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**ACCOMMODATING WILDERNESS:
GENTRIFICATION AND THE PRODUCTION OF NATURE IN THE
ADIRONDACK PARK**

by
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A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Anthropology in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

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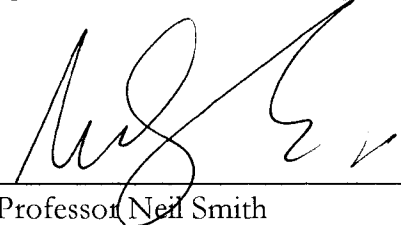
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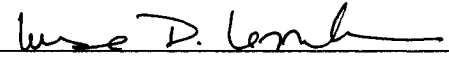
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ABSTRACTACCOMMODATING WILDERNESS:
GENTRIFICATION AND THE PRODUCTION OF NATURE IN THE
ADIRONDACK PARKby
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This dissertation examines rural gentrification in the Fulton Chain region of the Adirondack Park, a six-million acre, tightly regulated wilderness area located in northern New York State. Much like its urban counterpart, gentrification in the Adirondacks is an uneven and sporadic phenomenon, manifesting in those parts of the Park where burgeoning seasonal-home development in the context of the production of nature for recreational consumption has begun to drive residential real estate prices beyond the economic means of the Adirondack working class.

I argue that a constellation of State land management practices, including the outright ownership of wilderness areas in the form of the Forest Preserve as well as density restrictions on private property, have unwittingly contributed to setting up the conditions for rural gentrification by (1) creating a produced scarcity of private property in those Adirondack municipalities containing high percentages of State-owned land, (2) limiting subdivision and development on large swaths of what private property remains, and (3) preserving scenic recreational wilderness areas which in turn increase the rent-generating capacity of wilderness real estate on nearby private property.

The State of New York, however, is only one agent in the production of

Adirondack nature, both material and discursive. The Adirondack landscape has long been bound up with the romanticization of both rurality and wilderness, which has in turn been profitably mobilized in the capitalistic production of demand for green commodities, including countrified real estate. And development capital on multiple scales, from individual owner-occupants to corporate conglomerates, has materially shaped the gentrified geography of the Park through selective investment in the built environment.

I suggest that the purveyors, the beneficiaries and the victims of Adirondack gentrification cannot be reduced to a simple “outsiders versus locals” taxonomy, arguing that the complexities of kinship, class and land tenure help to mitigate and complicate the outcome of gentrification in terms of both profit-making and displacement. Finally, I explore the possibility of a “rural rent gap” in an attempt to determine the extent to which this facet of urban social theory can help to explain the causes, consequences, and geographical expression of Adirondack gentrification.

**This work is dedicated to my mother, Nancy Buyce,
and to the memory of Tom Bleyl.**

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The PhD Program in Anthropology at the CUNY Graduate School and University Center has been my academic home for the last decade, and I could not have asked for a better. The faculty and students at the Graduate Center have sustained, challenged and energized my work both politically and intellectually over the years. I especially thank Ida Susser, May Ebihara, Jane Schneider, Shirley Lindenbaum, Mark Edelman, Gerald Sider, Gerald Creed, Leith Mullings, Stanley Aronowitz and Michael Blim for providing a peerless climate for graduate study. Their dedication to social, political and economic justice has profoundly shaped my worldview. I owe Tom McGovern a special debt of gratitude for sharing a passion for political and historical ecology which extends far beyond the boundaries of his native subfield of archaeology. Louise Lennihan has been mentor, teacher, co-conspirator and friend, and I thank her for sharing with me her love of American landscape and her impeccable fashion sensibility. Cindi Katz, Neil Smith and David Harvey have been like a second family to me, and I thank them for opening the doors to the discipline of geography, which has become not merely an influence on my work, but my adopted intellectual home. My debt to Neil Smith in particular is immeasurable. His radical interventions on the subjects of nature, cities, and uneven development have been my political compass for the past five years, and his faith in my work and close friendship have gone above and beyond the call of duty for an academic advisor. I know that these and other faculty members have worked behind the scenes to secure funding for nearly every stage of my graduate career; for these efforts I am deeply grateful.

In the end, of course, it is the students at the Graduate Center who fill it with life, energy, passion and vitality, and I was fortunate to have joined a particularly stellar cohort. Suhong Chae, Anthony Marcus, Albina DeMeio, Julian Brash, David Vine and Penny Lewis have been an inspiration. Assistant Program Officer Ellen DeRiso not only provided logistical support, but more than once saved me from academic catastrophe with her heroic last-minute scrambles to keep me registered, funded, and sane. I join the ranks of several generations of CUNY anthropology students in thanking Ellen for her tireless work, her dedication to the Anthropology Program, and her friendship.

Several institutional programs provided much-needed funding as well as intellectual support for this project. Two grants from the Ford Foundation's U.S. Community Forestry Research Fellowship Program supplied the bulk of the funding for my research, as well as hosting two stimulating conferences on the subject of participatory research in U.S. forest communities. Several CUNY fellowships also underwrote various stages of research and writing, including a Clark Fellowship for Research with Potential for Social Action, an Urban Political Ecology grant from the City Hall Parks Project, and a Writing Fellowship at the City College of New York. The Center for Place, Culture and Politics at the Graduate Center furnished a challenging and supportive intellectual climate during what turned out to be the extremely turbulent years of 2001 and 2002 in New York City. In addition to the funding contributed by the Center toward the writing stage of this project, I received valuable critiques on early drafts of the manuscript from the CPCP Fellows, for which I am grateful. I am deeply honored by the degree of faith in my work evinced by these generous awards, and thank

all who were involved in helping to secure them.

Chief among that very long list was Tom Bleyl, whose support, friendship and intellectual insight contributed immeasurably to a project whose completion he did not live to see. The Bleyls were our neighbors when I was a child; I lived less than a mile down a lonely dirt road from his family, and went to school with his son. I used to come across him running the skidder during my long sojourns through the backwoods; he would wave cheerily to me as I passed by, then return to his labor. It was not until I became a graduate student, and decided to return home for my fieldwork, that I came to know him as a friend. The Ford Foundation's CFRF program asks its Fellows to work in tandem with a community partner from their field site, to attend the program's annual conferences with them, and develop participatory research strategies with their input. I wanted a partner who was local, a native Adirondacker with a genuine stake in forestry issues, someone who not only lived in the woods, but labored in them. I approached Tom, a longtime logger who had worked the forests in the southern Adirondack foothills for decades, with some trepidation, doubtful that he would be willing to take time off to travel all the way to Arkansas to participate in a conference organized by academics. Much to my astonishment, he agreed. With his great booming voice, his brilliant sense of humor, his keen intelligence and his authentic stories about life and work in the backwoods, he was the hit of the conference. He not only helped me secure the necessary funding for this project, but profoundly shaped its content; the idea to study development issues came one bitterly cold January night as we sat before his woodstove and pondered a letter he'd received from a speculator offering to buy his land for

“recreational and scenic development.” To my deep sorrow, a few years after our trip to Arkansas, Tom succumbed to a cruel and invasive form of cancer. I will never forget his kindness, his generosity, or his indelible spirit, and I sincerely thank his family, and particularly his wife Sunae, for letting me borrow him for our trip down south.

I of course owe an enormous debt of gratitude to the residents of the Fulton Chain region, which I eventually settled on as my primary field site. Numerous people in the hamlets of Old Forge, Eagle Bay, Inlet, and especially Raquette Lake shared their lives, their histories, and their landscape with me for nearly two years. Out of respect for their privacy, I will not name them here, but my gratitude is no less sincere for anonymity: without their help, there would be no dissertation, and I thank them from the bottom of my heart. I hope I have done their stories justice. Several public institutions were particularly helpful in my research: the Old Forge and Raquette Lake Public Libraries, which provided a plethora of local resources in addition to crucial interlibrary loan items; the Town of Webb Zoning Office, which kindly allowed me to root through their records, monopolize the copy machine and ask endless questions of their knowledgeable staff; and the extensive Adirondack Museum Library, and particularly its librarian, Jerry Pepper, the hero of Adirondack researchers everywhere.

The friendship, generosity and support of several other individuals has been instrumental in the completion of this project. I give special thanks to Steve Striffler for sharing Marxism, anthropology, Arkansas and assorted felines; to Jeff Derksen and Anders Lund Hansen for late-night talks at O’Reilly’s; to Jeff Flagg, Dan Smith and Todd Thomas for their passionate environmental politics; to Andy Gladwin for friendship and

self-awareness; to Elizabeth McDaniel for loft-sharing, protesting and baseball; to Diane Carver for a friendship rich with commiseration, conspiracy, cats and counter-curses; to Alexander Mabbett for love across the miles, and to The Cheshire Cat crew for Snitches, limericks, and kind words through trying times.

Lastly, and in the place of honor, I would like to thank my family. I owe a great deal to my brothers, Paul and Dan Brink, for shuttling my belongings between Brooklyn and the Adirondacks, for fixing my perpetually broken-down cars, for understanding my long absences from home, and for being the generous, decent, honest men that they are. I thank my sister-in-law Sharon Brink for her long friendship, her unfailing hospitality and her genuine kindness; our family became a warmer place when she joined it. I thank my nieces, Crystal, Danielle, Katie and Scout for bringing enormous joy to my life with their guileless charm, their free spirits and their sense of adventure; they are true Adirondack girls in the best sense of the word. I thank my father, Sam Darling, for keeping me up to speed with Adirondack news clippings when school and work took me far from home. The deepest debt of all, and one I can never repay, I owe to my mother, Nancy Buyce. She was born in the city and moved to the mountains, while I have done the very opposite, but in many ways we have traveled the same road. Anything I have accomplished as a student is a direct product of her long labors; without her emotional, intellectual and financial support, this project (and indeed any other) would never have come to fruition. Her abiding sense of social justice has indelibly shaped my own. I thank her for her strength, her intelligence, her compassion, and her feminism, but most of all for her example.

If my list of accrued debts has grown exponentially over the course of this project, it is because I have taken such an interminably long time to finish it, and profited from the insight of so many people along the way. The usual caveats apply: any omissions, oversights, mistakes and misinterpretations in this work are mine alone.

PREFACE
THE NATURE OF CLASS

Of Rednecks and Cowboys: Class Politics in White Rural America

This is a tale neither of victimization nor of mastery. Rural America has long been plagued by such dual objectifications, alternately romanticized as the steadfast guardian of rugged national character and denigrated as a backward holdover from a less urbane national epoch (McNicol Stock 1996, Jarosz and Lawson 2002). From Cletus the Slack-Jawed Yokel to the rough-hewn maverick Marlboro Man, these are the enduring myths we construct about the white rural working class. Such tropes are fashioned out of a long broken history of fable, event and experience, sometimes deliberately, other times unconsciously, with both foreseen and unforeseen consequences. It is the rare occasion, however, when idealized populations remain oblivious to the stories told about them, and rarer still when they fail to take an active hand in shaping them. Although Appalachia typically epitomizes the image of backwoods America, the Adirondack region of upstate New York emanates a comparably primitive aura. Like most rural Americans, the denizens of these backwater hills are well aware of the redneck narratives woven about their lives, and on occasion deploy them expertly for purposes of entertainment, diversion, or profit.

A curious set of circumstances which obtained in an obscure Adirondack town in 1998 provides a case in point. On February 23rd of that year, Timothy Morgan, a resident of the Town of Bleecker in the southern foothills of the Adirondack mountains, was arrested and charged with the murder of a cab driver who had taken him from a nearby

town to an isolated dirt road in the woods. In a preliminary motion, Morgan's lawyer, one Thomas Neidl of Albany, concocted an innovative if somewhat implausible defense in a bid to have his client's indictment dismissed. Neidl argued that Morgan was unable to be tried by a jury of his peers on the grounds that there were no "Bleecker people, hicks, hill people" on the grand jury. Morgan and his Adirondack neighbors, Neidl contended, in fact constituted a "subculture or subclass of citizens" (McGuire 1998:B1). As the Schenectady *Daily Gazette* reported,

Neidl told the court that Fulton County residents regard residents of Bleecker as "sexual deviants, of lower intelligence, lazy, shiftless, etc."... "Members of this class," he said, "hold no or menial jobs for the most part...are impoverished or sustained by Social Security income, welfare and/or other public assistance...[have] a high rate of alcoholism, criminal histories and generally have been unsuccessful in schooling and have little education. There are claims of high incidents of physical abuse, sexual abuse and incest and mental disorders in this subculture..." He said it appears that Bleecker residents "remain identifiable even when they move to the more urban areas of the county." (McGuire 1998:B1).

Neidl's argument was met with incredulity by the Fulton County district attorney, who added helpfully, "not all hicks or hill people are alcoholic or sex abusers or...lazy or shiftless or of lower intelligence or deviant," an insight she had apparently gained while living among those self-same hicks for several years as a Bleecker resident herself (McGuire 1998:B1).

While some Bleecker citizens reacted to the spectacle with understandable indignation, one opted for a more creative approach. A local man residing on a rural town highway quietly and without fanfare erected a double-decker outhouse at the end of

his driveway, with labels indicating “Hicks” on the top and “Mr. Neidl” on the bottom. For those unacquainted with the vagaries of backwoods life, outhouses operate on the principle of gravity, dropping human excrement downward into a pit, or, in this case, onto the head of the nefarious Mr. Neidl. A sign pounded into the dirt nearby explained, “Turning the other cheek.” At the risk of overgeneralizing a quite differentiated population, the nature of this response strikes me as characteristic of the Adirondack working class ethos: subtle, shrewd, and dead-on humorous. The lawyer’s insinuations were of course insulting, smacking of urban upper-class condescension yet tinged with an air of paternalism. The retort was measured, understated, biting yet somewhat bemused, and achieved the intended effect of making the urban lawyer appear the fool.

Like all Marxists, I have a keen eye for class struggle. I scan the newspapers, the streets, the subways for signs of legible resistance to the capitalist mode of production, the bolder the better. I envy anthropologists who do fieldwork among rebellious populations, like the Zapatistas in Oaxaca or the Sandinistas in Nicaragua, upstart workers here in the United States or abroad. Adirondack workers, by and large, do not comprise such a lot. Notorious for their political conservatism, they in fact constitute something of a right wing enclave relative to the rest of the New York State voting populace. The lines along which their political views actually fall out are a good deal more complicated than base caricature would allow, but in general they tend toward the traditional rather than the progressive. When factions of Adirondack “locals” do organize, as they have at times against New York State land management policies, the end result tends to resemble Wise Use-style movements which are easily appropriated by

local capitalistic interests.

Yet struggle is not an inappropriate term. The sort of class struggle I have encountered most frequently in the Adirondacks is not of the take-to-the-streets variety, but a far more nuanced, individualistic, daily, even mundane resistance, the type which fits into the narrow spaces between taking care of family and taking care of business. Jim Scott's "weapons of the weak" notion comes to mind (Scott 1985), but I cannot imagine applying the term *weak* to a population that weathers, year after year, the multifarious plagues which annually besiege the Adirondack mountains, from deep isolating winters to miserable biting blackflies to inconsiderate urban tourists to unrelenting economic depression. Such persistence connotes not weakness but endurance. Yet even the term "endurance" insinuates a certain degree of valor in the face of victimization, drawing the tale back to the polarity I set out to avoid. I hit upon on *accommodation* after fishing around for book titles among my Adirondack comrades. "We adapt," said one who has spent most of his adult life negotiating Adirondack gentrification. "Put *adapt* in there somewhere." As *adapt* conjured musty old images of quaint functionalist anthropology, I settled on *accommodation*. Other terms ring with a more dashing air: opposition, protest, rebellion, defiance, dissidence, insurgence. But at this particular moment in history, when the Adirondack working class appears to have made its peace with the seasonal green capitalism which structures its days, they simply do not apply. This tale, then, recounts the peculiar manner in which a particular slice of the rural American working class accommodates a set of cultural, geographical and political economic circumstances which are largely beyond their control, but in which they are far from passive victims.

Settling the Wild Wild North: Gentrification and the Production of Nature

The circumstances in question concern the problem of housing in the Adirondack Park. The term *accommodation*, of course, serves a double purpose here, referring not only to the manner in which the Adirondack working class negotiates class politics in their struggle to secure viable housing arrangements, but to the purpose the wilderness serves for the millions of tourists who visit the Park annually for a dose of unadulterated nature. Indeed, for much of the Adirondack working class, the accommodation of outsiders has become a primary means of sustenance. This is true not only for workers, but for all stripes of capital as well, from hotels and restaurants to real estate and construction businesses. Generations of Adirondack capitalists and workers alike have staked their financial hopes on accommodating tourists, a trend which has intensified in the postwar years.

If the geography of an epoch is a manifestation of the prevailing mode of production, then the Adirondack Park is above all a product of twentieth century American capitalism. Over the course of the last hundred years, upstate New York has witnessed a gradual shift from industrial production, predominant in the nineteenth century, to a so-called “service-based” economy (Jenkins and Keal 2004:169). The preservation of Adirondack nature and the reconfiguration of Adirondack capitalism have gone hand in hand as wilderness preservation is increasingly posited as an antidote to rural deindustrialization. Ecotourism, which supports a growing percentage of the Adirondack labor force, purportedly embodies a green capitalist compromise between environmental conservation and economic vitality in the wake of postwar capital flight

from productive and extractive industries. Jobs once provided by the conversion of nature into lumber, minerals and crops are now to be supplied by the subsidiary industries which package and sell the Adirondack wilderness experience for tourist consumption. The construction and sale of seasonal homes is an important venue through which buyers consume – and capital attempts to profit from – a produced Adirondack nature. While ecotourism is by no means new to the Adirondack region, the postwar period witnessed a second-home construction boom which differed fundamentally from the Great Camps era of the late nineteenth century. No longer the exclusive domain of oil barons and textile magnates, the Park has become a retreat for a humbler middle class seeking respite from the vicissitudes of urban and suburban life. This development has led to the gentrification of several Adirondack hamlets, bringing with it the attendant displacement of the working class typically witnessed in gentrification's urban incarnation.

Rural gentrification in the Adirondack Park is no accidental phenomenon, but the direct result of the ways in which Adirondack nature has been actively and deliberately produced by capital, labor, and the state. While it may seem strange to conceive of nature as something which is produced rather than given, over the course of the past two decades, “the production of nature” has become a stock phrase in the language of global political ecology. The idea of a *produced* nature takes on different shades of meaning depending upon who invokes it and for what purpose. Most frequently, political ecologists remind us that nature is no mere material artifact, but a set of socially, culturally, and politically constructed meanings with a complex history of their own –

nature, in this sense, is a symbol or text produced by the human imagination and the structures of power within which that imagination endeavors (Castree and Braun 1998; Cronon 1996; Descola 1996; Escobar 1996; Glacken 1967; Haraway 1991; Marx 1964; Nash 1982; Oelschlaeger 1991; Robertson et.al. 1996; Ross 1994; N. Smith 1996a; Soper 1995; Worster 1994).¹ In this sense, the *production* and *construction* of nature seem to boil down to the same thing (see N. Smith 1998:273), and if nature is constructed, then it can be deconstructed, and discourse-oriented scholars spend prodigious quantities of time doing just that. At other times, empirically-minded political ecologists invoke the production of nature to remind us that “environment” in the more mundane sense of physical reality (on multiple scales, from the subatomic to the global) is increasingly a material product of human meddling, from gene therapy to clear cutting to ozone depletion; such theorists examine not only shifting ideas *about* nature, but research the changing physical environment itself in great detail (Cronon 1983; Crosby 1986; Paddock and Peluso 1996; Peluso 1992; Richards and Tucker 1988). And on occasion, production-of-nature theorists paint a more sophisticated portrait combining both the ontological and epistemological facets of nature, suggesting that the material world and the process through which various social actors understand it are ever co-evolving in a sort of ongoing dialectical labor (Crumley 1994; N. Smith 1984). This dissertation considers the production of nature in all three senses.

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This is only a very, very partial list. The literature on the discursive construction of nature has grown so voluminous over the course of the past few years that to cite all of the literature hailing from all disciplinary backgrounds would make a book in itself; these are merely some highlights.

The history of the Adirondack wilderness justifies the characterization of nature not as a timeless, external essence, but as a material and discursive product of the various modes of production through which human communities reproduce themselves both biologically and socially. The discourses which construct nature are not disconnected from its material production, but serve to legitimize, contest, and account for specific material uses of nature, from industrial production to urbanization to wilderness preservation. Over the course of the twentieth century, the Adirondack forest has been produced not only materially through a state-engineered project of reforestation, restoration and protective zoning, but discursively as a rare and precious remnant of pristine nature in an over-developed American landscape. More specifically, the Adirondack wilderness has come to represent a sort of internal frontier, one of the few remaining spaces where nature flourishes with wild abandon: untamed, uncivilized, and capable of breeding the same rugged independence of human character that the American West once purportedly cultivated (a concept discussed at length in Chapter 2). The lucrative potential of nature-as-identity-politics has not been lost on development capital, which seeks at every turn to employ such tropes in the production and sale of seasonal Adirondack housing. Nature is not only “good to think,” it’s good to sell, and indeed has become one of the hottest commodities on the American domestic market in the past thirty years.

How to theorize rural gentrification was not, incidentally, the question I set out to ask about the Adirondack Park. In my own mind, the production of nature came first. I sought to understand how what appeared to be a quintessentially “natural” space could

be a product of not only human labor in a general concrete sense, but more specifically of the capitalist mode of production. However, it soon became clear that while Adirondack nature gets produced as many things – ideology, nostalgia, identity, and of course a very real material wilderness – the primary product emerging from this process has, for the last thirty years, been *real estate*. The production of wilderness retreats as commodity is in fact becoming a primary regime of accumulation for rural populations in the post-industrial era (see Chapter Two). Just as rural gentrification cannot be divorced from Adirondack wilderness itself, the production of that nature is similarly married to its colonization by the capitalist class which covets the Park's profit-generating possibilities.

The argument which unfolds in the following pages will therefore attempt to concretely link both the material and discursive production of Adirondack nature directly to the process of Adirondack gentrification. This presents a daunting challenge, both methodologically and theoretically, for it requires the weaving together of several hitherto disparate strands of Adirondack narrative. Nature has been studied in the Adirondacks, and housing has been studied in the Adirondacks, but the two have not always been presented as dialectically connected issues. More often, one is noted as a footnote to the other, depending on which serves as the focus of the story being told. To successfully connect gentrification and the production of nature in a theoretically meaningful way requires the mobilization of many different kinds of evidence, for neither process operates in a single exclusive sphere. Each is at once political and cultural, economic and social, and results from a complex intermingling of material phenomenon (such as the movement of capital) and discursive phenomenon (such as the mobilization of cultural

symbols) at both a broad national scale and a circumscribed local scale. This research therefore required the implementation of a variety of data-collection methods, from participant observation to public records comparison to discursive deconstruction. It also required contextualization within a specific Adirondack location, for rural gentrification, like its urban counterpart, does not blanket the landscape like so much falling snow, but takes hold in particular spaces while failing to manifest in others. This text is the result of two years of ethnographic fieldwork between 1999 and 2001 in the western-central region of the Adirondacks called “The Fulton Chain of Lakes,” described in more detail below. It is to the ethnographic process and its place in this research that I would like to turn next.

On “Native” Ethnography

Although ethnographic confessions of the postmodern stripe frequently come off as (at best) somewhat self-serving and (at worst) downright narcissistic, a book which scrutinizes the human sense of place stands to benefit from a certain degree of frankness with regard to roots. I did not set out to do native anthropology. I chose the Adirondack Park as a field site because I was interested in class conflict over the production of nature, and this particular landscape presented an opportunity to explore such conflict in a place where class figures strongly in daily life but seldom in academic accounts of it, and also because I was tired of the urban grind and wanted to spend some time at home. In addition, I regard the term “native” with a certain cynicism. If anthropology allows for any sweeping generalization about human beings, it is that we are a species on the move,

originating in Africa and migrating – by choice, by force, by virtue of circumstance – around the globe, and sometimes back again. All natives, then, come from someplace else originally, and it is doubtful that duration of occupation lends credence to moral or political claims on landscape. Nonetheless, for the researcher, the very possibility of staking such a claim colors the ethnographic experience with regard to access, interest, and the rocky terrain of identity politics, and such is my situation. I was born and raised in the Adirondack town where Timothy Morgan was arrested; in fact the murder took place on the very beaten dirt track where I grew up, known by the improbably placid name of “Lily Lake Road,” about a mile from my childhood home. More than this, I knew Timmy as a child and our lives were entangled in multiple ways, including the fact that my family – working class in our own right – had rented a trailer to Timmy, his father and his brother in his younger days. This book is not about the Town of Blecker. My actual field site lies some two hours’ north in a place where I would never be considered a “native.” Still I have tried to retain some measure of self-awareness with regard to my own particular biases about both the Adirondack landscape and the Adirondack working class, biases which emanate from a long and intimate association with the wilderness and its inhabitants.

If native ethnography constitutes a troubling and tricky enterprise, ethnography in general is not above suspicion. Ethnography began to strike me as a somewhat dubious means of collecting data after an instructive encounter at my field site. A friend of mine who worked as a chef at the League Club, an exclusive association of wealthy sportsmen owning nearly 57,000 acres of land in the Park, had promised me a tour of the grounds

and an interview for my book. Upon attempting to secure permission for the tour with his employers, he learned that all information flowing out of the Club is strictly controlled, and that it would *not* be permissible to bring me onto the premises for purposes of research. My friend promptly (and prudently) cancelled our tour, fearing for his job. While the tendency for the wealthy to jealously guard their privacy was not surprising, I was rather taken aback at the reaction I received upon recounting the story to other Adirondack locals. The discussion involved two workers, one an employee of the post office and the other an employee of a local marina – the latter hailing from a family which might be considered a part of the local petit bourgeoisie – and they defended the Club wholeheartedly. They contended that League Club members had worked hard to earn their money (a claim which ignited a lengthy argument), that they deserve their privacy, and that they should be commended for doing business with local establishments. I, in turn, questioned why the wealthy have the right to extreme privacy just by virtue of their wealth, while the poor and working class lead far more legible lives. “You’ve talked to me about my research,” I reasoned. The answer was illuminating. One replied, “I talk with you, yes, but I don’t tell you everything.”

This struck me as an astute admission. In retrospect, I suspect that all informants withhold information, or at the very least paint the portrait they want you to see, though perhaps to a lesser extent than the paranoid League Club. In a more general sense I believe most people do this on a daily basis; we weave tropes about our own lives, presenting to varying degrees of “public” the picture we would like others to see of ourselves. Of course, one can attempt to verify claims, through further ethnographic

sleuthing as well as public records research, but the former presents the same problem as the original inquiry and the latter frequently constitute deliberately constructed stories as well. Building permits, documents with which I have become intimately acquainted in the course of gentrification research, provide a good example. The figures cited in such documents for construction and renovation, for instance, tend to be understated for tax purposes, since home improvements lead to higher assessments, and it's difficult to discern their degree of (under)exaggeration. Such documents, after all, are constructed by human beings with varying interests and agendas, and though frequently used for official purposes, they hardly represent unassailable "fact."

Although all of this intrigue livens up the process of ethnography, its implications can be quite disturbing for a researcher attempting to construct a credible social history, leading either to a postmodern-style hypernarrative, in which multiple versions add up to a cacophony of equally credible yet contradictory stories, or to a defeatist nihilism, in which one completely loses faith in the possibility of unearthing the truth at all. In general, I prefer the latter, since it retains some belief in the idea of truth to begin with, but I believe good research ultimately calls for a process of compromise, in which all sources are interrogated, substantiated, and taken with a grain of salt. This is what I have tried to accomplish. In the end, however, an ethnography is still a story. Others might be told.

Fortunately, ethnographic research represents only one of the tools at the disposal of fieldworkers. Although I did live and work in the Adirondacks for nearly two years and talked with many Adirondack locals about my research, the arguments presented in

this book draw on multiple sources of data, including records on housing and development held by state, county and town zoning offices, vertical files housed by the Adirondack Museum in Blue Mountain Lake, an array of official documents published by the State of New York pertaining to Adirondack land management, publications by real estate corporations, economic development agencies, and environmental groups, various and sundry newspaper and magazine articles, U.S. Census statistics, and housing studies conducted by public agencies, non-profit and for-profit organizations, and private researchers. In short, I tapped every conceivable resource pertaining to Adirondack landscape and development to construct the argument found in the following pages. The study was, however, limited in both time and space. While the production of Adirondack nature has been going on for well over two centuries, the time period in question here dwells primarily upon the last thirty to forty years, for this epoch marked a distinct shift in both the production of nature and the production of housing inside the Adirondack Park. Furthermore, as ethnographic studies tend to be limited in geographical scale, this study took one particular Adirondack region as a case study. That field site is described in more detail below.

The Particulars: Field Site and Text

A study conducted by an urban design consultant and commissioned by four North Country counties in tandem with the Adirondack Park Agency in the early 1980s grouped the Adirondack hamlets according to geographical, functional and physical criteria. The document categorized the Fulton Chain and surrounding areas as

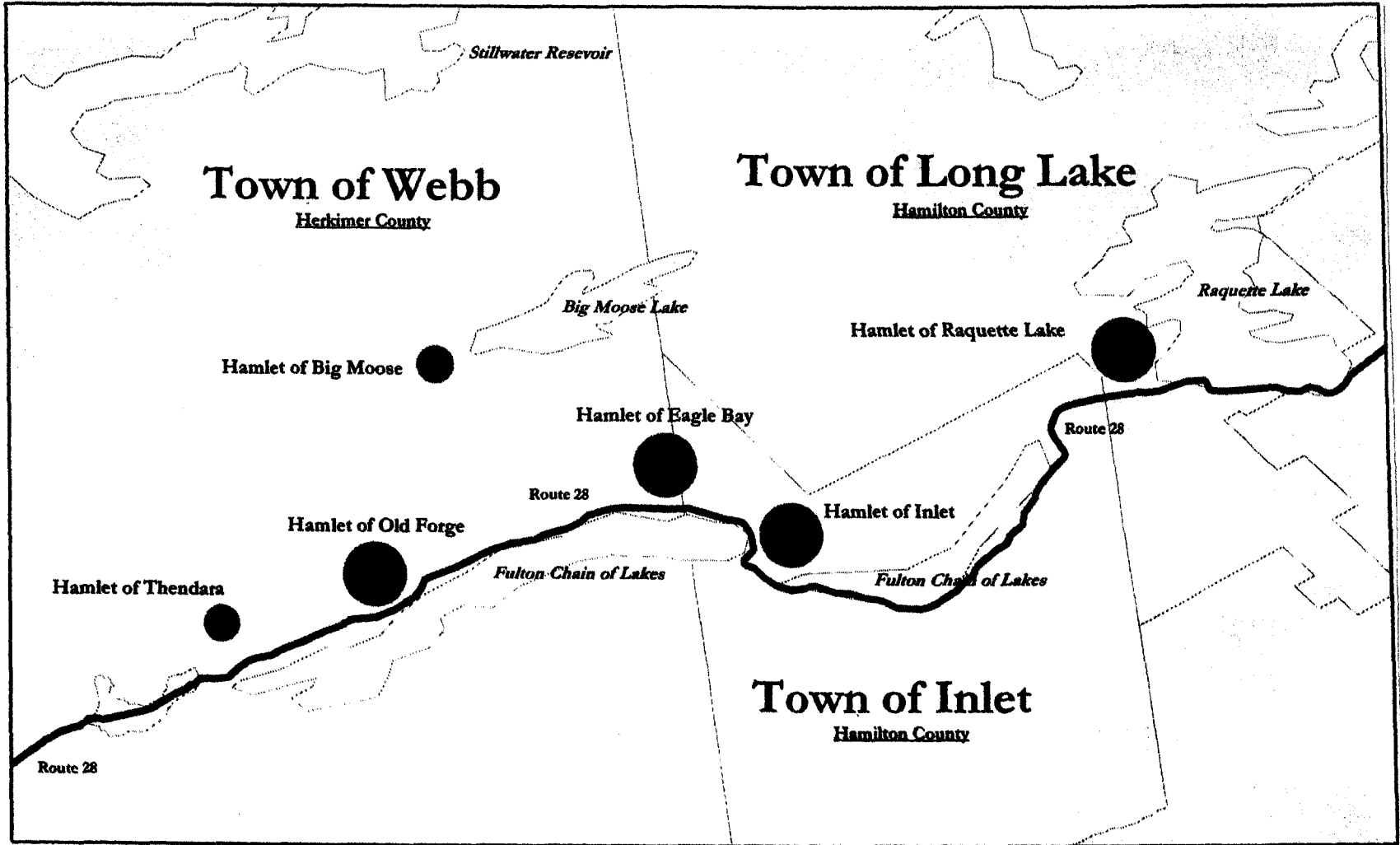


Figure i

“Adirondack Wilderness Outposts,” and it would be difficult to conjure a more accurate designation (Trancik 1983). The Fulton Chain region, stretching in a rough line from the hamlet of Thendara in the southwest to the hamlet of Raquette Lake to the northeast (see Figure i), constitutes one of the most desolate rural geographies in the United States outside of Alaska. Sparsely populated in the off-season (spring and fall) and overrun with tourists during high summer and winter, it is a space whose cultural geography ebbs and flows with the changing rhythms of the year.

The following story is based upon roughly two years of research on the Chain. In the Adirondack region, townships are constituted by politically demarcated boundaries which amount to subdivisions of counties, while hamlets are intra-town settlements with far more nebulous political implications. The Fulton Chain region, located in the western central part of the Park, spans portions of Hamilton and Herkimer counties and the towns of Webb, Inlet, and Long Lake. Within these three towns lie four hamlets, or village-type concentrations of rural populations: Old Forge and Eagle Bay in the Town of Webb, Inlet in the Town of Inlet, and Raquette Lake in the Town of Long Lake. Although I lived during this period in the hamlet of Inlet, the bulk of my ethnographic research was conducted in Raquette Lake, where I worked as a bartender for a period of one year. Technically, Raquette Lake does not count as part of the Fulton Chain, a series of eight lakes (literally named First Lake, Second Lake, etc.) stretching from Old Forge through much of the Town of Inlet, but since it is culturally and geographically proximate to the rest of the Chain, I have followed other writers in grouping it together with the Old Forge/Eagle Bay/Inlet region.

The text is organized into five chapters. Chapter One provides an introduction to rural gentrification in the Adirondack region, and supplies some background information on the Park and its history. Chapter Two takes a step back to look at the broader issue of the production of both nature and rurality in the nation at large, providing some sociocultural contextualization for gentrification in the Adirondack Park. In Chapter Three, I return to the local setting, tracing housing development at the Park scale and in the Town of Webb in particular over the past thirty years. Chapter Four takes a closer ethnographic look at the Fulton Chain region in an attempt to understand exactly who benefits and who suffers from rural gentrification in terms of both class and geography. Chapter Five explores the differences between rural and urban gentrification in the hopes of uncovering the underlying logic of rural gentrification as part and parcel of the capital accumulation process; more specifically it considers the applicability of the “rent gap” theory pioneered by geographer Neil Smith to explain urban gentrification, as well as the relevance of “post-productivist” theory, which has been explored by scholars seeking to explain rural gentrification in the U.K. And finally, a brief Epilogue considers the future of the social geography of gentrification, rural and urban.

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CHAPTER ONE THE NEW RURAL FRONTIER

Nature appreciation is a “full stomach” phenomenon, that is confined to the rich, urban and sophisticated. A society must become technological, urban, and crowded before a need for wild nature makes economic and intellectual sense.

A Marxist formulation is tempting.

Roderick Nash
Wilderness and the American Mind

Ghosts of Colonization Past: Capital Returns to the Adirondacks

In the spring of 1989, the Adirondack working class received an alarming wake-up call in the unlikely form of Robin Leach. The Adirondacks, according to the garrulous host of *Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous*, were a hidden jewel just waiting to be discovered by travelers with a taste for wilderness and the purchasing power to claim a slice of nature-at-its-moneyed-best for their very own. The show had even gone so far as to list the remote and rugged mountains as an “upcoming hot spot for jet-setters” in its Guide to the World’s Best Places (*Observer-Dispatch* 1989). Leach’s prediction had been well borne out by the mid-1990s. “Rough It Like A Rockefeller,” proclaimed one headline in the travel section of the *Wall Street Journal* (Robichaux 1996:B10), while an article in *Vanity Fair* encouraged readers to go “camp hopping in the haute Adirondacks” (*Vanity Fair* 1997:157) and *Travel and Leisure* billed it as a place where “the notion of escape endures” (*Travel and Leisure* 1996:83). Such articles, liberally sprinkled with posh photographic layouts depicting the rich at play in century-old lodges nestled on the shores of gleaming silver lakes, recommended accommodations such as The Point in Lake Placid, where guests could take in the clean mountain air for a mere \$1300 a night.

Beamers had been traded in for sport utility vehicles, and the Adirondacks, it appeared, had become an exclusive retreat for well-heeled consumers seeking respite from their taxing cosmopolitan lives in the newly fashionable wilderness.

Coming hard on the cusp of the new millennium, the tale was rather late in the telling. Vestiges of a older era of Adirondack opulence were, and still are, quite visible on the Adirondack landscape. A century earlier, the most famous seasonal residents of the Adirondack Park comprised a fair laundry list of industrial magnates: Whitneys, Colliers, Huntingtons, Morgans, Carnegies, Durants, Rockefellers and Hasbroucks had all built or bought majestic, rustic-style lodges which came to be known as “Great Camps” on the shores of Adirondack waters in the latter half of the nineteenth century, many of which still stand today (Kaiser 1982; Kirschenbaum 1990). A few long-time inhabitants of the village of Raquette Lake, one of the original sites of Adirondack wilderness colonization by the luminaries of America’s capitalist class, still recall seeing Cornelius Vanderbilt strolling about the grounds of Great Camp Sagamore. Many locals (or their parents) had worked as caretakers, guides, house cleaners and cooks for such men in the heyday of the Adirondack Gilded Age. If the rich and famous were “discovering” the Adirondacks in the late 1980s, it was old news for the mountains. The newly well-to-do were merely exhuming the ghost of a century-old capitalist occupation. Wealth is no stranger to the Adirondacks.

Still, by the 1980s the Great-Camps era had long been relegated to a distant if grandiose Adirondack past. Of more immediate concern than the reappearance of the billionaire tourist in the wilderness was an apparent upsurge in second-home

construction by developers with somewhat lesser aspirations. For at least two decades before Leach's official warning of impending re-colonization by the uber-rich, more mundane portents had begun to appear on the horizon that signaled the commencement of a more modest if still upper-class deployment. In 1967, a land development corporation named Great Northern Capital had begun construction on a 280-acre site in the sleepy town of Indian Lake with plans to subdivide and sell over 300 lots. This small project was apparently the least of their plans, for the *New York Times* reported in 1970 that the same corporation intended to buy some 10,000 forested acres near Old Forge, develop them into 5,000 luxury properties, dam a branch of the Moose River, and build several golf courses and marinas (Terrie 1997:167). A similar development scheme was proposed by Horizon Corporation in 1972 for 24,000 acres in St. Lawrence county, on which it planned to build some 10,000 houses in addition to the requisite luxury infrastructures and a dam on the Grass River (169-170; Graham, Jr. 1978:248-249; McMartin 2002:32-34 and 2004:199). In the Town of Altamont, yet another developer proposed a massive project called Ton-Da-Lay on 18,500 acres in 1969, reputedly to offer horseback riding, moss-harvesting and ranching in addition to housing 20,000 people (Browning 2002:49; Graham, Jr. 1978:249; McMartin 2004:198). Further large-scale developments were planned for Loon Lake and Black Brook around the same time (McMartin 2004:198-199).

