not have been considered "white" in the historically malleable definition of that word (see Susser and Patterson 2001), lived and thrived in Highlands. About one-third of Highlands residents reported Irish ancestry in the 2000 census; a fifth reported Italian ancestry, and nearly 17 percent reported German ancestry. Typically an area that is gentrifying increases its

percentage of white population.<sup>23</sup> However in recent decades the Highlands population had become slightly more racially diverse, moving from nearly 98 percent white in 1990 to 95 percent white in 2000. During my field stay, a couple of African American families lived in town, and a growing Hispanic population was visible as staff of a local restaurant and within the fishing industry.

As gentrification was occurring, the minority population had increased – possibly, as more service industries hired low-wage minority laborers and possibly because excluding African Americans and other minorities was more difficult in the post Civil Rights era, which seemed to reach Highlands belatedly. Long-time residents described much earlier episodes of violence toward African Americans who found their way into town. One story that I heard repeated several times recounted how an African American man found himself in the Twin Lights Tavern, Highlands’ last notoriously violent bar (replaced just before my field stay with an Irish pub/karaoke bar). The man, apparently provoking bar patrons only with the color of his skin, was severely beaten by locals and, so the story goes, by members of the local police department. Such stories about why the area remained white for so long perhaps said more about the people who told them than what actually kept African Americans, who endured so much elsewhere, away from the area. The story was set in the 1980s, another period of gentrification in the borough.

The process underway in Highlands was more about class shifts than shifts in race. The low-income residents displaced in Highlands’ current economic shift were largely of European ancestry and considered themselves to be white. Anecdotal evidence from my and others’ research suggests that many had been commercial fishermen (Caruso 1984,

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<sup>23</sup> Lang (1982) notes that even in standard cases of gentrification, white ethnic communities were also displaced.

McKenzie 1992). Commercial fishing households suffered economic strain in their industry at the same time housing values and property taxes increased. Some of these families relocated simply because their standard of living suffered. However others with more tolerance for a lower-standard of living or with no other options remained.

Once while waiting at a small marina to meet a clammer for a morning out on the water, I ran into an occasional resident of Highlands, Wayne (pseud.). Wayne had bright blue eyes, leathery brown weathered skin. He was sleeping under a tarp in his shallow clam boat that chilly spring morning. He said his brother dropped him off early in the morning to go clamming but he decided not to go though the bay was smooth enough that day for my friend to agree to take me out. I knew that Wayne was essentially homeless. He moved between friends and family to sleep and shower and eat. He was hoping to rent a small garage apartment from another clammer who kept putting him off, making various excuses for not renting to him. The real reason was that Wayne did not pay his rent, or when he did, paid it irregularly in small, incomplete portions. Not a situation the clammer himself, who would only be subletting the apartment that someone else owned, could have afforded. Wayne was the most economically disadvantaged commercial clammer I met during my stay, though other clammers also felt they were priced out of the borough's housing market, whether for renting or buying.

Because places are comprised in part of the interactions among people, knowing the class and other characteristics of residents is important to understanding the social relations at work in the construction of place. Here I use census-reported income and education levels as proxy measures of class. Over the last several decades, the incomes and education levels of Highlands residents had increased dramatically, even compared to

New Jersey as a whole. High school education in Highlands had traditionally lagged behind state rates. In 1970, more than half the state population (53 %) reported having a high school or higher education, while in Highlands only 39 percent of the population had completed high school. By 2000, nearly 88 percent of Highlands residents had completed high school, compared to 82 percent for the state.

A comparison of the borough's poverty rate and per capita income with those of the state and county in 1970 offered some insight into how the lower education level of Highlands residents influenced their quality of life. Highlands' poverty rate in 1970, when only 39 percent of borough residents over 25 said they had graduated from high school, was 11 percent. In contrast, the state poverty rate at that time, when more than half of the state residents completed high school, was only 6 percent, and statewide for non-metropolitan areas, like Highlands, was only 5 percent. In 2000, New Jersey's poverty rate was 8.5 percent while the poverty rate in Highlands was just more than 12 percent, about the same as the national rate. The per capita income in Monmouth County, in which Highlands is located, increased by 80 percent from 1970 to \$37,356 per year in 2000.<sup>24</sup> The poverty rate for all of Monmouth County was only about 6 percent. In those same years, the per capita income in Highlands increased by a comparable 78 percent<sup>25</sup> to \$29,369, still 30 percent lower than the Monmouth County incomes on average. Income increased in Highlands with education levels but the poverty rate stayed high, suggesting that the population with middle incomes was shrinking. With the borough's subsidized housing options, lower-income residents may have had an easier time staying in the

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<sup>24</sup> 1970 dollars were adjusted for inflation to 2000 dollars using the Inflation Calculator <http://www.westegg.com/inflation/infl.cgi>.

<sup>25</sup> 1970 dollars were adjusted for inflation to 2000 dollars using the Inflation Calculator <http://www.westegg.com/inflation/infl.cgi>.

borough than some middle-income residents.

Whether the borough was gentrifying had a lot to do with whether enough gentrifiers lived in it to create such a movement, and whether people were gentrifiers, in turn, was dependent on whether they were part of such a movement. As mentioned in Chapter 1, I define gentrifier as one within such a movement who expressed a desire for new or expanded consumer services in Highlands that fit middle- or upper-class preferences. The question of agency is an interesting one. Do gentrifiers always have to actively support or promote a certain kind of economic development? For example, do they have to participate in or promote economic development activities that draw upscale restaurants or consumer services for the middle and upper classes to the borough? Must they patronize or provide certain kinds of businesses, such as the relatively new day spa or web-site design services? Or, is it sufficient that a gentrifier simply possess a certain demographic definition, such as college educated, white, middle to upper-income, professional? I suggest that a person with middle or upper-class consumer preferences and capacity cannot be a gentrifier without associated socio-economic forces and a cultural milieu supporting the process of gentrification. A gentrifier cannot exist alone, but is part of a movement.

It could be argued that the consumer preferences of “gentrifiers” alone, uncoupled from a longing for “improved” consumption options, also results in gentrification. However, I chose instead to operationalize the term “gentrifier” as one who verbally expressed a desire for new or expanded consumer options in the borough that were geared toward high-income residents or patrons, and who believed Highlands had the potential for such expansion of upscale businesses or residential development. This



expressed desire was also linked to a belief that such expansion would then contribute to the tax coffers and social and economic well-being of the borough. Gentrifiers as I defined them did not have to be involved in an organized effort to bring such services to the borough but they did have to express the desire for them and believe that Highlands would be a better place were such services available. People whom I did not consider to be gentrifiers sometimes also had ideas about increasing the borough's income. Typically, such ideas involved increasing taxes or instituting parking tolls on the existing commuter ferry services and their customers.

Returning to the informant matrix, I labeled one column "untapped potential." This column identified gentrifiers – those informants who spoke about and highly valued what they considered to be the borough's "untapped potential" for a certain kind of economic development. By sorting the database first by "untapped potential" and then by "class" I was able to see that those who argued for the "untapped potential" of Highlands tended to be upper-middle or middle class. They included nearly all of the small business owners I interviewed, excluding those in the commercial fishing industry. Working class informants tended to ignore what others considered to be Highlands' untapped potential. They tended to talk about problems with the current influx of newcomers and new commuter ferry traffic, and to reminisce about what Highlands used to be like when they were younger.

Of the 47 people for whom I had enough information to know how they valued the borough's potential, 24 were gentrifiers and 22 were not. I called one woman a former gentrifier because she described how she had believed in such a revitalization of the borough in the 1980s but had become disenchanted and now did not consider

Highlands to have any special potential for that sort of development. Half of the gentrifiers I identified were men and half were women. Sixteen gentrifiers were Highlands residents while the other seven ran small businesses in the borough or were involved in local non-governmental organizations with a stake in Highlands. Of the resident gentrifiers, eight lived on the hill and eight lived in the low-lying section of the borough. Most of the people I interviewed owned property in the borough, but of the few renters, half were gentrifiers and half were not.

Based largely on their professions, I found that nearly everyone I called a gentrifier had higher than average incomes and educations and were in the middle or upper-middle social classes. Of the 11 working class informants for whom interviews revealed enough information to gauge whether they should be considered gentrifiers, none were. Of the 18 middle-class informants for whom I had enough information about how they conceptualized and valued the borough's potential (my marker for gentrifier status), half were gentrifiers and half were not. Of the upper-middle class informants nearly all were gentrifiers, 15 were and only two were not. Gentrifiers tended to consider attracting new restaurants, leisure-services and residents like themselves a priority. They had a variety of personal histories with the town, including people who had spent every childhood summer in the borough and became year-round residents as adults, old-time gentry or hillside residents, newcomers attracted by the ferry access to New York, and a few other property owners who were either summer or year-round residents.

Though they regarded Highlands as a place of untapped potential, gentrifiers' willingness and efforts to themselves tap the potential of Highlands varied depending on their stake in the borough. This usually had to do with the type of tenure they had in the

borough. For example, the few summer only residents I interviewed made minimal or no efforts to improve Highlands while those with a business and residence in the borough tended to be more involved in economic development or beautification efforts. With future-oriented narratives, gentrifiers drew on certain histories of the borough, particularly those of Highlands' resort past and the borough's transportation links to New York City, as they justified the changes they produced and sought. I often heard some variation of the phrase "Highlands is coming back" from people I call gentrifiers. Non-gentrifiers never referred to Highlands as "coming back," though they at times referred to improving environmental conditions for commercial clamming pursuits. They largely saw the changes in the borough as threatening to their economic interests and daily pursuits.

Some, though not all gentrifiers, referred to the borough as "shabby" but reviving. In answer to my question, about what he liked least about living in the borough, a gentrifier and Highlands property owner replied, "Just the general attractiveness of the town is a real detractor." He said vacant and unkempt buildings were the problem, but added, "I see property by property it is being purchased and fixed up".

Gentrifiers used more future-oriented rhetoric to describe Highlands and their place within it. They believed in and described the untapped potential of the borough to provide a service economy with a certain kind of aesthetic. They dwelled on economic development opportunities and wanted to see borough property values increase, whether or not they intended to sell property. While some working class informants, particularly in the commercial clamming industry, envisioned a future in which soft-clamming would resume in Highlands, this was a production-oriented rather than a consumption-oriented

vision. I do not link the production-oriented view with gentrification.

Not only were gentrifiers more future-oriented in how they spoke about Highlands, they also criticized some of the functioning of local government as old attitudes and “old-timers” stymieing business development, by which they tended to mean small upscale retail businesses or restaurants. Some also criticized the aesthetics of long-time borough establishments. One gentrifier, for example, did not like the color of the Veterans of Foreign Wars building, which sat just beyond the gazebo and playground equipment of the grassy Huddy Park.

[E]very time I see that I'm like why, why not white so that you are looking at the park instead of looking at that blue building? -- the cute little adorable park to see this big building. It's like -- "We're here, we're not going anywhere." It's awful. It's just horrible.

What this condominium owner considered to be a garish color also signified a perceived stubbornness of the borough's old-timers and working class. Others also spoke to this group of residents' resistance to changes. The one person I consider a former gentrifier said, “In my opinion, the old time Highlanders, blue collar workers – they really resist change and a couple of them were on the [planning] board [during the 1980s that brought more and more condominiums to Highlands] and they were always banging heads. They really didn't want any kind of construction in town. They were very much against it.” My data shows that gentrifiers engaged in a future-oriented rhetoric, often which accompanied concerns over the resistance of long-time working class residents. These examples may give the picture of gentrifiers as snobbish, but really most of them simply had a vision in their minds of an idyllic, quaint coastal community and they, some gently and some abrasively, argued for pushing Highlands in that direction.

### *Complicating Gentrifiers*

It is important to note that many gentrifiers I identified would have rejected the term being applied to them and to the processes that they advanced. Some informants considered gentrification to be a derogatory term but saw largely positive effects from the changes they created and advocated. To others, the term gentrification was unfamiliar. I have elected to use this term because of its analytical value.

Though grouped into the same category, not all gentrifiers had the same vision for Highlands' untapped potential. A handful of them were particularly interested in large-scale development schemes that included conference centers and upscale housing to attract Wall Street professionals for corporate retreats, for example, or smaller-scale developments like clustered condominiums to replace dilapidated housing. Most gentrifiers, however, were more interested in improving on the borough's small-town charm. "This isn't Disney World, you know," said one gentrifier in this larger group who opposed such corporate ventures. The rhetoric of this group of gentrifiers centered on drawing additional retail and restaurant businesses to the downtown, finding a way to make commuters linger, renovating run-down homes and cleaning up borough streets and borough politics. They also talked about maintaining water views and waterfront access by maintaining the scale of the borough though few actually enacted that rhetoric and the actions of many contradicted it, such as living in condominiums that privatized waterfront space.

The upper and middle classes populating Highlands were committed to an environment-oriented leisure. Their predecessors were summer bungalow residents, many of whom became year-round residents as the borough gentrified. Such predecessors in

standard cases of gentrification tended to be artists and other counter-culture people who often open the way for a middleclass repopulation of a low-income inner-city (Ley 1996). The population of an inner-city by a fragment of the middle class “committed to the ‘art of living’ alerts us to the transition from artists to gentrification” (Ley 1996: 364). For Highlands gentrifiers, the art-of-living involved enjoying waterfront views, access to the beaches and woods as well as patronizing the many restaurants in the borough. Some also became involved in community events, politics, and economic development activities. Some started small businesses in the borough.

### *Property*

In my analysis I considered the property status of informants, whether they owned or rented their homes or some other property in Highlands, because this status might have shed some light on the how individual informants thought about the changes underway in the borough. I also wondered if it would show some relative security or vulnerability to their tenure in the borough. According to the 2000 census, the homeownership rate in Highlands was lower than the U.S. average, 55 percent compared to 66 percent and renter-occupied housing units was higher with 45 percent to 34 percent in the U.S.

I included a column in my informant matrix labeled “ownership status” to indicate whether informants owned property or whether they rented property in Highlands. I have ownership information on 45 informants, four of whom did not own or rent in Highlands. Of the 44 informants who owned or rented property in Highlands, 34 owned commercial or residential property (or both) in Highlands. Seven rented commercial or residential property (or both) in Highlands. Three both owned and rented property in Highlands. I

included commercial or for-hire recreational fishermen who rented boat slips in the “renter” category. All but one of the fishermen I interviewed who rented boat slips in the borough lived out of town. The one in-town fisherman who also rented a boat slip lived in a home he inherited. In addition, two informants rented their home at the start of my field stay and owned at the end of it. Most of my informants were property owners, situated in all three occupation-based class categories, and renters were of both middle and working classes. To my knowledge none of my upper-middle class informants rented property in Highlands. Ownership information cannot necessarily serve as a proxy for degree of an informant’s vulnerability to displacement because many of the homeowners were very low-income and very concerned about increasing property taxes that would cause them to leave the borough.

### *Social Ties*

Social ties were important to the place-making of Highlands in numerous ways. They were often a reason that made living or running a business in the borough appealing. Conversely, for some they were also good cause to leave the borough. Because relationships between people in a certain geographic locale contribute to the construction of that place, it is important to examine some of the social ties among neighbors, residents, and business owners in Highlands.

I look at Granovetter’s enduring idea, the “strength of weak ties” (1973) to lend some structure to this examination. Granovetter suggests that people of higher social classes engage shallow social relations more broadly and efficiently for greater economic gain than people in lower social classes. For people in lower social classes, social ties

tend to run deep because they are engaged more frequently. They also constrain opportunity for engaging shallow ties to individuals of higher social classes who might be in a position to improve one's economic position. I relate these strong and weak ties to how the acquisition of goods and services have been commodified or professionalized. I distinguish three functions of social ties that linked people to each other and increased the appeal of staying in Highlands.

First is the domain I have labeled "business-related functions," which included things like attracting clients or customers to a small business, finding a job, or finding a worker. In these types of social ties friends, family, neighbors, and acquaintances become customers, clients, and service providers. For example, real estate agents often sell the homes of their friends, or friends of friends.

Second is the domain of activities that draw on social ties I have clustered and called "basic domestic functions," including childcare, temporary housing, small loans, car repair, borrowing a car or getting car rides to places, and many other activities. Also included in this category is the activity of finding a home to buy or finding a buyer for one's home through social ties rather than a real estate agent. I present an ethnographic example of such an experience later in this chapter.

As others have described (Stack 1984, Williams 1988), I found that lower-income residents of Highlands more frequently than higher income residents use social ties for basic domestic functions. Higher income residents tended to pay professionals to get these sorts of things done. For lower-income residents, filling these domestic needs was more often personalized through social ties that afforded services for less money (if any at all) than the professional service option. Those services obtained through social ties,



however, were not without cost. Reciprocity was expected and expended.

As in many lower income communities, Highlands residents with low and often unstable incomes depended on a network of friends, neighbors and family members to help with basic services (see Stack 1984, Williams 1988). One of my key informants cleaned houses a few days a week for other residents when she was a single mother, then worked in her new husband's business when she remarried. When she had a second child with her new husband, she arranged childcare with an older woman in the borough. The older woman's husband had provided work for the younger woman's husband and served as a mentor during his youth. Other residents depended on the younger woman's husband, who at the time of my field stay was doing relatively well financially, for personal loans and various kinds of work.

The third function of social ties that rooted people in Highlands performs what I call an emotional function. For many, their social ties simply provided a sense of belonging. One middle-class resident of Highlands born in Sea Bright said the few miles surrounding Highlands was where her "heart" was:

I could go any place around here and I'd run into somebody I know. It just means something to me. My best friends still to this day are the girls I went to grammar school with. We go out for each other's birthdays and it's just, I would miss that. I would miss that.

A working-class woman who had married a man born in Highlands several years after she moved to the borough told me that large families "so deeply rooted in this town" created a demand for housing in the borough. "Highlands -- nobody leaves. You know. It's very common for people to stay generation after [generation]." This can be said of people in the working class, upper-middle class, and middle-class.

Of course, social ties also extended beyond Highlands and drew informants

outside the borough too, but my main interest in looking at social ties was to examine how they related to the place-making of the borough. Therefore, I focused on the relationships that might have made Highlands a more or less appealing place to stay for an individual and also how the functions of those relationships affected the borough. In doing so, I considered the professional versus social initiation of a tie. For example, if a person got a job in Highlands through a friend or family member, I considered that a business type of social tie. Whereas if a person's work in Highlands was initiated through more impersonal venues, then I considered that not to be a social tie. An upper-middleclass woman who bought a building in the borough and opened a business there, I did not consider to have engaged a business type of social tie.

I determined a numerical value for the three types of social ties and, returning to my informant matrix, I indicated which, if any, of the social ties each informant engaged. (see Appendices A and B) Doing this and comparing the results with informants' classes, I found a loose relationship between class and the three functions of social ties as described above. Working-class informants tended to engage social ties for all three functions, while informants in the middle and upper-middle classes tended to rely more on professionals to fill their basic domestic needs. Several informants in the higher-level classes drew on social ties to enhance business activities and to fill emotional needs. Of the 13 working class informants for whom I had sufficient data, eight engaged three types of social ties, four engaged two types, and one did not engage any type of social tie that kept him in the borough. I did not have enough data for four working class informants to assess their engagement of social ties. This last person was a very professional commercial clammer who lived outside of Highlands. His work brought him to the borough, and he

was certainly friends with clammers and others in the borough, but those friendships were not a social tie that brought him to the borough. What brought him to Highlands and kept him there was the existence of the clam depuration plant. Of the 25 middle-class informants, seven engaged one type of social tie, five engaged two types, and four engaged three types of social ties. Three suggested that they engaged no social ties and I did not have enough data for six. Of the 22 upper middle-class informants, nine engaged no type of social tie, seven engaged one type, and one engaged two types. I did not have enough data about five.

In addition to determining the kind of social ties informants engaged, it was important to assess how highly a person valued those ties. Highly valued ties may forge stronger connections to the borough than less valued ties. For example, a middle-class woman whose only source of social ties to Highlands I classified as an “emotional” tie, would not consider leaving the area because of that emotional tie. While, a working-class resident engaging all three social ties categories said she would not mind leaving the borough if the right situation arose. I considered the middle-class woman to highly value her one social tie and the working-class woman to be neutral on the value of her multiple social ties to Highlands. As one would expect, how important social ties were to keeping an informant in Highlands had something to do with their length of tenure in the borough. Of the 23 informants who most highly valued the social relationships within the borough, 18 were life-long residents of the borough. Others had married life-long residents or spent summers in the borough as children. However this sense of valuing social ties is ambiguous. Several of my lower-income informants depended on social ties for economic support (such as housing, childcare and jobs) but also felt trapped at times by those ties.

During the spring of 2003, I joined a group of commercial clammers and others involved in describing the effect a large sewer spill earlier that year had on the clamming industry, individual clammers, and the borough of Highlands (see Chapter 6). We met at the clam plant on the waterfront within a tightly packed residential area to talk about the re-opening of the bay waters to commercial clamming. One of the out-of-town professionals there for this too said, “It’s pretty depressing down here.” He continued:

I was waitin’ for you guys to show up. I was walking up and down the block, you know, and – it reminded me of bein’ in, when I grew up in South Amboy [another Bayshore community further west].

A commercial clammer and life-long resident of Highlands asked, “Did you have a depressing life?” The professional mumbled that he did not and he would not want to see “redevelopment come in.” “Well you say it’s depressing around here,” continued the clammer. “We like it.”

There was tension in the professional who saw a neighborhood where people were poor, housing was old and cramped, the streets were pocked with potholes. Yet, there was something about this neighborhood worth saving. He did not want to see “redevelopment” completely overhaul the area. Or maybe he was just being polite. The clammer was a life-long resident and took offense at the professional’s initial comment, though in a playful manner. He absolutely loved Highlands and defended it with slightly abrasive and deprecating humor, a style of humor that was common among people like him in Highlands.

Not everyone from Highlands loved the place where they grew up. In the exchange above, the clammer pointed to another industry member who “can’t stand this place” but returned to Highlands more out of economic need than a desire to live there.

The older brother of the clammer defending Highlands left the borough as an adult to relocate several miles away. The move gave him a sense of freedom and potential to succeed in life. He once told his younger brother that he was impressed the younger man had been able to do so well while still living in the borough. Unfortunately, the younger brother's success did not last. It seemed as though the social ties that kept him in the borough also unraveled his successes, just as his older brother had feared.

Social ties were important to the place-making of Highlands in numerous ways. Different forms of social ties kept residents or businesses rooted in the borough, or conversely, were seen as good cause to leave the borough. Social ties kept other long-time residents within the vicinity of the borough and provided important support. Through such ties, working-class informants accessed economic necessities such as housing and childcare. Some long-time residents lived in Highlands because they had purchased or inherited family homes. As newcomers of more privileged classes repopulated the borough, some working-class residents began to feel they were losing that sense of familiarity. This loss because of the influx of new and unfamiliar residents was troublesome for some long-time working-class residents and made Highlands a different place from the borough's earlier incarnations. A life-long, blue-collar resident of Highlands complained that he no longer recognized the faces he saw in the borough as he did when he was growing up. Not only that, most of the newcomers came from different class backgrounds than the blue-collar residents and that contributed to the sense that Highlands was becoming a different place. The desire for more commodified, professional-oriented goods and services that accompanied the gentrification of Highlands devalued deep social ties, particularly those for "basic domestic functions,"

and Highlands as a place of transition suggests that the strength of social ties would remain weak among its newer, particularly middle and upper-class residents.

### *Social Relations in Home Buying*

Social relations also were engaged when families in the low-lying area bought or sold a home. Indeed one family believed it was their social relationship with another family that clinched a home sale. The Caputos [pseudo.] moved from a cramped bungalow they rented at below-market-value from a relative to a larger home that they purchased from family friends. The following story provides more detail of the house and the social relations at work in this home sale.

An elderly woman had lived in the home for the previous 60 years and raised her children there, one of whom, a man now in his 60s who I call Bill, remained in Highlands. Bill gave two blue collar residents, Mike and Stephanie Caputo [pseud.], a tour one June afternoon. In the last years of the old lady's life, Stephanie was paid a small amount of cash each time she sat with the old woman. Michael had at one time lived in the garage of Bill's house for a while during a period of personal crisis. Both the home they rented and the one they would buy were in the low-lying section of the borough. The larger home was built in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century on the center of a block, facing houses across the street.

During the tour, Bill said he was telling them what was wrong with the house and what was good about it too. This was taken by both parties as a favor they would not have had if a realtor had been involved. On the first floor of the two-story home was a sunroom, where a hospital bed and a leather reclining chair remained. Also on the first floor was an old lady's living room with a lovely wood staircase that led to the top floor.

In all, the home had three bedrooms and two-and-a-half baths and a large above-ground basement used for storage. There was rotting wood here and there, very old appliances, and passable wiring. Our guide said he was hesitant to sell the home to someone outside his family but the house, and its location did not fit the lives of any of the deceased woman's children or grandchildren at the time.

Stephanie and Mike had been talking about buying this house since shortly after the old woman died. They both referred to how Bill considered Michael family and insisted that their relationship would be important to getting the house. Stephanie loved the house. Michael did too. Initially, they wanted to avoid going through a realtor, but they took too long setting up a loan. In that time a real estate sign went up in front of the house. Stephanie and Michael, working through California-based loan officer who was supposedly a family friend, were approved for a loan using her credit rate and his income.

After the tour, Mike helped Bill bring down the older man's ex-wife's huge television set, with Michael teasing Bill about calling him over to look at the house with that chore in mind the whole time. Stephanie had very much enjoyed the tour. She and I sat down with Bill in the living room and talked about the house and how it was difficult for the family to let go of the home. Stephanie told him that she had seen the house and fallen in love with it when she was sitting with the old woman. She also talked about how they would be happy to put in their contract that the family would have the first right to refusal if she and Michael ever decided to sell it, including a 10 percent discount, like she believed she and Mike were getting. She emphasized that point again as we were leaving.

Stephanie first mentioned to me the figure \$130,000 as a price they could afford to pay. Eventually, through the realtor, they offered \$140,000 to the \$159,000 asking

price. The Caputo's ended up getting the house for \$155,000 and moved in three months after the tour recounted above. It is hard to know what role social relations had in the purchase of this home. Were any other reasonable offers turned away? Would a different buyer have paid more? It was not unheard of in parts of New Jersey for people to offer more than the asking price for a home, and as we will see below, the value of Highlands property was increasing dramatically. The young couple paid for various repairs and updates little by little over the next few years. I think one of the draws to the home for this young family was the building's long history as the home of a family which my informants considered to be happy, more financially successful, and better educated than they or their respective families had been. For them it was a step toward the middle class.

Compared to this story of strong social ties leading to the transfer of a home among working-class residents, the story of a middle-class resident is interesting. This professional woman who owned a condominium searched broadly along the Bayshore for just the right home in the \$450,000 range and enlisted newspaper advertisements and real estate agents in her search. Her home shopping had become a bit of a hobby. Though she had friends and family in the area, each weekend she would set out alone to tour open-houses and make real estate contacts. She did not want to burden them, or her boyfriend with whom she would purchase the home, with the minutia of the search but would occasionally ask someone along to see a house that particularly interested her. During my field stay, she never quite found the right home within her price range.

### *Keeping a Home in Place*

Place-making involves social relations and materiality, so the facets of



gentrification that led to changes in population composition and physical structures are of relevance to this work. One of the strongest indicators of gentrification, and one factor that leads to the displacement of low-income residents that characterizes the process, is an increase in property values. The property values in Highlands and also the monthly rent had shot up over the last several decades, even compared with changes in New Jersey overall.<sup>26</sup>

**Table 1. Changes in Home Value and Monthly Rents in Highlands New Jersey and Statewide**

	1970 *	2000	% Change
Highlands			
Median House Value	\$66,138 (\$14,100)	\$139,300	+111 %
Median Monthly Rent	\$427 (\$91)	\$760	+ 78%
New Jersey			
Median House Value	\$109,762 (\$23,400)	\$170,800	+56 %
Median Monthly Rent	\$ 521(\$111)	\$751	+44 %

Source: US census 1970, 2000. \*Adjusted for inflation to year 2000 dollars using the Inflation Calculator <http://www.westegg.com/inflation/infl.cgi>.

As Table 1 shows, in Highlands the median house value increased 111 percent from 1970-2000, while that same indicator for the same time period increased only 56 percent statewide. The 2000 census reported a median home value in Highlands of \$139,300. Later census data was not available for Highlands at the time of this writing, but at least one real estate-oriented website estimated the 2005 home value at \$289,300<sup>27</sup>, a 77 percent increase when the 2000 value is adjusted for inflation to 2005 dollars.<sup>28</sup> Statewide, home values increased by 79 percent to \$366,600 median home value (when

<sup>26</sup> It would be helpful to separate the census blocks in the low-lying section from the rest of the borough, because that is the part of town where most gentrification is occurring. In the traditionally wealthier hillside, subdivisions and condominiums may actually work against the general trend for increasing property values.

<sup>27</sup> <http://www.city-data.com/city/Highlands-New-Jersey.html> accessed May 2007.

<sup>28</sup> \$139,300 in 2005 dollars = \$163,102.40

2000 values are adjusted for inflation to 2006 dollars), according to the census. While the increase in Highlands in the first half decade of the 2000s compares to the increase in home values statewide, most of my informants and others who contributed to this research had the sense during my field stay in 2001-2003 that the borough was becoming crowded with people investing in upscale housing.

Rental housing in Highlands also saw an increase, though less dramatic than the jump in owner-occupied home values. As Table 1 shows, monthly rents statewide saw a 78 percent increase from 1970-2000, while monthly rents in Highlands rose 84 percent to \$760 per month, exceeding both the rate of increase and also the overall average monthly rents statewide. However, the percentage increase in Highlands rents was smaller than the 117 percent jump in owner-occupied home values. The monthly expenses in 1999, including mortgages, for Highlands homeowners averaged \$1,437 or 26.3 percent of household income for people with a mortgage<sup>29</sup>. About 30 percent of household income was commonly considered an acceptable limit to the amount households should spend on sheltering themselves (Stone 1993). However, according to the latest available figures from the U.S. Census, more than one-third of Highlands residents paid rents in 1999 that were 35 percent or more of their household income. Wayne in the story above represented one of the more vulnerable residents to rental increases. Comparatively, less than one percent of households paid 35 percent or more homeowner costs in 2000.<sup>30</sup>

During my field stay, there were always several homes undergoing a major renovation, often for the sole purpose of resale – or “flipping” – a short-term

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<sup>29</sup> 2000 Mortgage Status and Selected Monthly Owner Costs, [www.factfinder.census.gov](http://www.factfinder.census.gov), accessed August 9, 2008

<sup>30</sup> The categories for percentage of household income spent on rent or homeownership costs were set and presented on American Fact Finder for the 2000 U.S. Census.

renovation/investment project. Realtors recalled a heyday when one could purchase an old bungalow for \$50,000 to renovate, but said those “fixer-uppers” were gone. One realtor marked the demise of that market in the year and a half preceding our 2003 interview. Nonetheless, a nice profit could still be made in such investments. For example, an architect and her husband bought a property in July 2002 for \$210,000 and sold it the following March – eight months later – for \$305,000. The home was located on the upsweep of the hill, with a slightly strained view of the Atlantic Ocean over tree tops below. The renovators expected the new owner to be a New York commuter who would not think twice about the 15-minute walk to the nearest ferry dock. The couple renovated the property, but kept its footprint and square footage the same.

As property values increase, higher property taxes typically follow. During my field stay, Monmouth County ordered Highlands to undergo and pay for a re-evaluation of each property’s assessed value because the overall borough property sale prices were much higher than the borough’s overall assessed property values. The re-evaluation occurred in 2003. Such re-evaluations were required on an as-needed basis to make the property taxes in New Jersey municipalities align better with the properties’ market values. When a borough’s assessed property values were only 70 percent of what the homes were selling for on average, then the county ordered a re-evaluation<sup>31</sup>. Most people groaned when asked their opinion of the re-evaluation, expecting their taxes to increase. A few repeated what I heard from a borough administrator: the properties that paid the top one-third in taxes would go down, the bottom one-third would go up and the third in the middle would stay the same. Median real estate property taxes paid for

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<sup>31</sup> Information from an interview with the Highlands tax assessor Mr. Charlie Heck, 9-24-02.

housing units in 2000 was \$3,985.<sup>32</sup> By 2005, the average property tax in the borough was \$4,588 per household, representing 6.7 percent of the borough's average household income. In comparison, the average total annual property tax on residences in New Jersey was \$4,644 per household, comprising 5.7 percent of household income.<sup>33</sup> These data show that the taxes in Highlands were only about 1 percent lower than the state average, but they represented a higher burden on Highlands households than average New Jersey households because of the lower average incomes in Highlands.

Most property owners I interviewed, from a range of classes and occupations, complained that the borough's taxes were too high. About half (17) of the informants I formally interviewed and whom I asked to list the three worst things about living or working in Highlands listed high taxes as one of the worst aspects of living or working in the borough. Of these, about half (8) were lower income residents and business owners. Still half (4) of these were involved in commercial fishing and were concerned with waterfront space as well as home property taxes.

One working-class informant who owned his home said small increases in taxes were harder on him than on higher-income residents. "[Highlands has] always been a working-class kind of town, and you know, people aren't rich here. They're not necessarily poor but .... Like I was just saying, we pay 34 hundred dollars for this [monthly house payment] and it ain't the Taj Mahal. So I mean if you want to go jacking my taxes up another couple of hundred dollars, I'm gonna feel that." He said he, like other working class residents of Highlands wanted their children to have the best education they could, but that they rejected taxes because "the town can't afford it".

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<sup>32</sup> <http://www.city-data.com/city/Highlands-New-Jersey.html>

<sup>33</sup> Local Public Finance Database, Center for Urban Policy Research and Center for Government Services, Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey. Accessed May 2007.

Complaints about the lack of government-run services in the borough typically accompanied other complaints about high taxes. Of my informants, the middle or upper-income residents for whom taxes were a major complaint were condominium owners or employed locally in housing or economic development facets of government. Higher income residents tended to complain about the inefficiency of borough government while the lower income residents voiced concerns about a lack of activities for local youth. People in general wondered what the borough was spending all their money on. One borough administrator I interviewed (there were two during my field stay) said that Highlands had the second highest real estate tax rate in all of Monmouth County, a statistic echoed and at times embellished by other residents. He noted that the borough's high population density made it a place that needed a lot of services. This coupled with a lack of industrial base meant high taxes for individual property owners.

Condominium owners believed they were overcharged and were shocked by the taxes they paid. "Come on. I own air, you know. It's ridiculous," said one condominium owner who compared her \$3,600 tax bill to that of a friend with a free-standing house in a nearby bayshore borough. One real estate agent said that the high property taxes in Highlands affected the decisions of typically first time home buyers with limited incomes who were not interested in living near the water. However, those interested in waterfront homes typically were not swayed away from the borough because of its higher tax rate. She said of these buyers, "If you don't have a boat, you don't want a boat, you don't go swimming... So that's the people would say the taxes are too high, show me another town."

In the view of many of my blue collar, life-long resident informants, real estate

taxes in the borough were increasing so much that they were forcing out low-income residents who might have owned family homes outright but could not afford the increased tax burden. One woman involved in public housing issues pointed to the increased need for public housing especially for older residents given the increasing tax burden and the need to carry flood insurance. Still even in the midst of dramatically increasing home values and property taxes, Highlands remained a niche of affordable housing in exclusive Monmouth County because of its comparatively smaller lots and older housing stock, a public housing development, a subsidized apartment building for senior citizens, and two mobile home parks. The state of New Jersey in recent decades solidified what was commonly called “Mount Laurel” rules that requires municipalities to measure and ensure a fair share of adequate low-income housing (<http://njlegallib.rutgers.edu/mtlaurel/aboutmtlaurel.php> accessed March 11, 2008). In Highlands the borough was generally considered by middle- and upper-class residents to have more than its share of affordable housing.

Many gentrifiers would have preferred to see less low-income housing in the borough and considered such housing blights that often occupied valuable real estate. I spoke with a dozen who fell into this category by either mentioning this directly or describing poorly maintained buildings that had not been “fixed up” in the right way or in any way at all. One informant from borough hall expressed frustration with the location of the federally subsidized public housing. He thought the town could have been making a lot more money in property taxes from that piece of land. The 30 apartments of Jennie Parker Manor were built in the 1950s on the site of Highlands’ defunct incinerator (King 2001: 139). The location was on the upsweep of the hill but on the bayside of the

highway and offered good views of the ocean. It was also an ideal location for taking children to elementary school, accessing the bus routes, the community playground/park and the children's recreation center. The senior citizen housing was a 5-story tower located along Shore Drive at the base of the hill. In addition to these two federally subsidized apartment complexes, there was also some Section 8 housing in the borough and two privately owned mobile home parks that provided affordable housing opportunities.

Still, some long-time working-class residents worried about the ability of their children to live in the borough as adults. From an interview in July 2003,

I bought a house here in Highlands back in 1971....for like thirty-thousand. Do I think my children right now ... is ever gonna get a shot to buy a home where they were raised in this local town? Hell no. Hell no. Unless they hit the lottery.

This informant went on to talk more optimistically about the situation of one of his daughters. He said that the "next best thing" to buying a house was buying a trailer because it was an affordable investment that could grow into a down payment on a house, "maybe not in Highlands but elsewhere." Her purchase and his optimism for her investment predated the sale of the trailer park and the following zoning battle. Even an upper-middleclass real estate agent noted the difficult housing situation faced by young adults like his own daughter looking for a first home in the present market.

Home buying and selling was one important part of the expansion of capital through the consumption fund (Harvey 1985a, 1985b) at work in Highlands. One informant decided to opt out of homeownership altogether, after a bad experience owning a rental property. "I was turned off to the whole experience of owning a home. I said I don't want to ever own a house again!" she said. When I protested that living in a house

is different than owning a rental property, she countered that it did not matter. Either way, “it drains your pocketbook completely,” she said. Of course homeownership is only one consumption fund item, albeit a large one. Renting and keeping up a household has its own expenses: the purchase of food, clothing (even clothing for work), childcare and myriad other items fall into the consumption fund. Of interest in this work is how certain consumption fund items -- the restaurants and bars, the types of housing and transport to work -- contributed to the place-making of Highlands.

