SOCIAL CAPITAL, CULTURAL CAPITAL, AND THE RACIAL DIVIDE:

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT THROUGH ART

IN ALABAMA'S BLACK BELT

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# SOCIAL CAPITAL, CULTURAL CAPITAL, AND THE RACIAL DIVIDE: COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT THROUGH ART IN ALABAMA'S BLACK BELT

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A Thesis

Submitted to

the Graduate Faculty of

Auburn University

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the

Degree of

Master of Science

Auburn, Alabama
May 10, 2007

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THESIS ABSTRACT

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IN ALABAMA'S BLACK BELT

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Master of Science, May 10, 2007

(B.A. Kenyon College, 2000)

191 Typed Pages

Directed by Conner Bailey

In a changing economy, rural communities must seek new economic strategies to remain viable. This is especially true in Alabama's Black Belt, a region of persistent poverty, rural isolation, and racial segregation. This study uses the concepts of rural tourism and community development to evaluate efforts undertaken by the town of York, Alabama to revitalize through an art movement. The study considers the specific history of the Black Belt and its effect on revitalization efforts, especially the continued social and cultural segregation between the black and white communities. The concepts of

cultural and social capital are used to evaluate the role segregation plays in community development efforts in York, including both unifying and isolating impacts. Strategies for bridging the divide between the black and white communities by promoting an open, integrated, and cohesive art movement are the focus of this study. Because tenets of community development and strategies for integration are at the heart of any successful revitalization plan, experiences in York provide a blueprint for other Black Belt communities hoping to strengthen community in a new economy.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis would not exist without the residents of York and West Alabama who gave so generously of their time and readily opened a window into their lives. I would also like to thank Conner Bailey for his constant guidance and faith in the project. Thank you to my family for supporting all of my ideas, even those which appeared crazy on the surface. Many thanks goes to my husband, Andre, whose encouragement led me to Auburn in the first place and who made untold sacrifices these past two years both graciously and willingly. I'd still be a waitress without you. And finally, thank you to my son, Stan, who teaches me balance, reminds me to play, and learned to nap to the sound of the keyboard.

Style manual or journal used: *Rural Sociology*

Computer software used: Microsoft Word & Microsoft Excel

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# INTRODUCTION

This study explores the development of an art movement in the small, Black Belt town of York, Alabama, located on the far Western edge of the state. Like many towns in the Black Belt, York has experienced declining population rates, jobs, and resources in recent decades. York's young people continue to pursue better opportunities elsewhere, industries continue to pass it by, and poverty rates continue to climb. Once a booming railroad town and the hub of the county, York has seen its downtown shops close one by one with nothing to replace them, leaving the main street full of boarded up stores and empty of people.

York residents, however, have not given up on their town. Many in York recognize the limitations of traditional economic strategies based on attracting industry, more mobile than ever before in a global economy. Residents have witnessed firsthand the departure of longtime manufacturers and the resulting loss of jobs and a stable economy. Many in York have thus turned their focus toward creating a new economy by building on the assets they do have: a pastoral setting, a 25-year-old art center, downtown art galleries, and dedicated citizens.

In the past few years, York has breathed new life into its art scene through new directors, new artists in residence, and new galleries on the main street. York residents visualize the town as an arts destination for visitors seeking a unique experience in a rural setting. They hope to increase works of art in the community and the artists in residence

program in order to transform their town into an arts haven. York has created a monthly festival to attract tourists on day trips, beautified its main street, and opened new restaurants and shops.

The art movement in York is one example of rural tourism, a strategy implemented by some rural communities attempting to thrive in a new economy. The past fifty years have brought a decline in agriculture, the departure of manufacturing, and the rise of a new economy based on knowledge and innovation to rural communities. In a globalized world, other places now offer cheaper labor, lax environmental regulations, and a more skilled and plentiful workforce, forcing American communities to pursue new strategies to remain viable. This is especially true for rural communities, who are often unable to benefit from technical infrastructure and opportunities available in urban areas.

Fortunately, the globalized economy has one effect on which rural areas can capitalize. As the pace of change in modern society continues to hurtle forward, some Americans are beginning to seek out rural places for comfort, quiet, and a simpler existence. Day and weekend trips are on the rise, and many baby boomers seek didactic travel experiences which allow them to learn about history or local culture. Rural art tourism efforts have been particularly successful in the South, ranging from plays which feature local heritage to trails leading tourists to local artisans to entire towns rebuilt around experiencing locally made art.

Importantly, rural tourism fits into the broader context of community development, a movement which aids communities in implementing new strategies for economic success in a global economy. Community development efforts are locally driven, broad based, grassroots efforts which build on the community's inherent assets

instead of seeking outside solutions. Community development principles are rooted in equity within the community, equal access by its members, and building the capacity of all citizens. Community development efforts also attempt to retain the character of the community and to respect local environment and culture.

The art movement in York incorporates elements of rural tourism and community development by seeking to build on existing art as opposed to seeking outside solutions. York residents are keenly aware of community development principles, and those spearheading the art movement seek to create a diverse, equitable movement from the bottom up, with local citizens as experts and instigators in development plans. Residents do seek to build the capacity of all citizens, and are particularly interested in art which involves community members or addresses community needs.

York residents also recognize the need to gain broad based support for the art movement's success. In fact, many in York cite increased participation from a wide range of community members as the movement's biggest challenge, due to the social, cultural, and racial segregation which has permeated York since its inception. In York, blacks and whites are separated in virtually every aspect of life, including in schools, churches, jobs, social clubs, restaurants, and even in some area cemeteries. York's population is currently eighty percent black and twenty percent white, and the art movement has traditionally been viewed by the black community as a white enterprise. Thus, efforts to build the movement depend on leaders' ability to draw in members of the black community.

In order to increase black participation, the art movement must facilitate trust between the black and white communities in York. The networks, trust, and norms of

reciprocity among individuals which allow for collective action are what scholars refer to as "social capital." Increased participation by the black community also requires the establishment of a collective identity in order to unite blacks and whites behind a common goal. Scholars have dubbed this "cultural capital": the cultural signals, symbols, and knowledge which identify someone as belonging to a particular group. York has high amounts of bonding capital, existing between like individuals, but trace amounts of bridging capital, which connects disparate individuals. Thus, the success of the art movement in York hinges upon its ability to increase bridging social and cultural capital among black and white community members.

According to York residents, the key to breaking down the barrier of segregation and increasing bridging capital lies in providing opportunities for black and white youth to interact. York maintains a *de facto* segregation in its schools, with virtually all of the black students attending public schools and all of the white students attending a private academy. Residents view segregated schools as the main reason why segregation persists in York, stating that if black and white children went to school together, their parents would be forced together through school events, and eventually the community would move toward integration. Residents add that integrated schools would also help to prevent youth from forming stereotypes, thereby thwarting the persistence of segregation in the next generation.

Integration is critical for York because communities whose members are unable to work together cannot thrive. Segregation also hurts York's economy. Businesses rarely locate in York because white employees would be forced to either pay for private school or drive their children thirty miles to a school in another county to provide their

children with a good education. Segregation therefore sets up a vicious cycle of deterioration and poverty: businesses refuse to locate in York so youth leave to find work elsewhere, leaving the town with a diminished population, economy, and body of leadership. This lack of needed resources then continues to preclude reinvestment in the town.

The art movement in York can play a pivotal role in promoting integration by providing opportunities for black and white youth and their families to interact. In fact, leaders in the art movement hold integration at the center of their mission. They have worked to recreate the Coleman Center for the Arts as a racially neutral space and have featured the work of local black artists and the types of art of interest to the black community. Leaders have also moved beyond the Coleman Center walls to reach the black community by creating a yearly arts festival and community art projects. Finally, they have developed projects which specifically seek to unite black and white youth.

Although York's art movement is making strides toward integration, those involved in the movement are few, and there is still much work to be done. Challenges in leadership, funding, and segregation persist, and progress toward a racially unified community is made one person at a time. As former Coleman Center artistic director Richard Saxton states, the challenges facing York are

> the same challenges that everyone who works to better the Black Belt region face. Lack of funding, lack of interest from the outside world, trying to develop projects in a somewhat isolated region of America, poverty, lack of resources, low education levels, racism, the list goes on. I don't think there is anything that isn't challenging about working in this particular region of Alabama. That said, what makes this region attractive to an artist like myself is the level to which the projects can actually impact a local population of people and create real change and real examples of forward thinking and creative social progress.

Indeed, the art movement has created a sense of momentum in York, sparking new projects and new energy among its residents. The movement provides the only arena in town in which blacks and whites can freely interact, and has specifically created programs to facilitate interracial interaction among youth. Thus, the art movement in York has the potential for creating interracial relationships in a place where they are strikingly absent. These relationships are a necessary element for rebuilding the fabric of York and ensuring its longevity.

In summary, this study examines the emergence of an art movement in the context of community development. It addresses the challenge of increasing black participation in York's art movement by turning to community development principles, successes in York thus far, and residents' ideas for promoting integration. This study also evaluates the art movement in terms of the specific challenges faced by Black Belt communities, including high poverty and outward migration, low wages and educational attainment, scant jobs and resources, and persistent racial segregation. This study thus evaluates the art movement in the context of York's unique historical and cultural identity in hopes of discovering strategies to ensure its viability in a changing economy.

The overall objective of this study is to document the development of an art movement in the Black Belt in the context of historical and modern segregation in order to find strategies for promoting integration through the arts. This objective involves several tasks:

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| Task 1: | Conduct a literature review of the Black Belt and of York which includes history, racial segregation, economic and population trends, and media coverage. |
| Task 2: | Conduct a literature review based on rural tourism and community development. |

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| Task 3: | Conduct a literature review of cultural and social capital to understand their definitions and roles in community development. |
| Task 4: | Interview residents, business owners, and leaders in York, community leaders in the surrounding area and at the state level, and anyone else connected to the art movement to gain an understanding of the movement's history, current status, successes, and challenges. |
| Task 5: | Conduct non-participant observation at community meetings and events in York to gain a sense of the community, its leaders, and how it functions. |

## METHODOLOGY

This study uses qualitative research to develop a textured and intimate description of how an art movement in York, Alabama contributes to breaking down racial barriers. Qualitative research has a long history in sociology, tracing its origins to the social reform movement at the turn of the twentieth century. At this time, sociologists used qualitative research to construct rich descriptions of the living conditions of the poor in hopes of calling attention to their plight and spurring social change (Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias 2000). This study uses qualitative research in a similar spirit: in hopes that a detailed description of racial segregation as a barrier to community development will spur dialogue between the black and white communities in York, acting as an instigator for community defined social change.

Specifically, this research takes the form of a qualitative case study. I have chosen the case study format in order to explore community and economic development in depth and at the ground level. Case studies are prevalent throughout the field of sociology, as they allow researchers to gain detailed knowledge about one particular group in order to better understand like groups. Using a case study format allowed me to delve deeply into one community's past and present, instead of spreading my time and efforts thin by attempting to compare several communities.

Case studies have been criticized for being too specific and unable to be generalized, but I did not find those criticisms to be true when studying York. York shares much in common with other small, rural Black Belt towns, and the lessons York has learned in its attempts to revitalize are relevant and useful to other communities hoping to follow a similar path. In fact, other Black Belt communities have looked toward York as a model and have learned from their mistakes in building their own community development plans. Further, case studies of the Black Belt are particularly urgent due to the region's myriad challenges.

In order to gain access to the community of York, I began by introducing myself to one of the artists in her downtown studio in January 2005. We talked briefly upon our first meeting, and when I decided six months later to study York as a case study, I again contacted her and set up an interview. She in turn connected me with other artists, and I used a snowball sampling method in order to pursue new leads during fieldwork and to take advantage of unexpected potential informants. The bulk of my interviews and visits to York were conducted during a six month period from June 2005 to November 2005, with follow up contact and visits in 2006.

I interviewed a range of individuals, mostly in their residences, studios, or places of work. Interviews were usually scheduled ahead of time, but were sometimes spontaneous. At the end of several interviews, the respondent introduced me to another community member, and I interviewed that person on the spot. Because the drive to York is over two hours from my home, I scheduled two or three interviews for each visit, leaving plenty of time in between in case the interviews were lengthy or the respondents introduced me to other community members. I also conducted interviews in

Montgomery, Birmingham, Mobile, Demopolis, Livingston, and Camden (all in Alabama). Interviews usually lasted about one hour, though they ranged from fifteen minutes to two and a half hours.

In the past, I have found the use of tape recorders stilting and overly formal, so instead I took notes during interviews and typed them immediately afterwards. I used an unstructured format and did not prepare a list of questions. I found that if I let respondents follow their own thought patterns, the interviews took a natural tone. This resulted in collecting some unusable information, but it also facilitated trust between myself and the respondents, because I allowed them to direct the conversation and to reveal their thoughts to me in their own time. I did ask follow up questions. I usually began interviews by asking respondents how they became involved in the art movement, which allowed them to talk about their individual background and interest in art. After they had told me a little about themselves, respondents seemed more comfortable discussing more sensitive matters, such as the role of racial segregation in the art movement.

I did not intend to write a thesis centering on race, and in fact did not ask any questions related to race in my first few interviews, but I found that when respondents discussed the art movement, the issue of race always arose. Once I began to understand segregation as the main hindrance to the art movement's development, I began asking questions like, "Is the whole community involved in the art movement?" Or, "What do you view as the art movement's biggest challenges?" Thus, I never asked directly about race because I didn't want to place undue importance on it or direct respondents' answers toward it.

I used a purposive sampling method to ensure that I interviewed a diverse and representative group of people. I conducted 34 interviews in person (with three exceptions which were phone interviews). Respondents included those involved with the Coleman Center for the Arts in York, including five directors/former directors, the center's founder, three board members, four artists-in-residence, two fundraisers, and one major financial contributor. I also interviewed residents connected with the art movement in York outside of the Coleman Center, including four artists working at galleries on the main street, four non-art business owners, and two residents of York who are neither artists nor business owners. I also interviewed the current mayor of York and her predecessor.

To discover York's connections to the Black Belt at large and to the state of Alabama, I interviewed the president of the University of West Alabama, the president of the Sumter County Fine Arts Council, the visual arts program manager at the Alabama State Council on the Arts, the executive director of the Alabama Tombigbee Regional Commission, the director of Black Belt Treasures, the managing director of documentary production at Alabama Public Television and her cameraman, and a *Demopolis Times* reporter.

In addition to interviewing, I used both participant and non-participant observation. I walked and drove the streets of York and its surroundings, ate in local restaurants and shopped in local stores, visited the local library and downtown galleries, and read the local paper. I also attended events at the Coleman Center gallery, community meetings, and York's monthly festival. In addition, I visited the nearby town of Livingston, Alabama, the largest town in Sumter County and York's sometimes rival.

I drove around Livingston, conducted research in the University of West Alabama library, and interviewed board members or York residents who lived or worked in Livingston.

# CHAPTER ONE: RURAL TOURISM & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

## Rural Tourism

### A New Strategy

The town of York, Alabama, like much of rural America, is in the throes of change. In recent decades, rural areas have been "buffeted by demographic, social, economic, and environmental changes" (Willits & Luloff 1995:454), rendering it necessary for them to pursue new strategies to remain viable and vital in a new economy. Specifically, rural areas have witnessed the centralization of agriculture, the downturn of manufacturing due to increased offshoring, and the rise of a globalized economy based on technology and innovation.

These changes have caused rural areas to fall increasingly "behind other areas in wealth, job opportunities, health care, transportation facilities, school adequacy, water and sewage systems, and overall well-being" (Willits & Luloff 1995:454). Rural areas experience numerous problems in the new economy, including "the flight of the young from the community, persistent poverty of residents and of government, a lack of employment opportunities, and an overall lack of a stable infrastructure" (Lewis 1998:102). Thus, rural communities must develop new strategies for economic and

community success. Wilson states that "since the 1970's, economic restructuring and the farm crisis have reduced rural communities' economic opportunities, making older development strategies less viable and forcing many to look for nontraditional ways to sustain themselves" (2001:132).

**The Rural Mystique**

The town of York has chosen rural tourism as its new strategy in the changed economy, a strategy Wilson calls "one of the few viable economic options for rural communities" (Wilson et al. 2001:132-3), due in part to a rising American interest in rural culture. Bascom explains that as the pace of change in America quickens, nostalgia for rural life intensifies, causing rural identity to emerge as a symbolic value. To some, rural areas represent spaces where things perceived as good are polarized against those considered bad: pure versus polluted, free versus fettered, authentic versus artificial. Historically isolated places thus emerge as authentic, untouched rural spaces. Once considered marginal, rural places have been rediscovered and reassessed as quiet, gentle spaces: welcome reprieves from the pace and complexities of contemporary life. Rural isolation, once considered a bane of existence, is now viewed by some as a blessing (Bascom 2001).

Suburban and urban Americans often view rural spaces as friendlier, safer, and less stressful than other places, possessing both security and well-being. This phenomenon has come to be known as "the rural mystique" and studies have found widespread acceptance of it among urban residents (Willits & Luloff 1995). In some

cases, the rural mystique holds true. Sumners and Lee explain that "many city dwellers long for what people in small towns already have, and often take for granted- a slower pace, friendly people who know their neighbors, open space and scenery, quaint shops, historic homes and buildings, parades, festivals, and streets that are safe and free of traffic" (2004:31-2).

Overwhelmingly, non-rural residents view rural values as important aspects of the nation's heritage (Willits & Luloff 1995) and rural cultures as entities to be treasured and protected (Bascom 2001). Rural areas thus hold a special appeal to outsiders due to their distinct cultural, historic, ethnic, and geographic characteristics (Wilson et al. 2001). In fact, outsiders view a community as "authentic" when it possesses unique local elements, including cuisine, history, traditions, folklore, mythology, or a town hero (Bascom 2001).

The perception of rural spaces as symbolic and quiet spaces has yielded a rising American interest in experiencing them. Cheryl Morgan of the Small Town Design Initiative in Birmingham, Alabama states that "people are looking for places to go on day trips and with families, particularly within an hour's drive. These days people are seeking out small towns; recreational tourism is on the rise." Indeed, rural tourism has boomed in recent decades. "Nearly two-thirds of all adults in the nation, or 87 million individuals, [took] a trip to a rural destination" for leisure purposes between 1998 and 2001 (Brown n.d.), making rural tourism a "key facet of community-level development initiatives in many locales" (Krannich & Petrzelka 2003).

In addition to visiting rural areas, tourists seek to purchase local products as symbols of the places they visit. Beginning in the early 1990's in the U.S., there was a surge of passion for "all things local. For the first time in generations, it [was] popular to

buy products based on local color and regional identity" (Aycock & Brannon 1990). In 2000, the Survey on the Impact of Craft on the National Economy revealed the total direct impact from the sale of American craft to be $14 billion (HandMade in America 2006).

Globalization has intensified the popularity of both rural places and rural goods. Bascom states that the more globalized the world becomes, and the more spatial barriers disintegrate, the more people cling to place as a source of identity, seeking out rural spaces (Bascom 2001). Globalization has also increased purchases of rural goods by heightening Americans' commitment to buying local to support communities struggling to compete in a global market. Buying local also allows Americans to support ethical business practices through knowing the origins of their purchases.

**Benefits & Drawbacks**

Though rural tourism does present a powerful remedy for communities, both its benefits and drawbacks should be considered. First, rural tourism offers several economic benefits to communities. It is often less costly and easier to establish than other rural economic development strategies; it can be developed with relatively little investment credit, training, and capital. Rural tourism can also create jobs, which often benefit those in the community without advanced training. Because the jobs are often seasonal, they can aid farmers looking to supplement their incomes during the off-season. Rural tourism also adds income to the community through higher tax revenues and helps to diversify the local economy. It supports existing retail and small businesses, like restaurants, hotels, and shops, while simultaneously raising community visibility to

attract new businesses (Brown n.d.). Finally, it enhances local property values (Psilos & Rapp 2001).

Rural tourism can also enhance the quality of life in communities. Rural tourism often results in upgrading local cultural facilities and restoring regional historic sites which offer new cultural opportunities for residents. It often spurs beautification efforts, which boost the attractiveness of communities (Lewis 1998). This is particularly true with rural art tourism, which boosts both community amenities and aesthetics (Phillips 2004). Rural tourism is also a clean industry, unlike manufacturing, which produces pollution and other environmental side effects. Rural tourism can therefore enhance both recreation opportunities (Lewis 1998) and conservation efforts (Brown n.d.).

Rural tourism can also create a greater sense of place for rural residents (Brown n.d.). Because tourists view the community as worthy of visiting, residents may develop a new appreciation of their home (Krannich & Petrzelka 2003), as confirmed by a West Alabama resident who states that "it took outsiders coming in for York residents to see what they have." Rural tourism is also undertaken locally by residents, government, and small businesses utilizing local resources and organizations (Wilson et al. 2001:132-3). Because efforts come from within the community, rural tourism can foster community pride and responsibility while minimizing dependence on outsiders (Lewis 1998). Finally, rural tourism efforts often facilitate improved social and professional relations among diverse populations (Head 2002).

Despite the potential benefits of rural tourism, however, it has some important drawbacks. Brown states that even well designed rural tourism strategies can have negative effects. First, the jobs created by rural tourism are often low paying and

seasonal with few benefits or opportunities for advancement. Rural tourism can also result in higher taxes for local residents due to tourism marketing and infrastructure expansion costs (Brown n.d.), including paved roads and increased police, fire, and sanitation services (Lewis 1998). In addition, rural tourism can cause real estate prices to escalate, potentially putting the cost of housing beyond reach of the average local resident (Brown n.d.).

Rural tourism can also damage the quality of life of communities. Creation of new infrastructure and an increase in visitors can result in litter, noise, and air pollution (Lewis 1998). An influx of visitors can also increase sprawl, crowding, traffic congestion, and crime rates (Brown n.d.) while decreasing open space. Residents may be displaced by new developments or by skyrocketing land values (Krannich & Petrzelka 2003). The growth demanded by rural tourism can also degrade natural resources (Brown n.d.), including damage to wildlife and water quality (Krannich & Petrzelka 2003).

Rural tourism has potentially damaging social effects as well. It can radically alter a community's culture, diminishing longstanding customs and traditions and weakening social solidarity. It can also alter a community's sense of place, replacing the very essence which originally attracted tourists with a "phony folk culture" (Krannich & Petrzelka 2003:194). Bascom calls it one of the paradoxes of rural tourism that "the celebrated façade of a timeless and tranquil landscape [is] literally leveled and removed to invite more people to the rural experience" (2001:74). Krannich and Petrzelka add that "natural settings valued because of their ability to provide opportunities for privacy, reflection, solitude, communion with nature, and a spiritual linkage with the natural

world become less conducive to such outcomes when they are visited by growing numbers of tourists" (2003:195). Likewise, the greater demand for local art and crafts can lower the quality of products (Brown n.d.).

**Designing an Effective Rural Tourism Plan**

Despite its drawbacks, rural tourism can be utilized as a viable method for community revitalization. In order to use it successfully, scholars cite the need to recognize its limitations and its risks. Rural tourism is not a panacea. It will not solve all the problems of a rural community (Lewis 1998), nor is it an appropriate strategy for all communities (Willits & Luloff 1995). In addition, rural tourism should not be a community's only strategy, but rather one element in a diversified economic base. Communities which rely too heavily on tourism "can be as vulnerable to downturns as places dependent on more traditional…economies" (Krannich & Petrzelka 2003:192). Rural tourism strategies should also be "consistent with local goals and sensitive to sustaining a community's character and traditions" (Brown n.d.:5). Growth which "exceeds the carrying capacity of the natural landscape, overwhelms valued traditions, cultures, and interests of established populations, or displaces residents…certainly does not contribute positively to the well-being of rural people and communities" (Krannich and Petrzelka 2003:197).

Several components are necessary to implement rural tourism successfully. The first is a complete tourism package. This includes services which support tourism, as the "the quality of a visitor's experience depends not only on the appeal of the primary attraction but also on the quality and efficiency of complementary businesses such as

hotels, restaurants, shopping outlets, and transportation facilities" (Porter 1998:81). The tourism package should include the community, its surrounding area, and local businesses. Wilson et al. state that "successful tourism involves [both] getting tourists to stay longer than the time it takes simply to visit a major attraction and having repeat tourists" (2001:134). The community must be viewed as a destination rather than a stop off. It is particularly effective when communities build around groups of attractions instead of just one and hold special events. The tourism package must also be promoted and marketed to outsiders (Wilson et al. 2001).

The need for tourism packages which encompass whole areas underscores the importance of working regionally. Sumners and Lee explain that because "rural areas are sparsely populated, they lack a critical mass- of taxpayers, leadership, financial capacity, infrastructure, and skilled labor. So if rural communities are to survive, they must join forces and work together" (2004:26). "Rural advancement," they state, "requires regional collaboration instead of competition" (2003:9). Thus, successful communities include vertical networks that reach to regional, state, and federal organizations and resources (Krannich & Petrzelka 2003). Rural tourism efforts must also have the support and participation of the local government, as they provide funding, infrastructure, zoning, and maintenance (Wilson et al. 2001).

## Rural Art Tourism

The town of York, Alabama is pursuing a specific type of rural tourism which combines rural place and rural art, of particular interest to many Americans. In fact, "arts

related events have long been regarded as important components in tourism development," as evidenced by the longstanding popularity of Broadway plays, summer festivals in the Berkshires, and New Orleans jazz (Psilos & Rapp 2001:1). The arts also played a historical role in community development in the U.S. The City Beautiful Movement of the 1890's implemented public art, public parks, and architecture for public buildings into cities. This willingness to incorporate public art has since re-merged, going beyond art's physical dimension by including the recognition of art's social and cultural impact on communities (Phillips 2004). Thus, "in the U.S., communities are finding that the arts can play a crucial and valuable role in their local community economic development efforts" (Phillips 2004:112).

It is hard to overstate both the popularity of the arts in the U.S. and their salutary effect on communities. Consumers spent $9.4 billion on admissions to performing arts events in 1998. That is $2.6 billion more than they spent on admissions to movies and $1.8 billion more than on admissions to spectator sports. In addition, spending on performing arts increased 16% ($1.2 billion) between 1993 and 1998 (Psilos & Rapp 2001). By the year 2000, the fourth largest expenditure by Americans grossing over $1 million annually was wine and art (Anderson 2005). The non-profit arts industry, which earns $36.8 billion in annual revenue, supports 1.3 million full time jobs, and generates $134 billion in economic activity every year, is a potent force in economic development nationwide (Psilos & Rapp 2001).

**Rural Art Tourism in the South**

Rural art tourism is an especially potent solution for communities in the American South, which often possess an abundance of bucolic space and longtime artisan traditions. Several rural Southern communities have successfully used rural art tourism as a way to revitalize, and the following descriptions clarify how rural art tourism develops and functions in communities. In examining these success stories, common themes emerge. All of the projects began small, with local citizens' concern for their communities at the center of the efforts. All of the projects built on inherent cultural assets and on Americans' interest in rural heritage by attracting tourists to experience a part of the local culture already in place. Finally, all of the projects sparked new growth and the creation of new programs and partnerships in their communities.