If the second wave of Adirondack colonization had been underway since at least 1970, it took social scientists nearly twenty years to recognize the implications of these developments for the Adirondack working class. Ominous reports of locals being forced

out of housing had begun to appear in regional papers by the end of the 1980s, reflecting research by state agencies, local economic development corporations, and independent researchers at nearby universities. “Adirondackers Priced Out of Homes,” reported the *Plattsburgh Press* (Plattsburgh Press 1990), while the *Press Republic* noted that “Home Prices Squeeze Adirondack Park Locals” (Boyer-Rechlin 1989b), and the *Adirondack Enterprise* headlined with “AEDC Study Suggests Park Residents Priced Out of Housing” (Russell 1990). Even the *Albany Times Union* chimed in with a piece lamenting the “Dismembering [of] the Adirondacks” by ruthless real estate developers (Kunstler 1989). Several articles described an outright housing crisis in Old Forge, Lake Placid and Saranac Lake under investigation by a Cornell University doctoral student whose research surveyed households across the Adirondack Park (Boyer-Rechlin 1989a). The State of New York, too, kept a watchful eye on these developments: a State survey found that “Adirondack Homes Increased 43% in 20 Years,” warned the Glens Falls *Post Star* (Sanford 1990). The massive State-sponsored study entitled “The Adirondack Park in the Twenty-First Century” devoted two chapters to the issue of subdivision and development (New York State Commission on the Adirondack Park in the Twenty-First Century 1990c:296-345). The Commission, expressing alarm at the rate of growth in a region whose purportedly wild character enjoyed protection by no less an authority than the State constitution, recommended a one-year moratorium on subdivision and development across large swaths of the park (New York State Commission on the Adirondack Park in the Twenty-First Century 1990a:52).

The vacation-home construction boom heralded by the media in the 1980s

signaled both a qualitative and a quantitative departure from the colonization of the Gilded Age. In the first place, the class dynamic of the second wave differed fundamentally from that of the first. The vast majority of the new settlers were not Rockefeller-caliber families whose wealth so exceeded that of ordinary residents as to place them above and beyond the real estate market, but middle-class consumers whose finances were deeply entangled with the host of capitalistic enterprises which comprise the residential housing industry: real estate brokers, mortgage lenders, title insurers, developers, land speculators, construction companies, and the state itself. These were not people who could afford to build their own railroads if they found the local roads lacking, as J.P. Morgan and Collis P. Huntington had done in Raquette Lake nearly a century before. In the second place, the land market had changed dramatically over the course of a hundred years. When William West Durant began building Pine Knot, widely considered the first Great Camp prototype, in the 1870s, the Adirondack Park was not yet a park, but a vast unregulated wilderness whose forests supported a range of extractive industries from lumbering to tanning to mining to charcoaling. The ensuing century witnessed not only the decline of these industries and the constitution of the Park itself, but the construction of a complex land management system which eventually came to regulate all six million acres inside the Park border.

This meant two things. With the State of New York increasing its own land holdings inside the Park, the amount of private property available for sale and development had shrunk dramatically, with the State ultimately holding title to just under half of all Adirondack Park land by the 1990s. And when, in the 1970s, the State of New

York passed legislation allowing it to manage the land in the Park it did not own, what private property remained very suddenly became subject to a host of State regulations restricting subdivision and development to an extent seldom witnessed before in United States history. In short, both the producers and consumers of second wave Adirondack colonization were operating in a substantially different environment from that of their nineteenth-century predecessors.

In order to understand what all of this meant for Adirondack locals – which for the moment we will define in a strictly geographical sense as those already living in the Park when the construction boom began – we need to take a closer look at the Park, its people, its land, and its regulations.

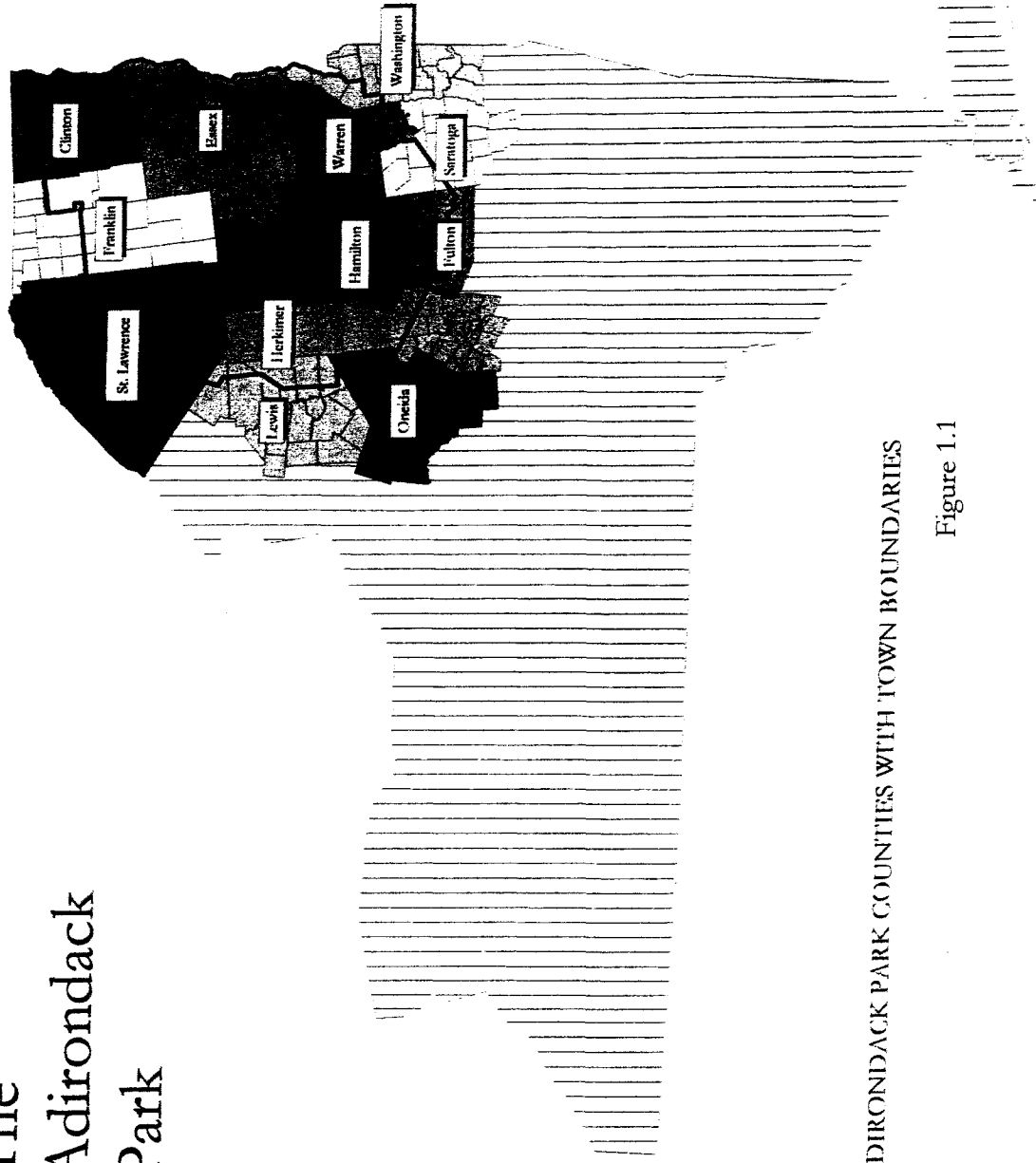
The Adirondack Park

From massively conceited cities to outlandishly conceited politicians, the “Empire” State rarely produces anything on a small scale, and the Adirondack Park is no exception. Modern commentators on the Park tend to wax poetic with a host of breathless superlatives regarding its enormous expanse, desolate beauty, and environmental progressivism. The Park is large – massively so. The largest contiguous wilderness in the lower 48 states, it would easily encompass Yosemite, Yellowstone, Grand Canyon, Smoky Mountain and Olympic national parks put together, its range covering an area the size of the entire State of Vermont. Bordered roughly by the St. Lawrence valley to the north, the Mohawk valley to the south, Lake Champlain to the east and Lake Ontario to the west, it also forms the lion’s share of the Adirondack-

Champlain Biosphere Reserve, the fourth largest worldwide in the UN's Man and the Biosphere Program. As Figure 1.1 indicates, the Adirondack Park encompasses parts of twelve upstate New York State counties and 100 townships in which 135,000 inhabitants make their year-round homes. Its border (frequently called the "Blue Line") bisects ten of these counties; only Hamilton and Essex are located completely inside the Park. Spanning six million acres thickly carpeted with mixed deciduous and boreal forest, the Adirondack Park constitutes roughly a fifth of New York State's total land mass. Perhaps more significant than any other geophysical characteristic, at least from the perspective of real estate development, the Park boasts an estimated 2800 lakes, 3000 miles of brooks and streams, and more than 1200 miles of river, including the source of the Hudson. The overwhelming abundance of water in the Adirondack mountains – and its significance for capitalistic production – played a key role in the formation of the Park itself, and came to figure centrally in the colonization process described in this chapter, as we shall see later on.

Distant descriptions of the Adirondacks tend to find common ground in their utter failure to convey the grand enormity of the place, the hoary wildness of its hinterland, and its effect on the vagaries of the human imagination. Perhaps the most convincing way to sense the true magnitude of the wood is to become lost in it; not merely bushwacking off the beaten path with compass in hand, but truly lost. This is not an infrequent occurrence. Reports of wayward hikers who underestimated the exigencies of severe weather and endless miles of trackless bush surface year after year; some escape, some perish far from home and help, and a few are never found at all. Even for

The Adirondack Park



ADIRONDACK PARK COUNTIES WITH TOWN BOUNDARIES

Figure 1.1



those who know their business in the woods, wandering around the Adirondack forest is a lot like wandering around a Grimm fairy tale; it's a place that tends to cultivate flights of fancy in even the most staid of dispositions. Unlike the flashy and ostentatious rainforests of the southern hemisphere, the Adirondack wilderness emanates a far more subdued and melancholy aura, relinquishing its secrets only reluctantly to the most persistent of apprentices. If the grey, the lonely and the desolate may lay a claim to beauty, then these mountains hold a place of privilege among the ranks of the world's most stunning landscapes.

This particular view of the Adirondack region was long in the making. From at least 1609, when Samuel de Champlain first ventured into the far eastern reaches of the region, through most of the eighteenth century, the Adirondack mountains were considered an uninhabitable wasteland by early explorers, labeled on the earliest colonial maps as "parts but little known," "dismal wilderness," or "drowned lands" (Bourcier 1986). Although the occasional visitor during this early period took note of the sublimity of its vistas, most commentators remarked that it was a landscape desperately in need of reworking by human labor to be rendered useful (Terrie 1985). It was not until the nineteenth century and the emergence the romantic school of nature writing, which captured the sense of awe, wonder and transcendence (Emerson himself made a trek to the Adirondacks in 1858) evoked by wild spaces in latter days, that the tide of public opinion began decisively to turn. With wilderness, and the Adirondack region in particular, increasingly viewed as an antidote to the stresses of frenetic urban life, many began to value nature beyond its economic utility (Nash 1982). Still, despite the gathering

strength of preservation-minded movements dwelling upon the sublime beauty of wilderness rather than its usefulness to industry, most Adirondack historians (Graham Jr. 1978; Nash 1982; Terrie 1985) agree that the ultimate creation of the Adirondack Park by the New York State legislature had far more to do with the preservation of commercial waterways including the Erie Canal and the Hudson River, whose lifeblood depended upon the protection of the Adirondack watershed, than with any aesthetic qualities the wilderness possessed. Whatever its ultimate reason, the State of New York began to take steps during the latter half of the nineteenth century to ensure the protection of the Adirondack region from heedless lumbering, farming and mining interests. After a series of debates in the legislature and the popular press, the Adirondack Park was constituted in 1894, prohibiting the extraction of timber from State-owned property in the region (collectively known as the “Forest Preserve”) which from that point on, in the words of the constitutional amendment which created the Park, were to be kept “forever wild” forest lands.

The ensuing century saw the State increase its land holdings inside the Blue Line from 600,000 acres in 1883 to 2.6 million by the early 1990s. Originally, New York State drew the Park border in a rough oval encompassing all of the scattered Adirondack Forest Preserve and added to its stockpile of wilderness over time. The Blue Line has therefore from the very beginning surrounded a great deal of private property as well as State-owned land. Although the enlargement of the Forest Preserve through purchases and seizures proceeded apace throughout the twentieth century, private property in the Park continues to constitute just over half of all Adirondack lands today. The Park’s State

and private lands coexist side-by-side in a sort of patchwork quilt, with various municipalities containing different ratios of each (see Figure 1.2). For the first 78 years of the Park's existence, the Blue Line meant little for private landholders, for the only land afforded protection within its purview belonged to the State. All of this changed in 1972 with a new set of legislation – as momentous (if not moreso) than the original passage of the Park amendment in the late nineteenth century – which rapidly caused the notion of living inside a “Park” to take on new meaning.

In 1967, New York State Governor Nelson Rockefeller commissioned a wide-scale study of the Adirondack Park, charged with constructing a proposal to mitigate the aforementioned wave of second-home development, which had begun to take root not only in the Adirondacks but in the adjoining Champlain valley on the Vermont side of the lake. At the time, the primary concern of the group in charge, dubbed the Temporary Study Commission on the Future of the Adirondacks (and chaired, not insignificantly, by a millionaire businessman whose family owned one of the original Durant Great Camps), was not the stability of local housing, but the “threat” this development posed to the wilderness character of the Adirondack Park. With over 3 million acres of unregulated Park property facing a renewed national interest in nature as an item of consumption (of which we'll have more to say in Chapter Two), the integrity of the wilderness seemed unlikely to persist outside of the protected Forest Preserve. Of particular concern was the issue of subdivision, as large-scale landowners began to realize the lucrative potential in dividing, developing, and selling off tracts of forested private property. In short, residential development appeared to constitute as great a threat to the Adirondack

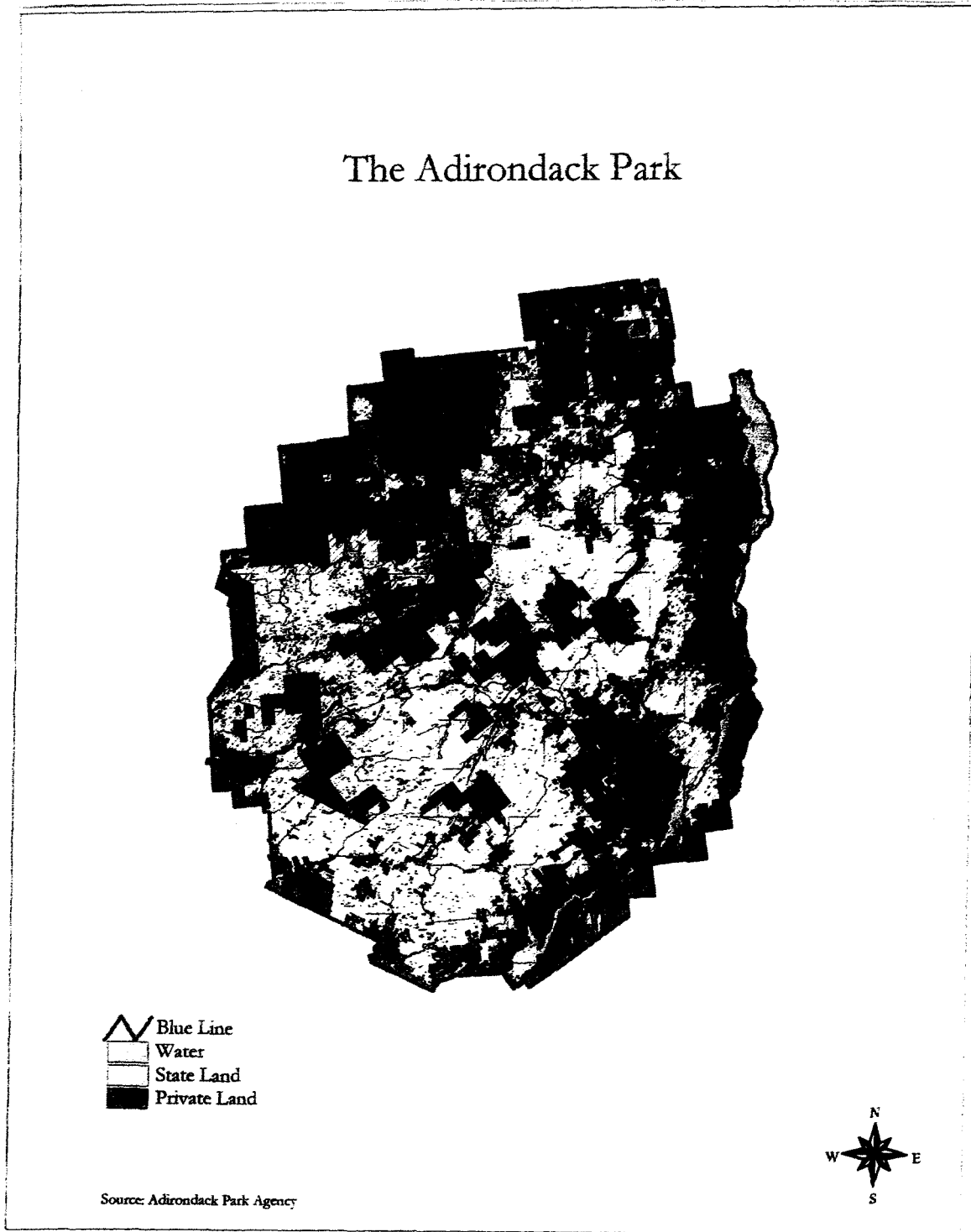


Figure 1.2

wilderness in the 1960s as lumbering did in the 1860s. The Commission recommended the constitution of a State Adirondack Park Agency responsible for regulating the use and development of all private property inside the Blue Line. This was done, and the APA subsequently drew up two documents designed to shape Adirondack wilderness management: the State Land Management Plan, pertaining to management of the Forest Preserve, and the Private Land Use and Development Plan, pertaining to the regulation of private property in the Park. The latter document constituted a remarkable strategy (even more remarkable because it passed muster in the New York State legislature and became law) for zoning private property, developing a system of density allowances which covered every inch of private land in the Park. The APA classified private property inside the Blue Line the into the following categories, described in Table 1.1.

Table 1.1	
APA Land Use Classifications	
Classification	Density Guidelines
Hamlet	none
Moderate Intensity	500 principle buildings/square mile
Low Intensity	200 principle buildings/square mile
Rural Use	75 principle buildings/square mile
Resource Management	15 principle buildings/square mile
Industrial Use	none
Adopted from the text of the Adirondack Park Agency Act as amended through 1998	

The plan also dictated guidelines for setbacks (the number of feet any given structure must be set back from a shoreline or roadside), signage, and septic systems, and outlined permissible primary and secondary use guidelines for each category. In addition, it

instituted a permit process through which construction projects which significantly altered the character of the landscape within restricted zones had to pass before being allowed to go forward. While we will examine these classifications more closely in further chapters, the most important point to note now is that the APA designed this scheme with the specific intent of channeling all new construction toward those parts of the Park where the most heavy development had already taken place: the hamlets¹.

This policy had the ultimate effect of restricting the available space within which Adirondack land developers could operate, as well as concentrating the power to permit or deny subdivision and construction projects in the hands of a single State agency. Significantly, the passage of the APA act created a mechanism through which the State of New York could, in essence, *override* market-driven development plans ordinarily based solely on capitalistic considerations of profitability. However, while these actions ostensibly put the brakes on large-scale development, development continued nonetheless, as the headlines from the 1980s cited earlier in this chapter suggest. But now, such development was encouraged to take place within the far more circumscribed spaces defined as acceptable by the APA, and inevitably in closer proximity to the already-existing Adirondack housing stock. The peculiar housing market which emerged from these events constituted a curious amalgam of traditional *laissez-faire* market

1

Since the institution of the Adirondack Park Agency Act, the term “hamlet” has come to refer to both the small population centers which dot the Park (rather like villages) and the formal land-use category described in Table 1.1. For our purposes, the geopolitical formation will be called a “hamlet” in this text, while the land-use category will be indicated by “Hamlet,” with a capital “H.” Note that the two are not always identical, though they generally overlap.

transactions functioning within a system of tight public ecological regulation, occurring in those private spaces lying in-between massive swaths of State-owned Forest Preserve, and all taking place in the climate of the middle-class back-to-nature movement of the post-Fordist era. It is this set of circumstances which combined to produced the housing crisis experienced by parts of the Adirondack working class in the past two decades. By the 1990s, many blue collar Adirondack families found themselves negotiating a precarious and highly destabilized housing environment whose attributes were strikingly redolent of a similar process well-documented in the literature on the urban housing market: gentrification. It is to this process – and the possibility that it accurately describes the second wave of Adirondack colonization – that we turn in the next section.

Literatures of Gentrification, Rural and Urban

In the winter of 1999, Molly Riley, a divorced mother of two living in the hamlet of Raquette Lake, found herself in a rather tight spot. Riley made her \$400 monthly rent payment with wages gleaned from several part-time jobs: house cleaner, bartender, nurse's aide. There had been no running water in her double-wide trailer for six of the most bitterly cold weeks of the year. The pipes were frozen and the landlord refused to fix them, so she and the kids drove to her mother's house to take showers and obtain drinking water. At the time, the trailer was on the market, and Molly anticipated eviction when it sold. She was subject to regular harassment from her absentee landlord, including a stream of letters questioning her fitness as a mother as well as the purposeful neglect of the building which amounted to a clear violation of New York State's Warranty of

Habitability Law. She was reticent to remove to nearby Indian Lake, the location of her primary job, for fear of her abusive ex-husband. There were no other vacant year-round rentals in Raquette, where 88 percent of the housing units are occupied seasonally by tourists. For awhile, she contemplated a move to the Carolinas, where she has relatives. I asked if she would take a place in Inlet, just west of Raquette, if one became available. “No,” she replied wearily, “I’ve had about enough of New York State.”

Molly and her family were experiencing the effects of what might be termed “rural gentrification.” Traditionally, scholars have understood gentrification as a postwar restructuring of urban space whose most visible manifestation is the recycling of working class neighborhoods into residential havens for a wealthier middle class. Gentrification is associated with a host of broader political, economic and geographical developments on multiple scales, from localized cycles of fixed capital devalorization and reinvestment to global patterns of deindustrialization in advanced capitalist nations (N. Smith 1986). Until recently, the extant scholarly literature has treated gentrification as a distinctly *urban* phenomenon (M. Phillips 2000:1, 2004:6-7). While theorists of gentrification debated the causes, consequences, and corollaries of this process, until a little over a decade ago all agreed on its primary location: gentrification happened in cities.

But in the early 1990s, scattered references to gentrification began to appear in the literature on rural housing produced by scholars, NGOs, and governmental agencies in the United States. Anthropologist Janet Fitchen, in an article on homelessness in upstate New York, notes that “the stock of low-cost rental housing has been diminished by development, rural gentrification, and inadequate public investment” (Fitchen

1991:177). The Housing Assistance Council, a non-profit rural development corporation, states that rural homelessness can be related to “gentrification, whereby people from neighboring urban areas relocate to obtain cheaper housing or vacationers build second homes, both of which result in rising housing costs for local residents” (Housing Assistance Council 1991:iv). A State-sponsored study of New York’s Adirondack Park conducted in the early 1990s remarks that “Many older buildings in the Park have been purchased, gentrified and resold at high prices, making affordable housing in some Park communities hard to find” (New York State Commission on the Adirondack Park in the Twenty-First Century 1990a:31). And a recent report by the Adirondack Park Agency states that “The issue of ‘gentrification’ and the ability of long-time Adirondack residents to maintain a quality and affordable lifestyle is an aspect of community welfare worthy of monitoring” (Adirondack Park Agency 2001:11). In each of these cases, the term gentrification is employed almost intuitively to describe recent developments in the rural residential real estate market. This frequent but imprecise invocation of “rural gentrification” suggests that those agents who commonly deal with issues of housing and rural poverty – academic scholars, community organizations, state and local governments – are discerning a pattern of displacement in the rural U.S. which is sufficiently evocative of urban gentrification to warrant the exportation of the term to the countryside.

If rural gentrification in the U.S. remains largely under-theorized, the same does not hold for the U.K., where a more fully-developed literature, based for the most part upon a series of rural gentrification case studies in the Welsh and English countrysides, has begun to coalesce (Little 1987; M. Phillips 2004, 2002, 2000, 1993; D.P Smith 2002a,

2002b; D.P. Smith and D.A. Phillips 2002; see Friedberger 1996, however, for an interesting U.S. exception). In general, this literature concerns itself with four primary issues:

1. Shifts in the class structure of rural Britain, often focusing on the “colonization” of the British countryside by an ex-urban or -suburban, middle class of homeowners who seek to create a lifestyle organized around the consumption of “nature” and/or rurality, and the subsequent displacement of working class rural residents as a result of rising local land and housing prices (Cloke, Phillips and Thrift 1995; M. Phillips 1998a and 1998b; Urry 1995);
2. Shifts in the rural capital accumulation process, and especially the theorization of the “post-productivist” rural landscape, in which industrial or agricultural production gives way to service-oriented accumulation regimes, including residential real estate development, often involving the conversion of formerly industrial structures such as barns into residential housing units (Lowe et.al. 1993);
3. Shifts in the composition of the rural British housing stock, including patterns of ownership, the impact of state housing policies, and the material make-up of the housing stock itself (Bowler and Lewis 1987; Richmond 1987); and
4. Rural gentrification as an object of theorization, particularly in areas (such as the Gower peninsula in Wales) where investment in residential plots affording rustic or pastoral ambience yields significant returns to a variety of developer types (Little 1987; M. Phillips 2004, 2002, 2000, 1993; D.P. Smith 2002a and 2002b; D.P. Smith and D.A. Phillips 2001).

Gentrification in the Adirondack region shares many commonalities with its British counterpart, including the discursive construction of “nature” and “rurality” by both consumers and producers of gentrified housing, the manifestation of class formation and struggle in the residential housing sector, and the displacement of local residents as a result of investment in gentrified housing. And the British literature shares some

fundamental commonalities with the present dissertation – in particular, the applicability of urban-based gentrification theory to rural gentrification, as well as the potential heterogeneity of gentrification in different types of rural settings – with two important exceptions. To begin with, there is an important element present in Adirondack gentrification which goes largely unaddressed by the British research: the significance of the *material* production of nature as *wilderness park* by the state management of the local landscape in creating the conditions within which investment and disinvestment in the rural built environment occurs. Furthermore, the bulk of the U.K. literature emphasizes *consumption* as the motor force of rural gentrification, even going so far as to point to uneven consumer preference as constitutive of the fundamental difference between rural and urban gentrification. D.P. Smith and D.A. Phillips, for example, have coined the term “greentrification” to signify the crucial importance of nature-consumption in the rural gentrification process which, from their perspective, “...stands in contrast to the ‘urban’ qualities which attract in-migrant counterparts in urban locations” (D.P. Smith and D.A. Phillips 2001:457). Indeed this penchant for consumption-side explanations for rural “revitalization” has been acknowledged within the literature itself (D.P. Smith 2002a:445-446).

An exception to this rule is the work of Martin Phillips, whose research has gone the greatest distance in applying “production-side” theories of urban gentrification to the rural setting. Phillips has made two important points which have direct bearing upon the concerns of this dissertation. First, Phillips has investigated the possibility of a *rent gap* – a concept postulated by urban geographer Neil Smith in a series of arguments which have

become a veritable watershed in debates about the “revitalization” of the inner-city – in the rural setting, documenting significant returns on investment in devalorized residential housing in the Welsh Gower (M. Phillips 1993:129-130). The prospect of an Adirondack rent gap will be addressed in Chapter Five of this dissertation. Secondly, Phillips has drawn attention to the potential parallel between “post-productivist” theories of the countryside (described in point number 2, above) and the cycle of disinvestment and reinvestment which underpins the rent gap in the urban setting, arguing that rural gentrification might plausibly be understood as a revalorization of landscapes “which have become seen as unproductive or marginal to agrarian capital, and indeed a variety of other rural capitals” (2000:5-6; see also 2004:14). Chapters Two and Five of this dissertation explore the relevance of post-productivist theories of landscape to the case of Adirondack gentrification.

These two lines of thought – the former addressing the scale of the local, the latter addressing the scale of the supra-local – are also relevant because they are analogous to the dual scales upon which gentrification operates in the urban setting:

...residential rehabilitation is only one facet (if a highly publicized and visible one) of a more profound economic, social, and spatial restructuring. In reality, residential gentrification is integrally linked to the redevelopment of urban waterfronts for recreational and other functions, the decline of remaining inner-city manufacturing facilities, the rise of hotel and convention complexes and central-city office developments, as well as the emergence of modern “trendy” retail and restaurant districts. Underlying all of these changes in the urban landscape are specific economic, social and political forces that are responsible for a major reshaping of advanced capitalist societies: there is a restructured industrial base, a shift to service employment and a consequent transformation of the working class, and indeed of the class structure in general; and there

are shifts in state intervention and political ideology aimed at the privatization of consumption and service provision. Gentrification is a visible spatial component of this social transformation (Smith and Williams 1986:3).

At the heart of this definition lies the notion that gentrification is, in a sense, the tip of the iceberg: it is the most conspicuous manifestation of broad sociocultural and political economic shifts which far exceed the result itself in both time and space. Marxian theorists have long insisted that gentrification cannot be sufficiently described as a mere constellation of attributes, but instead must be explained as a process with a discernable logic whose attributes derive from the spatial requirements of the capitalist mode of production (Smith and LeFaivre 1984:43). Many of the attributes typically associated with urban gentrification are also evident in the Adirondack case, although the latter exhibits some pronounced differences from its urban counterpart, which will be fleshed out in further chapters:

Gentrification entails a displacement of poorer occupants. Perhaps the process most immediately associated with gentrification is the replacement of the current population of residents by one of greater economic means; on the surface gentrification constitutes a “yuppification” of the inner city. When we think of gentrification in the city, we think of an active, immediate displacement of local working class inhabitants from their current housing to some other place. Current occupants are ostensibly driven out by higher rents, although this process may also entail purposeful structural neglect as well as a range of intimidation tactics on the part of landlords. Although this immediate displacement may also occur in rural areas, we need to redefine and broaden the notion of displacement to

understand how rural gentrification affects local populations. In such areas, displacement may take place over generations as, for instance, when children are unable to secure housing in the towns where they were born and raised, even after having left to obtain higher levels of education or income. It may also entail the negotiation of mobile housing, as in the cyclical relocation of residents from winter to summer housing and back again – as an economic imperative rather than a simple preference – or the literal relocation of mobile homes or trailers. Displacement may further involve broad geographical relocations based upon class, as in the gradual “ghettoization” of particular rural areas. In the preceding sentences I have reproduced a subtle elision of income and class status often witnessed in social science literature, but this is an issue with which we must struggle consciously rather than take for granted. While it is tempting to cite class as the fundamental factor in the displacement process, a tenant’s rent-paying capacity and his or her capacity as a producer whose surplus value is appropriated by capital are not synonymous. In theory, poorer working class occupants can be displaced by working class occupants who garner higher wages. Yet class and the production process from which it derives remain central, primarily because of the tight link between residential housing and the labor market, as described below. The specifics of gentrification-induced displacement in the Adirondacks will be addressed in more detail in Chapter Three, while the role played by class in the gentrification process will be addressed in Chapter Four.

Gentrification is a product of broad shifts in the urban capital accumulation process. Urban gentrification tends to coincide with shifts from industrial production to “service-based” accumulation regimes, particularly involving the FIRE industries of finance, insurance,

and real estate, which require very different types of land uses from those industries associated with manufacturing and call for capital investment in the host of edifices that facilitate the white-collar activities which move and organize capital itself (N. Smith 1996:86). Capital is therefore cycled into particular types of built environments (office buildings, for example) as opposed to others (like manufacturing plants). Far from providing a simple backdrop to the gentrification process, this shift becomes integral to the investment and development decisions which create urban landscapes. The Adirondack case does not fit neatly into the same pattern. Certainly the relative decline of resource-extraction industries such as logging and the rise to dominance of the ecotourist industry has directed the physical development of the Adirondack landscape toward one based upon the consumption of scenic views and recreational amenities and away from one based upon the messy (and sometimes environmentally “unsound”) process of resource extraction. Nature in the Adirondacks has become a commodity to be consumed in its “whole” form rather than to be dismantled and reassembled into something else. However, this change in the rural capital accumulation regime is not precisely analogous to that which accompanies gentrification in the city. To begin with, the service-based ecotourist economy is not new to the Adirondacks, and indeed has long been a staple of the particular Adirondack region in which this research was conducted. In addition, deindustrialization did not suddenly strike the Adirondacks in the 1970s, but occurred unevenly over the course of the twentieth century, the timing varying from industry to industry. Furthermore, some primary sector activity still takes place in the Adirondack Park, while a significant public-service based economy has also begun to

weigh in as a significant employer. To speak of a sea-change from industry to service in this part of the world is therefore overly simplistic. The issue of deindustrialization and capital sector-switching will be addressed further in Chapters Two and Five.

Gentrification entails a spacial centralization and decentralization of capital In addition to the industrial switching of capital, as described above, urban gentrification is bound up with a geographical switching of capital from the city to the suburbs and back to the city (N. Smith 1996:86-88). As capital build-up in the urban built environment begins to act as a barrier to further investment, nearby low-rent districts characterized by disinvestment become a magnet for capital. In the postwar period in Europe and the United States, this sort of outward geographical seepage manifested as suburbanization (which Smith sees less as de-urbanization than an expansion of the urban sphere itself) and the subsequent return of capital to the inner city several decades after the initial flight and subsequent devalorization. Urban gentrification is therefore intricately bound up with uneven development, and may in fact be understood as the product of capital's tendency to exploit profit-making opportunities in disinvested urban landscapes. Due to differences between the role of urban and rural landscapes in the process of capital accumulation, the forces which have combined to produce Adirondack gentrification are not precisely analogous to the geographical shifts which have ushered in gentrification in cities around the globe. Neither city nor suburb, the remote and isolated Adirondack wilderness offers no exact equivalent for the geographical circuit traveled by capital in the case of urban gentrification. This phenomenon will also be discussed further in Chapters Two and (especially) Five.

Gentrification is a postwar phenomenon. While evidence of wealth-dominated urban real estate markets abound before this period, such examples typically involve concentrated monopolies of a far different nature than the competition-driven postwar urban investment process. In describing prewar manifestations of gentrification-like urban market processes, Neil Smith writes that “Its agents...were generally from such a limited social stratum and in many cases so wealthy that they could afford to thumb their patrician noses at the mere dictates of the urban land market – or at least mold the local market to their wonts” (N. Smith 1996:37). This statement accurately describes the difference between first-wave of Adirondack colonization by the upper classes and the latter gentrification process of the 1970s and 1980s.

Gentrification involves capital-state collusion. From the granting of building permits and zoning variances to massive infrastructural investments to the adjudication of the loan process to the management of popular resistance, the state plays multiple roles in urban “renewal.” Although the process has been curiously under-theorized, I suspect that state investment in public spaces (parks, for example) plays a pivotal role in the gentrification of inner-city neighborhoods. While the state in general plays a similar role in facilitating the investment which underpins particular types of rural development, the State of New York specifically plays a far more pronounced role in gentrification through the management of the Adirondack Park, with some curious consequences. In the first place, the State of New York often finds itself at odds with producers of gentrified housing precisely because of its role in environmental protection. Rampant development, ironically enough, was the primary impetus for the creation of the Adirondack Park

Agency whose private zoning plan ultimately exacerbated the local housing crisis in gentrified areas of the Park. In the second, the enlargement of the Forest Preserve has helped to simultaneously limit widespread development and intensify highly concentrated residential construction by creating a sort of produced scarcity of private property in the Park. At the same time, the State has come under increasing fire for promoting environmental protection at the expense of local economies, and has been forced to negotiate a narrow road between economic development and environmental preservation. Caught in the crossfire between environmental groups which seek to “protect” the environment from the locals and local politicians who seek to “protect” their constituents from the environmentalists, the State has promulgated a line touting the dual benefits of ecotourism as a savior of both Adirondack people and Adirondack nature. The State of New York therefore plays an unusually strong role, both materially and discursively, in managing rural gentrification by attempting to mitigate the often-conflicting needs of capitalists, the local working class, environmentalists, and the forest itself. The function of the State in Adirondack gentrification will be addressed further in Chapters Three and Five.

Gentrification is profit-driven. As in every sector of the capitalist mode of production, the consumer demand for housing would not be met were there no profit to be derived. This is not to say that profit necessarily follows from investment, particularly when high-risk speculation occurs, but that the capital accumulation process (which of course entails competition between individual capitals for larger and larger shares of the market) drives all aspects of real estate investment. Great Northern Capital did not set out to build 5000

luxury properties in the western Adirondacks in order to meet some massive social demand for year-round housing; indeed, had the project gone forward (and it did not, as we shall see later), it would have quadrupled the housing stock of the town in which it was to be located as well as importing thousands more seasonal residents. The key role played by seasonal housing in rural gentrification makes it much more difficult to argue, as some theorists have done for the city, that gentrification arises to meet the basic housing needs of middle class consumers. Seasonal homes constitute a luxury item, and often represent the most hedonistic aspects of conspicuous consumption. Furthermore, if we were to attempt to explain Adirondack gentrification solely in terms of the consumer demand for the particular amenities offered by the wilderness, we would be hard-pressed to explain why some areas have been rapidly gentrified while others have scarcely changed in fifty years. Not every inch of the Adirondack Park is undergoing, or has undergone, or even will undergo, gentrification. On the contrary, rural gentrification turns out to be as geographically circumscribed as its urban counterpart. The uneven development experienced by different Adirondack townships cannot, therefore, be solely explained by differences in consumer demand. This is not to say that demand for such amenities is unimportant; in fact it comprises a key factor in capitalistic decisions to invest in a particular landscape rather than others. But it is nonetheless investment that drives rural gentrification, as consumers cannot consume luxury housing that does not yet exist. And importantly, under the capitalist mode of production, demand itself does not merely exist *de facto*, but gets created. This process typically involves the mobilization of a host of ideological symbols which tend to play upon cultural sentiments

already in motion and ultimately act to legitimate consumption as well as drive it along, a subject to be elaborated further in Chapter Two.

Gentrification advances along a cultural as well as an economic front. Scholars of urban gentrification have uncovered a host of discourses deliberately deployed to justify, facilitate and legitimize the displacement of the inner-city poor. Such tropes often employ remarkably naturalistic metaphors, referring to the ghetto as a frontier, wilderness, or jungle, to its inhabitants as natives, outlaws, and Indians, to gentrifiers as pioneers, cowboys, and homesteaders, and to the gentrification process itself as colonization, settlement, or conquest (N. Smith 1996:XIII-XVII). In the rural setting, we shall witness the mobilization of a host of comparable discursive symbols, but with a curious twist. While rural gentrification certainly proceeds metaphorically through the vilification of the natives, its attitudes toward frontier and wilderness are precisely the opposite. In the Adirondacks, wilderness is precisely the thing requiring protection; it is the frontier which must be subdued and contained. The project to send the Adirondack wilderness back to seed is in fact a very specific and ironic form of the production of nature: production through disinvestment, or the *removal* of fixed capital from the forest. For the engineers of this century-long restoration project, the wilderness is not a corrupt and corrupting den of inequity and moral decrepitude, as the “urban jungle” is often cast, but a place of virtue, innocence, purity and cleanliness: the less humanized, the more virtuous. The rural wilderness is the urban jungle turned on its head, produced through conscious, planned and purposeful activity rather than abandonment to the anarchy of the market; understood as a morally and physically pure environment where body and

soul can recuperate from the evil contaminations of modernism rather than representing the blighted manifestation of modernity's pathologies. In the rural setting the jungle is no dark haunt, but a veritable Garden of Eden, a wilderness not forsaken but contrived. The scorn heaped upon the urban jungle by those who condemn the inner city has been matched and exceeded in fervor by those who sing the praises of the rural wilderness. As with the wilderness metaphor, so with the frontier: the development of the urban frontier is a positive, courageous, moral imperative; the development of the rural frontier (in the form of human settlement) is considered a crime against nature, a contamination rather than a civilization. Gentrifiers themselves then walk a rather uncomfortable line between promoting the benefits of unadulterated nature and packaging and selling it as a commodity whose very purchase threatens the integrity of the product itself. This, of course, constitutes the primary internal contradiction of both ecotourism writ large and seasonal real estate development more specifically: both seek to sell something that is valuable by virtue of its undeveloped state, but can only do so by milling it into a commodity. The discursive production of nature, wilderness and rurality will be explored further in Chapter Two.