### *Serving a Place*

According to Bourdieu (1984), the bourgeoisie aims to legitimate its elevated status through cultural consumption. Chapter 6 examines water views as one element of consumption. Overall, as the borough gentrifies, the education levels and income levels in Highlands have leapt in recent decades. These indicators of the borough’s gentrification suggested a new juxtaposition that required residents to consider new meanings and values for borough resources and to reformulate their own identities in light of the changes in the borough. The increasing upper classes also created the potential for new kinds of consumption in the borough.

Not only do housing values increase and residential populations shift toward a higher class, services available locally also shift in cases of typical gentrification. Initially, essential services leave an area. In Highlands, old-timers, both year round and summer residents, bemoaned the loss of Highlands’ grocery store, bowling alley, movie theater, cobbler, tailor and a variety of other businesses that were supported not just by Highlands residents, but also by summer tourists and the military post at Fort Hancock on Sandy



Hook.

Closure of the military post and hence a diminished population of potential customers, coupled with flooding from major storms (two in the early 1960s and one in 1992, the most recent prior to my fieldwork) and more regular tidal flooding in the low-lying commercial district discouraged businesses from rebuilding. Gentrifiers however hoped that memory about storm flooding was relatively brief and did not discourage businesses from locating to the “happening” borough. The problem of flooding in most of the low-lying part of the borough may be one reason why the borough’s gentrification has moved in such fits and starts. This is discussed more in the following chapter which focuses on aspects of gentrification specific to Highlands as a waterfront community.

With gentrification, services increase but they may not be the kind of services most valued by existing residents. They may cater more toward higher-income newcomer residents. For example, one long-time older resident told me that the movie theater in the borough was the kind of place where you might “take home a little friend” -- meaning catch lice, but she said she and her working-class group did not mind the theater and implied that the newer middle and upper-class residents would. When I was in the field, the latest economic development strategy in Highlands was to foster small-business growth through the Highlands Business Partnership (HBP), the borough’s quasi-governmental business improvement district. Its main goal was to attract and foster new businesses in the downtown area – largely the low-lying section of the borough. To that end, the borough standardized and streamlined the process for establishing a small business and also promoted local businesses via its website and other kinds of advertising. Borough officials and others involved in economic development had focused on creating

events and destinations to attract “the right kind of people”.

In the low-lying section of Highlands, some vacant buildings had been filled by newer businesses, while other long-vacant buildings remained empty, with their broken windows, dirty floors, and signs that advertised long-closed businesses. Some businesses in Highlands had been replaced by others that catered to a different clientele. For example, recall that the Claddagh Lounge, which billed itself as “a home style Irish pub” and served up karaoke and shepherds pie, replaced the notorious Twin Lights Tavern, the setting of a story about local racial violence. A member of the planning board said it was “wonderful” to have the Twin Lights Tavern gone, though he was not fond of the “more boisterous” Claddagh. Informants agreed that the Claddagh attracted and catered to a different clientele than the Twin Lights Tavern. The earlier clients of the low-brow Twin Lights Tavern were considered to be narrow-minded, and often violent, local residents with low class status. In contrast, the Claddagh attracted both locals of all classes and middleclass clients from surrounding communities. They were not necessarily ‘high brow’ but complaints about the bar focused on parking problems and late night noise as opposed to the fear of physical violence.

At the time of this research 2001-2003, the borough still supported both low-brow and upscale businesses, though most of the businesses were restaurants or bars. There were The Driftwood and Andy’s Shore Bar, both package liquor stores and dimly lit bars, and then there was Doris & Ed’s, with culinary and wine awards, a menu of \$30-\$50 entrees, and a waterfront setting in a restored 19<sup>th</sup> century building. Doris & Ed’s was a long-established Highlands restaurant that attracted customers from the New York metropolitan area. Bahrs was another long-established seafood restaurant in the borough

with waterfront dining and \$16-\$35 entrees, a more affordable option as a big night out for locals. The bar at Bahrs was a popular hangout for commercial clammers and some charter boat captains and mates. A new business called Christine Michelle sold handmade candles and soaps with names drawn from elements of the surrounding environment, including Sandy Hook Beach Plum, Hartshorne Woods and Highlands Honeysuckle, along with various spa treatment services such as massages and facials. The owner said the shop catered to both locals and newcomers. She reported that even a “commercial fisherman” came in for special hand cream. He was likely a charter boat captain, but she kept his confidence by not revealing his name to me. The prices were not the prices one would pay for spa services or hand cream at a similar shop in Manhattan, but my blue-collar informants in the borough were uncomfortable in the shop. One even let a gift certificate that I purchased for her expire. A block or so away from the day spa, Katz’s Delicatessen sold lottery tickets, newspapers and a wide variety of magazines, very greasy “pork roll” sandwiches (a Bayshore delicacy) and basic coffee where a “regular” was drip coffee with milk and at least a tablespoon of sugar. A couple of professionals new to Highlands thought the coffee was terrible. Life-long Bayshore residents and even newer working-class folks loved it. I did too (see Map 2).

Katz’s had been in Highlands since the 1940s. One informant said she lived in the borough for eight years before she felt comfortable going into Katz’s. Two elderly brothers owned Katz’s. They preferred to calculate bills with a pencil and paper instead of using their cash register, and they extended credit to locals for lottery tickets, cigarettes and other sundries. One day in September 2002 Katz’s closed and sent the borough into a panic, revealing to me the centrality of Katz’s in the social fabric of the borough. That

morning, I went to Katz's for a "regular" but found the doors locked and the store empty. One informant who I ran into there told me that Katz's was closed because the brothers had gone to their sister's funeral in New York City. As we spoke, a man passing in a truck called out to us to find out why Katz's was closed. Informants later told me that the only time Katz's closed was when the brothers took a day off for a sibling's funeral – a third brother a few years ago and now their sister. They did not even close on holidays, until recently when the daughter of one of the men convinced them that they should close on Christmas. However, informants told me that the daughter continued to go in on Christmas Day to make coffee for the borough's on-duty police officers. The store also continued serving rescue workers on the day of the 1992 nor'easter that flooded all of downtown. The fellow I met at Katz's that morning told me later that there was a line of clammers at the borough's Cumberland Farms gas station/convenience store trying to get coffee but no one knew how to make it - with the milk and sugar. Another informant joked that the borough was full that day of people wandering around looking for coffee. I never was able to interview the owners of Katz's but the fact that other informants placed the business so centrally in the borough suggested it was so.

A franchised coffee shop opened early in 2002 in the small strip mall on Highway 36 just across the Highlands border. The place offered neat tables and chairs of a light wood, a few games, including chess, and more expensive coffee than you could buy at Katz's. It was a basic U.S. middle-brow coffee shop, nothing distinctive or especially comfortable about it, but I went to this coffee shop sometimes with my laptop and caught up on fieldnotes from happenings within the borough or worked on other projects. One March after it opened, I made the following observation that helped me think about the

coffee shop, its staff and customers, and what these said about the gentrification of Highlands.

A heavy-set, dark-haired young man who lived in the low-lying section of Highlands was working there one spring day. He had a radio that blared new-release rock music, wore a couple of different leathery, earthy kind of necklaces around his neck, wire rim glasses and baggy clothes. He also wore a visor backwards on his head. The customers that day were older couples or individual men or women with a middleclass look about them. One was a German woman who had a conversation with the young man about coffee shops in Germany. One of that day's blends was Copenhagen, which though not German, initiated their conversation. He asked if the coffee shops in Germany were "as nice as this." She replied that they were nicer. He seemed shocked. He also kept referring to the Copenhagen blend as their regular blend "like Maxwell House". I doubted that such a comparison was good for business. The young man, to me, represented Highlands working class -- insular, isolated, parochial, uneducated in coffee house and coffee drinking sophistications and values. The customers tended to be more worldly and upper- or middleclass. People who drank coffee at specialty shops did not seem to value the idea of drinking Maxwell House. They spent \$1.50 on a plain cup of coffee for something that they could consider special -- "distinct," in Bourdieu's sense of the word (1984), from a "regular" at Katz's that sold for less than a dollar.<sup>34</sup>

Gentrification affects existing residents not only in that some are displaced and

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<sup>34</sup> The young man was familiar with Maxwell House and comfortable making the analogy. He assumed his customers would share the same sense of familiarity and comfort that he did. Based on these and other observations, I suggest that coffee shops were selling class status as much as they were selling a beverage. Coffee, however elevated, had become a way for the working class to experience middle class status for between \$1.50 and \$5 per beverage.

others strained by the increasingly valued area but also in the loss of features in the built environment and social relations that anchor them to the place (Harvey 1985, Lamarque 1996, Birch and Wachter 2006). I saw in some working-class Highlanders evidence of a personal and cultural identity crisis occurring. Working-class dives, some notorious as sites for “bench clearing brawls,” had been abandoned or converted to bars more suited to middleclass consumers. Long-time residents complained about not knowing everyone in town anymore. One lifelong resident said, “The town ... It's not like it used to be. You go into Katz's. I mean, I know everybody in Katz's but I mean. ...It's like, I don't know anybody anymore. I mean when I was a kid I knew everybody who lived in town.” For many life-long, particularly blue collar residents, personal identity was related to familiarity with place, with people. Katz’s, a lunch counter and newsstand, was the remaining refuge of familiarity and insularity for long-time residents.

*Populating the Frontier with Sobriety, Beauty and Taxes*

Gentrification often occurs by luring “the right kind of people” to what may be considered frontier territory – space that pioneers believe needs to be conquered and repopulated with a different kind of person than those who inhabit the area. The rhetoric of gentrification states that existing residents, for whatever reason, have failed to live up to the location’s potential. They have failed to appreciate the views, properly maintain their homes or pay high enough property taxes. In gentrification stories, these failures justify gentrifiers’ claims on space and the particular form of place that they aim to create. In the form of “spectacle” (Tsing 2000), gentrifiers invoke Highlands’ elegant history and hype its access to New York City, its water views, and its growing middleclass

community to motivate continued investment in the borough. Local efforts to continue the in-migration of higher income residents and the services they desire included populating the space through condominium development and by fostering the growth of small consumer-oriented businesses that would benefit from the types of advertising in which the HBP engaged.

Many long-time Highlands residents recounted the promise of condominium developments and commuter ferry services to provide a much needed boost to the borough's tax base by attracting higher income residents to live in more expensive homes with higher taxes. Presumably these higher income residents would also value and pay for increased taxes for improvements to schools and other local services. Few believed the promise of generating more tax revenue through condominium development had been realized. Creating a tax base in the borough had been an issue discussed in planning board meeting minutes since the 1970s and supported the condominium boom in the borough of the 1980s. Developers presented plans with the assurance that their projects would attract the right kind of tax-paying residents, and local politicians supported or rejected plans based on their ability to attract tax payers.

The borough's 1972 Comprehensive Master Plan recommended high-density multi-family housing development to address the dramatic population increases estimated for coming years. Such development was referred to on the zoning map as "garden apartment residence". The plan recommended zoning changes to this high density multi-family zone in several areas around the borough, including one that would become Eastpointe, clearing the way for such development.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Shadowlawn trailer park is mentioned in the 1972 plan but I am not sure whether there was a special mobile home park zoning designation for that area then as there is now. Also, it is not clear whether the

The 1972 plan estimated that the borough's population would increase to 5,000 by 1985. Indeed, the population did see a 32 percent increase from 1970 to reach nearly 5,200 in 1980, the largest increase between 1960 to 2000. The following decade showed a seven percent drop to 4,800 residents in 1990 but the borough has since hovered around 5,000 residents. A local history book published in 2001 estimated there were just under 1,000 condominium units in the borough (King 2001). Though the first of the 1972 plan's two objectives was "to provide for the need of the people of Highlands," local government officials were convinced that this could be accomplished by drawing higher-income, tax-paying residents.

Changing the composition of the residential population was more difficult than attracting out-of-towners to events and restaurants. In a June 2003 interview, an informant involved in borough administration during the late 1980s, at the peak of the area's condominium development, said borough decision-makers expected condominiums to bring in "a higher caliber" person:

They felt that the people that would move in these properties would A) take care of their property because would own it, and B) they would not necessarily be from around here and they would be more open to beautifying the town to make it more of a resort community.

Though gentrifiers continue to refer to Highlands' resort past, residents in the 1980s were not apparently seen to be interested in the "resort" plans proposed then.

Even as far back as the 1960s, which is the farthest I searched in archived minutes, borough officials were talking about using condominium-style housing to attract residents who would improve the area. The following is from planning board meeting minutes, April 1964:

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plan is suggesting the removal of the trailer park in its recommendation of additional multi-family housing in the area.



Mr. Schiff said they were talking about eighteen houses, not a large development and they are paying taxes in a downtrodden area. He said the houses would bring people who would be a credit to the town.

Many gentrifiers avoided the rhetoric of displacement. Remember the woman shop owner described on the first page of this chapter who told me she found Highlands “scary” when she first arrived because “the number of drunks roaming on the streets” but that now the borough was the kind of place she would consider raising children. She avoided saying that the drunks were removed or displaced. Instead, she said they were simply out-numbered. When asked why she thought there fewer “drunks” around town, she replied, “I guess it’s ‘cause there’re more of other kinds of people here now. It’s becoming more of a melting pot.” In these gentrification stories, the poor and downtrodden remained, but new wealthy or middleclass residents were expected to improve the environment for all – contributing sobriety, beauty and taxes.

### *Planning in the Frontier*

Often underlying much of the actions taken to realize a place’s “potential” is a government approved plan. Master plans are documents that municipal governments use to guide local development. They typically take stock of the municipality’s built environment, transportation routes, economic base, residential demographics, and other things, then proceed to develop ideas – or plans – for how to direct the municipality’s growth over the next 10 or 20 years. These plans are often referred to in meetings of planning and zoning boards or town councils, particularly when those governing bodies are faced with people attempting to deviate from local building and zoning ordinances, or when businesses are hoping to locate in the area. Sometimes they become jumping off

points for more proactive measures of civic groups or government agencies.

Often master plans and their accompanying land-use and zoning maps become tools of an upper-class invested in protecting the land-uses that they value most. I observed several instances when lower-class residents engaged zoning regulations and other tools of local government control, but these were typically cases of using those tools to enact some revenge on another Highlands resident and were, at root, unrelated to the actual complaint lodged. For example, a person recently dismissed from employment at one location lodged a complaint against that business regarding actions that did not previously disturb her. Someone involved in zoning and code enforcement recounted similar observations. Aside from the mobile home park residents, there seemed to be no sense among long-time majority class residents of a need to band together in the face of zoning changes and changes in zoning enforcement resulting from (and promoting) the borough's gentrification. Wealthier and higher class residents on the other hand seemed to protest actions that interfered with their aesthetic expectations of the place where they lived: their line of sight, their sense of smell. Their investment carried certain expectations.

Work on the 2004 Highlands Borough Master Plan began during my field stay. In New Jersey, local governments were supposed to revisit and revise their master plans every six years. The plan preceding Highlands' 2004 plan was about 12 years old, dated 1992. The borough hired an outside firm, though one with which the borough had a long-time relationship, to develop the new plan.

The resulting document purported to be based on consensus-building and participatory planning and thus to represent a diversity of borough stakeholders whose

opinions about the problems and strengths of the borough and their visions for the boroughs' next several decades. Members of the Paradise Park Homeowner's Association and others later debated the degree to which the document represented a diversity of views regarding the borough's future. The project manager attempted to incorporate community perspectives by hosting a minimally advertised Visioning Workshop, interviewing officials and sending long surveys to various community leaders (considered "all stakeholders") to elicit their notions about the strengths and weakness of the borough and their visions for change. His findings were presented at another town meeting as a first draft of the plan (close to a year after I had left the field) and the borough council adopted the final version in October 2004. It can be found on the Highlands municipal website ([www.highlandsnj.com](http://www.highlandsnj.com)).

Evidence from the "Visioning Workshop" held July 10, 2003 suggested to me that the process for developing this plan excluded significant segments of the borough's population. Though I was very interested in this topic and spent a lot of time in Borough Hall as well as in the various public and business spaces around Highlands, I did not see much in the way of advertising for this workshop. None of the informants who I asked prior to the workshop had been aware of it, though one of the gentrifiers to whom I mentioned the workshop attended.

In attendance at the workshop were about 20 residents and non-residents with interest in borough economic and physical development, including a large contingency of non-residents from a new church congregation. Though there was a mix of long-time and newer residents and some class mix, it seemed as though most of the lower-income participants came from the church congregation. Commercial fishing interests and other

working waterfront interests were not represented at the meeting. Interestingly some significant players in Highlands economic development projects, including leaders of the Highlands Business Partnership, were not present, though the HBP was represented by a couple of board members who attended the meeting. The borough's planning board members also stayed to attend the workshop, which followed a regularly scheduled evening planning meeting, though looked quite tired during the workshop, with a few holding their heads in hands.

The meeting started at 8 p.m. on a weeknight. The planner conducting the meeting was dressed in a dark suit and brought a PowerPoint presentation that he distributed as handouts. He had a large aerial photograph of the borough and asked attendants to step up to the photograph and use that to describe the changes they would like to see in the borough. The agenda included time for "breakout sessions" ... "if enough people present," suggesting that the meeting organizer was not expecting a crowd. Though there probably were enough residents and others in the audience to break into smaller groups, the meeting did not advance to that stage.

In addition to the general conversation, using the large photo, attendees were asked to review the strengths and weaknesses that "key stakeholders" had previously described in earlier interviews and surveys conducted by the same planner. Attendees added strengths including the Garden Club, commended for its beautification of a small park, and they added weaknesses, including hazardous ferry traffic, lack of parking, and dissatisfaction with the garbage pick-up schedule. At the prompting of the planner, they brainstormed about how to better use the borough's waterfront.

Though the waterfront was clearly an important issue to the planner, the 9-page

survey that he asked “all stakeholders” to complete did not ask anything at all about waterfront issues. The survey seemed to be a standard survey for small New Jersey towns without any customization that would elicit helpful opinions or information about Highlands’ unique physical and social characteristics. For example, in a couple of places the survey elicited opinions about agriculture, but asked nothing about commercial fishing.

Whether or not the document was indeed created through a participatory process and whatever the degree to which consensus was reached, there were particular motivations for saying it was “the result of a consensus-based process” (G&O-1). Often master plans attempt to present a unified vision for the future of a municipality. A claim about consensus serves as an attempt to naturalize this vision, at least within certain development-oriented circles. If we accept the 2004 master plan as an official document of the local government, with a particular vision of future development, current situation and history, then it can serve as evidence of a trend/and or effort toward the gentrification of the borough. Content analysis of the master plan can reveal some of the ideologies or "narratives" to which the local government subscribes and in what way those promote a particular vision of the borough.

As the next chapter demonstrates, commercial fishing interests seem to be faring less well on the waterfront in Highlands than leisure-oriented interests aimed at gentrification. To triangulate data from interviews and observations regarding this shift in borough priorities, I did a very simple analysis of this master plan document, comparing the presence of the clamming industry and the commuter ferries. I looked for the number and quality of references made about each, where those references appear and what they

said about the borough's position regarding the two groups. The word ferry or ferries appeared 23 times in this 170-page document – more than three times as often as clam, clamming, and clams, which all totaled appear seven times. Reference to the people engaged in commercial clamming, “clammers” or “clam diggers,” did not appear at all. Throughout the various chapters of the 2004 master plan the ferry references were present- and future-oriented, though one statement also referred to Highlands prosperous history as a summer resort, facilitated by steamboat and ferry traffic. The comment regarding hazardous ferry traffic was not included as a weakness, though reference to narrow side streets that posed potential traffic hazards were. Most of my working-class informants in the low-lying section of the borough complained to me about commuters driving on larger arteries in the borough. No one in the visioning session complained about commercial clamming or that industry's operations.

Despite the 1995 resurrection of the commercial clamming industry in the borough, all of the plan's references to clamming set that industry in the past. The master plan was a document that intended to persuade its readers to overlook the revival of the commercial clamming industry in favor of more service-oriented economic development strategies and uses for coastal resources. It also focused on developing Highlands as a transit hub by drawing on the existing ferry services and encouraging the borough to seek funds through the New Jersey Transit Village Initiative (LU-23, 24). As a persuasive device, the plan became one of the cultural mechanisms employed in the process of coastal gentrification.

### *Conclusion*

This chapter has described the ways in which elements of suburbanization and gentrification have contributed to the place-making of Highlands. Many of these changes emerge from the borough's unique coastal setting. As this chapter has shown, Highlands was becoming neither suburb nor gentrified neighborhood but the changes underway in the borough reflected facets of both.

In Highlands, long-time residents with lower incomes and levels of formal education were being affected by gentrification in several ways. If they owned their homes, values were increasing enough for them to sell high, if they elected to leave the borough. The opportunities (or what Weber has called "life chances") of long-time residents and their children may have improved from early and profitable investments in Highlands property. For life-long renters, their opportunities for living in the borough decreased. Likewise, as rent increased for residents, so it did for businesses. Owners of low-profit businesses could not afford to continue paying increasing rents, and those businesses for whom the location of Highlands was inconsequential had no motivation to stay in the borough with increasing taxes and rents. The ability of working-class residents to remain in the borough seemed marginally threatened, though not imminently, by the increasing home values. They remained in public housing, the mobile home parks or in some of the borough's older housing. Their ability to purchase a home in the borough if they maintained their parents' class and relative income level seemed slim.

In this tightly knit borough, for some working and underclass residents the opportunity to remain in Highlands was important. As other studies of poor people have shown (see Stack 1974, Newman 1999), social connections are important for housing,

food sharing, childcare, help with transportation, and myriad other facets of life. Notably many of the benefits of these connections accrue only when people are living in geographic proximity to one another. So, some lower-class Highlands residents who happen to own older homes that they purchased decades earlier or inherited from their families, had the potential to sell those homes for significantly more than they paid for them. However, that profit likely would not be a windfall on such a home as evidenced by the \$150,000 price tag of the Tuckers' purchase.

The people actively involved in developing what they believed to be Highlands' potential drew on elements of both concepts as they made and advanced their claims. This can be seen in the economic development ideas in the master plan that focus on transporting people from the area to work, class-based distinctions in preference for certain kinds of services, and as the next chapter elucidates, the preference for Highlands as an idyllic small summer community for year-round residence in opposition to "the city". The following chapter explores the uniqueness of a waterfront setting in the fusion of gentrification and suburbanization stories and materiality.



## Chapter 5

### **On the Waterfront: The Making of a Waterfront suburb**

What was happening in Highlands combined elements of both gentrification and suburbanization, but its location was unique and resulted in a different kind of transformation that has not yet been well theorized in the literature. This sort of transformation has been called coastal gentrification (Valdes-Pizzini, et al. 1988). I propose that Highlands, through this process of coastal gentrification, was becoming a waterfront suburb and in the construction of this space the values, meanings, and uses of the coastal environment were in transition. As the migration of bodies and preferences was occurring in a marine context, it shifted the patterns of access and claims to waterfront space. Gentrifiers embraced the coastal aesthetics and the borough's maritime resort history to forge a new kind of place in which they asserted a "tourist ethic" (Urry 1995) into their everyday lives. The following examines the displacement of long-time coastal residents, changes in land-use and the class-orientation of services that were evident as part of coastal gentrification in Highlands.

The coastal gentrification of Highlands has moved in fits and starts. In a sense the founding of the borough in 1900 under the more respectable name "Highlands" rather than Parkertown, for example, was an early move toward gentrification. More recent waves included the condominium boom of the 1980s followed by the new-style commuter ferries in the mid-1990s. Prior to the latest version of commuter ferries, commercial fishing enterprises in Highlands were threatened by more leisure-oriented

enterprises and high property taxes. According to research fisheries biologist Clyde MacKenzie, in 1991 high property taxes threatened lobster pounds along the Highlands waterfront. He predicted the lobster pounds would consolidate or disappear. By the time I arrived in Highlands in October 2001, they were gone and not even mentioned by my informants regarding changes to the waterfront. I think the last lobster pound was located at Branin's Wharf, a family restaurant replaced by the Windansea, an upscale restaurant and bar. A small transitory marina for the boats of Windansea patrons and manned by a "harbormaster" replaced the submerged lobster pounds.

Commercial fishermen in Highlands described industry-specific changes in government regulations, resource levels, and market prices that they said weakened their economic position. Elsewhere commercial fishermen talk about "natural" fluctuations in resources and market prices from which they expected to rebound (Lamarque 1996). Others have shown that the loss of access to waterfront space during one of these low points inhibits recovery of an ailing fishing industry (Hall-Arber et al 2001). In Highlands, I suggest, the commercial fishing industry's weakened position, though possibly only a "natural" fluctuation, made way for early elements of gentrification. The resource of waterfront space accommodated service-oriented businesses rather than industry oriented businesses, which added another challenge to the commercial fishing industry's recovery. As early as the 1980s, one researcher found increasing competition between restaurants/bars and commercial fishing interests for Highlands' waterfront space (Caruso 1984). These warnings preceded but also predicted the recent thrust of coastal gentrification.

Two key features of coastal gentrification are that coastal resources become

valued in new ways and new regimes of property rights are established. The overall goal of this dissertation is to understand the following questions addressed in this and the remaining chapters: What shape does the new valuation of coastal resources and these new property regimes take, how does this new valuation and regime shift happen, and what effects do they have on those enmeshed in earlier property regimes?

First, real estate property values were increasing, arguably as a result of the new ferry services. But what of the other ways people living in Highlands valued different kinds of coastal resources? While the commercial fishers and their families no doubt appreciated the expansive view across the Atlantic Ocean or the fact that their proximity to New York afforded them a large market for their products, they did not tend to live in homes with large picture windows facing the water. Their homes for the most part faced each other on narrow neighborhood streets or were located elsewhere in the region. They appreciated the bay for its shallow depths and sandy bottom and the clams that it produced. In the context of coastal gentrification, views became commodities that newcomers valued and could afford. In addition to commodifying the aesthetics of coastal resources, gentrification processes also included very practical opportunities, such as the waterways providing fast transportation to New York City.

Second, new regimes of property rights, meaning that new patterns of access to and claims on coastal space, were emerging. The influx of new people with different uses for coastal resources shakes up earlier systems of property rights and results in the negotiation of new forms of access and restrictions. The effects of these new valuations and property rights in Highlands included shifts in access to the waterfront, changes in zoning restrictions and code enforcement, increases in property value and eventually

taxes, as well as changes in local businesses, the services they provided and the ways they operated.

Gentrification involves the in-migration of higher income residents who may be better able to pay increased taxes and who may very well demand increases in certain kinds of municipal services. Then, coastal gentrification, I argue, involves similar in-migration as well as the out-migration of lower-income residents for whom the newly valued amenities of the area remain unimportant or are rendered unattainable.

People involved in commercial aspects of fishing, such as commercial clambers and others interested in working waterfronts, cited examples of residents and fishing enterprises leaving due to increases in residential and commercial property taxes. One of the few remaining commercial fisherman who was born in Highlands and still lived in the home where he grew up near the waterfront said that rising taxes had pushed people he knew out of the borough, which was now populated with “people from the city”. Other residents pointed to neighbors, not necessarily commercial fishermen, who had relocated to avoid the tax burden. One woman who lived in a low-lying part of the borough said her long-time neighbors recently moved because of their high taxes.

They moved because they couldn’t afford the taxes, okay. Well ... they didn’t want to pay the taxes to live here. They stayed by the water. They moved to Tuckerton ... down in booney land.

This woman’s new neighbor moved to the borough to take advantage of the ferry access to New York City. Once taxes got too high for the people who did not value access to the city, they moved to “booney land,” meaning a scantily populated place far removed from the benefits of society. For the informant who told this story, proximity to the water was valuable but not in isolation from community. For her, access to New York

City was not and had never been a priority, yet she stayed in Highlands because of a combination of social ties and her love of the waterfront environment.

Perhaps the defining component of coastal gentrification in many waterfront communities has been how the meanings associated with coastal space change from the space being a location for work to one for play (see Johnson and Metzger 1983; Valdes-Pizzini n.d.; Hall-Arber 2001; McCay, et al. 2005). This is not just about the transition of how residents engage with the environment but also what the place is meant for. Was Highlands a commercial fishing community or a vacation spot close enough to New York City for professionals to make their homes?

In Highlands, different manners of consumption (à la Bourdieu 1984) were physical markers that gentrification was underway and illuminated the conflicts in cultural preferences for using space. Highlands became more a site of leisure, resurrecting its summer resort past, though in a new way. Many of the newer residents moved into the borough, not just for less expensive housing close to the city, but because it afforded them a “summer home” feel year round. Differences in the kinds of services offered in Highlands had something (though not all) to do with new life-style influences, as did differences in housing, use of space, and desires to “clean up the town” through an annual round-up and spaying of stray cats, year-round Christmas lights at Huddy Park, planters hung with petunias, brick walkways across the street, and restrictions in stowage of commercial fishing equipment and boats. Distinctions of bourgeois preferences in Highlands also included the preference for a home with a view of the water, taken up fully in Chapter 6.

Historically in Highlands, commercial fishing worked well with the summer

resort industry. Elsewhere, clean and quiet commercial fishing boats offer a picturesque and useful backdrop in a community where restaurants advertise fresh seafood and visitors stroll along a waterfront promenade (see McCay, et al. 2002b). The same was true for Highlands. Likewise, lobster traps typically hauled out of the water and stored in a commercial fisherman's yard in October did not disturb summer residents who were gone by Labor Day. However, commercial fishing enterprises did not accord so well with year-round residential and leisure uses. For some newcomers, an idyllic notion of small-scale commercial fishing and the ability to engage in leisure activities rooted in that maritime past was part of what they valued about living in the borough, though the ideal and reality did not always fit.

Stories I heard from local commercial fishermen describe how socio-economic and cultural changes underway in Highlands affected the commercial fishing industry. One fisherman squarely critiqued the process of gentrification in his description of shifting land-uses, aesthetic preferences, and political power. In a July 2002 interview, I asked him about the relationship between commercial fishermen and the non-fishing community in Highlands. He replied,

Poor.... Years ago this was strictly a fishing village. They didn't mind lobster pots in the yard and the smell of salt water. Now you got New Yorkers moving in objecting to what you see and smell right now. They object to lobster pots in yards or repairing them - what we've been doing for a hundred years.

Then he told a story about a lobsterman who lived in Highlands on a street that fronted the river. The fellow had died the year before at the age of 71. He used to haul out his lobster pots at the end of the season and put them in his backyard to repair them. However, one year a person "from New York" moved in next door and called the boards of health and zoning to complain about the lobster pots. According to my informant's

story, the agencies of local government then "shut him down" – or required that the old lobsterman remove the pots from his yard. Supposedly he had been doing commercial work on property that was zoned residential. My informant found it ironic that the New Yorker moved to Highlands because it was a small, quaint fishing village, yet disapproved of the activities involved in commercial fishing.

In this story, the newcomer is marked by class (my source called him a New Yorker, which in Highlands is code for a professional upper-class person) and fails to really appreciate commercial fishing despite his desire to living in a fishing village. He only has a superficial understanding and appreciation of the industry despite his desire to live in a fishing village. He can – and chooses to – employ government offices to affect changes in the economic and cultural geography of the borough, to the detriment of the commercial fishing industry that preceded him. However, it is not just class that is involved in this conflict; it is also the shift from summer to year-round residency. Lobster pots are usually retrieved from the ocean in October, well after summer residents left the borough in September.

Another fisherman, from an interview October 5, 2002, says that there are no places in Highlands to store equipment anymore. "As more places get developed, there are fewer places to put stuff," he says. He stores his equipment in Middletown because 20 years ago, he says, it became illegal to keep lobster pots in residential yards. "They put it to the town council for a vote and the fishermen lost." This quote is another telling of the shift in land-use that also employs a government body ruling against commercial fishing interests. This fisherman relates the problem directly to a larger phenomenon – development – not just to the conflict between two neighbors.

Such stories were important to the process of coastal gentrification because the process occurs at the levels of both individual experience and larger political economy. For example, the old lobsterman was an individual who represented many others in the form of a past (or quickly passing) way of life. He confronted another individual who represented many others in the form of a present and future socio-economic transition. Not verbalized in this story but part of it, is the decline of the lobster industry -- lower catches, smaller lobsters -- which I suggest is a key factor that offers an opportunity for gentrification and which is in turn exacerbated by gentrification. Did this story and others like it that commercial clambers and other fishermen told regarding their industry hasten the shift or make it seem inevitable?

As these stories show, such threats to the commercial fishing industry are not new to this wave of coastal gentrification. As the type of people who lived in Highlands during the summers started staying year round, life changed not only for commercial fishermen but also for other long-time residents. One life-long resident in his 30s said that while he had fun with some of the kids whose families vacationed in Highlands during the summer, he always looked forward to when they all went home again. Locals along the Bayshore and parts of the northern Jersey Shore referred to summer tourists as Bennies, which is a somewhat pejorative acronym for tourists from largely industrial cities in northern New Jersey (by some accounts Bergen, Elizabeth and Newark, by others Bayonne replaces Bergen).

I used to love September because that's when all the Bennies went home. ... The town was silent. You hung out with your one or two friends that you had since you were a child and that was it. Now the Bennies stay; they never leave.

He longed for the return to the quiet and insular borough of his youth. He and other



commercial fishermen brought up examples of “Bennies” or recreational fishermen in recent years who have met them on the water and physically threatened them and vandalized their equipment. He put it this way: “The Bennies that are out on the water, just like anything else, don't think that we belong there.” This turn of phrase suggests a sense that the newcomers to Highlands and to the bay make him feel unwelcome in both. Perhaps it is these sorts of encounters rather than, or coupled with, the economic strain that moves commercial fishermen and others away from the borough. Still, the economics of the situation are a real concern as the previous stories of displacement attest.

Along with increasing property taxes, land-uses changed as condominiums were built along once publicly accessible coastal space. One environmental group in the area occasionally reviewed and tested access to the waterfront afforded by New Jersey's Public Trust Doctrine. Individual group members trudged across “private” beaches with fishing poles and reminded condominium associations and others that the tidal zone was public property. A long-time resident who valued being able to watch the water and fish from shore just blocks from her home complained in particular of a condominium development that, despite State Coastal Area Facilities Review Act interventions to uphold public rights, still obscured views and obstructed access. While access to the waterfront in this particular case was neither physically cordoned nor restricted through warning signs, the long-time resident felt inhibited by the privatized space all around the small fishing dock. The condominiums replaced a popular waterfront restaurant that emanated more of a sense of public space. Other long-time residents noticed less beach access during my field stay than in prior years. Though all social classes suffered the loss, only the middle and upper-middle classes benefited from the condominium and restaurant

development that removed some of Highlands' beaches from the public domain.

### *Optimal Habitat*

Gentrifiers envisioned a potential borough and strove to create it. They created vantage points for views of the water and tried to beautify the downtown with brick crosswalks, stylized lampposts, and potted plants. The hope was that making the public spaces in the borough prettier would attract outsiders to the borough and would also encourage existing homeowners and business owners to maintain or renovate their properties, creating an "optimal habitat"<sup>36</sup> with which to lure the "right class" of people to town for a visit or to live. The gentrifiers sought to conjure a physical and social community believed to be latent in the coastal landscape that would then offer economic advantage by drawing wealthier visitors and residents.

Gentrifiers complained that places within the borough were "shabby" and holding back a full flowering of economic development. Many of these complaints during my field stay focused on old housing because the HBP and other local entities had "beautified" the public space to a degree. A borough administrator said, "It's the little things" like stringing little white lights around the downtown park and tidying up the streets that keep Highlands on track for reform. There was a sense among people who would change Highlands that they would not want to change too much of it. In Highlands, many gentrifiers said that they valued the small-town feel of Highlands and even some of

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<sup>36</sup> Anthropologist David McDermott Hughes (2005) has been developing a notion of "third nature" as the potential for wildlife habitat that is latent in a landscape. "Optimal habitat" is a way of creating third nature, a hope for the future that conjures up a material form that simulates the environment untouched by human hands and by doing so offers a "comparative economic advantage" to the existing environment. I find the concept useful for quite a different situation, conjuring a particular social habitat latent in Highlands' landscape.

the borough's more colorful characters, but there were aspects of this small town, its characters, its politics, and its physical structures, that they wanted to change.

A change in retail and restaurants in the borough delighted some informants and disappointed others. Three long-time summer residents described their disappointment with some of the "upgraded" services offered in the borough. The small population of summer residents scattered throughout Highlands typically included middle-income residents from elsewhere in New Jersey. The three I interviewed had bought into the borough when prices were quite low, and they looked to Highlands as a relatively inexpensive waterfront retreat within a short commute back to their places of work and residence. While most gentrifiers raved about the many new restaurants opening in the borough, these summer residents fondly recalled an earlier era of cheaper seafood. Specifically, they pointed to a change in one of the borough's long-time waterfront restaurants that went from selling buckets of locally caught soft shell "pisser" clams for a few dollars a bucket to selling complicated \$25 entrees and pricey wine. It was a waterfront restaurant that shared parking with the commuter ferry docked along side.

B: We tried Lorenzo's Clam Hut last year and I think we walked out. ...

W: It used to be the greatest place.

B: Back when it was the good old-fashioned clam hut, just put the shells on the floor, the picnic table -- The real sea shack kind of place. It was great.