*Swamp Gravy*. Named the official folk life play of Georgia in 1994, Swamp Gravy is performed annually in a sixty-year-old renovated cotton warehouse in Colquitt, Georgia. Swamp Gravy is a collection of real life stories taken from interviews of local residents and adapted for the stage by a local playwright. Each year a new script and original music are written and the stories are re-enacted by an amateur cast in an effort to "bring to life the stories that have helped shape the community," to "celebrate a culture that is uniquely rural South Georgia," and to "break down racial and socio-economic boundaries" (Swamp Gravy 2006).

Swamp Gravy began with a budget of under $2000 in 1989 and grew to a budget of $2 million by 2005. It is now the fifth largest employer in the county with an annual payroll of more than $650,000. 120,000 people have seen the play in twelve years, 80%

of whom lived outside the county (Kimbrell 2005). In 1996, Swamp Gravy was chosen as a Cultural Olympiad Event and performed at the Centennial Park during the Olympics in Atlanta, Georgia. The same year, Swamp Gravy actors performed at the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C. Colquitt, Georgia has been rated the #2 Small Town to Visit by the Atlanta Journal-Constitution, and even President and Mrs. Jimmy Carter have attended a performance (Swamp Gravy 2006). All of this took place in the ninth poorest congressional district in the country in a town with a population of 2000 (Kimbrell 2005).

As boasted on the website, "Swamp Gravy has brought a new vitality, unity, and sense of pride and hope to this region of the state" (Swamp Gravy 2006). In addition to its obvious financial and employment successes, Swamp Gravy has spawned new projects, including an arts council, museum, market, mural project, craft center, musical recording, annual storytelling festival, consulting project, and the renovation of five historic buildings (Swamp Gravy 2006).

The Colquitt/Miller Arts Council was formed with the purpose of enhancing rural area growth, and leads a five county regional tourism effort. One of its many projects includes the Museum of Southern Cultures, designed to take visitors on "a stroll through time" in a space reminiscent of an old town square. The Market on the Square features over twenty vendors selling antiques, arts, crafts, and jars of local mayhaw jelly. The Millennium Mural Project completed its tenth mural in Colquitt in March of 2005, making the town Georgia's First Mural City (Swamp Gravy 2006).

The New Life Learning Center was created with the goal of educating the community and preserving past cultures. It is a public facility where local residents and visitors can receive training in the traditional crafts of Georgia such as quilting, pottery,

sewing, and photography. With funding from a 21st century community learning center grant through the No Child Left Behind Act, the center provides after-school art classes, children's summer art workshops, family field trips, and character education classes. They have a pottery studio and classrooms for quilting, basketry, and children's art activities. The center also offers scholarships to encourage cultural arts education, giving students an opportunity to learn art while developing self-esteem, social skills, and life skills (Swamp Gravy 2006).

Finally, The Swamp Gravy Institute was created "to catalyze the replication of the Swamp Gravy spirit in other communities and organizations through short-term story-based consults and custom-designed training academies that combine its own unique story-based artistry with planning and reflective methods." SGI consults are conducted by a core of veteran Swamp Gravy cast members, and involve storytelling circles, role-play, Swamp Gravy vignettes, training in oral-history interviewing, and implementation planning. SGI has conducted programs in Texas, Florida, Louisiana, Ohio, Colorado, North Carolina, California, Mississippi, Georgia, and Rio de Janeiro, Brazil (Swamp Gravy 2006).

*HandMade in America*. Another project which confirms the potential of rural, Southern art to revitalize communities comes from the Appalachian Mountain region of North Carolina, which saw a loss of 93% of its manufacturing base in the last two decades (Anderson 2005). The organization HandMade in America sought to boost the manufacturing economy not through traditional industry, but through "the already established 'invisible industry' of craftspeople working in shops, classrooms, studios, and

galleries tucked away on small town main streets and back roads throughout the Blue Ridge Mountains" (Handmade in America 2006).

In order to gauge the impact of crafts on the economy of the region, HandMade in America sponsored a 1995 survey which "measured incomes of full and part-time craftspeople, sales generated by shops and galleries, spending patterns at craft fairs, and the impact of craft-related suppliers and schools." The study indicated that crafts played a vital role in the region's economy, contributing $122 million annually, which was four times the revenue generated from burley tobacco, the region's largest cash crop (Handmade in America 2006).

The survey also revealed some of the challenges and needs of the craft community, including access to capital, marketing, and business services (Handmade in America 2006). The artisans were isolated from each other by the mountains, and often traveled long distances to sell their products, preventing them from making a steady profit. HandMade in America sought to link these artisans on a craft trail, so that tourists could easily access and purchase local art directly from the artisans (Anderson 2005). To this end, the HandMade in America Craft Registry serves as a directory of artists, galleries, craft resources, and craft events in Western North Carolina. It is available on the web, or in *The Craft Heritage Trails of Western North Carolina*, a guide of over five hundred listings which also include bed & breakfasts, inns, historical sites, gardens, farms, special attractions, and restaurants. Thus, the local businesses and communities surrounding the artisans also benefit (HandMade in America 2006).

In the decade following the guide's publication, artisans saw their incomes rise by 28%. They sold 67% of their products to outsiders, 72% of whom spent more than $200

at each studio (Anderson 2005). In 2004, the organization grossed $140 million for its artisans (Riggs 2005). Since its founding, HandMade in America has expanded beyond the craft heritage trail, creating a Farms, Gardens, and Countryside trail, and HandMade Getaway Packages, intended to "offer a new level of engagement in the North Carolina Mountains" by providing studio tours, quilting parties, organic farming classes, mountain walkabouts, and garden-to-table cooking weekends (HandMade in America 2006).

HandMade in America also strives to establish "an academic base to empower crafts throughout all levels of education." Toward this end, the organization unites teachers with local artists in hands-on workshops. The teachers learn how to utilize craft and the region's craft heritage as a means of teaching math, language arts, science, and social sciences, and the artists receive another vehicle for sharing their craft knowledge. In addition, HandMade in America established The Center for Craft, Creativity, and Design, a part of the University of North Carolina system, with the purpose of incorporating the subject of craft as a valued part of university curricula (HandMade in America 2006).

HandMade in America has sought recognition for North Carolina's crafts outside of academia as well. In 1996, the organization partnered with The North Carolina Arts Council, The Blue Ridge Parkway, The Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, and The North Carolina Folklife Institute to form The Blue Ridge Heritage Initiative with the purpose of creating projects to demonstrate how a regional culture can provide a focus for preservation, education, and community and economic development. In 2002, representatives of HandMade in America and Advantage West, a regional economic development agency, introduced a bill into Congress which would designate 25 counties

in Western North Carolina as the Blue Ridge Heritage Area. Projects and programs in the area would encompass tourism, education, and economic development, and would focus on the region's distinctive agri-heritage, craft, music, and Cherokee culture. The bill was passed in 2003, along with a provision of $500,000 for the area's first year of funding (HandMade in America 2006).

Like the Swamp Gravy Institute, the HandMade Institute for Creative Economies allows other communities to learn from HandMade in America's success through conferences, instructional programs, workshops, training products, and custom consultation. The Institute boasts more than one hundred professionals engaged in agricultural tourism, attraction development and management, craft development and marketing, creative economic development practices, cultural heritage tourism, retail marketing, and small town revitalization. These experts provide strategic planning, practical instruction, and marketing and development in all aspects of creative economies to other communities hoping to revitalize through the arts (HandMade in America 2006).

*Paducah Artist Relocation Program.* Perhaps closest to York's vision of a future as an artists' haven, the Paducah Artist Relocation Program took place in a town much "like many small towns around the country. When the big shopping malls opened up on the outskirts of town, downtowns were devastated and many have never recovered. The difference between Paducah and many of these other towns," the website explains, "is their vision and love of the arts." The Artist Relocation Program has "created a self-sufficient, creative neighborhood designed for artists, by artists, perpetuated by artists. The Program has transformed a down-and-out area of town into an up-and-coming, city

supported arts and gallery district which is fast becoming a national cultural destination" (Paducaharts 2006).

The art scene in Paducah is located in the Lower Town Arts District. Nicknamed "the SOHO of the South" by Charles Osgood, Lower Town is the oldest neighborhood in Paducah and "the catalyst for a great deal of excitement, economic growth, and community pride." Located four blocks from the Ohio River, Lower Town is made up of impressively built homes influenced by Italianate, Gothic Revival, Romanesque, Queen Anne, and Classical Revival architectural styles which now house galleries and artists from across the country (Paducaharts 2006).

The Artist Relocation Program began in August 2000 and is now a national model for economic development through art, boasting over 45 artists from as far west as Hawaii and as far east as Germany. The Program owes its success in part to backing it received from the City of Paducah and Paducah Bank. The City of Paducah has committed over $1.2 million to the program with a return private investment from the artists of over $11.5 million. It completed a $1.2 million lighting project in Lower Town and offers several incentives to artists, including providing up to $2500 for architectural services, tax exemptions for all materials for rehabilitation or new construction, discounted web pages, and including artists and their businesses in the city's national marketing campaign. Paducah Bank also offers incentives to relocating artists, including low interest loans with up to 100% financing for the purpose of rehabilitation or new construction, free lots for new construction, and loan packages with 30 year fixed rates. The bank also financed the construction of three new storefronts, all of which sold (Paducaharts 2006).

In addition to the galleries, Paducah boasts several other art attractions. The city has three museums, two art centers (one of which is a $44 million, 1800 seat performing arts center located on the downtown riverfront), a theater, a cinema which shows national, international, and foreign films, and a symphony orchestra. Paducah also holds Downtown After Dinner every Saturday night from May through September, featuring six blocks of live entertainment, shopping, antique cars, and horse drawn carriage rides. Finally, each Memorial Day weekend, Paducah holds a Fine Art and Music Festival (Paducaharts 2006).

Paducah's recognition as a cultural and arts destination is growing rapidly. The city has been featured in eighteen national publications and a PBS documentary. They have received national, regional, and local awards honoring the Artist Relocation Program for using the arts for economic, community, and cultural development. As the website states, in four short years, Paducah realized "an idea pondered aloud by optimistic art folk everywhere" (Paducaharts 2006).

**Rural Art Tourism in Alabama's Black Belt**

Rural art tourism strategies can be especially advantageous for communities in Alabama's Black Belt, which like communities across the South, possess an abundance of rural space and native art traditions and a dearth of alternative economic options. Many Americans view the Black Belt as unique, and are interested its culture and heritage. The quilts of Gee's Bend have traveled to New York City and to Washington D.C. *To Kill a Mockingbird*, out of Monroeville, Alabama has been performed as far away as Israel.

Black Belt traditions, including culture, art, folklore, and food, have remained intact partly because the area has been bypassed by the highway for so many years, lending to their authenticity in the eyes of tourists. Sumners and Lee confirm that "many of Alabama's small towns still possess a sense of authenticity and charm that cannot be duplicated in bigger cities" (2004:32). Thus, the Black Belt fits the description of what is now trendy in American tourism: rural, isolated places with particular folk traditions. Two examples of the successful use of rural art tourism in Alabama's Black Belt serve to shed light on how rural art tourism can be implemented in Alabama communities.

*Black Belt Treasures.* A local reporter gives this description of Highway 28 in Wilcox County, heading toward the Black Belt Treasures gallery in Camden, Alabama:

> Cows lie in the shade near a dilapidated barn, eating and fanning flies lazily. The air is thick and overcast, and clouds part and move together above small white farmhouses and grand plantation homes. Trees line the long driveway of one stately home, its columns a reminder of how time seems to stand still in this place. A rusty sign nailed into a telephone pole swings with each passing car, advertising cattle feed half a mile up the road. The first sign of human life is a small gas station at the end of the highway. One foot up on the wall, the other planted on the ground, old men in baseball caps and cowboy hats lean idly against the gas station, munching candy bars and passing the time. But time in the Black Belt is a funny thing – it passes but nothing much seems to change (Telehany 2006).

The idea for Black Belt Treasures, a gallery and internet site featuring local art and crafts, developed when the Alabama Tombigbee Regional Commission partnered with the Center of Economic Development at the University of Alabama to begin a tourism initiative. They hired local woman Linda Vice to go into the Black Belt and catalog all of the assets in ten counties, "anything of value," as John Clyde Riggs, director of the Regional Commission put it. After fifteen months, Vice had discovered an abundance of

art in the area. As the website states, the Black Belt is "fertile ground for an amazingly diverse and talented group of artists, craftsmen and entrepreneurs" ("About Us" 2006).

Riggs proposed selling local art, crafts, food, and furniture through a gallery and internet site. Interestingly, he had suggested the idea fifteen years before, but the American interest in rural tourism had not yet taken hold and nothing came of it. Riggs secured funding through the USDA, University of Alabama, Delta Regional Authority, Alabama Power, and the State Bureau of Travel and Tourism. Vice was hired as coordinator, and spent a year cataloging work by 150 artists in 17 west and southwest Alabama counties. A former car dealership in downtown Camden was purchased for the gallery, which opened on September 30, 2005.

Black Belt Treasures adheres to two key rural tourism principles. First, it offers authentic and high quality craftsmanship: "not souvenir-type things" (Telehany 2006). Second, the gallery is marketed as representing a particular culture. The website states: "For more than just a shopping experience, visit Black Belt Treasures and immerse yourself in the history, culture and talent of our region" ("About Us" 2006). In addition to local art, the gallery offers books about the Black Belt, the Civil Rights Movement, and the Quilts of Gee's Bend.

Beyond marketing Black Belt culture, Black Belt Treasures was also designed to overcome stereotypes of the region, to "showcase a region that is often not cast in the best light" (Pickard 2005). Leaders wanted to "show there's more to Alabama's Black Belt than poverty" (Johnson 2005). Max Joiner, a county commissioner in Marengo County, states that "there's always been a world of talent in the Black Belt…We want to make it a little easier to see it" (Johnson 2005). Riggs adds that "there's been so much

[bad] publicity about the Black Belt, we felt we could take that negative and turn it into a positive and say, 'Look what the people in this part of the state can do'" (Johnson 2005).

Black Belt Treasures was also designed to boost the economy of the region. Riggs views it as "an income and job creating mechanism to advance our economy," and it has experienced much early success ("Black Belt Treasures" 2005). Two months after opening, the gallery had received visitors from 26 states and 2 foreign countries. Riggs adds that "it's been well-received by the downtown business owners," who have experienced increased activity. One local restaurant owner reported averaging 2-3 groups of customers per day who came to Camden to shop at Black Belt Treasures.

The project also intends to increase the earnings of its contributing artists. Riggs hopes to assist artists "in marketing their products to a wider group of potential customers" ("Black Belt Treasures" 2005). Previously, much of the artists' work could only be found by determined collectors at craft shows or in front yards on rural back roads (Johnson 2005). Artist Sam Williams used to drive eighty miles round trip each day to use the kiln at a junior college before he began selling his work at Black Belt Treasures. After selling 75 pieces in 8 months, Williams plans to open his own studio in Monroeville (Telehany 2006). In fact, two months after opening, Black Belt Treasures had reordered from every one of its contributing artists.

As often happens with successful rural tourism ventures, Black Belt Treasures has generated more ideas and more plans. Director Delia Brand hopes "to develop tourist trails that focus on our artists so tourists can drive around and see the artists' work in their own settings" (Telehany 2006) while experiencing the history and heritage of the region ("Black Belt Treasures" 2005). Black Belt Treasures has opened the door for new

artists as well. "Since we've opened," Brand explains, "we've had contact with other artists we had not heard about, so the interest is growing" (Pickard 2005). Riggs sums up the positive results by stating, "This has been more fun than anything I've done in thirty years" (Riggs 2005).

*Conecuh People.* Union Springs is described by one resident as "a small town that looks much the same as it did in the 1950's. It is anchored by a stately Second Empire-style courthouse and has stores that still close at noon every Thursday" (Forrer 2005). Downtown Union Springs may look unaltered, but the town shares much in common with other rural, small towns in the Black Belt. Once bustling centers of commerce in an agriculture-based economy, Black Belt towns have seen jobs and population disappear. In fact, Union Springs is the county seat of one of the poorest counties in the nation (Litchfield 2005).

The tourism council in Union Springs decided to pursue rural tourism as "a way to stand out and to capitalize on the area's assets" (Brown 2006). A local reporter points out that "the town hasn't lost its turn-of-the century charm, and America is a nation of tourists looking for places that offer something different" (Brown 2006). Union Springs leaders decided to create a play to celebrate their Conecuh River heritage. By marketing Union Springs as a particular culture, leaders hoped to sell the play to those outside the county (Litchfield 2005). Indeed, one reporter says the play "resonates with anyone who has ties to the rural South" (Brown 2006).

The play is based on the book *Conecuh People* by native Wade Hall. The book was the product of interviews Hall conducted in Bullock County when he realized that

"the generation which had formed him was dying off" (Brown 2006). Ty Adams, a Clayton, Alabama native and Troy graduate who is now a New York playwright, transformed the stories into a play entitled "Conecuh People…The Experience," the story of a boy's coming of age in rural Alabama in the 1950's (Brown 2006).

Play performances specifically attempt to cultivate the "rural mystique" sought by rural tourists. The play is performed in an Episcopal Church built in 1909 and old fashioned fans are passed out at the door to keep audience members cool. Director Margie Benson states that while watching the play, "you'll feel yourself slipping back in time, to the 1950's. Listening to the people who lived in that time period is like listening to your mother or grandmother" (Litchfield 2005). The Union Springs website invites tourists to "take a trip back in time and experience life the way it used to be" (Forrer 2005). The website also advertises "an old-fashioned dinner… prepared and served by ladies of the community at a nearby church in the same tradition of years gone by" (Forrer 2005).

The old-fashioned dinner is part of an entire tourism package created by Union Springs. In addition to viewing an old-fashioned play in an old-fashioned church after an old-fashioned dinner, tourists can partake in other activities based on the area's culture and heritage. A quilt exhibit containing fifty local quilts is displayed in the sanctuaries of four historic churches (Morrow 2006). Self-guided tours of a general store, historic city jail (Brown 2006), Civil War cemetery, 1850's log cabin, and other historic structures are also available. Finally, visitors can overnight at area hunting lodges (Litchfield 2005) offering Southern breakfasts (Forrer 2005).

The success of the play surprised the Tourism Council, which first wondered how they would sell tickets and then wondered how they would tell people there were no tickets left (Brown 2006). More than 630 people attended four sold-out performances in 2004, the play's inaugural year (Morrow 2006). 60% of those in attendance were from outside the county (Litchfield 2005). That same year, the play was nominated as the Alabama Tourism Event of the Year. In addition to the sold out performances, all seven rooms at the local hotel were booked for overnight stays and over one hundred people ate supper at the First Baptist Church on Friday night ("Play" 2004). Due to the play's popularity, two extra performances were added for the 2005 and 2006 seasons (Morrow 2006).

Rural tourism has also benefited the community in ways beyond economics and visibility. Colleen Forrer, the drama project director, states that "the project brought the community together" ("Play" 2004). Wade Hall, author of *Conecuh People*, adds that the play has sparked new revitalization efforts. He believes the play will encourage both the renovation of the Red Door Theater and the staging of additional dramatic presentations and recitals. He concludes by saying that Bullock County has the potential of being an important tourist destination ("Play" 2004).

## Community Development

Though the components, benefits, and drawbacks of rural tourism are crucial to an understanding of the art movement in York, it is also critical to recognize rural tourism as just one strategy in the broader field of community development. Thus, community

development must also be examined to fully comprehend the purpose, principles, and requirements of development efforts in communities. Further, community development principles are necessary for the success of York's rural tourism efforts which rely on building a cohesive community.

Community development exists as an alternative to other development methods which seek to recruit outside companies in order to create jobs and improve the standard of living in communities. It is rooted in asset based planning which looks internally, building on communities' inherent assets instead of seeking external solutions. Shuman believes a community "can best strengthen its economy when it builds on its internal strengths" (1998:6). Medoff and Sklar state that "effective community development begins by recognizing and reinforcing the resources within the community" (1994:4). Sumners and Lee add that "successful communities 'think outside the box,' looking for ways to set themselves apart from the pack. They identify what makes their community special and then work to cultivate and promote those unique assets" (2004:28).

Rural tourism specifically attempts to connect identified assets "in ways that multiply their power and effectiveness" (Sumners & Lee 2003:12). Because social and economic links to other areas clearly affect the viability of rural communities (Willits & Luloff 1995), "if rural areas are to survive, they must figure out ways to connect to each other and to robust urban areas" (Stauber 2001:52). Galston and Baehler state that "a central challenge for U.S. rural development will be to conceptualize, and put into place, new kinds of linkages between metropolitan areas and remote communities" (1995:15). Rural tourism is one way to establish these linkages. However, linking assets to outside

areas requires that the assets be seen as authentic by outsiders, as opposed to kitschy or contrived (Wilson et al. 2001).

Once authentic assets are identified, community development practitioners suggest an organization be formed to move efforts forward (Grisham 2005). This organization should develop a mission statement and strategic plan, with specific goals and objectives resulting in concrete actions. Strategic planning develops unity among citizens, aids progress by creating specific actions, and gives the movement legitimacy and momentum, both of which are needed to boost community participation (Sumners 2006). The Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative in Boston provides a good example of a community group which developed and carried out small, concrete actions to address immediate needs. DSNI's first efforts were aimed at stopping illegal dumping in the neighborhood. In addition to improving the neighborhood, this project bolstered community support for DSNI and helped to establish its reputation as an active, effective organization (Medoff & Sklar 1994).

Strategic plans are also essential for rural tourism specifically. Brown states that many of the risks of rural tourism "can be mitigated if proper planning is employed at the outset of tourism development" and views "comprehensive planning and development [as] one of the key components of successful rural tourism strategies" (n.d.:3-4). Wilson et al. add that strategic planning is required for the efficient and effective use of resources and funds, which are often limited in rural communities. Planning for tourism development should thus be integrated into a community's overall economic strategy (Wilson et al. 2001).

Community participation is a key component of community development.

Grisham and Gurwitt point out that "even the best of plans cannot succeed unless the people it will affect have the ability as well as the desire to make it work" (1999:54). The failure to involve citizens, they state, breeds suspicion and mistrust, "thus preventing the community from accomplishing almost any common action" (1999:10). They add that "meaningful and sustainable community change requires the participation of a large number of citizens" (1999:34), because the "more people [that] bring their individual talents, skills, and time to the solution of community problems, the stronger are the results" (1999:10). It is especially important to include youth in development efforts, as they will be the ones to carry the movement forward in the future (Medoff & Sklar 1994).

Community involvement and support are particularly vital to the success of rural tourism efforts "because of the nature of tourism: the community as a whole and its image must be marketed, not just one attraction" (Wilson et al. 2001:137). Community wide support also ensures a greater commitment to carrying out the tourist idea (Krannich & Petrzelka 2003) and increases the likelihood that tourists are treated well and receive a good impression. Communities also need to be mobilized to promote their area and to obtain funds, as the grant climate is increasingly competitive (Wilson et al. 2001).

Community involvement is central to community development because efforts are built from the bottom up, with citizens acting as experts in their own development. Craig defines the goal of community development as giving "ordinary people a voice for expressing and acting on their extraordinary needs and desires in opposition to the vested interests of global economic and political power" (1998:15). This concept is well illustrated by the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative in Boston, a development group led by members of the community which "turned the traditional top-down urban planning

process on its head. Instead of struggling to influence a process driven by city government, Dudley residents and agencies became visionaries, creat[ing] their own bottom-up…redevelopment plan" (Medoff & Sklar 1994:4). among

Because community development efforts are citizen driven, leaders emerge from the community. Sumners and Lee explain that "leadership is not confined to elected officials, business leaders, and those with specific titles. It recognizes that a community cannot do its work with just a few people. Rather, successful leadership requires mobilizing the talents of every segment of the community." Thus, "today's successful communities tend to be full of leaders" (2004:18).

Community development practitioners insist that efforts must also be rooted in equity. Khinduka contends that community development should actively create equity by realigning power resources in the community (Khinduka 1970). Craig adds that true community development is "concerned with social justice, with respecting the dignity and humanity of all, with the right of [people] to participate in decisions which affect them, with mutality [and] equality" (1998:4).

Giddons points out that "a highly unequal society is harming itself by not making the best use of the talents and capacities of its citizens" (1998:42). Thus, in order to build an equitable movement, communities must view each citizen as a resource. Grisham and Gurwitt state that "effective community development involves, respects, values, and builds the capacity of all the people" (1999:6), who are "the one asset that all small communities have in common" (1999:6) and "the raw material from which an answer [can] be crafted" (1999:17). They believe "each person should be treated as a resource. So the community development process begins with the development of people"

(1999:32).

One way community development efforts build the capacity of all citizens is through ameliorating the lives of the community's most disadvantaged residents. Scholars contend that community success in fact depends upon raising the level of the poor. Community developers in Tupelo, Mississippi believed that the area's future "depended as much on Lee County's poorest residents as it did on its most favored" (Grisham & Gurwitt 1999:15). They contended that "community development begins with a bold and clear-eyed examination of who the disadvantaged are and what keeps them in that condition" (Grisham & Gurwitt 1999:23).

In addition to high levels of community participation, community development movements also require broad based participation, involving a wide range of citizens from diverse backgrounds. Sumners and Lee state that if communities "are to survive and prosper, all parts of the community must develop an engrained habit of working together…Economic progress requires the resources of the 'whole' community" (2004:17). Broad based participation helps to ensure that community development efforts respect the needs of all citizens and keep communities intact. Without strong community engagement and a participatory approach that includes all voices from the outset of the planning process, rural communities can risk losing their sense of culture and community (Krannich & Petrzelka 2003).

In communities which are divided, however, achieving the broad based participation necessary for successful community development first requires uniting disparate groups. Sumners and Lee state that "communities that are divided- racially, politically, or socially- face near insurmountable barriers to economic advancement"

(2004:21). Uniting separate community groups requires building trust between them. The networks, trust, and norms of reciprocity among individuals which allow for collective action are what scholars refer to as "social capital." While communities may have high amounts of bonding social capital, which exists among like individuals, bridging social capital, which exists among disparate individuals is necessary for community development efforts to succeed.

Community development also demands a sense of collective identity among participants in order to unite them behind a common goal. Scholars call this "cultural capital": the cultural signals, symbols, and knowledge which identify someone as belonging to a particular group. Like bridging social capital, communities must build bridging cultural capital for development efforts to succeed. Because social and cultural capital are key components of community development, the next chapter examines the concepts in depth.

## CHAPTER TWO: SOCIAL & CULTURAL CAPITAL

Social capital is a necessary component of community development. Putnam calls social capital "a vital ingredient in economic development," adding that "in any comprehensive strategy for improving the plight of America's communities, rebuilding social capital is as important as investing in human and physical capital" (1993:6,8). Coleman adds that a group "whose members manifest trustworthiness and place extensive trust in one another will be able to accomplish much more than a comparable group lacking that trustworthiness" (Sumners 2005:6).