From Colonization to Gentrification

In the first part of this chapter, I suggested that the Adirondack region has undergone two significant waves of appropriation by capitalist constituencies. The first, coinciding roughly with the Gilded Age and dominated by the Great Camps regime of patrician capital, I have called "colonization." While the term may ring with an

unwarranted measure of extremity, the social science literature evinces some precedent for its applicability. Anthropologist Catherine Henshaw Knott, who conducted ethnographic research in the region in the early 1990s, argues that the Adirondacks, along with other wilderness outposts such as Appalachia and the Ozarks, have witnessed three distinct periods of colonialism:

Each area experienced a period of heavy extraction of natural resources, including timber, water, and minerals which left the region as raw products, bringing relatively little income into the area. During this period regional political control came from wealthy, external administrators and landowners; these regions experienced direct political and economic control from outside, or no control other than exploitation. The period of heavy extraction was followed in each case by a period of resource impoverishment, leading to a “neocolonial” situation in which local leaders took over local and regional politics as scattered rural communities struggled and continue to struggle to extract leftovers...A third period of colonialism follows these other two...This is the period of tourist colonialism...The latter stages of this period include cultural tourism as well as ecotourism (Henshaw Knott 1998:17).

This third period of “tourist colonialism,” which may be traced from the late 1960s through the present day and which has introduced the phenomenon of rural gentrification to several Adirondack municipalities, is the primary concern of this investigation. The question is, why this particular historical moment? What caliber of political, economic, or socio-cultural circumstances coalesced some thirty years ago to catalyze such a profound transformation in the Adirondack real estate market? Who were its agents? What were their motivations? Was it a sudden sea change, a slow buildup of events, or a watershed with deep historical roots?

It is an exceedingly daunting task to distinguish correlation from causality in the messy arena of social history. At best, we discern orderly patterns among the chaotic chatter of Babylonian reality, but our conclusions remain interpretations and may be bettered (or replaced entirely) by others. The colonial period of the Gilded Age affords us the benefit of a hundred year's distance, and is perhaps more clearly perceived across the wide gulf of the twentieth century than the era of gentrification, which is not only of more recent advent than its predecessor, but still going on at the time of this writing. Nonetheless – as we must take our shot or despair of explanation altogether – I propose that the roots of Adirondack gentrification lie in the coincidence of three interrelated phenomena, spanning multiple scales from the regional to the global and coalescing roughly in the early 1970s: (1), the rise to prominence of the mass environmental movement and with it a renewed interest in both American nature and American rurality; (2), the advent of innovative capital accumulation strategies hinging upon particular productions of nature and rurality following deindustrialization; (3) the reorientation of rural economies toward service (especially ecotourist) accumulation strategies in the wake of capital flight from industry; and (4), the burgeoning of middle-class prosperity and the development of middle-class consumerism following the end of the Second World War. Although the possible causal connections between these events will be explored in more detail in Chapter Two, by way of introduction, the tale in brief unfolds as follows.

It is no accident that developers began to take an intense interest in the Adirondack Park during the late sixties and early seventies, for a new reincarnation of an old social movement had begun to mobilize at precisely the same moment when second-

wave Adirondack colonization was taking root, rendering nature a hotter commodity than it had been since the Gilded Age. Amidst the waves of social unrest engendering the feminist, peace, civil rights and gay rights movements, the environmental movement was making nature-adoration into less of an elite pastime, as it had hitherto been in American history, and more of an organized mass political crusade. The environmental movement which emerged from these turbulent times, while itself a particular manifestation of a longstanding American passion for external nature, served to reignite, intensify and fan the flames of the old ardor, spreading it like wildfire among a far more expansive grove of suitors than it had ever reached before.

The production and consumption of nature as a profitable commodity has long been entangled with the desire to *protect* external nature from the “threat” purportedly posed by marauding humans. While it would give short shrift to the complexity of the American environmental movement to deny its quite radical, even revolutionary aspects, there is little question that consumption-based strategies for conserving the environment (or, at least, for making people feel as though they are doing their part) have become a significant component of the popular brand of environmentalism that has emerged over the last forty years (Luke 1997:115-136). However revolutionary its original intentions, the post-1960s environmental movement evolved rapidly into a consumer-oriented strategy for changing American society’s relationship with nature. Recycling, reusing, and conserving became the mantras of the day, particularly in the wake of the energy crisis of the early 1970s. As Americans had been accustomed to defining their identities through their consumption choices since at least the early postwar era, environmental

consumerism offered a convenient opportunity to align oneself with the interests of “Mother” Earth without requiring any radical restructuring of the capitalist political economy. By purchasing recycled products, driving fuel-efficient cars and otherwise investing in “eco-friendly” products, Americans could participate in a political movement that required little more than making different choices in the market place while simultaneously identifying strongly with such tropes as “nature,” “the biosphere,” or “the planet.” This practice of identification-through-consumption has direct bearing upon rural gentrification, for wilderness real estate constitutes an important manifestation of the nature commodity.

Environmentalism and its associated consumer strategies has helped to fuel the innovative creation of demand so necessary to the postindustrial reconfiguration of capital accumulation. Nature began to mean something new for capitalists just as it began to pervade the American political consciousness during the tumultuous emergence of the new social movements. As Cindi Katz put it succinctly, “Nature changed in the 1970s” (Katz 1998:46). She speaks here of a sort of “involution” of nature as capital reached the absolute boundaries of geographical expansion and jumped on the preservationist bandwagon in the search for innovative natural resources to mill into profits. In this article, she dwells specifically on bioprospecting in the rainforests of the southern hemisphere, but her argument could be easily extended to a wide range of capitalistic activities here in the United States, including, importantly, real estate development. As with other environmentally-friendly capitalistic ventures, development capital seized upon the opportunity to exploit the revitalized consumer demand for nature by

packaging and selling what was rapidly becoming a scarce commodity in an increasingly urbanized (and suburbanized) America: wide open space.

At the same time, widespread deindustrialization had left many rural Americans looking for viable alternative subsistence strategies. At precisely the same time when service-related industries began to fill the void left by industrial capital flight to the Third World, many rural communities began turning to tourism, and ecotourism specifically, as a base to shore up local economies. With rural geographies moving away from industries based on resource extraction – logging, mining, ranching, and farming – large swaths of land were becoming available for other uses, including second-home construction. As noted above, this process represented an intensification of a long-established accumulation regime rather than an about-face in the Adirondack region, but the potential implications for the Adirondack landscape were significant enough to act as the catalyst for the sweeping legislative changes enacted by the State to stave off development in the early 1970s. Increasing postwar prosperity, in turn, made investment in wilderness-as-luxury-item an attainable goal for the very middle class American consumers who began to turn to nature as a solid ground in which to plant their identities in an increasingly destabilized postwar environment. Real estate development became, in essence, the dominating accumulation strategy for deindustrialized rural spaces with little but rustic ambience to offer up to the whimsical market.

I believe it was this mixture of consumer demand, economic restructuring and geographical opportunity which development capital exploited in the housing boom described above. Furthermore, despite the theoretical limitations imposed by the unique

political geography of the Adirondack Park, I nonetheless suspect that gentrification manifests similarly in all rural areas which draw both producers and consumers of housing with the lure of stunning natural landscapes, the prospect of unfettered outdoor recreation, the nostalgia for wide-open spaces devoid of second-nature development, and the profits to be derived from the commoditization of these resources. We have now moved from the level of local Adirondack developments to a broad-scale national trend toward the production of nature in the United States at large. Because I believe that Adirondack gentrification represents one manifestation of this larger development, we turn to the broader scale of national nature-production in the following chapter.

CHAPTER TWO RURALITY AND REDEMPTION

In wildness is the salvation of the world.

Henry David Thoreau

~

Department Of The Interior Sets Aside Two Million Acres For Car Commercials

WASHINGTON, DC—Seeking to "safeguard our precious wildlands for future generations of SUV ads," the Department of the Interior set aside two million acres in Wyoming and Colorado for use in car commercials Monday. "If we do not protect this land," Secretary of the Interior Gale Norton said, "we may one day have no place for Dodge Rams to run wild and free."

The Onion

Rurality and Romanticization

In 1990, the Honda corporation aired a television commercial for their latest sport utility vehicle, the Passport. They named the spot "Woodsmen," and it manages to embody, in a mere thirty seconds, a perfect example of capital's ability to appropriate nature's authenticity to sell commodities. The spot begins with a smartly-dressed, clean-cut man emerging from an escalator to stand before a glass display housing the Honda Passport. A moonlit urban background flashes briefly across the screen. As the vehicle catches his eye, the yuppie lowers his cell phone from his ear as his jaw drops in open-mouthed wonder at the commodity before him. The accompanying musical score becomes increasingly rapturous as thunder crashes in the background and lightning flickers across the Passport's gleaming exterior. The man then begins to undergo a remarkable personal transformation: his impeccable three-piece suit melts away, to be

replaced by a flannel shirt, blue jeans, and rugged workboots; his hair lengthens and he develops a shaggy beard that eventually covers most of his face; his eyes acquire a glassy look of ecstatic revelation. By the end of it, he looks for all the world like a miniature Paul Bunyan. Cut to the Passport, revolving slowly against a wilderness backdrop in which a majestic, snow-covered mountain rises above a wide forest of conifers. The reformed yuppie smiles, then throws his cell phone into a nearby trash can. Fade to black, and the following words appear on the screen above the Honda moniker: “If You Had a New Passport, Where Would You Go?” We return one final time to the scene of the transformation, where another well-heeled urbanite has been transfixed by the vehicle. Our woodsman grins briefly at him and then saunters away, presumably to purchase his Passport and begin his new life as an earthy mountain man. Finis.

What makes this spot interesting is not merely the “nature” to which the vehicle purportedly provides a passport, but the quick, clever way in which its authors play on urban disaffection by inducing a nostalgia for rugged wilderness and blue collar masculinity. This constitutes an enormous amount of cultural information – involving class, gender, race/ethnicity, and geography – packed into a brief 30-second space of air time. In the first place, the images deployed by the commercial play upon symbols of class. The switch from the three-piece suit to flannels and blue jeans is a rather obvious crossing of class borders. But even more importantly, the yuppie’s clothing transformation is significant for the fact that he appears to be wearing rural *work* clothes rather than rural *leisure* clothes, which might include, for instance, L.L. Bean-style hiking gear. Similarly, the metamorphosis began from the point of his work clothes – the three-

piece suit – as well. The spot therefore conjures an image not merely of playing in the woods, but laboring there, signifying a deeper transformation than can be achieved by a mere camping trip to the mountains. Class is at work here in a specifically geographical sense as well, since woodsmen are not people who typically work in the city. The mountain wilderness scene to which the Passport momentarily transports him also invokes the rural, in contrast to the moonlit skyscrapers which had been earlier emphasized to set the urban stage.

Gender, too, figures prominently: there is something subtly effeminate about the man's pre-transformation identity which contrasts starkly with the rugged virility of the emergent figure, right down to the macho swagger with which the transformed yuppie throws his cell phone into the trash can. Yet class and gender are closely intertwined here, for the woodsman's increased masculinity seems to follow specifically from his entry into blue collar identity: when men gain something in terms of class, they appear lose something in terms of gender, and vice versa. This suggests something about the ways in which positive notions of heterosexual masculinity are bound up with specific types of labor, and particular kinds of landscape. It is difficult to imagine how this spot would have worked starring a woman. What would she have been transformed into? A waitress at a roadside diner? A housewife? A "woodswoman?" It's hard to picture a similarly archetypal rural occupation which would entice a woman to leave her urban middle class job to enter into the life of a blue collar female worker. And what of its unspoken statements about race and ethnicity? How would this commercial have worked with an African American, Latino or Asian man? It would be difficult to imagine these

figures being similarly evocative of the classical American rural woodsman without inducing a good deal of irony. But the crux of the piece lies in the simultaneous maneuvering of class, gender, race and geography: the white, straight, urban, middle-class male somehow becomes more classically masculine (at least for his own particular ethnicity) as he imagines himself exiting the city, leaving the corporate world behind, and getting “back to nature.” And commodity consumption provides the bridge for crossing these borders: in this case, the alienated yuppie can literally *drive* himself into a new identity, fording a personal impasse through the traversing of geographical space with the aid of a thirty-thousand dollar vehicle.

In many ways, the twentieth century can be described as a long flight from the countryside for America. In the year 1900, more than half the US population lived in rural areas; by the year 2000, less than a quarter of stalwart denizens could still be found there (U.S.D.A. 2003; U.S. Census Bureau 1995). Whatever else the past one hundred years may have signified for the United States, urbanization (and, in the postwar period, suburbanization) must surely rank among the last century’s most remarkable trends. And yet, despite this very real demographic shift, there remains a tangible nostalgia for rural America, material or mythical. Though most Americans today live in cities and suburbs, the tropes of rurality linger like ghosts, on television and billboards, in catalogues and magazines, through literature and art and film and music and photography – as though urban and suburban Americans have maintained an insatiable and deep-running love affair with the place they left behind, some of them long generations ago. Indeed, rural America is bound up with some of our most sacred national myths, from the rugged

individualism of Teddy Roosevelt to the contemplative transcendentalism of Henry David Thoreau to the spirit of democratic self-reliance celebrated by Frederick Jackson Turner. And of course, by the same token, rural America is also inextricably bound up with the most sacred American shibboleth of them all: capitalism. As the above quip from *The Onion* wryly notes, the countryside makes its deepest mark upon the public psyche when it gets mobilized to move commodities, from Marlboro cigarettes to Chevy trucks. If wildness will save the world, as Thoreau suggests, then the American capitalist class appears to be the first into the lifeboats.

Political ecologists have been quick to identify capital as one of the primary producers of nature, both material and discursive, in the modern era. Cindi Katz, in particular, has called nature a new “accumulation strategy for capital” (Katz 1998:46), and in recent years it has become difficult to imagine an aspect of the environment which has been more frequently appropriated for this purpose than wilderness. In the late twentieth century United States, such appropriations abound in the arena of popular culture. From Sea World (Davis 1996, 1997) to The Body Shop (Brabazon 2001) to Disney (Cypher and Higgs 1997) to The Nature Company (Price 1996, 1999), capital has proved decisively that the back-to-nature movement sells, particularly through the creation of consumer demands which tap into deep-seated anxieties about environmental degradation, urbanization, and the loss of open space to rampant real estate development. The phenomenon has become so pronounced in recent years that mapping the nature commodity chain from production to consumption has become something of a cottage industry in the social sciences and humanities, from geography (Pred 1998) to

environmental history (Steinberg 2002) to political science (Luke 1997) to anthropology (James 1995). And yet the academic nature cartel, like the broader social phenomenon it claims as object of investigation, appears to be equally susceptible to the fickle tides of ardor which govern the human preoccupation with nature to begin with. Ecology wasn't always this sexy. Roderick Nash, for example, in the preface to the third edition of his now-classic *Wilderness and the American Mind*, recalls being directed toward the natural sciences as a more appropriate venue for writing a history of American wilderness as a graduate student in the early 1960s (Nash 1982:ix), despite a long Western tradition of humanist dabbling in the social aspects of environment (Glacken 1967; Worster 1994). Today, social histories of wilderness (and particular wildernesses) are common. Indeed, Nash's watershed study marked the beginning of merely *the most recent* intellectual flirtation with that erstwhile paramour of the human psyche, Beldame Nature. As nature has become a profitable, even unremarkable vehicle for accruing real capital in the marketplace, so has it become a legitimate, even quotidian vehicle for accruing symbolic capital in the academy. Indeed, the most recent tryst with "Mother" Earth (both popular and academic) has been so successful that the politics of nature has lost a good deal of its radical edge:

We have won a major victory by putting nature squarely and ineluctably on the popular political agenda, but we have also suffered a major defeat insofar as the agenda of politics as normal has largely digested, institutionalized and marketized the politics of nature. Compared with the late 1960s and 1970s when the politics of nature erupted, *fin de millennium angst* about nature is widespread but of low intensity; we're all environmentalists now. (N. Smith 1998:272).

Thirty-odd years after the romance reignited, unbridled passion has settled into routine affability, even boredom, at least until the next torrid affair. While we still *love* nature, Smith seems to be suggesting, we're not quite *in love* with it anymore: enchantment has given way to a marriage of convenience.

So when the Honda corporation dangles the Rocky Mountains before the lustful eyes of the would-be exurbanite like so much forbidden fruit, it is merely appropriating an old theme in a new way for the purpose of capital accumulation. American wilderness has long been associated *positively* with the themes of whiteness, masculinity, rurality, and pastoral life (Cronon 1996). And yet, as mentioned in the previous chapter, the benevolent view of wilderness must be understood as an historical artifact whose emergence constituted a reversal of previous trends; this goes for American wilderness in general as well as for the Adirondacks in particular, which were merely symptomatic of a broader shift in attitudes. The American relationship with wilderness has been a notoriously uneven one, marked by fear, loathing and the will to domination on the one hand, and admiration, contrition, and the desire for atonement on the other (Nash 1967; Oelschlaeger 1991). Indeed the duality which has characterized the human attitude toward wild nature is strikingly redolent of the ambivalence with which it has regarded a related yet non-identical concept: rurality. Rurality, in its own turn, has been marked by equally antipodal sentiments, as often denigrated for its backwardness, insularity and parochialism as celebrated for its strength, simplicity and endurance (McNicol Stock 1996). The complexity of rural romanticism equals and perhaps even exceeds the complexity of nature angst, and they are bound up with each other.

It is no simple matter to disentangle the jumble of tropes that get packaged with American rurality. If sub/urban America retains a sense of romantic nostalgia for the countryside, then what, precisely, are “we” nostalgic about? What deep well of longing does Madison Avenue seek to tap with its carefully orchestrated barrage of loosely-associated rural symbols? Is it small-town America with its white picket fences and flag-lined Main Streets, or wilder spaces devoid of permanent human presence, like the Grand Canyon or Glacier National Park? Is it the all-but vanished family farm of the American heartland, the tiny fishing villages of Maine or the Chesapeake Bay, the decrepit mining towns of Appalachia, the ranches of Big Sky country in the American west – or those open spaces (often preserved by the state various scales) where “nature” is allowed to flourish with a minimum of human interference? Rurality and wilderness are closely related to each other, for collectively they comprise the American countryside, the thing we’re supposed to “get back to” when Madison Avenue instructs us to “get back to the land.” Yet they are not identical. The tension between the *settled* and the *wild* – the nature of which humans are an integral part and the nature that is said to be best left to its own devices – appears to be a lynchpin in the production of the American countryside, much as the tension between the concepts of *externality* and *universality* underpins the production of nature (N. Smith 1984, 1996a). This symmetry suggests that the production of rurality has something to do with the production of nature.

In both cases, the discrepant tropes of romanticization and vilification, I would contend, have a great deal to do with the material relations between people and landscape as well as the material relationship between people themselves; they constitute a product

of particular material conditions but can simultaneously act as legitimizing ideologies for the perpetuation and/or destruction of said conditions. Such contradictions are by no means new, nor even fundamentally “American,” for they may be traced back to an historical epoch predating the European colonization of the New World. When the Honda corporation informs consumers that they’ve left something behind – some fundamentally redemptive connection to nature that can only be regained through commodity consumption – it is drawing upon a long and venerable tradition of pastoral nostalgia, one that would begin with the romanticization of rurality and grow to encompass the worship of wilderness along the way.

The Death and Birth of Pastoral

It may very well be the case that human beings have been bemoaning the passing away of the rural ethos since the advent of rurality itself. Literary critic Raymond Williams, for example, finds the well of pastoral sentiment virtually fathomless in his celebrated study *The Country and the City*, where he seeks the roots of rural nostalgia in the pages of the English literary canon. “On the country,” he notes, “has gathered the idea of a natural way of life: of peace, innocence, and simple virtue,” (Williams 1973:1) and those sentiments manifest frequently as literary angst, particularly during those historical moments when the pastoral lifestyle is perceived to be threatened by social, cultural, and (especially) economic change. He chooses as his starting point the present day (1973 at the time of publication), noting a distinct romanticism surrounding the erosion of the “traditional” English countryside in the days since the first World War. But this ritualistic

grieving over the death of the shire jogs his memory sufficiently to unearth a similarly nostalgic literary funeral from a prewar publication, and then another from the dawn of the twentieth century, and backward in time through Hardy and Eliot in the nineteenth, Cobbett and Crabbe in the eighteenth, Massinger in the seventeenth, More in the sixteenth, and so on until he reaches the Celts and concludes that the end of the road most probably lies not in England, but in Eden, and asks: “Is it anything more than a well-known habit of using the past, the ‘good old days,’ as a stick to beat the present?” (Williams 1973:12). And ultimately, of course, it is, but the point is well taken: the longing for the pastoral is no more an organic product of the late twentieth century than it is of England, but rather exceeds these boundaries in terms of both time and space. By the same token, the pastoral impulse celebrated by the champions of the American countryside – and mustered so masterfully by the marshals of Madison Avenue to the banner of capital – is one specific geographical and historical manifestation of a widespread and time-honored tradition.

I am reproducing, of course, a common if subtle elision in the above account, for *pastoral* and *rural* are no more the same thing than are *rural* and *natural*. But the term *pastoral* is an important one, for it gives us some indication of just how far back into the depths of time Williams may have to travel to find his answer. “Pastoral,” while referring in a general sense to that which is *not urban*, technically describes a particular livelihood: that of herding or husbandry – in essence, the cultivation of plants or animals – and therefore has something to do with settled agriculture. Indeed Williams himself takes us back through Virgil and Hesiod and even to the ancient Egyptians in his quest for written

documentation of the pastoral concept ®. Williams 1973:14-19). The idea, of course, is to deconstruct the implicit dichotomy: in order for there to be some expressed longing for the pastoral, there must exist, first, a pastoral lifeway to think about at all, and secondly, some alternative non-pastoral from which to look back, as it were, over one's shoulder.

My purpose here is not to provide a history of the term pastoral (or rural, or nature, for that matter; for the latter see Clarence Glacken's monumental *Traces on the Rhodian Shore* (Glacken 1967)), but to move further down the path toward understanding the relationship between the production of rurality and the production of nature. For the concept of nature itself must necessarily rest upon a similar logic. At some point in the evolution of the species, human beings developed an *idea* of nature that did not include themselves – nature moved from being part and parcel of an inclusive “all” to a discreet “other,” and object that could be named and observed by the subject across some epistemological distance. Indeed Williams himself notes in an Appendix to *The City and the Country* that the term “country” derives from the root *contra*, meaning *against or opposite*, containing within it “...the original sense of land spread out over against the observer” ®. Williams 1973:307). Such a separation likely predates the written record of our species, and when history fails, anthropology (and, for the adventurous, philosophy) must take up the tale; thus does Max Oelschlaeger in *The Idea of Wilderness* locate the dawning of the idea of wilderness to an epoch after the Paleolithic (some 200,000 years ago) but before the Sumerians (3000 BCE), likely during the Neolithic revolution that witnessed the advent of settled agriculture. Cognitive anthropologists, of course, have long understood

the Cartesian opposition of “human” and “nature” to be a distinctively Western construction and a relatively recent advent in the annals of human-environmental relations (Descola and Pálsson 1996). Roderick Nash reiterates the point: “Until there were domesticated animals it was impossible to distinguish them from wild ones. Until there were fenced fields and walled cities ‘wilderness’ had no meaning. Everything was simply habitat, which man shared with other creatures” (Nash 1982:xiii).

The implicit assumption that anchors this analysis is that some fundamental change in material existence – specifically related to the organization of human labor for the purpose of extracting value from the environment – paved the way for a change in consciousness with regard to that environment. The discursive externalization of nature likely emerged from its material externalization, partly with the development of cultivated plants and domesticated animals, partly with settlement itself, which entailed the creation of permanent, bounded human habitats. But at the same time, the agricultural revolution allowed for the possibility of an accumulated social surplus, and subsequent division of labor which removed entire classes from immediate and necessary engagement with the landscape. The creation of a discursive boundary between human beings and the rest of the natural world, in other words, was bound up dialectically with the development of both a division of landscape and a division of labor. The same might be said for rural angst, which becomes a viable condition only when something other than “the rural” has been established. But again, the equal opposite of rurality – urbanization – is also, in part, a function of the reorganization of value extraction (and, more importantly, accumulation) through human labor. Both the production of nature and the production

of rurality are therefore entrenched in the geophysical organization of human society vis-a-vis landscape, but also through the social relations of production, which constitute the nexus of that very relationship. Lamenting the loss of the rural, or pining for it from across some temporal or spatial distance, is not only about *where* people live (with regard to the landscape), but about *how* they live (with regard to both the landscape and each other), the entrenched connection between property relations and labor relations. Understanding how people relate materially to the environment in both senses is therefore crucial to comprehending what they think about it, and why.

Environmental historian Richard White drives this point home in an article wryly entitled “Are You an Environmentalist or Do You Work for a Living? Work and Nature” (White 1996). The title, he explains, originated on a bumper sticker that circulated around the logging town of Forks, Washington during the height of the spotted owl flak, and neatly sums up one of the fundamental critiques of the modern environmental movement. Environmentalists, argues White, tend to treat productive laboring in nature in one of two ways: to vilify all manual work as an injurious, degrading, even violent assault upon the passive victim of pristine nature, or to romanticize certain kinds of (generally preindustrial) work as fostering a harmonious “stewardship” which encourages humans to respect and protect pristine nature. The former approach is more prevalent than the latter, according to White, and extends its disdain not only to work itself but to the laborers who perform that work. At the same time, those environmentalists who eschew work in nature tend to simultaneously celebrate play, and indeed posit leisure as the only legitimate modern role of humans in the wild:

Environmentalists so often seem self-righteous, privileged, and arrogant because they so readily consent to identifying nature with play and making it by definition a place where leisured humans come only to visit and not to work, stay, or live. Thus environmentalists have much to say about nature and play and little to say about humans and work...But the dualisms fail to hold; the boundaries are not so clear. And so environmentalists can seem an ecological Immigration and Naturalization Service, border agents in a socially dubious, morally ambiguous, and ultimately hopeless cause. (White 1996:173).

The dualism collapses because the very “play” celebrated by environmentalists is in fact an attempt by those who do not make a living via manual labor in nature to mimic that labor through play in an effort to “know” nature the way workers know it: to know it as though their lives depended upon it (174). The confusion springs from a conflation of muddled historical misconceptions, including the objectification of American Indians as “ecologically noble savages” who existed in Edenic harmony with the environment before colonization brought the white man to sully the Garden, as well as the tendency to view industrial technology (particularly that related to agriculture) as the enemy of nature (175). Such assumptions, of course, require a considerable degree of historical amnesia, ignoring both the extent to which the American landscape *was* changed by Indians (who, in the environmentalist fantasy, are dehumanized as childlike, innocent and ineffectual), and the extent to which modern technology merely constitutes a concentration of more archaic forms of human labor rather than a fundamentally different (more disingenuous) force for environmental change. Furthermore, White argues, both the vilification of human labor and the reification of the border between work and play on the part of the mainstream environmental movement have ceded crucial political ground to ostensibly labor-friendly (but in fact entrenched pro-property-rights) groups, a point which James

McCarthy explicates in his own analysis of Wise Use (McCarthy 1998).

Implicit in White's analysis (and indeed in the simple but shrewd piece of material culture that inspired it) is the notion that consciousness has something to do with a subject's relationship to the material conditions of production. Although the concept is most commonly associated with Marx, Gavin Smith notes that the connection between production and perception is implicit in the work of many other modernists, including Durkheim and Weber (G. Smith 1999:23). If this relationship has been thoroughly plumbed with regard to the subjectivity of the working class as historical (and potentially revolutionary) actors who make and remake themselves through the industrial labor process, (Gramsci 1973; Thompson 1968), it has been less explicitly theorized in the literature of political ecology, though tantalizing hints abound. White himself does not specifically reference Marx in his article, and it's unclear just how liberally we should interpret his meaning, for there are significant departures. In the first place, his analysis often seems to pertain to consciousness on an individual as opposed to a social scale, especially when he cites the philosophies of particular environmentalists, such as Wendell Berry and Bill McKibben. In the second, White appears to be talking about concrete labor as mere activity rather than labor power as one factor in the web that comprises the "means of production." Workers, according to the many Marxian interpretations of class consciousness, develop particular perspectives not merely because they *labor*, but because they *are wage laborers*, which entails a far more complex entanglement than the simple performance of going to work – including, among other things, a particular relationship to property.

Raymond Williams draws the connection between shifting property relations and rural romanticism, calling it “An idealisation, [which] based on a temporary situation and in a deep desire for stability, served to cover and to evade the actual and bitter contradictions of the time” R. Williams 1973:45). He speaks here of the breakup of feudalism by the emergent industrialization (and urbanization) of England and the subsequent radical restructuring of the English landscape, but the implications are clear: a highly romanticized rural past provides the ideological foil for the tumultuous and disconcerting re-organization of production in the present. Williams adds a layer of sophistication to the analysis in that he contrasts not merely one relationship to the means of production to another (as in worker versus environmentalist), but one such relationship to the *process* of productive transformation itself. Williams’ smallholders are not safely on the other side of this epochal shift, but embroiled within it, whence the older rural order seems stable, pleasant, natural and authentic by comparison. Their sense of instability comes from living through profoundly unstable times. Williams therefore conveys a sense of historical process that is perhaps missing in White, though there are other parallels between the two analyses:

...the most interesting use of the idea of a lost innocence comes not from the lordly or the landless, but from the shifting intermediate groups. For these were men caught...in successive but temporary settlements; achieving a place in the altering social structure of the land but continually threatened with losing it: with being pushed down, as eventually many were, into the exposed anonymity of the landless poor. Such men, who had risen by change, were quick to be bitter about renewed or continuing change ®. Williams 1973:43).

The men producing the rural sentiment of which he speaks are neither poor laborers nor wealthy monopolists, but a class of smallholders remarkable redolent of the sort later championed by Thomas Jefferson as the backbone of the American nation (see Marx 1964) and frequently celebrated (even emulated, as in the case of Wendell Berry) by that group of environmentalists described by White who seek a return to more archaic forms of labor which seem less of a threat to pristine nature than the evil mechanizations of full-blown industrialism. The last sentence of Williams' description in particular reminds me sharply of the environmentalists I know: neither proletarian nor capitalist, many only one or two generations out of the laboring classes, risen to middle class status on the fickle, unstable, tenuous foundation of the quaternary postindustrial economy, upper-class in education rather than income, uncertain and at times uncomfortable in their social and historical identities. Figure 2.1, an anonymous cartoon I found pinned to the bulletin board outside a real property office in the Adirondacks, captures the contradictory class status of such environmentalists, and their subsequently ironic environmental politics, quite nicely. I don't mean to suggest in an overly-simplistic way that environmentalists are the smallholders of postindustrial America, but that their middling, uneasy position in the modern class structure (and their subsequent subject-positioning with regard to nature and rurality) reminds me forcefully of the description of rural romanticism described by Williams. And while the past thirty years have not by a longshot seen as momentous a change as that from feudalism to capitalism, nonetheless I would agree with those (such as Harvey 1990) who have argued that this period *has* witnessed a substantial shift from one regime of capitalist accumulation to another. I

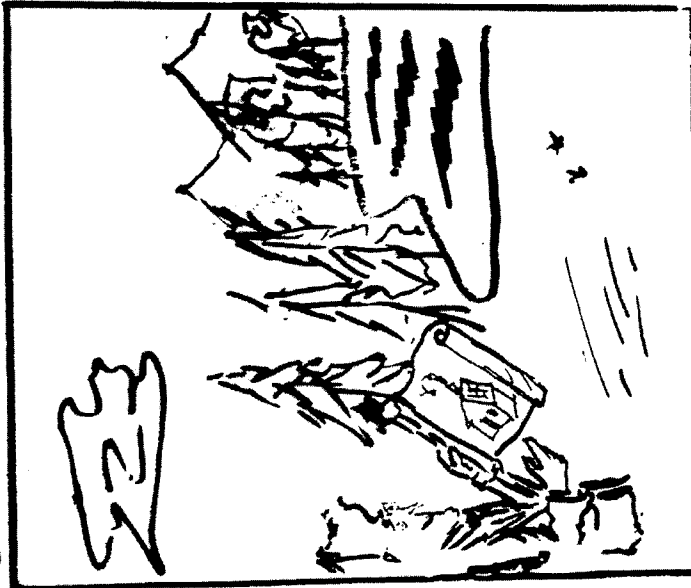
ADIRONDACK DICTIONARY

ENVIRONMENTALIST:



**A PERSON WHO HAS
A CAMP ALREADY!**

DEVELOPER:



**A PERSON WHO WANTS TO
BUILD A CAMP IN THE WOODS**

Figure 2.1

believe the rise of popular American environmentalism, and the renewed romance of the rural, has been, at least in part, a consequence of that shift.

Rural America, Wild and Pastoral

Leo Marx, like Raymond Williams, concerns himself with the idealization of the pastoral in the annals of high literature in *The Machine in the Garden* (Marx 1964). Unlike Williams, however, he is concerned with the pastoral ideal in America, and his foil for the rural is not the city but the machine: technology as a “counterforce” which intrudes noisily upon the idyllic countryside, bringing with it the irreversible death of a lifeway once fundamental to the American national project (29). Marx defines the pastoral ideal much as Williams does, arguing that “...the yearning for a simpler, more harmonious style of life, an existence ‘closer to nature,’ is the psychic root of all pastoralism” (6). He is careful to distinguish between *pastoralism* and *primitivism*, considering the latter to be a celebration of raw, unadulterated wilderness, nature not only externalized but uncontrolled and uncontrollable, the exact equal opposite of society, characterized by art, artifice and (importantly) industry. The pastoral idyll, conversely, constitutes a compromise between the artifice of civilization (epitomized by the city) and the chaos of nature (epitomized by the wilderness). Marx, like Roderick Nash, recognizes a continuum between wilderness on the one hand and civilization on the other, with the rural or pastoral “middle ground” lying in between: a spectrum of civilization running from “the primeval to the paved” (Nash 1967:6). The quasi-settled rural, in effect, constitutes the bridge between chaotic nature and the civilized city. For Marx, halfway between art and

anarchy, society and nature, the city and the swamp, lies the pastoral, and like Williams, he recognizes the antiquity of the notion, tracing its roots back to at least the writings of Virgil.

The roots of the specifically *American* pastoral ideal, however, lie in Elizabethan England, according to Marx: a period of time when the idea of the New World loomed large in the imaginations of even those Europeans who had never seen it. “Even in the sixteenth century,” he writes, “the American countryside was the object of something like a calculated real estate promotion” (Marx 1964:38). But the literary evidence to which Marx appeals (Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*, for example, along with a variety of travel logs from the period) paints a decidedly contradictory portrait of America from afar, replete with dualistic objectifications of its native inhabitants. On the one hand, the would-be colonizers of the New World saw America as paradise regained, an Arcadia characterized by plenty, tranquility and simplicity, with Indians as the innocent and child-like shepherds of this tame and appealing nature. On the other, they conceived of America as a dangerous wilderness, a dark, malevolent and desolate jungle inhabited by savages (36-42). Buried within these alternative conceptualizations of nature are some implicit assumptions about the human role in it: the Garden requires no labor investment to render it suitable for human habitation, while the wilderness must first be ordered, organized and brought under control before it can be rendered useful. America, at least from afar, was emblematic of both the primitive and pastoral in the eyes of those with the wherewithal to write about it.

These accounts point to a disjuncture between the European affinity for the

pastoral and the European fear of wilderness, wilderness not yet having acquired the twentieth-century glow that reassured Thoreau of the world's impending salvation. Fear would be replaced by celebration only gradually through the material subjugation of both the continent and its inhabitants; in a sense the sanctity of wilderness could only be established once the wilderness was no longer wild. As the American pastoral was produced through colonization, its "savages" exterminated or contained, its landscape brought under control, and its wilderness undone, the pastoral imaginary began to take shape as material reality with the geophysical reorganization of the landscape. Roderick Nash (1982) traces the American obsession with wilderness to the beginning of the twentieth century, which commenced with an increasing tendency to treat the American landscape less as a dangerous threat to civility and more as a stalwart guardian of national character, upper-class gentility and rugged masculinity (see Nash 1967, chapters 3-4). In his classic book *Wilderness and the American Mind*, Nash describes this reformulation of nature in terms of the development of a full-blown "wilderness cult" which emerged in the late nineteenth century out of a variety of material and cultural changes taking place on the American scene. Nash notes, importantly, that attitudes toward wild places were only able to shift toward the positive once the formidable wilderness no longer posed a material barrier to the white settlers of the American landscape. Only after wilderness (and its inhabitants, American Indians) had been subdued on the American continent by industrialization, colonization, and frontier settlement could it be conceived in a new, less menacing light. At the same time, Nash argues, increasing urbanization had thrown into high relief a host of social problems which caused Americans to question the values

previously assumed to spring from “civilization,” conceived in its urbanized incarnation:

As a result of this sense of discontent with civilization...*fin-de-siècle* America was ripe for the widespread appeal of the uncivilized. The cult had several facets. In the first place, there was a growing tendency to associate wilderness with America’s frontier and pioneer past that was believed responsible for many unique and desirable national characteristics. Wilderness also acquired importance as a source of virility, toughness, and savagery – qualities that defined fitness in Darwinian terms. Finally, an increasing number of Americans invested wild places with aesthetic and ethical values, emphasizing the opportunity they afforded for contemplation and worship (Nash 1982:145).

Several contemporary developments reflected these attitudes, Nash notes, including Frederick Jackson Turner’s writing on the connections between American character, democracy, and the lost frontier, the institution of the Boy Scouts, which were incorporated specifically to make “men” out of American boys by exposing them to the rigors of the wilderness environment, and the masculine posturing of Theodore Roosevelt, who encouraged (by his example) American men to protect their manliness against the softening effects of civilization by maintaining regular engagement with the rugged outdoors – shades of the work-like “play” celebrated by White’s environmentalists, above.

Interestingly, it was around this time that many writers began applying labels that had previously described rural landscapes to the city in quite contemptuous ways; it made sense in the early part of the twentieth century to talk about the degraded urban “jungle” or the “wilderness” of the inner city (Nash 1982:143) – tropes which would be resurrected in the justification of urban gentrification some seventy years later (N. Smith

1996:xiii). Wilderness itself, on the other hand, which had long been the antagonist in American social history, began acting as a pure, clean, heroic foil to the evil, contaminated, corrupt urban landscape. This cult of the primitive would find further credence in Thoreau's celebration of wildness, a host of large-scale conservation projects including the establishment of national parks at Yosemite and Yellowstone, and the mid-nineteenth century writings of the Romantics. To be sure, several different strains of wilderness appreciation emerged from the modernist tradition writ large, some emphasizing nature's capacity to lend both the individual and the nation a rugged, independent, masculine character, and others dwelling on the more genteel effects of sublime nature upon the refined mind. Most, however, departed from an *a priori* externalization which conceptualized nature as the antithesis of human imperfection, and particularly as an antidote to the evils of urban industrial civilization, variously conceived. Whatever the purpose of the journey, nature was something to *return* to, something that had been left behind in the civilizing process, something separated from the human by a cultural/psychological as well as a geographical border. William Cronon captures the duality precisely:

For many Americans wilderness stands as the last remaining place where civilization, that all too human disease, has not fully infected the earth...But...[f]ar from being the one place on earth that stands apart from humanity, it is quite profoundly a human creation...It is not a pristine sanctuary where the last remnant of untouched, endangered, but still transcendent nature can for at least a little while longer be encountered without the contaminating taint of civilization. Instead, it is a product of that civilization, and could hardly be contaminated by the stuff of which it is made (Cronon 1996:69).