A "real sea shack" kind of place might still have gone over quite well in the borough as it gentrified. However, the soft clams once plentiful in the bay and in Highlands restaurants disappeared from local waters in the 1980s (MacKenzie 1992) and were no longer commercially available in the way they had been. These local seafood resources made such a low-brow restaurant charming to summer residents. Their loss affected restaurant menus and ambience. Rather than maintain that style of restaurant, the

new owners upgraded, perhaps to try and capture the ferry passengers that disembarked at the restaurant's doorstep. The restaurant kept the name "Clam Hut" but added linen table clothes and a wine list. Keeping the name, with the addition of "Lorenzo's," drew on the restaurant's existing name recognition and also linked it to fond memories of the borough's summer resort past. By the writing of this in 2008, the restaurant had transitioned again into a different kind of place, with the original name The Clam Hut. This one had more of a Jersey Shore feel to it with drink specials and most of the indoor seating removed to make way for an expansive bar ([www.clamhut.com](http://www.clamhut.com)). Several long-time summer and year-round residents had voiced concerns during my field stay that what they considered a charming, quiet borough was on the precipice of turning into what this new club (opened after my field research) seemed to represent – the transformation of Highlands into a place for noisy, drunken crowds of unassociated people rather a quiet summer community.

Not only had restaurants attempted to upgrade, but maritime businesses along the waterfront also drew a higher-income clientele. A few decades ago, a half-dozen or so party boats that catered to recreational fishermen from a wide range of classes docked at what was called Pier 7. That space had since been converted to a marina and repair business that mostly served private pleasure boats with a capacity to hold about 300 such boats in a rack service and about 30 in the water. The family-owned Bayshore business was relatively new to Highlands. It sold used and occasionally new motor parts to Highlands commercial clammers, but one manager told me in an interview, "We're expensive." He called the clammers "a creative bunch" and recounted the history of commercial clamming in Highlands, including the clamming activities that once occurred

on a portion of his business's current site.

In a typical response when I asked commercial fishermen living in Highlands about how important commercial fishing was to the borough, one fisherman said, "That's a tough one. Things are changing," he said. Another informant involved in the commercial aspects of recreational fishing said he believed a dramatic jump in real estate taxes, from "\$2,000 to \$12,000," resulted in the departure of some of Highlands half-dozen or so party boats. By the time of my fieldwork, a large municipal marina in neighboring Atlantic Highlands had become a central location for party boats. Highlands marinas tended to be small and scattered throughout the borough. Most clammers docked at one of them. Recreational fishing from a boat had become more expensive and exclusive in Highlands as excursions from charter boats and personally owned vessels replaced the larger come-one-come-all style of party boat excursions. People involved in the recreational fishing industry described an increasing affluence of recreational fishers and a privatization of recreational fishing with the decline of party boats and liveries in the borough. Shore-based fishing and a small boat rental business (or livery service) were options that remained for what one person in the recreation industry called "middle-lower to lower-middle income" people. He added that "upper class" fishers take their own large boats far offshore to fish for tuna or hire one of the charter boats for similar excursions. "We don't carry high rollers," said the captain of Highlands' remaining party boat.

A life-long resident and former commercial fisherman fondly remembered a little place on Bay Avenue in front of the Pier 7 marina called Lucky 7's that served "french fries and stuff." It was a summer-only business that was the first he described when I

asked him what in the borough reminded him of the way Highlands used to be. “Walking by the Gateway Marina, I remember what that building used to be to me as a kid. ... I remember them being very nice people. You know, and I remember the slogan that they used to put on the door. ‘Closed for the season, the reason, we are freezin’.’ I remember that even still.” The feel of a small, sleepy, and low-key summer community that so many, including life-long residents and newcomers, desired seemed to be threatened by some of the changes in services.

### *Making a Destination*

The creation of Highlands as a “destination” also contributes to a notion of Highlands as a place of tourism, a place pleasantly apart from the ordinary (see Urry 1990). Through its “events” and “destination” strategies the HBP engaged in a strategy of spectacle to attract visitors to the borough and change the borough’s surly reputation of decades past. Through these events and the creation of destinations, the HBP worked to “conjure” (see Tsing 2000) a new reputation for Highlands – one in which the borough and its residents were no longer feared or avoided as they had been in years past.

According to its website, the HBP’s organizational structure included a “special events committee” that aimed to “create a destination for visitors and customers and promote Highlands as a place for activity, recreation and fun.... Events put Highlands on the map as a point of destination along with the great tourist attraction of our neighbors - Twin Lights Historic Site and Gateway National Park at Sandy Hook.” The HBP hosted events such as the annual Clam Fest, with carnival rides and games, clam eating and clam shucking contests, food booths from local restaurants, and craft vendors from the larger

region. Other HBP-sponsored events throughout the year included an Oktoberfest, Christmas tree lighting, car shows, and parades. One borough administrator told me that Highlands had gone from hosting three events each year to hosting 14 in one year. It should be noted that, though the Clam Fest had its roots in the area's commercial clamming traditions, commercial fishermen had little to do with the current incarnation of this project, aside from selling clams at a booth.

The HBP also tracked the number of times Highlands was mentioned in the media. The organization spent a lot of time, effort, and a large portion of their budget on creating "hype" about the borough, advertising community events. The HBP actually was recognized by a statewide organization in 2001 for its "Destination Marketing" efforts.<sup>37</sup> One active HBP representative said residents and business owners initially resisted the focus on hyping the borough because they did not believe it was necessary or that it would work, but for the most part have come around to see the value in that type of marketing. She said, "The truth of the matter is; it is because of all the hype from the business improvement district, it's becoming the happening place in this area."

### *Destination Highlands*

Like the plans of the HBP to create Highlands as a destination through the sponsorship of events, certain local businesses created the reputation of Highlands as a destination. Bahrs was a popular seafood restaurant established in 1917 and referenced in the 2002 season finale of *The Sopranos*. Mob boss Tony Soprano, trying to cheer up his wife Carmella, says, "Come on, we'll go down Bahrs n' get some lobsters." The

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<sup>37</sup> Downtown New Jersey, Inc. awarded HBP and its partner Allen Consulting a 2001 Downtown New Jersey "Best of the Best" recognition for "Destination Marketing".

Windansea was a newer destination restaurant. It was a two story waterfront building with shiny polished wood and surf boards suspended from the ceiling. Promotional material on the borough website described the Windansea's décor as "an eclectic interior where the South Pacific meets New York chic." A small marina at the restaurant catered to drop-in boat traffic. One very drunk man I met under the Windansea's palm-thatched tiki bar drove a large cabin cruiser from Brooklyn to the restaurant and intended to drive his boat back that night. Waterfront dining on a breezy upper floor extension offered stunning views of the sun setting over Manhattan to the west and a blushing sky over the Atlantic Ocean straight ahead. One of the business's staff told me one early evening in May 2003 that the Windansea had become a "destination" (see Map 2).

Indeed it was a particularly class-based destination. After dinner at the Windansea bar, a crowded dance floor and loud band replaced a section of tables and chairs. This was the place people brought out-of-town guests. One young woman at the bar identified the clients as "the rich kids" from Middletown (an upscale suburb of the region) coming to this "nice place." I asked her, a nanny with fair skin and curly dark hair, if she ever went anywhere else in Highlands. She said had been to Gimpy's, a smaller bar that had been closed for the two years I was in the borough, and another bar she could not name. She did not like the nameless bar, saying she was uncomfortable there. "I didn't think I was dressed right. I had all my teeth," she said, as a way to distinguish herself from locals with a physical marker of class through which she and others stereotyped Highlands residents.

The WindanSea firmly educated its clientele in proper attire. On this evening, my friends and I left around midnight and walked down to the base of the stairs where a



young white woman and two young men (one white and the other African American) were now collecting a \$10 cover charge. They were also enforcing a dress code posted on a sign that looked to be about three feet tall and was further elevated on an easel. The sign described what proper attire was - no work boots, no athletic clothing, no dirty work clothes, no tank tops,<sup>38</sup> etc. Back up at the top of the stairs, a sign reading “proper attire required” hung from the hostess podium. The big sign downstairs that described proper attire clarified, educated, and excluded. It suggested that there had been a problem or the fear of a problem with people wearing the wrong attire trying to infiltrate the club. In some ways, the sign describing proper attire was saying, “white professionals only”. Tank tops worn by men, especially the white undershirts known locally (as elsewhere) as “wife beaters,” denoted a lower class than was acceptable at the bar. No athletic clothing and no work boots along with a restriction on “dirty” work clothes also suggested exclusion of people who chose these fashions, and did not necessarily work in them, like, in 2003, the small but growing African American population and others who followed hip hop culture.

The existence of the huge placard describing proper attire suggested that the bar saw itself as civilizing, or making “proper,” the masses. One did not see signs like this in other places around New Jersey. I suggest that is because in those places everyone knew, or was assumed to know, the rules. The sign perhaps was also an attempt to shift local custom – the tastes and behaviors of Highlands residents. Perhaps it spoke to the business’s success as a destination, drawing many folks from the larger Bayshore area and its hinterland. The sign might have also served to comfort outsiders who might have been thinking about Highlands’ bad reputation and to assure them that this was not a

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<sup>38</sup> As one of my friends noted, tank tops were apparently not forbidden on women.

typical Highlands bar, though the option to have one's car valet parked did too.

Transportation had been seen as a key to making Highlands a destination and to the borough's economic development. Gentrifiers referred to the strong historical link via trains and steamboats between Highlands and New York City. They argued, when this link was severed, Highlands fell into decline. They suggested that Highlands' natural position was a destination for New Yorkers and the new commuter ferries restored the transit connection between the two places, which facilitated the re-emergence of Highlands as a destination.

### *Condominiums in the Coastal Frontier*

As the following section will show, the HBP attempted to create Highlands as a destination in an attempt to draw visitors to the borough and improve its reputation enough so that the area became a palatable and desired residence. Condominium development, which started in the 1970s, peaked in the 1980s and continued through my field research, was one such strategy as described in the previous chapter. Some gentrifiers considered the condominiums within the borough to be a huge asset for those who lived in them and for the borough overall. A couple of people I interviewed were in the process of constructing four-unit condominiums in separate parts of town, both hoping to take advantage of water views from their particular locations. They had razed or were in the process of razing dilapidated structures and considered their redevelopment of those spots to be a benefit to the borough. One person said he was engaging in the project "to help the community". Indeed, even one person who I met through my most blue-collar informants who I considered a former gentrifier agreed with current

gentrifiers that many condominiums replaced derelict structures. She had purchased a home in Highlands during the condominium boom of the mid-1980s with the intention of renting it out and then retiring to Highlands, which by then would have been a glittering resort community with high property values. The promised transformation never occurred, and she sold her property after much trouble renting it out. She said, “I don’t think that the town became the great beautiful place that they anticipated. It just didn’t happen. They did get rid of a lot of little bungalows that were kind of junky looking. But see the natives of Highlands liked those little bungalows.”

Whether people loved or hated the condominiums had little to do with their length of tenure in the borough, nor did it have much to do with class, though informants of the majority classes tended to have more neutral or negative views of the condominiums while informants of the more privileged class fell all along the range from loving to hating the condominiums. Also, during the 1980s, the borough council members who were supportive of condominium development tended to be what one informant called “the higher class people that lived up on the hill” and were largely unaffected by the construction and increased traffic. Only about a fifth of my informants said they approved of condominium development. People who hated the condominiums did so because they blamed the developments for increasing the borough’s already very high density and for blocking access to water views and beaches, through their physical presence and policing efforts.

The semiotics of these complaints reveal an ideology of quaintness as residents compared what they considered to be the somewhat roughshod development of Highlands with the care taken in neighboring coastal communities to restore or retain

Victorian-era structures and an openness that affords public access to the water. The concerns of these residents were mostly about the condominiums changing the character of Highlands. One newcomer resident described how many of the condominiums were not well integrated into the fabric of the community, that the smaller bungalows and the grander old homes or hotels would have been a better fit. She said, “Highlands should be more like Ocean Grove or Cape May.... [T]hose old houses shouldn't have come down and ... condos shouldn't have been slapped up there like on the water the way they are.”

Even some condo residents said they would like to see fewer developments in the borough. One said the first thing she would change about Highlands would be to stop building condominiums. “It's just, you know, too many cars, too many people.... Builders got to stop somewhere. I like that they have a couple of little parks down in Highlands. I'd like them to say, ‘Improve on what we have,’ rather than keep building.”

Of the six Highlands condominium residents I interviewed in-depth, three were men and three women. Only the women were concerned with this effect on the character of the borough. One of the men, a long-time blue-collar resident who recently returned to the borough, saw positive and negative features in the condominium development and had actually worked on construction crews that built several of the developments. However even he said there were enough condominiums in the borough. Some condominium residents and other gentrifiers considered the developments to be improvements to the borough, while other condo residents and other informants of all persuasions considered condominiums to be an urban invasion that threatened the charm that attracted them to the borough.

With the condominium development and the individual renovation of single-

family homes, the scale of Highlands' housing stock had increased dramatically. Typical one-story summer bungalows in the low-lying part of town winterized for year-round use were dwarfed by two-story condominiums, elevated to three stories to accommodate parking underneath. Even renovated older homes shot upward to catch views of the water, to avoid flood damage to a ground floor, and because they had no space to expand the building's footprint. As I was preparing a presentation about my research for an academic audience, I showed a photo that I was going to use to a Highlands commercial fisherman. It was a picture of condominiums built in 2001 shortly after I arrived in town and selling then for between \$300,000 and \$400,000 per unit. The fisherman, with sad resignation, said the borough was turning into Staten Island, a large densely packed borough of New York. The condominiums in the photo were much larger scale than earlier bungalow structures, and long-time residents complained about them blocking physical access and views to the water. Building heights were regularly discussed during borough hall meetings.

### *Grounding Paradise Park*

A major attempt to further transform the Highlands waterfront got underway about one year after I left the field. It involved the rezoning of a mobile home park in the borough and exemplified the multiple kinds of values associated with that type of accommodation and its location. Paradise Mobile Home Park was situated at the far eastern end of Highlands, right next to a small strip of beach that curved into the coastal bluff. Most people who knew about the beach referred to it as belonging to the trailer park, though it was county-owned. I moved in for the last few months of my fieldstay

during the summer of 2003. When I told people where I was living, they would make unsolicited comments expressing some dismay at how the trailer park had its own private beach. Paradise Park was located between this small beach and the Sandy Hook Bay Marina, which jutted out behind a seafood restaurant. From my front window one rainy morning in June, I watched the Sea Streak ferry cut a white foamy swath across the bay before it swung in to dock at the marina behind me.

A month earlier, a classmate of mine from Rutgers, Lori Dibble, purchased the trailer in Paradise Park from a long-time and well-loved summer resident who built a sprawling extension onto the trailer to accommodate the large family that he brought to the park each summer. As is the case in trailer parks, she purchased the trailer and leased the property from the park's owner. Her lease was for five years and she paid on it monthly. She had fallen in love with the view from the trailer's front porch and the tink, tink of the gently rocking boats in the marina behind her. The five trailers located on the property's northern waterfront tip enjoyed beautiful views of the New York City skyline, the bay waters, Sandy Hook and the ocean beyond. The remaining 50-odd trailers were more snugly situated in two long rows facing each other with a row of parking that separated the old asphalt road for entrance and egress. People drove to that end of the trailer park to turn around, like a cul-de-sac. Across the bay, except on that dreary day, I could usually see Earle Naval Station and huge ships at dock there, and beyond that the New York City skyline, the Verrazano Bridge and other landmarks. It was a nice view. One of the trailer park residents, a man in his early 30s, told me when I first arrived that he loved the trailer park because it was a beautiful and quiet location, especially compared to the downtown of Highlands. He added, "Those things you hear about trailer

parks” were not true of this one. “We don't have any trouble....The only time the cops come down here is to watch the sunset.”

On that dreary June morning, I watched two fellows in black slickers and baseball caps fish off of the bulkhead at the tip of the trailer park. One of them caught a big fluke (“summer flounder”) and the other ran over to grab the community net to help him haul it in. They kept their catch in a white 5-gallon bucket. A wooden ruler was nailed to a little low wall for people to measure their catch. A small wooden table stood next to the bulkhead – perhaps for filleting or just cutting bait. The men had been out there fishing since I got up at about 8 a.m. They seemed simply delighted with the fish in their bucket and with the whole experience. Despite the dreary weather, there was a spring in their step.

A few days earlier the 5-year old daughter of a blue-collar Highlands resident who was one of my main informants came to visit me in my new accommodations. She noticed three men fishing at the point and wanted to go talk with them, so we did. One man in particular who caught three fish while we were standing there was very talkative and engaged her in a conversation about the latest ocean-oriented cartoon *Finding Nemo*. It was all very cute. There was an 18-inch flounder head first in a bit of water in a 5-gallon bucket. I told my young friend that there was a fish in there and just as she walked over to peer inside, the fish thrashed, splashed water and scared her. We both jumped and screamed. She stood behind me talking with the three men for a while. Eventually she got up the courage to step out and was sort of chatting with anyone of them who would listen. They all seemed delighted with her. The men were not together - just three different people coming out to fish a bit in the early evening before the sun went down. One

looked middle-aged and middleclass, with neater and cleaner clothes than you would expect for an afternoon of fishing. Another, in his early 20s and overweight, seemed a bit upset that the guy right next to him kept catching with each cast but he was not. The last was the man who talked most with my young friend. He looked to be in his 30s, a slight man with straggly brown hair, old blue jeans and a gap between his teeth that showed when he smiled. He had a cast net out that he had used to catch his own bait. He threw back a small fluke and later a big sea robin. The fluke that he brought in fell off the line onto the ground and flopped around in the dirt and rocks a bit before he recovered them. He was fishing at the edge nearest the last trailer and had found a little spot where he would hook fish with each cast.

I was not sure whether the two rainy weather fishermen were park residents, but I knew that the other three were not. Often non-residents made their way to that point, much to the chagrin of some residents, and dropped fishing lines into the bay or just parked their cars on the point to enjoy the view. The trailer park's handyman regularly shooed non-residents from this waterfront spot and out of the park.

During my fieldstay, many upper and middleclass gentrifiers wondered how the trailer park could remain on this highly desirable location. The three park residents I interviewed tended to dismiss any possibility of the trailer park being converted into upscale housing. They suggested various reasons why the trailer park could not or would not be converted. One reason mentioned was the owner's particular interest in keeping it as it was. He regularly drove to the point to watch the sunset himself. Another reason both trailer park residents and others gave for why the park was not vulnerable to redevelopment was the zoning associated with the trailer park. Residents and four other



informants of varying classes noted that it would be nearly impossible to get the zoning changed from mobile home park zoning and that would be necessary to convert the park into anything.

However, about a year after I left the field, the borough's latest master plan was released and approved by the borough council, recommending the creation of a new zoning district that would reclassify the location of Paradise Park from a mobile home district to a newly created Mixed Use (MX) district. This new zone overlaid the waterfront mobile home park, adjacent marina and a few blocks inland of modest housing. The 2004 Highlands Borough Master Plan recommended creating the Mixed Used district that allowed for a combination of townhouses, waterfront commercial and professional office space. The MX district on the waterfront in the specified location was expected to "encourage uses that are compatible with and will benefit from the New York City ferry service, the Sandy Hook Bay Marina and open space from the County Park" (Highlands Borough Master Plan 2004: LU-22).

Soon after the borough council adopted this master plan, word got out that the long-time owner of Paradise Park had sold the property, something my trailer park sources in 2003 did not believe would happen anytime soon. The story of this sale, the zoning change and the grassroots battle that followed is one of great interest to questions of property rights and the different ways waterfront space can be valued. These are central themes to my dissertation. However, most of these events occurred a year or more after I ended my fieldwork and I depended on others to gather and report information to me not as informants but as colleagues. Therefore, I look to future publications co-authored with these primary sources to tell this particular story of the place-making of

Highlands.

Along with the threat to Paradise Park, a proposed shift in zoning also threatened Shadow Lawn Park situated atop of the coastal bluff near Eastpointe condominiums. Mobile homes were the only form of housing and land-use permitted in areas zoned Mobile Home (MH). However, the 2004 master plan recommended changing that so an MH zone could also include townhouses and single-family residential homes. This suggestion “acknowledges the trend for mobile home parks to evolve into uses that are more consistent with surrounding land use patterns” (Highlands Borough Master Plan 2004: LU-13). The master plan expressed no sense of necessity or benefit in keeping the mobile home parks as they were, but rather advised allowing that space to follow the trends of land-use development surrounding them. In Highlands, this trend included the construction of upscale condominium development.

The two zoning changes recommended in the 2004 master plan (the creation of an MX district and the broadening of uses in the MH district) both promoted and emerged from facets of gentrification that were particular to the coastal gentrification at work in the place-making of Highlands. The MX drew on the success of the commuter ferries which are widely credited with the increases in property value and other aspects of gentrification occurring in the borough. The new zoning district promoted coastal gentrification by converting existing uses, in this case low-income housing, to take advantage of upper-income desires to be near and view the water.

The role of zoning in coastal gentrification was clearly demonstrated in the threats to Highlands’ mobile home parks described above. However, zoning changes and changes in enforcement were also important to other aspects of commercial waterfront

uses. In the old lobsterman story recounted previously, the “New Yorker” neighbor wanted to live in a picturesque fishing community but did not want to smell the rotting ocean detritus that hung from his neighbor’s traps. The newcomer engaged zoning and health codes to force the lobsterman to stop storing his traps in his yard when he drew them up from the ocean each fall. In the story, the New Yorker was a member of the professional class moving into the borough and changing the way things were done, and the lobsterman was a member of the local *petit bourgeoisie*, an old working fisherman used to getting his hands dirty.

The distinction between consumption and production that is part of suburbanization (Jackson 1985) marked the Highlands landscape in the limitation of productive activities, such as those associated with commercial fishing, through enforced zoning ordinances and through various other kinds of land management plans that separated industrial, residential, and recreational uses. The work of commercial fishing was a different kind of work than the work that employed most gentrifiers, and so the presence of commercial fishing activities did not call to mind the work from which Highlands, as a residential tourist site, was a departure. Plus, as one real estate agent noted, the potentially disagreeable commercial fishing activity was “isolated” to a small area in the borough.

The separation of land uses worked dialectically with the construction of place, reinforcing one another. Highlands was largely residential, and limitations on commercial fishing and other productive waterfront and inland work were used to reinforce the residential character of the borough. I spoke to a borough employee who said he knew of some concern over commercial fishing operations, such as complaints about unsightly

stacks of traps on individual properties. He said he had suggested the commercial fisherman “put up a fence” to placate his neighbor rather than remove the traps. He had also heard other complaints of odors and noise at the clam wholesale and depuration properties.

A manager in the Highlands clamming operations noted complaints from a resident in a condominium development adjacent to the depuration plant:

Like the condos next door that's giving me problems right now about the air-conditioning unit running on one of the trucks. I mean, I moved those trucks three times in the last six months to accommodate the people over at Valley Street [the location of the recently opened clam wholesale operation], which you can understand. They have a pretty legitimate bitch. They were there before I was. But, the clam plant's been there, you know.... I wasn't getting complaints about this stuff last year from those, from those ah, condos association. Now I'm all the sudden, I'm getting, somebody moved in there that would rather not hear the noise. But you know what? Councilman -- [a long-time resident and member of the borough council], I was talking to on the phone, just said, “You know what? Then move.” You know. “The plant was there before you moved in.”

The first-come, first-served property rights argument (Blackstone 1995 [1766]) was at play here. The clamming industry manager worked to alleviate the source of complaints from surrounding residents on a block where the business was new. However, the complaints emanating from the condominiums were assumed to be from a newcomer. The manager, on the job for about two years at the time of this conflict, said the depuration plant had not received complaints in the past from the neighboring condominiums. Though the work of commercial fishing still allowed gentrifiers to feel a “departure” from their own ordinary work environments, many aspects of the industry were unattractive to gentrifiers (see Urry 1990 for comparison to the English countryside). Commercial clammers on the water blended into and enhanced the marinescape that gentrifiers valued, but other facets of the clammer’s work drew complaints.

The complaints described here about unsightly traps, odors and noise came from the center of commercial clamming and crabbing operations in a particular waterfront area of the borough. They suggest that in Highlands, the growing presumption and preference was to separate home from work, at least the kind of work that most agreed represented the borough's only productive industry. The story of the lobsterman forced to relocate his traps suggests that this is not a new preference and certainly zoning that restricts combining industrial and resident uses is not new. However, current class-based contestations over coastal space were incorporating these same old tactics via the borough's master plan and its zoning recommendations and regulations.

### *Social Ties in the Coastal Frontier*

As the previous chapter showed, working-class residents and some long-time upper and middleclass residents highly valued the relationships they had with others in the borough. These relations tied them to the borough and oriented them differently in terms of place-making from newer upper-class residents. Some residents failed to develop or avoided developing social ties within the community of Highlands. This lack of social ties among certain segments of the population, particularly more middle and upper-class residents, affected Highlands place-making as well. Their interest in Highlands was related more to water views and the borough's remnant and re-emerging summer community feel. Long-time summer residents told me they avoided local politics and reserved their civic activity for their home towns, though a couple had gotten involved in earlier battles against development that literally abutted their summer residence doorstep.

However for some gentrifiers, the charm of Highlands had as much to do with the interaction among different classes of people as with the views and waterfront access.

One upper-class woman in her 30s, educated and working in New York City, recounted her first impression of Highlands, debarking from a commuter ferry at an old, vacant beach clubhouse before it was razed to make room for additional parking. She recalled,

People were still using that as a beach, there were windsurf sails going off the beach and ... people in the water, and then there were men in these gorgeous suits, with their *Wall Street Journals* ... waiting in line with their brief cases. It was the most ironic picture that I've seen in my life. I'm like, there's something really cool about this place.

Like this woman, some newcomers found social relations within Highlands quirky and sometimes idealized them as charming. Often, they did not immerse themselves in these social relations, but observed them with almost an anthropological interest.

Another middleclass life-long Bayshore resident said in addition to the sunrises from her condominium picture-window in Highlands, she liked, "Something like a big town feeling in a small town." For her, and others, this sort of benefit to living in Highlands was not about personal connections with other residents or business owners, but about feeling connected with bigger events – kind of coolness by association. She went on to describe the filming of Kevin Smith's *Jersey Girl* in the borough and a recent episode of the *Sopranos* that referred to neighboring Sea Bright. "That's what I like about it. You can go anywhere [in the area] any night of the week and you might run into Bon Jovi, you might run into Springsteen. People from the *Sopranos* hanging.... So it's a cool thing." These interactions with television and rock stars are not real social relations. It is unlikely that a Bruce Springsteen sighting will turn into a friendship with him. However, they were appealing to her because they represented what was so enticing to her and

other gentrifiers about Highlands as a small seaside village with all the character and physical beauty that entails coupled with the access to the metropolis and conversely, the metropolis's access to and interest in the borough. At root, gentrification is people with economic means populating a location they find attractive for its physical environment, either the built environment of historic architecture or, in the case of coastal gentrification, waterfront views. However, its existing residents are often considered unsavory neighbors (Bon Jovi and Bruce Springsteen aside) or at least negligent in their care of the surrounding environment. A real estate agent noted the drawback of selling an expensive home adjacent to one in disrepair:

There are still many, many, many, little bungalow-type houses and when you have people, particularly at where the way the prices are going today, they are expecting beauty and significance in every home they look at, and there're still some shacks down there. Let's be honest, okay. So, yes, that can be a turnoff when the house you're showing them is \$329,000 and somebody has got half a broken boat next door, you know, and a little thing that needs a new roof for the last 22 years. So, yes, to be quite specific, yes, that has dissuaded some people. I mean, you won't necessarily get that driving through Rumson, Fair Haven or Little Silver, will you? [The neighboring boroughs listed are very costly places.]

Real estate agents and many others I interviewed also said the condition of Highlands housing, even the small bungalows, was improving greatly. "I wish you could've seen it five years ago," said one agent. These renovations included investors who were flipping properties, but also long-time residents who were intending to sell and those who were intending to stay.

Still the lack of cultural amenities in the borough – though people raved about the restaurants – was enough to send Manhattanites back to the city for a respite from their quirky getaway. As one newcomer to Highlands noted, the woods and ocean were the two reasons for living in Highlands. The third reason was the ferry because it was a way

to escape the borough to the “civilization” of Manhattan. “So, yea, the water, the woods and the ferries to New York. Like the two reasons to be here and the one way to get out,” she said in an October 2002 interview, “But, I feel like the ferries are a connection to, you know, civilization -- culture or something.” For newer higher-class residents, the borough’s physical connection to New York and, as the next chapter will show, the waterviews available to these residents from shore tied them to Highlands. They idealized and valued Highlands’ “small town charm” with the comfort of having an escape route via the ferries to New York City.

### *Ferrying “the Right” People*

The commuter ferries in Highlands essentially expanded the boundaries of both New York City and Highlands. The ferries offered a faster and arguably more pleasant trip to Manhattan than the other transit options: personal cars, commuter rail, or buses. The shortened commute minimized the distance between New York City and Highlands, both physically and culturally. Specifically in Highlands it was the catamaran-style commuter ferry with its enclosed climate-controlled cabin that made crossing the bay a more pleasant ride than the open pontoon-style ferry of earlier decades and that compressed the time and distance between Highlands and lower Manhattan. In 2004, a monthly pass for the commuter ferry cost \$433 – compared to the still costly bus and rail passes that were \$220 and \$257 respectively. Round-trip tickets for the ferry were \$35, while round-trip train fare was less than half that. The ferry ride typically took about 45 minutes between Highlands and New York City and terminated at two areas in lower Manhattan where commuters were likely to work, including the Financial District around



Wall Street. Taking the train to New York from Highlands meant driving to a train station in Red Bank or Middletown to catch a train that took generally an hour and 15 minutes to arrive in Manhattan's Penn Station. The arrival at Penn Station was often followed by a subway trip to various parts of Manhattan. Though bus stops were located throughout Highlands, the bus took longer and was unpredictable. Because of the new commuter ferries, New York no longer seemed so far away as the borough became more populated with residents who were familiar with the city through their work and leisure choices.

Though the ferries opened Highlands to a new push of gentrification and increased competition for waterfront space, the commercial clammers I spoke with did not feel immediately threatened by them during my fieldstay. One clammer said there were no problems between Highlands residents and the commercial clamming operations that the low-lying area continued to support. He said in a 2003 interview,

Highlands is a blue-collar town. It's a working town. The people are one and the same [meaning clammers and other blue-collar residents are the same kind of people]. If it was a high-end town with lawyers and doctors, you'd see some friction. It's not changing. I don't ever see it being like that. They want land and big houses and Highlands is small. The clam plant's in a perfect spot. It fits the town.

This clammer, however, admitted that ferry interests posed a direct threat to the industry. In the same interview, he recounted one rainy day in March seeing a man in a leather coat drive a Range Rover into the clam plant parking lot. "He didn't belong," said my informant. "He was looking to develop the land." My informant was convinced the man was scouting property for another commuter ferry dock.

Others involved in the local clamming industry were confident that the clam plant's location along the Highlands waterfront was secure. The borough leased the waterfront property to the Baymen's Association for \$1 a year, with a pending renewal

under negotiation to cover the borough's taxes.

JL: Have you signed your new lease yet?

Clammer 1: No. It's just a formality. Getting this all together, probably'll wait until after summer.

JL: Okay. It's a prime spot for another place like the Windansea.

Clammer 2: No. No.

Clammer 1: They wouldn't let the restaurant—they wouldn't let us put a restaurant way back in there.

Clammer 2: It's surrounded by one-way streets and they're all tight as it is. There's no parking.

JL: Okay, so you guys don't feel threatened by the ---

Clammer 1: Well we did at the ferry boats but they're dropping like flies so I'm not too worried about them anymore.

At the time of the interview, one of the two commuter ferry companies working out of Highlands had purchased the other, so three docks remained operated by one company. Parking was a significant problem with the Windansea and complaints continuously flowed into borough hall from its neighbors. The clambers believed that the tightly woven layout of the area's waterfront in the part of town that historically housed commercial fishing activities along with some summer bungalows protected it from increased development. Also, the plan was built in part through a grant from the New York New Jersey Port Authority. At least a few clambers believed this too protected the facility. They argued that the Port Authority might want "their money" back should the borough put that property to a different use

Earlier we saw that commuter ferries made suburbanization possible by linking the outlying area with the metropolis. The ferries also affected the social relations that played out in the confines of the borough, as commuters and non-commuters confronted each other in contested borough spaces. This was not a new phenomenon, nor was it unique to Highlands. Walt Whitman described the commuting scene at Brooklyn's ferries in the late 1800s:

In the morning there is one incessant stream of people – employed in New York on business – tending toward the ferry. This rush commences soon after six o'clock .... It is highly edifying to see the phrenzy exhibited by certain portions of the younger gentlemen, a few rods from the landing, when the bell strikes ... they rush forward as if for dear life and woe to the fat woman or unwieldy person of any kind, who stands in their way. (cited in Jackson 1985:28)

Non-commuters in Highlands observed a similar rush to and from the ferry terminals in the borough and complained not just about increased traffic and parking problems, but also the mad-dash some commuters made driving into town to catch the departing ferries. I attended Highlands borough council meetings, planning board meetings, and zoning board meetings for more than a year, and in most of those meetings some resident issued a complaint about the commuter ferry traffic or associated parking. In interviews, residents of the waterfront district in particular complained about the ferry traffic. A Highlands public works employee who had lived in the borough all his life said he was nearly run over by a commuter trying to get to the boat. In another interview, the mother of a young child objected to the commuter traffic streaming along a main entrance to the borough that was also the route children walked to the elementary school. When asked what the ferries do for the area, she replied,

Create traffic and give us something to bitch about. I haven't seen very much positive – very much, if any – positivity from the ferry services. It's my opinion, all they've done is create traffic. They bring no revenue. ... They make more of a nuisance than anything else. They make no profit [for the borough]. They don't shop at our stores. They don't eat at our restaurants. We've had to add, you know, safety fences and sidewalks, which I'm sure eventually would have had to have been done anyway but we had to do it that much sooner as a result of the commuters.

Most of my working-class informants shared similar negative perceptions of the ferries and the people who rode them. The perceived negative impact of the ferry was “something to bitch about” for these Highlands residents. These complaints demonstrated

the sense among working-class, non-gentrifier residents that the people who comprised ferry traffic cared nothing for the residents of low-lying Highlands and only rushed through on its roads on their way to hillside or more distant destinations. The double insult of creating inconvenient, and at times dangerous traffic conditions, and then neglecting to patronize local businesses was what outraged many working-class locals. For many residents, the ferry annihilated Highlands as a place by forging the borough's link with Manhattan its prioritizing its usefulness for parking and transit.

Gentrifiers, particularly those living in the hillside section of the borough, did not talk about this loss of place, and many refuted the charge of commuters not patronizing local businesses:

I know who the commuters are because I was like “the mayor of the ferry.” ... I do see them stopping, and then, the ferry is a Highlands business, so they are patronizing Highlands, and every single weekend I see our restaurants crowded with ferry people. ... They are spending money in Highlands. Now, granted during the week, they are rushing out of town because, why, the kid has a soccer game, your daughter has a basketball game. The same reasons I rush home.

For this gentrifier, ferry commuters were by definition patronizing a Highlands business each time they rode the boat. She added that they did return to the borough for weekend meals. Capturing the ferry riders was a major focus of the HBP and individual businesses in the borough. One life-long resident said in a July 2002 interview that her family's business was just starting to offer prepared dinner packages to ferry customers. The idea was that the commuters would call or fax in an order and pick it up as they exit the ferry in Highlands. She agreed with lots of locals who said that the ferry customers contributed little to the town because they did not spend money there. So, she said, “We'll go to them.” This enterprise did not last long.

The commuters described in these stories are not necessarily residents of the

borough, though the ferries were also understood by myriad informants as increasing property values and drawing new upper-income residents, for good or ill. One lifelong working-class resident who lives in a waterfront home she bought from her father for below market value several years earlier, said while she did not use the ferries, she did not particularly mind them. What troubled her was the development they brought. "I mean every square foot that they can get, in Highlands especially, they gonna get it. Because with the ferry, there's a ton of people that want to move here. So, I mean it increased our value of the home for that reason, but we're not moving so it don't matter."

A Republican lawyer who was elected to borough council during my field stay and eventually became the borough's mayor, said the commuter ferry was the main reason she and her husband moved their family and their six-figure income to the borough. She spoke in favor of expanded ferry services during a July 2000 council meeting. The following is my transcription of borough hall's tape recording of the meeting.

I just wanted to make a brief statement about why my husband and I chose to move here. We were originally from the area. I was born in Red Bank. ... We came back to the area because we love the shore. In looking for a place to live, we chose Highlands. Rob hates to commute. He can talk to you about that. He enjoys riding to New York on the boat. If the boat was not here, I can guarantee you, I'd be living in the city. I don't want that, okay. Um, our income combined, ah, is about a hundred and a half [lilting voice into question]. Uh, we spend that money here. We have three children who attend school here. We are extremely involved in the community. We marched next to Carla in, ah, the Memorial Day Parade. We are up and down Bay Avenue all the time. We've eaten at every restaurant. We've gotten to know the owners of many of the restaurants. I'm an attorney. I practice in Woodbridge [about 30 miles distant]. Um, I've got clients from down here. Um, many of them, because we are friendly, I may not charge the way I ordinarily would, as a benefit to the community. My husband is also a professional. He can talk to you about that. These are the kinds of people you're attracting now. These income levels are gonna help your businesses. It may not be over night. It might not be by next year that you see a huge input. But I would recommend that you take a look at the changes in Red Bank and Atlantic

Highlands with the kind of people that they been drawing and the changes that they've made in their town. I think it's an extreme benefit to this town and I look forward to living here a good long time. [two seconds silence, then applause]

The ferry service and the condominium development were two topics around which accusations of class distinctions and prejudices swirled. The woman quoted above ran for borough council in 2002 race. During that race, a leader in the borough's opposing Democratic Party claimed that she made disparaging remarks about Highlands residents in a council meeting. In various public settings, he claimed she said the ferries brought a "higher class" of resident to the borough and asked "what's wrong with the people who live here now?" The remarks he referred to seemed to be those above. She defended herself in a mailing to all residents: "I resent being misquoted so blatantly and maliciously." She described her blue-collar roots, and she compared the ferry services to the trains that once stopped in the borough. A Republican incumbent also running in the election fired a retort to alleged Democratic statements that were "questioning the value of condominium developments to our community". Democratic Party leadership, and at least one of the candidates in this election, countered by emphasizing the upper-class and newcomer affiliations of the Republican candidates and leadership. One blue-collar Democratic candidate who suggested imposing some sort of parking toll on the ferry commuters did not think such an idea would hurt him in the election because he did not believe the people who used the ferry actually voted in the borough. This was a typical belief about the ferry commuters, regarding both those commuters who lived outside and within the borough. One blue-collar woman who lived in the low-lying section of the borough said,

Some people move here and become a part of the community, you know. But more often people are moving here to be close to the New York ferry. They're not

contributing to the community. They're not even aware of what goes on. They just sleep and shower here.