These scholars' observations have proven true in the rural South. In Tupelo, Mississippi, community developers found that social capital was positively related to a strong economy and good government (Grisham & Gurwitt 1999). Likewise, in Uniontown, Alabama, increasing social capital was the first step toward economic development, leading Sumners and Lee to conclude that in rural Alabama "one of the best hopes for economic progress lies in taking steps to strengthen the civic life in rural communities (2003:12).

Studies involving social capital abound in sociology, but there are comparatively few studies examining the role cultural capital plays in community development efforts. In addition to strengthening social capital, I believe communities must also cultivate a common identity in order for development efforts to succeed. This does not mean that

cultural differences are minimized or abandoned. Rather, citizens should celebrate diversity while striving to discover a common cultural identity which can unite them in creating a cohesive movement. In the case of the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative in Boston, community development efforts united four ethnic groups under the common identity of hailing from Dudley Street. In the case of York, blacks and whites could find a common identity rooted in the particular customs and traditions of Alabama's Black Belt.

Significantly, social and cultural capital can play a divisive role in communities. Because they are both rooted in linking people together, they run the risk of shutting others out. York possesses high degrees of bonding social and cultural capital, which links people who are alike, within the black and white communities. However, there is little bridging social and cultural capital to link the black and white communities to each other. This has an enormous impact on community development efforts which seek to unite blacks and whites under a common goal. To evaluate the complex role social and cultural capital play in York, both concepts will be explored in detail with special attention given to the segregating effects of social and cultural capital and the development of alternate forms of social and cultural capital in minority communities.

The term "social capital" traces its origins to the work of Lyda Hanifan, a school superintendent in West Virginia's Appalachian region. Hanifan coined the term to refer to social features necessary for community success, described as "goodwill, fellowship, sympathy, and social intercourse among individuals and families who make up a social unit" (1920:78). Hanifan's concept of social capital was extended by the work of French theorist Pierre Bourdieu, who conceived of a number of different types of capital,

including cultural capital. Bourdieu's work explores the universal structures of human life and the practices that sustain, perpetuate, and modify those structures. In short, Bourdieu attempts to explain the social character of human reality, and relies on the concept of capital to do so (Dreyfus & Rabinow 1999).

In sociology, the concept of capital traces to Marx, who defined capital as part of the surplus value captured by capitalists who control the means of production. Marx explained that in the circulation of commodities and monies between the production and consumption processes, workers are paid for their labor, but the commodity processed can be sold by capitalists in the consumption market for a higher price. Capital is therefore surplus value; it is both a product of the process and an investment process. Importantly, it is the dominant class which makes the investment and captures the surplus value, thus Marx's theory is based on the exploitative nature of social relations between the dominant and subordinate classes (Lin 2001).

Like Marx, Bourdieu defines capital as "the private possession of the means of production" by the dominant class (Bourdieu 1998:16). Bourdieu builds upon Marx's concept of capital to include different species of capital previously ignored in classical theory (Bourdieu 1993). He believes immaterial forms of capital exist alongside material or economic forms (Calhoun 1993) and views the social field as built around the competition for symbolic advantage, not material advantage, as Marx had supposed (Dreyfus 1999). Bourdieu therefore deems the task of science as discovering the structure of the distribution of different species of capital, which he defines as "the energy of social physics" (Bourdieu 1992:118).

Immaterial forms of capital introduced by Bourdieu include social, cultural, symbolic, political, and linguistic capital. Social capital refers to the sum of the resources that accrue to an individual or group by virtue of possessing a network of relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition (Bourdieu 1992). Cultural capital denotes various kinds of knowledge, including skills or education, which mark individuals as legitimate members of a certain group (Ritzer & Goodman 2004). Symbolic capital is defined as any property or form of capital perceived by people endowed with categories of perception which cause them to know it, recognize it, and give it value (for example, the concept of "honor"). Political capital signifies the private appropriation of goods and public services whose unequal distribution causes differences in patterns of consumption and lifestyles (Bourdieu 1998). Lastly, linguistic capital denotes the dominant linguistic and dress codes which act as signals of intelligence and respectability (Carter 2003) and are used in discourse to produce a sense of the speaker's distinction (Jenkins 1992).

## Social Capital

According to Bourdieu, social capital is the sum of the resources that accrue to an individual through possessing a network of relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition (Bourdieu 1992). Social capital exists in social relations, obligations, or connections between people (Bourdieu 1993) as an asset to individuals who can access resources from the network or group of which they are members (Lin 2001). Flora et al. define social capital as the networks, norms of reciprocity, and mutual trust that exist among and within groups and communities (Flora et al. 2004), and Putnam defines it as

social networks and norms of reciprocity, and the trustworthiness that arise from them (Putnam 1995). Lin defines social capital as a collective asset shared by members of a defined group, with clear boundaries, obligations of exchange, and mutual recognition (Lin 2001).

Individuals access social capital by participating in social networks. As Coleman explains, social capital is a range of resources (real or potential) available to individuals due to their participation in social networks and relationships. These resources can include the acquisition of information, obligations of reciprocity derived from mutual systems of trust, or use of cooperative social norms (Herreros 2004). Individuals mobilize these resources when they wish to succeed in a particular action. Lin states that individuals are cognitively aware of the presence of such resources and make a conscious choice in evoking them. They use social capital as an investment with expected returns. By engaging in interactions and networking, individuals can access or borrow the resources of others (Lin 2001).

Several scholars tout the positive effects of social capital. Putnam argues that social capital promotes and enhances collective norms and trust which are central to the production and maintenance of the collective well-being (Lin 2001). He adds that social trust enables communities to work together toward a common goal, for mutual benefit (Putnam 1995). Hooghe and Stolle agree, stating that social capital allows citizens to join forces in social and political groups and enables them to come together in citizens' initiatives more easily. They believe social capital enables and facilitates collective action and allows citizens to overcome problems and to resolve conflicts more effectively

(Hooghe & Stolle 2003). The existence of social capital, therefore, is vital to community development.

Conversely, however, closure is essential to the maintenance of social capital. Bourdieu states that membership in a group is based on a clear demarcation excluding outsiders: closure of the group and density within the group are required. Coleman adds that dense or closed networks are the means by which collective capital can be maintained and the reproduction of the group can be achieved. He sees network closure as a distinctive advantage of social capital, because it maintains and enhances trust, norms, authority, and sanctions, the solidifying forces which ensure individuals can mobilize network resources. Putnam also views dense, closed groups as necessary to the production of social capital (Lin 2001).

Though scholars deem closure necessary for maintaining the positive effects of social capital, it also promotes domination and inequality. Bourdieu describes social capital as the investment of members of the dominant class engaging in mutual recognition and acknowledgement to maintain and reproduce group solidarity and to preserve the group's dominant position (Lin 2001). Gittel adds that at the turn of the 20$^{th}$ century, among the most important associations in America were charitable organizations which created social capital for themselves, but did not contribute to developing social capital for the poor. Rather, economic and social elites established those organizations to impose social controls on the poor and had no intention of including them in the system (Gittel 2003).

Schulman and Anderson highlight the dominating function of social capital in their study of a Southern textile community, revealing how social capital is embedded in

local networks of power and domination. They describe "paternalistic" social capital, which involves hierarchical differentiation between classes and a concentration of power, thereby allowing those in the dominant class to maintain control (Schulman & Anderson 1999).

In addition to domination, the closure required by social capital can also be used to exclude and discriminate against others. Servon questions the "usefulness and merit" of closure in a heterogeneous society. She states that closure, the very social structure that produces social capital, also excludes entire groups. Closure operates in tight-knit, homogenous groups, forming a social structure which produces the positive side of social capital (trust, norms, and networks), but does so at the cost of perpetuating both exclusivity and a society in which identity determines whether or not one is allowed to join (Servon 2003:15-16).

Servon explains that perpetuating existing organizations and/or creating new ones which draw strength from certain kinds of identity potentially deepens existing cleavages that feed intolerance and maintain institutions which discriminate along the lines of gender, race, class, and ethnicity. These homogenous associations in heterogeneous societies may strengthen trust and cooperative norms within an ethnic group (bonding capital), but weaken trust and cooperation between groups (bridging capital) (Servon 2003).

Putnam agrees that "social inequalities may be embedded in social capital. Norms and networks that serve some groups may obstruct others," he states, "particularly if the norms are discriminatory or the networks socially segregated. Recognizing the importance of social capital in sustaining community life does not exempt us from the

need to worry about how community is defined—who is inside and thus benefits from social capital, and who is outside and does not" (Putnam 1993:9). Hooghe and Stoole add that social capital can help societies achieve harmful goals. In predominantly white neighborhoods, for instance, community organizations can be used to exclude racial and ethnic minorities (Hooghe & Stolle 2003).

In fact, Gittel uses the exclusive function of social capital to explain racial segregation in the U.S. She states that there are differences in citizens' ability to accumulate social capital and to convert it into political and civic action, and points out that race and the history of racism are essential determinants of the character and quality of participation in organizations and groups. Gittel explains that historically closed and hierarchically structured communities run by narrow elites socialize citizens to remain outside the system. Those excluded thereby suffer a lack of access to and experience in self-governance which limits association and trust-building among groups, and alienates the excluded from the political system (Gittel 2003).

Despite the lack of bridging social capital across racial groups, however, bonding social capital thrives within them. For example, the high level of social capital in the U.S. in the early 1960's among the dominant white class also existed within black communities. In fact, social capital underwrote black communities' ability to act together for social change (Snyder 2002). Putnam cites the importance of "the repositories of social capital within America's minority communities," stating that "historically, the black church has been the most bounteous treasure-house of social capital for African Americans. [It] provided the organizational infrastructure for political mobilization in the civil rights movement [and] is a uniquely powerful resource for political engagement

among blacks—an arena in which to learn about public affairs and hone political skills and make connections" (Putnam 1993:7).

Unfortunately, few studies address social capital within minority communities. Gittel cites a lack of studies which distinguish differences in the kind and quality of social capital created by different groups or explain the reasons for those differences. Scholars have not sufficiently explored gender, race, and social differences, nor do they incorporate them in their theories. Further, there is little writing on the impact of structural racism and its effect on the creation of social capital (Gittell 2003). Servon adds that minority groups have different spaces in which to be political and to participate than do the mostly white, male, middle class groups studied by Putnam, and these spaces tend to be less visible. She believes scholars have a responsibility to render visible the spaces in which minority groups create trust, norms, and networks (Servon 2003).

## Cultural Capital

Like social capital, cultural capital also plays a vital role in community development. Bourdieu introduces the concept of cultural capital by describing social space as separated into classes, bringing together people who are homogeneous in their cultural practices, patterns of consumption, and public opinions. Those who possess the knowledge of certain types of cultural practices achieve the power of cultural capital, defined by Bourdieu as an "idea of greatness that is handed down but can never be totally objectified" (Bourdieu 1998:15).

Other theorists describe cultural capital as "high status cultural signals used in cultural and social selection" (Lamont & Lareau 1988:153) and as "various kinds of legitimate knowledge, including a skill or education" (Ritzer & Goodman 2004). Merelman adds that cultural capital consists not only of technical skills, but of the symbolic mastery those skills convey (Merelman 1994). Importantly, cultural capital is exclusive; it marks those who appropriate it for themselves in a legitimate and natural fashion from impostors whose pretensions to claim it are discouraged (Pinto 1999).

Like social capital, cultural capital is used by those who possess it as an investment. Bourdieu viewed culture as a kind of economy in which people use cultural capital (largely a result of their social class origin and educational experience) for gain (Ritzer & Goodman 2004). In other words, individuals' social position and family background provide them with social and cultural resources which need to be actively invested to yield social profits (Lamont & Lareau 1988). Cultural capital therefore represents investments by the dominant class in reproducing a set of symbols and meanings which perpetuate their domination (Lin 2001).

Bourdieu believes the dominant class uses cultural capital to maintain their position in society, an action he terms "symbolic violence." For Bourdieu, the most important feature of symbolic violence is the process by which the dominant values and culture are accepted and taken in as one's own without any resistance or conscious awareness on one's part. Symbolic violence occurs in the pedagogic action through which the culture and values of the dominant class are legitimated as the "objective" culture and values of society, so that they are not viewed as culture and values which support and sustain the dominant class. The culture and values of the dominant class are

"misrecognized" as the culture and values of the entire society. It is this acquisition and misrecognition of the dominant culture and its values which forms symbolic violence (Lin 2001).

Bourdieu maintains that the reproduction of the dominant class depends largely on the transmission of cultural capital, an inherited capital which appears natural and innate (Bourdieu 1993). A society's dominant class imposes its culture by engaging in pedagogic action which internalizes the dominant symbols and meanings in the next generation, thus reproducing the salience of the dominant culture. Social reproduction, therefore, is the imposition of symbolic violence by the dominant class on the dominated class (Lin 2001). The reproduction of the distribution of cultural capital is achieved through familial strategies and by the specific logic of the school institution (Bourdieu 1998).

Like social capital, cultural capital also has exclusionary traits. Bourdieu states that language and cultural codes can be used for cultural profit and exclusion (Jenkins 1992). According to Bourdieu, "cultural gatekeepers" use dominant linguistic and dress codes as signals of intelligence, respectability, and distinction (Carter 2003), receiving a linguistic profit as soon as they open their mouths. The very nature of their speech denotes their authority to speak so that it hardly matters what they say (Bourdieu 1993).

Lamont and Lareau view the role of cultural capital in exclusion from jobs, resources, and high status groups as one of the most important original dimensions of Bourdieu's theory. They propose a new definition focusing on cultural and social exclusion, defining cultural capital as "institutionalized, i.e. widely shared, high status

cultural signals (attitudes, preferences, formal knowledge, behaviors, goods, and credentials) used for social and cultural exclusion" (Lamont & Lareau 1988:153,156).

Merelman builds on this notion in his exploration of the use of cultural capital to exclude blacks in American society. Merelman explains that as a subordinate racial group, blacks find themselves at a significant disadvantage to whites in the pursuit of cultural capital, especially in its credentialed form. He contends that in the U.S., isolation between the races has been more complete than isolation along gender, class, or white ethnic lines, pointing out that federal law did not even require blacks and whites to have access to the same public schools until 1954. In contrast, men and women, rich and poor, Poles and WASPs were never legally segregated in public schools, nor were these groups ever as segregated in practice throughout the range of life as blacks and whites are today. Merelman states that though we are decades past *Brown v. Board of Education*, most whites and blacks still attend different schools, and when in the same schools, usually occupy different educational tracks. He believes this severe isolation has enabled whites to control the definition and flow of cultural capital in most schools and universities and in the media (Merelman 1994).

Likewise, Bourdieu uses linguistic codes to highlight the segregating power of cultural capital, citing the difference between standard, white English and black American vernacular. Bourdieu contends that the dominated class (black Americans) speaks a particular version of English which is devalued. Therefore, every linguistic interaction between whites and blacks is constrained by the encompassing structural relation between their respective appropriations of English, and by the power imbalance which sustains it and gives the arbitrary imposition of middle-class, "white" English its

air of naturalness. He adds that when a black person speaks to a white person, it is not simply two people speaking together. Rather, through them, the whole history of the economic, political, and cultural subjugation of blacks in the U.S. presents itself (Bourdieu 1992).

In her book *Worlds Apart*, Cynthia Duncan also uses the concept of exclusive cultural capital to explain blacks' isolation from a society controlled by wealthy whites. Duncan defines culture as "a tool kit of symbols, stories, rituals, and worldviews that we assemble as we grow up and experience the world" (1999:189). Through our social relationships, she explains, we acquire the habits, skills, stories, and worldview which we use to make decisions about how to act. These decisions define how we relate to one another and become the patterns we expect and the norms governing how things are done. Further, "these decisions, rules, and experiences…are grounded in the structure of class power and racial oppression" (1999:192-3). Immediate social context shapes who the poor become and how they see their options as individuals and as a community. When a poor, black, urban youth is asked why he does not become a doctor, his response is not that he does not want to become one, but is rather, "Who, me?" According to Duncan, being a doctor is not a part of his tool kit; it is not part of what he believes he can become (1999:190).

**Alternate Cultural Capital**

Merelman describes an "alternate" cultural capital formed by American blacks as a result of their exclusion from dominant, white cultural capital. He states that the distinctive historical isolation of blacks has created some hostility to and suspicion of

white-defined cultural capital. He points out that American blacks have been forced to survive not by assimilating into the dominant white group (as did many white ethnics), but rather by shielding themselves behind a defensive, protective culture designed to ward off, resist, and actively reject domination by whites. This distinctive culture causes many blacks to be ambivalent about the cultural capital largely controlled by whites, seeing in the acquisition of such capital not necessarily an opportunity for black ascent, but a device for reproducing oppression, division, and stigmatization (Merelman 1994).

Carter provides an example of the rejection of white cultural capital in a study involving low-income black youth. She states that racial discrimination and limited socioeconomic prospects compel some ethnic minority groups to maintain culturally different approaches to opportunity structures, thereby preventing them from gathering the requisite cultural capital for academic and socioeconomic success. According to Carter, a legacy of slavery and racism in the black social experience predisposes many black students to lower their aspirations for schooling because they believe high academic achievement only benefits white, middle class students. Academic achievement therefore comes to be seen as "acting white" (Carter 2003:137).

Like Merelman, Carter describes the development of a "non-dominant" cultural capital among low-income black youth which highlights how they resist the despair and hopelessness brought about by a limited opportunity structure. Instead of viewing their worth from the dominant social group's standpoint, black youth produce alternative cultural tool kits with which to evaluate their own and others' social actions. Dominated groups therefore possess their own standards and sets of norms which can be relatively autonomous from the dominant ones (Carter 2003).

Non-dominant cultural capital embodies a set of tastes, or schemes of appreciation and understandings, accorded to a lower status group which include preferences for particular linguistic, musical, or interactional styles. Non-dominant capital includes those resources used by lower status individuals to gain authentic cultural status positions within their respective communities (Carter 2003). Thus, lower status cultural signals (like being streetwise) perform within the lower class the same exclusivist function that high status symbols perform in the middle and upper classes (Lamont & Lareau 1988).

According to Carter, one of the central purposes of non-dominant cultural capital is to provide its users with the ability to navigate the terrain of ethnic authenticity using cultural codes and signals. In her study, black students' desire to maintain a unique identity in a racially hierarchical society resulted in the creation of codes for authentic membership, which operated similarly to those conventionally associated with dominant cultural capital (Carter 2003). In dominated groups, codes act both as a criterion for determining who is legitimate or authentic, while excluding those that lack legitimacy (Clay 2003). Styles, tastes, preferences, and certain understandings mark one as either in or out. For the majority of students in Carter's study, dress, music, and speech styles were the most salient signifiers of their racial identity (Carter 2003).

Authenticity enables members of the dominated group to gain status within the group and to preserve a boundary between themselves and outsiders. The students in Carter's study set up symbolic boundaries in order to acquire status among themselves and to ward off outsiders, particularly non-black youth. As they laid these boundaries, they also evaluated who was most worthy of "black" cultural membership based on their use of specified resources. Cultural authenticity was therefore used both to draw

boundaries between themselves and other ethnic groups and to socially control the cultural behaviors of members of their own group. Cultural capital served to reinforce their collective or group identity, giving them the power to discern who belonged and who did not (Carter 2003).

Like social capital, several scholars call for more studies exploring alternate forms of cultural capital in minority communities. Carter states that most cultural capital literature tends to ignore the non-dominant form, focusing instead on the experiences of the dominant social class. Therefore, the multiple ways cultural resources of other groups convert into cultural capital are ignored. She adds that current studies fail to raise a critical awareness of the value of non-dominant cultural resources within low-income, racial, and ethnic minority communities (Carter 2003). Clay adds that depictions of cultural capital and the black community have used white standards to cite the lack of cultural capital blacks have in relation to whites, instead of examining the alternative forms of cultural capital created by blacks (Clay 2003).

## Bridging Social and Cultural Capital

Establishing bridging social and cultural capital between disparate community groups is necessary for community development. Scholars offer several methods to increase bridging social capital which can also be used to increase bridging cultural capital. Many of the methods resonate with the tenets of community development explored in the previous chapter, including the need for sensitivity to local populations, equity, open participation, a bottom up approach, and diverse leadership.

First, scholars cite the need to remain sensitive to local populations. Crothers states that leaders acting in diverse communities to regenerate social capital must be sensitive to the values, goals, and ideals of local populations if they are to act legitimately and to serve as models of the kind of democratic action idealized in the concept of social capital. Leaders should recognize the significance of community norms and values in shaping effective programs and remain aware of the interplay of values, goals, and interests as they do their work. According to Crothers, it is not sufficient to build a model of social recapitalization which assumes unanimity of interests, goals, values, (or cultures) (Crothers 2002).

Scholars also insist social and cultural capital must be rooted in equity. Gittell states that community organizations should be models of democracy and participation. Policies instilling open membership, internal democracy, equal representation, circulation of leadership, and self-determination are essential to the creation of community groups with an inclusive purpose (Gittel 2003). Community organizations and efforts must be open to all who wish to participate. The process by which goals are defined and programs are implemented will reveal whether citizens' participation is actively sought or opposed. Therefore, leaders need to make choices which embrace democratic participation (Crothers 2002). Gittell adds that the measure of success for community organizing should be in outcomes of inclusion and participation (Gittel 2003).

In addition, scholars maintain that efforts to bridge social and cultural capital must be achieved from the bottom up. Programs aimed at expanding capital should be sensitive to neighborhood needs, designed in light of citizen capacities, and use a participatory model instead of a top-down approach. Unless citizens are engaged,

Crothers states, social capital cannot occur (Crothers 2002). She adds that "real social recapitalization will need to be built from the street up, not imposed from the penthouse down" (Crothers 2002:234). Gittell agrees, stating that external creation of local organizations may be a diversion from locally conceived civic action, thereby minimizing community participation (Gittel 2003).

Another important component in bridging social and cultural capital is the involvement of leaders from the dominated group. Successful examples come from Birmingham in the 1990's and Atlanta in the 1970's, where newly elected black mayors helped to decentralize local government to the neighborhood level and encourage broader participation in low-income communities. Both mayors engaged new constituencies and marginalized populations in the political process, increased their presence in community policy, schools, local health care centers, and city halls, and fostered trust in the political system (Gittell 2003).

Likewise, the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative in Boston recruited leaders from dominated groups by establishing a board of directors with "equal minimum representation…for the neighborhood's four major cultures- Black, Cape Verdean, Latino, and White" (Medoff & Sklar 1994:57). DSNI also distributed flyers in three languages, provided translation devices at meetings, and held multicultural festivals which served to build social capital by increasing interracial cooperation and build cultural capital by establishing a common neighborhood identity (Medoff & Sklar 1994). For the past five years, residents of York, Alabama have been attempting to create a racially inclusive art movement which mirrors community development efforts like

DSNI. In order to evaluate their efforts, it is necessary to first provide a detailed description of the historical and modern manifestations of the art movement in York.

## CHAPTER THREE: ART IN YORK

### York, Alabama

The town of York sits nestled in Sumter County, at the far West edge of Alabama's Black Belt, well over a hundred miles from any of the state's most populous cities of Birmingham, Montgomery, and Mobile. The drive to York from the state capital is pastoral and sparse, consisting of vivid green hills with scattered groupings of cows, thick patches of timber, and virtually no homes or shops in sight. In fact, the only visible people sit in front of broken-down, boarded-up stores clustered around one-block towns every twenty miles or so. The radio stations crackle out one by one, except for those with preachers, and the towns eventually give up the battle to farmland.

York is a few blocks long and a few miles off the interstate. Drivers must slow down to bump over the railroad tracks, which is fortunate, because without this momentary pause, they might pass by York completely. This hardly seems the place for a burgeoning art movement, yet that is exactly what York residents are attempting to create. Though some in York still hold out hope for attracting industry, others hope to attract tourists instead, by recreating York as an arts haven. As the current mayor states, "Industry won't locate here. We need to build on what we already have."

## History of Art In York: 1981 –2001

The origins of York's art movement trace back twenty five years to the first Cuba Craft Conference, held in 1981 in a barn on the property of two local artists who invited community members from Cuba and the nearby town of York to share and learn art. Tut Altman Riddick, a native of York with long family ties to the area, attended the conference and taught mask-making. The presence of so many local residents making art of whom she was previously unaware convinced Riddick of the need for an art center in York. She states that her "original vision was to show people in the Black Belt contemporary art. York had antebellum homes and antiques, but no contemporary art, and contemporary art wouldn't compete with anything already in place." Riddick also sought to "make a place for the artist," stating "if you're not into football and hunting, there was no place for you in York." In addition, Riddick desired to give her own art collection to York, instead of bequeathing it to a bigger city like Mobile which already possessed plenty of art venues. Riddick's cousin gave her the idea by asking, "Why don't you give your art to York? No one's ever given York anything."

### The Coleman Center for the Arts

Riddick began asking local residents for property and donations in order to start an art center in York, a feat a local business owner called "a hard sell" because people in York "are laid back and countrified" and "no one understood the concept of an art center." Riddick confirms "there was some negativity from local residents, saying York would never have anything like that, but the negativity spurred us on. Come hell or high

water, we decided they would have this center. There was determination among a lot of devoted people."

Interestingly, many of the devotees working to make the art center a reality were also working together in a campaign opposing a large hazardous waste landfill owned and operated by Chemical Waste Management (Alley, Faupel, and Bailey 1995; Bailey and Faupel 1992). In 1985, one of the artists began the group Alabamians for a Clean Environment in order to fight the landfill that was to be placed near York. Three other artists joined the battle, and the experience of working together for a common cause provided these individuals with a background in community organizing which would benefit the art movement.

Riddick secured the building for the Coleman Center by asking the Coleman family to donate it to York. The building was vacant, last used as a tire recapping plant. The Colemans agreed, with the understanding that the Riddicks would donate their art to York. The Coleman Center used tax revenues from the hazardous waste facility to renovate the building and to employ a part-time director. A handful of prominent families in the area also donated funds, and the Coleman Center opened in 1985.

Riddick chose Avenue A in York because its four lots and three buildings would allow the Coleman Center to expand, and the city of York soon bought the buildings down the block, adding a craft room and library to the Coleman Center (see Appendix 2, Figure 1). Riddick placed the gallery in the same building as the library because she says York residents "were familiar with the library. There were lots of readers in York, but not a lot of them could afford to buy books. They had a room in City Hall filled with paperbacks that was well used." By combining the gallery with the library, Riddick

hoped the art would capture the attention of those who came to borrow books. It was also a cost effective decision, as the library and gallery could be manned by one person.

The Coleman Center's early shows featured the Riddicks' art collection. Riddick states "people loved coming and looking at our collection. That was the backbone of the museum for years." She later discovered, however, that local residents wanted to show their own art as well, and decided that the Coleman Center should not be a permanent collection, but a revolving one. Riddick states that "people began bringing paintings out of the woodwork" to show at the Coleman Center. The Riddicks' collection was taken to the Mobile Museum of Art where it could receive curatorial care, with the intention of bringing it back to York to fill in at the Coleman Center. This was never necessary, however, because local art has sustained the Coleman Center ever since.