Wilderness, in other words, far from being “natural,” is quite literally a *creation* of human civilization, recognizable only as an object (and in particular, as an object of desire rather than fear) once contained and domesticated by the subject’s gaze, which itself follows only from a shift in the material relationship to landscape. The civilized (or, more precisely, the *colonized*) and the wild seem to construct their identities in tandem, each acting as a sort of photographic negative in which the defects of the other are thrown into stark relief, much like the urban and the rural as described in the work of Raymond Williams, or the pastoral and the technological as described in the work of Leo Marx.

As with the Passport spot, this scenario contains a great deal of unspoken information which requires a detailed dismantling. While Nash provides us with a decent overview, his account does not delve into the darker aspects of the American wilderness movement, which incorporated, among other failings, a deep strain of anti-immigrant, racist American jingoism. His narrative hints at it politely when he notes that “A flood of immigrants seemed to be diluting the American strain and weakening American traditions” (Nash 1982:144) on the urban scene while “In the primitive...many Americans detected the qualities of innocence, purity, cleanliness, and morality” (157). The connections between nature, nationalism, race and gender that would find their crossroads in the “pristine” wilderness landscape are not accidental. It is a small leap from thinking about purity of nature to worrying about purity of nation to imagining purity of race, and elements of the wilderness cult were indeed deeply entwined with the twentieth century American eugenics movement, which sought to eradicate undesirable foreign elements from the “pure” blood of the white American male (see Cook 1999;

Brechin 1996) – an historical congruence which makes White’s characterization of environmentalism as “an ecological Immigration and Naturalization Service” all the more pointed. Concomitant with the racist aspects of the American wilderness movement lay an unapologetic elitism. The urban “jungle” to which many contemporary writers referred was no blank social space, but one populated by the inner-city poor, whose morals, work ethic and even cleanliness came up consistently short in the registers of their upper class appraisers. If the urban jungle constituted a fetid cesspool of contamination, it was because the teeming masses were polluting it with their uncontrolled breeding, alcoholic proclivities, suspicious ethnic features, and cacophony of foreign languages. The urban parks movement which swept American cities in the early part of the century constituted an attempt to ameliorate this condition (as well as to quell the dangerous revolutionary potentialities lurking amidst the oppressed urban masses) through the importation of green nature into the city. By the same token, the most efficacious antidote to the disaffected urban condition – extended leisurely jaunts in the wilderness, such as the one made by Thoreau – required a certain level of economic freedom from one’s labors, a luxury of time and money that few Americans possessed. The outrageously conspicuous consumption evident in the Great Camps era of Adirondack history exemplifies an extreme form of the leisured wilderness life, but even more modest trips to the woods required a certain amount of free time, particularly before the advent of the automobile and its infrastructural support network opened up previously inaccessible remote spaces.

In the eighteenth century, Marx argues, the pastoral ideal moved from the literary

to the political, as manifested in the writings of Jefferson which championed small-scale agrarianism as a uniquely American political destiny, but driven in a material sense by the technological innovations of the period. The advent of devices to map and measure nature on multiple scales, from the microscope to the telescope, helped to intensify the extraction of economic value from the landscape while simultaneously moving the machine further into the garden. By the nineteenth century and the invention of the railroad, the machine had come to stand for value itself in America, an engine of progress which signaled the final triumph of humanity over brute nature. In a similar vein, Carolyn Merchant (1996) recognizes a three-fold domination of nature by Christianity, science, and capitalism when she characterizes the Enlightenment as an attempt to rebuild the Garden of Eden after the Fall:

The Enlightenment idea of progress is rooted in the recovery of the garden lost in the Fall – the bringing of light to the dark world of inchoate nature. The lapsarian origin story is thus reversed by the grand narrative of Enlightenment that lies at the very heart of modernism. The controlling image of Enlightenment is the transformation from desert wilderness to cultivated garden...As a powerful narrative, the idea of recovery functioned as ideology and legitimation for settlement of the New World, while capitalism, science and technology provided the means of transforming the material world” (Merchant 1996:137).

The modernist agenda, then, sought to render human order out of natural chaos through the discursive and material reorganization of nature by rational human labor. Rationality functions here not only as a trope to describe the Enlightenment’s faith in the reasoning powers of “educated” human beings – a component of the Enlightenment’s steadfast

faith in an ultimate truth which all rational minds can eventually come to discover – but as the precise mechanism through which industrial science would attempt to control and subdue the “external” natural world. As the subject of rational human thought, nature could literally be *rationalized*, or analytically and physically deconstructed into its component parts and then reconstructed as profitable commodities, just as a tree is broken down, mixed with other disconnected bits of nature, then reconstituted as paper. In the United States, capitalism carried this notion to its logical conclusion in Fordist production, in which space, time, the labor process and even laborers themselves could be rationalized – broken down and reorganized in more “efficient” ways – in the manufacturing of profitable commodities, a process driven by the ultimate quest for capital accumulation. Levins and Lewontin (1985:2) note that this epistemological viewpoint, deriving directly from Cartesian reductionism, emerges from “an ontological commitment” in which the world as a whole is not only *analyzed as*, but actually *understood to be* a function of its component parts. Rational science could discover the principles governing material nature, and thereby gain manipulative control over its properties, though the process of dissection and reconstruction. This rationalization of nature constitutes one of the most commonly noted of modernist metanarratives: the tendency toward “creative destruction” or “destructive creation” (see Harvey 1990:16), in which new, humanized, rationalized scripts are written heedlessly (and often violently) over older ones – whether in the razing of a chaotic, organic urban neighborhood for the construction of sterilized, uniform housing “projects” or the clearcutting of a old-growth forest to make way for a scientifically cultivated tree farm. Perhaps the most tragically

farcical conclusion of this process may be found in that penultimate modernist product, the atom bomb, whose splitting of nature into its component parts led literally to the twentieth century's most horrific mass destruction of living things in the creation of a "new world order."

At first glance, a project devoted to the scientific domination of nature would seem antithetical to the ideals of the twentieth-century American wilderness cult described by Roderick Nash: how could the veneration of wild nature possibly be a product of an urge to humanize and subdue nature in the first place? But before we are tempted to dismiss the wilderness obsession as a dissident fluke within the modernist agenda, we must recall Nash's exhortation to bear in mind the circumstances of wilderness adulation in the New World. Ironically, Americans began to pay homage to wild nature at the very moment when its domination had been secured with the ideological and geographical death of the American frontier in the late nineteenth century. The nature which got "preserved" as a result of this impulse – Yellowstone in 1872, Yosemite in 1890, the Adirondack Park in 1894, Grand Canyon in 1919, and Olympic in 1938 – constituted carefully constructed islands of wilderness on the developed modernist landscape, strikingly redolent of the cultivated "gardens" mentioned by Merchant as part of modernity's reconstructive agenda. Their preservation resulted in part from the emergence of the scientific field of forestry, which used such spaces as the subject of intense scientific exploration, observation, and experimentation in the Cartesian quest to understand the component parts which made "raw" external nature function in specific ways. We have noted, for example, that the State of New York

created the Adirondack Park in response to fears of watershed loss, but it was the work of naturalists such as George Perkins Marsh who brought such threats to light in the first place through the scientific observation of ecosystems (Terrie 1985:93-94). In addition, the increasingly vocal argument put forth by romantic proponents of wilderness, who held that nature preserves were an increasingly necessary physical and psychological antidote to the debilitating effects of civilization, marked wilderness not only as part and parcel of the modernist geography, but as necessary safety valve which made modernity tolerable at all. Such “wild” spaces served a specific recuperative function as outlets for modernist anxieties, landscapes of escape to which the denizens of modernity could retreat for the imaginative contemplation of the human condition away from the paralyzing rigidity of the urban grid. According to the Roosevelt vision of rugged nature, their palliative effects for the white male sprang specifically from their function as proving grounds for virile masculinity. Wilderness was to be valued, in other words, for providing physical and spiritual challenges which the modern male could overcome in the process of subduing nature to his will, if only through triumph in the very act of survival through human strength, cunning and ingenuity – in essence, through the concrete act of labor. Nature, once again, was of value once conquered, and occasional trips to the wilderness served as a reminder of obstacles overcome in the continuing battle for survival of the fittest. Above all, the modernist impulse behind the preservation of such islands of wilderness manifested in the solidly demarcated boundaries which separated them from the rest of the American landscape. These were not only conceptually but materially externalized pieces of nature, cordoned off from the social geography of the

continent by strict political borders preventing internal human settlement. Modernism conceived of nature (at least in part) as an external entity, and the creation of wilderness preserves served to reify such boundaries.

Importantly, for Marx, Nash, and Merchant, the contradictions embodied by the pastoral – between the ordered artifice of civilization and the anarchical chaos of nature – are resolved in the movement between them. Prospero, the archetypal symbol of intellect and art, is redeemed only through the flight from civilization, immersion in the wilderness, and triumphant return:

The contrast between “city” and “country” in the pastoral design makes perfect sense as an analogue of psychic experience. It implies that we can remain human, which is to say, fully integrated beings, only when we follow some such course, back and forth, between our social and natural (animal) selves...If the city is corrupt, it is men who have made the journey of self-discovery who must be relied upon to restore justice, the political counterpart of psychic balance” (Marx 1964:70-71).

The journey between city and country, then, is symbolic of the psychological journey between the artifice and nature within “us.” Marx points out that many foundational texts in the pantheon of American literature rely upon just such a tri-part trope: the flight from civilization, the sojourn in the wilderness, and the subsequent return (and, of course, redemption). Carolyn Merchant, in describing the settling of the American continent as Edenic recovery narrative tells a similar tale of redemption-through-conquest, positing colonial myth as recovery narrative: the brave journey into the dark wilderness, the struggle with a savage enemy, and the re-establishment in the new world of the pastoral, harmonious, pre-lapsarian Garden so irrevocably sullied by European

civilization on the Continent – as well as, importantly, the redemption of the hero himself *through* this necessary and heroic journey (Merchant 1996:140-144).

Leo Marx would undoubtedly balk at the conclusion toward which this discussion is obviously heading, for he felt strongly that the pastoralism pervading American mass culture and that embodied by “serious” literature were of two different species, the former “popular and sentimental...an expression less of thought than of feeling,” and the latter “imaginative and complex” (Marx 1964:6). I do not, and indeed find his implicit celebration of Mark Twain and denigration of John Wayne pompously elitist. I will therefore dispense with Marx and get right to the point: I believe the recent rural revival so cleverly exploited by Madison Avenue in the creation of demand has everything to do with the pastoral impulse described in many variations above – with the shift in the material relations of production as the United States moves further from its economic roots in the primary and secondary sectors of the economy and toward a post-Fordist regime based upon tertiary and quaternary activities, resulting in a shift in consciousness with regard to landscape. The most recent spate of American rural romanticism, I think, is a product of the continuing desire to embrace (and be embraced by) a mythical nature alienated through a long process of externalization, colonization and containment – hence the impulse to journey “back” to nature captured so presciently by the Passport advert, which might as well have featured Prospero as the disenchanted yuppie – but it is also expressive of a longing for material *engagement* with nature through labor, and for a shoring up of a plethora of destabilized identities as a consequence of that engagement. As noted by virtually all of the writers mentioned above, there is nothing particularly

“new” about the most recent preoccupation with wilderness, rurality, or nature writ large; as Raymond Williams makes clear, any pastoral impulse since the first in the uncharted depths of history must be understood as a revival rather than an invention. And it is not restricted merely to environmentalists, for as Neil Smith notes above, “we’re all environmentalists now.” But if the redemptive qualities of laboring in nature are celebrated in a general sense by some large-scale national mythos, the question of *who*, precisely, nature can redeem remains. Whose identities are at stake in the reappropriation of American rurality? Prospero does not stand for all of us; the “we” in Smith’s pronouncement requires a certain amount of analytical scrutiny with regard to gender, race, ethnicity, and particularly class. In the meantime, I turn to the evidence for a cultural, demographic, and geophysical “revival” of rural America in the section below.

The Rural Revival

In 1998, geographer Cindi Katz made a startling announcement about the state of nature under late capitalism which cuts to the quick of the political ecological shifts of the postfordist era:

Nature changed in the 1970s. However we “value” nature, our conventions and practical engagements with the external world – the “environment” or “nature” – under capitalism have operated as if nature were given, a free good or source of wealth, an unlimited bounty awaiting only the “hand of man” to turn it into a bundle of resources. With decolonization and the environmental movements of the 1960s and 1970s coupled with the oil shock of 1973, the utilitarian presumptions that undergirded so much of the relationship to nature under capitalism hit their limits...In the course of this shift, and central to it, nature became an accumulation strategy for capital (Katz 1996:46).

Katz argues that nature during this period underwent an “involution” in which capital, having been alerted to the limits of external nature by the spatial and environmental crises of the early 1970s, began to look inward to the profit-garnering possibilities of green capitalism – the packaging and selling of “intensive” nature through the subsidiary industries of park preservation. Rather than exploiting the environment outright, capital began to advocate the stockpiling of nature in the form of wilderness preserves in order to mine it in entirely new ways, thus solving two problems at once: its drive to satisfy the demands of capital accumulation in the face of a produced scarcity of natural resources, and its own vilification by a burgeoning environmental outrage on the part of the public at large. Green capitalism therefore emerged as a convenient way for capital to resolve a serious internal contradiction – the geopolitical

TABLE 2.1

ENVIRONMENTAL LEGISLATION**Global Environmental Watersheds**

- 1972 UNESCO drafts World Heritage convention
- 1971 Man and the Biosphere Program instituted
- 1972 First global environmental conference held
- 1973 Eighty nations sign CITES treaty

National Environmental Watersheds

- 1962 Rachel Carson publishes *Silent Spring*
- 1964 Wilderness Act
- 1967 Environmental Defense Fund formed
- 1968 National Trails System Act
- 1969 National Environmental Policy Act
- 1970 First Earth Day
- 1970 Environmental Protection Agency formed
- 1970 Clean Air Act
- 1972 Clean Water Act
- 1972 DDT banned
- 1973 US ratifies World Heritage convention
- 1973 Endangered Species Act
- 1974 Safe Drinking Water Act
- 1975 Energy Policy and Conservation Act
- 1976 Resource Conservation and Recover Act
- 1976 Toxic Substances Control Act

Adirondack Watersheds

- 1967 Temporary Study Commission founded
- 1971 Adirondack Park Agency created
- 1972 Private Land Use and Development Plan
- 1972 State Land Master Plan
- 1972 Blue Line expanded

inaccessibility of the very supply of resources required for its continued growth and therefore survival – by reinventing itself as nature’s ally while still allowing the accumulation process to proceed apace. While Katz dwells primarily upon the capitalist commodification of biospheres in the southern hemisphere, I believe she has hit upon an argument which could be extended to wilderness politics in the rural United States, and in the Adirondacks in particular, during this same period. The set of circumstances she invokes does not merely provide an “interesting” but detached backdrop for the tale told here, but begins to unearth the broader political-economic and sociocultural processes which have *driven* rural gentrification since the 1970s.

If capital began to recognize the limits of external nature during this period, it did so at least partly in response to the awakening of a new and urgent environmental consciousness on the part of both states and the general populace. The late 1960s and early 1970s witnessed an explosion of unprecedented environmental legislation (Table 2.1). On a global scale, the United Nations instituted its World Heritage and Man and the Biosphere Programs in the early 1970s, a period which also witnessed the world’s first international environmental conference in Stockholm, Sweden, and the signing of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species by some eighty nations. At the legislative level in the United States, the period between 1964 and 1976 witnessed the establishment of the Clean Air Act, the National Environmental Policy Act, the Environmental Protection Agency, the National Wilderness Preservation System, and several other landmark environmental laws. In New York, this same period saw the creation of the Adirondack Park Agency, the Department of Environmental

Conservation, the State Land Master Plan, and the Adirondack Private Land Use and Development Plan, as well as marking the Nature Conservancy's first intervention in Adirondack land purchases by the State.

Yet such legislative watersheds emerged in the first place amidst a rising tide of popular environmental sentiment, and it is the commencement of this mass participation in environmental politics which truly marks the period of the 1960s and 1970s as a turning point in American environmental history. Many popular accounts trace the birth of what has come to be known as "environmentalism" to April 22, 1970, and the founding of the first Earth Day. Looking back over the past thirty years, during which environmentalism has come to be intimately entwined in the consciousness of quotidian American life, it is difficult to grasp the significance of the *popularization* of environmental awareness manifest in this massive public spectacle. Yet it signified a penultimate moment in human-nature relationships on the American continent, marked by nationwide teach-ins, rallies, speeches, and the shutting down of both the United States Congress and New York's Fifth Avenue. Attended by an estimated 20 million participants across the country, the founding Earth Day has frequently been called the largest mass demonstration in the history of the United States. This is not to say that environmental sentiment did not exist before the 1960s and 1970s, at both the popular and legislative levels on multiple scales, but that such sentiments underwent a kind of quickening during this period, reaching a crescendo in the unprecedented outpouring of popular political concern at the first Earth Day celebration. If environmentalism in general and wilderness preservation specifically had been simmering away quietly on the

back burner of American politics since the mid-nineteenth century, both seemed to come to the popular fore just as the civil rights and feminist movements heralded a new kind of identity politics. By the early 1970s, environmentalism, long relegated to a relatively circumscribed, upper-class American constituency, had become a mass social movement driven by the concerns a far broader swath of the American population.

Just as American nature has undergone something of a renaissance which has gained fervor in proportion with its predicted demise, I would contend that the category of rural has experience a concomitant surge in national esteem. Although the contours of this most recent rural revival are not yet as clearly defined as those of the mass environmental movement, which by now, as Neil Smith notes above, has been tamed by the “politics of normal,” some signposts are beginning to emerge, most clearly in the arena of popular culture, but also in a plethora of rural preservation initiatives on the part of both state and private interests, as well as some specific demographic developments related to the real estate investment boom driving rural gentrification. The phenomenon has become sufficiently pronounced to warrant mention by rural studies scholars, and indeed the heralding of the interconnected nature/rural revival opens the pages of a recent scholarly volume exploring the widespread impulse to “save” the countryside:

Environmental themes have come to pervade our everyday lives. T-shirts, bumper-stickers, and TV spots constantly exhort us to save this species of animal or that patch of nature. An equally persistent, though less pervasive, “ruralist” movement has called for saving the countryside, family farms, and rural life. Rurality, moreover, is often linked to nature, so that the recent surge in interest in saving nature means interest in rurality is also on the rise (Vandergeest and DuPuis 1996:1).

And, as with Katz's description of the capitalistic appropriation of nature, rurality has become grist to the mill in the quest for novel sources of capital accumulation.

The rural revival has been most noticeable in the musical arena, particularly within the genre of popular music that has long been most closely associated with American rurality: country-western. I believe the roots of this rural musical Renaissance might be traced to the advent of Farm Aid concerts, founded in the mid-1980s during the heart of the recent agricultural crisis by Willie Nelson, Neil Young and John Cougar Mellancamp to raise funds for family farms. More recently, the unprecedented acclaim of the "O Brother! Where Art Thou?" project, a retelling of Homer's *Odyssey* set in the rural American south, has given birth to three albums (one of them Grammy-winning) in addition to the Oscar-lauded film itself and sparked a renaissance in folk music unparalleled by even the urban folk revival of the 1950s. Add to these the international popularity of the Grammy-acclaimed Dixie Chicks, who have taken country music from mere national to outright global popularity, and the phenomenon of Bering Strait, the Russian bluegrass band whose Top 20 country success has been covered by both NPR and "60 Minutes." Indeed, in the past fifteen years, annual country record sales have soared from \$921 million in 1989 to \$1.7 billion in the present day, a phenomenon often attributed to the astonishing success of Garth Brooks's aptly-named "Ropin' the Wind" album, which debuted at the top of Billboard's best-seller chart in 1991 (Roughstock 2000) and paved the way for subsequent country superstars from Shania Twain to Faith Hill. Much like environmentalism, this boom constituted not so much as a novel

invention as a mass popularization. Country music, along with its folk, blues, and rockabilly ancestors, has certainly witnessed moments of intense interest in American history, but none which extended so globally in reach. The era of Garth Brooks superstardom represents both a reiteration and an intensification, achieving greater heights in both popular consumption and profit generation than, for instance, the urban folk revival of the 1950s, which by comparison was a far more circumscribed phenomenon in terms of both geography and class. In the meanwhile, the cowboy trope has crossed the line from country-western into other musical genres, notably rock: “Where Have All the Cowboys Gone?” asked Paula Cole in 1996, while Kid Rock announced that he was “gonna be a cowboy, baby” in a fusion of rock and white Hip Hop.

Country has become more than repopularized; it has become, in many ways, repoliticized, with the invasion of Iraq and the cowboy posturing of George W. Bush acting as a catalyst for a severe division of country artists into pro- and anti-war camps. The recent death of Johnny Cash prompted a celebration of his music by the Tennessee delegates to the Republican National Convention in New York City in August of 2004 at a swank Sotheby’s fete (sponsored by the American Gas Association), as well as a fierce counter-demonstration by protesters (defendjohnnycash.org) who were outraged at this appropriation of the Man in Black by the right. When Dixie Chicks lead singer Natalie Maines announced at a 2003 London concert that “we’re ashamed the president of the United States is from Texas,” radio stations across the south responded with a boycott of the band, while angry pro-war listeners threatened to bulldoze their CDs and Heritage

Foundation founder Paul Weyrich leveled accusations of treason. The outrage prompted a public apology by Maines, the awarding the “Defenders of Democracy” award to the Dixie Chicks by People for the American Way, and a “60 Minutes” special on the entire affair. In the meanwhile, longtime political activist and country singer Bonnie Raitt has taken up the same cry, announcing to an audience at the recent Stockholm Jazz Festival that George Bush is “out of here, people!” and launching into her single “Your Good Thing (Is About to End),” reportedly to thunderous applause (Berglin 2004). While Toby Keith, Darryl Worley and Charley Daniels have backed the war in various musical compositions, Emmylou Harris, Rosanne Cash, Steve Earle and Lucinda Williams have signed the petition of “Musicians United to Win without War” (Associated Press 2004). This struggle over the political content of country music suggests a proprietary clash over the very meaning of “country,” particularly as it relates to nationalism and patriotism. Country isn’t merely being celebrated, it’s being contested, on the airwaves and in the streets, indicating that the tropes that associated with the American countryside *matter*, particularly insofar as they constitute a significant aspect of the face of the current presidential administration to the rest of the world.

Though not quite as obvious a success as in the music industry, the rural has made something of a comeback in other pop-culture arenas, including film, television, fashion and the hodge-podge of print media that clutters the typical consumer’s mailbox on a daily basis. Kevin Costner revived the grandiose western epic in 1990 with “Dances with Wolves” while the Cohen brothers have lent redneck America an air of retro chic in several critically-acclaimed films, from “Fargo” (1996) to “O Brother! Where Art Thou?”

(2000). In addition to the ubiquitous Passport-style SUV adverts, television shows such as “Northern Exposure” and “Twin Peaks” have lent a similarly quirky caché to life in the American wilderness, while the Bonanza-style TV western has been reincarnated (albeit in PC guise) in such shows as “Dr. Quinn, Medicine Woman” and “The Peacemakers” (see Price 1999:207-256). In the meanwhile, Ralph Lauren has introduced rural chic to haute couture in both clothing and housewares distinguished by their decidedly patrician, gentrified country air. Country fashion is available to those of more modest means as well. Magazine advertisements and catalogues, from L.L. Bean (which currently sells an “Adirondack Barn Coat”) to Absolut Vodka (which recently composed an “Absolut Adirondack” advert at Sagamore, one of the last standing Great Camps in Raquette Lake), are fairly rife with countrified, and sometimes specifically Adirondack images (see Figures 2.2 and 2.3). A few weeks ago, I even ran into an “Adirondack Country Store” in the middle of Park Slope, Brooklyn – Brooklyn! – apropos of absolutely nothing other than the rustic swank afforded by cheap woodsy tchotchkes. There is little doubt about it: in the last thirty years, country has achieved heights of coolness it hasn’t seen since the turn of the last century. No longer an item of conspicuous consumption merely for the upper-classes, country-as-commodity is far more widely attainable than it was during the Gilded Age.

Perhaps more significant than the increased visibility of the rural in popular culture, the rural revival is becoming evident in demographic terms as well. Today, roughly 49 million Americans live in rural areas, comprising 17 percent of the nation’s total population and occupying four-fifths of the nation’s total land mass (USDA 2004).



Figure 2.2

As noted at the beginning of this chapter, the twentieth century was one of overall decline for rural America in terms of population. Some of the reasons for this decline are painfully familiar by now: the industrialization of agriculture has led to the redundancy of manual labor and the rapid loss of small-scale family farms in the heartland, while increases in industrial productivity combined with the liberalization of trade borders has resulted in a nationwide loss in manufacturing employment, some of it from rural areas. Yet it would be premature to begin tolling the bell for the American countryside. While it is true that metropolitan populations continue to grow at a faster rate than nonmetropolitan ones, the last twenty years actually witnessed the beginnings of a demographic recovery in rural America, with nonmetropolitan areas growing by 5.3 million (or 10.3 percent) between 1990 and 2000; this compared to the 1980s, which also saw rural growth but at a smaller rate (2.7 percent) and with a smaller overall net gain (1.3 million). And while one in four rural American counties declined in population during the 1990s, some have remained stable and still others have seen their populations swell (USDA 2004).

What can account for such uneven development in rural America? The USDA contends that “The growth of recreation activity and second homes played a big role, along with the rejection of large-scale urban life, which for many resulted in ‘urban flight’” (U.S.D.A. 2004). For certain geographical areas, this phenomenon has become so remarkable that the federal government has recently designated such places *Nonmetro Recreation Counties*, where “Increased recreational activity, the appeal of second homes, and the influx of former urbanites into rural areas all create a demand for housing and

The Adirondacks

A state park the size of Vermont. Keeping warm becomes an issue. Our coat and sweater suggestions...



Figure 2.3

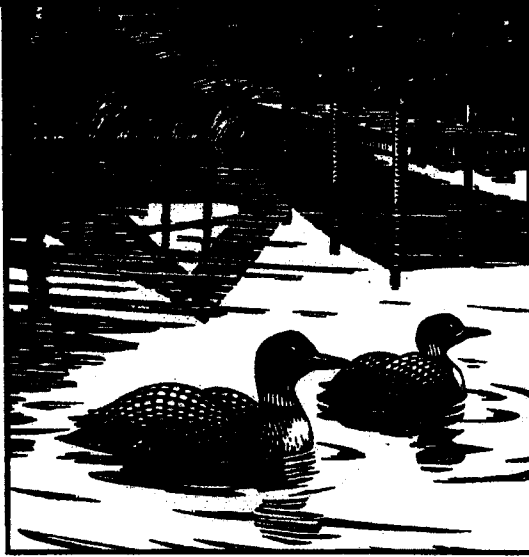
for an expanded business, service and governmental infrastructure to support it” (Johnson and Beale 2002:12). Importantly, USDA researchers have concluded that population increase in such areas is a product of in-migration rather than natural growth (i.e., high rates of fertility and/or low rates of mortality among the native rural population). Some 329 NRC’s have been identified to date, comprising 14.6 percent of total nonmetropolitan counties in the United States and containing 15.6 percent of the nonmetropolitan population (12-13). Significantly, Hamilton and Essex – the two Adirondack counties which lie entirely inside the Blue Line – number among them.

There is little question that investment in recreational housing is fueling such growth in many parts of the rural United States. A forest researcher in Michigan has called this type of amenity migration a “new gold rush,” arguing that:

Rural land is being chopped up to feed the crush of people looking for the good life – the cottage on the lake or the perfect wooded paradise for rest and relaxation. This gold rush generates high demand and high property taxes, putting even more pressure on rural landowners to subdivide their woodlands. Water is an especially strong magnet, and surging shoreline development has huge effects on riparian areas and water resources (Vasievich 1999:1).

There is a concomitant concern that such temporary recreational homes will be converted to year-round residences as the baby boom generation looks toward retirement, a trend also confirmed by the USDA (Johnson and Beale 2002:12).

It’s not simply rural America writ large that is being revitalized here, but that specific subset of rural America which constitutes the “middle ground” between the civilized city and the wilderness, the geophysical manifestation of the psychic link



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Figure 2.4

described by Leo Marx that allows for the redemptive journey between the city and the wilderness (see Figure 2.4). Such internal differentiation helps to explain why the New York Times in 2003 can run a front-page series on the death of rural America (Becker 2003; Egan 2003; Kilborn 2003a and 2003b) while the federal government is simultaneously documenting its revitalization – there’s rural America, and then there’s rural America. USDA researchers have even codified this subset by creating an “amenity scale” by which rural towns can be categorized. And in some places, these “amenities” are themselves making a comeback, particularly in American forests. “Whatever measure is taken,” notes Michael Williams (M. Williams 1988:218), “the conclusion that the forest is building up today rather than declining is unavoidable.” In part, this is due to conservation measures, but it is also attributable to the suppression of forest fires, decreased wood-product consumption, increased reliance on imports, the cutting of old growth to make room for robust new, and, significantly, the reclamation of abandoned farmland (218-229).

To date, this cultural, demographic and geophysical rural American revival has largely been described in *statistical* terms as a pure numerical shift rather than in *theoretical* terms as gentrification. Aside from a few scattered doctoral dissertations, rural gentrification in the United States has not produced a significant body of published literature, as noted in the preceding chapter. One may find, however, tantalizing hints in the US media which suggest that gentrification may be cropping up in rural landscapes across the countryside. Most emanate from exactly the sorts of landscapes where one might expect gentrification to be linked to the production of nature: resort areas such as

Aspen or Florida, coastal havens like New England or the Great Lakes, ranch country in Montana and Wyoming – places where the wealthy flock to revel in nature, developers invest in the necessary infrastructural amenities to support ecotourism, and workers are required to carry out all the distasteful labors involved in making a landscape function.

In October of 2000, the *New York Times* reported that America's quintessential resort town, Aspen, Colorado, was suffering from a severe labor shortage. With a robust second-home construction market, soaring residential real estate prices, and a brisk ecotourist industry, Aspen had grown too expensive for working-class residents.

According to the *Times*,

In the last few years, many of them have been forced to find more affordable housing 30 to 60 miles away, creating monstrous rush-hour traffic jams, polluting the air and undermining the quality of life of workers...even as some resort towns, like Aspen, are now requiring developers to build affordable housing for workers as a condition of building expensive single-family homes" (Janofsky 2000).

Resort companies at the time of this report were purportedly recruiting labor from as far away as Australia to fill the void, with employers offering housing subsidies, health insurance packages and wages well above the minimum in order to lure workers to the area.

In a similar vein, *The Times* reported in December of 2000 that working-class residents of Mackinac Island, a resort on Lake Huron, were becoming "hard pressed to run the local government and perform other vital work while keeping a rented roof over their heads" (New York Times 2000). In this case, the locals themselves were compelled to come up with their own housing solution, eventually forming a nonprofit housing

corporation which has raised sufficient funds through private and state sources to purchase land, build duplexes, and offer subsidized housing through a lottery system to local workers. The corporation has developed a complex set of regulations which prevents buyers from selling their houses to developers in an attempt to ensure that such units remain both affordable and local in the future. Interestingly, wealthy private interests on the island itself have played a significant role in facilitating this subsidized housing scheme, presumably with the full knowledge that the complete gentrification of the island would leave them with no one to wait tables, collect garbage, or clean their luxurious cliff side estates.

In some parts of the rural United States, and particularly the west, the purchase of land by wealthy outsiders has triggered something a new enclosure movement. *The Times* reported in late 1999 in an article entitled “Rich Newcomers Closing the Wilds of Montana” that access to federally-owned wilderness areas in Big Sky country is increasingly threatened due to the locking up of adjacent parcels by private interests. The article highlights a trend which has plagued in the Adirondacks in recent years as well: “Those who can afford a slice of the Rockies often find a bonus: when they buy acreage that borders government-owned wilderness areas, they gain access to thousands more acres of public land” (Robbins 1999) and in the process, shut out those who can only reach this public land via access trails which cross private property. Predictably, such closures infuriate longtime locals, many of whom make a living through guide services which depend upon such access. The process described by Montana locals is strikingly redolent of a phenomenon which has begun to evince in the Adirondacks as well:

Those who fight for public use say landowners often wage a war of accelerating intimidation. The first salvos are “no trespassing” signs on a public road, which most people obey. If that does not work, the next step is a locked gate. [Local man] Fairhurst said he drove on a country road not far from his home recently and found it blocked by a locked chain (Robbins 1999).

The irony is that it is seldom the longtime locals who post land, but rather outsiders who have recently purchased their own slice of the pristine wilderness and immediately plastered the perimeter with “private property” signs. An Adirondack informant recently recounted an amusing conversation with one such newcomer to the Town of Bleecker, who had purchased a piece of land previously owned by a local lumbering family which sold off its parcels after they closed the last remaining Bleecker sawmill – a lonely, backwater wilderness cross-crossed with old logging roads which many locals (including myself) wandered over freely years ago, never imagining that one day it would be closed by audacious outsiders. The buyer, a retired New York City policeman, after thoroughly posting his newly-acquired piece of the Adirondack wilderness with gaudy orange “no-trespassing” signs, informed his local neighbor, a member of the town’s road crew (which was at the time widening and improving the access road to the newcomer’s camp) that he was fond of hunting, and during his brief stays at camp had often seen game wandering right across his own woodlot. “But what I really like to do is hunt over *there*,” he continued guilelessly, pointing across the dirt road to someone else’s (unposted) private lot while evincing no sense of irony. My source chuckled but politely refrained from pointing out the contradiction of posting one’s own land while simultaneously trespassing on another’s.

The Adirondack Park, then, is clearly not alone. Its recent packaging as a rustic commodity, particularly in the form of wilderness real estate by the agents of gentrification, must be understood in at least three ways: (1) as part and parcel of a widespread revival so prominent that it is now being tracked on a national scale by no less an authority on rural America than the Federal Department of Agriculture, (2) as merely the most recent manifestation of a longstanding, deep-seated rural nostalgia which has in all likelihood plagued humanity since the first agricultural revolution thousands of years ago, (3) as an impulse which almost certainly predates capitalism but which capital has come to understand as a profoundly profitable one when selectively exploited, and (4) as a phenomenon related to the shifting material relations of production in post-Fordist America at large.

Having contextualized the romantic production of both nature and rurality in the broadest of terms, from Prospero to the Passport, the question becomes, what do we do with it? What is the role of such oddly disjointed yet strikingly redolent tropes, which often seem to be floating blithely above the mundane world of real estate, to be plucked out of the sky and placed in the puzzle of gentrification when they seem conveniently to fit? The romanticization of rurality described in this chapter might appear to be leading to a very simple conclusion about rural gentrification: that it is driven, fundamentally, by commodity consumption, the capitalist incarnation of a pastoral impulse both historically deep and geographically broad, well-defined in the scholarly literature, not an invention of capital but appropriated by it in a production of demand that exploits a new version of an old desire. In fact, in the chapters to follow, I hope to lay out an explanation for rural

gentrification that goes beyond the territorial production-versus-consumption tiffs which have tended to dominate the search for motor force in the urban gentrification literature. Fundamentally, I follow Neil Smith in holding that gentrification is the product of capital accumulation on multiple scales, but I also hope to get beyond the polarizing arguments which pit lifestyle choices *against* capital accumulation as explanatory factors and seem to disentangle forces that to my mind are inextricably linked – namely, demand, the production of demand, and the generation of profit through both disinvestment and investment in the residential housing market – and often simultaneously reify and reduce categories like “consumer,” “producer,” “developer” and “landlord” while oversimplifying our understanding of class into the bargain. In the end, I hope to posit rural gentrification not as a back-to-the-country movement by capital *or* people, but by both, and then complicate this notion further by deconstructing the boundary which capital purportedly crosses when it “returns” to the countryside by implicating two groups who *already* inhabited the geographical ground zero of Adirondack gentrification – local residents and the state – in the process of gentrification itself. Accordingly, I return to the Adirondack scale in the following chapter.

CHAPTER THREE THE SHELTERING GROVE

Deep silence fell about the little camp, planted there so audaciously in the jaws of the wilderness. The lake gleamed like a sheet of black glass beneath the stars. The cold air pricked. In the draughts of night that poured their silent tide from the depths of the forest, with messages from distant ridges and from lakes just beginning to freeze, there lay already the faint, bleak odours of coming winter.

Algernon Blackwood
"The Wendigo"

The Markers of Gentrification

Gentrification in the city is not hard to spot, particularly if you happen to be a refugee driven out of your former home to make room for a wealthier occupant. Many victims of urban gentrification relate stories of purposeful neglect of the structures they occupy, intimidation by their landlords, and even outright destruction of their buildings preceding the actual expulsion. Others are simply given an eviction date, notified of a dramatic rise in rents, or informed that the building is "going condo." But even for those who are not direct casualties of urban gentrification, the process is usually quite apparent, heralded as it is by a host of typical visceral signals. A neighborhood gets "artsy," upscale shops and restaurants move in, apartment buildings change hands, whole blocks are renovated, dilapidated parks are cleaned up, pockmarked streets get repaved, longtime residents move out, parking becomes a problem, and finally the *New York Times* runs an article in the real estate section detailing the "revitalization" of a declining neighborhood into a newly fashionable abode for the well-heeled consumer of urban chic: the next SoHo, the next DUMBO, the next Lower East Side.

The visceral cues are far less dramatic in rural gentrification, at least in the Adirondacks. For one thing, Adirondack hamlets don't typically sport many apartment buildings, so the simultaneous eviction of several hundred tenants at once is a fairly unlikely event. Indeed many Adirondack hamlets don't even have several hundred residents *altogether*. Owner-occupied housing tends to outweigh renter-occupied housing by a considerable margin, and most of the units in the Park consist of single-family residences. Yet there is something discernibly different about Adirondack towns undergoing gentrification, particularly for those who are intimately familiar with the general geography of the Park. Indeed, I arrived at the decision to focus on the Fulton Chain region for this study through the monumentally scientific act of driving down Route 28 one fine September day and passing more shiny Jaguars than beat-up old pickups. Intrigued, I continued down the highway, passing consecutively through Blue Mountain Lake, Inlet, Eagle Bay, and finally Old Forge (Raquette is somewhat off the beaten path and I didn't happen to make the turn that afternoon). As I crested the hill in Inlet in front of the house I would eventually occupy for the duration of the study, it occurred to me that the place looked "gentrified," at least compared to conditions in many of the towns I'd seen. The roads were smooth, the hotels full, the restaurants busy, the hamlet teeming, and many of the houses were considerably more spectacular than the typical modest trailers, cabins and split-levels which characterize most other towns. The visual difference between the hamlets in the Adirondacks reminded me powerfully of the visual difference between neighborhoods in New York City. Driving from Newcomb to Old Forge is a lot like taking the subway from Bed Stuy to Park Slope, without the ethnic

markers but evincing all the signs of a shift in the rural geography of class.