This informant, a Democrat, went on to clarify the relationship between classes and political parties in the borough. "A small, lower-income town shouldn't be Republican controlled. They're spending interests are very different ... and they can shift that balance, you know, toward the Republicans, and the people that really do 'live, work, play' and contribute to this community, in some ways, can suffer for that." In her opinion, the commuter ferries and their riders benefited from Republican control of the municipal government, to the detriment of lower-income borough interests.

No one who I spoke with who lived on the hill had negative feelings about the commuter ferries. Everyone who I talked with who expressed an overall negative view of the ferries was a resident of the low-lying area or were non-residents involved in working waterfront issues, such as commercial clammers, and were worried about being squeezed out of their necessary waterfront space. For most of the latter, this was considered a distant threat, particularly because at the time of those interviews one ferry company had recently gone bankrupt. Because of this, the ferries were no longer considered as much of a threat as perhaps they once were.

Everyone I spoke with about the changes in Highlands attributed them to the improved commuter ferry services. People who liked the ferries tended to highly value water views and also wanted to tap what they considered to be untapped economic potential in Highlands, either in the promotion of its natural resources or in its business potential. They tended to be people I classified as gentrifiers. If they were not overtly positive about the ferries, most other gentrifiers had a typically neutral view of them. Those who disliked the ferries were non-gentrifiers and tended to be negative about

Highlands' potential for economic development or to oppose the changes that they saw it bringing, such as increased density.

Rather than Jackson's (1985) pastoral suburb, Highlands offered a waterfront suburb – one in which “town and wilderness” synthesized in a coastal setting, and the ideal combined vacation and city rather than farm and city. With its link to the New York metropolis via comfortable high-speed commuter ferries, it afforded urban convenience for those wealthy enough to pay the fare. And its panoramic views, access to the ocean, bay, rivers and woods afforded country-like leisure and play. As home was segregated from work in Highlands, home also became more associated with leisure and play, remnant of the borough's resort past.

Like many of New York City's commuter suburbs, Highlands was an early summer resort town. Early suburbs like Brooklyn (later absorbed into New York City) developed when ferry services linked Manhattan Island with the larger, less developed area where farms quickly converted to city lots (Jackson 1985). Jackson (1985) notes real estate agents “sold” distance by time rather than length of space. The rapid transit allowed for quick commutes, thus essentially compressing the space between two points. This was happening in Highlands with the new-style commuter ferries launching from the borough since the mid-1990s. Space-time compression is facilitated by technology (Harvey 1990); in Highlands it was the catamaran technology that smoothed and quickened the ride across even a choppy bay. Also, the mode (across the water on a boat) harkened back to grander days, when steamboats ferried middle- and upper-class New York families to the borough's summer retreats.

Many gentrifiers referred to the commuter ferries as resurrecting this historical



connection between Highlands and the metropolis. One middleclass man who had moved to the borough in the mid-1980s and who, with his wife, was an enthusiastic gentrifier said,

As long as Highlands was a destination, it was flourishing. So when the train came, it made it accessible to all the people in New York. It was a getaway. Because it had a Merry-Go-Round and it was just the summer place to be. It was the summer hole for all the wealthy people in Manhattan. The train made it a destination and then the train went away. That was happening, now it has become a destination again with the ferries.

Other typically working-class residents who did not use the ferries argued that they made Highlands, not a destination but a parking lot, a non-place as suggested previously.

### *Conclusion*

During my field stay, Highlands was undergoing both gentrification and suburbanization. This fit with trends in how the process of gentrification was shifting generally. Ley (1996) suggests that suburban areas had been seeing similar class-oriented conversions that gentrification ushered into urban areas. “The lessons learned from inner city gentrification over the past twenty-five years may well find a broader spatial field of application at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century” (Ley 1996: 358-359). I argue that the borough of Highlands was not only combining gentrification and suburbanization, but was also becoming a new sort of entity, through a process that has not yet been well-observed or theorized in the academic literature. Gentrification in cities (Lees 2000, Butler 1997, Ley 1996, Smith 1982, Gregory and Urry 1985, Fainstein 1991) and rural areas (Spain 1993, Lisansky 1986, Martin 1953; Wasserman, et al. 1997) has been well articulated and addressed less fully specifically in coastal areas (Johnson and Metzger 1983, Ramsay 1996; Hall-Arber, et al. 2001; Valdes-Pizzini, et al. 1988; Valdes-Pizzini, et al. n.d.).

Study of the U.S. suburb is also strong (Jackson 1985, Mattingly 1997 and 2001, Stilgoe 1988, Baumgartner 1988, Salamon 2003, Beauregard 2006, Gotttdiender 1977, Ullman 1977). However, thus far, the analytical connections between these similar processes -- gentrification of cities, rural areas and suburbanization -- have been missed. Here I have attempted to elucidate some connections by elaborating on the social, economic, and environmental changes found in these processes that overlap and converge in what has been called coastal gentrification (Valdes-Pizzini, et al. 1988), and which was underway in Highlands during 2001-2003. I have examined the process in Highlands using the concept of place-making and the social relations that endow it to create the kind of space that I call a waterfront suburb.

For some in the commercial fishing industry, the transition to a waterfront suburb offered an economically comfortable exit from a dying way of life. "I raised my children not to get into this mess," said one informant from five generations of commercial fishermen. Since 1962 the family's seafood market and dock had been set on the bank of the Shrewsbury River with a breathtaking view of the Historic Twin Lights Lighthouse on the hills above and the Atlantic Ocean beyond Sandy Hook beach opposite. During a July 2002 interview, my informant kept busy weighing seafood and cleaning around the shop for several hours while we talked. Eventually, we went around to the dock where an umbrella shaded two chairs and a table so she could sit down and smoke a cigarette, drink orange juice and eat a bagel with cream cheese. I commented on the beauty of this location and asked if she had been approached by anyone wanting to buy their land. She said yes, definitely, but they weren't selling -- at least not yet. She raised her children not to go into commercial fishing. They were completing college degrees. I discovered

several years after this interview that their shop had closed.

Highlands had a long history as a thriving summer resort community, but for several reasons discussed in Chapter 3 had lost that summer traffic. Likewise, the commercial fishing industry had fallen into decline for its own reasons, including pollution of the clam beds, a decline in local lobster and fish stocks and increased regulations on commercial and recreational fishing. These coinciding declines, along with the exodus of residents from Fort Hancock which supplied a population base for borough businesses, left an economic gap in the borough that had yet to be filled. In the 1970s the borough had a reputation as a place to buy drugs, fight, and generally find trouble. For many living in the borough during this time, it remained a relatively quiet, close-knit community where kids could throw a fishing line in the water at the end of the street or jump into the river for a swim. By the 1980s, condominium development erupted in the borough as an effort to attract new higher class residents. The new-style ferries came in the mid-1990s, coincidentally at about the same time the current clam plant opened its doors, and drew an increasing number of higher class residents to (and often simply, through) the borough.

Different groups of people within the borough observed and engaged these histories differently. Gentrifiers tended to recall a historical past where New Yorkers and other city dwellers flooded the borough during the summertime, coming via steamboat and later railroad. A successful local politician wrote in campaign literature for a council race in 2001, “The ferries take the place of the train that was so central to economic success in Highlands’ history.” The sentiment was echoed by many middle- and upper-class informants. Gentrifiers considered the existing physical decay in borough buildings

and infrastructure to be remnants of the borough's more recent past. Some gentrifiers who came from other parts of the Bayshore or neighboring counties also recalled the unsavory reputation of Highlands' residents described in Chapter 3. Gentrifiers justified the process of coastal gentrification by rooting it in the borough's heyday as a summer resort, linked to New York through transportation. As in other constructions of place in other summer resort locations, coastal gentrification is a "forward-looking project for elites, a re-visioning of the modern future of these societies" that is based on recounts and reconstructions of the borough's past (Thompson 2006:15, regarding the *tropicalization* Jamaica and the Bahamas).

Many working-class residents, both long-time residents and newcomers, chafed at the borough's recent changes. They rejected any suggestion that the ferries and many of the condominium residents brought improvements to the borough. What they saw was increased traffic and taxes. They also saw a lot of new faces. Not only were these new faces, but they were a different class of people who brought with them different sensibilities and tastes and lived in oversized structures that did not resemble the borough these long-time working-class residents knew and, for the most part, loved. Campaign literature promoting a Democratic candidate, life-long resident and commercial fisherman who was narrowly defeated in a 2001 borough council race, pointed to this dissonance. "One item of particular concern to Dave is the seemingly excessive deference paid to out-of-towners. ... Dave is afraid there will be no more 'Highlands as we know it' for our children."

As we have seen in this and the previous chapter, Highlands had been gentrifying for decades but had never quite arrived. The process of creative destruction was stalled

by a combination of local-level resistance or simple lack of enthusiasm, physical constraints of the built and natural environment, and by the economic and political realities of affordable housing in New Jersey. Highlands was a small borough with densely packed blocks of older modestly built housing.<sup>39</sup> There were exceptions to this and the expansive views found within the borough made it feel less crowded from some vantage points. However, Highlands offered few architectural gems that attract a certain kind of gentrifier and none of the space that attracted people to the converted farmland of many New Jersey suburbs. At this writing, it seemed as though the latest version of the ferry might overcome these barriers to gentrification and more directly threaten the recently revived commercial clamming industry.<sup>40</sup>

Commercial fishermen and others dependent on a working waterfront bristled at the changes underway and at the promotion of more change. As one clammer told me, “If it was a high-end town with lawyers and doctors, you’d see some friction.” While he did not believe the borough was changing into that sort of “high-end” town, certainly it was the hope of gentrifiers that the borough would make that transition.

Coastal gentrification is not simply about higher income residents displacing lower income residents, nor is it about the displacement of a working waterfront. Coastal gentrification is also about the infusion of a “tourist ethic” (Urry 1995) into the social practices and built environment of the borough. Essentially tourism entails a departure from ordinary, regulated work experience (at least for the tourist) that marks the modern

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<sup>39</sup> The 2000 census shows that about 68 percent of the homes in Highlands were built before 1970, while 36 percent were built from 1970 to 1990.

<sup>40</sup> However, ferry services ceased in nearby towns Keyport and South Amboy, in addition to the failed business of one of the Highlands-docking ferry services. Several commercial fishermen, at the time of interviews with them, believed the ferries no longer presented a threat because the companies were having their own business troubles. Area commuters can find ferries to Manhattan from Atlantic Highlands and Belford as well as Highlands.

capitalist separation of work and leisure (Urry 1990). In part, the allure of a fishing community to a gentrifier, or as I suggest -- a residential tourist -- is a sense of proximity to the authentic and unfamiliar culture associated with commercial fishing. However, this allure is shallow in that only certain facets of commercial fishing are acceptable.

The changing temporality of economic and social patterns, as seen in the story of the lobsterman and his neighbor for example, is a key feature of coastal gentrification and essential to understanding the effects bringing the tourist ethic to tourist locations year-round. As summer residents (or those like them) occupy the borough year-round, the earlier year-round residents go from being hosts who are set apart from class issues as their tourist guests engage in a departure from their normal lives, to being neighbors. In this shift, their daily routines, their homes, and their bodies become scrutinized, partly because those things are seen by gentrifiers to affect their own property values (as we see regarding real estate concerns) and partly because gentrifiers are interested in both a touristic type of “departure” but also the security and comfort of home (as we see with the comment about the borough becoming a place to raise children because few “drunks” are seen roaming the street). By comfort, I mean to suggest the sense of belonging in a place because there are others like you there.

This chapter has shown how the process of coastal gentrification created place in Highlands and what is unique about the borough’s waterfront/coastal bluff location as it undergoes this process of coastal gentrification on its way to becoming a waterfront suburb. It has complicated standard notions of suburbs and gentrified areas by examining place-making in a coastal space. Stories and social relations unique to the particular history of this particular place engaged a different sort of place-making than in typical

situations of gentrification or suburbanization but also relied on imaginaries of those concepts as individuals, local government and other “social sites” (Tilly 2002) pushed or resisted economic development initiatives and the physical transformation of the borough landscape and marine-scape. The following chapter explores how views of the marine environment engage the imaginations of residential tourists and become a vehicle of place-making in Highlands.

## Chapter 6

### Making Place through Waterfront Views

There now is your insular city of the Manhattoes, belted round by wharves as Indian isles by coral reefs – commerce surrounds it with her surf. Right and left, the streets take you waterward. Its extreme down-town is the Battery, where that noble mole is washed by waves, and cooled by breezes, which a few hours previous were out of sight of land. Look at the crowds of water-gazers there.

Circumambulate the city .... What do you see? – Posted like silent sentinels all around the town, stand thousands upon thousands of mortal men fixed in ocean reveries....But look! here come more crowds, pacing straight for the water, and seemingly bound for a dive. ... They must get just as nigh the water as they possibly can without falling in.

*Moby-Dick; or, the Whale*, Herman Melville

The first few pages of *Moby-Dick* describe the fascination of city-dwellers with views of the ocean, though only the narrator self-prescribes sea travel as a cure for his harried mind. The title of the novel's first chapter, "Loomings," suggests an indistinctly large form seen from a distance, or an impending event, a brilliant beginning to this epic – and perhaps a helpful introduction to the next chapter of this book in which New York City becomes the view rather than the vantage point. It looms in the distance and, in a way, advances toward Highlands as more people with ties to New York make Highlands their home. The diminishing distance (in travel time and culture) between Highlands and New York City emerges as an event looming on the horizon, both figuratively and literally. At the horizon, the city skyline intersects sky and sea and draws gentrifiers' lines of sight across the water to their civilizing metropolis.



This chapter examines another vector of place-making in Highlands – views, in the truly visual sense. Gentrification as a form of place-making shapes identities and defines resistances through notions of class and development. This chapter demonstrates that views, particularly water views, are an important part of gentrifying Highlands. The value of views is socially constructed via cultural preferences expressed in regulatory tools and the real estate market. Views, themselves constructions made from what people look at and how they value what they see, situate Highlands in broader regional context and contribute to its construction a waterfront suburb and unique place. In particular, marine views make Highlands a special sort of place because of what they are both materially and symbolically. They contribute to the sense of departure from the ordinary for newcomers that is such an important part of the tourist gaze (Urry 1990) and to the construction of Highlands as a year-round summer getaway.

Though sight dominates, the people I met in Highlands describe other ways that the place engages their senses:

Sounds: The “tink-tink-tink” of sailboats rocked by gentle waves in neighborhood marinas, the call of seagulls, the ebb and flow of waves over bayside beaches, thunder rolling in over the ocean.

Smells: Salty ocean air, rotting clams, drying seaweed.

Tastes: Locally caught hard clams, sandy soft-shell clams and lobster, restaurants of various cuisines and costs.

Touch: Stagnant air at local bay beaches versus ocean breezes, the warmth of the sun, sandy beaches, damp cold of winter snow, cool shade of woods.

However it is sight, the views, that people describe most and that sells homes or

threatens them, e.g., the view available from the borough's two trailer parks is one of their features that made them vulnerable to more up-scale development.

Sight: A cloud-streaked pink and orange sunrise over the Atlantic Ocean, the moon over the water, birds floating on the wind or standing at the river's edge, choppy white-caps and placid surfaces, the colorful sails of wind surfers in the cove, boat traffic of all shapes and sizes cruising along the river and channel, commercial clammers balancing in small boats digging into the bay with long thin poles that arc behind them at the end of a haul, the historic Twin Lights Lighthouse, the New York skyline at night. As this list implies, it was not just nature<sup>41</sup> in Highlands – the river, the ocean, the long spit of sandy beach and brush known as Sandy Hook; the wooded hillsides themselves -- that made for a good view. “Having a view” in Highlands typically referred to a view of the water (the Atlantic Ocean, Shrewsbury River or Sandy Hook Bay) with some structural feature in the foreground (Sandy Hook beach) or background (New York's skyline). Nature was the predominant view, though some human creations, such as commercial clammers on the water, are enveloped into a construct of nature – and views of the New York skyline were seen by gentrifiers as a welcome escape back to civilization. Highlands bourgeoisie often mentioned views of the New York skyline as a benefit of living in the borough. For some others views of the borough itself, or of the Twin Lights Lighthouse, or of the clam boats and ferry boats operating out of the borough are also draws. Gentrifiers tended to welcome the view of New York, but also

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<sup>41</sup> By “nature” I do not mean to impose a false distinction between nature and human creations because such distinctions are usually met with legitimate objections. For example, considering Sandy Hook beaches to be natural areas is complicated by the fact that the beaches are protected through federal laws (Dilsaver 1994, 86 Stat. 1308) and are manipulated by huge machines that replenish and move sand around and by other machines that comb the beach free of litter, as well as by multitudes of visitors who fish from shore, build sand castles, litter and otherwise manipulate the surroundings.

appreciated that such a view put them at a distance from the city. The views of nature surrounded and buffered city skylines.

Views are commodified, as when a good view increases the real estate value of property and as in the sale and privatization of vantage points. Other sensory features are also commodified in a way but not to the extent that views are commodified. For example, proximity to the ocean makes pleasing sounds more accessible, and proximity to good restaurants makes it possible for residents to engage their senses of taste. These sensory features however do not typically make it into real estate ads while views do. What makes views such good advertising? Here we explore this and other social uses of views in Highlands and the meanings associated with views and visual access.

Which views different classes prefer in the way that Bourdieu (1984) studied preferences and taste was not an initial focus of this research, though class-based distinctions emerged as I analyzed my data. Views were rarely mentioned by my more working-class informants in reference to what they liked best about the borough. One resident, a housecleaner, when pressed about how she used the public spaces around town said she enjoyed driving out to Sandy Hook to watch thunderstorms roll in over the bay. This was a very different preference for scenery than expressed by the more middle- and upper-class informants. While one upper-middle class informant mentioned a fascination with a particular scene outside her picture window during a storm, most middle and upper class informants, particularly the newcomers, spoke at length about the serene and calming views of “beautiful” (i.e., sunny and clear) days. These middle- and upper-class residents, particularly the newcomers among them, said views were a main reason they lived in Highlands. Another good indicator of the class distinction in how views are

valued comes from street names. For example, the road constructed around the high-rise and expensive Eastpointe condominiums is called “Scenic Drive,” while the trailer park at the base of the condominium development, with its own dramatic views, is simply “Laurel Drive.”

While they often mentioned views and described situations in which they enjoyed water views (i.e., sitting on their front porch overlooking the bay), longer-term year-round residents of the upper and middle classes also described their familial and social ties to the borough or surrounding area. All of the upper-income life-long (or nearly so) residents I interviewed noted the water views as one of the borough’s valuable attributes that attracted newcomers, though they did not necessarily refer to views as valuable to themselves in particular. They tended to see these views as a product of the coastal bluff topography, a distinguishing feature and part of the borough’s identity. They often preferred to identify the borough via this feature, along with memories of commercial fishing and summer resort activity, rather than through the colorful, albeit unsavory, reputation for bar brawls and sketchy characters that the borough has had trouble living down.

The views that allowed for social connections were of more value to my working-class informants. The housecleaner who liked the storm views also appreciated the view of her yard from her kitchen window where she could watch her children play. She appreciated her stoop and the sidewalk in front of her house where neighbors socialized and kept an eye on children playing along the sidewalk. While she mentioned the lovely views from the Twin Light Lighthouse, she and her family did not go there once during the two years of my field research. Their home sat in the middle of a block in the low-

lying section of town, facing the houses across the street.

Of those who valued views most highly, none could be considered working class. They were all well-educated with professions (law, management) or artistic vocations (painting, music) that afforded a comfortable living. All but one lived in Highlands either year-round or as summer-only residents. Many also worked in the borough, typically running their own businesses. The only one who was not a resident in the borough was an artist who commuted for an hour and a half everyday to Highlands where her studio was located. For her the water view was worth the journey.

The next light is where you make the turn into Highlands, and then you see a little glimpse of the ocean in the morning. The water sparkles and it makes you smile ... That's what I look forward to is the ocean and if you've had a miserable ride, you know with the traffic, just seeing the ocean, it's just, it's wonderful.

Those who valued views most highly also described Highlands as a place of untapped (or under-tapped) potential particularly regarding the people who lived there, the structures they lived in and the services that were provided in the area. I refer to these informants as gentrifiers. Of the 24 gentrifiers I identified among my fieldwork informants, half clearly embraced the borough's water views. Eight other gentrifiers who did not mention views had little opportunity to discuss how they valued views because of the topic of our particular interviews. Only three claimed to not appreciate views themselves, though two of those recognized the economic value of waterfront views. I considered one gentrifier to be neutral regarding waterfront views. Conversely, 14 non-gentrifiers expressed no value for the kind of waterfront views described in real estate ads. Three were neutral and one highly valued waterfront views.

The sorts of changes gentrifiers engaged in, approved of, or hoped for included exterior renovations to homes and businesses in the low-lying part of the borough and the

addition of businesses that were expected to draw visitors to the borough. Many lauded renovations and retail businesses that harkened back to an earlier period in the borough that they either recalled themselves or had heard about from others. They did not envision large-scale changes but just wanted to see the borough tidy up a bit. Their focus was on maintaining the small-town character of the borough, with some improvements. They “like this little town,” its quaintness and “charm”. For these residential tourists, the borough is a departure from the more urban settings of New York and its surroundings.

Conversely, one resident/business owner who did not talk about her own valuation of views envisioned large-scale development that used eminent domain to replace small, old waterfront homes with a large conference center, including golf putting greens. She and another resident/business owner complicate my theory of class-based preferences for views, providing two noteworthy exceptions. One was a life-long summer-turned-year-round resident, and another was a gentrifier who arrived in the early 1980s. Both of these informants had been involved in various economic development activities in the borough, had small businesses in town, and were well-acquainted with zoning regulations. While they acknowledged that some residents highly valued views, in their expert status, they argued against the legitimacy of claims to retain views. One of these middleclass anti-view informants said,

Like everybody comes complaining that their view is gone, and the council sits there and kind of, not feeds on it, but they kind of respond to it when it's a real simple answer. ‘Read the zoning law. No one is entitled to a view. Thank you very much for your time and we'll see you next time.’ But for some reason, locals and others, feel they are entitled to the view when it is spelled out in the law that they are not.

For these two informants, Highlands was a community but also a commodity. The desire by individual residents, “locals,” to retain views that they cherished became a

potential obstacle to various other kinds of development that is occurring in the borough and blocking views. These two informants suggested that to retain views, one must have the financial means to buy property on which a view might be blocked by future development. Those and another gentrifier involved in local government explicitly pinned for the removal of lower-income residents and residences from highly valued vantage points to make way for higher-income occupants.

### *Classing a View*

What constitutes “a view” is subjective – though culturally constructed through group tastes and, specifically through real estate industry marketing. Geertz notes that as anthropologists, we see the lives of others through “lenses of our own grinding” and they look back at us through lenses of their own (Geertz 2000: 65). Views and what constitutes a view are seen through lenses of our own grinding. When discussing views we want to know what is a pleasing sight and from what perspective is the gaze.

Some views have become institutionalized over time and are now designated by real estate mores. Such views in Highlands are typically water-related -- a large picture window overlooking an ocean. Some “partial views” described in real estate advertisements and assessments are a bit of a stretch. When I described having to crane my neck to appreciate the “partial view” from a newly constructed expensive townhouse, one informant, professional who commutes to New York on the ferries and moved to Highlands 20 years earlier, laughed, “Oh well that’s a real estate description, you know. You have to watch out for those things.”

Another working-class informant in the low-lying section of town said, “Believe

it or not, we're considered having ... a water view. You can see the marina from these windows and you can see the river from [another] window. And we have a little tiny window in our laundry room and if you stick your head through, it's considered a water view." One imagines real estate agents peering out of each window in the wintertime when trees are bare, hoping to find a view they can market. The reality is that a water view increases exchange value.

Informants described their visual experiences of nature, as Wilson (1992) notes, in both the details and the sweeping vista. Views contained action – birds flying, boats passing, waves moving, fish jumping; and views changed -- the color and texture of the ocean and sky altered over the course of a day and night and season, shifting from smooth to choppy and varying colors of green, blue and gray. "But the view from the window here," offered one middleclass informant as we talked about Highlands one December day.

Right now the ocean is dark blue with white caps because it's bitter cold outside. But as the day goes on and maybe more clouds roll in, the sky will turn a darker grayish or darker blue, the water will turn a gray color. Sometimes the water and the sky look like one and sometimes when the sun sets the white clouds turn a rosy color and the sky turns a rosy color, but the scenery always changes, absolutely always changes. But today it's a gorgeous dark blue with the white caps.

Perhaps it is this action – the ever-changing scenery -- that makes viewing seem so much of an experience to many of my middle- and upper-class informants. A "water view" involves much more than just seeing water: It also includes the sky of different colors, clouds, sun and moon over the ocean; it is wildlife and curiosities like a heron stalking prey during a rainstorm at night, a school of fish swirling in the water, as another informant described. Several middle- and upper-class informants shared detailed



observations of nature like these. Views allowed them to access and casually study nature from a distance. For one informant who worked out of her waterfront condominium with a large picture window, viewing was an experience that substituted for action:

Yea, the view. I contemplate it a lot. I just sit and look out the window. I just look at it all the time --- too much. Think of all the things I'm not getting done. Never give a writer a view. I mean it gets so easy to procrastinate. You don't feel like you are procrastinating because *you are having this experience*, you know.

Her condominium overlooked the Shrewsbury River and was elevated enough so that she could see across the strip of Sandy Hook to the Atlantic Ocean beyond.

Informants I considered to be “non-gentrifiers” typically did not mention water views when asked to describe what they valued about living or working in the borough and how they used the space in and around their homes and throughout the borough. Two exceptions included informants who straddled the definition of gentrifier/non-gentrifier. These were a pair of summer residents with little financial investment in the borough and a working-class woman who started living in Highlands year-round as a teenager and had spent most childhood summers in the borough. However, even this woman more highly valued the gentle noises of the marina near her home over the water views, which she had to leave home to access. She often talked about how her friends and her husband who was from the area did not appreciate the views and waterfront access that she so highly valued. She imagined that they simply took it for granted. With this one exception, none of my working-class informants explicitly valued water or other leisure-oriented views.

Though views were not a priority for the working-class people I interviewed, a few appreciated the aesthetics of views from or of public spaces like the Twin Lights Lighthouse and from Sandy Hook of storms rolling in over the bay. Lower-income residents had limited access to water views from private spaces, such as their homes or

their friends' homes or the eating establishments that they frequented.

A few big exceptions to this access issue were two mobile home parks -- Paradise Park on the waterfront and Shadow Lawn atop the coastal bluff at the foot of the high-rise condominium Eastpointe, as well as the public housing complex and the subsidized senior citizens housing. The Jennie Parker Public Housing complex is situated on the lower part of the bluff, north (bayside) of Highway 36. The view surprised one housing authority staff member I interviewed, who noted that the complex is on the former site of the borough's incinerator. "The dump just happened to be in a really nice place. Because that's the first thing I noticed. First I went up there to look and I went into the courtyard and I looked this way and I went, 'Oh my god you can even see the water.' It's absolutely beautiful out there." The complex was built in the 1950s and was a source of consternation with at least one public official who I interviewed in 2002. He would have liked to see upscale condominiums with views that would contribute more tax ratables to the borough. The senior citizens housing, Ptak Tower, also in the bayside section of town on Shore Drive, was built against the foot of the coastal bluff. The upper floors of the 5-story building allow a view across town to the water.

Of these exceptions, it is the residents of the privately owned mobile home parks that have been threatened with relocation as the land on which their trailers sit was sold and bids for rezoning and redevelopment had surfaced. There is a good view of boat traffic from the trailer park where the boat channel curves from the river into the bay directly toward Manhattan. For some middleclass and working-class park residents, the view creates opportunities for commentaries on social class. It is a place to comment on the stupidity and misfortune of wealthy boat owners who sometimes run aground on the

shallow sandbars outside of the channel. It is also a place where residents imagined themselves in one of those large boats. In one conversation I had with a working-class man who lived in the borough year round and a middleclass man who lived there in the summers, the view momentarily brought them both into the realm of the upper class as they talked about imagined an easy retirement in warm southern waters on a large yacht. After a moment, the middleclass man drew them back to their physical and class locations. “I couldn’t afford to fill that thing up.” The water view of boat traffic allowed them to alternatively envy and deride the upper class. The view drew their imaginations onto a luxury yacht, while also allowing for the expression of *schadenfreude* when one of those big boats ran aground.

### *The Value of Views*

Views are not usually cultural capital as described by Bourdieu (1984) in the sense that knowledge of particular views helps negotiate certain social situations. One does not discuss the merits of a view along the lines that one would discuss the merits of a painting, though what constitutes “a view” is socially constructed and carries class-based preferences as described above. Except for the occasional social situation (fireworks display, Christmas tree lighting, an unexpected seal on a wharf or on September 11, 2001 watching the smoke rise from the site of the World Trade Towers in Manhattan) views are most often experienced in isolation. For many the experience of viewing is very personal, thoughtful and meditative. These sorts of personal experiences and the views themselves are rarely discussed at cocktail parties or in other social situations of any class, though the views may be important backdrops to those parties.

The cultural capital of a view is not in the learned knowledge about the view but in access to and ownership of those views that are prescribed as valuable. Possession of a water view, particularly a water view with Manhattan as a backdrop, can be a form of cultural capital that marks some people as members of upper classes but also, and importantly, threatens lower-income people as real estate interests pressure the sale and redevelopment of low-income housing that is situated with good views.

In the real estate economy of Highlands and elsewhere, views are highly valued and actually increase the exchange value of a property. There is economic benefit to home sellers who garner high prices for homes and commercial service-oriented businesses with a view. Also, the borough coffers benefit from views, as increased real estate values make for increased assessments and increased tax revenues. One informant who lives in a condominium with a large picture window and lovely view discovered that she pays \$200 more a quarter than her neighbor without a view in the same condominium building. She calls this her “view tax”. Some businesses benefit from their views. Waterfront restaurants are the most obvious, but local artists find inspiration from their views and one resident teaches private yoga classes in front of her picture window.

There is a long tradition of landscape art in the U.S., one in which art imitates nature (Sudlow and Bretz 1987; Korhauser, et al. 2003; Wilton and Barringer 2002; Pisano 1985; Ribak 2004).<sup>42</sup> In the case of waterfront views in Highlands, I suggest that

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<sup>42</sup> Artists of the Hudson River School started in New York in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century and their successors moved west, representing the “transformation of the land from wilderness to an industrialized urban-based society” in broad sweeping vistas (Korhauser, et al. 2003: 3). They took their technique from European masters, particularly as they developed a theory and ‘pictorial’ language” (Wilton and Barringer 2002) -- theories and a language that only a class of viewers educated in the master works could appreciate. Kornhauser notes that “The taste for landscape was largely restricted to the northeast elite” (2003: 3). On Long Island, New York, a group of 19<sup>th</sup> century artists were depicting their landscapes of leisure and work on the beach, farms and bays. Hundreds of artists flocked to what one art historian called the “first major outdoor school of painting in America,” founded by a fellow painter who “believed that the simplest object

art not only imitates nature, it *is* nature. The window frame becomes the picture frame, and housing for the middle- and upper-classes is constructed in such a way to showcase certain views. The term “picture window” refers to a large window that lacks the capacity to open and also lacks the interior intersecting lines of traditional window frames, which disrupt a view.<sup>43</sup> Because it does not open, the picture window eliminates a viewer’s ability to use other senses and the sense of sight predominates.<sup>44</sup> In Highlands, picture windows were installed in many condominiums and refurbished homes to take advantage of water views. There were often smaller windows in the vicinity of the picture window and sliding glass doors leading to small balconies that let in air, breeze and odors if desired.

I suggest that in the context of gentrification in Highlands, views transformed into art and became part of the room décor for many Highlands residents. As such, they served a social use in the way a painting that hangs on a wall does.<sup>45</sup> Views may not have required the level of interpretation that a work of art did, but preferences for views

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or setting could be beautiful when seen through the eyes of an artist (Pisano 1985: 9). Pisano cites a contemporary art critic, J. Walker McSpadden: “To the casual observer it is nothing but sand dunes, wire grass, and scrub brushes, rolling monotonously to the water’s edge. But the trained eye will see infinite variety in the lights and shadows of the landscape, bordered by the fickle sea and ever-changing sky (Pisano 1985: 9).”

<sup>43</sup> **Picture Window** - One single, large window pane that does not open from either side. Archiseek: Online Architectural Resources. [www.archiseek.com/guides/glossary/](http://www.archiseek.com/guides/glossary/) accessed October 11, 2006.

<sup>44</sup> Views allow viewers to study nature, but from a distance. Canadian environmental philosopher Neil Evernden suggests that vision is the predominant human sense. “It provides access to the world in a particular way, and while it gives us much, it also conceals. Vision permits us the luxurious delusion of being neutral observers with the ability to manipulate a distant environment. The gain is objectivity, but the loss is any notion of interrelation between the elements of the visual field. We see only what is, not how it came to be” (Evernden, 1985). The benefit of vision, then, is some control over our experience. We can close our eyes. We can look away. With the advent of air conditioning, nature could be viewed from within a closed car (without the dust and heat that might accompany a country drive) or from a closed window. “Nature was now even more something to be appreciated by the eyes alone,” while the other senses were “pushed further to the margins of human experience” (Wilson 1992: 37).

<sup>45</sup> I am not suggesting that appreciation of views is exactly like appreciation of paintings. Education and growing up where art is a familiar surrounding makes for a particular type of art appreciation.

were a matter of taste, and as this chapter shows, a particularly class-based taste.

In Highlands, water views, culturally and sociologically, served as what Bourdieu has called an “indicator of wealth” (1984: 116, 127). Having a water view was a bourgeois marker of success. It offered the sense of “having arrived”; it fulfilled a dream. It was possession of the view itself through ownership of a vantage point that fulfilled the personal goals for some of my informants.

- “I’d always had a life-long dream. I wanted to wake up in the morning and look at the ocean. ...and [my wife] found us a place where we could wake up in the morning and look at the ocean!”
- “I always wanted a view of the ocean. Like, you know how you have things in life, like, do you have things in life you always wanted? [J: Yea.] So I have a handful of them, and that was one of the things I always wanted.”

These statements came from two upper-middle class condominium owners in Highlands. Their views signified to them leisure and relaxation, and they owned those views by virtue of owning the vantage point. The views were a thing they possessed, to a degree, at a relatively high monetary cost.

Views were able to add value to otherwise bland homes, like some condominiums. One condominium resident, Amanda [pseudo.], was in the market for a detached house and explained the value of a view while we toured homes for sale at Saturday afternoon “open houses”. One December day in 2002, we saw several houses, one of which was a large home designed by an architect who lived in it with his family in the 1960s. The second owners were selling the home, with its multiple fireplaces, gourmet kitchen, and charm, for more than half a million dollars. Amanda loved the view from her condo but said she did not care about the lack of a view in this big old house nestled in the woods. She called this house a “happy house” and thought that it looked like a lot of care went in

to its design and construction. In what she called “cookie cutter” houses that we saw, the lack of a view was a big problem. For her, views added value to an architecturally boring house. The big happy house had no view to speak of but had a lot of character, so did not need to rely on a view. It was a “happy house” because it looked like the kind of pleasant place people had raised happy families, where she could envision doing the same.

Amanda said she and her partner were just beginning to try having a baby.

The view, then, was like home décor, which gave a non-descript house much-needed charm. Amanda’s condominium had neutral walls and carpet. The rooms were built of sheetrock with straight economical edges. The view, which entered her condominium in the living room and eat-in-kitchen, charmed up the living quarters. The view also focused attention outside of the home, while the focus inside the “happy house” was on social relations in the domestic realm – a focus from the public space of a view to the intimate space of a home.

### *“Location, Location, Location”*

Views situate a place of residence. What people see outside their windows tells them where they are. In Highlands, middle- and upper-class newcomers see both a vacation scene in the water views and a link to civilization and work in the view of New York City at a short distance. Bourdieu (1984) discusses the social use of a residence’s proximity to the cultural center, as well as the cultural density of a town. Views of Manhattan are valuable to the bourgeoisie because they bring Highlands close to the cultural center, as the cultural density that Bourdieu describes is quite sparse in Highlands. Views of the ocean and beaches offer landscape paintings to “nature-lovers” (in the vein

of art-lovers) and provide both a buffer from and a link to the city. Melville's Ishmael leaves New York City and takes to the sea to cure his depression. Additionally, as nature is considered a sanitarium, juxtaposed and external from bourgeois society (Smith 1996: 42-43), so are views a salve for the urbanite's mind. Consider that some of the most valuable pieces of property in New York City command views of Central Park -- the combination of a vast "natural" space within the cultural center. For some informants, the woods and ocean were two main reasons for living in Highlands. They soothed an urbanite's mind and brought leisure into everyday life. While sylvan surroundings evoke the sense of indulgence in leisure, commuter ferries and city views provided important transport back to the city.