**Community Response**

In describing the response of York residents to the Coleman Center, Riddick states that "people would come in and not say a lot, but just look, but we were excited about the response, that people came to the shows." She adds that after the Coleman Center had been open for a few years, the gallery featured a three generation show of a local York family. Upon viewing the show, one York resident told Riddick that the pottery done by one of the artists wasn't as good as her painting. Riddick called this "fabulous because it showed people had become discerning. By seeing good art," she explains, "you realize what is bad. This was a good sign. People were definitely yearning for this exposure." Riddick adds that there are a lot of stories in York and its

surrounding area about people who saw art for the first time at the Coleman Center and later became artists or art teachers.

Riddick is truthful, however, about the amount of support she received. She states that the Coleman Center never had a lot of community support, and that some residents only supported it because they didn't have anything else to support. Others supported it because Riddick's family was popular in York. She adds, however, that only a small percentage of a community supports an art center anywhere, even in New York City.

Riddick is also realistic about the amount of time it takes to cultivate an appreciation of the arts. She believes York residents "don't realize what they have" and asks,

> Where else in the world would you find a world class art center in a small town? For a lot of people, art is not a part of their early culture. You can't knock people for something they haven't grown accustomed to. Like, I have no need for a computer. Why should I take on something I don't need? Art is the same for some people. For example, the principal at the public high school in York had never been to an art gallery or art store when we opened the Coleman Center. There is a difficulty in trying to communicate art in that context.

Some in York, however, believe the Coleman Center did more for the community than Riddick allows. One former fundraiser states that

> people all over Sumter County stepped forward and made nice contributions because they were happy about the Coleman Center. Even when we were providing [the director's] salary, they contributed. There was a good attitude among people. I never would have thought [people would] pay $1000 to pay an art director's salary. The Coleman Center has been a strong element in the county [which] brought York together when York needed an institution to bring it together. It brought a sense of community throughout the county. People were proud of the Coleman Center. The most amazing thing was how the Coleman Center brought people together I never thought would have come together for the purpose of supporting the arts, especially in an area of hunting and football. But even the hunters and football fans gave money and enjoyed the cocktail parties.

In addition to uniting the community, residents believe the Coleman Center has helped to change local perceptions about where art exists. Previously, Livingston was seen as the place for the arts, since it was home to the University of West Alabama, but the presence of the Coleman Center has helped to change that. One resident calls it "amazing that a town York's size has had an art center for twenty years." An artist in residence agrees that "to have an art center that lasts more than twenty years is a remarkable occurrence in a poor, small, rural town."

## A New Phase of Art in York: 2001 – present

The Coleman Center maintained itself for over fifteen years, employing part-time directors and focusing on local crafts. It featured gallery shows, book signings, speakers, and workshops. A local 1987 publication describes the Coleman Center as offering "various short courses to the public" in "china painting, book arts, needlework, and cake decorating" (Avery 1987). According to a board member, the Coleman Center "just existed for awhile." At the turn of the century, however, the arts in York began a new phase. In December 2001 and April 2002, respectively, two prominent artists, Marilyn Gordon and Amos Kennedy, came to live and work in York, sparking the art movement's modern phase. Riddick both invited them and laid the groundwork for their arrival.

**Artists in Residence**

Marilyn Gordon came to York to direct Black Belt Designs, intended to employ local women recently laid off by closed textile mills. Gordon defines Black Belt Designs as "a sewing project and workshop where anyone can come in and improve their sewing skills, and develop skills that are marketable. It's not a quilting bee. Our goal is to help every person who has an intent in learning and improving their sewing skills to reach the potential they want to reach." Eight women attended the first sewing workshop in April 2002, where they pieced together worn denim and African cloth to create unique clothing and accessories.

In its first year, Black Belt Designs received funding from a $10,000 building capacity grant from the Alabama Civil Justice Foundation. The funds were intended to jumpstart and expand the Coleman Center, or as one fundraiser put it, to "breathe some life into the Coleman Center itself." Black Belt Designs received $6,000 of the grant money to obtain sewing equipment and to sponsor the first workshop. Additional equipment was donated or loaned, and blue jeans used in the sewers' creations are donated or purchased at thrift stores. Because the project is located in a Coleman Center building owned by the city, Black Belt Designs does not pay rent, telephone, or electricity costs. The project also profits, of course, by selling their handmade items.

Amos Kennedy is a well-known print artist whom one board member credits with bringing a "new dimension to the Coleman Center. He is well known in the Black Belt, brought in artists from around the nation, and has a lot of connections in the art world. Because of Kennedy's presence, other artists started coming to York." Georgine Clarke, Visual Arts Program Manager at the Alabama State Council on the Arts states that

Kennedy is "a key resource, is known throughout the state" and "has had lots of impact on growth in the community." A York artist adds that Southern Living, Alabama Public Television, and *Black and White* (a Birmingham newspaper) all came to York because of Kennedy. A local business owner adds, "We get a lot of press because of Amos. He's a unique man, the only black man I know of doing lead print. He travels and teaches nationally."

The presence of both Gordon and Kennedy has done wonders to promote York as an arts haven. Clarke states that "a lot of people in Alabama know about York because of Marilyn and Amos, their presence at the Kentuck Arts festival, and newspaper articles about them." One local artist explains that Kennedy "tells people to come to York and see what we're doing. He doesn't talk about his own work. He says, 'Let me tell you about the Coleman Center.'" She calls him an "ambassador for York."

The director of the Coleman Center at the time of Gordon and Kennedy's arrival calls it "incredible" to have these two master artisans in York. When they arrived, she decided the Coleman Center needed a full time director to make use of its newfound talent and enlisted the help of a local woman with fundraising experience. Together they raised the money necessary to employ four full time Coleman Center employees: an executive director, a community arts director, and two employees funded through VISTA grants.

**New Directors**

In August of 2003, two newly hired full time directors began building on an arts foundation set for them by local residents twenty years before. Amy Horst was hired as

the Coleman Center's executive director. Horst had previously worked as a consultant to the Coleman Center, assisting them in applying for grants through the Alabama State Council on the Arts and through HUD, and reinstating their tax exempt status. Richard Saxton, who first came to York as an artist in residence, was hired as the Coleman Center's community arts director.

As executive director of the Coleman Center, Horst states her "first priority was to deal with the infrastructure of the organization," including setting a budget and reinstating board terms and bylaws in order to develop the board's capacity for setting organization policy. Horst also began what she calls an "organic, strategic planning process." She developed a written history of the Coleman Center and hired a designer to create a website clearly stating the Coleman Center's purpose. She also worked to define the Coleman Center's basic programs, including a description of and literature about Black Belt Designs. As a part of this process, Horst encouraged the board to develop a mission statement. One board member states that when he joined in 2003, the board "was in the process of asking, 'Who are we? What are we doing? What have we become?' The Coleman Center was trying to refocus." The board defined the mission of the Coleman Center as being "to improve the quality of life in the Black Belt Region of the Deep South through creativity and inspiration derived from the arts" ("Coleman Center" 2006).

**Funding**

In addition to addressing the infrastructure of the Coleman Center, Horst also reached out at the state and federal levels to secure grants for Coleman Center projects.

She states that upon her arrival, the Coleman Center was not applying for grants and was receiving funding solely through the hazardous waste facility tax and private donations. Horst secured grants from Alabama Power, the Alabama State Council on the Arts, and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

While residents applaud the resources Horst acquired at the state and federal level, some call for increased collaboration locally. The Sumter County Fine Arts Council in nearby Livingston has many members in common with the Coleman Center and funds their yearly photography show, but the president hopes the two agencies "will make new connections and partnerships," adding, "our door is very open to shared endeavors." Likewise, the president of the University of West Alabama agrees that "York would be particularly strong if in synergy with the SCFAC." He is on the Coleman Center board, and states the university has helped the Coleman Center with marketing and publicity, but would like to see the two organizations work more closely. He states that they "can't afford to be in competition" and "have to play off each other's strengths."

In addition, a local fundraising group called the Friends of the Coleman Center disbanded upon Horst's arrival. The Friends had recruited sponsors and organized fundraising events for the Coleman Center for a decade, often to pay the director's salary. A former member states that previous Coleman Center directors "had kept Friends alive," in part by reminding "the Friends of their quarterly meeting." Upon Horst's arrival, the Friends of the Coleman Center had $12,000 saved, which they gave to pay Horst's salary. "We were happy to do it," one member states. "We turned the money over and that was the end of the Friends." He believes the new directors and board members were "remiss

when they dropped the Friends, because the day will come again when the city or county can't pay the Coleman Center director."

In fact, funding continues to pose a challenge to the Coleman Center. One resident states that the money from the toxic waste facility tax "has dried up to almost nothing now." He believes the movement needs to "work for different sources of funds, both government and private." Shana Berger, the Coleman Center's current executive director, agrees that individual contributions need to be focused on and increased. Horst states that the "hardest thing is to find a sustainable funding base. It's hard to find enough local support," she states, "because it's a poor area." But an artist in residence states that "while Sumter County is poor, it has some very wealthy people who could easily make large donations."

**Community Art**

Upon assuming his position as community arts director, Saxton found that

> it was clear that both the bylaws of the organization and the view of the City Council was that the Coleman Center was to be a community directed arts organization and serve the City and the County with cultural stimulation. There was already a history with the Coleman Center and the City; the Coleman Center is the 'cultural agency' of the City. This relationship seemed to me to be ideal and unusual, and so I felt that the thing to do was to nurture that relationship and use it to really identify the Coleman Center as a true cultural asset to the community.

Directing the Coleman Center's focus toward community, Saxton "tried to bring in exhibitions that were rooted in the region or that directly linked something in the community with art making." The Handmade Basketry show, for instance, highlighted basket makers from Alabama and Mississippi. It featured work by Mary Jane Everett, who was so inspired by the show she decided to move her studio to York, and by Marilee

Keys, “an artist from Opelika, Alabama who introduced ideas of contemporary installation art to the community while working with native materials (pine needles).” Saxton also curated a “Folk Art exhibition which highlighted some of the best contemporary Folk Artists in the State.”

In the spirit of community art, Saxton began the Municipal Workshop, described as “a contemporary public art laboratory that works in conjunction with municipalities and communities to foster a more creative approach to living” (Durst 2004). For example, Saxton’s Utility Now project was designed to solve the York Department of Public Works transportation problems. The department formerly operated with one truck to accomplish all of the city’s cleanup and maintenance. In an effort to conserve both time and manpower, “Saxton converted Asian rickshaws from eBay into utility tricycles that city workers could pedal to job sites” (Spencer 2004).

The Municipal Workshop also invited artists from outside of Alabama to be a part of the creative problem solving process. Artists lived in York from a few weeks to a few months and were provided with housing and stipends for materials and living expenses. They were required to leave a piece of art behind when they departed and to develop projects which accomplished at least one, but hopefully all of the following goals: actively engaging citizens in the creation of art, beautifying York, and serving a function. These projects have included the creation of a bench at a youth bus stop, the repair of a city park, an audio collection of local music, a bicycle shed where local youth can learn to repair bikes, and several sculptures.

Building on the attention York garnered from the presence of Gordon and Kennedy, Horst and Saxton sought to attract additional well-known artists from around

the U.S. through an artists in residence program. The Bank of York building was donated and turned into two apartments, and the renovation of the building was a community effort. Unlike the Municipal Workshop, these artists were not asked to do anything for the city. The Coleman Center provided housing and stipends for materials and living expenses in the hope that their presence would boost interest in York and create community momentum for the arts.

Indeed, the artists in residence program accomplished both of these goals. One local artist states that "getting artists in residence who are better known has helped increase the popularity of York." A local resident agrees that "York needs to continue pulling in young artists and interns." A West Alabama resident adds that when artists began locating in York, "the arts took off. It took outsiders coming in for York residents to see what they have," she states. "That's the challenge of rural tourism: getting locals to see their towns with new eyes. It's taken twenty years for York to come to the point of acknowledging what they have."

The Coleman Center experienced a period of new growth with the arrival of Horst and Saxton. In addition to bringing in artists in residence to create community projects, the new directors began regular shows and receptions, ten per year. They sponsored craft workshops in quilting, mosaics, and painting, created a yearly festival called Rooster Day, held poetry readings and book signings, and brought in speakers. One of the VISTA workers at the Coleman Center explains she helped to bring "people in for a sewing class, coordinate museum showings, and plan for local schools to bring children in to see what the Coleman Center was about [because] lots of kids didn't know what was going on there." She also implemented a summer reading program for young children.

One resident states that with the arrival of Horst, Saxton, Kennedy, and Gordon, the Coleman Center "hit a growth spurt. [They] brought the Coleman Center from being a local museum to a center doing things anyone from any large city would see as art. They raised the bar for all of us."

Horst and Saxton departed York in the summer of 2005, but were replaced by directors who have continued and expanded the Coleman Center's focus on community art by recruiting new artists in residence and designing new community projects. For example, new directors Shana Berger and Nathan Purath curated a project entitled "The Darkest Hour is Just Before the Dawn," taken from a quote by Martin Luther King Jr. For the project, two artists in residence collected lamps from York residents to display in a vacant retail space in downtown York. According to the artists, "each day around dusk the lamps turn on one by one, representing the participants in the project, as well as the possibility that collective action can impact our communities in positive and lasting ways" ("Coleman Center" 2006). The exhibit received so much attention over several weeks that the building, abandoned for three years before being cleaned up by community volunteers, sold immediately ("Coleman Center" 2006).

**Youth Programming**

Berger and Purath have also added a new dimension to the Coleman Center programming through engaging youth. Purath states that he "would love to have a permanent group of kids that make art in York," adding that "there is a real need for youth programming, because there are no art programs in the public or private schools,

aside from individual teachers doing art projects with elementary school kids." Residents confirm the need for the Coleman Center to "have a greater impact in schools." A board member states that "art and music are non-existent" in the schools. Another explains that the public schools discontinued music and drama after the state refused to pay for them. She sees music as essential, and laments the fact that kids in York have no access to musicians.

Residents in York believe access to art through the Coleman Center would provide youth with a venue for expression which they currently lack. A board member states that "many kids have talent and the Coleman Center gives them an opportunity to express that talent." Purath believes "it is important for any kid anywhere to have ways to express themselves, but especially in a community that has the challenges York does." Dr. Richard Holland, President of the University of West Alabama, agrees that although the Black Belt "has been called a third world culture with many challenges…there are a lot of good things about it. The people are our richness," he states, adding that art can help young people to see the positive things about the Black Belt. A local resident adds that using art to teach children "about the culture of their people and their area [can] give them a sense of hope. We need to lift our children," she states.

Residents also believe that offering activities in the arts gives youth a new focus, keeping them away from risky activities. One resident states that "if we had more cultural activities in York, it would eliminate a lot of problems, like drugs. It would move [youth] out of the realm of fooling with drugs." She explains that a cultural center which provides various activities in drama and dance would help reduce drug use by giving "kids an interest in something else and giv[ing] them a sense of pride." Riddick

adds that she is thrilled the Coleman Center is starting to work with teens, because "teens need something to do for God's sake!"

Efforts to boost youth participation in the arts have proven successful so far. The bike shed Saxton created to teach youth how to repair bikes is always bustling on Saturday mornings. Purath adds that when working with fifth and sixth grade students on a community art project, at first the students were hesitant, insisting they couldn't draw, "but then started asking questions about how to do things and were excited to find that they could do art." He adds that "all the kids were eager to participate," more than any other kids he has instructed. A resident of York had a similar experience instructing children in a chapel program. She explains that "other kids who watched thought, 'I can do that too.' When you watch others," she explains, "you think, 'I can be somebody, I can be creative.' It's contagious."

**Downtown Artists**

As the Coleman Center and the artists it recruited continued to build the arts and to generate outside interest in York, another major event boosted the art movement. In January 2004, eight downtown buildings were auctioned to five artists and two buyers who planned to open restaurants (see Appendix 2, Figure 2). The eighth building sold to the city of York, whose mayor hopes to use the building for an art related purpose.

The bourgeoning art movement spurred by the Coleman Center helped to encourage local artists to purchase the downtown buildings. A local reporter states that the "buildings went up for auction at the right time [when things were beginning to

happen in York] and were inexpensive." A local artist adds that Kennedy and Gordon "are both fine artists and as a result of their work, local artists have opened shops on the main street." Georgine Clarke of the Alabama State Council on the Arts states that the "artists wouldn't have bought the buildings without the Coleman Center as the driving force. The support of an institution, citizen support, and its longevity got artists excited and willing to buy buildings in York."

Horst describes how Mary Jane Everett, a West Alabama basket maker, came to buy a downtown building:

> We met Everett at Kentuck [Arts Festival] and curated her into the first show we did at the Coleman Center called 'Basketry from Alabama.' Everett met local York artists through the show and became excited about the energy of five artists working on the block (Avenue A). When I mentioned that half of downtown was going up for auction, she decided to bid for a building. And when Linda [Munoz, a stained glass artist], heard, she decided to bid too. All of it centered around the Coleman Center to start. Everett was interested in the energy and activity going on and wanted to be around other art.

According to residents, after the artists purchased the downtown buildings, the York art scene "made a leap and began a flurry of activity." A local resident explains that at the same time the Coleman Center was generating more art in York, "the storefronts went up for sale. I thought the downtown was dead, but now there's almost a whole block of artists, plus the blues café. And I know someone else who wants to open an antique shop, and a couple of other interested artists." Horst confirms that "all of a sudden there was all this activity. There were five artists working at the Coleman Center every day, plus the artists downtown: four glass artists, a music teacher, a sculptor, and a basket maker."

So for the first time, local artists who had been working independently in their homes now worked side by side on the main street running through town, which served to boost the artists' cohesion as a group. One artist states that now the artists' ideas can "feed off each other." In fact, the artists even use each other's products in their work. A local basket maker works both pieces of fused glass and printer's drawer handles from other York artists into her baskets (Durst 2005).

The downtown artists also work alongside the Coleman Center to keep the arts growing in York. A local business owner calls the relationship "very close," adding that several of the downtown artists are Coleman Center board members, and one is the board president. The mayor of York agrees, stating, "You can't tell the difference between them." A local artist states that "one bolsters the other," explaining that when the artists have visitors, they direct them to the Coleman Center, and vice versa. The downtown artists and the Coleman Center have also collaborated on several community art projects. Although the Coleman Center spearheads the art movement in York in many ways, its work is often directly supported by downtown artists and community volunteers. Thus, for the remainder of this study, references made to the Coleman Center will include the artists and other community members who act in tandem with the Coleman Center.

## Effects of the Art Movement

### Beautification

Creating art in York has helped to beautify the town. In the summer of 2004, when the downtown artists were moving into their studios, one artist brightened the sidewalk outside her studio with plants and flowers, which another artist says had a "trickle down effect down the block." Soon, all of the artists had flowers out front, and many of the older stores added them as well. The same thing happened during the holiday season. One artist put up lights outside her studio, and every single store on the block followed suit. Store owners received a big response from York residents about the lights, and left them up until March, when the strands started to fray. One artist states that the mayor was disappointed when the lights came down; she had hoped they would stay up throughout the year.

Many York residents believe the plants and lights improved the town's appearance. One artist states she has heard more positive comments about the plants than about what she sells inside her studio. She adds that York residents are excited about the change, that the artists have "brought a little bit of pride to the local people." Another artist agrees that "everybody likes [the change]," and that the artists have heard "lots of positive feedback from the town." He believes the simple act of adding flowers and lights to the main street in town has "a salutary effect on civic pride." A visitor to York calls it "a cool atmosphere," explaining that "around Christmas time there were lights everywhere, people sitting in shops talking, drinking coffee, an exhibition at the gallery.

You wanted to move there." A local business owner cites the Coleman Center's efforts to beautify York as well, stating that the Coleman Center is now "more active than they've ever been as far as the beautification of York is concerned."

**Civic Energy**

The art and flowers and lights in York have given residents new energy and hope. In fact, though she founded the Coleman Center over twenty years ago, Riddick believes that in some ways York is "in the beginning" of the art movement. The Coleman Center director states that "York has a spirit, an energy, things are picking up, people are excited about what's happening." One York resident states that the energy "has spilled into the whole community and gotten everyone interested. I never thought art could do that, but it has." A resident who grew up in West Alabama in the 1980's states that at that time "York was nothing, it was a gas station, a stop on the way to Tuscaloosa. Now there's something going on, something York needed for a long time."

New energy in York is reviving town pride and inspiring some York residents to embark on new projects. One resident believes art in York "brought pride back to a lot of people. [York] was a ghost town. Now you see flowers on the street. People see a little bit of revitalization downtown and everyone gets inspired. It has pushed the group creating a new sports complex to get going and pushed the renovation of Cherokee Park." The art also inspired the beautification board of York to re-organize and encourage residents to clean up their yards by holding a contest for the best looking lawn. The mayor states that prior to the art movement in 2001, York "residents had an 'I don't care'

attitude.' But now people are concerned about the perception of York. They want to know: Are we on the map? Are we recognized?"

To further community momentum, the Coleman Center hired the Small Town Design Initiative, a development agency out of Birmingham, to provide York with community planning sessions and a site plan for York's revitalization. Community meetings were held in the fall of 2005 to catalogue York's assets and to discuss goals. Members of the Small Town Design Initiative then used the information from these sessions to create a plan for York's revitalization. The plan is to be used as a tool for the community, as a road map to help residents visualize what York could be. One of its key recommendations is to continue building on the arts.

In addition to sparking new energy and projects, art in York has also encouraged the establishment of new businesses. One York resident calls the art shops "a boon to downtown." Indeed, four new businesses have opened since the artists opened their studios, and residents have found employment in the studios, the new businesses, and through Black Belt Designs. A local business owner states that "York is coming back. We're filling up buildings. Now only a few buildings are empty. We're getting independent business owners. In the last two years, ten businesses opened, which is unheard of in a town this size. Just about anything you need, short of a shoe store, is here now." A local reporter believes art in York will continue to "open the door for new small businesses" and states that "the blues café would never have opened without the art movement."

**Outside Attention**

As those in the art movement hoped, the growth of art in York has drawn attention from people outside the community. Articles have appeared in several local papers and in two newspapers out of Birmingham, Alabama. Alabama Public Television has visited over a dozen times to film a documentary about the arts in York and Southern Living reporters have also shown interest. One artist reports that when representatives from York go out into Alabama, "people want to know what's happening in York." A local resident adds that "a lot of people have been looking at properties [in York]."

In the press, York has been celebrated for its successes despite the odds. *The Sumter Record-Journal* featured a story which stated that York's Christmas lights "may foretell a brighter future for the struggling city," calling them "just one example of how York is making strides toward improvement." The author added that "those improvements, if successful, could have an impact on the entire county" ("York Lets Light Shine" 2005). *Black and White*, a Birmingham newspaper, ran two stories about York artists entitled "Rural Renaissance" and "New York" in which the author describes York as "a place where changes that many people once thought impossible are happening in big and small ways everyday" (Durst 2005).

York has also boosted outside attention through First Saturdays: community art days held the first Saturday of every month. Visitors come to walk York's streets and admire the public art, buy from the shops and studios, visit the Coleman Center gallery, and eat food sold at booths by local residents. They come from nearby towns and from larger cities like Birmingham, Alabama and Meridian, Mississippi. One resident states

that "First Saturdays are really taking off" and a local reporter agrees, stating that "tours on First Saturdays attract more and more people every time. On each tour I hear at least one person say, 'I wish we had something like this in our town.' York is really unique in the Black Belt," he adds. "There's nothing like it around. In fact, a lot of people from Demopolis," a town commonly regarded as a Black Belt success story due to its high quality, integrated schools, express the desire to have something like the art movement in York.

Perhaps the greatest validation any community can receive is to be regarded as a resource and prototype by surrounding communities, a status York has achieved. The Black Belt Action Committee touts York as a model for other small communities. A publication by the Economic Development Institute at Auburn University cites York as a prime example of a "diverse and innovative economic development strategy" for rural Alabama (Sumners & Lee 2004:27). The authors describe York as a community "open to any opportunities that align with community assets…to new ideas, and [to] new ways of doing things" (Sumners & Lee 2004:28).

York also inspired the development of Black Belt Treasures, an internet site and gallery in Camden, Alabama, which sells Black Belt art and crafts. The founder visited the Coleman Center "because York was reviving its town, giving York a sense of pride and direction." The director adds:

> We looked at York as an anchor. During our planning phase, we benefited from their long experience. We avoided people thinking you can't do it because we could point to York as an example. York just took what they had and made a product out of it. It's not a pretty town, it has no architecture or famous social movements, but they now have a national reputation. Their vision set the standard for the rest of us who wanted to improve cultural assets in the area. Black Belt Treasures is an outgrowth of what we saw in York.

## Vision for Revitalization through Art in York

York residents are well aware of the upward trend in rural tourism, and several cite it while discussing their visions of York's future. A local business owner states that money is currently being invested in small towns which are close to the city, but do not have the smog, noise, crime, and traffic. She believes York could be a place for city dwellers to come to get away. A Coleman Center board member agrees, stating that "people in general are looking for little getaways, which is particularly true with local and folk art." The mayor adds that "art will draw people to York because people like to get away to cozy little places like York." The director of the Coleman Center believes "people aren't likely to come to York for an evening art opening and then have to drive home that night, but day trips are more likely," as evidenced by the popularity of York's First Saturdays.

A few York residents also cite examples of other communities or programs using rural tourism successfully. One artist in residence points out that "art as a way to generate income and outside interest has a long history. Artists beautify the community, make it hip, and generate interest. Embracing the arts has transformed towns" elsewhere, like Paducah, Kentucky. One York resident describes a bus tour which stops in various towns and cities known for antiques. She believes something similar could be done for the arts, including York as a destination for its art shops and the Coleman Center gallery.

Some York residents go beyond seeing York as a tourist destination, envisioning it as a center for art learning. A board member defines the mission of the Coleman

Center as "promoting the arts and developing York as an artists retreat or resort." A documentary filmmaker believes York "could be a learning place for others, a place where people can buy unique art, take classes, wander around, and be immersed in art." One artist envisions York as "a mini Pinlan" (an art school in North Carolina). Riddick also wants York to move in this direction, stating that

> Pinlan has done so much for Spruce Pine, [North Carolina]. There are now restaurants, galleries, businesses. In forty years, Pinlan has made that community. Now North Carolina gets big contributions because others know what art can do. We have a very healthy craft nation now. People are doing photography, pottery, papermaking, printing, and painting like never before. There has been a renaissance in our country. The cost of Pinlan courses is rising and not everyone can afford to go there to learn, and the demand for crafts is rising as well. York could be another kind of Pinlan. There's nothing like it in Alabama, Mississippi, Georgia, Louisiana or Texas.