Rural gentrification constitutes not only a spatial shift, but a temporal one, at least for longtime residents who live to see such changes. As one Adirondack local told me,

I see these changes because I'm a walker; I've walked these roads for years, and everything is different now. When I first moved here [in the 1950s], everybody was poor. There were no trailers then, but I remember tar paper shacks like the one we lived in, and old brown houses with no paint on them, and everybody drove junky cars because nobody could afford to do anything different. And there were logging trucks – now there are no logging trucks, but there are cement trucks everywhere, and where are they going? We heard a loud car go by the other night and we all noticed because it never happens anymore. There are a lot more cars on the road but they're much nicer. People are snapping up land and building incredible houses with real stonework and elaborate windows. What is going to happen to this little burg? What would've happened to my family if things had been this way when they moved here? We'd still be back in the city. I felt so bad when the old sawmill burned [just this year], because that was the end of an era. They'll never rebuild it. [The owner] is too old to run it anymore and most of his children have moved away; the ones who are left are either too sick or too crazy. It's kind of sad to see all these people who grew up poor leaving, and where will it all end? You talk to the people moving in here, and they're desperate to get back to nature. And what do they do? They *post it*. Joe [a neighbor] and I are the only ones left who have land that isn't posted. They don't want anyone on their pristine land. And the tax base has changed; taxes here are horrendous. And now I'm very attached to the land; the magnitude of the beauty here gets to you after awhile. I wonder what will happen to the boys [her children] in the end. *They're* attached to the land – how will they afford it? That car that went by the other night was the Joneses [neighbors who live in a dilapidated trailer down the road], and I had to laugh. Their place is a mess, but I'll tell you though, I'd sure as hell rather live here, where you can have wildflowers growing on the lawn and junk cars in the yard, than in some gated community where a Neighborhood Watch makes sure your grass is mowed correctly. I appreciate that freedom; I can live the way I want to live and I don't mind others doing the same. I wonder how it will all pan out in the end.

Still, gentrification as a process comprises far more than such intuitive changes in

the character of a place. And gentrification, while constituting a particular brand of urban development, cannot be reduced to simple development per se. Gentrification in cities around the world has been found to adhere to some fairly predictable spatial, economic, political and cultural precedents, all products of the capitalistic mode of production which drives real estate development, as all other industries under its auspices, toward the highest-possible profit margins. And while the Adirondack Park has witnessed a general boom in residential housing development since the late 1960s, as with urban gentrification, it's the *character* of the development which counts. Due to differences in population density and the nature of the housing stock itself as we move from the urban to the rural, there is good reason to suspect that rural gentrification will depart from the familiar pattern of its urban counterpart in significant ways. However, since urban revitalization is the most well-established benchmark for measuring the process of gentrification, any meaningful analysis of rural gentrification must necessarily begin with an urban-rural comparison.

The singular nature of Adirondack gentrification, which is based upon the construction of seasonal rather than year-round housing, not only distinguishes it from urban gentrification, but makes it difficult to track in the course of research. For example, one of the primary indicators of urban gentrification – a marked increase in a neighborhood's income – emerges clearly in the Decennial Census data. An upward swing in the Census category of "median income" for a particular locality over a brief period of time is a clear signal that the space has been gentrified: wealthier residents have moved in, poorer residents have been swept out, and the resulting shift is reflected in the

income data collected by the federal government. Not so in rural gentrification, for seasonal residents are not counted in the Decennial Census of their recreational locality. A seasonal homeowner in Inlet who makes her primary residence in Syracuse will be counted as part of the population of Syracuse, not Inlet. In fact, seasonal residents appear most consistently in the Adirondack Census data as a pronounced silence, going uncounted in statistics on labor force, poverty status, and social characteristics, all of which take into consideration only the Park's year-round population. The Census category in which seasonal residents *do* appear, of course, is housing. The data gap is clearly discernable. The Town of Webb in 1990, for example, boasted a total population of 1,637 residents and a total housing stock of 3,743 units: more than twice the number of places to live as people to live in them. The discrepancy reconciles itself quite clearly in the category of "seasonal, recreational, or occasional use" housing. In the Town of Webb, 2,958 housing units were occupied only occasionally by seasonal visitors in 1990. But beyond this, the Census offers little information on the *characteristics* of these seasonal occupants. Where do they come from? How much money do they make? Where do they work? What do they do with their Adirondack "camps" – visit them on vacation, rent them out to others, both, or neither? To complicate matters further, the Census does not consider seasonal rental housing as part of its "contract rent" count (i.e., the average monthly amount paid by renters to landlords). The amount of rent collected by owners of seasonal units – such as the \$500 to \$5,000 weekly luxury rentals listed in the class ads of the local papers – goes untallied by any official source.

Seasonal dwellings make their most visible mark in their geographical expression.

It is no coincidence that the three references to rural gentrification quoted in Chapter One describe conditions in upstate New York. For much of the postwar period, New York State led the nation in absolute numbers of vacation homes (U.S. Census Bureau 2000). While the percentage of total housing comprised by these homes varies from region to region, this number is particularly high in the counties and townships of the Adirondack Park, which lies within a day's drive of an estimated 70 million people. As Figure 3.1 indicates, in 1990 the highest state ratios of seasonal to total housing units on the township level roughly coincided with the boundary of the Adirondack Park, with additional dark patches occurring near the Catskills to the south, the Finger Lakes to the west, and on the tip of Long Island. If we examine the same data on a county-wide scale, as in the following Figure (3.2), the difference is striking. In Hamilton County, a part of which comprised the location of this study and one of two counties situated completely inside the Blue Line, a whopping 66 percent of the total housing stock is comprised of seasonal dwellings – more than twice the number of the next-nearest New York State county. The spatial concentration of capital in seasonal housing is therefore tightly linked to the larger concentration of capital in ecotourism generally; gentrified housing is not simply *linked* to broader industrial changes, but constitutes a major aspect of that industrial change.

If the consumers of gentrified housing and the uses to which they put their properties are difficult to characterize, what of those displaced by rural gentrification? How does displacement occur, and by what means do the displaced secure alternative housing? In terms of methodology, the rural scene does not differ significantly from the

urban in this regard. Because no regulatory agency tracks the movements of those dislodged from their housing by gentrification, urban and rural researchers alike have recourse primarily to ethnographic methods: if you want to know where the displaced go, you have to ask them. In this respect, tracking gentrification in the countryside presents less of a challenge than doing so in the city, for populations are smaller and far more intimate, making it easier to locate those directly affected by gentrification-induced displacement and learn their stories. Several Adirondack case histories are related in this chapter.

In the city, however, the primary movers of gentrification are neither the consumers of gentrified housing nor the displaced, but the various capitalistic actors which drive gentrification in the first place: developers, land speculators, real estate brokers, construction companies, and mortgage lenders. It is therefore necessary to determine the extent to which such agents play a role in the production of gentrified housing in the countryside. In what way is rural gentrification bound up with the generation of capitalistic profits in the subsidiary industries of rural development? Public records are generally far more availing in this regard. Although there is no “Adirondack redevelopment authority” of the sort frequently found in urban areas undergoing revitalization, the researcher of rural gentrification finds an unlikely ally in the quest to document development in the pristine wilderness: environmentalists. As noted earlier, a surge in residential housing construction in the northeast, and particularly in the adjoining Champlain valley, provided the primary impetus for the creation of the Adirondack Park Agency in the early 1970s. Since that time, the APA and several private

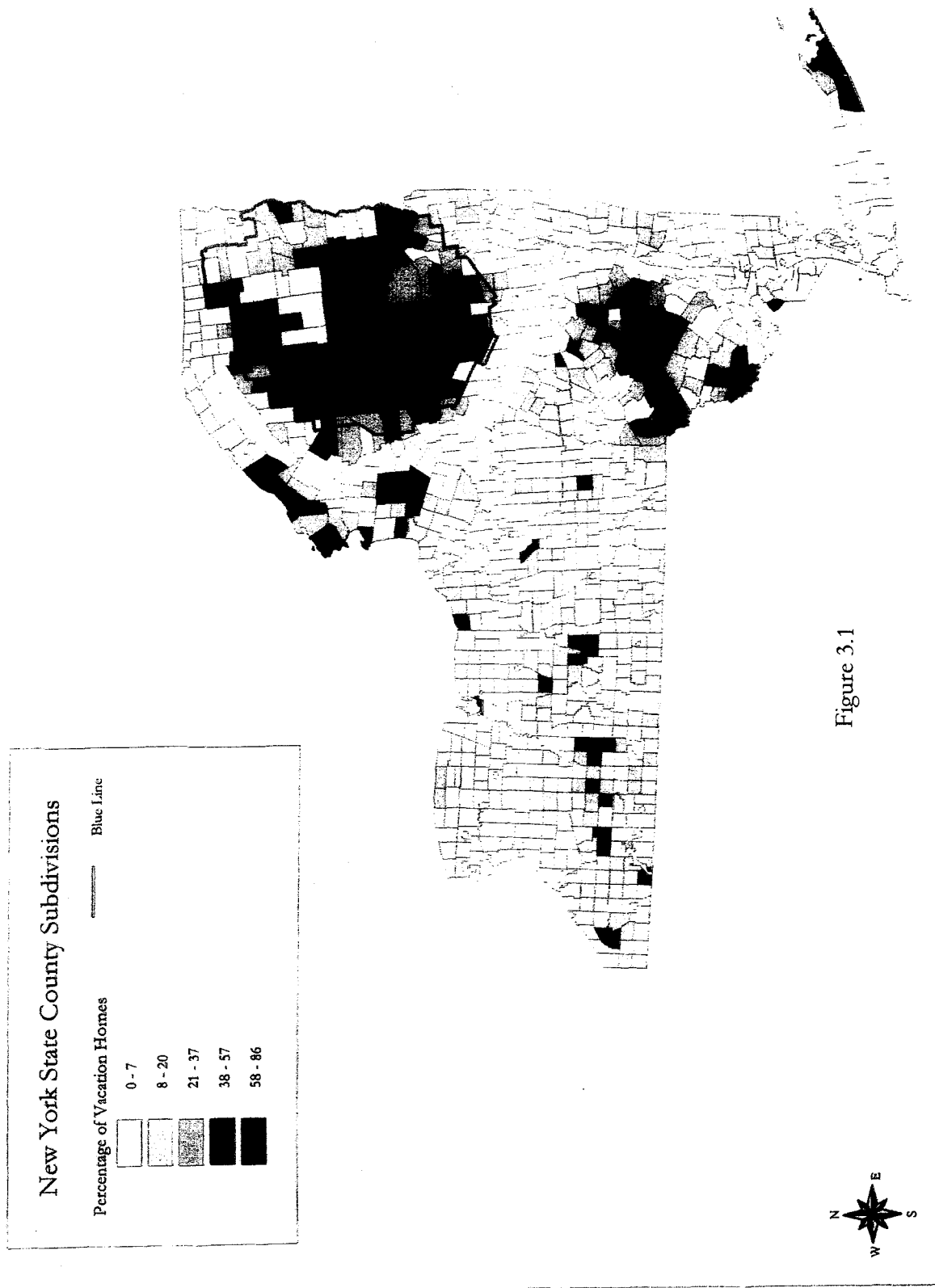


Figure 3.1

environmental organizations have devoted considerable resources to tracking subdivision and development in the Adirondack Park. Their broad-based research efforts provide an extensive overview of Park growth over the last thirty years, and afford a good vantage point from which to view the generalized phenomenon of wilderness development. They do not, however, provide a great deal of insight into the class dynamic of this development, nor to the minute details of its character. For this we must turn to local record-keepers, which in the Adirondack Park means town- or county-based Offices of Real Property Services, which document building permit applications as well as property transfer reports: essentially, the nuts and bolts of land sales and construction.

For the purposes of this chapter, I focus on development in one particular Adirondack neighborhood, the Town of Webb, a popular ecotourist destination located in the far western reaches of the Fulton Chain of Lakes. There are several reasons for this. To begin with, a landmark study conducted by the Residents Committee to Protect the Adirondacks, an environmental watchdog organization focusing specifically on the Adirondack Park, found that Webb issued more residential building permits (counting new construction and renovation combined) than any other township in the Park during the 1990s, a decade which witnessed a considerable boom in Park-wide development (Residents' Committee to Protect the Adirondacks 2001:19). It also permitted more actual construction than any other town. Furthermore, the Town of Webb and its primary hamlet, Old Forge, evince all the above-mentioned visceral signs of rural gentrification, particularly around Fourth Lake, whose shoreline is ringed with an abundance of luxury seasonal housing. Indeed, the town bureaucracy itself has officially

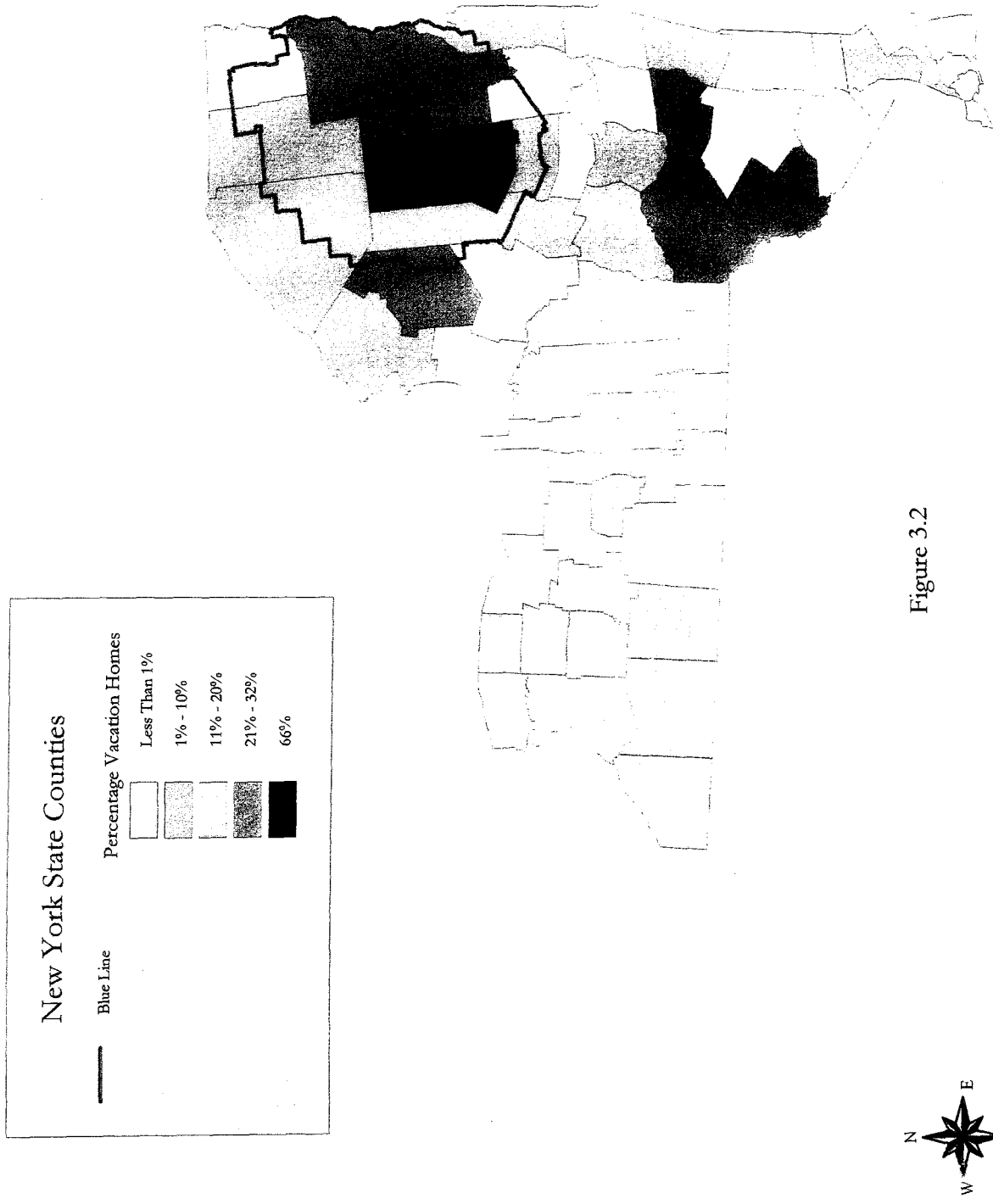


Figure 3.2

recognized a housing shortage in the local vicinity: during my tenure there, a special subcommittee of a larger body focusing on hamlet revitalization was formed specifically to address the problem of scarce housing for local workers (discussed below). To boot, the Town of Webb was the site of the proposed 5,000 luxury-home project by Great Northern Capital in the early 1970s, the threat of which provided an important impetus in the constitution of private property regulation and the creation of the Adirondack Park Agency. And finally, as many researchers have discovered, the Town of Webb Real Property Office keeps particularly excellent records in considerable detail for an extensive period of time, stretching in some cases back to the early 1970s. It is these records which form the basis of the detailed housing analysis in this chapter. We begin first, however, with an overview of Park-wide development in the last thirty years.

Development in the Park Since 1970

The Blue Line encompasses roughly 6 million acres of land. The State of New York holds title to just under half that amount, effectively sealing off 43 percent of Park acreage from residential (or any other type of) development (Figure 3.3). The remainder of Adirondack Park land comprises private property, categorized by the State into progressive degrees of development restriction, and open water (see Figure 3.4). As noted in Chapter One, the Adirondack Park Agency has regulated construction on all private property in the Park since 1972 according to a system of density limits (see Table 1.1). Private property categories include Moderate Intensity, which allows 500 principle buildings per square mile, Low Intensity, allowing 200 principle buildings per square

mile, Rural Use, allowing 75 principle buildings per square mile, Resource Management at 15 principle buildings per square mile, and Hamlet, with no density limits. About 25 percent of the total acreage in the Park falls into the above categories (excluding Resource Management, which is generally used for forestry practices rather than

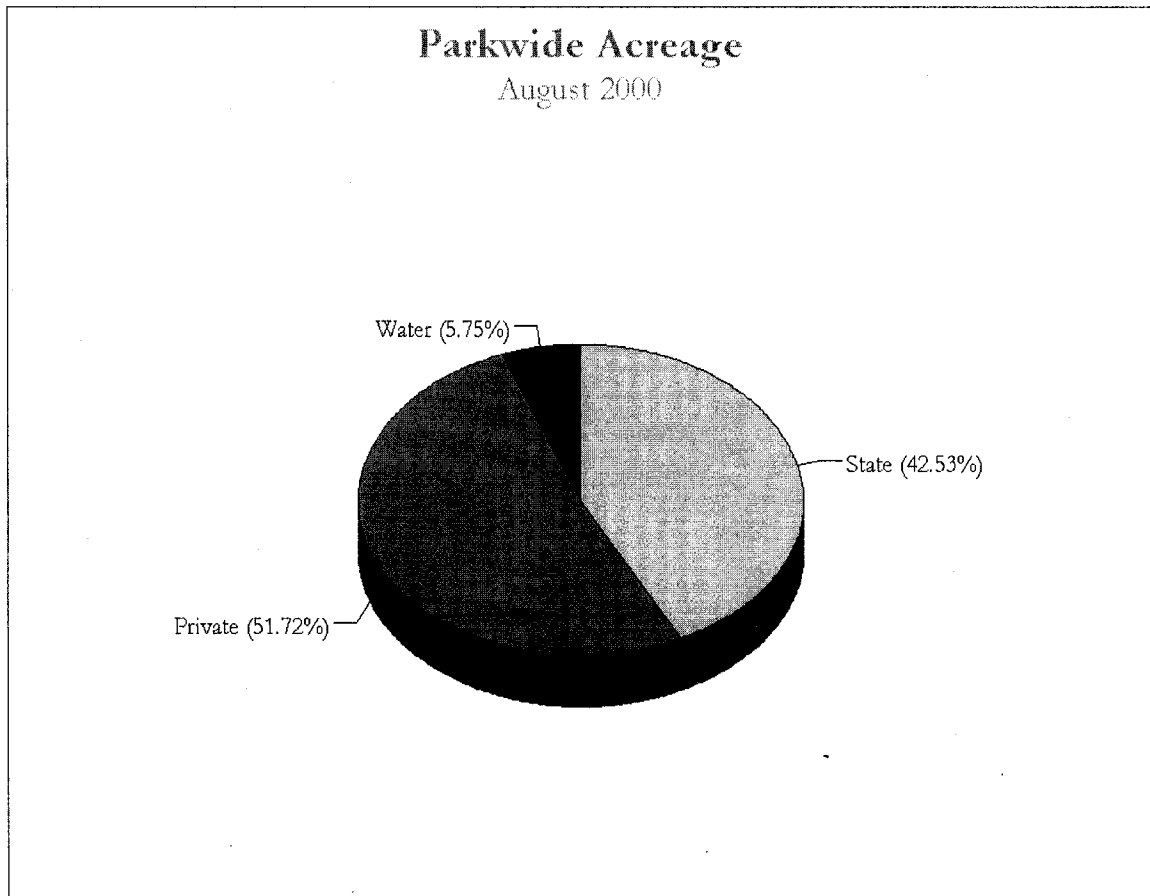


Figure 3.3

housing), and is therefore available for residential development. Less than 1 percent of the Park is categorized as Hamlet and available for completely unrestricted residential construction. While actual APA oversight varies somewhat due to periodic budget constraints and personnel deficiencies, these are the general guidelines within which private property developers must operate at the State level. This does not, of course,

include the plethora of local-level regulations to which developers must conform. The securing of an APA permit alone does not constitute permission to begin construction, but comprises only the first step in a process which also entails obtaining a permit from local governments, usually towns. These municipalities are exceedingly important in shaping the built environment of the Adirondacks, for they constitute the regulatory “net” that catches projects which are not of sufficient scale to warrant oversight by the APA.

According to State and environmental authorities, the Adirondack real estate market has been fairly hopping since the late 1960s, particularly for such a remote, isolated, and rugged geography. The past thirty years in the Adirondack Park have witnessed a remarkable rate of subdivision, renovation, and construction, a trend which grew steadily between 1965 and 1990 and increased dramatically in the last decade of the century. While no official State body keeps track of all new construction inside the Blue Line, four comprehensive studies were commissioned to document development trends across the Adirondack Park during this period: The Temporary Study Commission on the Future of the Adirondacks in 1967, established by Governor Nelson Rockefeller and chaired by Harold Hochschild, the Commission on the Adirondack Park in the Twenty-First Century in 1990, established by Governor Mario Cuomo and chaired by Peter Berle, “Growth in the Adirondack Park,” compiled by John Banta of the Adirondack Park Agency in 1993, and the above-noted “Growth in the Adirondack Park: Analysis of Rates and Patterns of Development,” conducted by the Residents’ Committee to Protect the Adirondacks, a nonprofit environmental organization, in 2001. Taken together, the

conclusions reached by these studies provide a reasonably extensive overview of development trends in the Adirondack Park between 1967 and 2000¹. For purposes of this chapter, I will call them the Rockefeller, Cuomo, Banta and RCPA reports, respectively.

Of all private property acreage in the Park, comprising some four million acres of non-State land, Adirondack residents themselves owned just over half in 1988; landowners hailing from just outside the Blue Line owned another 20 percent of private property; residents from other parts of New York State owned 14 percent; New England residents held nearly 8 percent of private acreage; mid-Atlantic residents held another 4 percent; and the remaining 4 percent were owned by residents of other states (New York State Commission on the Adirondack Park in the Twenty-First Century 1990a:48). In terms of private land ownership, both the Rockefeller and Cuomo commissions documented large swaths of private Adirondack land concentrated in the hands of relatively few landowners, particularly the forest industry, a trend which intensified in the twenty-year period between the two studies.

In 1967, the Rockefeller commission reported that 626 landowners held 1,949,230 acres of private property in parcels of over 500 acres apiece. By 1988,

1

As with all Park-wide analyses, the research conducted by these organizations was infinitely complicated by the jurisdictional division of the Park into 12 counties and nearly 100 townships. As noted earlier, only the counties of Essex and Hamilton are located completely inside the Blue Line. The most fine-grained analysis must therefore be conducted at the town level. Researchers have found that Adirondack town property offices hold records in varying degrees of detail and for various historical time periods. Differences in methodological approaches between these four studies make clean comparisons difficult, but where possible, I have noted this in the text.

according to the Cuomo commission, 564 landowners held a total of 2,066,306 acres in 500-plus acre parcels – meaning that those owners held title to over a third of all the land inside the Blue Line. In both cases, such large portions of Adirondack wilderness were

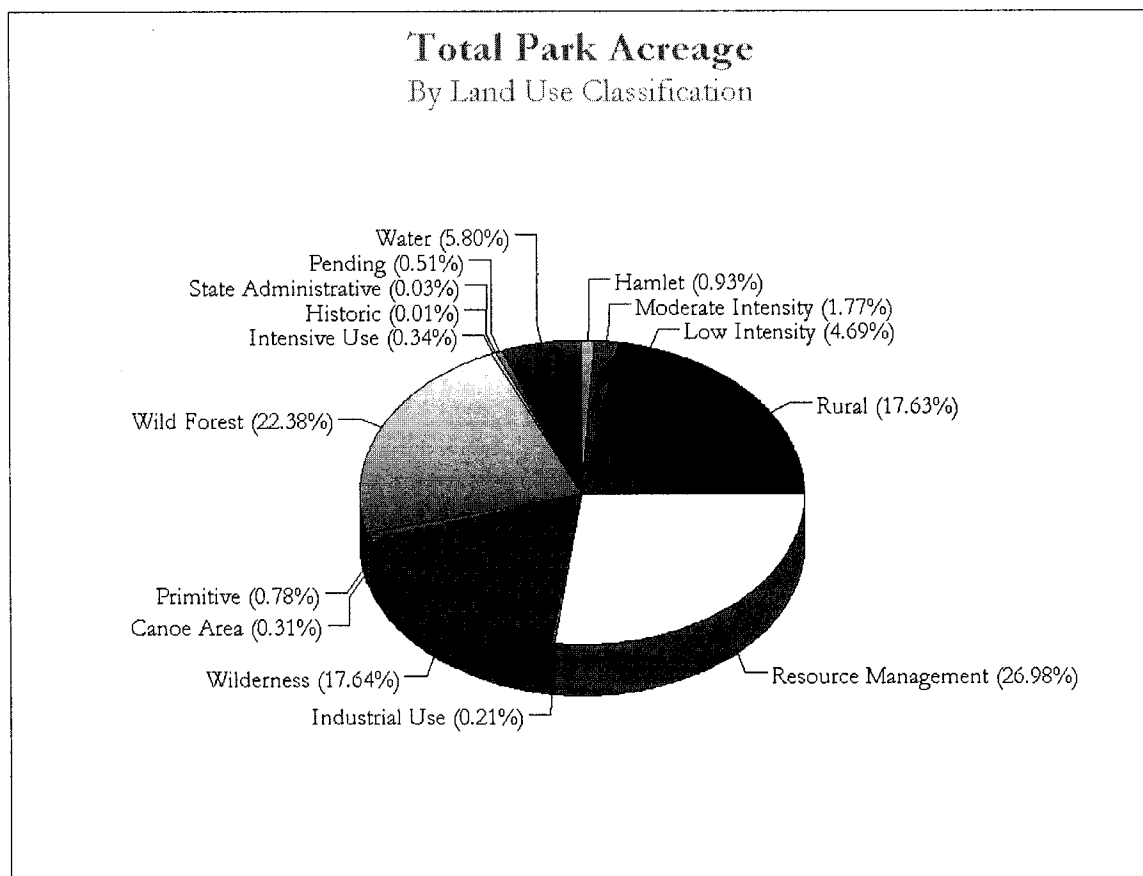


Figure 3.4

held by various categories of owners, including game clubs, religious organizations, timber companies, individuals, and other types of corporations. But the largest acquisitions between 1967 and 1988 were made by the forest industry, which held thirty percent of large-scale acreage in 1967, but 54 percent of large-scale acreage in 1988. By the time the Cuomo commission made its report in 1990, 26 percent of all private

property in the Adirondack Park was concentrated in the hands of 10 landowners (1990a:45-47).

The Cuomo report noted, however, that “rising land values and increasing costs that result have made it difficult for industries based on natural resources to withstand the development pressures,” reflecting widespread fear that declining profits in the forest products industry in the face of higher potential profits to be made in the real estate industry would lead to the subdivision, sale, and residential development of previously forested acreage (1990a:47):

Under current circumstances, large forested tracts will be for sale with increasing frequency. The financial pressures on timberland-owning firms force them to view their forest lands as “profit centers.” They must reap maximum value from their land or become targets for hostile takeovers by raiders who will (1990a:48-49).

The primary concern of the Cuomo commission, as with its predecessor, was the geographical fragmentation of open space. The ownership of Adirondack forest lands by timber companies effectively maintained large contiguous swaths of wilderness intact, whereas real estate development threatened to fracture the forest into smaller and smaller units. By 1988, it appeared that the most profitable production of the Adirondack forest had shifted from the milling of nature into raw materials and manufactured commodities to the production of nature as wilderness real estate. It is ironic, however, that the older industrial accumulation regime, which produced profits through the rational break-down and reconstitution of the environment, would ultimately do more to maintain the Adirondack forest in a contiguous state than the latter post-industrial ecotourist regime,

which profits from the purportedly holistic properties of nature but ultimately resulted in the fragmentation of wilderness into smaller and smaller consumable pieces (all figures in this paragraph from 1990a:46-48).

But how and where did this fragmentation occur, and who were the owners of the resulting developed land? The Rockefeller report found that in 1967, the Adirondack Park contained a total of 127,736 private taxable parcels. By the time the Cuomo commission conducted the same count in the late 1980s, using assessment rolls from 91 towns across the Park, that number had increased to 177,736 lots spanning just over four million acres: an increase of 50,000 parcels, or 39 percent (New York State Commission on the Adirondack Park in the Twenty-First Century 1990a:45). Since this staggering jump takes into account the enlargement of the Park border, which occurred alongside the creation of the Adirondack Park Agency in 1972 and significantly increased the total percentage of land inside the Blue Line, it probably speaks more to the absorption of entirely new lots formerly on the fringes of the Park than to subdivision activity within the Park border itself.

Fortunately, the Cuomo commission also analyzed subdivision within already-existing properties inside the Blue Line, documenting the addition of 8,400 lots to the total number of taxable parcels in the Park between 1969 and 1989, the result of 425 requested subdivision projects (Miller 1990a:298). Subdivision activity during this period did not occur evenly, but peaked during two periods of particular intensity: between 1971 and 1973, which also witnessed low real interest rates as well as (interestingly) the creation of the Adirondack Park Agency, and between 1986 and 1989, a period which

(coincidentally?) culminated in the appearance of multiple housing-shortage reports in local newspapers (298-299; see also Chapter One). According to this report, 54 percent of these projects were located along public roads, 41 percent contained shoreline frontage, and 18 percent occurred in backcountry areas (the overlap is due to the fact that many subdivisions included more than one type of frontage, for instance a public road on one side of the lot and lakefront on the other) (304). The majority of the resulting parcels were quite small: just over half the lots created by these subdivisions were less than one acre in size, and another third fell between one and five acres (303). In terms of geographical distribution across the Park, Warren county to the south registered the highest number of both subdivision projects (40 percent) and resulting new parcels (39 percent), followed by Essex (18 percent of projects, 19 percent of new lots) and Hamilton counties (14 percent of projects, 16 percent of new lots), respectively (303).

According to the Cuomo commission, the APA estimated that upwards of 20,000 new single family homes and 6,500 vacant lots, most along waterfronts, had been added to the Adirondack landscape between 1967 and 1987, constituting a 42 percent increase in twenty years (New York State Commission on the Adirondack Park in the Twenty-First Century 1990a:47). Yet despite the emergence of a few large-scale subdivision projects during this period – including a site in Ausable resulting in more than 1,000 new lots in 1974 and a condominium development in Bolton resulting in more than 200 lots in 1986 (Miller 1990a:304-306) – the massive development plans rumored by the media to be in the pipeline in the early 1970s did not materialize. Great Northern Capital did *not* erect 5,000 luxury properties on 10,000 acres in Old Forge, nor did Horizon Corporation

develop 10,000 houses on 24,000 acres near the Grasse River in St. Lawrence County, as predicted (see Chapters One and Five). In some cases – such as the proposed Ton-Da-Lay development, which projected a 7,000 residential lot build-out in addition to a ranch and an equestrian ring on 18,500 acres in the Town of Altamont – large-scale development was derailed by the Adirondack Park Agency through either outright permit denials or a frustrating series of requests of more information, resulting in the wholesale abandonment of development proposals (Browning 2002:49). Guinness Enterprises similarly scrapped plans to build a \$200 million Lake Placid resort (including a 285-unit townhouse complex) called “Gleneagles” in the late 1980s after its permit application, which purportedly cost the company \$30 million to compile over the course of three years, was deemed incomplete by the APA (Dunne 1990a:340).

Although the formidable permit process instituted by the Adirondack Park Agency in the early 1970s appeared to effectively stymie large-scale development, several smaller condominium projects were completed in the ensuing years, apparently passing muster with both the APA and local zoning laws. Rocky Point Townhomes, a complex build on 28 acres with 2,300 feet of Fourth Lake frontage, was constructed in the Town of Inlet in the late 1980s. The compound boasts an indoor heated pool, spa, 4 tennis courts, a renovated antique gazebo, 1,300 feet of sandy beach, and rentable dock space. Rocky Point townhomes were reportedly selling for over \$100,000 per 3-bedroom unit at the time of construction, with those units offering particularly spectacular lakefront views demanding the highest prices (Dunne 1990a:322). At the time of this writing, several Rocky Point townhomes are being rented on a weekly or monthly basis to tourists, with

prices ranging from \$1,300 per week to \$6,200 per month during the summer season. The Summit, a condominium complex built in the 1980s and located near the Gore Mountain ski facility in the Town of North Creek, offers similar amenities: an indoor pool, sauna, game room, and townhouses equipped with fireplaces, Jacuzzis, and furnished decks replete with the requisite pristine mountain vistas. Although nearly all of the units at The Summit had sold out by 1988, like the townhomes at Rocky Point there are several now available for weekly rents of \$840 to \$2250 during the winter season. Summit condominiums are also available as investment properties, meaning that units may be purchased and rented out by their new owners. Similar developments have been constructed on Pecks Lake in the Town of Bleecker, with lakefront units selling between \$200,000 and \$500,000 each in the late 1980s. Other projects include Ausable Acres in Jay, Top of the World in Lake George, and Roman Heights in Hadley, but none of these came close to approximating the mammoth projects proposed by developers in the early 1970s, never to materialize.

Park-wide development proceeded apace in the 1990s. According to the Residents' Committee to Protect the Adirondacks, 8,268 new residential tax parcels were added to the Park rolls between 1989 and 1999, constituting a twelve percent increase in the last decade and bringing the total number to 75,517 as of 1999 (Residents' Committee to Protect the Adirondacks 2001:5).² The RCPA also found that permits were

2

Since the Rockefeller and Cuomo commissions tallied total private tax parcels and the RCPA counted only those listed under the "residential" classification (200), it's not possible to compare the two.

granted for the construction of 8,598 new buildings in the Adirondack Park during this period, bringing the total number of structures of all types to 83,475, with over 800 new buildings going up every year during the decade of the 1990s (5). Matching the spatial trends of development in the seventies and eighties, construction in the nineties occurred primarily along roadfronts and lakeshores. In addition, the study reinforced the earlier finding by the both the Rockefeller and Cuomo commissions that large-scale industrial landowners, and timber companies in particular, continue to preclude subdivision by holding large contiguous parcels in an undeveloped state, effectively acting as a deterrent to backcountry real estate development (13-15), a trend I will discuss further in Chapter Five.

The developments described above are not particularly conspicuous, for several reasons. In the first place, the Park continues to be utterly dominated by huge swaths of open forest land. The casual observer driving through the Adirondacks today would hardly call the place “overdeveloped;” indeed compared to the rest of the American landscape, particularly on the heavily populated East Coast, the Adirondack Park in the dead of winter resembles a vast white desert, its inhabited geography less like an oasis than Blackwood’s “camp, planted there so audaciously in the jaws of the wilderness” (Blackwood 1941:104-105). The famous NASA photograph of the northeastern United States from space at night reveals a large black hole where the Adirondack Park is located. In the second, “development” is a relative term. The construction of 800 new buildings per year across a six-million acre swath of land only becomes significant in light of the State regulations which restrict that development to highly circumscribed regions

of the Park, the overwhelmingly rural nature of the Adirondacks, and the impressive rate of increase since the early 1970s. Thirdly, many of the more elaborate Adirondack estates are surrounded by a good deal of secluded private wilderness and are therefore not visible from the Park's major transportational arteries. And finally, development over the past thirty years has not occurred uniformly across the Park, but is instead highly localized, concentrated in particular spaces while others have remained largely untouched.

A Closer Look: Development in the Town of Webb

While the above figures constitute an interesting broad-scale assessment of development in the Adirondack Park over the past thirty years, they do not provide a fine-grained view of the consequences of such development for the residents of any particular locality. In order to gain a more detailed perspective, it is necessary to examine development on a smaller scale: in this case, the Town of Webb, which lies on the far western edge of the Fulton Chain of Lakes in the central Adirondacks (Figure 3.5). Webb contains three of the five primary hamlets in the Fulton Chain, which include Thendara, Old Forge and Eagle Bay in Webb, Inlet in the Town of Inlet, and Raquette Lake in the Town of Long Lake. These small settlements lie primarily along First through Eighth Lakes, which stretch in a northeasterly direction beginning in Old Forge and terminating just before Raquette (see Figure i). Webb's primary demographic concentration lies in Old Forge, which, with the exception of the hordes of tourists who cram its streets in high summer, looks like any other quaint, well-kept, upstate New York town, with a main thoroughfare lined with shops and restaurants, an assortment of older Victorian-style

houses mixed with later ranch styles, a variety of hotels, motels, gas stations and other tourist amenities, and a covered wooden bridge spanning the inlet to the only body of water lying entirely inside the hamlet, called “The Pond.” Forge’s most noticeable landmark is the gaudy “Water Safari” theme park, which sprawls unapologetically along Route 28 in the middle of town.

Two primary routes give access to the lands east of Old Forge: the main highway, Route 28, and South Shore Road, which travels along the back side of the Fulton Chain between Old Forge and Inlet. Route 28 continues on up the Chain between Inlet and Raquette, while a dirt road (known locally as “Brown’s Tract” and open only to snowmobile traffic during the winter) provides the only other connection between the two. A thin strip of heavily developed private property surrounds First, Second, Third and Fourth Lakes on either side of the water, with both roads sprouting smaller tracks leading into clusters of mainly second-home settlements along the lakeshore. Some ten miles east of Forge lies the hamlet of Eagle Bay, a small village on the easterly end of Fourth Lake. One may head northward out of Eagle Bay toward an even tinier settlement around Big Moose Lake, and from there travel along a desolate dirt road through International Paper land all the way to Stillwater Reservoir. The termination of Eagle Bay, which is also the eastermost border of both Webb and Herkimer County, gives way to the Town of Inlet, which contains Fifth, Sixth, and Seventh Lakes, as well as the very end of massive Fourth Lake. Ten miles to the northeast of Inlet lies Raquette. The gentrified seasonal housing stock lies mainly along the lakefronts of the Chain, from First through Sixth Lakes, and on the shores of Raquette and Big Moose Lakes. It is important

Town of Webb

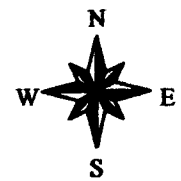
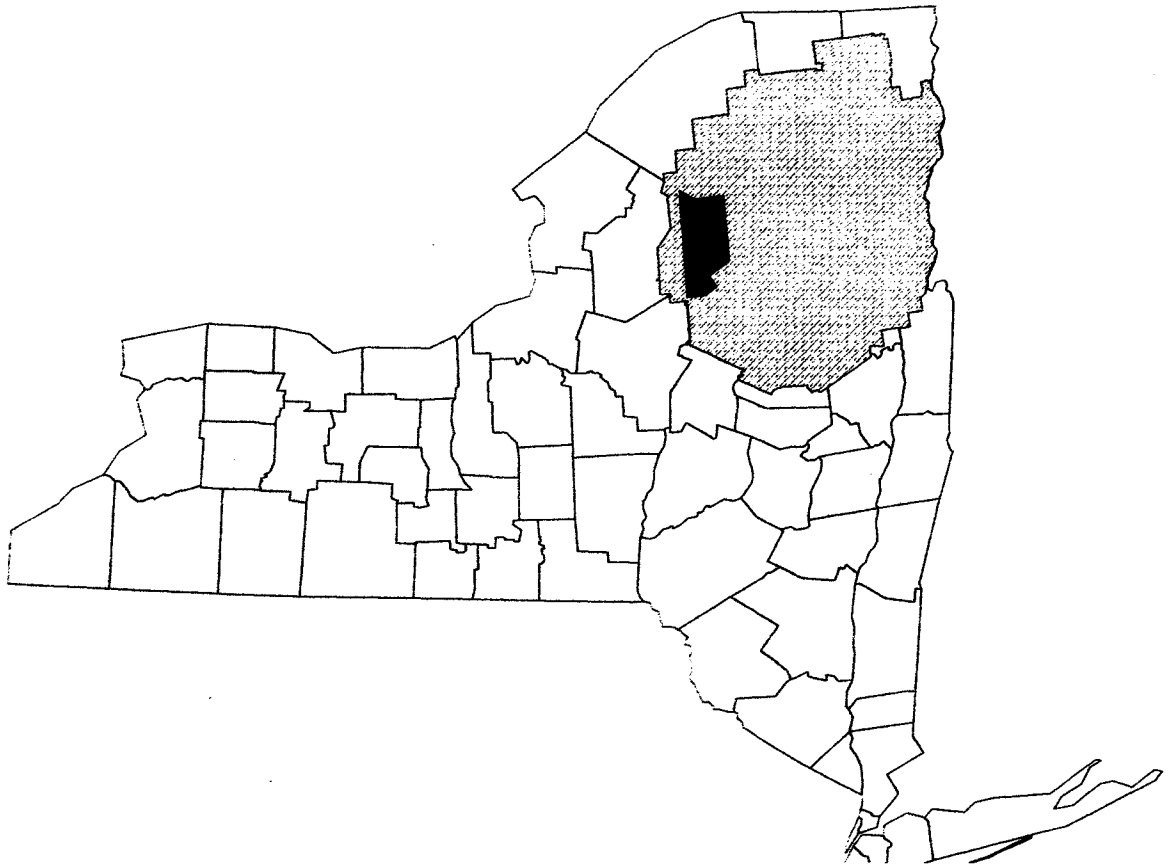


Figure 3.5

to note that while there are many quite extravagant lakeside chalets along this narrow strip of developable lakefront, not all seasonal housing in Webb *looks* particularly gentrified. I discuss how even those properties embodying quite *low* amounts of capital can still garner the relatively high levels of rent that contribute to rural gentrification in Chapter Five.