The natural views offered one version of escape, and the small town of Highlands, itself a type of wilderness for some gentrifiers, offered another. Many of the views on display in Highlands included humans, such as the commercial clammers who themselves are considered rustic and part of nature, the luxury leisure boaters, and the Manhattanites imagined in their tall buildings seen across the bays. "I mean I haven't met anyone who doesn't like the view of Manhattan, okay, at night," said one local real estate agent. Everyone seemed to appreciate the view of Manhattan for its glittery beauty but also for the way it linked Highlands to the larger cultural center. While people referred to the view of Manhattan or New York City, they rarely if ever mentioned Staten Island and Brooklyn, two New York boroughs that also comprise the New York skyline view from Highlands. In this case the typical escape to wilderness was mirrored by the complementary need to return to the city. The view of the New York skyline offered an escape back to civilization from the wilderness of Highlands, at least for gentrifiers.



### *Perspective*

The features that interrupt the prized water views include utility wires that crisscross the streets just in the line of site of three story condominiums at the foot of the bluff, a streak of brown sludge in the water current and other unpleasant items in the bay or river. Some residents could selectively look beyond the interruptions of their views, and real estate agents ignored them in descriptions of views. Some Highlands residents were able to look beyond utility wires crisscrossing borough streets to the bay and others complained about what they considered to be a dilapidated trailer park and would have happily seen it rezoned for a different use. What did views mean to people in Highlands? Were they an escape *to* wilderness and an isolation from humans, as research has shown they are for tourists in some parts of the world?

In Highlands, many different vantage points -- the coastal bluff, waterfront buildings and buildings that rise above others in the low-lying section of town -- offer sweeping views of the wide, open ocean that made the dense borough seem more spacious. Waterfront views were highly valued in Highlands, as elsewhere. In part, the perception of isolation and privacy within the wilderness especially with a view over the water attracts people to particular vantage points (Wilson 1992, Hughes 2006). Hughes describes an “optical geometry” in which lines of sight give the illusion of solitude. Such geometry “created a sense of privacy along the shoreline. People could watch the water without, themselves, being watched” (Hughes 2006: 280-281). Of course privatizing the view creates this sense, as in when one puts up condominiums with picture windows to view a park, mountain or marine-scape.

This section explores the optical geometry of the views in Highlands, and how that geometry was situated in the political economy of the borough and its economic development. The following ethnographic example demonstrates the issue of optical geometry -- three geographic points and different lines of sight.

### *Different 'Pointes' of View*

**Map 3. Perspectives: Highlands Views 2001-2003 noted from where photos were taken.**



Base map courtesy of Gateway National Recreation Area



View of New York City skyline from Highlands, NJ, April 2003. Shrewsbury River, Sandy Hook National Recreation Area, and Raritan Bay in the foreground.



View of Highlands, NJ from Sandy Hook National Recreation Area: (top) Twin Lights Lighthouse State Historic Site, (bottom) 9/11 memorial in Veterans Memorial Park, December 2003.



Eastpointe Condominiums in Highlands NJ, from Sandy Hook, December 2003.



Eastpointe Condominiums overlooking Paradise Park Mobile Homes, Highlands NJ, July 2003.

Eastpointe was a 14-story condominium building on top of Highlands' coastal bluff. The bluff itself was the highest point on the eastern seaboard and provided views of the Atlantic Ocean, the New York skyline, bays, beaches, the Shrewsbury river and also Paradise Mobile Home Park. Interestingly it was the controversial height of the condominium building that allowed upper-floor residents to peer over the wooded slope for what some residents considered to be an offending view of the trailer park. The foundation of Eastpointe was laid in 1974 (King 2001: 147).

Paradise Park housed about 60 trailers on waterfront property between an undeveloped county-owned wooded beach and a marina. The location offered unencumbered views of the river, bay, beach, and ocean, though the skyline of New York across the expanse of water was not visible from the low-lying grounds. The park had been mostly a summer community for decades but in recent years, more trailers housed year-round residents. As is typical in mobile home parks, the residents owned their trailers and rented the land beneath them from one person who owned the entire park grounds.

Sandy Hook was a 7-mile barrier beach that protects Highlands from Atlantic Ocean waves and marks the northern start of the Jersey Shore. It was part of the Gateway National Recreation Area (GNRA) within the National Park Service that encompasses New York Metropolitan area beaches. The Sandy Hook part of GNRA was established as such in 1972, around the same time the site plans for Top o' the East, which would become Eastpointe Condominiums, were being discussed in Highlands Borough Hall. It offered bay and ocean beaches with some concession and bathroom facilities available for the 2 million to 2.5 million visitors a year. The area was a shifting 2,044 acres, about

3 square miles – or nearly twice the size of Highlands. Most of the park was considered “natural landscapes,” while about 10 percent was managed as “developed recreational” space and 5 percent as “historic landscapes” (NPS Sandy Hook Fast Facts FS05/05.v.01).

Visitors to Sandy Hook saw the Atlantic Ocean to the east and to the southwest they saw the borough of Highlands nestled along the waterfront and up the wooded coastal bluff. Patrons of the Sea Gulls Nest, a second floor open air bar on Sandy Hook, sang God Bless America, led each summer evening by the concessions leaseholder, as they watched the orange sun set over the coastal bluff. Jutting above the bluff’s tree line were the historic Twin Lights Lighthouse and taller than that, the boxy Eastpointe high rise. The Eastpointe high rise was the subject of much controversy from the perspective of Sandy Hook in the early 1970s. (see map 3 and accompanying photos).

#### The View from Eastpointe

Eastpointe residents I interviewed said the mobile home park made the whole borough of Highlands seem a bit shabby. Here is an exchange with two informants after I protested that the mobile home park is tucked away on the edge of town and so could not really affect the overall impression of the borough. They pointed out however that they could see the park. “We overlook it from our balcony,” said the woman. “I mean there are trailers that really are uninhabitable, that look to me like a rat infested probably .... [T]hey look to me like a real health hazard.” Her husband agreed and referred to the trailers as a “pigsty”.

Despite their distance from the park, this couple assessed it as a public health hazard. Perhaps it was the distance that allowed such an assessment. An aerial view of

the park provided a different perspective than being in the park. The perspective from above excluded indicators of community, like picket fences, small gardens, and neighborly chats that occurred on front porches meant for visiting.

Mark, who later called the park an eyesore, was the same informant who had a dream of being able to wake up in the morning and see the ocean. He got that with his condo at Eastpointe, but the trailer park intruded. Viewing the trailer park from their expensive condominium unit brought Beth and Mark into the realm of the trailer park. For them, the view of the trailer park diminished their experience of looking at the ocean and thus, the use-value of their home. These Eastpointe residents admitted their aesthetic preferences but tried to bolster their anti-trailer park stance with references to public health hazards. This strategy reflects the story described in the previous chapter about a conflict between an old lobster fisherman and his newly arrived “New Yorker” neighbor, in which zoning and public health ordinances were engaged by an upper-class resident for his aesthetic preferences.

The re-zoning and redevelopment of the Paradise Park location recommended in the borough’s 2004 Master Plan would have removed what Mark and Beth considered to be a public nuisance and what residents considered to be pleasant and useful affordable housing. The park’s location afforded spectacular water views to the first five or so trailers on its northern, waterfront point. However, as we saw in the previous chapter, the re-zoning attempt was quashed by an ambitious campaign orchestrated by one of the park’s newest residents, a classmate of mine from the Rutgers University anthropology department, who had just a year earlier purchased one of the park’s trailers with a beautiful view and a leaky roof. As described in the previous chapter, the Master Plan

professed to be a document built on a consensus of local residents and business owners for the vision of the borough's future. However, later protests to the proposed re-zoning and to the sale of the park to a developer suggested that several key stakeholders were excluded from the "consensus" process, namely the trailer park residents whose homes were being threatened. After I left Highlands and ended my fieldwork there, my classmate, Loretta Dibble, successfully organized her neighbors to protest the transition, secured financial backing from national organizations concerned with affordable housing, and enlisted top lawyers to take the case. She and her neighbors formed a homeowner's association through which the action occurred and through which they were working toward purchasing the property in common.

### The View from Sandy Hook

While the trailer park represented an unwelcome intrusion of the lower classes to some residents of Eastpointe, the Eastpointe building represented an unwanted urban intrusion from the perspective of those who valued the "natural" character of the Sandy Hook Gateway National Recreation Area. In a letter from the Monmouth County Planning Board dated April 6, 1972 to the Highlands Borough Council regarding master plan and zoning changes that would allow the high rise development, a planner writes,

One area of concern to the Monmouth County Planning Board staff is the proposed multi-family use in the Ocean Blvd-Mount Mitchell area. We are not necessarily opposed to the multi-family use even though there are some questions as to the traffic capacity limits on Ocean Blvd; but we are concerned about the type of multi-family structure. *The construction of townhouses or garden apartments, limited to two stories and "built into" the natural features of the area could take full advantage of the view of Sandy Hook Bay and New York without destroying the appearance and character of the cliff and the Sandy Hook Bay region.* We would therefore strongly urge that you give additional consideration to the planning and re-zoning of this portion of the Borough (emphasis added).

The planner acknowledged that the views of both nature (Sandy Hook Bay) and culture (New York) are desirable but urged consideration of how the high-rise structure would disrupt the view from another perspective. In this case, the proposed national park became the vantage point rather than the view. Capital, via real estate development, created one vantage point, while a layer of local government (a step away from the borough scale) objected to this creation on the grounds that the view from a publicly accessible vantage point would be adversely affected.

Reference to the appearance of the cliff suggests a concern with the geological formation and its tree line (nature). The character of Sandy Hook Bay region, especially at that time, referred to a more relaxed waterfront, a maritime, definitely not urban, environment (culture). A letter from an official with the New York-based Regional Plan Association to the director of the Monmouth County Parks and Recreation Commission makes the point more directly. The planner argues for keeping “the skyline in a natural state” and calls the high-rise building a “threatened urban intrusion” that would “seriously militate against the objectives of Gateway [the national park system proposing to incorporate Sandy Hook]” (March 15, 1972). Nonetheless, the borough’s 1972 Comprehensive Master Plan, adopted in April of that year, recommended zoning the area for high-density multi-family residential development and the site plan for the project gained final approval from the Highlands council in December 1972.

One of my informants had similar complaints about condominium development in general from the perspective of a Highlands resident living in the low-lying section of town. She said residential development along the waterfront blocked public access in a way commuter ferry docks did not. She described the borough’s largest and waterfront

ferry parking lot which replaced the vacant clubhouse of a much-loved beach club. She said,

[I]t's just a big parking lot. I mean not very attractive but at least it's open. No. I don't mind the ferries that way at all. The condos I do because they take up a lot of height .... And it looks like the city because they're so tall and they're so big and they block everybody's views. I don't like it, especially right on the water.

This woman spent her childhood in urban northern New Jersey, but summered in Highlands and then converted her family's summer bungalow into a residence for year round living, adding a second story to the home a couple of blocks from the waterfront. To her, and other low-lying residents, the condominium and townhouse developments represented a more urban setting, a denser population crammed into tall buildings. The developments particularly along the waterfront diminished the public's visual and physical access to the bay. They did not fit with her sense of Highlands. They were remaking the place of Highlands in a way that did not suit her. Viewers in Highlands preferred to keep the city at a distance but both my informants and the objectors to Eastpointe in the 1970s appreciated the abstraction of New York in its skyline and what that abstraction represented – prominence, culture, civilization – but held that civilization at an accessible distance.

The regional planner who wrote in 1972 to protest the Eastpointe development referred to a state of nature, an environmentalist argument for retaining the view of the skyline. The comments about the view from Sandy Hook suggested a desire to exclude urban from natural, with the main concern of protecting the view of (not from) the coastal bluff. Eastpointe residents drew on public health arguments to prop up their visual preferences. What do these perspectives and these different lines of sight say about place-making in general and gentrification specifically? Before concluding with the answer to



this question, this chapter examines the creation of views through tools of local government, their sale in real estate, and finally the attempt of one working-class family to access a public view on July 4<sup>th</sup>.

### *Views and the Capitalist State*

In place-making, views have been created both by developing vantage points and by constructing a scene. Regulatory tools, such as the Coastal Areas Facilities Review Act (CAFRA) and municipal planning and zoning boards and their documents, often played a role. In New Jersey, the Public Trust Doctrine was another tool used to restrict development in the coastal zone and create vantage points for viewing along the waterfront.

There has been a history in the U.S. of constructing views for leisure. “For a long-time now our culture of nature has typed certain topographies and climates – mountains, coastlines, islands, exotic or fragile ecosystems – as special places. But *inevitably, even in culturally valorized scenic places, certain elements have to be rearranged to meet tourist expectations*” (Wilson 1992: 48, emphasis added). The attempt to re-zone Paradise Park in Highlands is an excellent example of this active re-arrangement of a valorized scenic place. A suite of recently proposed zoning amendments to the Highlands zoning and land-use code included a mixed-use zone that would have replaced the mobile home park within the line of sight of pricey Eastpointe condominiums atop Highlands’ coastal bluff. While Eastpointe residents may or may not have influenced the rezoning attempt, the rezoning attempt fit with the sort of suggestions I heard in earlier interviews with some Eastpointe residents. As of this writing, the

rezoning request had been rejected by the borough council but it showed the possibility of using zoning to change the scenery that constituted the view from a particular vantage point.

In another example, Monmouth County's planning board had developed a "Scenic Roadway Plan" that used some of the same strategies as those used during the New Deal for managing the landscapes through which designated roads pass to set scenes for designated "scenic routes" of interstate car travel (Wilson 1992). For example, constructing the Blue Ridge Parkway as a "landscape of leisure" entailed removing people and land-uses that did not conform to the desired landscape view (Wilson 1992: 37). The "scenic route" designation created tight land-use restrictions for what the remaining land-owners and tenants could not, could, and must do within view of the parkway. It accomplished much of this through the purchase of "scenic easement rights".

In Monmouth County, the strategies for creating similar scenes included special reviews of subdivisions and site plans for property along a scenic roadway, design guidelines for the roadway right-of-way, and influencing local governments to adopt master plans and zoning regulations sympathetic to the plan. "Without these design guidelines in place, new development will continue to encroach upon the scenic roadway, further altering the character of the environment that provides the *sense of place* for each roadway within the county" (Monmouth County Planning Board 2001: 11, emphasis added). Again it is the view of surroundings that creates the sense of place – that connects the viewer/consumer with a copse of trees, the rustic farm, the ocean or the long lawn and large old home situated along a curving road.

Examples like the attempted rezoning of Paradise Park, the Blue Ridge Parkway,

the Monmouth County “Scenic Roadway Plan,” and others show how manipulation of scenery could create certain views. Often, however, views were constructed through the creation of vantage points such as the location of a condominium development and placement of large picture windows within it, or height and location restrictions on waterfront structures.

The most carefully designed public viewing spot in the area was The Mount Mitchell Scenic Overlook, part of the Monmouth County Parks and Recreation Department. Within the border of the municipality of neighboring Atlantic Highlands, the park was situated at the foot of Eastpointe Condominiums. The park offered two pavilions with seating, viewfinders and information tablets that outlined and described the New York skyline within view. From the pavilions people could see across the bays to New York boroughs, Brooklyn, Staten Island, and Manhattan, including the former site of the World Trade Center Towers – so noted the placards.<sup>46</sup> Sandy Hook beach and the boat channel were also visible, as were part of the Bayshore coastline and a U.S. naval station.

As previously noted, the New York-based Regional Plan Association opposed Eastpointe’s development on the coastal bluff. In their letter to the Monmouth County Parks and Recreation Commission, they instead supported plans for installing a scenic public park “the one of the greatest panoramic views on the eastern seaboard” on the Eastpointe site. The letter goes on to argue for the purchase of property by Monmouth County in the vicinity of the proposed development site for the public park. The park ended up just across the Highlands border in Atlantic Highlands. The outside pressure

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<sup>46</sup> Recently an elaborate memorial was erected to the victims of the September 11, 2001 attacks who were from Monmouth County.

exhibited in this letter to create green space in the borough is the only portion of the two-page letter that local Highlands authorities acknowledged and addressed in a curt response to the County Parks Commission. In its response to such pressures, borough government valued the coastal bluff as vantage point rather than as view, at least when that vantage point was commodified as a high rise condominium development.

The borough's 1972 Comprehensive Master Plan makes no mention of water views or views of any sort as an important feature of the borough or for planning the borough's future. Though the document is only 8 pages, the absence of a concern about views is particularly interesting in that one of the plan's two stated main goals was to develop a resort industry. The other was simply to meet the needs of borough residents. By way of comparison, the borough's 2004 170-page master plan mentions views of the water 10 times as important resources and once mentions the view of the coastal bluff's ridgeline as something to protect when considering development. While views were not mentioned in the 1972 master plan document, the previously described letters (one dated just a month before this plan was adopted by the borough council) indicate views are of great importance to development projects – both commercial in the Eastpointe project and public in the creation of National Gateway Recreation Area at Sandy Hook.

The following section examines views in three planning documents that affected Highlands and how middle- and upper-class residents evoked some of the concepts presented in them. These documents effectively legitimated class-embedded inclinations in a number of ways: 1) by suggesting they represented a consensus of community perspectives (particularly in the case of the 2004 Highlands Borough Master Plan), 2) by standing as the products of professionals expert in assessing communities and directing

development toward an ideal future, and 3) by positioning the proposed direction for development as an economic advance to benefit the community as a whole.

The 2004 master plan, being developed when I left the field, sought to maintain and maximize waterfront views, identifying them as one of the borough's "strengths" and recognizing views as an important element to the borough's economic development.

McCay et al., argues that this recognition was steeped in the Public Trust Doctrine and the borough's historical link to waterfront activity.

Because this area was developed as a waterfront and fishing community, people have a strong belief that they have every right to access the water, this is especially true with the long-time residents. The concept of the Public Trust Doctrine is an inherent notion. The 2004 Master Plan asserts a commitment to maintaining public access to the waterfront, particularly in terms of views (McCay, et al. 2005: 13).

The plan encouraged limiting building heights and the numbers of units attached in townhouse developments to retain a "view corridor" of the waterfront. It proposed to "provide a marine landscape setting" and to use landscaping to "enhance dramatic views of the bay" (Highlands Master Plan G&O 7). By encouraging the borough to provide a marine landscape setting, the plan reflects the link between land and sea. The borough, should create a setting in which a person situated on land would experience the maritime. "View corridor" and "marine landscape setting" suggest links between land and sea. When enjoying a "view corridor," one is situated on land, looking through a corridor flanked with condominiums.

The preference for protecting or creating water views extended beyond Highlands to the entire Bayshore region. A 1997 economic development plan for the Bayshore noted the centrality of water views in defining and marketing the region.

[The Bayshore] offers the public tremendous opportunities to appreciate the Raritan Bay or view the Manhattan skyline and the Verrazano Narrows Bridge. Beyond the ‘visual experience,’ the area offers an abundance of local scenic resources, including a diversity of tidal and freshwater creeks and ponds, wildlife viewing areas, beaches, and upland forested areas. (Executive Summary, BEDIS 1997: 63)

Another document of local government, the 2006 Bayshore Region Strategic Plan<sup>47</sup> called for protecting “viewsheds” (Bayshore Plan 2006: II-4-12) along the Bayshore’s waterfront. This plan suggested that municipalities review and change waterfront zoning and enlist design and density regulations “to preserve views and to ensure that development is visually compatible with the waterfront environment” (Bayshore Plan 2006: II-3-23). Views have become highly valued tools for gentrification of the entire area.

Among the proposed amendments to Highlands’ zoning code were design guidelines for townhouses, where they should be placed to maximize views of the water “from the public realm” (Proposed zoning changes: 19). This was not constructing scenery like the re-zoning of Paradise Park or the creation of scenes along “scenic routes”. Rather, it is creating a *vantage point* from which to view the water.

The Bayshore plan suggested not only preserving views along the waterfront, but also creating views along the Route 36 corridor.

Currently, Route 36 has very little visual connection with these creeks and the bay despite their proximity and their role as defining elements in the character of the Bayshore Region. In areas where Route 36 crosses creeks and estuaries, viewsheds should be protected and enhanced. (Bayshore Region Strategic Plan 2006: 3-20)

The meaning of “viewshed” is not clarified in the plan, though it conjures the

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<sup>47</sup> Final version adopted September 2006, available on-line at the following website: <http://www.shore.co.monmouth.nj.us/03230planboard/BayshorePlanFinal/BAYSHORE%20REGION%20STRATEGIC%20PLAN.htm>

concept of watershed. A watershed is the land over which rain, rivers, and other water flows to drain into one particular body of water. In terms of a viewshed, do the plans authors suggest that lines of sight draw one's vision across a landscape or marine-scape to an ultimate resting point? If so, what do they suggest that point would be for viewers along Route 36? Staten Island, Brooklyn, and Sandy Hook in the background? Boat traffic and birds and marshes in the foreground? Or, across the expansive ocean with the ultimate point being the horizon between sky and sea? Another likely possibility is that "viewshed" refers in this context to the tidal-scape, where animals, plants, water and land mingle.

A concept rendering (Figure 3-7 in the plan) depicted a vehicle pull off area, a walking trail, and signs that would provide visual access via an "interpretive overlook" to a creek and salt marsh where native plantings would "enhance" the view. This plan would provide both a vantage point for viewing and would physically alter the view by planting native species. This case of regulatory and planning tools to support the protection, enhancement, and manipulation of views, ironically, would allow public access to the "natural".

Though regulatory tools can protect, enhance and manipulate views, some regulations can have the unintended consequence of obscuring desirable scenery. Flood protection and views seemed to conflict in waterfront communities. The Bayshore Plan noted that elevating structures in flood zones to adhere to Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) rules had "adversely affected community character" along the Bayshore (2006: II-4-9). Builders in coastal areas were particularly aware of height restrictions that local governments enforced to avoid "corridors of darkness" from too

many tall buildings in a row (Evans 2006)<sup>48</sup>. Parking problems exacerbated the building height issue in the Highlands flood zone. Because parking was so limited in the low-lying section of the borough, the zoning board regularly granted variances to builders to allow taller structures that locate parking beneath. One relative newcomer who was involved in planning and zoning issues expressed his view of parking garages in a July 2003 interview. “While we need parking for ferries, I can't imagine building it right on the waterfront,” he said. However, the persistent practice of elevating the living space of individual dwellings and condominiums to construct parking accommodations beneath, though typically approved by local governing boards, eliminated access to views and caused complaints.

As I have already remarked upon, Highlanders, particularly the low-lying residents, complained about a flood protection measure taken after the exceptionally devastating storm of 1992. FEMA erected a metal bulkhead along the waterfront for two blocks on either side of a neighborhood marina. The bulkhead completely obstructed views from the small public space or waterfront “promenade” along those blocks. The Bayshore Region Strategic Plan noted this in a description of the borough, “Views of the Bay from the promenade are completely blocked by a sea wall that extends roughly six feet above the walkway” (2006: I-4-3).

Not only does the bulkhead block views, residents complained that it limited access to the water and was just plain ugly. One woman who spent her summers in Highlands and moved to the borough during high school elaborated a common complaint among the residents of the low-lying section. She and some of her neighbors collected

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<sup>48</sup> Jeff Evans, [www.coastalhomeplans.com/buildingcodes.php](http://www.coastalhomeplans.com/buildingcodes.php) “Four Coastal Codes You’ll Need to Know” accessed 7-11-06)



signatures on a petition in an unsuccessful protest against the bulkhead.

They say they built it for storm surge, for flooding when you have storms. And we were very angry at the fact that we weren't getting flooded over the bulkhead, we were getting flooded from storm drains. It came up that way. "So why are you putting this armored wall up?" And it's so ugly.

The bulkhead was not designed to protect the borough from chronic tidal flooding, "from the storm drains," but rather from the strong storm surges of occasional nor'easters. The wall's height and metal surface make it visually unappealing – a poor substitute for the public water view it replaced. The wall's lack of safety features such as a ladder into the water and railing to hang on to eliminated other kinds of access that the former wooden bulkhead provided at ground level.

### *Real Estate: Selling Highlands Views*

In addition to the regulatory tools of local governments, market considerations in the real estate and building industries constructed views by creating vantage points. Condominium and townhouse developments, renovated summer bungalows, and a few waterfront restaurants were the main vantage points created for enjoying water views in Highlands in the past couple of decades. Several public sites in the borough for scenic viewing had been privatized or, like the bulkhead, made inaccessible.

The resource known as "a view," particularly a water view, had been important to promoting Highlands at least since the middle 19<sup>th</sup> century. An auction announcement dated May 1866 reads, "Beautifully located on the Highlands of Navesink in Monmouth County, NJ. Each site commanding fine views of the ocean, bays, etc." (cited in King 1996: 161). Two-hundred years earlier, propaganda to induce settlement of the area focused not on views but abundant food sources and healthy children (cited in King 2001:

16-18), although even then, the sight of what would become Highlands and Atlantic Highlands inspired comment. A crewmember of the Half Moon, a ship captained by explorer Henry Hudson, wrote in September 1609 that the coastal bluff of Highlands was "a very good Land to fall with, and a pleasant Land to see" (cited in King 2001: 9-10).

When I was in Highlands, the official borough motto was the generic: "Highlands, a great place to live work and play." Realtors preferred an earlier, more distinguishing though exaggerated phrase: "Where the mountains meet the sea." This promoted the borough itself as scenery, as a dramatic junction of coastal bluff and sea, but it also suggested the borough's capacity for delivering views – for elevating a resident to the top of the coastal bluff to survey the land and water below. For the years of my field stay, the view of Highlands from the borough's website ([www.highlandsnj.com](http://www.highlandsnj.com)) emphasized the coastal bluff and waterfront. From the perspective of Sandy Hook beach, foregrounding the draw bridge that crosses the Shrewsbury River into town, the website's photo included the river and a jumble of boats, housing and restaurants at the water's edge, condominiums nestled into the hillside, and the Twin Lights Lighthouse rising above the tree line and the otherwise uninterrupted green, woodsy coastal bluff.<sup>49</sup> The coastal bluff made views more important in Highlands by affording more surface area to build on and therefore more vantage points, thus views, to sell.

During my field stay, the local newspapers regularly carried real estate classified ads that promoted views in Highlands such as the following one for a condominium for sale.

- **MAGNIFICENT VIEWS!** NY Skyline, river, ocean & bay views from all 3 levels this end unit in the hills. Gar., patio, dbl. decks, Jacuzzi, walk to ferry - \$250,000 (Asbury Park Press, December 01, 2002)

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<sup>49</sup> Note that the Eastpointe high rise is absent from this scene.

One of my informants distributed an advertisement via an email list-serve to rent out her waterfront condominium. Accompanying the ad was a photo of the view from her balcony rather than the condo's interior. The view is what she valued, and she supposed the view was what would attract a tenant.

The housing arrangements in Highlands signified the newcomer middle- and upper-class preference for water views. Most condominium and townhouse developments, which popped up both in the low-lying section and the hillside from the early 1970s onward, faced the water to take advantage of the borough's water views, while most of the older homes in the low-lying section faced each other in a grid pattern. When asked where one might find expensive homes to buy or rent in the borough, informants always said "up the hill" because of the views. Hillside homes, of course, had less risk of flooding, but that was mentioned only as a secondary factor, if at all. The average size of lots and structures were bigger up the hill than in the low-lying bayside section of town<sup>50</sup>. Hillside lots averaged about one-third of an acre each (.316 acres), while bayside lots averaged about one-tenth of an acre (.098)<sup>51</sup>. The hillside structures averaged nearly 1400 square feet while the bayside structures averaged about 1233 square feet.<sup>52</sup> The space of lots and structures also added value to a property, but it was views that people talk about.

The first condominiums in Highlands were constructed in the 1970s, with a boom in that style of construction through the 1980s. These multi-family, largely owner-occupied dwellings, often in a townhouse design had contributed to the borough's

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<sup>50</sup> I used 2006 Monmouth County tax records, which list the square footage of structures and the acreage of each property in Highlands, to determine this. For the purposes of these calculations, I operationalized the "hillside" properties to be on the south side of Highway 36 and inside Portland Road.

<sup>51</sup> The bayside figure omits a 7-acre piece of property used for parking by the commuter ferry and a few other non-residential outliers. There were no similar outliers for the hillside acreage figure.

<sup>52</sup> I omitted all properties that listed "0" in the structure column.

increased population and median home value, as it decreased the average age of housing. Mostly, these newer developments took advantage of water views via their location, their orientation on lots, and the position of their windows, which were often large picture windows. The condominiums were a source of frustration for many long-time residents, including summer residents. One long-time resident living in the low-lying part of town complained of condominiums in general as overpopulating the town and one condominium development in particular that was elevated to accommodate parking underneath the living space. The development replaced a local waterfront restaurant called Long John's.<sup>53</sup>

All those condos there just totally took over, blocked the view. And that used to be beach. And the pier was there. We used to go on the beach right there. We could fish off the pier and now you see condos. And *they* have the view, sure. And they also can pay how much money for – you know – an apartment, for an apartment, you know.

For her the loss of public access to the beach and fishing pier was a secondary concern to losing the view. Plus, the style of home was odd to her. The attached townhouses this resident described cost between \$300,000 and \$400,000 a unit in 2001-2003. The fact that they were not detached dwellings was confusing to the middle-class suburban aspirations of single-family detached homes (see Jackson 1985). This working-class informant associated these townhouses with a wealthy upper-class that could afford to spend a lot of money on less desirable accommodation with a highly desirable location. Indeed these townhouses, though they had hardwood floors and vaulted ceilings, suffered aesthetically from an economic design. What most of the structures had going for them was their view.

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<sup>53</sup> This was a local restaurant not the franchise seafood restaurant.

Notwithstanding the complaints of several informants that those condominiums obscured water views, various regulatory bodies mediated the command of waterfront space that the structures held. New Jersey's Coastal Area Facilities Review Act (CAFRA), which regulates many facets of waterfront development, ensured a measure of public access to the Highlands waterfront in this set of townhouses, just finished at the start of my fieldstay.

### *Seeking a View*

This is an account of the difficulties one family faced finding a view to watch Independence Day fireworks. In New Jersey fireworks were typically shot out over water when possible because it was assumed that everyone will have visual access to them. "Waterfronts provide the public with a place where there is a largely unrestricted view and where they feel that they can relax" (Urban Harbors Institute 2003:4). The following ethnographic example demonstrates class differences in access to a socially desirable view.

The Tucker [pseudo.] family's July 5<sup>th</sup><sup>54</sup> expedition included three young children, mother, father, teenage babysitter, and anthropologist. It began about an hour before sunset. After borrowing life jackets and picking up drinks, we first tried to take a small clam boat out into the bay. We climbed aboard the shallow boat and donned our life jackets. On our way out of the marina, we passed people preparing larger pleasure boats for a similar cruise, neither party acknowledging the other. There was no genial exchange that is typical among boaters. Our little boat entered the choppy bay. Despite our life

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<sup>54</sup> The fireworks to celebrate the July 4<sup>th</sup> holiday were displayed July 5<sup>th</sup> to accommodate the fireworks display schedules of neighboring towns.

jackets, the ride was harrowing with waves splashing over the bow onto our huddled group. The water was too rough for the 15-or-so-foot shallow, cabin-less boat, so we turned back. Larger pleasure boats were out on the water and stayed out, no doubt affording their passengers a brilliant view of the fireworks.

Next, we drove out to Sandy Hook, but this public space was closed at night except for people with night fishing licenses. A guard stopped our truck and made us turn back at the entrance. The father and leader of our expedition thought this would happen but hoped the National Park Service was making exceptions for the holiday. He voiced resentment at being turned back, especially because the Highlands' volunteer fire department (of which he had been a member) responded to problems on the Hook and he suggested some reciprocation was in order. Our third try was at the Mt. Mitchell Scenic Overlook, but that public space on top of the coastal bluff was blocked, also closed at night.

Next, we drove along Ocean Boulevard into neighboring Atlantic Highlands looking for a place to park and watch the fireworks. Ocean Boulevard ran high along the coastal bluff with breathtaking views of the bay and ocean. Several of the many large homes along the road were hosting parties. Lots of cars parked in their circular driveways and signs that read "invited guests only" blocked entrances. The Tucker family adults spent this part of our drive recalling people they had associations with and who might offer them room at their view. However, they could not remember where one person lived and recalled that another had moved from that area.

Finally we drove down a road that ended at a small beach on the far edge of Atlantic Highlands. By some miracle, there was a parking spot not far from the beach

among the crowd of other cars. We brought out a blanket and the family cuddled up in the wind and chill as the sunset. Everyone in our group enjoyed the fireworks, from a bit of a distance.

This is a story of a social rather than individual or personal experience of a view. Though, the cloak of darkness and the huddle in blankets offered some privacy to the family, as the boat would have, perhaps suggesting a preference for family unity in isolation from others even in this social view setting. It also showed a working-class family seeking a view on a special occasion and the various attempts they made before finally finding the visual access they wanted. They did not typically place a value on water views, and they had to make several attempts before finding a vantage point for the view that they desired. First, the small clam boat failed them in the choppy waters that larger recreational boats managed. The larger boats represented a higher exchange value as private property, while the clam boat could not make it out onto the open access bay. The family's access was constrained by the small boat, representing a smaller capital investment. Public parks were not available that evening and much of the other vantage points were privatized. Driving along Ocean Boulevard, the parents ignored class barriers as they described these associations, but did not try to find the people they described or test those class barriers. Finally, the family found a patch of undeveloped beach in Atlantic Highlands. The beach was accessible because of a regulatory tool that maintained physical and visual access to the waterfront for the public.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> The ends of the streets that approach waterfronts are not vacated to property owners.

*Views of 9/11*

The view of Manhattan on September 11, 2001 became terrifying and alluring because of the attacks on the World Trade Center that morning. Highlands residents found places along the coastal bluff to watch smoke rising from where the World Trade Center Towers once stood in lower Manhattan. Commercial clambers who were working on the bay during the 9/11 attacks said they saw the fire as well. This view across the bay, but also the sight of victims' cars parked in the commuter ferry lots for days after the attack, bespeaks the close connection between New York and Highlands. One of the boaters who assisted, along with commuter ferry companies, in evacuating people from New York that morning said, "It was apparent from that tragic day that the links, the waterway links, between our metropolitan areas were paramount."

It is hard for me to know just how much life changed in Highlands because I did not move there until a couple of weeks following the attacks, but residents and business owners suggested that things were not so different than before. People who traveled for work tried to travel less. Neighboring Atlantic Highlands erected American flags in the median along Route 36. American flags also waved from Highlands homes, particularly evident in the low-lying section of the borough. Some new businesses in Highlands struggled during the economic decline that followed the attacks on Wall Street – though as one owner of a local retail business noted "the restaurants are packed". At least one new business opened in Highlands following 9/11 because the owners lost their Wall Street-affiliated jobs and took a chance on a long-time dream to start their own little sandwich shop. On the one-year anniversary of the attacks one of my working-class informants told me she was sick of all the fuss. Others were more interested in the



performance of remembering the events and victims of 9/11.

A set of sculptures memorializing the victims of the attacks was installed on the Highlands waterfront and the borough hosted a ceremony at the sculptures on first anniversary of the attacks. Two 20-ton white marble pillars (Metro Briefing Sept. 6, 2002, NYTimes) resembling the twin towers stood side by side in Highlands' Veterans Memorial Park (see Photo 3 on Map 3). From the road, the sculptures simply look like two tall white pillars, reminiscent of the World Trade Center Twin Towers. However, the sculptures face the river, Sandy Hook and the Atlantic Ocean beyond. From this perspective, viewers see two human forms – a man and a woman -- emerging from (or perhaps melting into) the white pillars. Visitors had placed flowers, pictures, obituaries, notes, and other tokens at their base. As symbols of resurrection from the recent attacks on New York City, these sculptures had become a pilgrimage site for victims' loved ones in the area.

The presence of these monuments solidifies the borough's connection with the 9/11 attacks in a more permanent way than the memories and stories of commuters' cars abandoned in the ferry parking lots. It also solidifies the connection between Highlands and New York City, as other monuments along the Bayshore do for the Bayshore in general and the towns in which they are set. A board listing the names of the Monmouth County victims stood to the side of the sculptures in Highlands. Though the borough lost no residents in the attacks, informants described a sense of connection with the event. The issue of the monuments came up around borough hall and in conversation with residents. The general hope was that the monuments would stay in borough but many, disappointedly assumed that they would not.

### *Situating Place and Shaping Identity*

This chapter concludes by summarizing the way in which views were a vector of place-making and how place-making, with regard to views, was about a particularly class-based identity formation and resistance. Class-based preferences for views were part of class identity formation and a particularly upper-middle class and middleclass aesthetic as distinct from working-class values. The preferences for views became a part of place-making, with gentrifiers promoting Highlands as an ideal vantage point for the views appreciated most by the middle and upper classes.

### Views as vectors of place-making

The promotion of Highlands as a place of good views was one obvious facet of place-making. Regulatory tools and the way that realtors, developers and individual investors promoted views and manipulated vantage points were obviously place-making devices and strategies, both physically – ie, constructing a place as a view or as a vantage point for a view -- and by creating a buzz about the views from vantage points within the borough. As we saw in the previous chapter, positive “hype” about Highlands was highly valued by several gentrifiers involved in the economic development of the borough through the Highlands Business Partnership. Though, views were not personally valuable to each of these residents, they were acknowledged as valuable to increasing tax ratable properties via various kinds of development.

Residential and commercial real estate markets, through class-based preferences, privatized public space as a means to capture views for those who could pay for them.

Privatization of vantage points limited physical and visual access for the public. A cultural preference for views pressured policy makers and municipal governments to counter these market forces by creating public spaces for visual access and rules that supported public access to vantage points. However, who actually benefited from those rules and to what degree they were effective remained in question. Residential views meant increased property value and higher taxes for homeowners. For renters in modest accommodations such as the Paradise Mobile Home Park, the market potential of views made the park residents vulnerable to relocation.