As in Spruce Pine, York residents hope drawing tourists to the town will create economic opportunities. The president of the University of West Alabama states he is "extremely interested in improving the quality of life in the Black Belt," and believes this can be achieved "through the arts." A local artist adds that "art can't do anything but help the local economy," pointing out that if visitors come to see art, they have to eat lunch and buy gasoline too. Another explains that York residents "realize we're probably not going to get the next car plant, but we can have a community that people will get off the interstate for and they will come to see York and they will start going to businesses and looking around and noticing us and I think York will definitely benefit." The mayor of York agrees that art will help the community economically by building an economic base on tourism, adding that much of the Black Belt is focusing on tourism through art. Indeed, art has already benefited York economically by sparking new business growth

and increasing employment opportunities. In fact, according to its director, the Coleman Center brought $700,000 to the area in the past five years.

## Strategies to Achieve the Vision

Many in York believe York is on the right track to becoming a tourist destination. A filmmaker currently researching York states they "need to keep going the way they're going, with the artist in residence program and improving the community through art. It can only get better," she states. "You could end up with a whole town filled with mosaics." Shana Berger, the executive director of the Coleman Center, agrees it needs to "continue going in the direction it's going" and one of the Coleman Center's primary donors believes if it can "keep the arts going, York could be a neat little town again." Richard Saxton adds that "York simply needs to recognize its assets in relation to the arts and support the efforts of both the local artists and the visiting artists that come through the Coleman Center."

### Build on Assets

In fact, many in York do recognize the town's assets and seek to build on them. A local business owner states that "we have a lot of potentials, if we had some way to pull tourists here." First, York residents view their location as an asset. With railroad lines and two interstates running through town, one resident calls York "a main thoroughfare." York is also the first stop in Alabama when traveling from Mississippi,

and residents believe the town could be marketed as a gateway from one state to another. In addition, residents cite York's small town feel. York has a main street with an intact historic downtown, leading one resident to describe York as a "small town in a classic sense." Another adds, "I love this town, I love living here, I know my kids' teachers, the parents, I just love the atmosphere." Residents also cite York's energy and momentum as assets. As Cheryl Morgan of the Small Town Design Initiative explains, York is in a "state of renaissance: things are happening here."

Art tops the asset list, and residents agree that success in York means more of it. The mayor "would like to see the Coleman Center really grow and be out at the forefront of the city." A board member believes the Coleman Center should go beyond the artists in residence program, community art projects, and public art by adding visiting exhibits and workshops. Another agrees that the Coleman Center "needs to set up regular exhibits and exhibit more art to encourage people to stop by on their way through town." A local artist adds that she hopes the public art scattered around town will increase and Riddick "would like to see York put more art into the town: into benches and sidewalks." She envisions York as "an artist experience," inspiring people "to go there just to walk around and see the art in town." One artist in residence hopes a mural program will develop in York, stating that if York had ten murals, it would help to draw outsiders who would wonder what was going on in this little town.

In addition to more art, many in York agree the town also needs more artists. One local artist hopes for a bigger arts district, with more artists opening shops and displaying their talents and another "would love to see every empty building in town filled with

artists." In fact, an artist in residence calls artists "the building block" of York's revitalization plan. Another agrees, pointing out that

> artists bring in other artists so they can hang out and drink together. If you make space available to artists, you create the buzz and the momentum. That's all it takes, it's just that simple. There is an opportunity for towns like York to be revitalized by artists, because artists are looking for cheap space they can do what they want with, without being hassled by planning boards, etc. What's the difference between SoHo in New York City and rural settings? Not everyone wants to move to the city. Some want to be a good state or regional artist. It can be done in York; it has been done for years in other places. And small towns have cheap and vacant buildings. York could advertise its small, cheap houses, or even give away ten for free in order to attract more artists and create a buzz.

A Coleman Center fundraiser agrees, stating that Riddick "always said that artists are looking for two things: a place to work and a cheap place to live. York has so many empty buildings, they could provide both."

**Create a Tourism Package**

Echoing Riddick's vision to make York "an artist experience," York residents believe the whole town needs to be made attractive and convenient to tourists. Georgine Clarke of the Alabama State Council on the Arts confirms that "you have to market York as an entire experience, package it together." A Coleman Center board member adds that "York could be another Fairhope, [Alabama]: pretty streets, a tourist town. But before we can draw artists and tourists, we need to build the township aesthetically. If we continue on the route to bring the town up to where it needs to be, York as an artist colony could work." A local business owner agrees that beautifying the main street is key to encouraging passersby to stop.

Several York residents cite the need for lodging in town. One local business owner hopes to open a bed and breakfast, believing that people would come to York to learn art if they had a place to stay. Many also emphasize the need for good food, calling for more restaurants, better restaurants, and restaurants open for lunch. One artist in residence believes "people would come from other places on the weekends if there were a restaurant in York. They could see five artists and get a good meal at the same time." He adds, "If you want to see something happen, get someone making good ice cream. They'll come from Tuscaloosa, [Alabama]. Say you only have five flavors, 'cause that's what you make that day. Or be famous for your peach cobbler or your pecan pie. Then people will come to get it and to see the art." Cheryl Morgan of the Small Town Design Initiative agrees, stating that "people in Alabama will drive for food, especially if it's something distinct."

**Market It**

One local artist wants to "put York back on the map" and "make more people aware of what's going on here" while another wants "Alabama to realize what York can do for the state." To accomplish this, residents cite the need to further publicize York. A local business owner states that York has "to reach out to put ourselves in a tourist position to get the extra dollar." Dr. Holland, president of the University of West Alabama, agrees, stating "you have to decide who you are and what you're trying to do. You have a niche and you build on it, you promote it." The mayor adds that York must "let them know we're out here. Put our information out there. Everywhere I go I tell people we're 'New York.' Come see what we're doing, come see the Coleman Canter.

You build on the cozy community part as a drawing card to get people to come to York: our love for our city, our art, the Coleman Center." She also believes York needs to promote itself through the internet.

Georgine Clarke of the Alabama State Council on the Arts agrees that "marketing is key" and believes "York has to get the word out. Find a way for people to visit York and stay there. They need to send out press releases all the time." An artist in residence points out, however, that the "city has nothing in the way of literature to promote York. There are no brochures, no press kit, no website, and no business-starter kit in the whole county." A local artist adds that creating a map of York art to serve as a walking tour for tourists would be helpful. Another states that because York is the first Alabama exit when traveling from Mississippi, a sign on the interstate could advertise York as the "first little pocket of interest in the Black Belt, as an introduction to the Black Belt."

Some in York believe publicizing needs to take place on a broader geographic scale. Horst calls the Coleman Center "an important economic asset for the city and the region" and a local resident agrees that "the Coleman Center is no longer about York; it effects the whole county." Riddick adds that the Coleman Center is "certainly something Alabama and Mississippi need." Holland states that "York's advantage is that they're the only thing going in the region." He agrees the Coleman Center needs to be marketed regionally, stating that "they undersell it. They keep talking about the Coleman Center for York, but it could have a tremendous impact regionally, throughout the Southeast. The more they reach out to have a broader impact, the more support they will get. It took a great deal of activity to get to this point, but now we need to move to a bigger level, a level that's greater than York, although York will benefit."

Holland believes York needs "to promote itself to Atlanta and Birmingham, to both public and private organizations." He points out that a recent Black Belt Designs exhibit in Birmingham and trip to New York brought a lot of attention to York. A local artist in residence agrees, stating that "if you get publicity in Birmingham, people will stop on their way to the beach or on their way to New Orleans because they'll see a sign for York and the Coleman Center and they'll remember hearing about it."

In order to publicize effectively to the region, both informants cite the need to recruit experts. Holland states that the Coleman Center has a good relationship with the Alabama Folklife Association and the Alabama State Council on the Arts. He suggests the Coleman Center "work with the State Arts Council to bring in consultants who have experience in creating arts colonies in order to raise their horizons. They could point out what York could be doing, and what other communities have done." The artist in residence adds that "there's enough to market York now to other artists, but they need someone who knows how to market." In fact, this need has existed for over a decade. In the 1990's, fundraisers had hoped to create a gift shop at the Coleman Center, but although artists contributed items, one fundraiser states that it "never got off the ground because we didn't know how to market it."

**Increase Community Support**

According to local residents, the most critical need for the art movement is broader community support. One resident states that "York has gone down over the years. It will be good if it can come back through the arts, if we can just get the community motivated. At meetings you see the same group of people working when you

have a population of 15,000 [in Sumter County]. We need some more players." An artist in residence adds that "there are a lot of plusses with getting more people involved. More support and understanding develop about where the arts can go in this town. It generates fever, excitement, a volunteer base, connections. People that aren't participating now could have friends or relatives that are folk artists we don't know about. There are plenty of folk artists in Alabama drawing in the back woods. We may also get people involved who have money."

## Assessing the Movement

York residents have implemented the tenets of rural tourism and community development in several ways. First, they recognize the need for asset based planning and seek to build on an art center and art studios already established instead of looking for outside solutions. York residents remain sensitive to the local environment by seeking to enhance, rather than to change it. They seek to create a tourism package by designing the town as an "artist experience," and have also created groups of attractions and special events. In addition, residents recognize the important role marketing plays, and cite the need for improved promotion of York to those outside the region.

The art movement in York has reached out to agencies at the state and federal level for funding and support, though some residents cite the need for stronger partnerships with the University of West Alabama and the Sumter County Fine Arts Council. In addition, York art has the backing of the local government through the presence of a very supportive mayor. York also created an organization (the Coleman

Center) to move revitalization efforts forward, and has embraced strategic planning. The art movement in York also used small, visible actions, like placing flowers and lights on the main street of town, to boost community support. York residents also recognize the importance of involving youth in the art movement and have taken art into the schools to get youth interested.

York residents also recognize the need for equity in the art movement and seek broad based support. In fact, they view increased participation from a wide range of community members as the movement's most critical need. Residents do seek to build the movement from the bottom up, with local citizens as leaders in development plans. Though they did not speak explicitly about aiding York's most disadvantaged citizens, residents' desire to build an inclusive movement which ameliorates conditions in York and creates economic opportunities will no doubt benefit York's poorest citizens. Those in the art movement do seek to build the capacity of all citizens, viewing each as a resource, as evidenced in one resident's statement that in the Black Belt, "the people are our richness."

Thus, York residents have well wrought intentions for building a community defined and community driven movement which represents and benefits all citizens of York. In a town which is 78% black, however, boosting community involvement means specifically garnering support from the black community. Because the art movement has traditionally been viewed as a white enterprise, boosting black participation in the arts requires redefining the art movement as interracial and inclusive. Though York residents have strived to do this, efforts are often thwarted by a lack of trust and common identity

among the black and white communities, sustained by pervasive social and cultural segregation.

Facilitating trust and cooperation between the black and white communities in York is thus a necessary first step toward revitalizing the town. Building this interracial trust and cooperation requires creating bridging social capital between blacks and whites in York. Putnam reminds us that "in any comprehensive strategy for improving the plight of America's communities, rebuilding social capital is as important as investing in human and physical capital" (Putnam 1993:8). This is a difficult task in York, as segregation seeps into almost every facet of society. Blacks and whites possess high degrees of bonding capital within their communities, but little bridging capital between them.

Though fewer studies demand increased bridging cultural capital, I believe it to be as important as increased social capital. Social capital unites disparate community groups by building trust between them, while cultural capital unites them by establishing a common identity. As Merelman points out, black communities often possess an lternate cultural capital formed as a result of their exclusion from dominant, white cultural capital. Cultural capital in minority communities is often formed to ward off, resist, and actively reject domination by whites. Therefore, many blacks are ambivalent about white cultural capital, viewing it as a device for reproducing oppression (Merelman 1994).

Thus, creating bridging cultural capital between blacks and whites in York must be preceded by an awareness and appreciation of the distinctive cultural capital blacks possess and a possible reticence toward participating in white cultural capital. In York,

bridging cultural capital could be increased through an art movement which recognizes unique elements of black culture while joining black and white cultures under a common theme, like the Black Belt. Bennett and Savage confirm the need to broaden inclusive forms of cultural capital by going beyond increasing participation in cultural activities (like going to the theater, reading literature, or listening to opera) which have historically been ranked as high culture and which, in terms of the demographic profiles of their publics, have been markedly socially exclusive (Bennett & Savage 2004).

York residents recognize bridging social and cultural capital as both their greatest challenge and greatest necessity. In order to develop specific strategies to increase bridging capital in York, it is necessary to first understand the segregation which has permeated the town since its inception. To this end, the next chapter investigates both the history of segregation and its current manifestation in the Black Belt and in York.

# CHAPTER FOUR: SEGREGATION

Bridging social and cultural capital and promoting equity are required for community revitalization. In York, however, the black and white communities often exist in separate worlds with little interaction, trust, or shared identity between them. In order to discover ways to fuse these worlds, we must first understand the nature of social and cultural segregation in York. This chapter takes an historical and modern look at segregation and inequality in the Black Belt, in York, and in the York art movement in hopes of discovering strategies to create bridging capital between the black and white communities.

## The Black Belt

The southern Black Belt is a region of 1000 miles that sweeps from Virginia to Mississippi and includes 200 contiguous counties. The Black Belt takes its name from its dark, highly fertile soil which inspired a slave trade and established a region of black people who remain in the area today. The term is now used to refer to counties in which the black population outnumbers the white. Today, the Black Belt holds the largest black population in the country (Wimberley & Morris 1996). Of the 30 million African

Americans living in the U.S. in 2000, half of them called the Black Belt home ("Black Belt").

The Black Belt has a long history of economic depression and is continually plagued by high poverty rates and inadequate schools. In fact, the term "Black Belt" has become synonymous with a lack of basic health care, adequate housing, and educational opportunities ("Black Belt"). The Black Belt has been labeled as a region of persistent poverty, unalleviated by economic programs (Wimberley & Morris 1996). In the 1990's, population and job growth were lower in the Black Belt than in the rest of the South, and unemployment rates were well above the national average. In 2000, the average poverty rate in the Black Belt was 22%, compared to a national average of 13% (Gibbs 2003).

Alabama's Black Belt, which spans the midsection of the state, holds many of the poorest counties in the U.S. Representative Artur Davis has called the Black Belt "a statistical anchor on the state of Alabama," pointing out that if you remove the Black Belt from Alabama, the state moves to number seven in the nation in productivity, number eleven in the creation of new jobs, and number twelve in healthcare ("Black Belt"). Current residents confirm the dismal condition of the Black Belt. One states that there is "not much hope in the Black Belt" and another believes "the whole Black Belt needs some kind of injection."

**Segregation**

Since cotton was introduced in the late 1700's, a system of inequality has reigned in the Black Belt. 75% of Alabama's slaves were located in the Black Belt, controlled by plantation owners who grew rich and powerful throughout the 1800's. As is well known,

a small number of white plantation owners controlled all of the wealth and the slaves in the region. In 1847, the state capital was moved from Tuscaloosa to Montgomery, the heart of the Black Belt, and wealthy plantation owners gained increasing power over many aspects of Alabama culture ("Black Belt").

Sumter County, in which this study takes place, embodies the character of the Black Belt. In 1860, the average number of slaves per household in Alabama was 4.5, and in Sumter County it was 16, the third highest of any county in the state (Boyd 1931). Alabama historian Virginia Hamilton discovered lyrics in Alabama Slave Narratives which read, "Bred an' bawn in Sumter County, wore out in Sumter County, 'specks to die in Sumter County, an' whut is I got? Ain't got nothin', ain't got nothin', ain't got nothin'" (Hamilton 1984:70).

1865 marked the end of the Civil War and the end of slavery, but not the end of control by white, wealthy landowners. As historians explain, though "externals changed, the old verities and the old arrangements stayed the same. Alabama accepted the war's political verdict but rejected its social judgment. It built a postbellum society in the incredible likeness of what had gone before. It did not accept the idea or the law that blacks were free and equal and independent citizens" (Rogers, Ward, Atkins, Flynt 1994:226).

Whites retained their control over free blacks by "political chicanery, economic intimidation, and physical violence. They allowed black voters to continue on the rolls, but in many places manipulated their votes on behalf of white planter interests, especially in the Black Belt. Periodically whites lynched blacks to punish them for heinous crimes,

real or imagined, to liquidate their most independent and strong-minded political leaders, or to stifle their economic, social, and educational aspirations" (Flynt 2004:318).

Hamilton explains the "old midnight fear that slaves were 'rising' gave way to apprehension that armed freedmen would ravish the countryside. In response, the Klan terrorized and flogged untold numbers of ex-slaves" (1984:84). Violence was "an instrument of policy" in Reconstruction Alabama (Flynt 2004:318). Secret societies flourished, leading one historian to dub Alabama the "most Klan-ridden state" in the South in 1869 and 1870 (Hamilton 1984:84). In the 1890's, "Alabama's lynchings led the nation," occurring disproportionately in Black Belt counties (Flynt 2004:318) where most black voters lived (Hamilton 1986).

Sumter County, well known for its Klan outrages, was no exception ("Reconstruction" 1959). Klan members in Sumter County targeted both blacks and whites supportive of black rights. Hamilton states that "white republican candidates feared for their lives when speaking in Sumter or Greene County, because Klansmen whipped and shot whites as well as blacks" (1986:222). "Klansmen in 'bloody Sumter,'" she explains, "conducted a sustained reign of terror, whipping blacks in daylight and murdering, along with several blacks, a white lawyer from New York who had been politically active among black voters." She quotes an agent of the Justice Department assigned to Alabama during Reconstruction who sent back word that "he had rather be in the heart of Comanche country than in Sumter County without soldiers" (1984:84).

In addition to voter manipulation and violence, whites maintained control over blacks by retaining the plantation system. This system simply emerged in a new form as sharecropping, with landowners clinging to the soil as the source of wealth behind their

political power ("Black Belt"). Historians explain that "the form and nature of Alabama's agricultural system… determined the distribution of wealth, decided the status of rich and poor, [and] apportioned power and influence" (Rogers, Ward, Atkins, Flynt 1994:269).

Through sharecropping whites retained control over black laborers, who were "no less dependent economically" on the landowners than during slavery and who were locked into a world of "rural isolation." A black tenant farmer in Hale County in the 1930's remembers, "There was no place to go to be segregated out of, 'cause you couldn't get away." Sharecropping communities "contained more than fifty percent rates of child poverty, double-digit unemployment, and median incomes half to three-fourths of the national average. Poor health, lack of hospitals and physicians, underfunded schools, and low test scores conspired to make the former plantation belt, once America's richest land, its poorest" (Flynt 2004:319-20).

The land itself also suffered under sharecropping, as rising absentee landownership yielded tenant farmers who exploited the land and made no effort at conservation. The soil eroded until only inches remained above the level of chalk. At this time, the center of Alabama shifted to industry in Birmingham, which became known as "The New South" ("Black Belt"). Much of the region's black population left for industrial jobs in Birmingham and other urban areas (Gibbs 2003). The Black Belt, which had been the richest, most productive, and most populous part of Alabama began a steady decline ("Black Belt").

In the second half of the 20th century, opportunities in the Black Belt became increasingly limited. Cotton harvesting was mechanized causing labor demand to

plummet while "outmigration rose sharply- between 1945 and 1965, the southern farm population fell from 16 million to 5 million" (Gibbs 2003:258). In addition, during the 1960's, the government began to encourage planting pine on the idle acres of farmland, and the region became home to pulp and paper mills. Many small farmers lost their land to large tracts of pine, catfish farms, or hunting camps ("Black Belt").

Thus a new system of power emerged which mirrored the old, in which most of the land was owned by a few white, wealthy landowners who often lived outside the region ("Black Belt"). Conditions during this time, after the civil rights movement, had improved only marginally for blacks. As Flynt states, "racism persisted long after Jim Crow was knocked off its perch" (Flynt 2004:358). Blacks were often prevented from advancing in the workplace and sometimes taught white workers job skills they were not allowed to perform themselves. White Alabama churches, sororities, fraternities, and country clubs were highly resistant to accepting blacks, and many remain segregated to this day (Flynt 2004). In addition, throughout the Black Belt, whites pulled their children out of public schools upon the federal desegregation ruling and enrolled them in private all-white academies, creating de facto segregation which still exists throughout much of the region. Thus, blacks still lived in a system operated by whites, who controlled wealth and resources in the Black Belt.

A civil rights worker who visited Gee's Bend, Alabama in the 1960's witnessed this disproportion of wealth and power firsthand. She stated that the population was "living for parts of the year on the edge of starvation and largely dependent on capricious federal farm programs," calling Gee's Bend "the portrait of the third world." She attributed the poverty to landowner corruption: "a clear pattern of white landowners

intercepting the government subsidy checks belonging to their tenants and extracting forced labor from the cheated farmers in exchange for food at the company store." She called the situation in Gee's Bend "a white conspiracy," in which blacks' own government was used against them (Scheper-Hughes 2003:16). In her book, *Call to Home*, Carol Stack agrees that even after civil rights and voting rights came to the Black Belt, "the whites still owned just about everything and managed to control just about everything else" (1996:5-6).

In her 1970's research of a county in Georgia's Black Belt, Melissa Fay Greene also describes a separation between black and white societies based on wealth and power and maintained by whites who controlled both internal and external resources in the region. A local resident explains this system in his description of the county sheriff, who "had black police officers, probably some of the first in the state, but I believe he had them in order to control the people. McIntosh County under his tutelage was a very depressed area. I think he felt if the county got in too much money, too much industry, too many outsiders, they'd lose control" (Greene 1991:87).

Stack also documents a system of power in the Southern Black Belt in which whites control resources and thwart opportunities which would undermine their control. A city council member with whom she spoke explains:

> Long before there's ever a public meeting, decisions have already been made. If a business is unionized, the Industrial Development Council won't have it. If a business pays more than minimum wage, the council won't have it- they feel like their own operations are at stake, because if one place is paying higher wages, then either that's where all the best employees are going to wind up or else everybody's going to have to pay higher wages. And a lot of the industries around here, poultry and textiles and so on, are so cutthroat that the employers are afraid a higher wage would just sink them. So there's an element of the white community that is absolutely an unmovable obstacle. They don't want new jobs, they don't want better jobs, and they'll fight to prevent it. And the position

> they're in, they can win a fight like that. There's no way to work around them or get something done when they don't want it. I have been sitting at the table with those people now for five years…and I have tried everything in the book. But if they don't want to hear it, they don't hear it. It really is as simple as that: they call the shots (Stack 1996:173).

Greene explains that in the Black Belt, "the fiction was to be maintained of two separate societies living rather gingerly side-by-side, each with its own hub of social and business life… the unspoken social contract that allowed the whites and the outcast blacks to live in peace" (1991:122). A Georgia resident explains that

> as long as you stay in your area, or stay where you know you supposed to be, then that's the way, that's 'friends.' As long as you're doing the laundry every week or coming to cook dinner every day and go on back where you supposed to be, you could be 'friends.' But when it come to you sitting down at my table and having dinner, that's something different. And that's just the way it was. Whether you like it or not, that's the way it was. And any time you thought about you wanted to switch grounds, the grounds that have been established for you, then you have a problem. You have a problem (Greene 1991:148).

Cynthia Duncan confirms Greene's findings on wealth and power in the Black Belt through research conducted in Mississippi in the 1990's. Duncan finds "a large divide between whites who have money and power and very poor blacks who have long been dependent on them," where the per capita income for whites is five times the income for blacks (1999:74). She states that blacks live isolated from the world of whites due to corrupt politics, racial segregation, inadequate schools, and white control over resources and jobs in the region. Like Greene discovered in Georgia, this two-class system has created two separate societies. Duncan states that "socially, the black and white communities are distinct worlds with separate schools, churches, separate Christmas parades, separate activities for children" (1999:84).

In the Black Belt Duncan describes, "patterns of inequity were established long ago to meet the economic needs of a plantation economy, and they have been

deliberately, and on occasion ruthlessly, maintained to preserve white power and affluence in a black majority area" (1999:96). Powerful whites frequently block industry and misappropriate state funds in order to retain control. Wealthy white farmers claim large government subsidies by manipulating the system and shutting out blacks. They prevent new industry from entering the community in order to ensure a monopoly over employment and wages. Local whites once thwarted a manufacturer's attempts to enter the area because the company refused to hire whites only (Duncan 1999).

Duncan explains that whites also control blacks on an individual level, maintained in part by blacks' "longstanding habits of deference and fear of crossing whites" (1999:84). In fact, both blacks and poor whites "believe powerful whites can ruin your life if you oppose them" (1999:113). As local residents told Duncan, "whites can get you out of jail if they need you in the fields, have you permanently blackballed from work if you cross them, or make sure you and your family never get credit anywhere if you let them down" (1999:75). Blacks are so dependent on whites that they refuse to vote powerful whites out of office because they provide them with jobs, loans, and housing. Thus the system is maintained. Duncan even discovered elderly black women who had white Catholic nuns do their grocery shopping for them to ensure they obtained fair prices (Duncan 1999).

In his 2003 article, Gibbs also cites the "social exclusion that continues to restrict the full participation of blacks in rural southern labor markets and in civil society" (2003:254). He describes the Black Belt as a "society still divided along racial lines, with limited economic possibilities" (2003:259). Gibbs rejects the "recent shift in emphasis" away from conflating race with poverty, pointing out that "one cannot disregard the

essential fact that being poor and black are nearly synonymous in scores of small towns and villages in the region." In 2000, one in three blacks in the Black Belt was poor, and the black poverty rate was three times that of the white (Gibbs 2003:256).

It is easy to see how the segregation of races and resources in the Black Belt yielded the absence of bridging social capital. The white community used the closure required by social capital to form a tight-knit, homogenous group which excluded the black community. The Black Belt thus fits Gittel's description of "hierarchically structured communities run by narrow elites [which] socialize citizens to remain outside the system." Blacks in the Black Belt "suffer a lack of access to and experience in self-governance which limits association and trust-building among groups, and alienates the excluded from the political system" (Gittel 2003:9). Due in part to their exclusion from white social capital, blacks in the Black Belt formed high degrees of bonding capital within their communities, further isolating themselves from whites. This lack of bridging social capital has prevented the formation of trust and cooperation between the white and black communities which is so vital to successful community development efforts.

Likewise, racial segregation resulted in a dearth of bridging cultural capital between the black and white communities. In addition to controlling resources in the region, whites employed various cultural signals and legitimate knowledge in order to prevent blacks from accessing the white social world. The black community reacted by developing an alternate, non-dominant form of cultural capital. As Merelman states, the isolation of blacks has created some hostility to and suspicion of white-defined cultural capital. Blacks in the Black Belt have been forced to survive by shielding themselves behind a defensive, protective culture designed to ward off, resist, and actively reject

domination by whites (Merelman 1994). Thus, in many ways, blacks in the Black Belt possess a separate culture from whites, marked by distinct tastes, speech, music, and social codes. The resulting lack of bridging cultural capital between the black and white communities precludes the formation of a common identity which is crucial for community development.