Geographical perception being relative, Old Forge, which boasts a year-round population of 1,912 by the 2000 Census count, probably feels like the end of the earth to

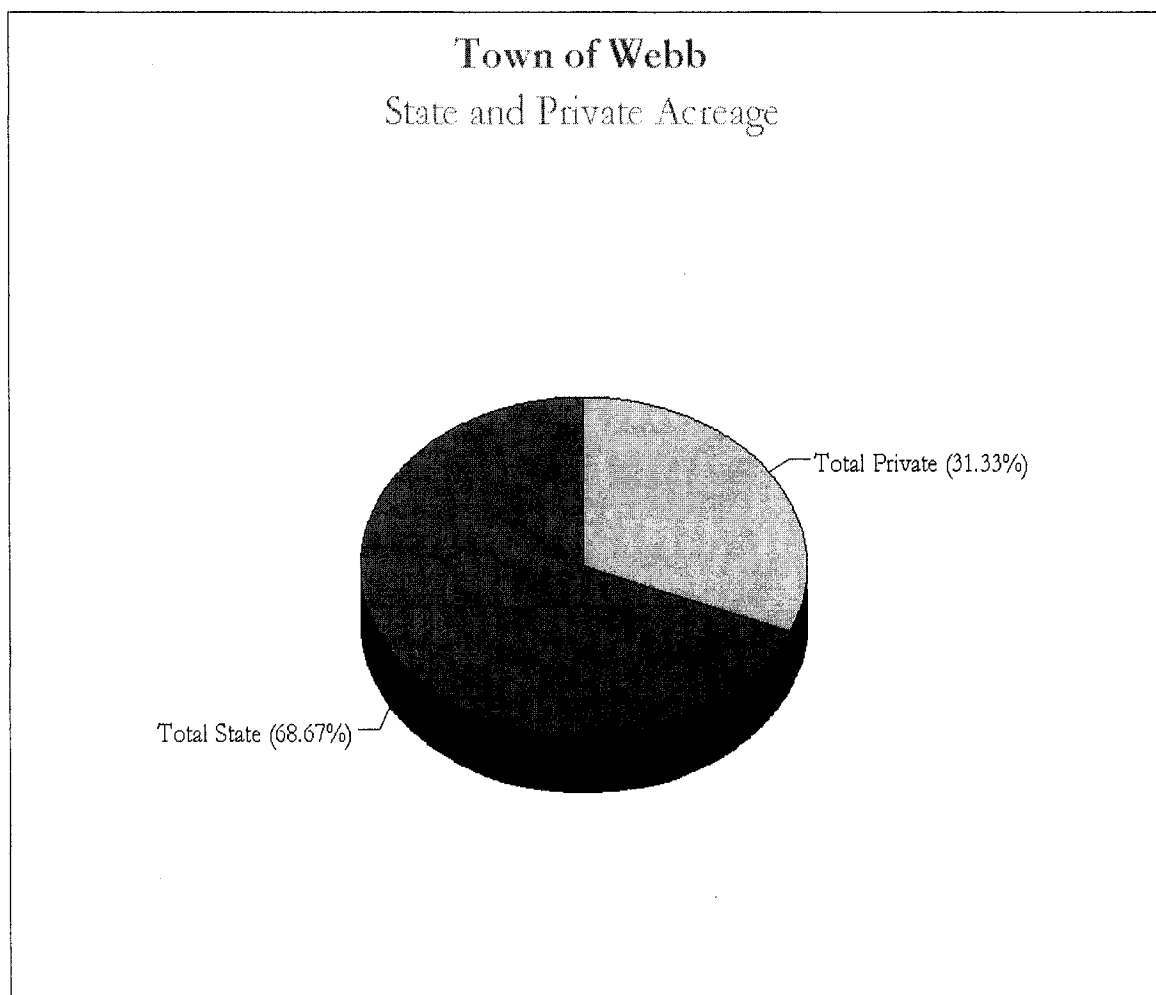


Figure 3.6

the urbanite fresh out of Manhattan. To the Raquette Laker (population 128), it frequently feels like a city, particularly during the height of the tourist season, when it can take longer to drive from Water Safari to the Moose River than it can to go ten midtown Manhattan blocks during rush hour. Old Forge, like the other area hamlets, has a resort-town feel to it, its bustling streets filled with sandal-clad canoers in the summer, gear-packed snowmobilers in the winter, and aging leaf-gawkers in the fall – all stopping in town for rest, refreshment, and the replenishment of supplies, ready to jump headlong into the next sojourn into the great outdoors. And there is plenty of nature for the asking: the overwhelming majority of Town land consists of open, forested space. This is largely because Webb, like many Adirondack municipalities, comprises a large percentage of property which is effectively sealed off from residential real estate development (see Tables 3.1 and 3.2, also Figures 3.6 and 3.8). The State of New York holds title to roughly 70 percent of land inside the town border; leaving the remaining 30 percent the only property available for any type of commercial activity – industrial, residential, or otherwise. Webb is also home to three large-scale landholders: International Paper, which maintains an enormous logging property near Stillwater Reservoir, the Adirondack League Club, a ritzy sportsman’s club owning a large swath of wilderness just south of Old Forge, and the Brandreth family, which holds title to its ancestral lands surrounding Brandreth Lake.

Since the implementation of the APA Act in 1972, the State has regulated all private property in Webb, as with all lands inside the Blue Line. The four categories of private property on which residential construction typically takes place – Hamlet,

Housing Units in Webb

1939 - 2000

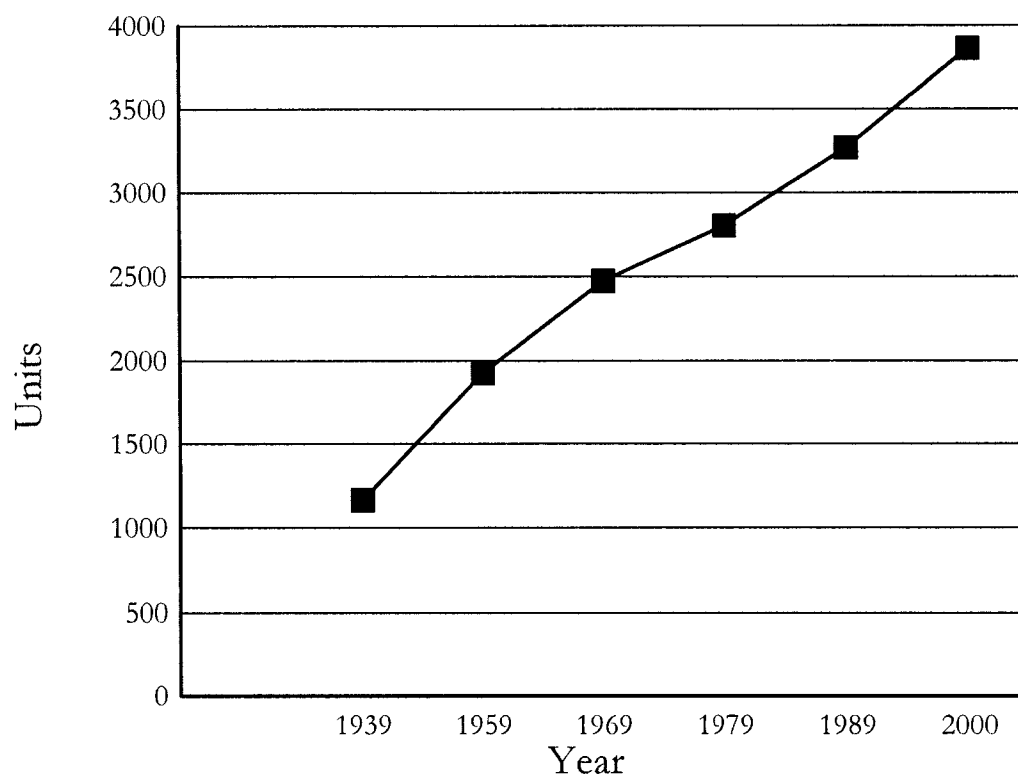


Figure 3.7

Moderate Intensity, Low Intensity, and Rural – make up less than 7 percent of all Town

Table 3.1			
Residential Private Property in the Town of Webb			
Category	Percent of Total	Sq Miles	APA Density Allowances
Hamlet	.45	2	no restrictions
Moderate Intensity	1.51	7	500 principle buildings/sq mile
Low Intensity	1.21	5.6	200 principle buildings/sq mile
Rural	3.5	16	75 principle buildings/sq mile
Source: Adirondack Park Agency			

land. Since Webb (which is the largest township in the State of New York in terms of physical space) contains roughly 466 square miles of land, that leaves 32 square miles of property for residential development. Only in the Hamlet category (comprising 2 square miles of Webb land) is this development unrestricted. Moderate Intensity (comprising 7 square miles), Low Intensity (5.6 square miles) and Rural (16 square miles) are restricted by APA density limits, meaning that only a certain number of principle buildings may occupy each square mile within each category, as noted above. The bulk of the remaining private property in the Town is classified as “Resource Management,” used mainly for activities such as logging. Interestingly, the percentage of developable residential property is just about equal to the amount of open water in the Town: 7 percent in each case.

According to the 2000 Decennial Census, the Town of Webb currently contains 3,863 housing units. The overwhelming majority of these consist of single-family residences, ranging from modest trailers to elaborate log homes. According to the Census, roughly 30 percent of Webb’s houses were built before 1939. In the postwar

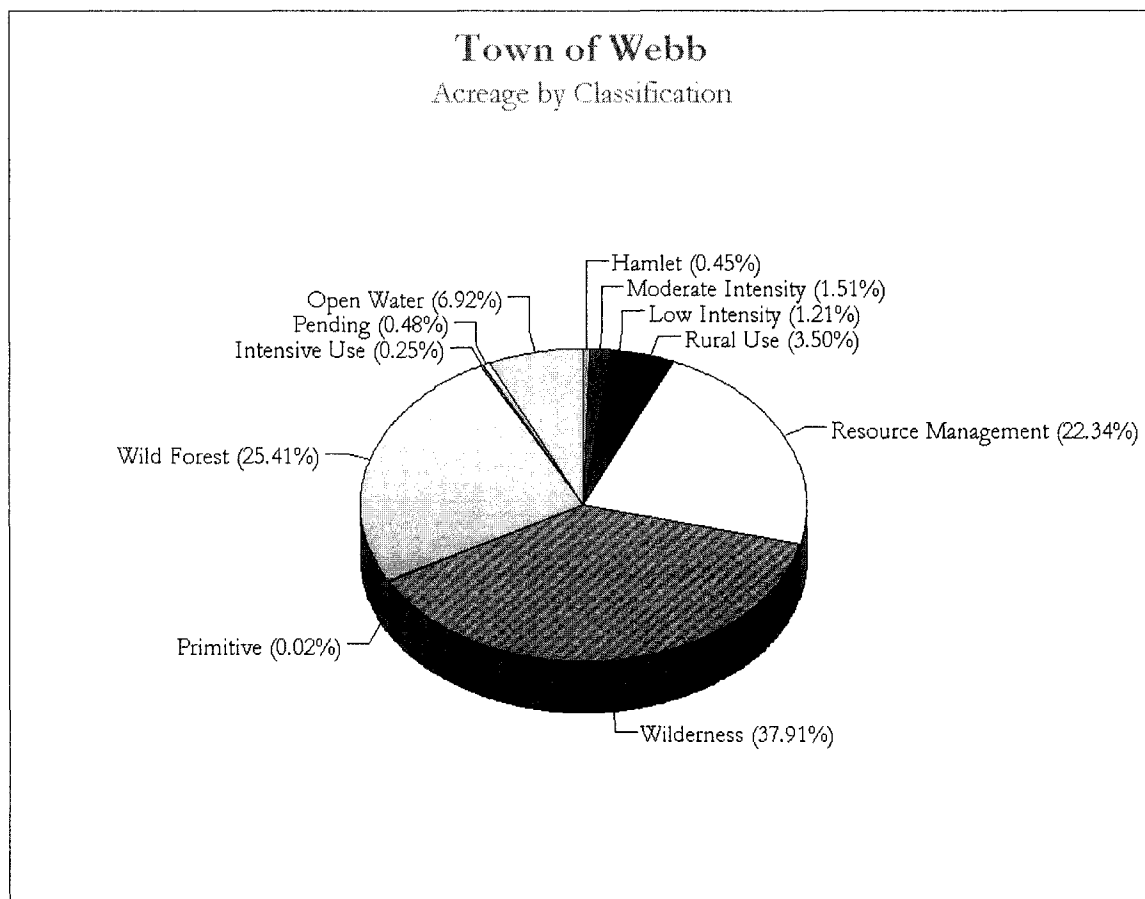


Figure 3.8

period, the decade of the 1990s witnessed the most intense construction, with nearly 600 new units going up between 1990 and 2000, constituting a 18 percent increase of the total housing stock during that decade (see Figure 3.7). Building permit data (Figure 3.9) show a jump in the late 1980s, when permits for the boom of the following decade would likely have been filed, with new applications topping out at 326 in 1990. Single family residences comprised anywhere from 10 to 29 percent of total permit applications for each year during this time, while the majority of permits pertained to improvements, renovations, variances, signage, usage, or the construction of accessory structures such as

Permits Issued 1975 - 1999

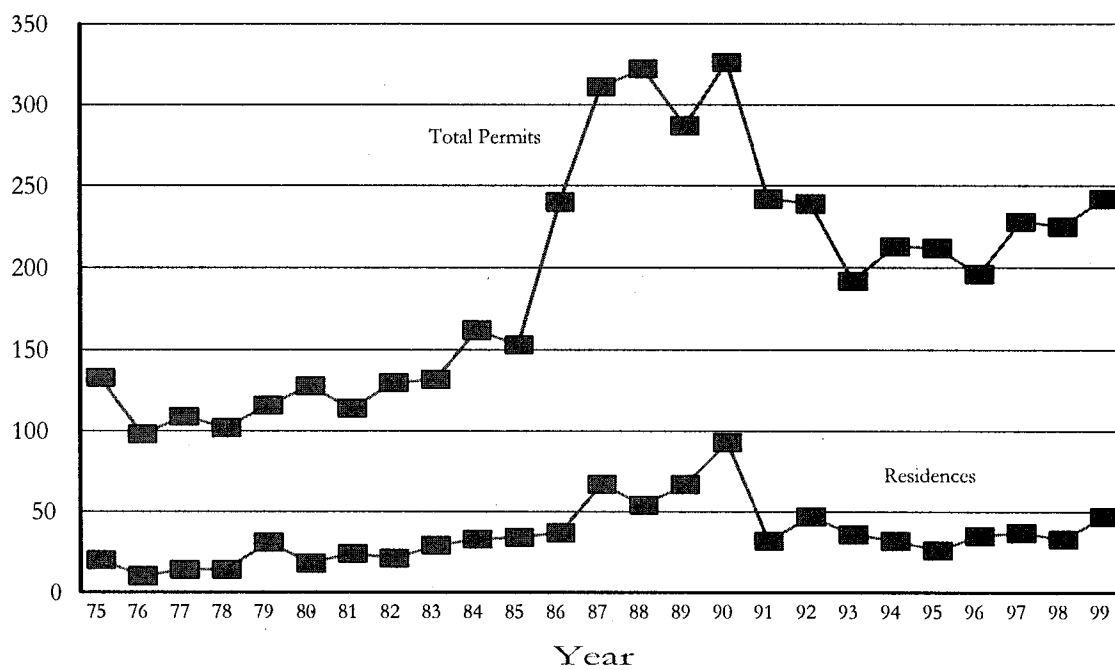


Figure 3.9

docks, boathouses, barns, and the like.

Town of Webb building permits do not reliably document residential housing types. For years they have been hand-written (and though the zoning office now owns computers, the extent to which it makes use of them is dubious) and individual descriptions of building projects tend to vary widely in detail. It is therefore difficult to discern the number of each *type* of housing – seasonal, owner-occupied-permanent and renter-occupied-permanent – constructed each year. Fortunately, the US Census Bureau, in its never-ending quest to wheedle increasingly detailed information out of the American populace, recently developed a new category describing housing tenure according to the year the structure was built, grouped by decade for both occupied and vacant units (see Table 3.3). But we must be careful to pinpoint exactly what kind of information this gives us. The figures indicate only how these housing units were being utilized (either vacant or occupied, and within the latter category, owner-occupied or renter-occupied) at the time of the Census in 2000. These same homes may have been

Table 3.2		
State Land in the Town of Webb		
Category	Percent of Total	Square Miles
Wilderness	37.91	177
Wild Forest	25.41	118
Primitive	.02	.09
Intensive	.25	1
Pending	.48	2
Source: Adirondack Park Agency		

used for other purposes in the past and been converted in the ensuing years. For example: we know that 465 new housing units were constructed in the Town of Webb in the 1980s. According to the Census count, 160 of those structures (or 34 percent) were occupied by year-round residents (122 owners and 16 renters) in the year 2000. This means that the other 457 houses built in the 1980s (or the remaining 77 percent), were officially “vacant” as of 2000. Since seasonal homes (as opposed to abandoned homes, homes for sale and the like) tend to dominate the vacant housing classification, it is safe to assume that roughly 77 percent of the houses constructed during the 1980s are *now* being used as vacation homes. This doesn’t *necessarily* indicate that they were used for the same purpose in the 1980s, nor that they were built specifically for that purpose. As noted above, they may have been converted (and the same goes for the year-round houses). As we move farther back in time, this seems like more of a real possibility. The Census reports that 1,165 Webb houses were constructed before 1939, 23 percent of which are currently occupied year round. The other 77 percent are currently vacant and probably seasonal, but the figures do not reveal whether they were built as seasonal houses to begin with, or whether they’ve been used in that capacity in previous years. Conversion cannot be accounted for by these numbers.

But what these numbers do reveal is that the overwhelming majority of the houses constructed during each decade are *now* classified as vacant, and are likely being used as seasonal dwellings. They also reveal that Webb has witnessed a fairly brisk pace of residential development given its remote location, low population, and limited employment opportunities: the housing stock, which totaled 1,165 in 1939, increased by

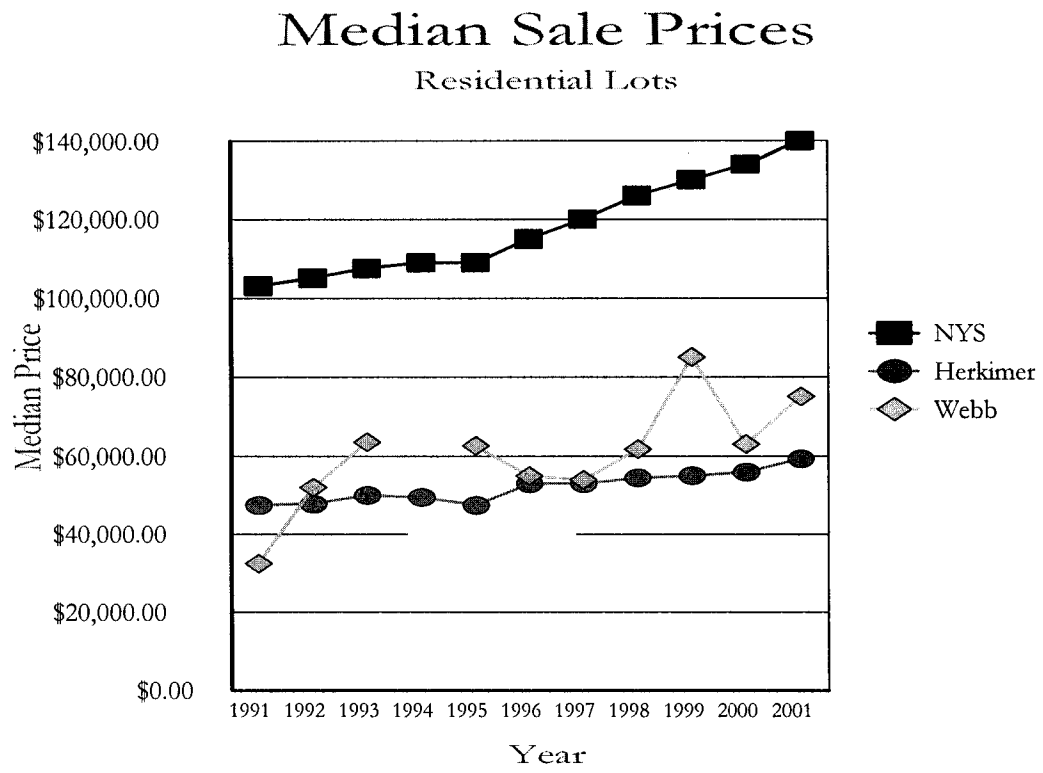


Figure 3.10

Table 3.3							
Year Structure Built: Permanent versus Vacant Homes according to use in the year 2000							
Yr Built	# Built	Permanent Housing				Vacant Housing	
		# Owned	# Rented	# Total	% of Built	# Vacant	% of Built
90 - 00	595	122	16	138	23%	457	77%
80 - 89	465	120	40	160	34%	305	66%
70 - 79	330	74	27	101	31%	229	69%
60 - 69	545	59	11	70	13%	475	87%
40 - 59	763	66	41	107	14%	656	86%
pre - 39	1165	204	67	271	23%	894	77%

Source: US Census Bureau, 2000 Decennial Census, SF 3

65 percent in the 1940s and 1950s, by 28 percent in the 1960s, by 13 percent in the 1970s, by 17 percent in the 1980s, and by 18 percent in the 1990s. Year-round population increases failed to keep pace with the rate of new-housing starts (indeed the Town of Webb *lost* 4 percent of its population in the 1980s) until the decade of the 1990s, when population growth and housing construction occurred at nearly the same

Table 3.4				
Population versus Housing Increases, Town of Webb				
Year	Total Housing Units	% Change	Population	% Change
2000	3863	18% increase	1912	17% increase
1989	3268	17% increase	1637	4% decrease
1979	2803	13% increase	1701	5% increase
1969	2473	28% increase	1616	
1959	1928	65 % increase	n/a	
1939	1165		n/a	

Source: US Census Bureau, 2000 Decennial Census, STF 3

rate (17 percent and 18 percent, respectively). This last figure is quite startling, and could indicate any one of several trends. These numbers alone do not, of course, reveal whether the demographic upsurge of the 1990s was due to natural growth or immigration. Table 3.5, which breaks down population change in the 1990s by cohort, suggests a few possibilities. Despite the clear population jump, the number of children under the age of 5 decreased during this period by a full 25 percent, suggesting that Webb families during the latter half of the decade were either not having children, or having children and then leaving, and that families with very young children were not moving in. All other age categories increased, the cohort of 55-59 year-olds by a full 70 percent, suggesting the possibility of an influx of early retirees. Although it is too early to be certain – and indeed the population turnaround of the 1990s provides ample evidence that trends can reverse themselves quite rapidly – such demographic statistics, when combined with seasonal-home development figures and the Town’s own concerns about the rising cost of housing given the limitations of the local wage market (see below), suggest that the FDA findings described in Chapter Two – which attribute population increase in NRCs to the influx of aging exurbanite baby boomers – may be manifesting in the town of Webb.

By the year 2000, 2,818 of the town’s 3,863 housing units (a full 74 percent) were classified by the U.S. Census under the “seasonal, recreational, or occasional use” category. Of the year-round housing stock, owner-occupants inhabited 76 percent and renters inhabited 24 percent. Out of the total housing stock, 22 percent were inhabited by owner-occupants and 5 percent were inhabited by renters (see Table 3.6). Median

Median Income of Buyer Places

1990

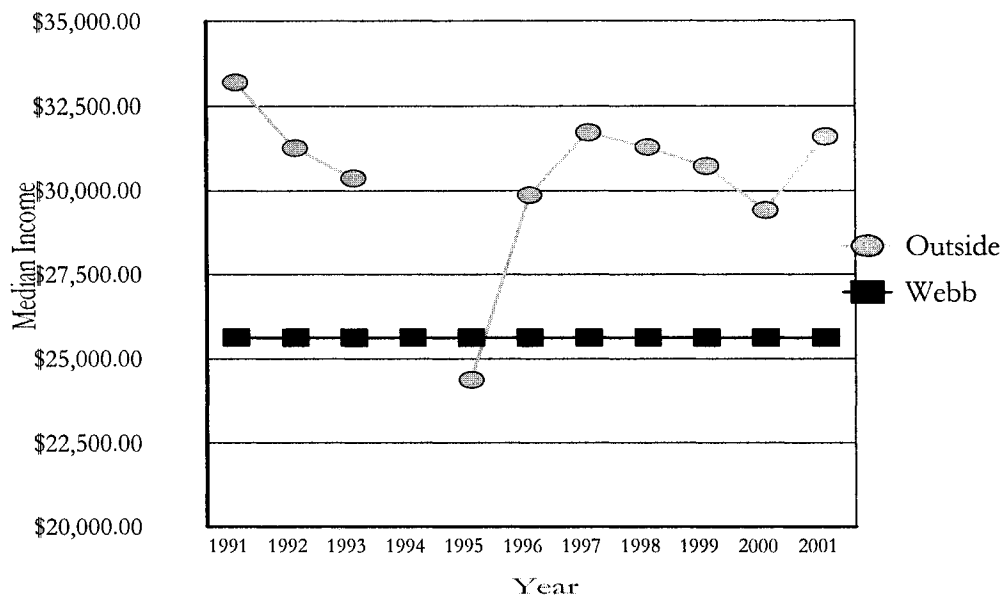


Figure 3.11

gross rent for the Town of Webb was \$345 in 1990 and \$452 in 2000. The only clue to the numbers and prices of seasonal rental housing comes from real estate advertisements. A quick glance through the online postings as of this writing (December 2002) revealed over 150 seasonal rentals listed by three major realtors, all located in Webb, Inlet and Raquette Lake. Some were booked until Labor Day 2003. Since not all rental properties list on the internet (and indeed many are advertised by word-of-mouth or rented again and again by the same tourists and therefore not publicly advertised at all), it is safe to assume that the actual number of seasonal rentals is far higher. Prices for such rentals range from \$675 to \$9,700 per week.

The real estate market in the Town of Webb during the 1990s underwent some interesting changes, particularly compared to trends in Herkimer County and New York State at large. While the median sale prices of residential properties in both the County

Age	1990	2000	# Change	% Change
Under 5 years	97	73	-24	-25
5-24	370	457	+87	+24
25-44	487	490	+3	+1
45-54	213	283	+70	+33
55-59	93	156	+63	+70
60-64	114	115	+1	+1
65-74	132	192	+60	+45
75-84	97	108	+11	+11
85+	34	38	+4	+12

and the State witnessed slow, steady increases, the Town saw quick, steep changes during

the decade of the 1990s, as depicted in Figure 3.10³. As evident in this graph, the median sales price of residential properties in the State at large have increased by around \$5,000 per year since 1991. Herkimer County prices have also increased gradually but at a slightly slower rate. Webb, in the meantime, is all over the board. Median residential sales prices nearly doubled between 1991 and 1992 alone, jumping from \$32,500 to \$52,000. The period between 1998 and 1999 also witnessed a sudden jump, from \$61,750 to \$85,000, and an almost equal decline the following year. Overall, median sale price increased by 131 percent in Webb, by 34 percent in New York State, and by 25 percent in Herkimer County between 1991 and 2001. However – and this is an important point – in absolute terms, the actual prices of even luxury homes on pristine lakefronts remained

Housing Types in Webb, 2000		% of Total	% of Occupied	% of Vacant
Total # of Houses	3863	100%		
Total Occupied	845	22%		
Owner-Occupied	643	17%	76%	
Renter-Occupied	202	5%	24%	
Total Vacant	2988	78%		
Seasonal, Recreational or Occasional	2818	74%		94%
Other	170	4%		6%

Source: US Census Bureau, 2000 Decennial Census STF 3

relatively low compared to other parts of New York State containing luxury housing

3

Data from all of 1994 and part of 1993 are not available from the Town of Webb zoning office.

(such as the Hamptons) during this period. While cataloging residential sales figures for this decade, I came across only one listing for over \$1 million. Most were priced far lower than this. While still far out of reach for the typical working class Adirondack resident, real estate prices across the Park constitute something of a steal for those accustomed to dealing with luxury housing in other areas, a discrepancy I will come back to in Chapter Five.

But what about the characteristics of those purchasing these homes? An analysis of tax-billing addresses on real property transfer reports divulges the location of buyers' permanent residences. Since the US Decennial Census provides socioeconomic data for localities across the United States, we may use this information to determine the median household incomes of the places where outside buyers originate. Importantly, this does not give us the actual household income of the buyers themselves: a buyer who comes from Utica, New York hails from a locality whose overall median income was \$19,950 in the year 1990. The buyer's actual median income may be higher or lower than that figure. While we can compare neighborhoods, we cannot compare individuals. For most years, most outside buyers (defined as those whose tax billing addresses are not listed as Webb) came from places with higher median incomes than that of the Town of Webb in 1990 (see Figure 3.11).

As for the physical locality of buyers who purchased property in the Town of Webb over the past ten years, the results reflect those of Parkwide private property ownership. The percentage of buyers actually residing in the Town after the sale (either because they moved there, or they already lived there and were merely changing houses),

ranged from 12 percent to 31 percent during this time. Outside buyers hailed overwhelmingly from places lying within a day's drive of Webb, most from other parts of New York State, New Jersey, Connecticut, Maryland, Pennsylvania, and Florida, with a smattering of other (mainly eastern) states thrown in. Very few buyers listed permanent addresses outside the United States.

What may we deduce from these statistics? Unfortunately, unlike with urban gentrification, no single indicator – such as a sudden upward swing in median income or contract rents, as noted above – provides a smoking gun as definitive evidence for gentrification. We may conclude only the following from the above figures:

1. That despite its large size, only about 7 percent of the town of Webb is available for residential development (and only 2 square miles for unrestricted development) due to environmental regulation by the State of New York;
2. That a majority of housing units in the Town of Webb are occupied seasonally by visitors;
3. That the majority of people who purchase property in Webb come from outside the Town and the Adirondack Park itself, usually from other parts of New York State, New England, and the mid-Atlantic;
4. That those outside buyers generally make their permanent homes in localities with higher median incomes than Webb;
5. That Webb's population level has remained fairly level for most postwar decades while its total number of housing units has increased; indeed the decade of the 1980s saw a 17 percent increase in the housing stock and a 4 percent decrease in the year-round population;
6. That the demographic trend described in #6 has reversed itself in the last decade with a dramatic upswing in population, and that the very youngest age cohort in the Town of Webb has not reproduced itself demographically through either in-migration or natural rates of increase,

while the cohort nearing retirement is on the upswing;

7. That the residential real estate market in Webb has been remarkably erratic relative to that of Herkimer County and New York State, experiencing rapid jumps and declines in median price while the same figure on larger scales has increased steadily with inflation;
8. That the difference in rents between year-round and seasonal units is extremely steep, making seasonal rental properties a far more lucrative investment for landlords than permanent ones;
9. That real estate *sales* prices remain relatively low compared to many other parts of the United States, while seasonal *rental* prices rival and sometimes even exceed those in gentrified parts of New York City and other expensive residential areas, providing potential landlords with a relatively higher rate of return than luxury housing that in other areas might require greater initial outlays of fixed capital.

These conclusions, in and of themselves, do not provide definitive evidence for rural gentrification. I would argue instead that these circumstances provide the conditions within which we might *expect* rural gentrification to occur: a finite and dwindling amount of developable land, an established seasonal housing market with the requisite natural amenities and tourist infrastructures, low actual real estate prices and high potential rent returns, median sales prices which behave differently from other established benchmarks, and a recent demographic trend suggesting an inability on the part of young families to gain a foothold in the housing and/or labor markets. But in order to answer the question “*Is this gentrification?*” we must make some judgements about the most salient factors of gentrification in the city. As noted in Chapter One, urban gentrification constitutes a constellation of attributes on multiple scales rather than one defining characteristic. I would nonetheless argue that the true measure of gentrification in any geographical locality is its consequences for local working class occupants: in a word, displacement. In

the Town of Webb, as in most parts of the Adirondacks, displacement is not so much a matter of residents being evicted from the housing they currently occupy as it is a problem of locating alternative housing in that event – or, in the case of newcomers, the problem of finding year-round rental housing to begin with. In short, Adirondack gentrification entails a housing *shortage* in some parts of the Park. The evidence for such a condition is abundant in the Fulton Chain.

The Workers: Negotiating Gentrification

In August of 2002, the Town of Webb released its Comprehensive Master Plan, a study of the long-term needs of the Town along with some recommendations toward meeting those goals. As noted above, housing was one of the primary concerns of this committee, and its conclusions are worth quoting at length:

Housing, particularly for the local workforce, is a critical issue in the Town of Webb....New housing construction and remodeling remains strong, yet this relates primarily to the construction of recreation and seasonal homes at relatively high prices. Local realtors report that in Webb recent average values for waterfront homes are \$200,000 or greater, while “off water” homes recently averaged around \$85,000. Compare these values to those reported as average sales prices by the Herkimer County Chamber of Commerce for other communities, ranging from a low of \$46,375 in Herkimer to a high of \$82,610 in Frankfort. Similarly, a recent search of housing listings from a four-town area, including Forestport, Remsen and the Booneville area just west of Webb, showed only 6 listings for homes below \$80,000...Homes are being built, yet consistently, year round residents, employees and employers cite a lack of available moderate or affordable homes as a growing problem in Webb...Any genuinely affordable housing is rare and briefly on the market. Even the Town’s one mobile home park has seen increased occupancy by winter recreation enthusiasts. Also, property that appears affordable is often only suitable for warm weather occupancy, given the predominance of seasonal

residences in many neighborhoods of Webb...There is very little, if any, affordable housing for the current local work force, and there is expected to be an increasing need for such housing as the demand for year-round local work force grows (Master Plan Advisory Committee, Town of Webb 2002:46).

As noted in the section above, the real estate prices cited here are not particularly astonishing compared to prices in many neighborhoods in New York State and across America. They are high enough, however, to keep them far beyond the reach of the Adirondack working class, which survives largely on seasonal, low-wage employment in the service sector. Many workers therefore rely upon year-round rental housing, which has been downright scarce and growing scarcer since I first arrived in the region in late 1999. Since no official agency keeps track of such conditions, the evidence for this scarcity is largely ethnographic.

For example, an informant of mine in Raquette Lake (whose housing conditions are parallel to those in Webb) lost his job repairing heating systems for a local contractor in the summer of 2002. The small cabin he occupied during his tenure was owned by the contractor and came with the job; indeed the business owner maintains several such cabins specifically to house his own employees, conscious that he is unlikely to attract workers given the lack of year-round rentals in Raquette: a typical “company town” setup in which the employer is both boss and landlord. Tom, a highly skilled worker, was easily able to locate new employment with another contractor in addition to picking up a few side jobs on his own. The housing situation was far more grim. In the end, he was compelled to move in with another young man from Raquette, a friend of his and (probably not coincidentally) the son of his new boss. His old cabin now sits empty,

waiting to be filled by his replacement. Another employee of the same company, who occupies a cabin almost identical to Tom's as part of *his* wage relation, described the situation thusly: "It's a goddamned feudal system. Massa' owns the land; massa' don't sell the land; you wanna live here, you gotta work for the massa'." This was not said in bitterness – he maintains an amiable relationship with his boss and considers him a friend – but a simple statement of fact.

This is a typical strategy for finding housing in the Fulton Chain. Kin networks, real and fictitious, are frequently exploited in the search for year-round, affordable housing. Some years back, another informant – a retired salesman in his eighties who now pilots boats across Raquette Lake for various employers – lost his own house due to a family inheritance dispute. There were no available rentals in Raquette and with no driver's license, he was unable to move even to Inlet or Old Forge, had a place become available, and still get to work in Raquette. A friend of his, seeing his predicament, offered to share his own house with him, and they have lived there together since.

Kinship ties are also often used as an avenue to home ownership. Joe, a Raquette Lake local, recently purchased a piece of property on Antlers at a bargain price from his parents, who are also his employers. Around the same time, a tourist acquired a nearby lakefront lot and determined to demolish the modest camp which sat on the property to make room for a new log home. Joe, being a skilled laborer like many local men in Raquette Lake, offered to take the cabin off the tourist's hands instead. This was accomplished, and the cabin was skidded down Antlers Road to its new home on Joe's property, where he has since made numerous repairs and modifications in the hopes of

turning it into a permanent residence.

Still others manage by adopting a mobile housing strategy. Yet another informant, Jane, had long occupied a one-bedroom cabin on something of a family compound on Poplar Point. Most of the buildings on the compound that were not occupied by the family itself were rented out seasonally to summer tourists, but Jane knew the family well and managed to secure her apartment for a reasonable rate. The cabin, however, was not winterized, and Jane was therefore compelled to move out every October and spend the winter and spring months elsewhere. When I first moved to Inlet, Jane was spending those months renting a room in the double-wide trailer of another friend. When the trailer sold and her friend moved out, she was compelled to seek winter housing in Inlet – also secured through a friend of her Raquette Lake boss. Jane hails originally from Syracuse, but her family owns a cabin on Antlers Point which now belongs to her brother. Her family had been visiting Raquette since she was a small child, and her long-time connections with friends in the hamlet gave her advantages in the precarious housing market which a stranger – particularly one with no ties to local capitalists – could probably not exploit.

In truth, it is working-class newcomers to the Fulton Chain who are at the most serious disadvantage in the local housing market. In the winter of 2002, Shelly, a woman who had previously worked at Great Camp Sagamore, decided to move back to Raquette from her home in Oregon. If she had never been to Raquette before, it is unlikely she would have managed to find a place at all. As it was, she was compelled to rent a few rooms in the house of a friend in Blue Mountain Lake who was recently divorced and

subsequently had extra space in his house. She now works in Raquette and makes the ten-mile commute nearly every day.