#### Views and class-based identity formation and resistance

Views situate a place. As we saw in Chapter 4, middle and upper-class gentrifiers in Highlands lived in the borough because it felt like a summer retreat and, as we saw in this chapter, they were able to own vantage points of water views at a lower cost than similar vantage points in New York City. Many of the power holders in Highlands who structured policy and physical development regarding scenery and vantage points were among this class of people, and they privileged their visual preferences. Resistance to the condominium and townhouse developments in town reflected resistance to increased population and building heights that blocked views of the waterfront as well as to the loss of a small and leisure-oriented summer town that was quiet in the wintertime. Many residents opposed the privatization of public space and visual access that resulted from much of the borough's waterfront condominium development, but along with that they also resisted the borough's transition into what they considered a more urban, commuter suburb.

Given the class-based elements of views, particularly the opportunities for access and the aesthetic preferences of different classes, views may be considered more of a channel for place-making, and thus more about identity and resistance, for middle and upper class residents than for working-class residents. In particular views were important to newcomers of those higher social classes. Conversely, long-time middle- and upper-middle-class residents also valued social ties in the borough at least as much as they valued views. This indicates that they have spent enough time in the borough to develop relationships they really care about or they have remained in the borough because of strong relationships.

In addition to opportunities for access to water views, middle- and upper-class residents may typically also have more opportunity to hire lawyers to protect their access to a view they like. Middle- and upper-class residents resisted views of the trailer park as an affront to their class status. However, the middle- and working-class trailer park residents had (as of this writing in November 2008) successfully engaged legal and other assistance to fend off rezoning and redevelopment of the trailer park, they had been organized and led by an upper-middle class resident activist. My working-class informants, newcomers or long-time residents, rarely discussed views and certainly did not cherish or defend them in the way that middle- and upper-class residents, particularly newcomers, did. While they appreciated the aesthetics of water views, they could not or did not access them in ways that shaped their places, identities, and resistances to the process of gentrification.

### Loomings

Though views may have had a use-value in terms of how they engaged an emotional or mental state, including the knowledge that came from seeing, the use-value became exchange-value in a real estate market that sold land as vantage points. Good views increased property values, which increased property assessments and property taxes for individual homeowners and, in turn increased revenues for borough coffers. It was the ideology of private property and real estate as a free market that allowed vantage points to be privatized. The increased costs of private views and the privatization of public views upped the demand for government tools to protect views and the public's visual access. Often the same people benefiting from this ideology of private property and free market real estate, those with the economic power to access the residential and restaurant views they desired, demanded that state powers intervene in market forces to limit the views of some (ie, proposed zoning changes to Paradise Park) or to keep building heights lower and maintain the views of others (ie, open, public space at the waterfront).

In *Distinction* Bourdieu (1984) writes about how the lower classes excluded certain things from themselves: "that's not for us," he quotes his informants as saying. Certainly the folks I talked to in Highlands whose homes did not have views and who lacked the financial means to obtain views did not place views as a priority. Did they believe water views were not for them? Middle- and upper-class residents who consciously paid for their water views via the vantage points that they called home were more identified with having a view and were more resistant to interruptions of those privately held views. The disappearance of public vantage points, the blocking of a view,

as well as the change in scenery (ie, Eastpointe rising above the coastal bluff) generated displeasure and resistance from people for whom those changes meant a change in their identification of Highlands as a summer getaway and a historic maritime place, and their self-identification as residents in a vacation spot, rather than a suburb of New York City.

Views could be considered a means of place-making because they affected how people identified themselves in relation to that place. For commuters, the view of Manhattan from Highlands brought their daily travels – from home to work to home -- into one visual space. They and others could see the entire spatial practice of commuting as a single territory that combines aquatic and terrestrial space. This secures for them their identities as linked to the city – to “civilization.” The other views of nature -- a heron stalking prey, of a sunrise or sunset, of choppy or smooth water -- these views assure them that they have the best of both worlds in this waterfront suburb. The leisure of a summer vacation converges with their workaday world.

The views of Manhattan also bolstered newcomers' identities as Highlands residents. As geographers have noted, a view makes a region and can make people feel as though they belong within the whole reach of that visual territory. Not only does the view of Manhattan remind newcomers of the nearness of civilization, it also legitimizes their presence in the small and often very insular borough. One former resident who was still very involved in borough events recalled the “an enormous amount of suspicion of outsiders” when he lived in Highlands.

The view of Manhattan from Highlands' coastal bluff includes Staten Island to the west and Brooklyn to the east, both much larger bodies of land positioned in front of the smaller island. A boat traveling from Highlands to Manhattan moves through a strait

nearly the length of the smaller island between these two highly developed land masses. Distance flattens this depth, particularly in photographs, as the eye loses the ability to measure depth-of-field. The Empire State Building stands out along this flattened horizon and stands above the other buildings. Viewers do not see individual objects so much as their minds create the image of a skyline. Post-9/11 viewers used that iconic symbol of New York, and America, as an orienting device with which to construct the rest of the skyline. The Twin Towers might have provided another reference point.

Viewers understand their position in relation to the object in the distance, in this case the “Manhattan” skyline, through a combination of foreground, middle ground and background. These notions of classical composition allow viewers to understand their position in the world.<sup>56</sup> I argue that gentrifiers, particularly newcomers, are invested in cityscape views that they refer to as Manhattan because those views position within the visual territory of the city, creating a region in which newcomers belong in both the spheres of culture (New York) and nature (Highlands). Through this view not only do newcomer gentrifiers become residential tourists, they also imagine they are seeing Manhattan before them, and with this image they come to imagine possession of, not just inclusion in, the metropolis. As Yertle the Turtle king proclaimed, “Oh, the things I know rule! I’m king of a cow! And I’m king of a mule! ... I’m Yertle the Turtle! Oh, marvelous me! For I am the ruler of all that I see!” (Geisel 1982).

Aside from my informants’ inclusion of a view from her window in the only photo to accompany advertisement of her condominium, the great views in Highlands were typically talked about in real estate rather than visually displayed. A classified ad in

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<sup>56</sup> Thank you to architect and scholar Lisa Henry-Benham for helping me understand basic concepts of visual theory, particularly regarding depth-of-field, orienting devices, and the positioning power of foreground, middle-ground, and background.

the real estate section showed a photo of the Eastpointe Condominium high rise and proclaimed “WHAT A VIEW! Vacation year round in your 2 bdrm, 2 bath oceanfront condo.... Only minutes to NYC ferry & beach.” The ad (September 22, 2002 in the Asbury Park Press, G21) sums up my argument that gentrifiers move to Highlands to engage in the tourist ethic at home and that this is a central tenant of coastal gentrification.

Not only did the hype about the views from Highlands draw newcomers who valued them, and could pay for them, but it also constructed Highlands as a vantage point for highly valued water views. The coastal gentrification of the borough – through the creation of privatized and public vantage points, the real estate-related hype that advertised water views, and the transfer of working waterfront space into upscale dining with water views – describes a “complex visual system” through which gentrifiers imagine Highlands (see Thompson 2006:5). Some active gentrifiers have worked to conjure a new image of Highlands that they hope will translate into a new way skeptical Bayshore neighbors think about and interact with the borough. Highlands’ physical and visual link to Manhattan is a key to that transformation.

The views of New York and of nature are part of the borough’s marine context and aesthetic that made the process underway there quite different from other settings and forms of gentrification. In Highlands, changing access to views of the water and changes of the borough itself as scenery were some of the shifts that influenced the place-making process of coastal gentrification. As the borough gentrified, the views and presence of New York City loomed closer to the delight of some and the dismay of others.



## Chapter 7

### Public Toilet or Public Trust? Framing Public Waters in a Coastal Sewage Spill

In March 2003, a pipe ruptured in a suburban sewage treatment facility and released an estimated 570 million gallons of untreated sewage into some of the most productive clam beds in the U.S. Mid-Atlantic.<sup>57</sup> The sewage spill underscores the ecological connection between municipal functions in suburban New Jersey and the harvest of seafood in local waters. It is connected to the broader development – inland and not just coastal – of central New Jersey and shows the link between that inland growth and the marine environment that is so integral to the place-making of Highlands as well as the broader region. The bays expand Highlands to New York and to these inland suburbs, not just through transportation via the ferries (many of the ferry riders are inland residents headed to New York), but in the uses of the bay to absorb some of the negative externalities of suburbanization, such as sewage. The bay is physically and symbolically connected with the place-making of Highlands as waves and tidal flows shape the bayshore, as it serves multiple uses that affect the economics, transportation and residential growth of the borough, and as it opens the borough to expansive water views and views of New York. The sewage spill, in ways this chapter describes, physically and symbolically constructed the bays and by extension, Highlands to a degree. The spill is also an event that brought commercial clammers to the forefront of residents' minds from the background of borough history to which many had relegated them.

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<sup>57</sup> The rupture occurred in a 104-inch sewerage pipe a Middlesex County Utilities Authority treatment plant in Sayreville, New Jersey, on the shores of the Raritan River which spills into the Raritan Bay about 12 miles west of Highlands.

The spill closed clam beds to commercial harvest for six weeks and raised political and legal questions about blame, responsibility, and compensation, questions that reflect and in some instances articulate broader issues concerning access and rights to coastal resources. If there are strong public rights to and interests in the waterways, as sanctioned in New Jersey's Public Trust Doctrine and in legislation, a problem arises when there are different publics involved: those served by municipal sewage facilities; those who rely on public waters for a livelihood; and more diffuse publics concerned about utility rates and taxes, on the one hand, and about environmental quality on the other. The conflict over this pipe rupture was in part seen as one of two very different orientations toward the bay. As a clammer told me, "Monmouth County looks at the Raritan Bay complex not only as a recreational resource but as an economic resource. Middlesex County looks at it as an extension of their public utility." Indeed the title of this chapter "Public Trust or Public Toilet" comes from the repeatedly expressed belief that such a dichotomized perception and treatment of the bay exists, not only between counties but also among different publics.

The sewage spill serves as an event to document and interrogate different interests in and ideologies of coastal resources and how groups engaged those ideologies and interests as devices for place-making. The sewage spill reveals the tightening relationships between suburban development and productive use of marine resources that occurs as part of waterfront suburbanization. In this way, it is integral to understanding place-making in Highlands, which was one of the boroughs most acutely affected by the spill. Suburbanization transforms the landscape and leads to a tighter coupling between activities (*à la* Perrow 1999). A fully suburbanized region is a tightly coupled and

complex system in that multiple specialized functions operate in such a way that “what happens in one [item] directly affects what happens in the other” (Perrow 1999:90).

These specialized functions are often separated by zoning requirements and include various kinds of commerce, transportation, residences, and schools.

The sewage spill resulted from a simple component failure, a burst pipe, within a larger and increasingly complex system. This system is part of the space I am calling a waterfront suburb in which a shared resource, the bay, links suburban development with the productive uses of the bay such as commercial clamming. It includes skyrocketing residential growth that encroaches on coastal space as ancillary services of residential and other development (such as sewage treatment) reach beyond the simple placement of newly constructed homes.

The contradiction in waterfront suburbanization is that with coastal development, the numbers of residents with political/class power who value environmental quality of the bay, though largely for aesthetic and leisure pursuits, increases. However, the increasing population growth also increases the likelihood of accidents that damage the resource. The past history of pollution was not an accident but a planned part of municipal systems that regularly dumped sewage into the waters. The pipe rupture was an accident, though not a “normal accident” or a systems accident as Perrow (1999) would describe it because the MCUA’s plan for dealing with such accidents was simply to dump untreated sewage into the bay. As this chapter concludes, that sort of backup system became unacceptable.

The waterfront suburb system tightens the coupling of productive and consumption activities through increasing proximity (conflicting uses are closer to each

other and there is less room to absorb errors) but it also requires some cultural institutions to establish priorities and rules for functioning. The narratives regarding the spill and its effects reveal different ways in which different groups prioritize the bays and varying “rules” for interacting with (and in) coastal resources. Property as the social relations between people regarding things (Furobotn and Pejovich 1972) is one such institution. As one clammer told me nearly a year after the spill, “What I’ve learned is everyone has an angle.” This chapter examines the narratives employed by interest groups representing different publics. Of particular significance is how these narratives evoked the Public Trust Doctrine, an implicit principle that arises in United States law and tradition and calls on the government to hold coastal resources in trust for the public.

McCay has referred to the Public Trust Doctrine as a symbolic construct in law and legal practice which has “played a decisive ideological role in maintaining and changing structures of access to resources and responsibility for human impacts on nature” (1993: 85). The event of the sewage spill served as a forum for promoting public trust constructions of the coastal environment. Not only that, but the construction of narratives surrounding the spill and its effects evoked different “positionings” (see Hodgson nd.) in relation to the spill, the bays, and one another from the various actors discussed in this chapter. In this way, the event and the narratives that emerged from it are materials with which we can examine the ways that ideology and social relations are mutually constitutive (cf. Woolard 1998: 9-11).

I am interested in ideology “not so much as ideas but construed practice” (Woolard 1998: 10-11). Ideology is not only a set of ideas, but also the way those ideas create meanings for particular behaviors, events and other practices, and how those

meanings influence continued practice and responses to such practices. Part of what is interesting about the narratives produced in relation to the spill is that they allow for the examination of “how and why certain groups decide to project and promote particular images of themselves” (Hodgson nd.: 4). The positionings of the groups discussed in this chapter are examined in the context of the sewage spill. In other situations they may prove quite different. Examination of the spill and resultant closure of clamming grounds unveils conflicting ideologies about rights to the marine commons and can provide a basis for understanding the relationship between productive uses of the bay and the year-round consumption landscape developing as Highlands gentrifies.

The narratives produced by commercial clammers and environmentalists regarding the sewage spill reveal an ideology that underlies local resistance to changes in access to coastal resources. Other groups, including the utilities authority responsible for the sewage spill and the state Department of Environmental Protection, produced narratives from different perspectives. These various narratives illuminate and, in some cases, advance different ideologies regarding development and the proper use of coastal resources in the region in which Highlands is nestled. These narratives and associated ideologies also reveal how the various actors position themselves in relation to others and to the environment.

This chapter will show evidence of the reemergence of claims to common property rights of the bay and attempts to invoke and also transform the Public Trust Doctrine along those lines. The sewage spill was followed by narratives that attempt to persuade action. The utilities authority eventually compensated one set of commercial clammers for lost wages. As such, the utilities authority implicitly accepted responsibility

for the spill, despite the narratives it advanced. Through the narratives that emerged following the spill, the authority's backup system that allowed so much contamination of the bay was deemed unacceptable, and arguments to that end advanced the notion of the bay waters as a productive resource rather than a place to flush various kinds of human waste. However this shift in thinking was aided by very pragmatic economic arguments made by and on behalf of one group of commercial clammers, commoners who were able to position themselves as a stand-in for a broader, undefined public. The need for such a stand-in reveals a weakness in the Public Trust Doctrine as it was currently practiced and reflects the general need in environmental law in the U.S. to specify damage to a particular group rather than the environment writ large.

### *The Public Trust Doctrine*

The Public Trust Doctrine, which holds that certain coastal zone resources, such as an estuary or shellfish beds, should remain in trust by state governments for uses by the public, took shape in the U.S. through battles over rights to oyster beds in coastal New Jersey (McCay 2000). The Public Trust Doctrine assumes that the sovereign or, in the U.S., state governments, holds a resource in inalienable trust for use by the people. Currently more a "behind the scenes principle" than a codified law, the doctrine is based on an ancient "principle of Roman law ... that certain things are *incapable* of private ownership, namely 'the air, running water, the sea and consequently the shores of the sea.' (Bracton 1968 italics in original) The things were not only incapable of private ownership, but were also deemed too valuable to leave to market forces.

The Public Trust Doctrine is an important source of legal and cultural claims for public or community rights as against private ones. It is a common law idea that gives the

public special rights to tidal and navigable waters, the soils under them, and adjoining beaches and wetlands. As such, the Doctrine recognizes a kind of property right that requires the bay remain accessible for seafood harvest, navigation, and other uses by the public. Drawing on Thompson (1975), McCay suggests, “The public trust doctrine may be just one of those laws, available to serve different masters, including from time to time, the relatively powerless” (McCay 2004: 13-14). The Public Trust Doctrine can offer a way of legitimizing common access to valuable coastal resources and redistributing power in some areas for some people.

McCay (1998) describes the form of public trust that emerged in the United States, shaped by legal, political and physical battles over oyster harvesting in New Jersey during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. By the end of these “Oyster Wars,” McCay writes, “Federal courts had decided that the relevant commoners in areas brushed by the tides were *all* citizens. This is the ‘public trust doctrine.’ The state became owner of tide-brushed lands and trustee of fishing, navigation, and other natural privileges” (1998: xviii).

The history of the Public Trust Doctrine in the U.S. also involves the notion that individual rights and capacities were also once considered property, along with material property. It also involves the idea that property includes the right to revenue and as well as the right to things. McCay (1998) focuses on public trust cases that involve commoners and their demand for the right to work in tidal flats to harvest shellfish and achieve revenue. Highlands commercial clambers supported this notion of the right to revenue that also affords freedoms when they spoke about their quality of life and choosing this livelihood to be able to spend more time childrearing, when they focused on their lack of opportunities outside of the clamming industry, and most forcefully when

they described the economic devastation brought on by a major sewer spill that fell on the heels of a rough winter.

### *Chapter Methodology*

In this chapter I examine both the venues for talk and text as well as the particular words chosen by four groups with interest in developing their own narratives of the sewage spill and the events that followed. The groups are 1) environmental organizations, 2) the state department of environmental protection (DEP), 3) commercial clam harvesters and other industry members, and 4) the utilities authority (MCUA). This chapter addresses what the narratives of each group both revealed and construed about their various social positions and their ideological and material intentions regarding the sewage spill in particular and, more broadly, the bay and the coastal environment.

From my larger collection of research materials, I have examined for this chapter transcripts of the one public meeting held about the sewage spill and six interviews that I conducted with eight people who were involved in the spill's aftermath. I listened to an audio recording of a Highlands Baymen's Association meeting in which members hotly debated the issue. I also examined all related news clippings, websites, and press releases and my fieldnotes from numerous interactions with stakeholders over the months following the spill. The narratives that emerged from these data demonstrate attempts by different groups of people to assert claims and shape public opinion, political will and, in turn, the material outcomes of the event. The people who produced these narratives believed that what they said, how they said it, and who heard it would affect a material outcome or a shift in social relations. In other words, the narratives were intended to have rhetorical power. Analysis of this event finds a very tangible set of outcomes that



describe the mutually constitutive features of ideology, social relations and materiality.

*Setting: Contaminations and Revivals*

Sewage spills like the one that occurred in March 2003 illustrate the conflicts that arise between the needs of suburban and industrial development and the protection of natural resources for the commercial harvest of local seafood and for ecological systems that sustain natural resource productivity among many other values. The pipe rupture that released close to 600 million gallons of raw sewage into Raritan Bay occurred in the Bayshore town of Sayreville, New Jersey, population nearly 40,000. The city lay along the Raritan River in Middlesex County and was the location of a Middlesex County Utilities Authority (MCUA) sewage treatment plant that served Sayreville and about 40 other municipalities in Middlesex, Somerset and Union counties, a densely populated urban-industrial region. Monmouth County, which included Highlands and was the base for most of the bay clamming in the area, was not served by the MCUA. Monmouth County was a somewhat more rural and suburbanized region adjacent to Middlesex County. The conflict over this pipe rupture was in part seen as one of two very different orientations toward the bay.

As populations increase in the areas surrounding urban centers, so does the need for additional or upgraded sewage treatment facilities. Coastal development is considered to be a significant threat to coastal ecology and traditional resource use (Kullenberg 2001). Though Middlesex County was the denser of the two, population density in both

**Table 2. Resident population of select New Jersey Counties in 2000**

	Population	Change from 1990	Density as people/mile <sup>2</sup>
Monmouth	615,301	11 %	1303.8
Middlesex	750,162	12 %	2,422.1

Source: American Fact Finder, Census 1990, 2000. Percent change calculated by author.

Monmouth and Middlesex Counties had increased in recent decades (see Table 2), and Monmouth had lost some of its rural character. Since 1970, Monmouth County's density increased about 35 percent, from 965.1 people per square mile to 1,303.8 per square mile in 2000. In 1990, about 10 percent of Monmouth County's population lived in rural areas. By 2000, it was about 5 percent. These numbers did not simply represent increased populations in urban areas. Residential development had eaten away so much farmland in Monmouth County and elsewhere in New Jersey that a former Republican governor Christine Todd Whitman spearheaded a move to preserve the state's dwindling open space. This residential development did not represent squatter communities popping up on the outskirts of New Jersey cities. They were middleclass and upper-class suburban housing tracts that were, notwithstanding the more recent open-space preservation initiative, endorsed and supported by the state and inextricably linked with the jobs created or lost in New York City, Newark, New Jersey and other smaller hubs. Thus they evinced a history of tacit support for a certain mode of development, one that valued residential expansion over environmental conservation.

For centuries, the Raritan Bay estuary had been a dumping ground for wastes flowing from increasing residential and industrial development surrounding it. As a result of such pollution as well as unsustainable fishing practices, particular shellfisheries in the

Raritan Bay had flourished and declined periodically over the last few hundred years. Oyster harvesting, which produced a main source of protein for the New York metropolis, ceased completely about 100 years ago, while other forms of commercial shellfish harvest limped along (McCay 1998, McKenzie 1992).

Federal regulations that passed in the 1970s eventually led to cleaner waters. By the 1990s, the Raritan and Sandy Hook Bays were said to be cleaner than they were decades earlier. Cities no longer dumped raw sewage into the bays as a matter of course and several major industrial polluters had gone out of business (MacKenzie 1992). However, clams harvested from those waters were still considered unfit for human consumption. In 1995 a depuration plant that would purify hard clams for sale as food opened in Highlands, the latest of several others over the years.

The J.T. White Depuration Plant and its associated wholesale operation Certified Clam, both affiliated with the Highlands Baymen's Protective Association, employed about 25 workers and bought clams from another 75 clambers. These owner-operators of 15-to 25-foot long boats manually dug in the sandy mud of the bay floor with rakes on long telescoping poles and delivered their catches to the cooperatively owned depuration plant to undergo a purification process. Another plant with half the capacity of the Highlands plant operated in adjacent Sea Bright, New Jersey. At the depuration plants, clams were placed in cleaned water for three days so they purge themselves of biological toxins that could harm humans. However, the process was not expected to rectify damage done to clams exposed to untreated sewage during the March 2003 spill.

The ruptured sewer main at MCUA's Sayreville plant caused the release of an estimated 570 million gallons of untreated sewage that spread into the Raritan and Sandy

Hook Bay system. The rupture occurred March 2. The flow of sewage was stopped March 11. Clam beds were closed from March 3-April 18, with the opening of a small portion of the beds April 5 and the temporary opening of beds to the south of the contaminated area in the Manasquan and Shark Rivers.

### *Groups and Their Responses*

As this section will show, the different groups involved in creating narratives around the sewage spill positioned themselves differently regarding uses for the resources of the bay, responsibilities for those resources, knowledge and understanding of the resources, economic position, and in other ways. At times groups attempted to align with one another, at other times they stood in opposition. This reveals the ways in which these positionings were relational and consequently affected the position of others (see Hodgson nd). Below are operational definitions of several stakeholders who weighed in on the sewage spill. An analysis of each group's response to the spill and its effects follows.

- New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) – This was the state regulatory agency charged with monitoring environmental resources with state power to enforce law and assess penalties and a state-imposed responsibility for the welfare of the natural environment. In press releases and interviews with the media, the DEP Commissioner and DEP spokespersons presented the agency's public face during this crisis. The agency also provided information on its website.

- Environmental Organizations – For this group, I clustered the organized non-governmental groups that focused on the welfare of the environment, specifically clean water issues in the vicinity of the Raritan Bay, and whose representatives made public statements about the spill or who I interviewed directly. These groups included: Edison Wetlands Association, Clean Ocean Action, the American Littoral Society, the Bayshore Regional Watershed Council, the Raritan Riverkeeper and the New York / New Jersey Baykeeper. Although some individuals who commented on the spill may consider themselves environmentalists, I did not include them in this category unless they were representing an environmental organization.
- The Middlesex County Utilities Authority (MCUA) – The MCUA was a quasi-public entity established in 1950, funded through tax dollars to treat sewage for parts of New Jersey. It owned the pipe that ruptured and released the sewage into public waters. The MCUA served between 750,000 and 800,000 customers in three different counties.<sup>58</sup> The paid representatives of the MCUA, specifically the executive director and public relations officer, were cited in newspaper articles and press releases. The authority also posted information on its website.
- Clamming Industry – This category includes commercial clambers who were cited in newspaper articles, whom I interviewed, or who spoke at a public meeting that I attended. There were two distinct groups of clambers: those who belonged to the Baymen's Protective Association and those who

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<sup>58</sup> The MCUA website notes 750,000 customers but in the Sayreville Council meeting under oath, the executive director said the Authority serves 800,000.

did not. Their experience and tenure as clammers varied greatly. This category also includes the owners and managers of depuration plants and their associated distribution operations as well as lawyers for the clammers.

### Department of Environmental Protection

The New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) positioned itself as an agency armed with scientific practices and charged with protecting public health<sup>59</sup>. Testing for various pollutants, the department decided when to reopen waters to shellfish harvesting and when to keep them closed. “The department continues to closely monitor the impacts of the sewage spill and will reopen the shellfish beds as soon as test results indicate that the water quality meets public health standards,” said DEP Commissioner Bradley Campbell, in a press release dated March 17, 2003. Computer modeling and what one DEP spokesperson called “common sense” allowed the agency to close unaffected areas of the bay system toward which the sewage plumes were expected to flow. The agency took a “precautionary approach” to the closures and to reopening the waters. It reopened waters after several rounds of different kinds of testing showed them to be safe, in what they called a “phased approach” to their “reopening plan”.

The harvesters were clearly an intended audience of the DEP’s messages. The agency’s press releases referred to “expedited,” “ongoing,” and “daily” testing in an effort to open waters as soon as they cleared. An Associated Press article in local newspapers reported, “DEP spokeswoman Amy Cradic said the state is aware of the baymen's hardship. ‘We'll remain vigilant in our testing to open those areas sooner than

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<sup>59</sup> The Middlesex County Public Health Department also participated in decisions regarding remediation and safety of land, but the DEP monitored water safety for public health.

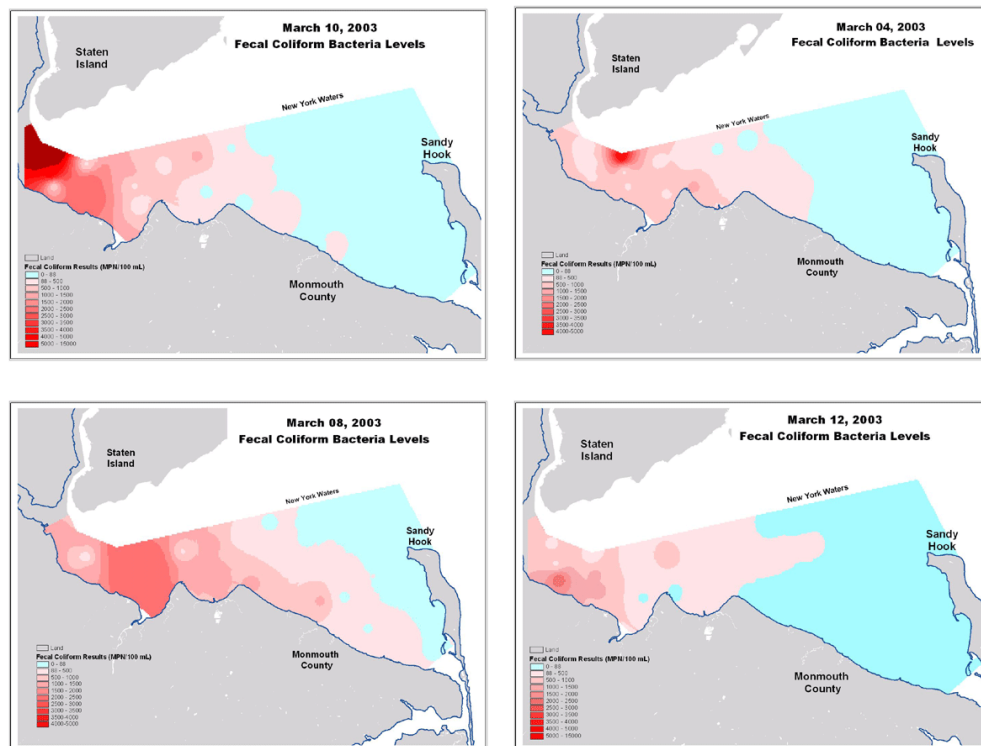
later” (Linkous 2003). Announcements of water re-openings and closures included detailed locations important to clam harvesters. Six of the DEP’s seven press releases regarding the spill focused on the opening or closing of shellfish beds to commercial harvest. The seventh announced the DEP’s website that would provide updates and testing results as well as a link to MCUA information. DEP comments to the press and in press releases expressed concern about getting clammers back to work with expedited tests, by opening shellfish beds in a less productive area and by getting clean water to the depuration plants.

While getting the shellfish industry back in business was a theme in both the press releases and newspaper quotes, the issue of compensation to idled harvesters appeared only in newspaper quotes, presumably raised by reporters rather than the DEP. However the DEP seemed to prefer discussing the topic of compensation to clammers more than the topic of fines for the MCUA. When asked by the Associated Press about penalizing the MCUA for damages caused by the rupture of their pipe, DEP Commissioner Campbell replied, “Our focus is first on assisting the efforts of shellfishermen to receive appropriate compensation” (Associated Press in *The Burlington County Times*, July 5, 2003). In an earlier article, a DEP spokesperson assumed that clammers would be compensated for their lost opportunity to work. “The DEP has asked clammers to put together an assessment of the spill’s economic impact, Jackson said. The department expects that either the utilities authority or the state will provide financial assistance” (Associated Press in *The Daily Record* March 17, 2003).

The DEP’s twin foci on monitoring the waters and compensating the clammers curtailed a broader discussion of the DEP’s culpability in the MCUA’s inadequate

operations and backup system, as well as any possible penalties to MCUA. The DEP discussed the situation with MCUA's old permit in only one newspaper, a local weekly with limited circulation. According to two articles in this newspaper and other interview sources, the authority was required to update its permit every five years. However in 2003, the plant was operating on 1992 standards. A DEP spokesperson told the local newspaper that MCUA contested its requests in 1997 for permit updating. The DEP and MCUA reached a settlement that required the utility authority to study the impact of their operation on the bay water, which had not yet been completed. At the time of the spill, MCUA was "not in violation" because the DEP had given the authority an extension on its 1992 permit (Danskin 2003). Despite these failings, the DEP never publicly accepted any blame for allowing the MCUA to operate with what environmentalists called

Map 4. Select images from the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection website of a computer model depicting fecal coliform levels in Raritan and Sandy Hook Bays from March 4-March 19.







negligence by the MCUA, chastised the authority's slack standards for sewage treatment in general, and called for an investigation into the spill and stiff penalties for the MCUA. They tended not to publicly chastise the DEP, perhaps because they hoped later to work with the state department in revising standards for the MCUA, or perhaps because they perceived obduracy in MCUA's resistance. The environmental organizations referred to the spill as an environmental disaster and raised the specter of long-term damage to waterways, mostly in the form of multiplying fecal coliform bacteria during warm weather months and other unknown problems. "A spill this extensive will effect [*sic*] the health of the bay for many months or years," wrote Joseph Reynolds of the Bayshore Regional Watershed Council (BRWC) in an *Asbury Park Press* editorial April 1, 2003. Fortunately the predicted algae blooms did not arrive that summer.

Environmental groups also asked about the release of industrial sewage as a result of the sewer main break. MCUA accepted pre-treated sewage from several major industrial customers. Environmental groups and the DEP were concerned about the increase in levels of certain heavy metals. The environmental groups called for careful and more comprehensive monitoring of the situation. Here is an exchange between Ann Barron, a scientist with Edison Wetlands Association, and Richard Fitamant, MCUA executive director, from the March 10 Sayreville Borough Council meeting where MCUA representatives addressed concerns of residents, clammers, and environmentalists in a public forum:<sup>60</sup>

Edison Wetlands: I wanted to raise the issue of testing. Have you done any soil testing yet for other things besides coliform bacteria?

MCUA: Those are the only tests that the, we, in discussion with the DEP and the

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<sup>60</sup> I transcribed the Sayreville Borough Council's tape recording of the meeting because it was clearer than the recording that I made. All of the quotes from that council meeting come from my transcription of it.

health department that was in fact a concern.

Edison Wetlands: Because we want to raise again the issue of industrial discharge into the sewer pipes. The residential standards that you mentioned earlier, they're still much higher than you want going into the bay. Edison Wetlands Association has done their own testing and ... sample results ... show that there are elevated levels of lead, chromium, volatile and semi-volatiles in the soil and the water.

MCUA: Yes. That's not of any surprise. That's something that is present in sewage. Um, and it's something that, um, you know, that it's at low-levels. It's not hazardous levels. ... The most concern is really the bacteria. That's the highest concern that we have. And in discussions with the DEP, that's the issue that we're focusing most on.

Edison Wetlands: Now, why do you consider bacteria more important than some of these other chemicals that have been found?

MCUA: Because the other chemicals don't pose any direct immediate impact to health. And essentially, they're at such low levels that they're really of no consequence. ... They've been washed off with the rains and what have you. And it's the bacteria that is of a primary focus.

Edison Wetlands: So you did the testing for these other chemicals that we just mentioned so that you know for a fact that these are low level?

MCUA: We know what's in our sewage and we know that these compounds are not of significant concern.

Edison Wetlands pointed out the presence of heavy metal contaminants in the sewage spilling into the bay and suggested that MCUA's focus on bacterial contaminants should be broadened. The question posed by Edison Wetlands at the public meeting -- "Now, why do you consider bacteria more important than some of these other chemicals that have been found?" -- suggested that MCUA's response ignored the potential of long-term, cumulative damage by heavy metal contaminants.<sup>61</sup> Indeed the question elicited a response from MCUA that revealed the authority's concern with "immediate" impact.

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<sup>61</sup> Note that the clambers did not want the specter of heavy metal contaminations raised because it was bad for their business. Their depuration process does not eliminate heavy metals.

While the MCUA focused on alleviating the pollution that could cause direct public health problems in the short-term, the Edison Wetlands enlarged the focus to the potential for environmental problems to emerge over a longer period. Also noted elsewhere, environmentalists and commercial clammers also raised the potential for algae blooms in the summer that would harm bay waters, a lingering effect of the spill. These are two different ways of thinking about the environment and prioritizing the problems caused by the sewage spill.

*The “Dark Ages.”* Environmental organizations emphasized the inadequacy of the utilities authority’s backup plan and took the opportunity of the sewage spill to denounce the utilities authority’s out-of-date operating permit, the 1992 permit, from what the NY/NJ Baykeeper’s Andrew Willner called the “dark ages” in sewage treatment. The Baykeeper raised the permits issue numerous times in press releases, newspaper interviews and during a press conference environmental organizations held March 11 with local politicians in attendance. “This incident, horrible as it is, validates our ongoing concerns with MCUA,” said Willner quoted in the weekly newspaper *Two River Times*, March 14-21, 2003. In a letter to the editor that appeared in two local newspapers, the Bayshore Regional Watershed Council (BRWC) raised the issue of MCUA’s outdated permit and called for additional oversight by the state environmental agency. “NJ DEP needs to conduct a thorough account of MCUA permits, as current permits do not consider industrial usage that has been transpiring for several years” (*Two River Times* March 28 – April 4, 2003 and *Asbury Park Press* April 1, 2003).

*Public Use.* The New York/New Jersey Baykeeper and the BRWC explicitly talked about the contaminated waters as public resources. “It’s a philosophical

difference,” said one member. “People who are harvesting shellfish have a right within certain restrictions to use those waterways, whereas, the discharger doesn’t have a right to utilize those waters for the discharge of raw sewage.” Prior to the spill, the Baykeeper had described the Public Trust Doctrine in its own literature as a way to improve conditions in the bays, so it was unsurprising that their concerns were framed in terms of public trust rights. The Baykeeper’s Andrew Willner said in a March 11, 2003 press release, “Everybody has a right to use the water... No [one] has a right to use it at another’s expense. The MCUA used the Raritan River as their toilet at great expense to the public and the clammers.”

The BRWC was an organization that claimed to work for “the restoration and conservation of Raritan and Sandy Hook bays.” The organization suggested an outline for the DEP and MCUA to follow to ameliorate the ecological and economic damage caused to public waters by the sewage spill, including compensation to commercial clammers, and to guard against similar disasters in the future. That organization referred to the bay as “one of the most important natural resources along the Jersey Shore” and argued that its protection was “in the best interest of the State of New Jersey” (*Two River Times* March 28 – April 4, 2003 and *Asbury Park Press* April 1, 2003).

Environmentalists, specifically the NY/NJ Baykeeper and BRWC, positioned clammers as a group of people with a tangible economic interest damaged by the spill. They became the tangible stand-in for the public. At least one environmental group funneled media attention to individual clammers. “What we did was we said, ‘It’s not our story. The clammers are out of work. There’s a big deal clam industry out here. That’s the story.’ So, the story did get told.” Working to frame the story of the sewage spill as a

story about commercial clammers who have been pushed out of work, suggests that the environmentalists suspected the Public Trust Doctrine was too nebulous to shake public opinion or carry the legal weight that lost wages do. This represented both a legal strategy and a political strategy. In U.S. environmental law generally, it had been easier to claim damages for a specific group that was hurt rather than for the public writ large. Politically, the clammers were seen to represent a better human interest story to capture public attention. Indeed, the clammer's situation was featured with photos in the *New York Times* (Peterson 2003) as well as smaller regional and local newspapers and television news. Evidence of the strength in using clammers as a stand-in for the general public is presented in the discussion of commercial clammer narratives.