## York, Alabama

York, Alabama, population 2854, sits at the far western edge of Alabama's Black Belt. One local artist in residence calls York "a go through place," stating that "things come through York, but rarely stay." In fact, York began as a "go through place," as a railroad town whose growth was spurred by the start of the Civil War in 1861 (see Appendix 2, Figure 3). With stores, a hotel, a post office, and a livery stable, it was the center of activity for county residents at the time. Named New York in 1838, the town was incorporated in 1881 as York Station, then became York in 1900 (Avery 1987).

At the turn of the century, York was mostly comprised of working class people connected to the railroad. A day's work on the railroad was 150 miles, and York is exactly 150 miles from Mobile. Therefore, many men lived in York as it allowed them to work the train to Mobile, spend the night, then work the train back to York the next day. In fact, there were boarding houses in Mobile especially for train crews from York. One local historian states that in York's early days "there were three saloons that sold whiskey… Horse races were held in the streets. There was little arbitration; differences

called for fist fights. The real life adventures were in the streets, and stores stayed open late because of the excitement there" (Riddick 1980).

The saloons left York when Sumter County went dry in 1885 (Riddick 1980), but the town remained a hub for the region in the decades to follow. In 1941, an Alabama State Planning Commission report describes the town as "a trading center for the surrounding agricultural district, a railroad junction, and lumbering town" (Smith 1941:297). York went on to experience exceptional growth in the 1940's and 1950's, an era many residents recall as its prime. Between 1940 and 1970, York's population nearly doubled, even as the population of Sumter County declined by 30%. York held 7.5% of the county population in 1950, and 14.6% by 1960 ("Population & Economy").

One former resident describes York as "the big town in the county" during the 1930's, 1940's, and 1950's. She remembers going into York with her family once a month to do their shopping. Another agrees "it was a big thing to come to town, to see everyone and to visit. Mama would let us walk downtown on the weekends. The vegetable vendors would be there, people would congregate and socialize. We would go to the Five and Dime to get fabric to sew our little outfits for school the next week. York was bustling when I was little; the streets were never empty. We had a lot of stores back then. None of the buildings were empty. There was a lot more going on. There was always something to do."

One white resident who grew up in York describes it as "a delightful town," "a wonderful town to grow up in" and an "idyllic way of life." She states that everyone knew everyone else, students could walk to school and ride bikes everywhere, and the crime was "almost nil." There was a community center with an Olympic size swimming

pool and a roller rink where the teenagers congregated. The school was the social center of the town; sports were big and so was playing in the band. Though traveling shows came through town, York was close enough to larger places to attend cultural events. She recalls going to Livingston for college events, to Meridian for the symphony, and to Birmingham for music and art.

Another white resident echoes these sentiments, stating that "York was a wonderful place to grow up." She too mentions the swimming pool, community house, and skating rink, being able to ride her bike everywhere, and a low crime rate. York had two police officers during these years, but only one on duty at a time. "We didn't hardly need them," she explains. "That's just the way it was." She states that York had "everything a town could want. We had the biggest football team, a big hospital, tennis courts, playgrounds. We had two grocery stores, clothing stores, two drug stores." She calls York "the place to be when I was growing up."

**History of Segregation**

Despite similarities in the way white and black residents describe York's status in the county, racial segregation yielded disparate experiences of the same town. Though York gained prominence as a railroad town, it was not free from the structure of plantation towns across the Black Belt. Much of the town was owned by a handful of prominent white families, descendants of wealthy whites from South Atlantic states who settled in the area to farm in the 1830's (Owen 1938). During its heyday, in the forties and fifties, York was 35% black, but the downtown businesses were all white owned. Black residents were not allowed to use the community center, skating rink, or swimming

pool described with such fondness by white residents. When attending the movies, blacks were required to sit in the balcony (Muñoz 1992). York thus resembles most Black Belt towns, where a system of power based on segregation has traditionally allowed a few wealthy whites to control the resources.

Black citizens report a constant and keen awareness of their race, and their place because of it, while white citizens often state that there were no racial issues in York. A white resident who grew up in York during the 1930's explains, "We didn't recognize discrimination that existed against black people. I loved black people, I was raised with them, I played with them, I was looked after by black women when my mother was often gone. I was taught to respect any grown person, black or white." In fact, the issue of race relations did not surface for her until college, when she "wrote a paper on how blacks fought in WWII, then came back to live in a place where they had no rights. The teacher wanted to know why I chose that subject," she explains. "The issue didn't come up a lot."

Meanwhile, during the same era, black residents of York sought to start a high school for black students. The only other high school open to black students in the county at that time was ten miles away, in Livingston. Members of the black community contributed by mortgaging their own cattle and horses to raise money. They were given permission by the superintendent of the county school system to demolish a previous all white school and use the materials for their new all black school. Some members of the white community, however, did not want the remains of their school to be used this way. When members of the black community arrived to dismantle the school, "many white

men stood around with guns, daring anyone to demolish the building" (Black 1996:3). Despite their fear, the black community proceeded and the building was completed.

Separate experiences due to race continued into the 1940's and 1950's. One white resident states that "blacks and whites got along," that they "were friendly with each other, and that blacks were "treated well and were accepted." She states York "didn't have a lot of unrest between races, no boycotts or anything like that." She does recognize, however, that a separation existed between the races, and that blacks were excluded. She calls this separation "an accepted way of life" in "a typical Southern conservative town."

A black resident of York during the same time period describes the situation as more than separation. She states, "You had to stay in your place as a black person. Black kids couldn't sit on the seats in the drug store. There were blacks as housekeepers, but no black clerks. Everything was segregated. All businesses were segregated, except for stores. Blacks had their own washeteria, restaurants, beauty shops, barbershop, hotel, and insurance company." Another black resident adds that "it was real segregated when I was growing up. You could go in and shop in the stores, but there were not a lot of blacks working there." A third black resident adds that in the 1950's, you had to pass an exam and get a white man to verify you were a black man in the area in order to vote.

Crossing the racial boundary was not tolerated in York during the 1950's and 1960's. One black resident explains that "blacks and whites hanging out was not approved of. My family received bomb threats the first time my uncle brought his white wife home. That was in the late sixties. My dad had a friend who was white and he'd bring his family over for dinner, but it was frowned upon and he was isolated from the

white community because of it. My mother used to work for a white lady and I'd play with her daughter and her daughter's friend until we were about thirteen, and then the daughter's friend would act like she didn't know me on the street."

**Civil Rights**

In the late fifties, the black population surged in York. The white population barely increased between 1950 and 1960, while the black population almost tripled. Blacks represented 36% of the population in 1950 and 56% in 1960. Thus, blacks became the majority in York just as the civil rights movement began to build momentum. In fact, the black population would continue to rise while the white population fell until the present day (see Appendix 1).

Despite its rural isolation, York was not too far to be reached by the civil rights movement. One black resident states that York "had a lot of Freedom Riders come through, trying to help integrate the schools." Another adds that the riders mostly stopped at bus stations, led by troopers, with the purpose of integrating the stations. When they came through York, the white owners of the drug store and the bus station took out all of the seats so the riders could not sit and integrate the store or the station. Blacks in York also boycotted town stores until blacks were allowed to be clerks. Telling me this, the resident laughs and says, "York was a tough little place." These statements are easily contrasted with those of the white resident who stated that "blacks and whites got along" and that York "didn't have a lot of unrest between races, no boycotts or anything like that."

In fact, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. came to York to lead a march with the purpose of integrating the schools. One local black resident was a teenager at the time, and states she "thought Dr. King was the best thing since sliced bread." She struck out with the group, marching from the community center to the high school, but only made it as far as the end of the neighborhood. She explains that her father "didn't want me to march because if [whites] saw your kids marching, they would retaliate against the parents and they could lose their jobs."

Indeed, there was much white retaliation against blacks who participated in the civil rights movement. One black resident explains that "when you become a registered voter and realize your vote will count" in a place like York which "has been run by a few for a long, long time, people get concerned." He adds that as a black person in York in the sixties, "You got intimidated." He describes a night when he went to Selma for a school event for his daughter and was "driving home wearing a coat and tie, so the whites want to know if you've been to a [civil rights] meeting. I stopped at a traffic light, then got going when the light turned green and got pulled over for speeding. I was going fifteen miles per hour. The cop wanted me to argue so he could shoot me for resisting but I didn't. I paid the ticket."

Other black residents living in York confirm the fear and retaliation present during the civil rights era. One states that "there was fear during that time" and another states that "it was scary." She states that her parents tried to keep the details away from her, but she knew a lot of people received threats, especially that their houses would be burned. There were cross burnings. There were "several areas you didn't go to, certain communities. They used to say 'they'd throw you in the wells up there.'" She adds that

Joseph Stegall, a former mayor of York, wrote a book about a massacre that occurred in Sumter County during civil rights years.

In 1969, federal law desegregated the schools. In York, however, integrated schools never occurred. White parents pulled their children out of school for a few months until a new all white private academy could be constructed. White families who could not afford to attend were either sponsored by wealthier community members or simply left town. The separation continues to this day, with virtually all of the white students attending a private academy and all of the black students attending public school. The public pool was also supposed to be integrated following the federal ruling in 1969, but whites in York chose to fill it in with cement instead of allowing blacks to swim there (see Appendix 2, Figure 4). One black resident states that most of the fear and the threats were over after integration, but the segregation continued.

**York's Decline**

With mandatory integration, York began its decline, along with most of the Black Belt. One resident explains that "the way of life changed and people couldn't get used to the new way. The town was not at all ready for integration." Many young people found jobs in other places and York began to lose population. The movie theater, the community center, the pool, the skating rink, and the city library all closed. (A city library would not open in York for a decade, when it was opened by the Coleman Center). The car dealerships went out of business and even the railway station closed in the early seventies, as trains stopped in York less frequently.

York also lost most of its stores when the owners retired and the younger generation was not present to run them. York residents began shopping in Meridian, Mississippi, made more accessible with the rising number of families who owned cars. One resident suggests that white residents stopped purchasing from York stores and started buying in Meridian because they "got angry in general about the way things were going." York now has half as many stores as before, causing one resident to call the town "past its vibrancy point." Another agrees that when York lost its shops, it lost "the heart of the town."

Following the departure of small business and manufacturing from York, the timber industry entered the region in the late seventies. Gulf States built a paper mill between York and Demopolis (30 miles apart), and some residents found employment there. Overall, however, York declined throughout the 1980's. One resident states that he came to York in the mid seventies, when it still had "some activity. But that's changed," he explains. "The jobs played out, went overseas. The good jobs have gone and nothing has replaced them. I worked at a copy place in 1976. It was a good paying job. I made more than minimum wage is now [in 2005]. McGregor was here. They had a good three shift workforce, but they went to Meridian, and that job hasn't been replaced. We had a big sewing factory with a workforce made up of almost all the ladies from York and Sumter County. Nothing has replaced that." A West Alabama resident states that in the eighties "York was nothing. It was a gas station, a stop on the way to Tuscaloosa."

York continued its decline in the 1990's and into the present. One longtime resident calls York "a hard place to live." Another resident who left York in 1985 states

that she saw no change in the town upon her return in 2002, except that the arts district was decorated for Christmas. A former resident adds that "it's been touch and go in [York]. If you're not growing, you're dying, and York has been dying for fifty years." The present day severity of York revolves around high poverty rates, departing youth, job loss, a dwindled economy, and an inability to attract industry. In 1999, 38% of York residents lived below the poverty level, compared to a national average of 12%.

York's struggle to remain viable is due in large part to the departure of many of its youth, leaving the town with an aging population and a diminished workforce. It's a vicious cycle: there are few jobs in York, youth leave for places with more opportunities, and York is left without a young workforce to attract more jobs. The following represent several residents' comments.

> Half of York's young people leave. Most head north to Chicago, Detroit, Cleveland, the cities where blacks migrated in the sixties and seventies. They don't come back until they retire. 70% of the houses being built in York are for retirees who have moved back home. And of those who do stay in York, very few are interested in running their own businesses. –business owner

> When kids graduate high school [in York], they leave. That doesn't leave us much workforce. The population of York is aging, and industry wants a young workforce. We need to educate our kids and keep them around for one or two years at the local college [in Livingston] to generate a workforce. Once we have a base, companies will start looking at York as a place with a workforce. –business owner

> The good students leave York to go where the salaries are better. They have no entertainment here. It's sad to say, but York is for retired people and older people. Even doctors leave soon after coming here. There's nothing to hold people. –longtime resident

> We've been exporting both black and white youth, the ones smart enough to leave. If they come back, it will be a better community, but they won't come back with young children, because no one would want to put their kids in the York schools. -former resident

Many residents cite York's need for jobs, businesses, and a boost to the economy to retain youth and to make the town prosperous again. York's current mayor cites her biggest challenges as economic development and financial stability. She explains that "it's hard to keep small towns economically viable. It's hard to provide things the city needs with a small revenue base." A local resident adds, "We're losing industry. We're stepping back in time. Wal-Mart is leaving Livingston in January [2006] because they're not making any money. They say they've been carrying Sumter County. I'm scared to see what will happen. There just isn't enough in Livingston and York."

Despite the need for industry, most businesses will not locate in York due to what the mayor calls its "dual educational system." Virtually of the white students in York attend a private academy, while all of the black students attend public school. The mayor insists that "relocating businesses look at this," and York's former mayor agrees. He states that as mayor, "the hardest thing was to get industry to locate here. They wouldn't because [the white employees] would have to pay for private schools." A local business owner agrees that segregated schools "put a burden on the city and on white parents who have to send their kids up to the academy."

One resident believes that "segregated schools put [York] twenty years behind. If industry is looking at York, the first thing they say is that our schools are twenty years behind everyone. They won't want to have to drive their kids thirty miles or pay for school. This issue should not be here in 2005." Another resident adds that "the industrial board director said it will take integrated schools [to attract industry]. The primary concern for outsiders is the separate schools and low test scores. They see that and they

keep going to the next town." In addition to industry, new residents and faculty also pass by York because of the segregated schools.

In addition to failing to attract new residents, York lost many of its current residents during the years of its decline. One York resident explains that since desegregation in 1969, York has "had a lot of white flight." Indeed, between 1970 and 2000, the white population in York decreased by 57% while the black population rose by 34% to represent 79% of York's population in 2000 (see Appendix 1).

The 1980's and 1990's therefore saw a rise in the participation of blacks in the local legislature. Blacks were elected as school board members, as mayor, and as superintendent of education. One resident states that "the tables have turned." When she left York in 1971, all of the political positions were held by whites, and when she returned in 2002, they were predominantly held by blacks. Howard Kennedy, former mayor of York, states that in 1984, the city council was all white and the majority of the town was black. The black community was encouraging blacks to run, and Kennedy was asked because he was an educator. He served on the city council from 1984-1995, then served as York's first black mayor from 1995-2000.

The rising number of blacks in local legislature had a positive effect on the black community. One black resident states that when York gained its first black judge in 1980, the number of domestic disturbances declined. She states that the presence of a black judge "gave people a sense of hope," that they thought, "We can do something now." The white community, however, did not relinquish control willingly. "[White] people don't know how to deal with it" one white resident explains. "They've lived [in

York] all their lives and they don't want to change. Whites in York hadn't experienced the fact that blacks can do more than work in their homes or on their land."

Kennedy agrees that white control in York was "custom. You get used to it and you can't stand the change. That's what happened when I was mayor. A few people had been in charge for many years and they thought, 'They took it from us,' because our votes started to count. There was white opposition" when Kennedy ran for mayor. "People were disgusted," he says. "Some said, 'I didn't think I would live to see this.'" Some residents contend that during Kennedy's campaign, whites in York paid two black preachers to run as well, in order to split the black vote. They allege that one of the black men who ran against Kennedy used to accept bribes from whites during the civil rights movement to cancel marches.

Blacks have gained such political clout in York that Kennedy states, "Now if a white wants to win in Sumter County, you have to get black support. If they don't want you, you won't get in." Others agree that the pendulum has swung, but one black resident states that "even when a black person comes into power, they perpetuate the institution [of racism]." Another agrees that York "went from one extreme to the other. Now we have the same mistrust of those in power, except it is against blacks in power. There's no middle ground here. It never existed in York."

**Modern Racial Segregation in York**

Though blacks have gained power in York, whites still control many of the resources, jobs, businesses, money, and political positions. One resident states that racism "permeates the fabric of York. Whites say they like black people," she explains,

"but they don't understand racism is the power you hold over someone. It's not about color. It's institutionalized. It's not the individual. It's built into the fabric of our institutions." Another agrees that "racism still exists. Not like it did in 1954, but there's still tension. It's more subtle. You can't distinguish it, or say it's blatant. It's institutional racism. It's woven into the fiber of the institution."

There are several examples of institutional racism in York. The town is 78% black, but businesses are primarily owned by whites. Prior to the auction of eight downtown buildings in 2002, only two or three people owned buildings in downtown York; four or five families owned the entire town. When York's first black mayor took office in 1995, he discovered that the City of York was providing water to the private academy at such a discounted rate it was practically free. A black business owner reports that the local bank refused to give him a loan when his wife was sick, despite the fact that he made consistent payments on his previous loan. He states, "I told the banker I lived right here in York and he knew where to find me. But he refused."

Institutional racism in York is in large part perpetuated by invisible lines which prevent blacks from accessing the world of whites. One resident explains that "there are things that are ingrained that blacks don't do that whites do. There are lines between the races that aren't crossed, that are embedded in the town culture and in the culture of the rural South." York thus resonates with Gibbs' description of the Black Belt, where "social exclusion…continues to restrict the full participation of blacks in rural southern labor markets and in civil society" (2003:254).

**Social and Cultural Segregation**

Longstanding segregation in York has caused the formation of two separate cultures, mirroring the "distinct worlds" Duncan describes (1999:84). These separate worlds have dire implications for community development efforts whose success relies on mobilizing both communities behind a cohesive movement. Speaking of York, one former resident calls race "the big elephant in the room." Another describes York as "a pretty divided community," citing the "historical formality" that exists between the races. As Gibbs states, York is a "society still divided along racial lines" (2003:259).

Significantly, residents do not name hostility nor racism as reasons for the segregation in York. Instead, most explain it by citing tradition and custom, as reflected in one local business owner's statement that "some whites want to stick together because they were bred that way. It hasn't changed because the young carry on the tradition of their parents. White kids are sometimes raised by black people," he adds, "but when they grow up, they disassociate from them, or maybe they get along with only them, but don't branch out to other black people."

Residents further emphasize custom as the reason for racial segregation in statements concerning segregated churches. One resident states that "black and white don't go to the same churches because they weren't brought up like that." Another believes churches are still segregated possibly "because they have more elderly people in churches that can't turn loose the ideas they grew up with." A third explains that "separation came up back in the olden days. It's always the way it's been. After slavery, freed blacks started their own churches. We're not together on anything [in York]:

different churches, different Bible studies. I don't know of any religious organization where we're together." She shrugs and states, "We're just separate people I guess."

But many in York contend that the races remain separate not because they are inherently separate people, but because there are no spaces in which they can mix. One resident points out that "you don't even see kids of different races mingling here. There's no forum for them to get together." Another states that the separation "infiltrates everything." Indeed, blacks and whites in York exist separately in businesses, jobs, schools, churches, and even in area cemeteries, which sometimes contain fences separating white graves from black (see Appendix 2, Figure 5).

In addition to the segregation that exists in schools and in the workplace, whites and blacks are socially segregated, as Greene says, "each with its own hub of social and business life" (1991:122). One resident states that "York is fractured socially by race issues." Blacks and whites have separate community programs and clubs. Certain restaurants are seen as white, while others are seen as black. A local business owner explains he has "mostly black clientele" plus "a few whites that are personal friends, or friends of friends." When asked why he has so few white clientele, he responds, "This is the South." Then he adds, "The average white person feels he doesn't belong in a black setting. The first thing he wants to know is, 'Am I going to be alright?'"

This custom of separation is perhaps perpetuated most strongly by segregated schools. School segregation has been in place since the federal law to desegregate schools was passed in 1969, and is seen by many in York as "the main issue, the reason the town is so separate." One resident calls the separate schools "the biggest challenge facing

York," because "children in [York] don't grow up thinking it's okay to mix with people who are different from them."

In York, virtually all of the white students attend Sumter Academy, a private school, while all of the black students attend public schools. "For years and years," explains one resident, "we're one of the few towns in the whole country where not one white person goes to the public schools." In fact, during the 2004-2005 school year in Sumter County, only 4 white students attended public schools, compared to 2624 black students (Adams 2005). The private school has all white faculty, while the public schools have both black and white faculty. The white faculty at the public schools who are parents, however, do not send their own children to the schools in which they work.

Some white parents in York do not send their children to Sumter Academy. Instead, they opt out of the system all together by home schooling them or enrolling them in public school in a different county. Many white kids from York are driven to public schools in Meridian, Mississippi or in Demopolis, Alabama, both thirty miles from York. One resident calls this "strange" because both Meridian and Demopolis have integrated schools. Students are also integrated at the University of West Alabama in Sumter County, well attended by white students from York. The black to white ratio at the university is 50/50, and one professor reports that "students integrate without a problem. There is no friction." Even though for many of the students, "it's the first time they've sat by someone of a different race." In fact, one black student from York met white students from York for the first time while attending the university. She calls it "sad and embarrassing that I didn't know them."

So if white parents will send their children to integrated schools outside of York, why do they refuse to send their children to integrated schools in York? One resident believes that whites stay in private school "because they were brought up that way. There is also the notion that York public schools aren't good," she adds. Indeed, in recent interviews with white parents in Sumter County, "race was never, even when provoked, cited as the ultimate reason for sending white children to the private school. The poor quality of the public school's education was continually mentioned as the reason for sending kids to either Demopolis or the academy" (Adams 2005:75).

Another resident states that "people are so ostracized when you don't follow the norm." She believes "white parents would get flack from the community if they put their kids in York public schools." The Superintendent of Sumter County Public Schools confirms that "any white families that move here are pressured out of the public schools (by realtors and white leadership)" (Adams 2005:71). Another resident states that public schools in Meridian and Demopolis are racially balanced, while Sumter County is 80% black. Therefore, "white students would be a minority [in York public schools]." Interviews with white parents in Sumter County confirm that whites will return to public schools only if a racial balance can be achieved (Adams 2005).

One black York resident states, "I guess whites feel better being at private schools. So much goes on at public schools. Private schools don't have problems like ours, drug and pregnancy problems." In fact, white parents consistently cite a healthy atmosphere and safety as reasons for not sending their children to public schools in Sumter County. The Headmaster of Sumter Academy points out the lack of locks on the lockers and the school's emphasis on morals and values (Adams 2005). Further, Adams

writes that "a 2002 stabbing at the public high school in Livingston that left a special education student dead legitimated [white parents'] sentiments to a large degree. Of course, this tragic incident is a singular, isolated event that has now given white parents the rationale needed to justify their separation from the public system" (2005:74).

Though white parents in York believe their school is safer, with higher values and a better education, it is not free from the problem of scarce resources that daunts the Black Belt. A resident who has worked on community projects in both public and private schools in York states that "both schools are lacking. It's not a wealthy community," she explains, "and when you split the little resources you have, all the kids have a lot less." Another states that "Sumter Academy is making it, but they're struggling. They're losing enrollment as this area loses [white] population."

**Effects of Social and Cultural Segregation**

In addition to splitting scant resources, social and cultural segregation in York has several other dire consequences which impede community development. First, segregation prevents blacks and whites from developing friendships with one another. An Alabama resident who has researched York explains that "older white people who have lived through racism have a hard time talking to blacks because they're cognizant of what they've gone through. They tiptoe around it, so there's not the natural ease that's present in a friendship. And if you don't have that natural ease, you don't go to each other's parties, even if you're invited." A York resident adds that "because people don't

come together in the schools, they don't know how to talk to people like they're people. It always becomes about race."

Indeed, segregation fuels a heightened awareness of race in York, resulting in a tendency to view everything through a racial lens. Visiting artists in residence who had conducted community art projects outside of the South were surprised when white school children in York drew themselves with a yellow marker, even though the paper was white. One states, "They were really aware of the color of their skin," adding that he has noticed "a heightened awareness of race in York" which causes "some things that aren't about race [to] get pushed into being about race when [the issue] is really more personality driven. It's easy for things to fall into the race category, and it gets to the point where there's so much tension around race, how could things not be about it? It precedes everything." Thus, although there are undoubtedly incidents of racism in York, there is also a danger that incidents which are not about race get pushed into the race category due to the lack of communication and interaction between the black and white communities. These incidents serve to cement segregation between black and white and lay the ground for additional misunderstandings.

Further, segregation promotes ignorance and distrust between the black and white communities. Duncan describes a Black Belt town in Mississippi where everything is segregated, with "no social interaction between the races, and no trust. Stereotypes thrive," she states, "when isolation is this complete" (1999:85,89). The situation is similar in York. One resident explains that "because the races don't do anything together, including worshipping or working together, a distrust develops between them, created by people who are paranoid, in denial, or who make money by keeping the

separation in place." Another confirms that "there are cultural misunderstandings between [the races]." A third resident states that "communication between the black and white communities is real difficult. There are still lines drawn. There is still a lack of trust." A local business owner adds that blacks and whites "really don't mix too well together. There's still a lot of segregated issues that need to be resolved." Another agrees York "has a long way to go as far as race relations are concerned." Thus, in York, segregation has prevented the development of bridging social capital between the black and white communities, precluding them from working together for a mutual purpose.

Segregation has also prevented bridging cultural capital from developing in York, as blacks and whites attend separate events, clubs, restaurants, parties, and festivals. In part due to their continued exclusion from white culture, the black community has developed an alternate cultural capital, with its own codes, patterns, and values. The maintenance of separate cultures has emboldened stereotypes the black and white communities hold about each other by preventing cultural exchange. It has also precluded blacks and whites from forming a common identity, further solidifying their separation in all aspects of life. This has serious implications for the art movement in York, which depends on broad based participation and unity among disparate groups.

**Segregation in the Art Movement**

Unfortunately, the cultural and social segregation which permeates York has historically infiltrated the arts as well. Prior to efforts in the past five years to redefine it as an interracial center, the Coleman Center was another racially identified space in York, traditionally "seen as a small, elite club of white people." The mayor states it used to be

"a white thing" and a local business owner refers to it as "their center." The black community believed the Coleman Center "catered to a white audience," one artist in residence explains, "excluding the largest part of the population in the county. It functioned like a high school club. It was a small group of people. Older, white people, because those are the donors. It was a club for little old lady white folks having Sunday tea." In fact, the perception of the Coleman Center as "white people having tea" was echoed by several members of the black community.

Members of the black community who have attended Coleman Center functions in the past have confirmed their perceptions (perhaps minus the tea). One local artist in residence states that when the center holds openings, "It's all white folk." At meetings, says a local business owner, "You'd think York was 80% white and 20% black instead of the other way around." At one Coleman Center event, a black attendee told another that "she thought she'd be the only black person there."