Renters on the Fulton Chain have grown accustomed to the irony of a perennial housing shortage in a region where many homes sit empty most of the year. Stories of cyclical moves, temporary quarters, and housing shares abound in this desolate part of the world. Kin take care of kin, bosses strike deals with laborers, and the working class secures year-round quarters through a jerry-rig combination of company housing, caretaking, roommate deals, and reliance on family. Land tenure matters, and those who came into Fulton Chain property before real estate prices grew beyond their reach consider themselves fortunate. It is tempting, under such conditions, to romanticize small-town life as a throwback to a kinder, gentler, mythical rural capitalism in which America's purportedly independent nature was tempered by a measure of collective solidarity. Rural gentrification, under such circumstances, might be considered a matter of "us versus them," of friendly, beleaguered insiders against the cruel, monied outside world. While a nostalgic vision to contemplate, it is at best an obfuscating half-truth. I explore this proposition in the next chapter in an attempt to complicate our perception of who suffers and who benefits from Adirondack gentrification.

CHAPTER FOUR CROSSING BORDERS

“Beyond the Wild Wood comes the Wide World,” said the Rat. “And that’s something that doesn’t matter, either to you or to me. I’ve never been there, and I’m never going, nor you either, if you’ve got any sense at all. Don’t ever refer to it again, please.”

Kenneth Grahame
The Wind in the Willows

~

“The wide world is all about you: you can fence yourselves in, but you cannot for ever fence it out.”

J.R.R. Tolkien
The Fellowship of the Ring

Us, Them, and *Them*: Class versus Geography

An old adage holds that there are two Meccas of social life in the Adirondack mountains: the churches and the bars. Never having been much of a churchgoer, I decided to give the other prospect a try after a neighbor of mine informed me that the Raquette Lake Hotel and Tap Room was “hands-down the best place to take in a little local Adirondack culture.” I was not disappointed. The bar indeed turned out to be something of a crossroads of local life, but it also afforded a prime opportunity to observe the dynamic between the locals and the tourists, and thus to come to grips with what makes for a genuine local to begin with. Several months later, the proprietors offered me a bartending job, which I gratefully accepted. Many of the observations recounted in this chapter spring from my experiences here – the conversations I engaged, the labor I performed, the stories I heard. My apologies to the churchgoers, whose side

of the story I'll leave to my more pious anthropological successors.

I learned an instructive lesson in localism on a balmy Friday evening in the summer of 2001, just a few months after I'd begun working at the Tap Room. I had stopped in for a late lunch and was chatting with the regulars when I overheard a conversation between the bartender and some summer tourists, who were questioning him closely about the wood-framed charcoal portraits which adorn the Tap Room walls. The pictures, many darkened and creased from presiding over a thousand smoke-filled evenings, were drawn by a talented native-born artist and span thirty years of Raquette Lake history. They depict the faces of Raquette "locals," some current, some long-dead, some so young when the portraits were taken that the images scarcely resemble the aged countenances of their living subjects. As the years have passed, the skills of the artist have grown, and the newer impressions capture the indelible personalities of Raquette's long-time inhabitants with an uncanny empathy. The newcomers glanced around the bar, trying to match the portraits with the faces of patrons. "So who's a local here?" one asked. Joe surveyed the assembly briefly, then gestured in my direction. "From Wednesday here," he replied, "to the end of the bar." He gave me a wink and a nod as he said this, well aware that no one had ever graced me with the prestigious designation of "local" before, and that the statement was at best a highly relative half-truth. I was certainly no local in Raquette Lake, and yet I was more local than the strangers asking the question.

It was a generous comment, but one of ambiguous consequence. Localism is a perennial topic of important discussion in the Adirondacks (see Taylor 2004 for a recent

insider taxonomy), and the conversation I overheard has been played out many times between tourists and residents as well as between the various brands of “locals” themselves. The term confers an odd sort of authenticity among those who share it, for the label defines the nebulous but important boundary which designates belonging in a small town. The constellation of characteristics which differentiates insiders from outsiders is at least as complex as the privileges and responsibilities which result from the classification. The mechanics of such border construction are fairly similar, I suspect, to those governing insular human enclaves around the world, drawing on unwritten rules of kinship, geography, common experience, and length of association. In the hamlets of the Adirondacks, geography has the most immediate bearing upon the question of “who is a local.” Locals, on the face of it, are those who live and work in the Park all year round, and nonlocals are people who don’t. Yet there is a deeper underlying reality to the region’s social geography – one that is difficult to discern by simple drive-by ethnography – which belies this facile dichotomy.

And yet such identification strategies have been all too frequently appropriated by scholars, journalists, and other commentators who contend that the “unheard voice” of the disenfranchised Adirondack local has been drowned out by the cacophony of propaganda disseminated by the purportedly *external* enemies of the natives, variously conceived as tourists, developers, environmentalists, and the State. The following provide some typical examples from scholarly accounts of Adirondack life:

The land is being developed and resold by and to people who are not residents at all. Vacation- and retirement-home development brings only

seasonal and temporary people. This development does not bring children for the community's schools, volunteers for its fire departments, or ministers for its rural churches. It is a "vacationland" phenomenon...(Fitchen 1991:97).

This is the period of tourist colonialism...Many of the original local populations, dependent on subsistence and natural resources, dwindle, leaving mainly the poor, the elderly, retirees and second-home owners, and those who are able to make a living from what natural resources are still available. Many of these convert to providing low-wage seasonal labor for tourism. Outsiders migrate to the area as owners and developers of tourist facilities and services, taking advantage of the low-cost labor available (Henshaw Knott 1998:17).

While there is no single "Adirondack" identity, no such thing as the typical "Adirondacker," people throughout the Park share a culture that makes their lives distinct...they are profoundly aware that they enjoy a rural life that is threatened by a host of problems...most Adirondackers like their rural life and want it preserved (Terrie 1997:181-182).

There is nothing in the above statements that strikes me as untrue; indeed, anthropologists Janet Fitchen and Katherine Henshaw Knott as well as historian Philip Terrie are well aware of the competing affinities, agendas, and interests which divide the Blue Line population, and make this abundantly clear in their texts. Yet despite the efforts of scholars to address these disparities, the temptation to refer to the nebulous Adirondack "locals" seems irresistible. I feel the pull of it myself.

What significance does this place-based identity politics hold for gentrification and the production of nature in the Adirondack Park? To begin with, the most organized resistance to state environmental regulation has been mustered around the banner of localism, in a sort of scaled-down version of the Wise Use movement of the American west (see Terrie 1997:168-183). And as with Wise Use, localist Adirondack populism

obscures a host of associations and interests with far greater political significance than mere geographical proximity. The most important of these, and the least emphasized at both the popular and academic levels, is that of class. Like all capitalist landscapes, the Adirondacks are populated with both a working class which produces surplus value and a capitalist class which extracts that value, as well as various supporting institutions which help to organize the extraction process. Yet class divisions are obscured by geographical associations almost no matter how one slices Adirondack land politics. In analyzing the wilderness preservation process, it is tempting to conclude that outsider environmentalists in collusion with Albany and the downstate voting population have disenfranchised the locals through the imposition of burdensome ecological regulations. In analyzing the peculiar production of nature which has resulted in the gentrification of Adirondack hamlets, it is tempting to conclude that the investment strategies of downstate developers selling seasonal homes to interloping flatlanders has resulted in a dislocation of the natives; indeed, the media clips on the housing crisis cited in Chapter One invoke precisely this sort of terminology. But class divisions internal to the geography of the Park have vastly complicated environmental management as well as gentrification, dispersing both their punishments and their dividends quite unevenly among that purportedly homogeneous population of Adirondack locals.

The purpose of this chapter is not to argue that geography is insignificant to rural gentrification in the Adirondacks. On the contrary, the fact that localism has dominated the discourse surrounding the production of nature in this region indicates that place and space continue to matter to both those whose actions drive gentrification and those who

are uprooted in its wake. Rather, my intention is to both complicate and clarify some hitherto simplistic assumptions about who benefits and who suffers in the production of Adirondack nature. I would contend that such a clarification is required for the construction of a progressive environmental politics which, unlike either the mainstream environmental movement *or* its Wise Use contender, works toward a realistic environmental justice for the rural American working class.

Localism as Reality

The Blue Line is not a particularly conspicuous border. Most travelers entering the Adirondacks encounter a modest state sign displaying some iteration of “Welcome to the Adirondack Park” as they drive across its boundary, but there are no check points or registers of the kind often found at American national parks. From nearly every entry point, the most notable change is one of topography, as the roads climb upward, the forest grows denser, and human settlements thin out and eventually disappear altogether, reappearing in clusters as one navigates the hundred or so hamlets scattered across the Park, meager islands of human occupation awash in a vast sea of dark conifers. By all appearances, these outposts in the wilderness afford visible evidence of the endurance of Rockwellian small-town America, replete with white picket fences, flag-lined main streets, and even functioning one-room schoolhouses. The quaint familiarity of such spaces is undeniable, even to the occasional visitor. The locals wave in greeting as they pass each other in their pickups, everyone is on a first-name basis with the local postmaster, and if you drive off an icy road and into a ditch, you can invariably count on someone stopping

to pull you out.

If such examples ring with a hackneyed air of stereotypical rural American myth, it's because that is exactly what they are. But like most myths, which do not materialize from thin air fully formed, but grow pearl-like around some tiny original grain of truth, they are lodged in the continuing if dwindling reality of small-town life which most Americans have long abandoned in the migration to city and suburb. In the time I lived in Inlet, population 350, and worked in Raquette, population 128, I came to hold a new appreciation for the singular character of rural American life. In fact, I lived next door to a working one-room school house, which, with its bright white paint and shiny red roof, looked as though it had leaped straight out of a smarmy Hallmark card and planted itself on the Adirondack landscape. And for two years, I did wave in greeting to the Raquette boys on their way to breakfast at South Bay Tavern in the morning, to Joe driving the fuel truck on the long road home from Utica in the evening, to the construction crew digging up Route 28 in front of my house. I was pulled out of Adirondack ditches by the locals more times than I care to count, and I can still ring Mary, the Inlet postmaster, even from New York, and know she'll recognize me by my first name. Raquette life is so local that even the animals are conspicuous characters. Everyone knows the fox living under the white house next to the Tap Room, the mother-bear and her three cubs scavenging off the garbage dump at the Girls and Boys Camps, and the cow-moose who haunts the hills around Eighth Lake. Geographical spaces, too, hold exclusively local meanings, often based on long-defunct historical references and appearing to the outsider's eye as nothing more than a footpath, a hilltop, or a bend in the road: names

like Antlers, Hunter's Rest, and Buck Hollow ring familiar only to those in the know.

Rural isolation breeds an inexorable and totalizing familiarity. If there are locals you don't know, you've undoubtedly heard of them – and they of you.

This can make for an undeniably amiable existence. The positive qualities of rurality have been extolled to the point of romantic mythmaking in both scholarly accounts and in the popular national imagination. "For centuries," notes historian Catherine McNicol Stock, "Americans have thought of rural people...as the moral backbone of the nation" (McNicol Stock 1996:2). Sociological studies suggest that rural Americans think the same about themselves. A 1992 survey conducted by the Roper Organization, for instance, found that rural respondents "scored their communities high in terms of personal values, community spirit, quality of life, and friendliness" (Danbom 1995:268-269). The characteristics most often evoked as constituting the quintessence of rural life almost invariably hinge upon the attribute of community solidarity. Rural folks are people who stick together through thick and thin, who rely upon each other in lean years and selflessly share the bounty of good times. They are self-reliant, rugged and individualistic, reluctant to ask for the support of others yet generous in offering their own to neighbors in need. Little house on the prairie, down home on the farm, over the river and through the woods; *rural people take care of their own*. And that, we are led to believe, constitutes the basis of localism.

According to many of the tourists who perennially flock to the Adirondacks during the summer and winter seasons, it is precisely these mythical affinities which not only bring them to the mountains, but make them long to stay. Many aspiring Raquette

Lakers I spoke with – most often “summer people” who owned one of the ubiquitous Raquette camps but desired to eventually retire and live out their days there – yearned to relocate because their brief sojourns gave them the impression that the landscape constitutes a sanctuary of ultimate freedom and ultimate shelter, someplace where, in the words of one tourist I spoke with, “you can run naked through the streets and nobody cares,” but where one simultaneously constitutes an important member of a tight-knit, protective community. What transplants invariably find, however, is that the freedom afforded by such outposts in the wilderness is short-lived once one becomes a bona-fide member of the community – once, in other words, everyone knows you’re there to stay. As a mere acquaintance, Raquette strikes one as quaint, old-fashioned, down-to-earth, familial, no-bullshit, authentic, legitimate, genuine, *real*. The family metaphor emerged over and over again, not only from the tourists, but among the locals as well: “we treat each other like family.”

It’s not the metaphor itself that I’d like to dispute; indeed, the inhabitants of Raquette Lake, Inlet, Indian Lake, Long Lake, and to a lesser extent Old Forge, certainly live as though the entire community were one big family. And though I am certain that such invocations were offered in the spirit of putting the best possible face forward (particularly to outsiders) while simultaneously representing an incontestable truism, they ring painfully ironic for those whose families resemble the Mansons far more than the Cleavers. Despite the *ad nauseam* admonitions of sycophantic American politicians bemoaning the disintegration of the sacred (and perhaps mythical) American “family,” far from constituting safe havens free from exploitation and suffering such institutions

can generate struggles and animosities more painfully bitter than those between nations, races, genders, or ethnicities. *Family* is an extremely ambiguous appellation, affording at alternate times and under alternate circumstances impunity or culpability, amity or violence, emancipation or servitude, intimacy or alienation, devotion or apathy, clemency or castigation. Family can save your soul or sell it cheap; if no one loves you like family, then no one hates you like family, either. Blood ties can bind individuals together through war, separation, hunger, poverty, torture, bereavement and every other conceivable manner of loss, grief, anguish and misery; while blood feuds can brutally lacerate those self-same affinities, *in the same lifetime, between the same people*.

These are precisely the contradictions which to my mind make true rural life – life lived out in the kind of relentless, bone-hard solitude rarely experienced in suburbs or (to a lesser extent) cities – a *local* phenomenon. Numbers matter less and characters matter more in places like Raquette, where the population can be counted in the dozens during mud season, when there is little relief from the same infuriatingly familiar faces which (ironically) provide an undeniable solace in the summer months when the town is so overrun with strangers that you can't even find a seat at the local coffee shop, when they – when we – are left with no one to talk to, no one to look at, and no one to think about, at least in the immediate sense, but ourselves. It's certainly possible at times like this to contemplate world politics, global environmental disaster, or the nature of the cosmos – but such distant affairs somehow seem far less relevant than the fact that your neighbor is poaching deer off state property, and getting away with it. During these times, those of us who choose to maintain some sort of a social life – and there is a sizable minority

which simply buries itself in solitude, discreetly disappearing only to surface weeks or months later – we are all, to each other, suddenly the most fascinating, irresistible and repellent creatures on the planet. Small items loom large on the local rumor mill: who's sleeping with whose wife, who's making a penny off of which nefarious scheme, who's most likely to go crazy before the flatlanders return. And woe to those who have neither the time nor the money to escape for a few days. The solitude of mud season bears down on those unfortunate souls with relentless inevitability. Even during the summer and winter months – when the town is no longer our own – a subtle but potent undertow of local currency continues to suck us back down below the fleeting fascination of bright-eyed, engaging, *different* strangers. It's no wonder we bite, snap, and keep tabs on each other. It's the quintessential rural pastime.

“*So we all decide to head down the line....*” Don Crane is in rare form as I relieve Paula for the evening shift, holding forth amidst the happy hour crowd. “And we figured we'd hit all the bars on the right side of the road on the way down, and all the ones on the left on the way up.” His listeners, who have heard a thousand and one Crane stories, grin into their highballs with bemused anticipation. “And by the time we got halfway back we couldn't figure out why we kept winding up in all the same places, until we finally realized that we'd turned around and all the bars we wanted were on the other son-of-a-bitchin' side of the road.” If the relentless scrutiny of small-town life constitutes an important aspect of rural familiarity, it's partly because the relative freedom of the wilderness affords myriad opportunities for spectacle. Stories of daring, danger and indiscretion circle the local rumor mill until they achieve the status of legend, but the experiences

beneath them comprise an indelible aspect of life in the woods. Dick Brown blowing the windows out of Camp KilKare at the annual pig roast with a case of dynamite, Chip Davenport dropping his drawers while dancing on the Tap Room bar one infamous Easter Sunday, Don Crane water-skiing on Old Forge Pond in the middle of January, Shorty Lowe driving around with a dead deer carcass, propping it up on the barstool next to him and buying it a drink at every local tavern, these are the tales which lend credence to the old adage that “truth is stranger than fiction,” and which lead many tourists to conclude that the Adirondacks afford a kind of wanton freedom precluded by the monotony and alienation of (sub)urban life. Certainly not every Adirondack denizen displays this kind of inventive recklessness. Many are sober, upstanding citizens who shun the bars, raise their families, and generally live a quiet existence. Yet many citizens now considered pillars of the community are known to have lived hard in their younger days, and public improprieties fade slowly in local memory.

While the scrutiny of rural life can give one the uncomfortable sense that one is living inside a Nathaniel Hawthorne novel, the often astounding generosity of one’s neighbors bears testament to the reciprocal caregiving engendered by the often dangerously extreme solitude of life on the margins, and this is where the stereotypes become real. Sometime during my second year in Inlet, the house of a family of six living just up the road from me burned to the ground, taking everything they owned with it. The subsequent benefit banquet thrown by the Inlet Fire Department garnered so many donations of food, clothing, furniture, and other necessities that the family had to re-donate a good deal of it to charity. Such events are not atypical. A perennial column in

the *Adirondack Express* entitled “card of thanks” bears witness to the unfailing (and often heroic) benevolence of local volunteer fire departments and emergency medical technicians, frequently called upon not only to truck ailing locals ninety barren miles to the nearest hospital, but to extricate wayward hikers, injured snowmobilers, and unfortunate victims of the slippery winter roads from precarious and treacherous conditions. Indeed, the kind of reverence for emergency personnel which emerged in New York in the wake of the World Trade Center disaster has long been a staple of the Adirondack ethos. I’ve seen such public expressions of heartfelt gratitude come not only from the locals, who frequently know their rescuers by name, but from tourists hailing from around the globe who found themselves unexpectedly delivered from dire circumstances by merciful strangers who take such actions as part and parcel of life in an isolated geography whose economic lifeblood depends upon the accommodation of blundering outsiders.

Indeed, it is not only the internal dynamic of small-town life which lends strength to local solidarity, but the cohesive identity formed in opposition to various brands of “interlopers” who perennially inflict their presence upon the otherwise isolated hills. A New York Times human-interest story once called Adirondack tourists “summer’s plague of angels,” a phrase which hits close to home for those who both anticipate and dread the inevitable annual scourge. The reappearance of the tourists signals the commencement of a badly-needed influx of dollars after the long dry mud season, and its signs are as familiar as the rite of sending the kids back to school in September. Boarded-up and battened-down businesses fling their doors wide, sweep out the dust and light

their welcome signs; darkened camps are aired out and inspected for winter damage; the towns spruce up their streets and the classifieds overflow with cabins for rent and services for sale. The strange new faces which begin to make an appearance in the local establishments provide welcome relief from the monotony of mud season familiarity, while those who have been making the summer sojourn to the woods for decades are often welcomed back as long-missed friends. Waitresses and bartenders who managed to keep working during the off-season see their tips and their hours double, triple, and eventually quadruple as the season swings into high gear. Yet the arrival of the flatlanders brings innumerable irritations along with its life-sustaining injection of capital. The transition sends entire towns headlong into the exclusive business of serving up hot food, cold drinks, clean rooms, woodsy kick-knacks and local folklore to demanding, impatient, and often downright rude consumers of Adirondack nature; the ugly American is not a species spotted exclusively abroad. In Raquette Lake, which houses a century-old summer camp for the pampered children of the exceedingly wealthy, some locals dread the inevitable arrival of “parents’ weekend,” when the town is overrun with Jaguars, Mercedes, BMWs and their ostentatious owners, who lay out \$10,000 per head to force-feed their children an unadulterated dose of Adirondack rusticity but seem invariably reluctant to swallow it themselves as temporary guests of the town.

If the tourists are generally regarded with resigned ambivalence, there are two other types of “outsiders” who are viewed by a considerable number of local residents with unequivocal scorn: environmentalists and the State of New York, ostensibly separate institutions which nonetheless share ambiguous and overlapping borders from a

certain subset of the local perspective. Although tensions between local residents and the State stretch well back into Adirondack history, revolving particularly around conflicts over animal poaching and timber theft on the Forest Preserve (see Jacoby 2001), animosities reached a crescendo in 1972 with the creation of the Adirondack Park Agency and the imposition of environmental regulations on private property in the Park. Though the conflict never reached the often-violent proportions witnessed between locals and the National Forest Service in the wilderness preserves of the American west, tensions occasionally reached the boiling point in such confrontations as the citizens' blockade of the Northway in 1990, the illegal reconstruction of a fire tower torn down by the State in 1989, and the burning of two barns owned by an APA member in 1991. Ten years later, after the furor has largely subsided, resentments continue to linger. One can still occasionally hear a local advising any unfortunate soul who has inadvertently intimated an affinity for the APA inside the Tap Room: "Don't trip over the Blue Line on your way out."

While the designation "environmentalist" tends to elicit general derision on the part of some locals, many reserve a particular hatred for those interloping "bug lovers" who work exclusively in the Park, including the Residents' Committee to Protect the Adirondacks, the Adirondack Mountain Club, and the widely reviled Adirondack Council. Such groups, which are ironically often in conflict with the Adirondack Park Agency itself (the APA is frequently criticized by environmental watchdogs for lax oversight due to lack of funds and understaffing, an accusation which many find downright laughable), the State of New York is generally understood to be comfortably

in bed with the environmental lobby, at least when it comes to the Adirondacks. Responses to environmental land management from year-round Park residents are undeniably varied, from property-rights groups who disseminate scathing literature excoriating the State for violating the sacred American institution of private property, to residents who accept State management as a burdensome but inevitable part of life in the woods, to recreational business owners who know full well that the precious and protected Adirondack forest is the only thing that guarantees them full coffers at the end of the fiscal year. It would be absurd to claim that “all” locals despise environmentalists, or the State for that matter (for a decent overview of the complexity of attitudes in this regard, see Henshaw Knott 1998). But I find that constituency of Adirondack residents which evinces bitter derision for the environmental set particularly fascinating, since many of the ones I know are ardent wilderness-lovers in their own right – particularly those who hunt, fish, trap or otherwise spend prodigious amounts of time soaking up the Adirondack solitude their purported enemies would claim to “protect.” Indeed, some of them are (ironically) the most passionate environmentalists I’ve ever encountered, though they eschew the label. Nonetheless, however one perceives the experience of living inside the Adirondack Park, the inexorable presence of the Blue Line border, with all of its legislative and discursive significance, makes geography the basis for a far more cohesive and visceral identity than affinities related to class.

The Invisibility of Class

In the above paragraphs, I have purposefully attempted to refrain from invoking

any vision of localism which alludes to notions of class. This is not easy to do, for very often what we frequently take to be the cultural markers of class coincide directly with the cultural markers of rurality itself. On the face of it, driving around in pickup trucks, wearing workboots and flannel shirts, going hunting in the fall, despising environmentalists and the state, and spending one's days working at hard physical labor all appear to signify the hallmarks of rural blue collar life.

Yet class divisions are difficult to discern in the Adirondacks due to the absence of precisely these visible markers of class difference. In the small-business environments typical of the Adirondack social geography, owners frequently work alongside their workers, under the same physical conditions, doing the same type of labor, wearing the same kind of clothing, driving the same kind of vehicle. Bosses are neither absent nor alienated, at least in an immediate psychological sense; the same owner who labors alongside the workers, whether repairing a broken-down dump truck or cleaning out a summer cabin, is the same owner who will have a beer with the workers when the day is done. Owners and workers are frequently members of the same family, and the proprietor of one business might function simultaneously as a laborer in another. In the year in which I worked at the Tap Room, my boss could invariably be found at the bar at seven o'clock every morning, sweeping the floor, wiping the ashtrays, warming the coffee and getting ready for the day's business. When things got busy in the high summer months, she would frequently act as bar back in the kitchen and waitress on the floor, and when there was no bartender available, she could be found pouring the drinks. At some point during the day, her husband and business partner would arrive to make the

soups, take inventory, and stock beer, taking time out of his other job working as a carpenter. And on the cultural level, they are as blue-collar as it gets. They tool around in four-wheel-drives and chop their own firewood; both of them know how to fix a broken toilet without calling a plumber. In fact most of the Adirondack businesses with which I am familiar, from construction companies to hotels, function in much the same way. The differences between the workers and the owners are not immediately discernable to the casual observer.

Beyond simple cultural markers, the class-local conflation obtains partly because local resistance to State land management is frequently tinged with an air of blue-collar authenticity, as Philip Terrie describes below:

The primary local version of the Adirondack narrative acknowledged that the Park was a place of beauty and natural splendor but insisted that local governments elected by local people were perfectly capable of protecting the Park. This narrative frequently cast the story of the Park Agency and the Private Land Plan into a class-based contest between two groups. On one side were politically powerless blue-collar Adirondack families whose love of the land, based on experience and history, was deep and genuine. On the other were effete, wealthy, politically powerful conservationists from outside the region who were indifferent to the lives and well-being of the year-round residents and aimed only to 'use the Adirondacks for their greedy enrichment and elitist pleasure' (Terrie 1997:172).

Adirondack capitalists themselves are markedly absent from this scenario: locals, according to the narrative described by Terrie, are workers, and by no means "effete, wealthy, politically powerful, greedy or elitist." He goes on to describe how this apparently "working class" resistance was in fact appropriated by capitalistic interests (primarily land developers) in a scenario strikingly resonant of the ongoing Wise Use

movement, in which “...a group of capitalists deeply invested in rural production responds by mobilizing and using a larger class of rural workers and property owners to lend numbers and the ideological legitimacy of populism to its defense of existing property rights and relations of production” (McCarthy 1998:127). In the Adirondacks, it was developers and speculators who sought to protect their ability to subdivide against the interference of State land management, while in the American west, it was logging, ranching and mining interests who sought to protect their current production practices from environmental regulation. But in both cases, what appeared to commence as a resistance movement with quite genuine blue collar origins – specifically hinging on the conflict between workers’ right to earn a living by virtue of unobstructed access to land and elitist desires to take land out of production for the benefit of their own consumption needs – got obscured when *other* capitalists stepped in to “defend” private property rights, ostensibly on behalf of the workers. Sorting out class interests in the midst of these competing agendas, in which the working and capitalist classes appear to be allied against the designs of the middle class, at least insofar as it is represented by environmentalists, is no simple undertaking.

I believe that much of this confusion springs from the ambiguous meanings which haunt the perennial debates on what constitutes “class” in the first place, particularly in the United States. I do not invoke the term “confusion” as if to suggest that someone has got a bad case of false consciousness which I can rectify with some refreshingly clear line of thought; on the contrary, I believe that the ambiguities are themselves instructive as a starting place for understanding why “local” has come to ring

synonymous with “working class” in the Adirondacks. From a generalized Marxist perspective, the working class comprise those members of a capitalistic society who produce social value under wage labor conditions, while capitalists are those who extract a surplus from the value workers produce. Capitalism, from this perspective, is a system of organized theft, while class is the structure of relations through which that theft is coordinated. From a related Marxist perspective, workers are those who have no access to the means of production, particularly land, while capitalists are the penultimate landowners. In this version, property (and access to it) appears to constitute the key difference between the classes. From a more popular cultural perspective, the working class are the people who do the work, while the capitalists are those who organize and oversee the work. Class in this sense appears to have something to do with decision-making power. From an even more basic perspective, workers are relatively poor, while capitalists are relatively rich. Class in this sense appears to have everything to do with levels of accrued wealth, plain and simple.

Capitalism is a strange animal in the Adirondacks. Far removed from the Microsoft-style multinational domination ritually denounced by the anti-globalization movement, it continually defies, or at least calls into question, the most widely accepted meanings of class relations. This is partly due to the precarious foothold capital claims in the habitually-depressed region. Because nature-related accumulation strategies constitute such risky business that a single bad season can put a marginal operation under – and because the lion’s share of Adirondack businesses *are* small-scale and marginal – individuals frequently find themselves alternately struggling up or sliding down the


slippery slope of class mobility. Indeed, it often seems as though Adirondack residents are compelled to relive again and again, in a single lifetime, the arduous American dream – working, scrimping and saving to accumulate enough capital to invest in a venture of their own – only to see it fail in the face of the overwhelming odds against the prospect of making nature profitable in the long run. Many Adirondack capitalists seem like workers because they *were* workers quite recently, because they continue to work for others while they manage their own businesses, because they have not reached a level of accumulation which allows them the luxury of removing themselves from day-to-day production, or for some combination of the three. They simply don't seem to fit quite neatly into any of the above-cited definitions of class. They appear to produce social value and extract a surplus from their own labor; they may or may not own property and the property they do own may or may not constitute a portion of their particular means of production; they may organize the work but they may perform it themselves as well; and they may have no more money in the bank than a neighbor who pulls down a hefty State salary as a diesel mechanic. There are, of course, exceptions. Even Raquette Lake boasts a few families who have managed to secure a relatively stable foothold among the ranks of the capitalist class. But in general, the marginal status of most Adirondack businesses helps to maintain the stubbornly persistent perception that “local” and “working class” constitute one and the same thing.

For the purposes of this text, my intention is not to lay to rest once and for all the myriad inadequacies of Marxian class analysis, nor am I in any measure equal to the task, if indeed anyone ever will be. What I would like to say is this: while I agree

wholeheartedly with Philip Terrie's contention that the scenario which pits upper-class "outsiders" against working-class "locals" is at best facile and at worst inaccurate, class still matters in the Adirondacks. On occasion, internecine class conflict manifests in a manner which belies the very outside-inside narrative which Terrie deconstructs, not only in terms of environmental politics, but in terms of gentrification itself. The following section contains two stories – one I witnessed firsthand, and one I discovered by accident, captured on paper in the real property files of the Town of Webb – that throw into sharp relief both the lingering importance of the category of "local" and the internal class-based conflicts which reveal deep divisions within that category.

Class, Private Property, and Gentrification

The tension between outsider and insider, as well as the internal contradictions of "local," played out tellingly in the struggle to determine the fate of the Inlet and Raquette Lake public schools in the late 1990s. As mentioned above, during my research stint I lived next to the one-room schoolhouse in the Town of Inlet, which at the time serviced some eighteen students through middle school, upon the termination of which the students were sent to the much larger Town of Webb district to complete high school. Raquette's school, while physically larger with several classrooms and a gymnasium (indicative of the degradation of the year-round population in Raquette Lake since the building's construction in 1977), was attended by only eight students during this period. In the course of my stay there, both schools saw their very existence threatened by the vicissitudes of economies of scale. The school districts of Inlet and Raquette Lake both



S.O.S.
SAVE OUR SCHOOL
Supporters of
Inlet Common School
UNITE!!!!
TUESDAY, FEB. 29TH
INLET FIREHALL
7:30 PM

Figure 4.1

recognized that it was far more expensive to hire year-round teachers (and maintain year-round facilities) to educate such a small number of students than to simply bus them to nearby municipalities with larger schools – for the Raquette children, Indian Lake to the southeast, for the Inlet children, Old Forge to the northwest. Separate referenda were held in each district, preceded by a series of public meetings in which the parents, teachers, town officials and other interested parties (the latter constituting a large category) came together to debate the closings (see Figures 4.1 and 4.2).

The sentiments expressed during these meetings, and in private discussions with informants, were revealing. The vast majority of participants in the “other interested parties” category, many of them retirees or other sorts of outsiders whose own children would never attend school in Inlet or Raquette, expressed a distinct nostalgia for the intimate scale of small-town, rural American life, and saw the one-room schoolhouse as the apotheosis of that tradition. They argued that the very existence of such institutions added to the quality of life in the Adirondacks, and that the schools should remain open in order to honor that tradition, even if it meant spending tax dollars inefficiently in order to do so. Conversely, many local parents – including some of those who had been born and raised in the towns and had attended these same schools themselves – argued in favor of closure, citing a desire to see their children attend larger schools with more resources and greater opportunities for socialization (such as team sports). A report commissioned by the Raquette Lake School District confirmed this general split:

The majority of the parents of children in the elementary grades agree that the school should be closed and all children tuitioned to a neighboring

district...It is interesting that the strongest support for remaining open came from residents without children or whose children have finished school. The parents of school age children, in general, felt that a more complete educational program could be obtained in a larger district (Huntington 2000:8-9).

But this well-reasoned and logical argument on the part of local parents was belied by an incident which occurred after one particular public meeting in Raquette Lake. The group had adjourned from the school to the Tap Room, and continued discussing the predicament over cold beers. It was a poignantly local moment, for aside from myself, most of the outsiders had retired to different environs, and the evening took on the air of a small and struggling town gathering to debate its own demise. Some quiet conversation ensued for half an hour, until one of the fathers – a local and native of Raquette Lake – burst out with a bitter proclamation that silenced the pub: “Just close the fucking thing. It’s going to happen anyway. This town isn’t ours anymore.” The simple statement threw the contradictions of rural gentrification into stark relief. A town whose very purpose for being is the accommodation of outsiders doesn’t need a school, for while the transient population of tourists which swells the population of Raquette Lake in high summer may bring their children along for the visit, they do not educate them there. And given that real estate prices had grown beyond the capacity of local wages, dimming the prospects of home ownership for those locals whose families had little land to bequeath to them, many faced the possibility that they (and their own children) would be permanent renters in their own home town. There would be no recovery for working-class families in Raquette without a fundamental change in the housing market.

LEGAL NOTICE

INLET COMMON SCHOOL will put up for vote the following propositions on Thursday, April 6, 2000. The vote will take place at the Inlet Town Hall from 2:00 p.m. - 8:00 p.m. A public hearing will take place on Wednesday, March 29, 2000 at the Inlet Town Hall beginning at 7:30 p.m.

Vote for Proposition A or B

Proposition A

The Board of Trustees of the Inlet Common School District shall continue to maintain the present operation of the school district, which involves the education of all pupils in Kindergarten through Sixth (6th) grade at the existing schoolhouse in Inlet.

Proposition B

The Board of Trustees of the Inlet Common School District will contract for the education of all remaining elementary pupils of the school district to an adjoining school district for the 2000-2001 school year, the following years, and close the existing school.

**VOTE FOR
PROPOSITION A
*KEEP THE INLET SCHOOL OPEN***

Figure 4.2

Given such circumstances, it is little wonder that the imminent closure of the local school seemed to sound the death knell of the town itself, for a town without children cannot socially reproduce itself. The end of the school, in some sense, seemed to signal the ultimate failure of the category of “local.” In retrospect it made the earlier pro-closure arguments of the parents ring somewhat hollow, as if they were searching for the silver lining in a darkening sky. The father’s outburst seemed to suggest that it would perhaps be better to just *get on with it*, to jump into cold water all of a sudden instead of freezing by inches. His frustration toward those who would keep the school running for the sake of romantic nostalgia rang all the more bitterly: the rural life that he had known and loved was being objectified in the process of its own “preservation.” No longer a real life to be lived out and struggled through, it had become yet another tourist attraction to be goggled at by wide-eyed flatlanders who considered a trip to the Adirondacks a trip back in time, a geographical and historical journey to an all-but-dead lifeway. The school had become a museum, a monument to the past, its children little more than artifacts to render the rural spectacle all the more compelling to the outsider’s gaze. In the end, however, nostalgia carried the day – an unsurprising outcome, since it had the strength in numbers to begin with – and both schools remained open.

If the above incident demonstrates the potential for rural gentrification to harden the socio-geographical boundary between “locals” and “outsiders,” a conflict which erupted two years before I arrived in the Fulton Chain region demonstrates its capacity for highlighting internal divisions. In August of 1997, the Town of Webb Planning Board received the following request from a local landowner in Eagle Bay:

to: Members of the Board

My property lots...are approved for one family dwelling per lot.

I would like to provide low-income housing for single parents, young couples, and low-income families. Therefore, I would like to change each of these lots to duplex housing, in order to make this more feasible.

Being situated a distance of the Big Moose Road, yet within walking distance of stores and the Eagle Bay Post Office, I feel it is an ideal location for this type of operation.

Further plans submitted to the Town revealed that the landowner sought to build eight two-family duplexes for low-income tenants on her property. When her intentions became known publicly – rezoning projects frequently require Planning Board approval and are therefore submitted for public review in the local paper – the Town of Webb received numerous letters of response from neighboring individuals and property-owners’ associations. The hailstorm of opposition from nearby homeowners, most of them local, year-round residents of Eagle Bay, engendered by this proposal was striking. A few excerpts from letters filed by the Webb property office are listed below.

One (anonymous) opponent objected specifically to the proposal to construct “low-income” housing with what might be described as an ill-defined yet forceful form of class anger, expressing disbelief that the owner in question was the actual mastermind behind the subdivision plan:

...why would [the landowner], a clerk in Old Forge Hardware, want to attempt a project of this magnitude? Unless it’s someone else’s project??

...Is this low income or fixed income housing (seniors)? There’s a

difference!

...If this is low-income, I hope the board is aware of the problems that usually are inherent in past projects.

...Is it fair to us as neighbors to have this project thrust down our throats? What does this project do to/for us in Eagle Bay?

...In closing, I'm sure the board will look at this project and "between the lines." Maybe [the landowner] should consider taking "her" money and investing it in property down in Thendara next to [sic] Ni-Mo building, where this project is probably best suited!

Others objected to the low-income housing proposition on the grounds that such a project would disturb some normative state of "peace" in addition to lowering property values:

We are residents and perspective homebuyers in the process of purchasing...property in Eagle Bay. It has come to our attention that there is a public hearing set for 10/28/97 concerning a proposition submitted to you by [the landowner] to change the zoning of her properties. The fact that she is planning eight two family dwellings as a low-income housing development directly affects us, adversely. We feel that low-income housing in this area would not only upset the peaceful harmony of our neighborhood, but it would greatly reduce property values of the existing homes here. We have been residents in this area for a number of years and moved here for the peace, quiet, space and beauty this area has always offered.

Still another objected on the grounds of "peace" and property values as well, but also expressed concern about increased traffic and the loss of their view in addition to the unclear implications for maintenance and upkeep of the development's service road:

In review of the map provided for your inspection by [the landowner], our

front yard and main picture windows will face a proposed 96 by 24 foot, two-family dwelling with parking lot and prospective porch; all within close proximity of our view and property line....

The choice for building our home here had specifically to do with existing restrictions imposed within our deed and in accordance with the APA. These stipulations being one family dwelling each, within a set amount of existing one acre lots. The two lots immediately affecting our private driveway and home would be housing two parking lots, two added entrances and four family units. My husband has maintained this driveway for five years with an added contribution of \$1,000.00 worth of materials to upgrade. [He] has also provided plowing and maintenance to the private road with its entrance to Big Moose Road. The private road for personal homeowners use could eventually house sixteen added (non tax-paying) families, contributing to a perpetual flow of traffic that is now at a fair minimum.

The investments we have made to build and upgrade our home would no longer remain at its present property value with the prospect of 16 low income units. But far more alarming is the adverse change in the environmental atmosphere that has provided our family and neighbors with a peaceful refuge we each affectionally [sic] call home.

Yet another letter, this time from a resident of a nearby lakefront development, echoed the sentiments expressed above:

...The project will diminish the value of property in the area (namely the development). It will also affect the enjoyment, prosperity and growth of the neighborhood.

...The inharmonious appearance of the proposed duplex structures adversely affects the neighborhood, will affect the taxable value of real property.