#### Middlesex County Utilities Authority

While environmentalist organizations tagged MCUA as operating with “dark ages” technology, the utilities authority described itself as an efficient and innovative public utility that used the latest technology to protect the environment and accommodate increasing populations and businesses. According to its website, the authority's practices protected public health and the “environmental integrity of the Raritan River basin” as it treated 110 million gallons of sewage per day. The website also asserted that MCUA's practices “promote public health, protect environmental quality, and sustain the development and growth of Middlesex County” (<http://www.mcu.com/authority.htm> and <http://www.mcu.com/wwater.htm> last accessed April 7, 2007).

MCUA representatives presented the authority as both enlightened and technologically advanced. In the Sayreville public meeting, Executive Director Richard

Fitamant argued, “One of the things that MCUA was hired to do many years ago, well, was charged with many years ago, was to clean up the Raritan River. We’ve accomplished that. ... It’s because of the MCUA that you do have a livelihood in the Raritan Bay for clamming.” Switching from the word “hired” to “charged” suggests more than an economic incentive toward this work. Treating sewage becomes a morally bound service – the MCUA’s vocation. As a quasi-governmental agency formed in 1950 to treat sewage, the MCUA was not technically “hired,” it was created by government decree. Using the word “hire” might have been a slip that revealed the more business-oriented daily practice of the relationship between MCUA and its governmental founders.

*Strained Backup.* During the March 10 public meeting that Executive Director Fitamant attended regarding the sewage spill, he was forced to address several issues that the utility authority avoided in its controlled press releases. One issue was the failure of its backup plan. A commercial clammer and an environmentalist each raised the point that the MCUA’s contingency plan failed to keep the raw sewage out of the bay. In controlled information releases, the MCUA mentioned backup sewer lines only in conjunction with weather problems, the melting snow and ice causing the backup lines to overflow. The speakers at the public meeting demanded to know why various other backups were not in place, such as berm pools to hold diverted sewage or installing a backup pipe of the same size as the main pipe used to transport sewage.

Clammers and environmentalists talked about the MCUA having “no” backup system, while the MCUA talked about the “strain” on its backup system. MCUA’s backup system consisted of routing untreated sewage to an unused 72-inch pipe while its 102-inch sewer main underwent repair, thus the overflow of sewage, or what they called

“bypass”. In press releases, the MCUA referred to its backup system as strained by melting snow and rainwater but continuing to do its job. The authority did not have to address problems with its contingency plan until the public meeting when environmentalists and commercial clammers questioned it, and the DEP did not have to publicly address those failures at all.

The environmentalist who raised this issue during the public meeting also pointed out to the audience that the MCUA experienced a similar spill 20 years earlier and asked why no better contingency plan was in place following that spill. Fitamant responded, “Twenty years ago we were – we were in fact permitted to discharge into the bay. We do have a pipeline that, that goes directly into the Washington Canal actually. That is the contingency plan. In the event that, you know, we have a bypass, we’re permitted to operate. We’re allowed to operate on an emergency basis by the DEP. This is most certainly an emergency basis.”

The privileging of land over tidal waters was a consistent theme with MCUA. An update on its website reported that the Borough of Sayreville had constructed a berm “to divert water to the nearby marshland.” After a public meeting regarding the sewage spill, the MCUA representatives in attendance wound through the crowd and brought a few of the Baymen’s Association members into a room to discuss the issue and arrange another time to meet more formally. At this hurried encounter, an MCUA representative told clammers that the company’s insurance covered damages on land only and not damages to bodies of water, suggesting that compensation of the clammers’ losses was not a given.

*Informing the public.* The MCUA claimed a commitment to public notification about the event. For a while, the authority posted regular updates on its website regarding



the sewage spill. The MCUA's first website posting following the March 2 rupture came in the form of a March 6 letter from the executive director, beginning "Dear Neighbors and Colleagues." In that letter, Fitamant lists a "timeline of events" from March 2 – 6. The seven remaining updates, also published on MCUA's website looked more like press releases and were issued from March 6 to March 11. The MCUA's website proclaimed, "If there is any further information on any aspect of this incident, we will make it available to the public immediately." The last update, March 11, 2003, announced that repairs ended the flow of untreated sewage into the river that day. MCUA presented no "further information" to the public on this event -- neither negotiations with commercial clambers, investigations into the cause of the spill nor penalties levied on the authority by the state Department of Environmental Protection. However, the website included a company newsletter "Monthly Highlights" in which the October 2007 issue described "efforts to ensure the integrity" of the main and backup pipes at the plant.<sup>62</sup>

The updates tended to focus on around-the-clock efforts to repair the rupture and cease the flow of untreated sewage, which the press releases failed to say included not only residential sewage but also industrial wastes. The bypass and the capacity of the backup system were frequent notations in the MCUA's repair updates, which were couched in industry language: The flow of raw sewage into the Raritan River became "bypass sewage," uncontained by a backup pipe that had a smaller diameter than the ruptured line. The MCUA posted the "bypass sewage rate" and "total amount of bypass sewage" with each update.

The updates seemed geared to engage readers with a sort of statistical scoreboard in the utility authority's battle to repair the rupture, as storm-water runoff and continued

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<sup>62</sup> <http://www.mcu.com/constructionandrestartschedule.htm> last accessed 3/29/08.

customer use overwhelmed the smaller backup line. From the March 6 letter, “Backup system, working at full capacity due to melting snow and rainfall, treats average of 100-110 million gallons per day, but still bypasses a range average of 1.7 to 4.8 million gallons/hour.”<sup>63</sup> According to the MCUA, the continued gush of sewage water coming from the residential customers who continued using their toilets, sinks and other sewage receptors, presented the main contaminations of untreated sewage to the river. In this way the authority shifts some of the blame for contamination back on to the public. Likewise the “melting snow and rain” associate the problems with natural environmental processes.

While it took MCUA 10 days to stop the sewage flow, or in their terms “eliminate” the “bypass,” fast and persistent action was an important message that the MCUA tried to convey. The authority insisted that it was acting quickly and continuously, ending most of its daily updates with the phrase “Work is continuing on a 24-hour basis.” Representatives for MCUA positioned the authority as a responder to the various problems associated with the spill, not only in repairing the pipe, but in addressing the more immediate needs of neighborhood residents and clammers.

- “Let me just say. First of all, your issue with respect to sewage at your property -- Tony, if you could please take down her address -- we’ll send somebody out there tomorrow to take a look at the rear of the property. I thought our guys took care of all those areas.” -- Richard Fitamant, March 10, 2003, Sayreville Council Meeting.
- “The clammers were saying that they had a significant problem and the DEP brought it to us,” said Tony Ciciatello, public relations representative of MCUA quoted in *Two River Times*, March 21-28, 2003

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<sup>63</sup> Notice the shift in the unit of analysis from gallons-per-day to gallons-per-hour in favor of larger numbers of sewage being treated and smaller numbers bypassing treatment. Over what period of time are these averages taken – a week, a day? If the company typically treats an average of 110 million gallons of sewage per day, as reported on its website, how do the averages for treated and bypassed sewage add up? These questions are not answered in MCUA materials.

The MCUA paid for trucks to transport uncontaminated water from southern New Jersey for the clam plant to use in its depuration process and eventually did compensate a group of clammers who were put out of work. The MCUA was working under the assumption that it should remediate particular problems caused by the spill. It was an agency that existed to clean waste, the by-product of industrial and residential activity. Its public narratives had to assert the value of a cleaned – as opposed to just clean – environment.

*Under Control/Out of Control.* The MCUA continued land-based testing and took efforts to remediate affected dry land areas by throwing down lime pellets. However, the bay and river had to cleanse themselves. “The DEP has informed us that they wanted no sort of chemicals placed in the water,” said Fitamant at the Sayreville Council meeting, emphasizing oversight by the DEP and the Middlesex County Health Department. In this narrative, the natural tidal flows rather than MCUA were charged with cleaning the bay and river waters.

The MCUA contended that repairs, remediation and public health concerns were under control. They offered timelines, with dates and hours of when repairs would be completed. They confidently argued that lime applied to the top layer of soil would eradicate any bacteria deposited on land by the spill. MCUA representatives said they did not test for the heavy metals that are often found in industrial waste because such testing would not reveal anything that they did not already know. As noted previously, Fitamant argued that MCUA knew what was contained in the sewage it treated. The authority knew what it was getting from the businesses that sent partially treated industrial waste to it. Fitamant said at the Sayreville meeting:

We have a rigorous program. ... I just want to assure you that industrial discharge is something that's under, under control. You may think that yes there is a problem with chemical and whatnot, but they are in fact regulated, highly regulated by us, the state, and also the federal government.

While the repairs and remediation were under control, the initial rupture and results were beyond the authority's control. In response to a clammer's admonition to the MCUA for dumping sewage water into the bays that they claim to be protecting, the executive director replied, "I didn't do that. I mean it's a break that occurred." At another point in the meeting he reiterated, "The MCUA – this is something that was beyond our control. We had no control over it."

Not only was the ruptured pipe out of the MCUA's control, but so was the existence of a smaller backup pipe. Regarding the authority's failure to contain the spill, the executive director said, "It's unfortunate but the rate of flow that we have, it's just physically impossible to contain two million gallons per hour." And again, he reiterated, "It's an unfortunate situation, but you know, unfortunately we were faced with no other alternatives. This is, this is a decision that was made many years ago to put in a line this size. It's unfortunate that it ruptured." In this narrative, the current MCUA had no control over the conditions that existed because of decisions made by an authority of the past.

Initially, the MCUA statements to the press suggested that a lightening strike disrupted power at the plant and caused a backup of sewage that burst the pipe. In the 16 statements regarding this issue that MCUA representatives made in press releases, news articles, and the public meeting, 10 suggested power outages and seven blamed lightening strikes, with several referring to both. By the time the public meeting rolled around, nine days after the rupture, there was no mention of lightening strikes but power fluctuations

were still discussed and the possibility of a weakened pipe was also raised. The weakened pipe would later emerge as a major factor in the rupture.

The MCUA representatives failed to accept blame for either the spill, or later for the presence of a prematurely corroded sewer main. This segment appeared in *The Star Ledger*, a major regional newspaper, July 12, 2003:

Manufactured in the 1970s by Interpace Corp., similar pipes have failed in more than a dozen locations around the country, but Middlesex County Utilities Authority officials said they were unaware of the problems. “You find out about these things once the pipe fails. We’ve never had any reason to believe there was anything wrong with it,” said Richard Fitamant, executive director of the MCUA, who has worked in the sewage industry since the 1980s. “It’s not something that people talk about on a regular basis at conferences.”

However the article notes that others in the industry said that the flawed pipes had been frequently discussed and were well known to industry members.

The MCUA’s narratives positioned the authority as efficiently, effectively and compassionately responding to and taking control of a situation for which they were not to blame. Indeed, this reflected the authority’s broader mission – to reduce the flow of pollutants, which it did not produce, into the bay where tidal flows could disperse them. When discussing the sewer spill, the MCUA was at the mercy of nature – snow melt added to the pressure on its backup line and caused more overflow into public waters, perhaps a lightening strike caused the spill in the first place, it could not do anything to clean the waters but had to simply allow that to happen naturally through the ebb and flows of daily tides.

*Regarding Clammers.* When it came to effects on the shellfish industry and commercial clamming, the MCUA said it was sympathetic, but also insisted that this was a temporary setback in the utilities authority’s long history of improving water quality in

the bay. Again, as Fitamant said at the Sayreville public meeting, “It’s because of the MCUA that you do have a livelihood in the Raritan Bay for clamming.” Compensation to the clammers was not an issue that the utilities authority broached voluntarily. During the public meeting and in press releases, the MCUA pointed to its focus on repairing the rupture and efforts to help clammers return to work. When asked at the public meeting about compensation, Fitamant said, “Right now, our main focus was to try and get the pipe up in operation, get the bypass stopped, so we can get the shellfish beds open for the baymen.” However, compensation was a main concern of baymen and the subject of several news articles.

The MCUA required careful documentation from clammers seeking compensation and gave clammers until June 16 – about three and a half months from the rupture – to file their claim. MCUA paid a total of \$265,000 to Baymen Association clammers, most of those who filed lost wages, with several requiring additional documentation. In July, after the back and forth between the Association and the Authority, MCUA paid most of the Baymen’s Association members a total of about \$400,000.

### Clammers

Commercial clammers framed the sewage spill in terms of the closure of clam beds and their lost income. Clammers also emphasized the poor timing of this sewage spill, which came on the heels of one of the worst winters in memory. The harsh weather kept clam boats docked for much longer than usual. The following quotes summarize what many clammers expressed in newspaper articles, interviews and other public

comments:

- “We had no money coming in; we couldn’t pay any bills,” Tomaszewski said. “It takes a toll. You work all summer to save up enough to get you through the winter, and just when you come back to start again, you can’t work. Most of this winter we were frozen out from all the ice in the bay, and then this hit.” (*The Burlington County Times*, July 5, 2003)
- “I don’t think many of us will get through this,” clammer Carl Bacic told the *Home News Tribune* of East Brunswick. “Another two or three weeks of this and I’m just finished. It couldn’t happen at a worse time.” (Associated Press in *The Daily Record*, March 17, 2003)
- “Last week we went out in a 14-degree wind chill, icicles hanging from the gunwales to the water, so cold we had to put the clams in saltwater to keep them from freezing,” said William Dean, a bayman. “And at the end of the day we were still laughing, we were so happy just to be working.” Mr. Welsh finished his thought, “And now this.” (*The New York Times*, March 5, 2003)

The problem with timing was compounded because clammers were unable to recover from the rough winter. However, the closure would have been bad in any March. Like clammers, the depuration plant’s and wholesale operation’s economic solvency is seasonal. “At the end of the summer I’ve got a good sum of money in the account. By March I’m running on empty,” said one plant manager I interviewed. Both Baymen’s Association businesses, J.T. White and Certified Clam, loaned money to each other, to affiliated clammers and to employees who needed help paying rent and handling other personal emergencies during the closure.

Clammers also argued that it was not just their individual incomes and industry at stake during the closure, it was an entire local economy based on the commercial harvest of clams from the bay. “This isn’t just a bunch of clammers ..... This is an industry and a business,” said a clammer quoted in *The Daily Record*, March 17, 2003. Indeed, the Highlands plant processed about 50 million clams the year before the spill. The two

plants in Highlands and Sea Bright and their associated wholesale operations were tied into retailers, other wholesale operations, and restaurants throughout the eastern United States. The Baymen's Association plant and wholesale unit were located in Highlands, whose main industries were commercial clamming and local restaurants. David Tauro, general manager of Certified Clam and a lifelong Highlands resident concerned about the effects of the spill on the small town told The Associated Press in a March 11, 2003 article, "You got 50 clammers who aren't coming here to go to work each day. They're not stopping at the places to get coffee, breakfast, and on payday, hit the local bars. It's screwing up everything around here."

Possibly worse than the immediate economic losses to the individual clammers and auxiliary businesses was the specter of a lost market share. The clammers and the wholesalers warned that an extended closure would be an opportunity for businesses in other states to grab their customers. They viewed as competition businesses in southern states that sold cheaper and purportedly lower quality aquaculture clams as well as areas just to the north in New York and Connecticut, particularly where displaced lobstermen were beginning to use motorized equipment to clam deep waters in the Long Island Sound and elsewhere. Competitors in both of these areas could offer clams at lower costs because they could harvest clams unlimited by depuration capacity. "The wholesalers in the city are waiting for us to produce and ... if we don't fill the orders, then somebody else in Connecticut will," the president of the Baymen's Association Keith Craffey told the *Asbury Park Press* in a March 7, 2003 article.

Newspaper articles noted that the price of clams was higher than usual at New York City's Fulton Street Fish Market because of the spill and preceding harsh winter,



but that the price of New Jersey clams had plummeted. Competitors had taken the spill as an opportunity to disparage New Jersey clams as unclear, and the reputation stuck for some time.<sup>64</sup> Long after the ban was lifted, one clammer told me that he overheard a customer at a clam bar call New Jersey clams “sludge clams”. This contrasts with the pre-spill perception of New Jersey clams as both better tasting than farm-raised clams and heartier in terms of having a longer shelf life than farm-raised and wild-caught clams from other areas.

*Public Presence and Public Education.* Clammers took the opportunity of the Sayreville council meeting to educate the public about their situation and to open dialogue with the MCUA. The Mayor of Sayreville presiding over the meeting tried to curtail the expression of concerns over damages to the bay and the baymen’s dilemma, prioritizing the land-based concerns of Sayreville residents. One of the clammers in attendance lived in Sayreville and prefaced his public statement about the spill and its effects on clamming by asserting his residency. He told others after the meeting he did so, so that the mayor could not “shut me down”.

Clammers rallied at the Sayreville Council meeting held March 10, more than a week after the initial rupture and a day before the sewage flow ceased. Close to 20 clammers, some with wives or girlfriends joining them, stood in the back of the council chambers. Of the 10 people who formally addressed the gathered council and audience regarding the sewage spill, four were commercial clammers who all worked with the J.T. White plant in Highlands.

Clammers blamed the MCUA directly for their lost income. During the public

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<sup>64</sup> By summer 2004, the general manager of Certified Clams reported that business was again good, and he was selling all the clams that they could process.

meeting, the Sayreville clammer said,

Right now, you're putting me outta work, because I am a commercial clammer. And for everyday I lose, I get no money. And who's gonna buy my house when it goes into foreclosure? What am I gonna tell my kids because we don't have the money to be able to live here? You got an answer for that?

Clammers wanted to know the cause of the spill and why the contingency plan polluted the waters so badly. At the Council meeting, one baymen asked,

"Why is this being dumped into the river and not into some kind of berm pool or tanks? Why does it have to go in the river and kill everybody's livelihood?"

Clammers and others in the industry attempted a conciliatory stance at times, nodding their heads and saying "I understand. I understand" when MCUA representatives referred to the rupture as an accident. Regardless of who was to blame for the actual cause of the spill, the clammers wanted to make sure MCUA took the blame for their lost income. Here is the MCUA executive director's earlier assertion of the accidental nature of the spill in context, in a public exchange with a clammer at the Sayreville Council meeting:

Clammer: The river should not be, well, since you say you're the one who cleaned up the river, it should not be a dumping ground for you to be able to pollute it again like you did this time.

MCUA: I didn't do that. I mean it's a break that occurred.

Clammer: Well, you got four hundred and forty million gallons of raw sewage dumped into the river and you're just wiping your hands of it.

While the MCUA considered the break an accident, the clammers, along with environmentalists, considered it a result of neglect.

Clammers also used the public forum, along with comments to the media and an energetic letter-writing and telephone campaign to elected officials, to make sure that word spread about the closed waters and the problems the closures meant for them. It was

particularly important to remind the public that just because the “bypass” was being eliminated the next day, as the MCUA emphasized during the meeting, the ecological damage and economic problems were far from over. Tauro emphasized the loss of work and promised activism on the part of commercial clammers until the situation was resolved.

I think that everybody should know the truth.... We're not gonna be back to work for eleven tides. You may think so, I don't think so. Maybe we'll be stuck in a little part of the bay somewhere [a small scale opening]. But, we don't want to be forgotten about and we'll be at every meeting from now on, until both [Sandy Hook and Raritan] bays are open. That's all I got to say.

It ended up being a total of six weeks before both bays were cleared for clamming, about 84 pairs of (high and low) tides.

Clammers were ambivalent about clean-water environmental groups who spoke out during the sewage spill crisis, even those who tried to align themselves with clammers in their statements to the press and in interviews. Clammers understood that environmental organizations had much to do with higher standards and cleaner water in the bays, and they were aware that public outrage at the sewage spill that contributed to their cause of getting compensation. However, they remained wary of such groups. They did not want the presence of increased amounts of heavy metals in the bay to become an issue because their depuration process did not rid clams of those contaminants. They did not want such publicity to increase public concern over consumption of bay clams. Also, there was a sense among clammers that the environmentalists had ulterior motives when they invoked the plight of the clammers. Indeed some statements from environmental organizations suggested that they viewed the sewage spill as a vehicle for publicizing

their own agendas<sup>65</sup>, such as long-standing criticism of the MCUA and broader issues of natural resources damages and the public trust doctrine.

*Location issues: New beds versus old.* In addition to the timing issues, clambers tried to educate the public on the importance of location in commercial clamming. The general public tended to view the bays as undifferentiated bodies of water, space that made possible expansive views and ferry rides to New York City. For clambers, the bays were distinct places that encompassed other smaller areas of significance, such as places where “clams were thick” or where they were thin, different types of bottoms that made digging easier or more difficult. The Raritan Bay is by far the most productive location for commercial clamming in the area, superior to the Sandy Hook Bay, which reopened after four weeks of closures, and superior to the Manasquan River, south of the contamination. The DEP opened the Manasquan temporarily in a largely unsuccessful effort to get clambers back to work. Under state supervision, J.T. White employees trucked clams that baymen dug from the Manasquan River up to the Highlands plant for depuration. Finding water in which to depurate the clams was another matter. MCUA provided a truck, which plant employees drove down south, filled with 5,000 pounds of water and brought back to the plant twice a day every other day until the plant could again use local water for the purification process. The truck was a big deal because it would have cost the baymen thousands of dollars to rent and the businesses were totally broke at the time. They would not have been able to take advantage of the opened Manasquan at all had the MCUA not provided the truck.

The MCUA and DEP hoped that these measures would appease clambers while

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<sup>65</sup> Of course it can be strongly argued that the agendas of environmental organizations represent the interests of a broader public.

the tidal flows cleansed bay waters. However, the newly and temporarily opened waters were much less productive than the Raritan Bay<sup>66</sup> and were difficult to access for many clammers whose boats were docked in Highlands, much farther north. Clammers argued that the Manasquan produced so few clams that the extra cost and effort were hardly worthwhile. “ ‘I’ve already heard some of the guys are disappointed; they didn’t find many clams,’ ... said Frank Brooks of Brooks Seafood in Sea Bright” (*Asbury Park Press*, March 18, 2003). The Highlands plant manager called the situation “double the work, double the aggravation and no extra pay” (*Asbury Park Press* April 18, 2003). Opening the Manasquan did allow several clammers to continue working, although they were not able to produce as much with their effort as they could in the plentiful Raritan Bay. Manasquan produced so few clams that the Highlands plant was working at about 10 percent of its capacity when the Sandy Hook Bay reopened after four weeks of complete closure.

A local news station covered the opening of Sandy Hook Bay on April 5. Only about a dozen clammers launched their boats on this miserably cold day but a local news crew made its way to the J.T. White plant in Highlands to cover the reopening. One of the plant workers blinked into the light of a news crew’s camera and said it was good to get back to work because he had been living on his savings. The reporter and cameraman then went to the end of the dock and met a commercial clammer delivering the day’s catch, an old salt getting in at about 3:40 p.m., 20 minutes before he would have been ticketed for bringing clams in past 4 p.m.

Squatting on the dock and leaning down toward the clammer whose boat was low

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<sup>66</sup> Clammers and others pointed out that it was not unusual for a newly opened bed to produce few clams. They said because clam rakes churned the soil during harvest they actually improved conditions of the beds and increased the numbers and quality of clams in places that were worked regularly.

in the water, the television reporter asked what it felt like to go back to work. “Oh god, I thought I did something wrong,” the clammer said to all of the attention. About 10 people stood at the end of the dock watching the report. The clammer, standing in his boat and looking up at the reporter, said “It was a tough day today” but he has “a lot of kids” that he needs to support so he had to go work. “I got the sheriff after me,” he said. He was behind in bills. “We had a rough winter. It hasn’t been good.” <sup>67</sup>

Finally, six weeks following the initial closure, the Raritan Bay reopened for commercial clamming on April 18.

Keith Craffey, the president of Baymen’s Protective Association, said he looked forward to the reopening of the Raritan and Sandy Hook bays. “These are the most productive shell beds in our area,” Craffey said. “This brings everything to an end, and I’m very pleased that we can start working again.” *Asbury Park Press*, April 18, 2003

It was not quite “everything” because some small areas from which direct sales of clams to the public was still allowed remained closed. A few clammers still worked in these less restricted, or “open” waters. One Baymen’s Association member’s concern was picked up by a local newspaper. “Dean is one of several clammers who still want to pursue open-water claims, losses based on the failure of the state DEP to reopen waters from the tip of Rocky Point to the Oceanic Bridge” (*Asbury Park Press* July 1, 2003). Many who comprised another loosely organized group of clammers called the Sandy Hook Bay Alliance also harvested in these open waters, which required little government oversight. These clammers kept few records that were deemed acceptable for compensation claims and delivered their catches directly to local restaurants and other customers rather than to

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<sup>67</sup> A law enforcement officer stood watch at the J.T. White plant on opening day and actually arrested a man for not paying his child support. Under the Child Support Program Improvement Act, N.J.S.A. 2A: 17-56.7a. et seq., people applying for a hunting, fishing or shellfishing license were required to complete a Child Support Certification Form.

a central location such as the depuration plant.

*Compensation.* After the reopening of the Raritan Bay, compensation became the news story. Two sets of clambers sought compensation from the MCUA as a result of the sewage spill: the Highlands Baymen's Association and the Sandy Hook Bay Alliance. The Baymen's Association members, who worked waters that required additional purification of harvested clams and were carefully monitored by state regulators, were compensated; the other group was not. The Baymen's Association submitted documentation that demonstrated each clammer's wages for the last three years from March 3-April 18, the days the main clamming beds were closed. Many open waters clambers had no such documentation. Also the Sandy Hook Bay Alliance membership was more diffuse with no central geographic or business ties.

One Baymen's Association clammer who participated in the compensation negotiations said establishing their right to compensation was simple. He said in an interview with me at his home, "[W]hat it came back to was, they made a mistake. They dumped a lot of sewage. They flooded that town. They took our job away – no backup system."<sup>68</sup>

The Sandy Hook Bay Alliance, advised by an environmental organization and a lawyer it recommended, sought Natural Resource Damages, a legal argument steeped in the Public Trust Doctrine that calls for polluters who damage natural resources to compensate citizens for their loss of use or benefit from that resource.<sup>69</sup> They had

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<sup>68</sup> Baymen involved in the negotiations said the MCUA seemed to be working well with them, but some not involved felt the utilities authority should have paid the clambers their compensation more quickly and the documentation requirements left too little flexibility for special cases.

<sup>69</sup> The state of New Jersey recently launched a wave of law suits that promises to be the first of many demanding polluters to clean up and compensate residents for environmental damages (press release NJ DEP May 2004).

received nothing as of August 2004. The MCUA only said additional information was required regarding those claims and did not discuss the basis of the claim. The issue of environmental resource damages did not surface in the newspaper accounts of the other group of clammers, nor did anyone from that group speak at the Sayreville public meeting.

I asked one clammer from the Sandy Hook Bay Alliance about Natural Resources Damages (NRD) law and if that ever came up in discussions with their lawyer. He replied, “Everybody’s laughing at it now,” and went on to talk about needing to fight battles when you want to fight them and not when or how someone else wants you to. Although he did not come out and say it, he seemed to be arguing that his organization allowed the environmental group that recommended their lawyer to co-opt their position in this disaster as a way to test NRD law. In the process they lost their opportunity for compensation. He did say that they were discouraged by the environmental organization and by DEP representatives from discussing their case directly with the MCUA. Conversely, the Baymen’s Association representatives joined their lawyer in meetings with MCUA representatives. The Sandy Hook Bay Alliance member said the group would have been better off filing their own compensation request with the MCUA rather than depending on their lawyer, the environmental group, and the DEP. Indeed the relationship between this group of clammers and the environmental organization that recommended this lawyer had become strained. “We let [the organization’s leader] and the DEP defend us against MCUA and we came up with nothing,” he said.

The Sandy Hook Bay Alliance’s lawyer (with whom the group had a falling out) would not respond to my queries. “We don’t want him. We don’t want anything to do



with him,” the clammer said of the group’s former lawyer. He added that to entice them the lawyer rented out the American Legion hall in Highlands and bought all the clammers drinks, rolled up his sleeves and promised them that his past experience working at the DEP would situate them well for a large settlement. “He promised us multiples of our claim,” said the clammer. Newspapers quoted the lawyer as seeking \$750,000 on behalf of this second group of 50 clammers.

A Baymen’s Association representative I interviewed referred, unsolicited, to the rumors of NRD claims in an interview.

We’re not asking for, you know, because you did this, ... the bay was hurt and maybe some flounder died and we need a hundred grand each. No. We lost our job. We want our job back. We want our money. We can substantiate what we lost.

Most of the Baymen’s Association clammers were eventually compensated 90 percent of their individual incomes for that six weeks’ of closure, based on an average of that period’s income over the three preceding years. It amounted to between about \$1,000 and \$17,000 each. The remaining 10 percent was subtracted for “costs not incurred,” such as gasoline and wear on equipment. One clammer involved in the negotiations with MCUA said the Baymen’s Association was making “a realistic case and a realistic claim” that would go through quickly, of particular importance to the working baymen. The quick compensation that was so important to the baymen stymied discussion of the larger public trust issues at play.

In addition to payment of lost wages, the Baymen’s Association retained the right to seek compensation if algae blooms that summer closed the bays again. They also asked that the MCUA improve its contingency plan so that in an emergency the authority would contain sewage rather than dumping it into the bay. One clammer said in an interview

with me,

[MCUA] said ... they would work ... vigorously on their backup system, which, I mean, that could just be public relations. I don't really know. To this day [December 2003] I don't know what they did or if they have backup plans. But supposedly they're going to attempt it.

The problem of an inadequate backup system surfaced again when a regional electrical grid blackout in August 2003 shut down two New York City sewage treatment plants and a pumping station, which had no backup generator. The sewage flowing from those facilities closed the Raritan Bay for three weeks and Sandy Hook Bay, which is about half as productive, for three days. One bayman sent a *New York Times* article to the Association's lawyer. In an interview, he told me,

I e-mailed this to [our lawyer]... because here it was right in the *New York Times* front page [of the metro section], .... It said, the sewage, it's a lingering problem and they basically admitted to guilt, ... They basically admitted that they don't have a backup plan and they should.... Would a hospital not have a backup plan? No. They not gonna let their people on life support die. So, why is this any different?

The clammer suggested that compensation from New York would be tougher and take longer than New Jersey because they would not be subject to the political and social pressure from New Jersey clammers and their supporters that the New Jersey authority was. He said their lawyer told them not to expect compensation from the New York utilities authority for up to a year. The clammer said he was convinced New York would eventually compensate them.

I'm sure it will end up in the news if we go to court with them now, so they're just gonna pay us because it's gonna be bad publicity again and, ah, with the environmental movement across America, and with the Sayreville sewer authority paying, so they'd be like, 'Go pay those goofballs. What's your problem?' And it's even, the claim's a little less.

In both the New York and New Jersey spills, commercial clammers positioned

themselves as a small ragtag group against a giant organization. The clammer remarked on the social and political pressure put to the MCUA by the general public. “ ‘You have to pay those guys, those clammers down in Highlands. They don’t have much....You took their job away.’ So, ... it’s like [MCUA is] a Goliath.” Perhaps without realizing it, the Highlands Baymen’s Association clammers drew on an ideology of their common property rights to use the bay as a part of the coastal public trust. They asserted their right to work, and by raising the issue of differently productive parts of the bay, they asserted their right to work well, to have access to higher quality clam beds. They asserted these rights in public forums as a means to affect public opinion and pressure power holders.

### *Public Pressure*

The commercial clammers and environmentalists both asserted ideologies through their narratives regarding the spill in order to influence power holders, the DEP and MCUA, and affect material change. Clammers and environmentalists applied political and social pressure to secure compensation for themselves and punitive fines and more stringent operating procedures for the MCUA. Clammers played on their group’s collective public image as hardworking and poorly paid men of the bay. As fishers elsewhere (Griffith and Valdés Pizzini 2002, McCay 1984), the position of these baymen in the working class was central to their interactions with the state. They showed up at the public meeting in work clothes. The wolf was at the door in their statements to the press. Houses were in danger of foreclosure. Meager savings dwindled, particularly because of the preceding harsh winter. Children needed shoes.

Clammers’ families also became involved in sending out this message. Children

wrote letters to elected officials relaying their concerns about their fathers being out of work. Although they did not send out press releases, individuals felt free to contact the local newspapers and offer interviews. One Baymen's Association member handed out phone numbers of elected officials to clambers and their family members whenever he saw them. During an interview, he said,

I mean I was talking to every press, anybody that would listen we were trying to get a hold of because we wanted everybody to know what they were doing to us. The more people that knew, the more pressure was put on them. We had our wives calling the governor's office. They [elected officials] were getting two or three hundred phone calls a day.

Environmentalists wrote newspaper editorials and letters to the editor. They distributed press releases and hosted press conferences. They spoke at public meetings and challenged the scientific merit of MCUA's testing and the authenticity of its concern for environmental protection.

This pressure and media exposure resulted in compensation to clambers and state-imposed penalties to MCUA. Additionally, it became clear that the MCUA's contingency plan of dumping raw sewage into the river even on "an emergency basis" was unacceptable. As I left the field, efforts were underway to ensure MCUA developed a backup plan that kept sewage flow better contained.

### *Implications of Sewage Spill and Its Aftermath*

In some ways how the Public Trust Doctrine emerged in the U.S. actually reduced the power of commoners to control the resources upon which they depended for a livelihood (McCay 1998). The shift toward public trust as free rights for all to use and abuse weakened the position of commoners who actually made their livings from the

tidal lands and waters. They were no longer considered property owners of any sort, which eliminated any legal control over the once commonly held resource. As common resources became the property of all citizens, they lost the protections that the social control of commoners might have at one time exerted.<sup>70</sup> The “negative externalities”<sup>71</sup> foisted upon the bay by residential and industrial development in central New Jersey for many decades reveal the bay’s *res nullius*, open-access, status. The clambers’ and environmentalists’ arguments for compensation and punitive fines, as well as demands for improvements to the utility authority’s procedures, can be considered to be protests against this loss of common rights. Compensation, fines, and an improved backup system are evidence of the beginnings of a resurrection of such rights, as well as a shift in conceptualizations of the bay.

The event of the sewage spill offered a good example of how ideologies and social relations are mutually constitutive. I consider the Public Trust Doctrine to be a common property ideology in which the public, as sovereign, owns coastal resources which are held in trust by their elected representatives in government. Each group discussed in this chapter invoked common property rights to the bays as afforded by the Public Trust Doctrine: clambers in their demand for compensation and the right to work, environmentalists in their call for public access, and even the utilities authority in its claim to making the bays safe for clamming but also tacitly in its acknowledgement that

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<sup>70</sup> The situation reflects the “Tragedy of the Commons” described by Hardin (1968), though others have successfully challenged Hardin’s use of the term commons (McCay and Acheson 1987; Acheson 1988; Fortmann and Bruce 1988; Feeny, et al. 1990; Ostrom 1990; Rose 1994; Hunt and Gilman 1998; McCay and Jentoft 1998; McCay 1998; McCay 2000). A central point in the counter to Hardin’s argument is that the situation he describes is one of open access rather than common property.

<sup>71</sup> Economists and others use this term to describe negative impacts that are outside an economic transaction, where the cost for a negative impact is not paid by the producer or the immediate consumer of that impact but by a third party, e.g. “when a company pollutes the environment, it may enjoy efficient production yet society is faced with the cost of the pollution” (Bothamley 1993: 191).

sewage dumping must go on, another public use. As a state agency the DEP was most explicitly and formally steward of the bay. The DEP's focus on public health largely had to do with concerns over consumption of clams harvested in the contaminated area. Yet its assurance that clambers would be compensated either by them or by the MCUA suggested a belief in the clambers' common property rights as well.

How did these different invocations of the Public Trust Doctrine constitute the social relations of these groups and how did these social relations, in turn, constitute the ideology of the Public Trust Doctrine and common property rights to the coastal resources of the bays? The different groups positioned themselves to each other and the bay as they framed persuasive stories regarding the bay and the sewage spill, and as the presence and stories of one group influenced the rhetoric of another.

Through news media and public gatherings, the sewage spill gave particular environmental organizations a platform for relaying the Public Trust Doctrine to a general audience, as they tried to get the citizens of New Jersey to engage as owners and protectors of the bays and to conceptualize the bay waters as a personal and collective resource. While the commercial clambers did not refer to the Public Trust Doctrine, they did position themselves as commoners actively using the resource in a productive and sustainable way, in opposition to the MCUA which, they and environmentalists argued, used the waters in a destructive manner. Both commercial clambers and environmentalists pointed not only to the event of the sewage spill and MCUA's inadequate backup system but also to the sewage outflow pipe that contaminated clams around it so much as a matter of course that they could not be harvested.

In the environmentalist narratives regarding the sewage spill, the utilities

authority's customers were in no way considered "the public" though the burgeoning residential population in the metropolitan area certainly required means to dispose of its sewage. During the Sayreville Council meeting, a clammer suggested limiting population growth as a means to mediate sewage crises in the future, to some applause from the audience and some annoyance from the town mayor.

Clammer: Right. I'm just trying to make sure that we have a plant that's built to do the job, because you know, I know this state's been expanding over the last twenty years and if we keep building more and more homes and more and more dwellings ---

[loud applause from audience]

I don't know if it's outdated but if it, if there's a point where you have to go to the federal government or if people, if towns have to stop building homes that produce sewage....

Mayor: I'm, I'm gonna have to cut this short because we're here to deal with the residents.

The sewage spill demonstrates the links between population growth in the consumption-oriented landscape of suburban development and productive activities such as commercial clamming.

Participation in the public meeting was a "fundamental social act" (Haugerud 1995: 100) signifying membership in a social order, in this case as community members seeking restitution in a forum of local government. Clammers equated themselves with property owners but set themselves apart through their dress and by lining the back of the room and not sitting in the audience largely made up of Sayreville residents attending their town council meeting. In this the clammers were positioning themselves as citizens who deserve the attention of government and its agents. This event was an unusual occurrence and the interpretation of non-transparent talk was clearly important in this

setting as in others (see Haugerud 1995), but the opportunity for participants to learn the semiotics that would help in those interpretations was limited. This seemed to be a one-shot deal, but then months later another sewage spill occurred because of blackouts in New York City. This one closed clam beds for a shorter period of time, but then the clammers focused immediately on the New York authority's lack of a "backup system" in their calls for compensation.