The Coleman Center was not, however, just something white people did. Rather, members of the black community often voiced the opinion that the Coleman Center was expressly off limits to them. One artist in residence called the Coleman Center "something ingrained that blacks don't do that whites do." Another agrees, citing "that invisible line that people believe shouldn't be crossed, an old community convention." This point is perhaps best illustrated by an anecdote from a local white artist. When she offered a black York resident a tour of her studio in the Coleman Center in 2003, he asked, "Can black people go in there?"

In addition to being viewed as explicitly for whites, the Coleman Center was perceived as being for the elite. One resident refers to it as an "elite club" and as an "art

playground for a few select members of the community." Most of the Coleman Center's donors were wealthy whites, and most of its private contributions came from Riddick and her friends. The Coleman Center once held an opera event to raise money, and one of its two yearly fundraising events was a wine and cocktail party. A former fundraiser explains that "in Sumter County, people love to dress up and go to cocktail parties. It's a hat and glove county." He adds that many of the "art openings were held on Sunday afternoons, as dressed up occasions. That's what people responded to."

Because it was seen as an establishment for the white elite, the Coleman Center attracted and involved a narrow group of participants. It is described by one artist in residence as a "social establishment for a select group of individuals." Another resident states that "the same people attended all the functions." When the Friends of the Coleman Center, its fundraising body, formed in 1991, they obtained the membership list from the Sumter County Fine Arts Council and invited its members to a meeting. After agreeing on the need for a fundraising body for the Coleman Center, officers were elected and dues were paid at that very first meeting, making it impossible for anyone outside of the Sumter County Fine Arts Council to be an elected officer.

While the black community was largely left out of the Coleman Center, some wealthy blacks did participate. One resident states that the Friends of the Coleman Center "brought nice, lovely black and white people together" and that both races attended the cocktail parties. The Friends eventually had members of both races as officers, and blacks who had the means to do so contributed financially. He states that "art brought black and white together…regardless of politics, race, gender, religion. Those things never entered. People came together regardless of those things." Despite

this seemingly open environment, however, blacks (or whites) earning low or middle incomes were strikingly absent.

A further comment by the same individual illustrates this point well. He explains that "one year during Black History Month we had a Smithsonian travel exhibit at the Coleman Center. The black home economic girls served refreshments and their parents came because their kids were there. It was an afternoon where whites and blacks were simply at an art show. It was a good feeling of humanity." Despite the presence of both races, however, blacks were there fundamentally in a service capacity. Those blacks who viewed art did so almost by accident, as they were only present due to their connection to the people serving the drinks. Clearly, this is not an environment where whites and blacks were invited to partake equally, despite this individual's portrayal of it as such.

Despite all this, many in the black community were simply unaware of the Coleman Center's existence or unsure of its purpose. One artist states that the general response of the black community to the Coleman Center was, "What's that building and why is it always closed?" One resident recalls wondering, "What do they do there? There was never anything showing," she explains. "It was just a beautiful building. Sometimes you'd see art and sometimes not." A local business owner states, "I knew the Coleman Center was there, but I didn't know anything about them." Another resident calls the Coleman Center "a nice place to go," but doesn't "think too many people use it."

As in the broader society of York, social and cultural segregation has heightened awareness of race and fueled perceptions of racism within the art movement. One example occurred upon the search for a new Coleman Center director. A local artist reports that a black man from Mobile who was in his fifties and had three years

experience running an art gallery applied for the position and was not granted an interview. This same artist offered to be the interim director during the search, and was turned down. The Coleman Center then hired a seventeen year old black high school student to direct in the interim. The artist states, "I personally think they didn't want a black man in charge." These statements are easily contrasted with those by a member of the white community, who does not "believe any of the recent changes in directors in York was racial. There were egos involved," she explains. "I don't believe there are racial problems in the art community."

This same artist also contends that he made suggestions to the Coleman Center which "fell on deaf ears, either because they weren't sophisticated or I was black." He classifies the members of the board as "old guard with an ingrained tendency towards racism" and adds that he once met a black lawyer who is president of a well-known dance center in Birmingham and agreed to be on the Coleman Center board. When the artist told the director of the Coleman Center about the lawyer, however, she failed to contact him, an incident the artist perceived as racist. "Things change to remain the same," he states.

A black board member also cites incidents she perceives as racist which occurred in the art community. She states that a Coleman Center building was once owned by a white family named McDaniel, who then sold it to a black family named Wimberley. The Coleman Center then bought the building from the Wimberley family, but named it McDaniel. She states, "I told them they needed to name something in the building Wimberley, and they said they would name the patio Wimberley, but I'm still waiting." This same board member states that her husband had formerly been involved with

securing funding for the Coleman Center, and she "used to wonder if they put me on the board to keep [the funding] in place."

These incidents may indeed be racist and may not be, but perhaps the more important observation is that members of the black community perceive racism while members of the white community do not. In a town as segregated as York, these incidents reflect a vicious cycle at work: they are both caused by the lack of bridging capital between the black and white communities and they solidify the lack of capital between them.

The dissension created by segregation in York often prevents effective communication between the black and white communities, stunting the growth of a cohesive art movement. Anecdotes from a black business owner illustrate this point well. He states that several years ago, a white business owner felt the sign above his store was indecent and asked him to change it. He did, stating "I did it to please her." A few years later, this same white business owner, along with fellow white members of the art community took photographs of a building owned by the black business owner to city council and asked that the building be condemned because they felt its appearance was a detriment to York.

Statements by the black business owner reveal the tension and lack of communication caused by a lack of bridging capital. He states:

> The art community is not approaching it right. They don't understand how things go. If they want me to beautify my buildings, why not offer me grants? Or why not ask me? Say, 'As soon as you are able, why don't you do something about it?' I care about beautiful things. I'm a dreamer. I dream of beautiful things and beautiful people. I never dream of streams with milk cartons and foam in them, I dream of streams with clear running water, water pure enough to drink. They need to find a way to help instead of finding fault. I had hard times for three or

four years, and after this, it looked like they just wanted to keep it hard instead of helping.

Social and cultural segregation also results in a lack of cooperation between blacks and whites in the art movement. The mayor states that there are "racists on both sides," meaning there are both blacks and whites who refuse to work together. An artist in residence adds that "in small towns, there is a lack of cooperation between people that is needed to create the institutions and practices that make a town grow. It's the same for York. For the town to grow in the arts, it has to grow in so many other ways. It has to change the way it sees itself as a town." A local business owner calls the creation of a racially inclusive art movement "a sensitive, tricky situation." She states, "You can have a successful organization as a white person, but if you want it to be community wide, you'll lose some white support."

The contingent support of some in the white community and the segregation in the art movement have split York's scant resources. Speaking of a black business owner in York, one artist states that "no one gives [him] respect. If he retires, he won't get a key to the city, but he's a longtime business owner and he hires people for the city. He's a pillar of the community though [whites] don't want to admit it." This black business owner himself states that on "Friday and Saturday nights, [my place] brings in a lot of traffic. People get a chance to look at York and want to come back because they've had good times here."

Due to York's cultural segregation, however, members of the white community have failed to catalog this business as an asset and to include it in their efforts to draw people to York. Instead, they demanded that the business owner change his sign and attempted to get one of his buildings condemned, because his business does not resonate

with their vision of York. Strikingly, this business owner described the same vision for York as did the art community. He believes, however, that his status as an outsider to the movement would prevent his ideas from being heard. He states, "The tourist idea really needs to be expressed by someone with more clout and authority than I have." Unfortunately, this anecdote reveals a division of cultural resources and a lack of appreciation for black culture in York.

This chapter ends on a less than positive note, but fortunately many in York do seek to bridge cultural and social capital between the black and white communities and to promote an integrated art movement. The next chapter explores strategies for and successes in integrating York and its art movement. Importantly, segregation is not the only challenge facing the art movement in York; challenges in leadership and funding continue to play a role. But because integration is most often mentioned as the most important challenge impeding the art movement's success, it is the focus of this study.

# CHAPTER FIVE: INTEGRATION IN YORK

## Integration & Community Development

Scholars and York residents alike view integration as a crucial component of successful community development. Yet recent years have seen several failed attempts to integrate the races in York. In one instance, a black high school student tried to get an integrated youth group together to talk about race, but black and white parents shut it down before it could begin. On another occasion, a black minister preached, "We need to get all of us together. Christ isn't going to have a white kingdom and a black kingdom. If we get there, we're going to be together." He told the story of the Good Samaritan, then stated that "We are all neighbors, and the Lord means for us to be together, both black and white, to be a neighbor to each other." To this end, the preacher organized a sunrise service to pull the black and white communities together. The plan was for blacks to go to the white service one year and for whites to go to the black service the next year. The attempt failed, however, because "some black preachers told blacks to stay at the black churches and not to go to the white churches."

In fact, in the history of York until 2001, I was only told of one instance in which blacks and whites came together. During World War II, one resident recalls, blacks and whites "got together in churches, singing and praying for the boys to come home. A

drastic disaster has got to bring us together," she states, adding that during this time, some residents still chose not to mix.

Some York residents, however, do not believe a drastic disaster is necessary for integration, and cite recent successes. One resident states that "in the past ten years, people have become more integrated in homes, and communities are becoming more diverse." Another confirms that now "you see black and white living in the same neighborhoods" and another states that "there are more mixed marriages now." One resident adds that "in some places, black and white work together and at the University [of West Alabama] they socialize together." Though she points out that some students at the university still choose not to mix, "because their parents told them not to." She believes "the younger generation will be somewhat different than the older generation" and "will work more closely together."

Despite these advancements, however, integration in York is a work in progress. Several residents point out that even when spaces are integrated, a true mixing of the races does not necessarily exist. One resident states that she lives in an integrated community in West Alabama, "but the people don't talk to us. In Birmingham," she explains, "we were friends with our neighbors. Here we just live together and that's it. We wave to each other." Another states that "at integrated meetings, people flop to one side or the other. People want to be with their own kind."

As a whole, York residents believe true integration takes time. One Alabama resident points out that interracial marriages are still new even in Birmingham. A York resident states, "You can't change it overnight, it takes a long time before a change can be made." Another adds that "bringing black and white together can't be done with

speed. It will be one [person] at a time and will require intense outside help." Another resident believes that in the attempt to integrate, "we'll disappoint each other a lot, but we'll keep trying. Even in our struggles, we're growing."

York residents also recognize that not everyone will be convinced that integration is the answer. Horst states that at the Coleman Center, "it was hard to find projects all people would support, but over time," she states, "integration becomes more natural." Riddick adds that there will always be "a trickle of people that are racist. Certain people don't want blacks to have the same as whites," she states. "You can't change people. You can only do what you can do and hope people see how much joy it can bring."

Despite the slow pace toward integration, York residents stay the course because they believe integration is necessary for community growth. One resident states that "we're still pretty separate in terms of culture. We have to get on the same page to make the art movement grow." Another states that cosmetic changes in York "may help, but if you don't change the culture, you don't answer the deep-seeded stuff. York will only prosper through consensus." A local business owner adds that in York, "We have to have each other to make it. We are in a community with no jobs. If we don't rely on each other, we can't exist." A resident of York puts it another way: "We gotta get together some way or another, but how?"

Many in York answer this question by calling for cooperation between the black and white communities. The mayor states that unless the community comes together as one, "we'll all die out. The only way to make it as a community," she insists, "is if we work together." A local business owner agrees York needs "to work together as a whole instead of the left arm going left and the right arm going right." She states that "the

community consists of both races, and until we come together as a community, York will not prosper."

One resident points out that York "can't draw people or industry without a good climate. We have to come together instead of being separate by race. This is the first step. It's going to take all of us working together to make this county work or it will dry up. We have a lot of talented people. We just have to come together." She believes York needs "a mixture of both cultures working together" and calls for "more whites working in the public sector so that people see it as integrated. The city council has two white members" she states, "but it should be 50/50." The mayor of York agrees that the town "needs middle ground" with "white and black working together 50/50."

A local business owner believes the races could come together through "town meetings where everyone can come out and express their opinions. There is no forum now for meetings," he explains. "They're only held if some issue comes up." He adds that the races need to be inclusive of each other. For instance, "If the white girls are having tea, they need to invite the black girls, and if the black girls are having a barbecue, they need to invite the white girls. It's about exchanging," he states. "That's the only way to have harmony." This statement poignantly illustrates the lack of cultural exchange present in York today, with this resident picturing white girls sitting down to tea while black girls hold a barbecue.

## Integrating the Schools

While residents have mentioned community forums and seeking a racial balance in government as strategies to promote integration in York, the strategy most often mentioned is integrating the schools. Upon researching segregated schools in Sumter County, Adams found that "when community loyalty is split in rural communities between public and private school systems, the social networks that may facilitate deliberation are limited or divided and the possibility for collective action diminishes" (Adams 2005:6-7).

York residents confirm Adams' findings. One states, "I have no idea short of building a new school what will bring the community together. Mixed schools are the very first step. If black and white children go to school together, they can get along and be friends. It's the first step in changing the community. Once students are forced together, parents are forced together." Another resident believes York "should build a magnet school to attract all kids." She asks, "How will we ever come together if someone doesn't take that first step?" The current mayor of York adds that she "would like to see the school systems merge together" and the former mayor believes that "one of these days the schools will be integrated and Sumter County will have one high school" although "it might be 2050 or 2055" before it happens.

Interestingly, another resident in York suggests involving older whites in the public schools as a step toward integration. He states that older whites

> don't participate in public school functions, and they came up in that school. They need to be given opportunities to come back into the school system. No one ran them out. They chose to leave during civil rights years, but that story's got

> old. A lot of people graduated from there. They need to have a chance to reminisce about their school days. We need to invite white graduates back to join with them in harmony and understanding. To have appreciation days. That would clarify a lot of stuff.

Despite these positive statements, however, York residents are "mixed about integrating the schools." When the new superintendent held focus groups on integrating the schools in York, the response was divided in half between those who wanted to integrate and those who did not. One resident explains that citizens of York "want better schools but don't know how to do it, or even what it means." She states that "lots of tension and deep wounds keep people from seeing integrated schools as a possibility" and that "people are afraid to initiate change. They wait for permission," she explains, "for someone who has more authority to make the change."

## Integration in York's Art Movement

As many in York believe schools should be integrated, many also believe in the need for an integrated art movement. In fact, York residents often view integration as vital to the movement's success. Creating an integrated art movement in York demands increasing black participation, which residents believe would bring new leaders, new donors, and previously untapped knowledge, talent, connections, and resources. The black community's own cultural capital, separate from white cultural capital, contains resources and talent unknown and unrecognized by white leaders. One resident states that Coleman Center shows featuring local black artists have revealed "a wealth of talented people I wasn't aware of." Thus, integration is crucial to the art movement

because black participants can help to reclassify elements of black culture as assets, preventing black cultural assets from being overlooked, or worse, condemned.

In order to increase black involvement, residents believe the art movement must reach out specifically to the black community, especially due to the past perception of the Coleman Center as a white institution. As Servon states, perpetuating existing organizations which draw strength from certain kinds of identity potentially deepens existing cleavages that feed intolerance and maintain institutions which discriminate along the lines of gender, race, class, and ethnicity. These homogenous associations in heterogeneous societies may strengthen trust and cooperative norms within an ethnic group, but weaken trust and cooperation between groups (Servon 2003).

Thus, the success of the Coleman Center depends on its ability to recreate itself as a heterogeneous, interracial center. A local business owner states the Coleman Center "needs to make the black community feel welcome, to help them to know the art is for them." An artist in residence believes the movement must "do outreach to the black community for the arts to succeed." Another believes York needs a continual program to involve blacks in the arts, pointing out that it will take a lot of enrolling to get blacks to participate as traditionally they did not view the arts as open to them.

Some residents believe personal invitations to art events would help to increase black participation. A local business owner states that the Coleman Center "needs to make more of an effort to involve blacks," pointing out that "it only takes a few minutes to extend a personal invitation." She believes that if the Coleman Center extended personal invitations to black organizations, they "would be enthused to participate" and "it would help to get the black community involved in art in York." Executive director

Shana Berger agrees that the Coleman Center "needs to reach out specifically to the black community and let them know the doors are open. Lots of folks won't come without an invite," she states, "because it's not a place they felt welcome in the past."

Residents recognized the need to extend personal invitations to the black community in the Coleman Center's early days as well. Founder Tut Riddick states that because a lot of people in York do not read the newspaper, she had five hundred cards printed announcing the Coleman Center's opening and went to every post office in Sumter County to hand them out personally. "Just like a politician," she says. As a result, five hundred people attended the opening, "but finding the manpower to communicate personally is a problem," Riddick states. Thus, involving the black community was a priority at the Coleman Center's inception, but the challenges of doing so and the subsequent years of part time directors left the task unaccomplished.

Since the arrival of two new full time directors in 2003, the Coleman Center has again consciously attempted to reach the black community, and has met with some success. Their efforts have helped to transform the Coleman Center's identity into an integrated institution, leading to bigger turnouts at events and a changed perception among the black community. One resident calls the Coleman Center "the one progressive thing going on in York," stating that "previously there was no understanding by the black community that the Coleman Center was something for them, but it has made real strides in involving the black community." Another resident believes the Coleman Center has recently "gone further than it has before in terms of reaching out to the whole community." A third resident states, "My perception of the Coleman Center

was of little old ladies drinking tea, but now I see it as a growth mechanism for the county."

## Strategies for Increasing Black Participation and Promoting Integration

### A Neutral Space

One York artist states that "one thing that brings people together most is a shared goal that all participants want to achieve. Art could be that goal. It could be a big step in bringing people together in York." Indeed, the Coleman Center has brought people together through art, partly because it provided a neutral space in which the races could interact. Saxton states that "one thing we tried to do was create the Coleman Center as a place that was racially 'neutral'- meaning that no matter what race you were, you would know that the Coleman Center was welcoming to you."

Horst adds that many of its members wanted the Coleman Center to be integrated upon her arrival in 2003, but did not know how to go about it because there are no integrated organizations in the area to serve as examples. She states that "Coleman Center members were liberal minded and open to change. They did not impose segregation [at the Coleman Center], but they didn't know how to incorporate the entire community because there is no example of an organization that's integrated in the area. They needed advice about what steps to take. Lots of people want to work together, they don't want to be segregated, but they don't know how. People on both sides don't really know what to do."

Thus, the new directors provided the leadership necessary to promote integration at the Coleman Center. Horst states that "the Coleman Center is in a position to serve as a unifying force in the community, as a neutral ground where everyone comes together. The Coleman Center gave [York residents] an opportunity for mixing." One resident calls the Coleman Center the "one thing that brought different segments of society together," and that it "became the center for mixing the races." Another adds that in York, "things have been segregated, the community has been completely divided, but the Coleman Center has been able to pull the races together and give some diversity to the arts in this area." To illustrate the diversity at the Coleman Center, Horst describes a project by artist in residence Stuart Hyatt. Hyatt lived in York for four weeks listening to as much live music as he could, then wrote eight songs inspired by what he had heard and recorded eighty eight people in the community singing them. "At the opening," Horst states, "it was the first time a lot of people had been in the same room together. It was a Sumter County harmony moment."

The interracial contact afforded by the establishment of a racially neutral space in York has helped to diminish the gulf of ignorance between the black and white communities and replace it with friendship and trust. After dining at Horst's house, one black resident of York told her, "We've never had dinner at a white person's house before. You eat just like we do!" Indeed, research in the Black Belt community of Uniontown, Alabama, confirms that as blacks and whites "focus on the interests they have in common" through community development efforts, "the differences between them begin to seem smaller…Relationships are being established across the issue of race, not by dealing with the issue explicitly or talking about racial barriers or how to

overcome them. Rather, trust is developing as black and white citizens work together on projects to bring about community improvements" (Sumners 2005:14). Likewise in York, one artist states that simply working together in the arts district and on Coleman Center projects has brought black and white together. An art project in the schools, for example, allowed white volunteers to relate to black youth and showed black youth that they are cared about by white residents.

Interracial contact also creates a desire and a momentum for further contact. After participating in an arts project at a black school, a white youth expressed interest in becoming a reading tutor at the school. "So it opens those doors," states a local artist. She believes it is important that art projects continue to be integrated, because in Sumter County "there aren't a lot of chances for kids of different races to relate to each other. When they go to college, that may be the first time they've sat in a classroom with someone of another race. There needs to be more understanding between the races earlier [in life]." Fortunately, the art movement in York has taken a step toward generating that understanding.

**Targeting Youth**

Many in York believe targeting youth is an effective way to boost black participation in the art movement. A local business owner suggests setting up "neighborhood art projects so youth can access art in their own streets." Many residents believe getting schools involved in the arts is critical. Berger and Purath agree that educational programming is a good direction for Coleman Center to go and have begun

working with youth in schools. They also hope to attract school field trips to the Coleman Center gallery.

Artists have already experienced success in programs targeting youth. Streetscapes 2004 was a collaborative effort between the Coleman Center and downtown artists which invited local youth to participate in a free mosaic workshop. The project was staffed with volunteers who taught youth about abstract art and science by enlarging images of indigenous trees (pecan, white oak, and silver maple) to create images of cellular structure which resembled abstract art. The patterns were then transferred onto concrete slabs and thirty participating black and white youth learned to cut glass and create mosaics during a two-week workshop. The mosaics were installed in sections of damaged city sidewalks in York, next to examples of the trees they represent.

The Coleman Center and downtown artists also collaborated in Your Art Here, a project intended to raise youth awareness of the arts (see Appendix 2, Figure 6). Fifth and sixth graders at both public and private schools were instructed to draw about their community. The drawings were then collaged, enlarged, and featured on three billboards around town. One of the billboards sits at the back of a vacant lot across from an artist's shop, and she has watched kids pass by it, proudly showing their parents their work. Another billboard sits atop the York police station, where officers report increased traffic congestion due to drivers slowing down to look.

In addition, New Outlooks was a project involving eleven local youth who attended photography classes at the Coleman Center for five weeks during the summer of 2006. Berger states that the group consisted of ten black students and one white who participated in a range of activities "focused on composition and self-expression" with

the purpose of creating "a space for their vision within the community." At the end of the project, students' work was featured on billboards in York, Livingston, and in the Coleman Center gallery, where blacks and whites alike attended the opening.

In fact, youth programming was used as a strategy for increasing black participation in the Coleman Center's early days as well. Founder Tut Riddick relates the following anecdote as illustration:

> A few years after the Coleman Center opened, we had an art demonstration at the Sumter County High School and the condition of the school was so bad, it was like we were furnishing cake when they didn't even have bread. I said the best thing we can do is not another program at the Coleman Center, but to paint the school hallways. Some whites didn't want to give money to fix black schools. One friend told me I was ruining myself in York for getting involved. I told her I didn't want to belong to the country club anyway. And I said, 'You mean they won't take my money at the grocery store?'
>
> So kids came to Altman Corner (on Avenue A) to talk about colors. Since the halls were so dark, we painted the lower halves denim blue and the upper halves glossy white. Then on the railing we had a green segment that led to a green door, a purple segment that led to a purple door, etc. We gave the plan to the teacher and he said, 'What is this?' but he had no choice. The school was totally organized before we got there and we painted the whole school, then we collected posters from friends and put them on the walls. Then the basketball team raised money to paint the gym. Someone brought us watermelons in the cafeteria. They supported us completely. It's just having the guts and the courage to do it.

Youth programming is a key strategy for building an interracial art movement because it helps to prevent youth from developing racial stereotypes. One artist states that "hopefully the kids don't have preset notions about race yet" so that integrated community art projects can prevent those stereotypes from ever developing and break down stereotypes already in place. Further, many in York believe the path to integration is through youth and the schools. Thus, one of the strongest powers of art in York is its ability to provide contact and opportunities for building interracial relationships between

youth who have no other forum in which to do so. The mayor states that "if art is integrated, people will start asking, 'What else can we do? What can we do to pull kids together?" Purath adds that "if the community has places that are integrated, we'll get closer to thinking our kids could go to school together."

Youth programming also increases black participation by drawing in adults. A Coleman Center board member states that when the Coleman Center "goes into schools, the parents of the kids who participate become interested and it brings them to the Coleman Center." She believes the Coleman Center needs "to have more exhibits where students have participated in the art" because it gets their parents to come. "In order to get to the community," she states, "we have to get to the parents and children." A local business owner calls it "a good step that the Coleman Center went into public schools. When the students come," she states, "the parents follow." A local resident confirms that "if you get children motivated, parents will come out. And if you get families, then you get the community."

Berger agrees that "contact with the community happens through youth programming." She explains that "people really connected to Your Art Here because they had a personal tie to it." At the opening, several people made comments like "My grandson did that" or "I know someone who goes to school there." Adults were willing to approach her, Berger says, because their children knew her through the project. Indeed, York residents cite youth projects as a major reason the black community has begun to participate in the art movement.

**Community Projects**

Former Coleman Center director Amy Horst states that "the most eye-opening and moving thing was when artists in residence were in York doing projects that engaged the community." Thus, in addition to creating youth projects, the art movement has also reached out to the black community by creating projects in downtown York. One local artist states that the "community won't come to you, you have to go to the community" and Berger and Purath have pledged to "do more outside the Coleman Center walls." Former directors Horst and Saxton accomplished this by recruiting artists in residence to create public art. One resident explains that "you used to have to come into the gallery, but all of a sudden art was on billboards, benches, sidewalks, sculptures in Cherokee Park. The art got out in front of people." A Coleman Center board member adds that the "greater emphasis on public art and community art needs to expand even further."

Horst and Saxton also created a yearly festival called Rooster Day in which local black artists offer free art classes to residents. One resident called the festival "a good community motivator," stating that afterwards "people who didn't come said they heard it was so nice that they would come next year." A local business owner agrees that Rooster Day "brought out lots of people" and believes more festivals in York would increase integration. He believes "all the businesses need to get together and come up with something to benefit the city, and have all the city people understand we're working with them. At least once a year," he states, "we need to have an event with rides, food, and clean entertainment. York will come out for these events."

Coleman Center directors Berger and Purath maintain the emphasis on community art by continuing to recruit artists in residence to create public art in York and

by designing community art projects. Their Community Memory Map consisted of two large abstracted maps of York which residents filled in with memories, photographs, drawings, stories, poems, and collages. The project's intention was "to bring together all community members in the common goal of reflecting on the past to juxtapose individual perceptions with collective identity" ("Coleman Center" 2006). In other words, to create bridging cultural capital between the black and white communities by uniting them under a common identity. In fact, all of the community and youth oriented projects at the Coleman Center have encouraged black and white residents to discover common cultural ground and to develop friendships and trust. Thus, we see the creation of bridging social and cultural capital so vital to community development efforts.

**Local Artists**

The art movement in York has also boosted black participation by featuring the work of local black artists. Berger states that "if people have a connection to the artist, when they come they'll have a good experience and will think about coming back." She cites one of her goals as building "innovative programming that directly involves the community. In the past," she explains, "when local clubs have exhibited artwork and crafts at the Coleman Center, it really helped to draw in the community because it was local art." A local artist agrees that the Coleman Center should "let the public know they can put in some of their work. That would draw more people to participate, and their families and friends would come to support them." When the Coleman Center sponsored a poetry reading by a black York resident, it drew more members of the black community

than ever before. "It was wall to wall people," the poet states. A resident adds that "blacks and whites of all ages and all levels of education came."