Which publics did the groups discussed in this chapter represent, or claim to represent? The MCUA claimed to represent the residents of central New Jersey by providing safe and clean sewage services and a cleaner bay that allows for commercial clamming and other activities. In its narrative, the MCUA claimed to balance the needs of development with environmental protection. The DEP claimed to represent consumers of bay clams by closing the bays to clam harvest and in doing so keeping contaminated clams out of the market. It also claimed to represent the concerns of the clammers by ensuring the safety of their product and by performing careful and expedited tests to determine when the bays could reopen. Environmentalists claimed to represent the general public in its interest for increased access to clean waters. They also claimed to represent the clammers to a degree in their interest for access to uncontaminated clam beds. Clammers represented themselves and their interests in use of the bay and compensation for the loss of that use.

As it turned out, the public directly benefiting from public trust construal of the bay were commercial clammers who presented clear loss of income. The commercial clammers who worked in less restricted waters without detailed documentation of their catches did not benefit. While the lawyer for the Highlands Baymen's Association did not



explicitly invoke the Public Trust Doctrine, I suggest that the ideology of the bay held in public trust underlies assumptions that clammers should be compensated for their lost opportunity to work. He presented an argument based on clammers owning state licenses to clam and being unable to act on those licenses. As documents of the state, those licenses should be viewed as permission granted from the trustee back to the public to access this common property. The license to clam cost \$50, but was that cost the basis for the access to public waters that the license bestows? Clam licenses were available to everyone, even people who did not live in New Jersey. Selling clams was another matter.

In practice the capacity for depuration of clams was limited, thus there was a limited market in which clammers were able to sell. The pollution of the bay limited the public access to bay clams by requiring depuration before human consumption. As environmental groups pointed out, this limitation was an infringement on the public trust rights inherent in the Public Trust Doctrine. However this limitation also discouraged unsustainable harvesting practices that plagued shellfisheries generations earlier. One wonders how the state's practice would be influenced by an increase in depuration capacity or the elimination of the need for depuration. Would the state embrace its role as trustee of these waters, and which of the numerous publics would benefit from any shift in regulations and economy?

### *Framing Persuasive Stories*

The sewage spill was an event, but by itself was only something physical. The MCUA, DEP, environmentalist, and commercial clammers gave meaning to the event. It was through narratives, which these actors produced, that such meanings were conveyed,

confronted and shifted. The interaction of these meanings and the actors who produced them affected the physical reality of the events that followed the sewage spill.

One commercial clammer among those who were not compensated told me angrily in an interview at Bahrs, a local restaurant and bar:

We shouldn't have to sue them. We shouldn'ta had to hire this guy [the lawyer] to get our money. This is bullshit. You think that people who got their cellars full of sewers, their houses flooded and shit. Do you think they have to wait for their settlement? They didn't even know we exist. How can they get away -- how can they get away with still dumping the treated sewerage in the bay when they weren't supposed to do it since 1992? Right or wrong? And the market, the market is doing a lot worse than it was. You talk to [owner] Jay in here, and he'll tell you. People won't even eat clams.

The frustrations expressed above encompass multiple facets of the clammers' narrative, including damage to the clam market and full blame to MCUA for outdated operating and backup systems. Most interesting, however, is the perceived contrast between treatment of property owners – people with land, cellars and houses – versus the commercial clammers with no private property claim but instead with a user's claim to common property, endorsed by individual licenses and a public trust construal of the bay. The clammers' presence at the Sayreville council meeting not only served as a public forum for publicizing their situation, but also linked the clammers with other property owners, the Sayreville residents, whose homes, cellars, cars, backyards and public playgrounds were damaged by the flood of sewage.

As the clammers framed their plight in comparison to that of the more readily accepted land-based property owners, environmentalists often used the plight of commercial clammers to frame their arguments about access to the bay. Without alignment with clearly verifiable economic claims, the Public Trust Doctrine alone offered too weak an argument – or perhaps too unfamiliar an argument – to persuade

action in this case. Common property notions embedded in the doctrine supported the case of reimbursement to commercial clammers and to changes in MCUA's operating procedures. However, the Natural Resources Damages claims advanced by one group of clammers were not granted, and environmentalists advocating for changes to the MCUA enlisted clammers and their economic hardship as a stand-in for the "public," suggesting that they too believed the Public Trust Doctrine on its own would be inadequate to move MCUA and DEP to action.

The narratives surrounding the sewage spill most directly contributed to the construction of "the bay" – meaning the Raritan and Sandy Hook bays through which the plume of sewage so vividly advanced in computer models produced by the DEP. Like a view, the plume of sewage originated from a single point – the rupture or the mouth of the river, akin to an individual positioned at a vantage point on land. As such, it mirrored the point-cone geometry of a view, expanding out from the origination point, though the sewage expanded along tidal flows and water currents. This "sewage-shed" is the opposite of a view-shed in that the aesthetics involved in valuing and constructing views and constructing Highlands as a place of "good" views deny the value of labor and make clammers and their work invisible. The predominance of the view-shed obscures other values of the bay and the land from which views, sewage, and clammers originate. The sewage-shed foregrounds the labor of commercial clamming by illuminating its constraint.

With the sewage spill and accompanying visual and narrative accounts of it, commercial clammers asserted their own values of the bay, the land-base of their operations (Highlands), and their labor. For commercial clammers, the sewage spill and

its aftermath allowed them to reassert their presence on the changing landscape and “bay-scape” of Highlands. Their identities as commercial fishermen with rights to compensation for loss of access to the fruits of the bays became contributed to the construction of place in Highlands.

The bay was described as valuable – both economically and environmentally – not something to be used as a dumping ground. The MCUA concurred, arguing that its actions had actually cleaned up the bay from earlier municipal polluters. These various notions of the bay, of course, have a longer history than the few months the sewage spill was publicly discussed. The narratives both drew on and expanded popular notions of the bay as an environmental resource.<sup>72</sup> The presence of the clammers brought in an economic dimension that fell on the side of the bay as a resource, as opposed to the opposite economic argument that would have positioned the bay as a dumping ground to facilitate residential and industrial development on land. The presence of the clammers and environmentalists in the public debate forced the MCUA to shape its narratives a certain way. The environmental and economic narratives advanced by the clammers and environmentalists demanded, and indeed preceded, better emergency plans and backup systems to keep untreated sewage from contaminating the bay. Such contamination, even in an “emergency,” was deemed unacceptable.

In this way, the ideologies as conveyed through narratives were mutually constitutive with social relations and material conditions. The persuasive narratives of the commercial clammers as hardworking men of the bay and the underlying public trust ideology lent power to commercial clammers and environmentalists in their negotiations

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<sup>72</sup> At a press conference held by the environmental organizations, reporters asked about the safety of swimming in the bay when the weather warmed. Environmentalists about potential problems, but there were never any official closures or warnings. I did not see the issue raised again.

with MCUA and DEP for compensation and more restricted sewerage operating procedures. The material conditions included, among others, the contaminated water, the preceding harsh winter, and resultant economic strain to the industry and individual clammers. These material conditions also accompanied social relations that existed prior to or because of the spill between the various groups discussed in this chapter: the long-standing history between the DEP and MCUA, the newly formed relationship between MCUA and commercial clammers, the tenuous relationships between environmental organizations and commercial clammers, the history of antagonism between environmentalists and MCUA. These social relations and material conditions both influenced and were affected by the spill and by the narratives that followed. In this way, too, the narratives advanced by the DEP, MCUA, environmentalists and commercial clammers contributed to place-making by creating a notion of the bays – what they were, what the spill made them, and what they could or should become.

The MCUA tried to draw out the notion of the bay as polluted in past decades and cleaned by the authority to its current condition – not withstanding the spill. Environmental groups even before the spill were trying to get people to think of the bay as an environmental resource that could rebound (and had) from myriad contaminations. A few groups in particular had been working against the notion that the waters surrounding New York were a lost cause. They wanted to make people consider the bays as a resource being reclaimed and becoming more and more accessible for many different uses by citizens of New Jersey. Environmentalists were emphasizing a more positive relationship between suburbanization and the coastal environment, one in which growing numbers of residents value the bay for highlight the resilience of the bay waters in the

face of continuing hazards, which at least a couple of environmentalists believed would help the general public see that an environmentally vibrant bay was possible. The DEP preferred to focus attention on fixing the problem, rather than on the cause of the problem, which would have led to some discussion of that organization's culpability in the spill. After all, the DEP was fully aware of and implicitly endorsed the existing operations of the MCUA. So just how culpable is the DEP in this story? The DEP had made unsuccessful attempts to reign in the MCUA's practices. It is not clear how hard the department tried, but it may be that the backup system was simply anachronistic.

I suggest that the notion of the backup system that allowed sewage to flow into the bay resulted from the lingering transition of the conceptualization of the bay as a resource for dumping wastes to an environmental resource for different purposes, specifically in this case commercial seafood harvest. In response to a question about why its backup system released so much sewage into the water, the MCUA executive director noted that years ago the authority was allowed to dump directly into the water. So, it follows, when the backup pipe was installed 25 years ago (according to the executive director during the public meeting), it seemed just fine for it to release sewage into the water on an emergency basis. When the MCUA elected to use a smaller backup pipe, it was in the context that the bay could be sacrificed when necessary, perhaps for the sake of lower utility rates represented by the smaller capital investment in the smaller pipe. What the narratives described in this chapter show is that the idea has since evolved to oppose such sacrifice. The narratives produced in the aftermath of this sewage spill evinced a new conceptualization of proper stewardship of the bay, one in which the release of sewage into public waters, even on an emergency basis, was not acceptable.

Decisions made decades earlier, such as the MCUA's decision to install a smaller pipe, and decisions made more recently, such as the DEP's series of extensions to and exceptions for the MCUA, occurred at an earlier stage in the evolution of thinking about the bays. I am not suggesting that the sewage spill and attendant narratives alone caused this shift, or even that the shift is solid or complete. However I am suggesting that the sewage spill and the narratives that followed reignited a transformation in what the bays meant and how they were used. In the place-making of the bay, this shift from "public toilet" to "public trust" had been a long time coming.

## **Chapter 8**

### **Conclusion**

This ethnography has shown how Highlands' coastal setting contributed to the emergence of a unique form that combined elements of gentrification and suburbanization in a process of coastal gentrification. This form I have called a waterfront suburb. In this research, I further suburbanization and gentrification studies by examining in one geographic locale the overlap and contrasts between those two analytical categories. This advances a recent call to critique the dichotomization of city and suburb (McDonogh 2006). In developing the concept of waterfront suburb, I suggest that aspects of both gentrification and suburbanization are in play with the construction of this place as a summer getaway for year-round living as a distinguishing facet. This aspect of what I saw in Highlands could also occur in any number of geographic settings that are inland. The process of coastal gentrification is further distinguished by the marine locale at which it occurs. Property rights regarding common pool resources may be more salient than in other areas. Indeed, gentrifying coastal areas are different than inland areas because the water that defines them is useful to so many different groups of people for so many different purposes. By examining how participants in the place-making of Highlands engage the coastal and marine environments in their actions and their rhetoric, this work expands the relatively young body of literature on coastal gentrification (Hall-Arber, et al. 2001).

As comfortable catamaran ferries sped commuters to and from Manhattan for



both work and play from three docks throughout the tiny borough, this connection between New York City and Highlands oriented Highlands toward upper-class preferences. In some ways, the ferries had turned Highlands into a parking lot for the hundreds of commuters a day who drove from their homes in the hillside or waterfront of the borough, but largely from other towns in the vicinity. In other respects the commuter ferries had increased the value of the borough as a waterfront residence with a vacation-home feel within reach of the city. Highlands was part of an emerging marine landscape that encompassed suburb and city.

The commuter ferries facilitated a suburbanization of Highlands relative to New York City. While the transportation innovation helped create Highlands and other Bayshore communities as suburban space, the way people talked about and engaged each other and the borough's bucolic setting helped to create Highlands as a distinctive place. Gentrification stories about conflict between commercial fishermen and newcomer neighbors occurred long before the current wave of gentrification generated by the new-style commuter ferries and, along with other ethnographic data, suggest that gentrification has been an old and erratic process in Highlands.

In addition to the presence of commuter ferries in the borough, popular waterfront restaurants – one in particular that offered docking space to drinkers and diners who boated to it – advanced the sense of Highlands as a place for leisure that was quite separate from middle and upper-class work. The general push of business development in Highlands had been toward providing leisure-oriented and consumer services for upper-middleclass residents or commuters -- a small spa, restaurants, the suggestion for a dry cleaner service with pick-up and drop-off at the commuter ferries.

As this had been occurring, a reviving clamming industry brought opportunities to commercial fishermen, particularly clammers, many of whom lived outside the borough but docked their boats and dropped their catches at the borough's depuration plant. However, other forms of commercial fishing were nearly extinct. Even the more low-brow "party boat" form of recreational fishing had given way to more expensive forms including charter boats and individually owned pricey watercraft for boating and fishing recreation. The working-class informants I interviewed described the sense that the ferries had undone their Highlands by turning it into a transit hub rather than a community. They talked about the commuters just driving to and from the ferry docks without much care for the safety or convenience of residents and without stopping at local businesses. Clammers compared their contribution to the borough favorably against that of "the commuters."

Most people who opposed the commuter ferries did so because of material effects such as traffic hassles, but also because the ferries represented a significant change in the borough that failed to incorporate them. They did not take the ferry into Manhattan. They did not appreciate the increased property values mostly because they did not own homes and paid increased rent or because they had lived in Highlands all their lives and did not intend to relocate, but were stressed by increasing property taxes. They did not appreciate the variety of new businesses in the borough, because in large part, those businesses did not cater to their needs, income levels, or tastes.

Others, who I considered to be gentrifiers and middle or upper class residents, highly valued the commuter ferries. Some who lived or worked in the waterfront section acknowledged parking problems the ferry traffic causes but did consider the service to

benefit themselves personally or the borough in general. They told stories about change that described the borough's recent past as difficult and violent in opposition to a more peaceful and profitable future. They harkened back to an earlier history of Highlands as a thriving summer resort to support either their economic development or personal preferences, or both. The opportunity for access to New York City delighted these story tellers either because of their own convenience or for what they perceived that access meant for the borough's transformation.

This dissertation has revealed and examined some of the social, cultural, economic and governmental processes involved in creating the place of Highlands as an emerging waterfront suburb. This work has documented particular ways in which consumption habits and preferences are a part of place-making. I viewed actors in terms of an occupation-based class and the extent to which their preferences were class-based. Along with the socio-economic indicators of gentrification and suburbanization, in particular, this dissertation examined how the stories people told and the experiences they shared made spaces into places and shaped their own identities in terms of how they fit into the changing borough. These stories revealed ideologies about development, property, and the environment that were deployed by a variety of different kinds of residents and business owners, real estate agents living and working in the borough, by commercial fishermen or clammers who either lived in or commuted to Highlands for work, agencies of state and local government, and locally based environmentalists.

I argue that the daily commuters in Highlands are a new group, different from the long history of higher-class hillside and summer colony residents. Their presence creates new social relationships in the borough, new kinds of experiences, practices, values and

meanings. Gentrifiers may or may not be commuters, but they are invested in the changes brought by this emergence. As Chapter 6 suggests, they in some ways are a subordinate class in low-lying Highlands, opposed to the residual working-class dominance still relevant in borough social relations, politics, and economic development endeavors. In Highlands at the time of my research, “dominance” (as posited by Williams 1977) was held by the local ideology of transition. Gentrifiers delighted in many of the borough’s changes, non-gentrifiers opposed many of them. Most agreed that the borough was in flux and change was its dominant feature.

Competing ideologies are a part of place-making. In this study of an American coastal town, it is not surprising that I found a political and economic system in which “value” and hence meaning is manifested in real estate terms. However, I also found attempts to express alternative values for the environment by many informant place-makers. I suggest here that these values and their expression reflect ideologies.

Chapter 6 about waterfront views as a vector of place-making showed that identifying Highlands as either a suburb or a gentrifying extension of the city runs counter to the way many newcomers identified the borough as their residence. For them, it was important that Highlands be neither suburb nor gentrifying neighborhood because they saw themselves as living in a summer getaway, a small resort community that had become their year-round retreat. I argue that the summer getaway feel is a major component of a waterfront suburb in which views play a large role.

However for commuters, their views of Manhattan revealed the entire spatial practice of commuting as a single territory. The viewed space put work and “civilization” at a comfortable distance, close enough to access when desired but abstracted, after all no

one really works in a skyline, and distant enough to ignore. The value of New York City views to newcomers also lies in their claims to Highlands space. New York City is more a part of those newcomers than it is a part of most long-time residents and the view of New York from Highlands brings New York into Highlands and helps establish the newcomers' rights to live in the borough, despite a sometimes chilly reception from some residents. Long-time residents of all classes and newer working-class residents did not value views in the way or to the extent that other residents did. They valued Highlands most as a small close-knit community where neighbors knew each other, children played outside on sidewalks because there were few backyards and the social relationships and informal economic exchanges that characterized many low-income areas intertwined families, friends, and enemies.

These long-time residents did not need the view to establish their claim on the space in Highlands. Their claim lay in their personal histories of social ties in and around the borough. Conversely, the small-town feel was only of secondary value to some of the newer residents and was not mentioned at all by others. The social ties of these newer residents often lay outside of the borough in New York or elsewhere, though some were working to develop ties within the borough among newcomers and certain long-time residents.

For long-time residents, their familiarity with the borough, the sense that they knew everyone in town and had some connection with their fellow residents, was a significant part of their personal identity. For the working-class life-long residents I interviewed, that was under threat as the borough population began to shift to a class comprised of residents who spent time in New York City and who had educations and

family backgrounds that were both from different places and were very different from those of many local residents, particularly those living in the low-lying section of the borough. This shift was an uncomfortable one for working-class residents who had lived in the borough many years. The more upper-class long-time residents did not report a sense of feeling out of place.

The values at work as the borough changed were life-style values that translated into market values, be it up-market or down-market goods. The value that gentrifiers placed on access to New York City increased the value of borough properties. As seems to be typical in cases of coastal gentrification, some “working waterfront” space in Highlands had been converted to higher-end boating or restaurant uses during times when the commercial fishing industries floundered. The value of waterfront access to commercial fishing and other marine-dependent businesses was maintained by some public officials (even upper-class relative newcomers) and included in the latest zoning ordinances, though “marine dependent” did not prioritize commercial fishing endeavors. Commercial clambers believed the borough’s waterfront depuration plant, upon which they depended for their livelihoods, was protected from conversion because it was largely funded through a grant from the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey. Still, members of the clamming industry at times felt threatened by the highly popular commuter ferries that they feared might have sought additional dock space. The sustainability of waterfront access for the commercial clamming business depended, in part, on how much local government, restaurants, and other businesses valued Highlands being the home of a commercial clamming outfit, advertising fresh seafood from the borough throughout the region.

Private-market redevelopment, much like in standard cases of gentrification, moved gentrification along in Highlands too. This process was a function of individual investors working at a relatively small scale, without the large infusion of public dollars as in the urban renewal of the 1960s and without the large-scale franchise development that brought mall and office development to waterfronts and center cities in the 1990s (Fainstein 1990). The process underway in Highlands was an old-style gentrification that was “essentially private-capital-induced development” (Lang 1982: 8) in a waterfront setting, engaging environmental elements/conflicts in new ways. For the most part, residents in Highlands and in some other communities where such change was occurring viewed those changes as inexorable (see Lamarque 1996). An exception was the battle over the zoning and ownership of a mobile home park on a picturesque edge of Highlands led not by a long-time resident but by a newcomer activist with recent investment in her property and a recent but strong attachment to the place.

A place undergoing gentrification can see a shift from poor, lower class residents or the displacement of middleclass residents by those of a higher class (Lang 1982: 6). In the case of Highlands in the early 2000s, the place of low-income residents seemed more secure in the borough because of its federally and otherwise subsidized housing options than was the place of residents with slightly higher low-incomes. Anecdotal data showed these residents working-class leaving the borough and being replaced by upper-middle class residents. Census data on rental increases, per capita income, poverty levels and home values triangulated interview data on this point.

As coastal gentrification occurred in Highlands, the services offered in the borough shifted to accommodate the consumption preferences of higher income, often

newcomer, residents. These different services included the commuter ferries, new restaurants and bars, a day spa and yoga studio, and at least one of the marinas in the borough which catered to high-end boaters. Long-established restaurants, bars and other kinds of services remained in the mix as well. Typically these newer businesses populated vacant space or took over from struggling businesses in the borough rather than displacing thriving existing operations. For example, the largest commuter ferry parking lot in the borough replaced a much-loved beach club that had been vacant for some time. Informants of all classes described an economic decline that accompanied a loss of population in the borough and at Fort Hancock and losses of commercial clamming opportunities for borough residents. In this decline, informants described the loss of various borough businesses that provided services and entertainment for residents and visitors. Gentrifiers saw the commuter ferries and efforts by the Highlands Business Partnership as resurrecting the economic vibrancy of the borough. In years past, condominium development offered similar promise, which many of my informants argued was unfounded and unfulfilled.

Stories and the everyday verbal interactions that embody values and meaning often also revealed ideologies that informants engaged in the place-making of the borough. They also revealed the ways in which informants valued or resisted the changes underway and how they positioned themselves in these changes. Chapter 7 on the sewage spill that closed clam beds for six weeks during my field stay examined the interaction of language, social class, and positionings (Hodgson n.d.), as a way to understand the sewage spill and what it meant for the place-making of Highlands and the bays surrounding it. The commercial clamming industry depended on common property rights



to harvest bay clams. During the closure, the industry's access to bay clams and to bay water for its depuration process had been halted by the spill at a suburban sewage treatment plant in a neighboring county. For the clammers and others, the spill represented the threat to coastal commons of increasing suburban development. It allowed environmentalists to raise the issue of the Public Trust Doctrine and the manner in which access to common resources was constrained by pollution of them.

The narratives of various groups involved in framing the spill and its effects revealed an interesting component of the place-making of the bays – the shift in meanings of the bays and material reality of the water and people's behavior towards it. The sewage spill revealed that while the bays were no longer considered a dumping ground -- their historic role as the recipient of “negative externalities” of residential and industrial development -- they were not quite free of that role. Emergency dumping into the bay was acceptable 20 years earlier, but the crisis during my field stay revealed that it was no longer acceptable. The bays had become an environmental resource valued for other purposes. Perhaps as Highlands became a waterfront suburb and the coupling of the productive and consumption uses for the bays tightened as those activities moved in closer proximity, such negative externalities became more visible and less acceptable because of their proximity.

As mentioned above, one salient aspect of waterfront suburbanization relative to ordinary suburbanization is the salience of common pool resources in waterfront suburbanization. Common pool marine resources occupy a larger space, literally as well as figuratively, so common property may be more important in these venues. Along these lines, the Public Trust Doctrine was an issue in waterfront development regarding rights

to physically access the tidal zone and its views for recreational fishing and other uses.

Chapter 7 recounted an event that highlighted the residue of an opposition to private property ideologies that dominated coastal development, though checked by various regulatory tools. If property is not a person's relationship with a thing, but the relationship between people regarding things (Furobotn and Pejovich 1972), coastal property, then, can be considered the relationships among people concerning all or parts of a variously construed coast. Like other institutions, institutions of property are not simply formal rules that govern legal behavior. They are "the habituated, regularized 'rules-in-use' maintained by human practice and investment over time" (Watts 2000:40). Property is an institution that is both codified in formal law and practiced as informal, but equally binding habits of behavior and belief (McCay 2002).

This dissertation is concerned with the social relations regarding a particular sliver where land and water interface, with the bay water and bay clams, and with the visual and marine links between Highlands and New York City. A sewage spill that occurred during my fieldstay, the subsequent closing of commercial clam beds and commercial clambers' quests for compensation of lost weeks at work revealed the residual and "re-emergent" features of Public Trust Doctrine. The Public Trust Doctrine, is steeped in the history of coastal New Jersey and, I argue, is one of the residual facets (as described by Williams 1977) of Highlands' cultural system. As Chapter 7 showed, environmentalists were positioning the doctrine also as emergent.

Ideologies affected meanings and social relations regarding coastal resources and properties. They affected the material reality of these resources. At times these material effects in turn caused people to adjust the ideologies they used to advance or resist

changes in Highlands. Though private property investment, either through residential or commercial real estate or other business ventures, spurred much of the coastal gentrification of Highlands, informants claimed their public rights to access the waterfront.

This dissertation has shown how storytelling creates and maintains identities (Tilly 2002), particularly as they are changed and asserted in the process of place-making (Gupta and Ferguson 1997). Commercial fishermen told stories of land-use changes that affect their industry, as in the old lobsterman story in Chapter 3. Long-time working class residents who lived in the low-lying section of Highlands told stories of the traffic hazards created by commuter ferry traffic as a way to resist that transformation. Gentrifiers told stories about property values, great views and city access. Other gentrifiers more intentionally “hyped” Highlands as a “great place to live, work and play” to assist with economic development plans.

One group of informants consisted largely of middle- or upper-middle-class residents, mostly of the low-lying portion of the borough who opposed waterfront condominium development that reduced visual and physical access to the bay. These residents tended to see Highlands as a residence that provided a summer home feel. Another group consisted of people in the commercial clamming industry that fought for compensation following the sewage spill. This group was joined by environmentalists arguing for public trust construal of the bays. One environmental group in particular took the Public Trust Doctrine, as a right of the general public to waterfront access, as a way to encourage people to view the bays as their own – to take some stewardship of the waters and demand that their representatives in the state take stewardship of the bay

seriously.

The way people in Highlands valued and used the bays continue to change. For many informants during my fieldstay, the bodies of water had become places of recreation or leisure, either for viewing, boating or recreational fishing. For some they were also a relatively leisurely ride to work. For a few, they remained places of work where commercial harvest of clams and other marine life produced seafood for the region and an income for themselves. The place-making of Highlands -- as the vantage point for views, the dock for commercial fishing and recreational boats, as a year-round vacation home, or one of few relatively affordable places to live in Monmouth County for working-class residents -- this turned on the borough's historic and present integration with the waters that brushed and shifted its shores.

## **Appendix A – Narrative**

I developed what I call the informant matrix as part of a second-level of analysis to help identify patterns in how groups of demographic-type categories related to the different ways informants valued various aspects of the changes underway in Highlands during my field stay. Sixty-eight informants appear in this matrix, about 20 more than those with whom I conducted semi-structured interviews. The additional “informants,” loosely contrived, are people who I met or observed in public settings or whose testimony I read in the minutes of public meetings. I included these informants when I could glean enough demographic and “values” data from these informal interactions or public meeting minutes.

This data was gleaned in an ethnographic manner rather than through a standard survey method. The cells for which I could not determine the variable for a particular informant are filled in with an asterisk (\*). Such absences are one problem with using qualitative data to complete this sort of matrix. Had I pre-determined the categories of interest and ranges of possible responses at the start of my project, I could have had more complete data. However, because this is an ethnographic project, I let the categories and ranges of responses emerge from informal and semi-structured interviews and observations.

The benefit of analyzing transcript and fieldnote data in this way is that it helped me to organize the data so that patterns became more clearly discernable. As previously mentioned, the matrix is a second level of analysis that followed extensive reading of qualitative data and an initial development of themes, represented by the column headings. For example, it became clear upon initial readings (and even during the course

of fieldwork) that a person's residential or business location in the borough would likely be relevant both to how they valued different elements of the changes underway and also to how they were perceived by others in the borough. The different facets of change that were most salient to my informants appear in the "values" section of the matrix.

The indicators and attendant variables identified in the columns of the matrix include:

**DEMOGRAPHIC INDICATORS:**

1. Gender:
  - a. Male
  - b. Female
2. Location of residence or business
  - a. Waterfront
  - b. Hill
  - c. Outside Highlands
3. Number of years living on the Bayshore or in Highlands
  - a. Less than 20 years
  - b. More than 20 years
  - c. Entire life (I include this category despite its overlap with a. and b. because being born in Highlands has emic relevance to one's residential status. For example, a woman in her 80s carefully noted that she was not born in the borough, and conversely a man in his 20s carefully noted that he was. To include them both in the same category would be awkward.)
  - d. Does not live on the Bayshore or in Highlands

4. Type of tenure
  - a. Summer resident
  - b. Formerly summer only resident, but now residing year round.
  - c. Year-round resident
  - d. Business
  - e. Resident business owner
  - f. Bayshore business owner/or economic development agent
5. Occupation-based class (Please see in-depth description of class categories in text.)
  - a. Upper-middle class
  - b. Middle class
  - c. Lower-middle class
6. Property ownership status (commercial or residential)
  - a. Rent property in Highlands
  - b. Own property in Highlands
  - c. Did not rent or own property in Highlands

#### **VALUES-SECTION INDICATORS**

7. Untapped potential (Please see detailed description of “gentrifier” and the “untapped potential” category in the text.)
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
  - c. Former
8. Views (range of 1-5)

- a. 1=No value
- b. 3=Neutral
- c. 5=Highest value

9. Type of social ties in Highlands (Please see detailed description of these types in text.)

- a. Business
- b. Domestic
- c. Emotional

10. Value of social ties – as a reason to locate or keep a residence/business in

Highlands (range of 1-5) (Please see detailed description of this category in text.)

- a. 1=No value
- b. 3=Neutral value
- c. 5=Highest value

11. Access to New York City (range of 1-5)

- a. 1=No value
- b. 3=Neutral
- c. 5=Highest value

12. Opinion of commuter ferries docking in the borough (range 1-5)

- a. 1=Hate the ferries
- b. 3=Neutral about the ferries
- c. 5=Love the ferries

13. Opinion of condominiums in Highlands (range 1-5)

- a. 1=Hate



b. 3=Neutral

c. 5=Love

## Appendix B – Grid

								VALUES							
				Type Tenure  Years on	Type/work 1=real estate 2=environ 3=clam/fish 4=art 5=retail 6=lawyer 7=business 8=skilled labor/craftsman 9=not employed 10=local govt 11=unskilled labor 12=retired	Occupnt-based Class 3=UM, 2=MC, 1=WC	Property ownership 1=rent, 2=own ^did not rent or own in Highlands	untapped potential 1=yes 2=no 3=fomer	Views 1=no value 5=highest value	Taxes: 5= big problem, 1=no mention as problem	Social Ties --reason to locate or keep res/biz in boro 1=no value 5=highest value	Social Ties 1=no value 5=highest value	City Access 1=no value 5=highest value	Ferry 1=hate 3neutral 5love	Condo 1=hate 3neutrl 5love
Informant	Gender 1=Female 2=Male	Location res/bus 1=Wtrfrmt 2=Hill 3=outside Highlands	Bayshore 1=<20yrs 2=>20 yrs 3=life 0=not on Bayshore												
A	2	1	3	3	9	1	2	*	1	1	1,2,3	4	*	*	4
B	2	1	*	3	*	1	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	1	*
C	1	3	*	*	2	1	*^	*	*	*	1,3	4	4	4	*
D	2	3	0	4	3	1	1	*	1	*	*	4	*	*	*
E	2	3	*	*	8	1	*	*	*	*	*	1	*	5	*
F	2	3	0	*	11	1	*^	*	*	*	*	1	*	*	*
G	1	1	1	5	3	1	1 and 2	2	2	5	1,2,3	3	1	1	3

H	2	1	3	5	3	1	1	2	1	*	1,2	2	1	3	*
I	2	1	2	5	8	1	2	2	4	5	1,2,3	5	1	2,5	1
J	2	1	3	5	11	1	2	2	1	5	1,2,3	5	1	1	1
K	2	1	3	5	3	1	1 and 2	2	1	5	1,2,3	5	*	*	*
L	2	1	3	5	3	1	1 and 2	2	1	*	1,2,3	5	1	1	2
M	2	1	1	3	8	1	2	2	1	5	2,3	3	1	3	1
N	2	3	1	4	3	1	1	2	1	*	0	1	1	2	*
O	2	3	3	4	3	1	1	2	1	5	1,5	5	1	1	3
P	1	*	3	3	12	1	2	2	*	5	1,2,3	5	*	*	1
Q	1	*	3	3	12	1	2	2	*	5	1,2,3	5	*	*	1
R	1	3	1	4	11	2	*	*	*	*	*	*	1	2	*
S	2	3	1	4	8	2	2	*	*	1	1	5	*	*	*
T	2	3	0	*	*	2	*^	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
U	2	3	*	*	3	2	*^	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
V	1	*	2	4	11	2	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
W	2	*	3	5	3	2	2	*	*	5	*	*	*	*	*
X	1	3	2	5	7	2	1	3	3	3	0	1	*	*	2
Y	1	1	3	5	6	2	1	2	1	5	1,2,3	5	1	3	3
Z	2	1	3	5	11	2	2	2	1	3	1	5	3	4	3
AA	2	1	3	5	3	2	2	2	1	5	1,2,3	5	1	3	*
AB	2	1	3	5	3	2	2	2	1	*	2,3	5	*	*	1
AC	1	3	1	4	11	2	*	2	3	4	0	1	1	3	3
AD	1	3	3	3	9	2	2	2	1	1	2,3	5	*	*	2
AE	2	3	3	4	3	2	1	2	1	*	1	2	1	1	1
AF	2	3	3	3	7	2	2	2	3	1	2,3	5	*	*	2

AG	2	*	2	5	11	2	2	2	*	*	1	5	1	4	5
AH	1	1	3	5	3	2	2	1	4	*	1,2,3	5	1	4	*
AI	1	1	3	5	4	2	2	1	1	1	1,3	5	4	5	5
AJ	1	1	3	5	1	2	2	1	4	4	1	5	1	3	4
AK	2	1	1	5	10	2	2	1	5	5	1	1	4	5	5
AL	2	1	2	5	4	2	2	1	1	1	1,2	3	2	5	3
AM	1	2	3	3	7	2	2	1	5	5	3	5	4	4	1
AN	1	3	1	4	4	2	1	1	5	3	0	1	1	4	*
AO	2	3	0	6	3	2	*^	1	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
AP	2	3	3	4	11	2	2	1	3	2	1,2,3	5	1	3	3
AQ	2	1	*	3	7	3	*	*	*	*	0	1	5	5	*
AR	1	3	0	*	7	3	*^	*	*	*	*	*	*	5	*
AS	2	3	0	4	6	3	*^	*	*	*	1	3	*	*	*
AT	2	3	0	*	7	3	*^	*	*	*	*	*	*	5	*
AU	2	3	0	*	7	3	*^	*	*	*	*	*	*	5	*
AV	1	1	2	1	7	3	2	2	5	1	3	4	3	3	3
AW	2	1	2	1	7	3	2	2	5	1	3	4	3	3	3
AX	1	1	1	5	6	3	2	1	4	4	0	1	4	4	*
AY	1	1	2	1	7	3	2	1	1	2	0	1	2	2	1
AZ	2	1	2	3	7	3	2	1	4	3	0	1	5	5	1
BA	1	2	1	5	4	3	2	1	5	4	0	1	5	5	1
BB	1	2	1	5	6	3	2	1	5	5	1	3	2	3	3
BC	1	2	1	3	7	3	2	1	*	*	3	3	4	5	*
BD	1	2	3	3	1	3	2	1	*	1	1,3	5	1	5	2
BE	2	2	1	5	7	3	2	1	5	5	1	3	4	5	3

BF	2	2	2	5	1	3	2	1	4	1	1	5	5	5	5
BG	2	2	*	3	7	3	2	1	4	*	0	1	*	5	5
BH	1	3	1	4	7	3	*^	1	*	*	0	1	3	3	*
BI	2	3	3	6	4	3	*^	1	*	1	*	*	3	5	*
BJ	2	3	*	6	3	3	2^	1	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
BK	2	3	2	6	2	3	2^	1	*	*	0	1	3	3	2
BL	2	*	1	3	12	3	*	1	*	5	0	1	*	*	*
BM	1	1	*	3	7	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	1	1	*
BN	2	1	*	3	8	*	*	*	*	*	0	1	*	2	*
* No information about this informant regarding this indicator															

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- (1992). Postmodern urban landscapes: Mapping culture and power. Scott Lash and Jonathan Friedman, eds. *Modernity and Identity*. Oxford: Blackwell, pp. 221-247.

## Curriculum Vitae

Johnelle C. Lamarque

**Education**

- January 2009      **Doctor of Philosophy in Cultural Anthropology**  
Rutgers University  
New Brunswick, New Jersey
- December 1996      **Master's of Science in Urban Studies, Anthropology track**  
University of New Orleans  
New Orleans, Louisiana
- May 1991      **Bachelor's of Arts in Journalism, News Editorial**  
Louisiana State University  
Baton Rouge, Louisiana

**Employment**

- 2004-present      **Research Analyst**  
Utah Department of Health  
Salt Lake City, Utah
- 2001-2003      **Graduate Research Assistant**  
Rutgers University  
New Brunswick, New Jersey
- 1997-2000      **Teaching Assistant and Instructor**  
Rutgers University  
New Brunswick, New Jersey
- 1994-1996      **Research Assistant**  
University of New Orleans  
New Orleans, Louisiana
- 1991-1995      **Intern, Newspaper Reporter and Contributing Writer**  
*Times-Picayune*  
New Orleans, Louisiana
- 1992-1993      **Newspaper Reporter**  
*The Journal*



## Martinsburg, West Virginia

**Publications**

- 2005 McCay, Bonnie and Andrew Wilner, with Deborah A. Mans, Sheri Seminski, Johnelle Lamarque, and Satsuki Takahashi. Identifying and Claiming the Coastal Commons in Industrialized and Gentrified Places. New Jersey Sea Grant Final Report. <<http://www.nynjbaykeeper.org/pdf/SeaGrantFinalReport.pdf>>
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