**Type of Art**

In order to connect with the black community, several York residents believe the art movement must employ types of art of interest to the community. One local business owner believes "getting more input from the public about what kinds of programs the community wants would help to get more blacks involved." Indeed, by asking the black community about the art they produce and prefer, the art movement can include more of the cultural attributes in the area, boosting the power of the movement as a whole. Just as some whites failed to catalog a local black business as an asset, they may also lack knowledge about art assets in the black community.

Some in York suggest that the traditionally low turnout at Coleman Center events is due to the black community's limited interest in the type of art shown. An artist in residence explains that under former directors,

> The exhibits were contemporary artists which people don't understand. Four people showed up at a contemporary art opening, but when a local artist from Demopolis opened, 150 people showed up. I see no problem with contemporary art, but it should be limited to two shows per year and the artist should have a connection to the state. Sumter County isn't the audience for contemporary art. The audience needs to be educated about art in the first place, because contemporary art is often conceptual and has more to do with the story than the object. How are you going to put seven Pepsi cans in a gallery when people will say, 'I just saw seven Pepsi cans in the street?'

A local business owner agrees that "some people didn't like the contemporary, conceptual work. They said, 'This isn't art.' You can't do solely that type of work. You have to be aware of your audience and what they understand and appreciate." Purath

adds that "it's hard to get new people interested in art. In any community there's a stigma, an air of pretentiousness. They think it's not for them, they're not smart enough to understand, so you have to think of other ways to connect."

One artist in residence agrees there is a disconnect between the type of art formerly shown at the Coleman Center and the type of art of interest to the black community. He states that blacks primarily access art through performance and music. "Music is a major folk tradition in West Alabama," he states, and "performance poetry also has deep roots in the recitation traditions occurring in black churches." Thus, he believes music and poetry programming could attract the black community to the Coleman Center. In fact, he attributes the recent high attendance at a poetry reading not only to the fact that the *poet* was black, but to the fact that *poetry* has strong black roots. Berger agrees that York residents are "more into music, poetry, and crafts" and adds that exhibits of local work were well-attended because they featured crochet and quilting, which are popular in the area. She also agrees that tailoring the type of art shown at the Coleman Center to fit community interest would draw in more members of the black community.

Importantly, residents who advocate designing art programming to match local tastes do not believe that West Alabama residents are incapable of comprehending or appreciating conceptual and contemporary art. The artist quoted above suggests that "poetry could be an in for the black community as far as interacting with the Coleman Center, and through patience and time, there would be an appreciation of visual art as well." A local business owner agrees the "appreciation of art will build over time as the Coleman Center audience changes."

**Catalysts & Champions**

Community developer Vaughn Grisham states that the community development process begins with individuals he calls "catalysts" who seek to improve the community. These catalysts get together with other like minded individuals whom Grisham calls "champions," and a community development effort is born (Grisham 2005). Though communities cannot directly create catalysts and champions, their presence is key to successful community development efforts. York has benefited from several of these leaders, whose combined presence created momentum and "a buzz in York about the arts."

Tut Riddick, founder of the Coleman Center, was the catalyst in York. Many residents believe art in York would have never flourished, or have even begun, without Riddick's vision and dedication. Further, one Alabama resident calls her "instrumental in bridging the black/white divide." Indeed, Riddick did not seem confined by the traditional structure of York. She was a member of the white elite, to be sure. Hers was one of the town's founding families. Yet she rejected the loftiness her position afforded her, stating, "I didn't want to belong to the country club anyway," and instead used her power and status to create something for the entire community. In fact, Riddick believes that "if an art gallery doesn't affect the life of the community, it's failing." The Coleman Center's current director agrees that the goal of art is to "transform society. As artists, you couldn't think of a better mission," she states. "I think it's the responsibility of artists to have goals like that. Tut believed that. It's the mission of the Coleman Center."

Several artists have acted as champions for the art movement and integration in York, building on the foundation Riddick set. One resident states that the "same people attended all the [Coleman Center] functions" until Amos Kennedy arrived in 2002. A local artist believes that because Kennedy is black, he has helped blacks to feel more welcome in the art movement and has "helped blacks and whites understand each other better." Indeed, one black resident states that he only knows of the Coleman Center because he made friends with Kennedy. Marilyn Gordon, director of Black Belt Designs, is another often cited champion for black participation in the arts, especially because she introduced the women attending her sewing workshops to the Coleman Center. Both Kennedy and Gordon are credited with getting local youth interested in their crafts and producing work which "is all about embracing the larger community, breaking down invisible barriers and color lines." Mary Zeno, a local black poet, is also viewed as essential to the movement after her first reading at the Coleman Center drew more than fifty members of the black community to the Coleman Center for the first time in history.

The mayor of York has championed the art movement as well. Residents call Mayor Carolyn Gosa "totally supportive," "embracing of the arts," and "very active and energetic." One resident states that the mayor "is so supportive of anything and everything we do. If we come up with an outlandish plan, she'll find a way to make it happen." Another adds that "Mayor Gosa is really involved. Whatever the Coleman Center wants to do, she asks what the City of York can do. The mayor was instrumental in getting new board members and in shaping the mission of the Coleman Center." Another states that there is "lots of cooperation between Mayor Gosa and the Coleman Center," and believes this city leadership has been crucial to the art movement's success.

A West Alabama resident agrees, calling it "interesting and promising that local government has gotten behind the art initiative."

The mayor specifically aided the art movement by boosting the involvement of the black community. Horst states that the mayor was "key to pulling the community in." An Alabama resident researching York views the mayor as a "progressive and intelligent" person who "desires to see beyond color." Indeed, Mayor Gosa cites one of her goals as changing the perception of the Coleman Center "as a white thing. I wanted to be the person to unite the city," she states. "I told the black community, 'They're having all these shows, let's go!' And the more the black community went, the more they enjoyed it and talked about promoting it. When I brought the black community to the Coleman Center, things started happening. Now they knew they could come; now they felt a part of it." Mayor Gosa calls the Coleman Center "the right idea at the wrong time. It took until 2001 for it to take off," she explains. "It works now because I'm a black female and I can draw both sides. I'm part of the newer generation. I can bring [the races] together."

Former Coleman Center directors Horst and Saxton are key champions of the art movement, and are often credited with increasing black participation. A local artist states that Horst and Saxton positively influenced the racial inclusiveness of art in the community. Speaking of Horst and Saxton, an Alabama resident adds that it only "took a few people inviting blacks in and making them feel safe and wanted" to increase black participation in the arts.

Horst and Saxton boosted black participation through direct, purposeful efforts. They created a Coleman Center sponsored Rooster Day at which black artists offered free

art classes to the community. In addition, the Municipal Workshop strengthened the Coleman Center's relationship with city government. Because public works, the city council, and the mayor are all black, this stronger connection to the city helped link the Coleman Center to the rest of the black community. As artistic director, Saxton states his goal was "to transform the Coleman Center from a place of private activity to one of community involvement." His success in this venture is confirmed by a resident who cites Saxton's program, and states that in the past five years, the Coleman Center "directors have become more involved in bringing the whole community in."

Horst and Saxton also encouraged black participation by actively seeking black members for the Coleman Center board. Saxton states that the "board has increased in size and the racial makeup is beginning to be more reflective of the community." Another board member adds that there is a "pretty good mix of races on the board. When I came in 2002, there were only two blacks, but now it's a little more diverse." Horst adds that in addition to being represented in larger numbers, blacks now occupy higher positions on the board. The subsequent Coleman Center directors continued to recruit blacks to the board, and by the summer of 2006, the board consisted of 6 blacks, 4 whites, and one Native American.

The increased involvement of blacks on the Coleman Center board reflects an important tenet of community development: diverse leadership. In fact, Gittel emphasizes the need to specifically involve leaders from the dominated group (Gittell 2003). Directors' actions to increase the number and rank of blacks on the Coleman Center board helps to legitimate the Coleman Center in the eyes of the black community

and boost support for the art movement. Growing local leaders also aids both continuity in and commitment to the movement.

**Growing Local Leaders**

Many of the changes in York over the past five years were sparked by outsiders. Horst and Saxton's ability to rally the black community is often attributed to their outsider status. A local artist explains that the directors "were able to make a lot of black friends" because they did not possess "a southern white York perspective where you always controlled everything. You could just say yes or no to them. Not yes ma'am and no ma'am." An Alabama resident agrees, stating that because the directors "didn't grow up in the Deep South, they automatically invited black people to events. They got out and made friends with the black community, invited them to their house. So the black community felt welcome and wanted and treated as equals."

Horst concurs that "being from the outside helped a lot. Both cultures were completely foreign to us," she explains. "We weren't in either, or perceived as belonging to either group." In fact, despite being white themselves, Horst states that she and Saxton "were more accepted by blacks than by whites." Current Coleman Center directors Berger and Purath also cite outsider advantages. They too are from the Midwest, as Horst and Saxton were, and believe "a sense of 'They're Yankees, they didn't know any better'" exists in York, allowing them to "cross social lines and get away with it without judgment. Though it is a fine line," they state.

These outside leaders played a critical role in promoting integration in York. Just as some local residents hesitate to take steps toward integrating schools, waiting "for

someone who has more authority to make the change," some also hesitate to take steps toward building an integrated art movement. Their reticence is due to several factors, including a lack of knowledge about how to pursue integration, a dearth of integrated organizations in the area to serve as models, and a reluctance to cross longtime racial barriers. A local business owner explains, "You can have a successful organization as a white person, but if you want it to be community wide, you'll lose some white support." An artist in residence adds that the art movement's "challenge is to overcome small town thinking. Every small town has its forces that keep it a small town," he explains. And York is no different." Riddick agrees, stating that "in small towns, people are very influenced by what others think." Whenever she did something controversial at the Coleman Center, Riddick states, people "were glad I came in and said 'This is what we're going to do.' Then they could say, 'Tut said to do it' and I'd be off to Mobile."

Thus, leaders from outside York were needed to set a path toward integration. It is up to local leaders, however, to build upon their efforts. Successful community development requires locally driven, locally defined efforts so that the community can control its fate. In addition, outside leaders cannot provide the continuity and longevity necessary for successful development. A West Alabama resident states that changing Coleman Center directors often is "a problem for long-term development," pointing out that both couples who have served as directors will move on from York. She believes the town "needs to grow local leadership and talent to continue growing the program, for the vision to be maintained."

In addition, Horst and Saxton's outsider status also had some negative consequences for the movement. A disadvantage of being outsiders, a local artist in

residence explains, was that Horst and Saxton simply did not know people in the community when they arrived. The former Coleman Center director used to "call people before the exhibitions and get them to come, but [Horst and Saxton] didn't have that advantage." Horst and Saxton's lack of knowledge of local groups like the Friends of the Coleman Center also resulted in a loss of critical financial support. There was also some level of mistrust of Horst and Saxton due to their outsider status. One resident explains that Saxton "didn't pay attention to the way things go down here socially, and some people found that threatening." Another states that upon Horst's departure, "she offered to find someone to take her place, but someone on the Coleman Center board said, 'Why would we want to do that? It would just be more damn Yankees.'"

The cultural gap between the new directors and the older members of the Coleman Center board fueled dissension over which direction the Coleman Center should take. The following quotes illustrate the views of three local residents.

> Tension eventually developed because their visions didn't coincide anymore. The old members of the board and Riddick felt like this isn't what the Coleman Center used to be. They felt their ideas and visions didn't have any weight, that they'd lost some control. All the older crowd was wealthy and here were these young Yankee people telling them they weren't going to do things their way anymore. The old crowd was used to being able to get their friends shows. They felt like the message was that shows of local people weren't good enough anymore, and they felt that people don't want to see art they don't understand.

> Leadership problems occurred when Horst came in as director of the Coleman Center because she didn't understand the situation of York. There were several older white people on the board who'd been there a long time and had a traditional Southern background. Young folks have to realize that these habits and culture can't change overnight. Horst got new members on the board and poisoned the well against the older members. Now they have a bunch of new members that can't support the Coleman Center financially.
> Little old ladies have a different opinion about what kind of art needs to be showcased. They don't want anything too radical or extreme. Some [older board members] have died, some have moved on, and some it would be better if they

left, but some have influence in terms of funding. The new members are open to anything, as long as it's not distasteful or disrespectful.

Following Horst and Saxton's departure, the current Coleman Center director states that "tensions that had been under the surface blew wide open. It was tough for everyone. People had been upset but it had been under the surface. It was a result of a lack of direct communication, gossip getting out of hand, making things big. It undermines people's trust in each other." One artist attributes the tension to a "small town mentality" which "undermines efforts to bring people together. Gossip has a high currency," she explains. "Things get blown out of proportion and grudges are held a long time." In fact, the tension was so severe that the Alabama State Council on the Arts stepped in to assist in the transition from Horst and Saxton to the new directors.

This dissension did cause some major shifts on the Coleman Center board. An artist in residence states that "the board is changing. Many of the old guard have left because they served for so long and got tired. Four have resigned. [Horst] redid the bylaws and some took that as an opportunity to leave." In 2005, one board member explains, the Coleman Center was still in the process of reorganizing. Riddick was involved less and the chairman of the board had resigned after twenty years of service. The longtime treasurer had recently died, and new directors had come on board in July.

Despite the upheaval, several of those in the art movement do not view the divisions as insurmountable. A documentary filmmaker researching York sees the differences among leaders as a natural part of growth, stating that "people start something and feel ownership of it, then get upset when others take it over. These are natural growing pains that have been happening in York lately. Now they're having problems

about whose name is on this, who takes credit. He said, she said stuff." A former York resident agrees, stating that the "Coleman Center has the potential for doing a lot, if it had leadership, but now the leaders are just fussing at each other. They need to get their act together and start promoting the town." Riddick adds that "people get their feelings hurt and I'm upfront, I've hurt some feelings, but we're all working for the good of the group. We've all made mistakes, but grudges weigh you down too much. As a group matures, more and more good stuff will come out of it."

Berger adds that Riddick's vision of "artists teaching and people taking classes [in York] is not that different from the vision of the new board members. The visions could come back together again." She cites one of her major goals as director as "bringing everyone with an interest back together and really moving ahead, moving forward. People are starting to come back together," she says. "We're hoping we can bring everyone back on board."

To unite the divided members of the art movement, several York residents cite the need for strong leadership and clear goals. A former resident believes York needs to develop new leadership, and hopes leaders will emerge from the new generation. She adds that leadership also needs to come from "city government and the Coleman Center. It takes a plan and someone to execute the plan." Growing local leaders is thus necessary to provide the stability, continuity, and determination needed to continue moving toward integration.

**Art Itself**

Art can promote integration through its inherent functions and qualities which break down barriers. Riddick views art as a "bridge capable of pulling people together." A regional development agency outside of York agrees that

> the arts touch people on a personal, emotional level and have the power to rebuild the fabric of the community where it has been torn apart by years of poverty and struggle. The arts can construct bridges across barriers of class, race, gender, and age. The arts can interpret and celebrate the past, present, and future of a community to replace despair and apathy with hope and creation (Phillips 2004:114).

Celia Carey, currently filming a documentary about York for Alabama Public Television, states that "the thing that struck me [about York], the bigger story, was that in a town in the Black Belt, which is 78% black, this was the first time blacks had socialized with whites. This project crossed social lines in ways other activities hadn't in decades. I wondered, 'What it is about art that makes it a bridge?'"

York residents have several responses to Carey's question. First, they believe art is accessible to everyone. Horst states that "no one owns art. Everyone can access it." A Coleman Center board member believes the arts have aided integration because they are something everyone can enjoy. He states that "art activities help the community come together [because] art overcomes racial boundaries. People like music whether they're white or black." Riddick cites art's inherent neutrality as an aid to integration. "You can talk about quilts, pottery, or printing without getting people's back up," she explains.

Art also fosters integration by producing a visual model of racial integration. By including white students from the private academy and black students from the public schools, the Your Art Here project blended the students' drawings to create a racially integrated vision of York. In addition, some of the artists who work in York create art

which "is all about embracing the larger community, breaking down invisible barriers and color lines."

Thus, art in York can provide residents with new visions and ideas. Carey states that artists "show others a different way of seeing the world; their vision helps us broaden our horizons." A Coleman Center board member adds that the meaning of "art is to provoke." Saxton offers a summarizing statement:

> From school on into adulthood, most of the population [in York] remains segregated. Of course, it is not a forced segregation—it is a choice, and mostly people choose that way because they have never been given any other options. This is where I think the arts can play a role in helping with the race issue. Bringing artists into the community who are somewhat 'alien' immediately presents someone who is totally different than what the norm is in York. And I think artists, in the end 'make things' that are somehow telling of our world—so giving the citizens of York the opportunity to view works by these artists, also gives them new ideas and hopefully, new choices.

# CONCLUSION

Residents involved in the art movement in York are realistic about the scale of their achievements toward integration. Despite obvious strides in raising black participation, several residents caution that "blacks who do participate are few." Riddick states that a "limited few" are involved and that "some will never want to mix. You do have breakthroughs," she states, "but on a limited level. The Coleman Center has made a dent in racial segregation." Even in integrated spaces, however, blacks and whites sometimes remain separate. A filmmaker researching York adds that York is "forty years behind, so any step toward integration is positive, but it's been on a small scale. York has made a little progress toward integration, but it's not all happy and harmonious." He adds that Saxton "wanted to make sure Alabama Public Television wouldn't present the situation in York as rosy, as art breaks down racial boundaries, because York has a long way to go to achieve that."

York does have a long way to go to achieve racial integration, but efforts by the art movement to increase black participation have been an important first step with tangible results. Riddick states that the Coleman Center "has made progress in racial integration." She has "seen it change a tremendous amount since the Coleman Center opened," pointing out that "blacks and whites now sit together on the front porch at Avenue A." Blacks have also turned out in greater numbers for recent Coleman Center

events, especially those involving local artists and youth, and have participated in community art projects. Importantly, blacks have also begun to take leadership roles in the art movement.

Increasing black participation in the arts in York has tapped holes in the barrier of cultural and social segregation between the black and white communities. Through working together on community projects, black and white have begun to disprove racial stereotypes, build trust, and set the stage for future collaboration. Importantly, the art movement has facilitated contact between black and white youth in York. This boosts the probability for future integration by breaking down and preventing stereotypes in youth, raising a generation accustomed to interracial contact, and setting the stage for integration of the schools. Residents involved in the art movement cite the need to continue promoting integration by seeking open and broad based participation, actively recruiting black residents and artists, and incorporating the black community's unique assets and resources.

York has by no means conquered the challenges which threaten the viability of the art movement. Challenges in marketing, funding, leadership, and segregation remain. Especially in a town which has been racially, culturally, and socially segregated since its foundation over 150 years ago, progress comes slowly. But York has made important steps toward integration by seeking to create an interracial art movement which builds on York's greatest asset: its people. This fledgling integration is critical to the success of the art movement, but more importantly, it is critical to the success of York in a changing South. As one local artist states, the movement is "the beginning of a change in direction

of the community. Things are changing around here," he says. "Slowly, but they're changing."

This study builds upon previous research by providing an updated look at racial segregation in the Black Belt. It not only documents segregation, but offers a detailed view of the effects of segregation on community members and on community development efforts. This research reveals that segregation causes the formation of two separate societies and cultures in the Black Belt, with little interaction between them. Segregation promotes ignorance and distrust between the black and white communities and emboldens racial stereotypes, precluding the establishment of friendships, trust, and a common identity needed for effective community development. Segregation also splits community resources and omits assets held by the minority group, a particularly devastating effect in the Black Belt where resources and assets are scarce. Segregation also heightens awareness of race which increases the likelihood that neutral events will be perceived as racist, further solidifying the separation between black and white.

On the surface, the Black Belt appears unaltered from the decades in which Scheper-Hughes, Greene, Stack, and Duncan conducted their research. Despite whites' diminishing numbers, they still hold much of the power and resources throughout the region. The experiences of York citizens, however, offer a glimmer of hope in a long history of poverty and repression. This study reveals that though some in the Black Belt still hold tight to segregation, many others are ready for integration, and in fact view integration as necessary for their community's survival. For most in York, segregation is not perpetuated by animosity, but by habit and a lack of knowledge about how to create something to replace it. Yet, though Black Belt citizens are often unsure of how to

pursue integration and reticent to take a first step, they have embraced steps toward integration provided by outsiders.

Indeed, York's art movement reveals the complex role outside leadership plays in community development. On one hand, outside leaders served as necessary catalysts and guides for creating a racially integrated art movement in York. Unconstrained by local social boundaries, recent Coleman Center directors worked with black and white community members without being rejected by either group, thus providing needed direction for York residents. The movement's future success, however, depends on its local leaders. With a clear path set toward integration, the art movement now needs stability and continuity. Disruptions in leadership brought by the constant departure of outside leaders often cause losses in funding, resources, and momentum. Additionally, community development efforts must be locally driven and locally defined to ensure community control and to boost community members' abilities and pride. York ultimately belongs to its citizens, and it is up to them to carry the mantle forward.

This study also evaluates York's art movement in the context of rural tourism. Experiences in York confirm many tenets of rural tourism, including the need for marketing, regional collaboration, support of local government, and the creation of a tourism package. The art movement has also benefited from creating an organization to move efforts forward, strategic planning, and carrying out small, visible actions to boost credibility and community support. The art movement also validates the importance of involving youth in development efforts.

Broader than its definition as a rural tourism effort, York's art movement is also a community development effort. In this context, experiences in York confirm the

importance of several community development principles and show how they function in practice. The art movement in York validates the need for community development efforts based in equity, constructed from the bottom up, and sensitive to local populations. Community development efforts like York's art movement must be locally defined and locally driven, achieve broad based participation, and seek to build the capacity of all citizens. Community development efforts should also grow local leadership and specifically seek out leaders from minority groups.

This study specifically contributes to a rising body of knowledge about the role of social capital in community development, especially when communities are racially, socially, and culturally divided. Currently, few studies address social capital within minority communities or the effect racial division has on the creation of social capital. Some studies recognize the challenges for divided communities attempting to revitalize, but few offer concrete steps toward unification. Scholars often tout bridging social capital as a necessary ingredient for community development without offering practical strategies for accomplishing it.

Though the strategies laid out in this research are by no means new to sociologists, they can serve to strengthen the existing evidence of the importance of addressing racial divisions in community development work. When attempting to revitalize communities with diverse populations, this study confirms the importance of creating a racially neutral space, involving youth, establishing projects in the physical space of the community and projects which demand community participation, using local experts, tailoring the project to fit community interests, growing local leaders, and designing a project which is naturally non-threatening and inclusive.

This study also emphasizes the role of cultural capital in community development, a concept rarely examined in sociological studies. This study acknowledges the alternate cultural capital created by the black community in part as a result of their exclusion from dominant, white cultural capital. It recognizes the defensive, resistant quality this capital can take in order to resist oppression by whites. In York, the existence of this distinctive capital poses a barrier to boosting black support for a traditionally white art movement. In order to bridge cultural capital between the black and white communities, specific strategies must be employed by leaders in the art movement, many of which overlap with strategies for bridging social capital and promoting integration.

Bridging cultural capital requires the establishment of a racially neutral space and the inclusion of black cultural assets. York's art movement has created bridging cultural capital by featuring local black artists, tailoring art programs to fit the interests of the black community, and creating projects which unite black and white youth. In addition, I propose that creating a common identity among black and white community members is important in bridging cultural capital. This does not involve subordinating differences between groups, but rather embracing diversity while establishing a common theme under which all community members can identify. I believe invoking a common cultural identity to be as necessary as building trust in divided communities in breaking down barriers of difference.

This study thus continues the dialogue among sociologists and community development practitioners about how to unite disparate community groups through bridging social and cultural capital. It recognizes the very real place racial division claims in many Black Belt communities. By seeking to understand how racial divisions

originated and operate in York today, this study is able to suggest solutions toward overcoming these divisions. Importantly, these solutions do not include community forums held to discuss the issue of race. They do not include protests or boycotts. These things certainly have their place and have historically acted as necessary tools for establishing equity in divided communities. But in York, where segregation is now sustained out of habit rather than hostility, non-aggressive community development strategies are needed. In York, integration comes most naturally through creating spaces in which black and white can interact in a peaceful, creative, and celebratory manner rather than by emphasizing the divisions between them.

Thus, this study also confirms the effectiveness of art as a tool for promoting equity and integration in divided communities. Art is something every community member can access and enjoy. In York, art provides a non-threatening, cohesive medium which invites community members to work together toward a common goal. York's art movement has furthered integration by preventing and breaking down racial stereotypes and by building interracial friendships. It also provides a chance for black and white youth to develop a habit of cooperation, thus solidifying integration in the next generation. Finally, art provides a visual model of integration previously absent from the community.

In summary, this research provides a detailed look at one town's struggle to overcome a divisive past through the arts. The community development tenets emphasized are relevant to communities across the South, and to diverse communities anywhere. In a changed economy, many rural communities are in the throes of reevaluating the status quo, changing directions, and implementing new ways to sustain

themselves. In divided communities, these efforts must include strategies for promoting integration. This study aids communities in the transformation process by providing tools for creating diverse and equitable community movements.

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# APPENDICES

**APPENDIX ONE: Population Change, York, Alabama, 1930-2000.**

Black Population as a Percentage of Total Population in York, Alabama

| Year | Total Population | Percent Black |
|---|---|---|
| 1930 | 1796 | 33.9 |
| 1940 | 1783 | 34.7 |
| 1950 | 1774 | 36.5 |
| 1960 | 2932 | 55.8 |
| 1970 | 3044 | 54.9 |
| 1980 | 3422 | 61.6 |
| 1990 | 3160 | 70.0 |
| 2000 | 2854 | 78.3 |

## APPENDIX TWO: PHOTOGRAPHS OF YORK

**Figure One: The Coleman Center**

**Figure Two: Galleries in Downtown York**

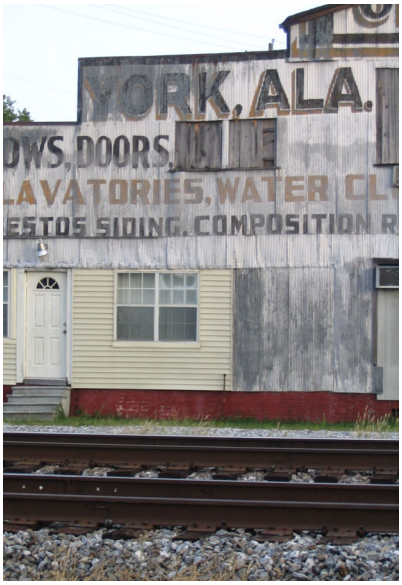


**Figure Three: York's railroad**

**Figure Four: York's former pool**

**Figure Five: Fence separating black and white graves in Sumter County cemetery**

**Figure Six: Your Art Here**