One letter expressed doubt at the need for low-income housing, and, interestingly, speculated on the potential impact on the local job market in the event that proposed subdivision were to attract outsiders to the area:

We hope the Board realizes the impact that this would also have on the existing difficult job market within the Town. Sixteen families relocated to this area would put a tremendous strain on this existing job market problem, thereby potentially creating the possibility of dislocating existing residents from the local job market.

The original landowner responded with the following rejoinder on the heels of a well-attended Planning Board meeting at which the above concerns, as well as others, were apparently raised. She expresses a clear dismay at the elitist undertones of many of the objections:

I wish to note [an objector's] words, when he said [at the town meeting] that people who grow up here move away for two reasons: because they can make more money elsewhere, and "for a better environment." For those reasons, he stated, there is no need for low-income housing.

I think perhaps part of the negative reaction to my proposed project has been due particularly to that very phrase: "low-income." It seems to bring to many minds the concept of a people perceived as lazy, or shiftless... "free-loaders" and "Welfare people" being used almost interchangeably. Perhaps "affordable housing" would have been a more appropriate term.

In my experience, affordable housing *is* in high demand and short supply here; it always has been. Unless you share housing with friends, or live at home with parents, for the most part housing here is too costly for young people to afford. It requires, quite often, social services' aid for single parents; and subsidies for the elderly who can no longer maintain their own home (HEAP being just one of the services in demand)...

Living here is a choice which I can afford to make: I am not married, I have no children to support. But I could not afford that choice if I had to pay rent at the weekly rates so many rentals charge to the transient population of the area. Waitresses, mechanics, busboys or any of the dozens of other basic-wage jobs of this service-oriented area cannot afford to pay rent at the rates the tourists pay. I firmly believe affordable housing *is* needed in this area!...

The fact is, I do not believe that many of the objections raised [at the

Planning Board meeting] the other night really had anything to do with the discussion at hand.

I just think people are against the concept of “low-income” housing because, in their secret hearts, they do not want “that kind of people” living near them; and, to prevent anyone’s accusing them of prejudice, they need to find excuses to stop the duplexes from being built.

Well, to me, “that kind of people” is nothing more than the same kinds of people I grew up with, and went to school with: people just like the ones I work with, or the people I wait on at the store every day. To me, the people of the Adirondacks are genuinely the “salt of the earth.” They are there at the drop of hat to help any one of their neighbors in need. And I would welcome any one of them as a neighbor.

And finally, the file contained a somewhat defensive response to the developer’s accusations of class bias from the president of a nearby homeowner’s association, arguing that such accusations were a mere diversion from the heart of the matter – that being that the surrounding homeowners, many of whom had bought their properties from the landowner’s family, had done so with the understanding that remaining lots in the division would be developed into single-family homes:

First, let me say that we do not think people who live in low-income housing are necessarily shiftless or free-loaders. However, we do not think that the place for low-income housing is mixed in with a small development of single-family homes, originally developed and designated as such very strongly by [the landowners] themselves...

...Each of us was assured that the lots would be developed with single family homes, not duplexes.

...Lastly, our objections have nothing to do with prejudice, they have to do with being honest about what the property in question was meant to be used for and what we were told when we purchased each of our properties. Several of the people [the landowner] went to school with and grew up with, “the salt of the earth”, attended the meeting and objected to her whole project the night of the hearing, and still more of those people

have signed the petition circulated around the Eagle Bay community concerning the proposed “low-income” housing.

The file also held a copy of the above-mentioned four-page petition, signed by 58 people, all listing local addresses, as well the minutes for both the public hearing of October 28, 1997 and a subsequent Planning Board meeting on January 27 of the following year, at which a motion to deny the subdivision request was unanimously approved.

There is a fair amount of local-level politicking to disentangle here, much of it entailing the sort of tit-for-tat barb-trading over common property rights and responsibilities (regarding the access road) and private-property upkeep (regarding junk on the developer’s own lot) that often characterizes local discourse in small communities. My intention is not to take sides in this conflict, but to use this example to lay bare some of the internal divisions which complicate the category of “local” in terms of class interest. The argument suggests that several of the local homeowners, regardless of their own subjectivity with regard to class, feared a devalorization of their properties stemming from the purported propensity of the poor to “disturb the peace,” as well as from the possibility that the new subdivision might be lacking in certain aesthetic qualities. The excerpts suggested that the local community did not necessarily agree with the premise that affordable housing was in short supply in the Town of Webb, in contrast to the conclusions drawn a few years later by the Town itself and described in Chapter Three. The statement that several of the “salt of the earth” Adirondackers the subdivision was apparently intended to benefit *also* objected to the project is telling, for I encountered the same attitude in a conversation with a local renter living in a dilapidated trailer not far

from the proposed subdivision site who similarly expressed dismay at the idea that “the poor” might have invaded the neighborhood had the project gone ahead. This example seems to betray an unconscious, internal working-class vilification of itself while simultaneously demonstrating that the condition of private property ownership, steady work or both may cause people to affectively disassociate themselves from the working class to begin with. The fact that at least one objector found a positive connotation to the purported emigration of young people out of the area – on the grounds that they could obtain higher wages and a “better environment” – is also telling, for it suggests an critique of the assumption that young Adirondack locals *want* to remain in their hometowns as adults: an assumption which is perhaps too often taken for granted in the romanticization of the “local” identity. Which leads me to some final words about the complex intersection of class, private property and kinship in gentrification.

My intention is not to lay blame for gentrification at the feet of the Adirondack locals. My purpose is rather to point out that kinship in the absence of land tenure makes for an unreliable safety net to protect against the social failures of capitalism, while kinship that bequeaths land in the form of inheritance can give the local a distinct advantage over outsiders. In the first place, not all owners of gentrified rental properties live in Raquette; indeed the majority of recent property buyers in the Fulton Chain hail from outside the Blue Line, as I noted in Chapter Three. In the second, local owners have myriad reasons for renting to high-paying tourists rather than neighbors in need. Some are retired and depend upon the extra income for survival, while others simply cannot afford the expensive winterization process. Some have become landlords by

profession and are compelled by the principle of competition to seek out the highest return on their investment in the form of rent. Still others depend upon high seasonal rent profits to keep up with rising property taxes. The point is not to turn the stereotype of the disenfranchised local on its head – indeed, the romanticization entailed in portraying the locals as victims is every bit as objectifying as the vilification entailed in portraying them as miscreants – but to dismantle it altogether. Yet in some cases, the peculiar production of Adirondack nature confers an unanticipated advantage in the real estate market to certain types of locals, even in the face of intense competition from far wealthier nonlocal developers. The reasons are not cultural, but economic.

Of all the aspects of class mentioned in the preceding section, it is property ownership that constitutes the most significant relation of power in the gentrification process. It stands to reason that ownership of another means of production – capital itself – can provide the means for acquiring property to renovate, develop, and resell at a profit. Indeed, this process of buying cheap and selling dear lies at the very heart of gentrification. Ostensibly, anyone with the capital to do so can act as a gentrifier, regardless of their geographical location, past or present. But the peculiar production of nature which has rendered Adirondack property (and lakefront parcels in particular) so profitable has also created conditions under which capital alone is frequently insufficient in securing land to gentrify. Due to the large percentage of property owned by the State of New York, the Fulton Chain suffers from a produced scarcity of private property. State-owned land has been taken out of both production and circulation, diminishing the remaining available land for development. In essence, there are few remaining parcels of

developable land up for grabs. Under such circumstances, certain aspects of “localism” can place natives in a quite advantageous position, regardless of how elite or effete the competitive outsiders may be. When “local” refers to an owner who bought property before land values began to rise in the early 1970s, or to the child of such an investor who stands to inherit the land, relative control over capital is at some point overridden by the advantage of land tenure. Even huge outlays of capital cannot not purchase land that is not for sale. Many landowners in Raquette found themselves in just such a position when the boom struck – some hailing from families which constituted some of the earliest settlers of the hamlet, others who bought land in the 1950s in order to erect simple fishing shacks before the mad rush to gentrify was even a spectre on the horizon. In such cases, class as a stagnant structural descriptor pales in explanatory comparison to the factor of simple historical accident, and to the unexpected benefits which kinship (when combined with private property) can bestow. In effect, private property ownership on the part of local interests can act as a barrier to further capital investment in much the same way that the existence of the Forest Preserve itself does. It is to capital flows in and out of the built environment of the Adirondacks, and the walls which shape, block and direct those flows, that I turn in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE THE CITY IN THE COUNTRY?

Country, n.

The circumurban region inhabited by the quail, the trout, the deer, and the armed granger. It is a region of romance, where the Golden Age still lingers, as in the earth's green prime, when Virgil sang and the gods mingled with men and maidens.

Metropolis, n.

A stronghold of provincialism.

Rent, n.

An outrage, imposed by blood-sucking vampires on virtuous sons of toil.

Ambrose Bierce

The Enlarged Devil's Dictionary

Toward A Theory of Rural Gentrification

The evidence presented in this text – quantitative, ethnographic, historical – paints a portrait of rural gentrification as a constellation of attributes: a set of social, economic and political conditions on multiple scales which have combined to produce a rural real estate market in which year-round, affordable rental housing is hard to find. But urban researchers, who have investigated the process in cities around the world, have found gentrification to comprise more than a simple set of characteristics. The peculiar attributes of gentrification are no mere historical accidents, but derive from an underlying logic which not only drives the process itself, but causes gentrification to unfold in a fairly predictable pattern across diverse urban geographies. Gentrification has been documented in cities as far-flung as London (Challen 1973; Hamnett 1973; Hamnett and Williams 1979; Legg and Allen 1984; Munt 1987; Robinson 1987; A. Smith

1989), Vancouver (Cybriwsky, Ley and Western 1986; Ley 1981), Adelaide (Badcock 1989; Randell and Szelenyi 1981), Baltimore (Covington and Taylor 1989), Stellenbosch (Swart 1987), Malmo (Clark 1987), Amsterdam (Cortie and van Engelsdorp Gastelaars 1985) Paris (Gale 1985; Olives 1977), Montreal (Ley and Mills 1986; Rose 1989), Toronto (Kary 1988; Sabourin 1988); Melbourne (Jager 1986; Logan 1982 and 1985), and New York (Baldassare 1984; Bergman 1978; Kasinitz 1988; Marcuse 1985 and 1986; Salins 1979; Zukin 1982) – to name a few. Why does this phenomenon manifest so similarly in so many different places?

For my money, Marxian theorists have got the best measure of it: they explain gentrification as a geographical expression of the capital accumulation process in the postwar period. The logic which drives the gentrification process thus derives from the logic of capitalism itself, at least insofar as it manifests in the urban built environment. This is not to say that the particular social and historical conditions which characterize individual places undergoing gentrification are irrelevant. Indeed, the unique geography of a city's urban grid, the intensity of local class struggle, and the degree of state involvement in the production of housing – all of which vary across different urban environments – often shape gentrification in quite specific ways. But despite these differences, gentrification remains a remarkably consistent process. The question before us, then, is this: does the same logic undergird the process of rural gentrification? Do the peculiarities of the rural capital accumulation process, to say nothing of the unique geopolitical development of the Adirondack Park, demand a fundamentally different theory of rural gentrification? The purpose of this final chapter is to explore these

questions in the hopes of moving beyond surface description – the “what” of rural gentrification – to a deeper level of explanation – the “why” and “how.” Toward that end, this chapter locates itself at the crossroads of two ostensibly disparate related fields of study: urban social theory and rural political ecology.

The dichotomy between urban and rural studies is a curious one. Despite a few extraordinary exceptions which specifically trace the material and discursive relationship between the metropole and the hinterland – William Cronon’s *Nature’s Metropolis*, Leo Marx’s *The Machine in the Garden*, and Raymond Williams’ *The Country and the City* spring immediately to mind – urban and rural scholars tend largely to keep to their own epistemological pumpkin patches, comfortably sequestered in the midst of their respective canons, despite the myriad ontological ties which bind such landscapes together. One notable recent development, the emergence of a field of “urban political ecology,” seems to buck this trend. The moniker suggests that while there was nothing intrinsically *rural* about the older political ecology, there was something vaguely *un-urban* about it, to the point where a new, distinctly city-based political ecology has emerged as a hybrid urban sub-species which has borrowed liberally from lessons learned in the countryside. Indeed, *urban* political ecology often seems like the same old political ecology with a mere change of address¹. But if the study of nature in the city is increasingly shaped by agendas originally developed in the countryside, the opposite does

1

Some of the typically “rural tropes investigated in the city by urban political ecologists include struggles over water rights, air and water pollution, park preservation and garden movements: almost as though urban political ecology examines bits of rural nature *within* the confines of the city rather than positing the city itself as a product of nature.

not hold true. The relationship between political ecology and urban social theory seems to be a (largely) one-way street, with the latter absorbing many of the tropes of the former, discovering nature in the city rather than exporting its own critical analytical tools to the study of nature in the countryside.

And why should it be otherwise? Urban social theory, after all, is intended to do just that: to theorize the urban. But if urban theorists have found much of value in the study of (ostensibly) non-urban nature, then it makes sense to ask whether rural theorists might do well to borrow a leaf from their urban cousins, particularly when historically *city-based* phenomena begin to manifest in the hinterlands, opening the door for a productive exportation of urban social theory to the rural. Such has been the case with gentrification, a process long assumed to be a distinctly urban process but which has recently begun to appear with increasing frequency in rural areas. Scholars of rural gentrification (Friedberger 1996; Little 1987; M. Phillips 2000, 1993; D.P Smith 2002a, 2002b; D.P Smith and D.A. Phillips 2002), however, have only just begun to evaluate the efficacy of applying urban social theory to the countryside (the work of Martin Phillips (1993, 2000, 2002, 2004) has led the way in this regard). This chapter pushes such analyses further, exploring in depth the application of a classical concern in urban gentrification – the theory of the *rent gap*, as postulated by urban geographer Neil Smith in a series of arguments which have become a veritable watershed in debates about the “revitalization” of the inner-city – to gentrification in the countryside.

Smith (1979a, 1979b, 1987, 1996, 2002) argues that the rent gap can only be fully understood by examining the flow of capital in and out of the built environment on

multiple scales. Urban gentrification manifests most visibly at the local level, as dilapidated low-rent neighborhoods are transformed into polished high-rent havens for the middle class through a process of disinvestment and reinvestment which results in the displacement of lower-income tenants (N. Smith 1996:51-74). However, this localized transformation is in fact the product of uneven development, and specifically the shifting of capital investment in both a sectoral and a geographical sense, occurring at several larger scales, from the regional to the national to the global (75-91). In short, the phenomenon typically associated with gentrification – i.e., the “revitalization” of a particular neighborhood – is an end result rather than a root cause; it constitutes the most visible aspect of a series of capital flows in and out of the built environment on a far broader scale than that of the neighborhood itself. In order to evaluate the relevance of the rent gap theory to gentrification in the countryside, it is therefore necessary to compare the urban and rural contexts not only in terms of local cycles of investment and disinvestment in the built environment, but in terms of their specific roles in the broader process of uneven development.

Gentrification and the Rent Gap

To understand the rent gap, it is important to establish some basic precepts regarding private property ownership under the capitalist mode of production. The best way to do so is to think like a capitalist. I will begin with the obvious: the purchase of a piece of land constitutes an investment from which the buyer may profit in several ways. Land doesn't necessarily require any infrastructural improvements in order to be

profitable. The owner of a scenic Adirondack property, for instance, could call it a park and charge for recreational use (hiking, swimming, or simply “worshiping in nature’s cathedral,” to borrow a leaf from Muir) without having to move so much as a stone. Yet there are many ways to profit from the “improvement” of a piece of land, here defined broadly as alteration via investment of labor and/or capital. A farmer could make a garden and sell the produce; a logger could harvest the trees and sell them for lumber; a rancher could raise horses on it and run them in the Kentucky Derby; George Bush could sink an oil well and sell the crude to a refinery. Put simply, a landowner may choose between many different “improvement” options, depending upon both natural and social constraints. The construction of rental housing is only one of many options by which a landowner might gain a return on investment. But it is important to keep in mind the difference between profits gained from *unimproved land* (like the above-mentioned park) and *improved land* (such as the ranch), as well as different types of profitability within the latter category. For the sake of simplicity, we’ll adopt a version of the typical Marxian parlance and call profits made on unimproved land “ground rent,” and profits gained on improved land “house rent.”

Ground rent and house rent are related. If I buy a piece of unimproved property on Fourth Lake, and make a profit on this land in its original state, I’m gaining simple ground rent. If I buy a piece of unimproved land, then subsequently build a house to rent to a local family, I’m gaining both ground rent *and* house rent. The difference is intuitive: if I bought two lots in the Town of Webb, one with 200 feet of shoreline on Fourth Lake and the other in the middle of town surrounded by houses on all sides – *yet built*

identical cabins on each – I would stand to garner a higher amount of house rent from the Fourth Lake property, even though I invested the same amount of money in the improvements. Why? Because of the difference in ground rent: lakefront property offers a higher margin of profitability than any other type of land. House rent, therefore, invariably *includes* ground rent as part of its total, because the house and the land it occupies are inseparable. While a landowner may garner ground rent alone, without any house rent component, the opposite cannot logically be true: house rent is invariably bound up with ground rent.

There is yet another distinction to be made between ground rent and house rent. In a broad sense, ground rent derives from the permanent aspects of land, which require no further investment beyond the original purchase to maintain their profit potential. House rent is different, because buildings, though they deteriorate slowly compared to many commodities, nonetheless deteriorate over time, and require maintenance in order to remain profitable. Indeed, as any homeowner can attest, older buildings tend to require more investment as time wears on, particularly to upgrade plumbing, heating, roofing and electrical systems. Newer houses generally require lesser investments due to technological improvements in construction materials and methods. When I calculate the potential house rent to be gained from my Fourth Lake property, I therefore have to weigh two factors, assuming ground rent to be constant: the amount of profit I stand to obtain from my tenants *less* the amount I have to spend to maintain the house itself (there is also the initial investment to consider, but let's assume the property has amortized by this point). This is an important consideration in the decision to use my

property in one way versus another, or to keep it rather than sell it: if my tenant pays \$400 per month in house rent, but my maintenance costs exceed \$500 per month, in terms of profit alone I have little incentive to continue to maintain this rental property in its current state. Indeed, under such circumstances I have a strong incentive to change the situation, and this is where gentrification comes in.

At this point, it is necessary to abandon the individualistic viewpoint adopted thus far, and examine the social aspects of rent. No piece of property exists in isolation; all land, regardless of how human beings divide it up on a map, is contiguous, surrounded by a various assortment of “natural” and “created” geographies. My Fourth Lake property may abut lakefront on one side, but it has other characteristics as well, and these characteristics also affect its potential house rent. My cabin may be surrounded by similar cabins rented to tenants of similar means; it may border a low-rent housing project or a high-rent condominium development; it may be surrounded by vacant wilderness; it may border Bush’s oil well or the farmer’s garden; it might be serviced by a paved public road or a summer-access dirt trail; it may be five miles from the nearest grocery store or fifty miles from anything resembling civilization. These factors, from nearby “natural” amenities to available public services to the socioeconomic status of the neighbors – all of which constitute an important aspect of ground rent, which is as much a social relationship as a factor of landscape – affect the potential house rent of my slice of the Adirondack wilderness. But if the social conditions in my neighborhood (especially the rent-paying capacity of my tenants) prevent house rent levels from keeping up with necessary maintenance and upkeep costs, in the interest of maximizing

profit, I have a serious incentive to *disinvest* – to stop pouring money into a deteriorating house, to perhaps even stop paying property taxes on it, and to continue to collect rent from my tenants – in essence milking the property (and its inhabitants) for all it's worth without recycling any capital back into it.

So what does all of this have to do with the rent gap? The rent gap, in technical terms, is the difference between the *actual* house rent that I currently make on a rental property and the *potential* house rent I could make if I put my property to what realtors call its “highest and best use” – in other words, the use which will garner the highest return. The rent gap generally refers to the difference between the low rents my current working-class tenants now pay and the high rents my potential upper-class tenants might pay, if I could lure them to the area, minus the cost of the investments it would take to do so. The rent gap in this sense constitutes a theoretical condition, but in real-world terms, it might be described as the moment in the gentrification process when the economic futility of continued investment in a neighborhood whose tenants cannot afford a level of rent exceeding the cost of upkeep becomes abundantly clear to landlords. Physical decline due to the removal of capital from the built environment tends to occur on a neighborhood-wide scale, for as a single building deteriorates, the potential sale price of neighboring buildings also decreases, giving nearby landlords, who are likely facing the same conditions, further incentive to disinvest. During the course of this decline, the gap between actual house rent and potential ground rent increases to the point where residential real estate prices bottom out, and the built environment of an entire neighborhood deteriorates until individual properties can be bought for a song.

This is the moment at which gentrification becomes a distinct possibility. If speculators begin to purchase such extremely low-cost properties in anticipation of increasing market values down the road, effectively setting off a new wave of neighborhood-wide investment, then the gentrification process has been triggered. Developers base this investment decision on the gamble that the current low-income tenants can be replaced by higher-paying renters, whose house rents will more than offset the price of purchase and improvements. The reinvestment process often begins along the “edge” of declining neighborhoods, particularly along the those blocks which border more upscale neighborhoods, because the prospect of luring higher-income renters to such “frontiers” often outweighs the prospect of luring them to the very heart of an inner-city neighborhood (racism often plays a key role here; think of gentrification in Harlem). Landlords, in the meantime, don’t typically sit around waiting for their current tenants to simply bow out. With profits on the line, they take action to force them out, and displacement is frequently a violent process characterized by class struggle.

If the rent gap constitutes a theoretical condition, then how have scholars operationalized it? The first step, of course, is to find some real-world equivalent for the rent gap’s two primary components, potential and actual rent. Some researchers (Badcock 1989) have approached the problem by analyzing real estate sales in particular cities, employing the average market price of vacant lots as an indicator of potential rent and the average market price of improved lots (ones that have residential buildings on them) as an indicator of actual rent. When the average price of vacant lots exceeds the average price of improved lots (a rather curious situation, assuming that properties with

An Illustration of the Rent Gap

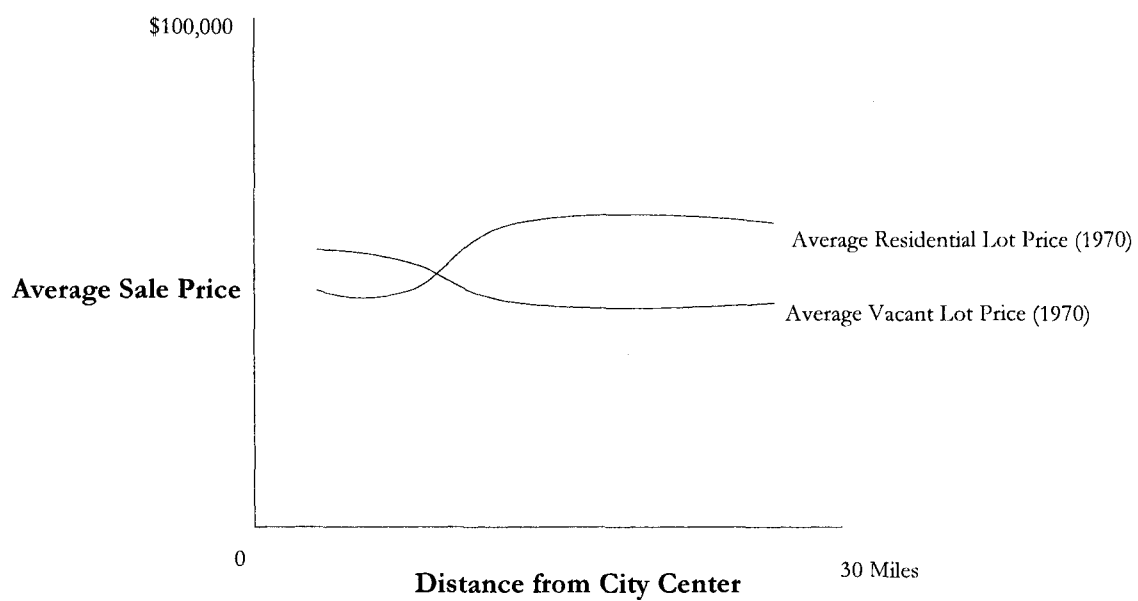


Figure 5.1

buildings should ostensibly cost more than empty ones), then a rent gap has been established, indicating both a pronounced disinvestment in existing residential buildings and an anticipation of future returns on investments in vacant lots (which have no costly buildings to renovate and no pesky tenants to kick out). Because gentrification tends to proceed along a predictable spatial pattern, beginning in older, inner-city neighborhoods before progressing outward, researchers then plot these data against a geographical scale proceeding from the inner-city to its outermost reaches. Depicted graphically, the result might resemble Figure 5.1. The rent gap appears here as the difference between the higher average price of vacant lots and the lower average price of residential lots, occurring near the “ground zero” of the inner city. Now, if all of this is so important in the urban gentrification process – and Neil Smith himself considered the rent gap “...the necessary centrepiece to any theory of gentrification” (N. Smith 1987:165) – then might it not also manifest in rural gentrification? To understand whether the rent gap played a significant role in the Adirondack case, it is necessary to look to the logic of gentrification in this particular part of the world, which evinces some distinct discrepancies from both its urban counterpart and other gentrified rural spaces. For the sake of clarity, I will henceforth refer to this particular type of gentrification as *wilderness gentrification* in order to set it apart from both urban gentrification and the rural gentrification described in the U.K. literature. Since both the localized exploitation of the rent gap and the broader motion of capital investment are, according to Smith, intrinsic characteristics of urban gentrification, as well as, according to Phillips, relevant to the understanding of rural gentrification, it makes sense to examine wilderness gentrification

in the same light, beginning with the scale of the local.

Rural Versus Urban Gentrification

To begin with, consider the relative importance of *qualitatively different* types of ground rent in the wilderness and urban landscapes. Ground rent is an important factor in urban gentrification. Indeed, a whole host of urban landscape characteristics – from transportation to parks to schools to commercial districts – affect potential ground rent, and therefore the investment decisions of a prospective developer. The state can play an important role in urban ground rent, as public service and infrastructural investment often goes hand-in-hand with gentrification-as-revitalization. Indeed, the rent gap itself has everything to do with ground rent, since the neighborhood-wide disinvestment described above helps to write down the initial cost of the property under consideration for development. I would suggest, in contrast to the arguments of D.P Smith and D.A. Phillips (2001), that greentrification, or the importance of nature consumption, might easily play as significant a role in the maximization of urban ground rent (in the form of urban parks, gardens, and other types of greenways, as well as urban waterfronts) as it does in the rural.

So what difference is there between this pattern of investment in the urban gentrification cycle and that of the wilderness? The disparity lies in the relationship between the labor and housing markets in each locality, and its ultimate manifestation is a discrepancy in the geography of the gentrified housing stock. What gets produced in the process of urban gentrification is *residential space*. What gets produced in the process

of wilderness gentrification is *recreational nature*. The production of gentrified housing in the Adirondacks has little to do with the production of permanent residential abodes; indeed the vast majority of gentrified housing lies empty for the majority of the year because it is only occupied on a temporary and sporadic basis by tourists (as evidenced by the fact that in the year 2000, 2,818 of the Webb's 3,833 housing units (a full 74 percent) were classified by the U.S. Census under the "seasonal, recreational, or occasional use" category). A different type of ground rent is being maximized in the Adirondack setting. Proximity to schools, CBDs, and workplaces is for all intents and purposes irrelevant in wilderness investment decisions, whereas proximity to wilderness areas, and particularly lakefronts, is paramount. Without the production of nature upon which ground rent in the Adirondacks is predicated, there is no reason for the occupant of gentrified housing to be in the area at all, and therefore no purpose for investment on the part of the developer.

Urban and wilderness landlords are compelled to court different kinds of renters. The potential consumers of gentrified housing in the city typically hail from the middle-class, managerial classes of the urban economy whose lives are bound up with the "service" market produced by the shift to post-Fordist capital accumulation (Harvey 1990). They are, above all, *permanent* residents who make homes of gentrified buildings. The potential consumers of gentrified housing in the Adirondacks are visitors. Wilderness landlords of gentrified housing do not rent permanent homes, but occasional retreats. Under such conditions, it is not sufficient for landlords to offer simple living space as the commodity for sale, for the local pool of available renters cannot *consistently*

afford rents which offset the price of either new construction or costly renovations, nor are there enough of them to justify large-scale investments in structures like apartment buildings. In order to profit from gentrified housing, wilderness landlords must offer a commodity which attracts outsiders, and in the Adirondacks, that commodity is nature – wilderness, lakes, hiking trails, snowmobile trails, charismatic megafauna, open space, and the like. Importantly, the tenants of gentrified wilderness rental housing need not *necessarily* have any greater economic means at their disposal than the local population. They may spend higher amounts on wilderness accommodation than they would on permanent residential housing, but only for a very brief period of time – for some, perhaps a single trip per year. Thus, while consumption is of course an important aspect of wilderness gentrification, the wage differential between housing consumers in the rental market is insufficient to completely explain the process, since wilderness landlords may profit from renting gentrified housing to consumers of equally modest means – just more of them, with quicker turnover. Therefore, if the purpose is to seek some explanatory “motor force” of gentrification in the wilderness, then rent profits are the most likely culprit, and in particular, ground rent. In some cases, potential ground rent can be increased to the point where it outweighs the rent to be garnered from the structure itself – as evidenced by the exceedingly high rents (upwards of \$500/week) commanded by landlords of what can only be described as seasonal shacks in the Okara Lakes area of the Town of Webb, which are singularly unremarkable in terms of the amount of capital they embody, but which remain far more profitable than year-round housing by virtue of their ground rent.

I believe the motive for investing in Adirondack properties because of their potential ground rent often outweighs the importance of disinvestment in the decision to gentrify. Geographical patterns of investment are therefore likely to differ in the wilderness. If gentrification in the urban setting has historically tended to commence in the inner-city and proceed outward, following patterns of disinvestment in the built environment, there is no reason to expect the same in the wilderness setting. Wilderness landlords seeking to capitalize on ground rent don't necessarily have a lot of incentive to invest in lots in the middle of an Adirondack hamlet, no matter how devalued, unless the hamlet contains a developable body of water. The hamlets of the Fulton Chain region vary in this regard. In Webb, the gentrified housing stock can be found along those areas of lakefront, inside or outside the hamlets of Eagle Bay and Old Forge themselves, which have not been designated by the State of New York as untouchable open space. The Fulton Chain, from First Lake through Sixth, is surrounded by a thin strip of developable private property, mainly categorized by Moderate Intensity Use, with a few patches of Rural Use and Hamlet thrown in. The eastern end of Seventh Lake is surrounded by Wild Forest, a category of land owned by the State and not available for development. Eighth lake is also surrounded by Wild Forest, with the exception of its very southern tip, which falls into the category of Intensive Use, a classification reserved almost exclusively to describe State campgrounds (there is a large one on that end of Eighth Lake). The land immediately surrounding Raquette Lake's 99 miles of shoreline comprises a mixture of the above categories, with the addition of a few patches of Wilderness (the most heavily protected State category). The investment pattern on

Raquette is also complicated by the fact that much of even the developed shoreline is accessible only by water – that is, by boat in the summer and sled in the winter – because certain swaths of private property are surrounded by patches of State land, over which access roads cannot be built. But in general, the gentrified housing stock has emerged on those developable sections of private property surrounding the Chain, and has little if anything to do with proximity to the commercial centers of the hamlets themselves. The geographical expression of Adirondack gentrification therefore differs from that of its typical urban counterpart.

The wilderness gentrification researcher seeking to document the rent gap therefore faces a singular problem: what to do with the “x axis” on the above graph. It is a simple enough task to locate sales data for vacant and improved lots, at least for the 1990s. But these data cannot be plotted in the same way as the urban figures, because the spatial logic of wilderness gentrification is unique. The sample graph plots property prices according to distance from city center. A similar attempt to plot Adirondack sales figures from some central point in the Town of Webb would likely yield little more than a very confusing mess, because the same geographical logic does not apply here. If anything, gentrified housing might be expected to occupy landscapes *away* from the hamlets themselves, with the exception of developed shoreline lie within their midst. One possible methodological solution might be to simply shift the geographical scale of gentrification from distance-from-inner-city to proximity-to-water, using developable lakefront as the geographical center of gravity for investment. In this case, the x-axis would depict a property’s distance from water: ground zero being those properties

fronting shoreline, moving progressively outward.

But the situation is more complicated than that, because Adirondack landlords capitalize not only on nature itself, but on *access to nature*, when weighing investment decisions. Lakes open to motorized navigation might prove more profitable than those that don't. Lakes which do not freeze in the winter, and therefore cannot be crossed by snowmobile, might prove less profitable than those that do. Lakefront properties which are surrounded on three sides by State land, and are therefore inaccessible by road (and this condition describes much of Raquette Lake on the far western end of the Fulton Chain), might fall somewhere in between. Again, ground rent is the deciding factor, and ground rent is contingent upon the social production of nature.

The house I rented in Inlet provides an example. The property was located on Route 28, which is the primary road running through the Fulton Chain hamlets, and faced Fifth Lake on the back side. Though not directly on the lake itself, I had access to dock privileges. It might have made a profitable summer rental property, had my landlords been so inclined, but in the winter it was fairly useless as a generator of ground rent. Fifth Lake, the smallest on the Fulton Chain, has a deep channel running through the middle of it which prevents it from freezing over. Adventurous sledders might attempt to water-skip the open parts to get to the trail which runs behind the lake, but a sled which sinks to the bottom of Fifth will never see the light of day again, and the driver will face a hefty fine from the Department of Environmental Conservation for polluting the lake if caught. At the same time, this particular house is located on a stretch of the main road which is closed to sled use by local zoning laws. In essence, my old

house, and the neighboring properties on that side of Fifth Lake, are completely cut off in terms of sled access; the only way to get a sled onto the property legally is to haul it there on a trailer. Properties on the other side of Fifth don't face this problem, since the road which services them not only allows sleds to travel it, but runs right into the route which heads up into the extensive Moose River Plains trail system. Landlords seeking to monopolize on ground rent would do well to avoid sinking capital into places like mine, given that they stand to lose an entire season's worth of house rent due to the property's social-geographical characteristics.

The upshot of all of this is that the geography of rural ground rent cannot be reduced to a simple proximity-to-water formula any more than it can be reduced to proximity-to-CBD, for not all Adirondack water is equal in terms of its rent-generating capacity, and social factors such as laws barring particular *uses* of water may indeed put a ceiling on that capacity. In the absence of a severely devalORIZED housing stock (or, at least, one that is more devalORIZED than any other in the Park; see below), the presence of water in and of itself can not replace disinvestment as the vacuum which pulls capital toward it in any easily-predictable geographical fashion. It is not, in the end, the *reasons* for investment that set Adirondack gentrification apart from urban gentrification, but the geographical expression of that investment, which simply does not proceed in the same linear fashion outward from some central stock of devalORIZED housing near the center of town.

It is important to note that Smith himself has conceded that the pattern of urban gentrification described above, whose target comprises older inner-city housing, is likely

to be merely one wave in the historical development of a gentrification process which will continue to seek out similarly profitable conditions in urban areas farther dispersed from the CBD: “Empirically, gentrification has indeed tended to hug the city center, at least in the early stages, but...as these first areas are recycled, other areas offering lower but still substantial returns or at least presenting fewer obstacles to reinvestment would be sought out by developers” (N Smith 1996:69). In his latest work on urban gentrification, Smith (following the model established by Hackworth (2000)) frames the central-city investment described above as the second of three phases (*sporadic* in the 1950s, *anchoring* in the 1970s and 80s, and *generalized* in the 1990s) in the historical development of gentrification (N. Smith 2002:440). He cites the outward diffusion of gentrification as a fundamental characteristic of the third stage, in which gentrification becomes generalized as a ubiquitous urban strategy no longer restricted to North America, Western Europe and Oceania, nor to the housing stock which flanks the CBD:

...as gentrification near the center results in higher land and housing prices...districts further out become caught up in the momentum of gentrification...The more uneven the initial outward growth of capital investment and the more uneven the disinvestment in these newer landscapes (2002:442).

If the key factor in devalorization is the aging of the urban built environment, then as the housing stock in *outer* neighborhoods grows older, requiring larger and larger outlays of capital to maintain, those neighborhoods will present further opportunities for the cycle of disinvestment and reinvestment that is constitutive of the rent gap, thus providing the potential to displace the rent gap further outward, and even disrupt the linear spatial

expression recorded by Badcock, above. The generalization of gentrification might, therefore, bring the spatial expression of urban gentrification closer to the sort of scattershot arrangement of the gentrified housing stock exemplified by the Adirondack case.

Beyond the technical difficulties of operationalizing the rent gap in the rural setting, there is also good reason to suspect that there might not be one to document. There is little evidence to suggest that the Webb housing stock underwent a period of disinvestment similar to that found in the inner city. On the contrary, the available real property data for the region (see Chapter Three) indicate a fairly brisk pattern of investment in the postwar period which merely intensified in the 1980s. Ethnographic data point to the same conclusion: people who lived in the region from the 1950s through the present do not report a period of housing decline in which the built environment was falling into disrepair; nor do county or town statistics demonstrate any spate of wholesale property abandonment (resulting in reclamation for tax arrears) on the part of owners, which is often an indicator of disinvestment in the urban setting.

In order to understand why disinvestment may not have occurred in this region, consider the flip side of Smith's local arguments about the rent gap: uneven development at a broader scale. Urban disinvestment, he argues, is intricately connected to the process of suburbanization, which Smith sees less as a decentralization of capital than an agglomeration on a wider scale as the urban sphere itself expands. The "explosive expansion of urban space in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as well as the subsequent postwar urban decline and capital flight toward the low-rent margins, are an

expression of capitalism's tendency toward equalization and differentiation" (N. Smith 1996:84). The relationship between the city and its own periphery, therefore, is crucial in understanding the process of gentrification:

The investment of capital in the central and inner city, then, caused a physical and economic barrier to further investment in that space. The movement of capital into suburban development led to a systematic devalorization of inner- and central-city capital, and this in turn, with the development of the rent gap, led to the creation of new investment opportunities in the inner city precisely because an effective barrier to new investment had operated there (85-86).

This movement of capital in and out of the built environment in pursuit of profitable investment opportunities constitutes the essence of uneven development, which is not merely a *condition* – a snapshot of the capitalist landscape at any given time – but a perpetually-in-motion *process*. This type of capital switching in pursuit of profit occurs not only from one geographical setting to another, but from one sector of the economy to another. Smith argues that such cycles are a product of the boom-and-bust, crisis-prone character of the capitalist mode of production, with heavy investment in the built environment (particularly on the part of financial capital) tending to occur simultaneously with falling rates of profit in the industrial sector, especially in the postwar period, and particularly between 1969 and 1973 and in the late 1980s (86). The earlier *locational* capital switch, resulting in the devalorization of the inner-city and the development of the suburbs in the postwar period, functioned to steer the capital freed up by the later *sectoral* switch toward the geographical locality of the central urban landscape. Gentrification, in this view, is no mere statistical blip on the radar of capitalism, but a structural

component of uneven development at the regional, national, and even global scale. It speaks to the particular role of the metropolis in the location, dislocation and relocation of capital operating on multiple scales simultaneously.

If I interpret Smith's intentions correctly, the sectoral and locational capital switching on a broad scale is every bit as important to the rent gap theory as the more immediate fact of profit-generation through investment at the scale of neighborhood. Ostensibly, in order to explore the applicability of the rent gap concept to the countryside, it is necessary to examine rural gentrification in the same light. As noted in Chapter One, rural gentrification researcher Martin Phillips has made the most tangible effort to apply production-side theories of gentrification to the rural setting. Yet in his (early) study of gentrification in the Welsh Gower, he focuses solely upon the local level in his investigation of the rent gap:

A comparison of the prices paid by...gentrifiers with the price they would expect to sell their house...indicates the existence of a clear "rent-gap": the gentrifiers apparently stand to make significant clear financial gains from selling their improved properties (M. Phillips 1993:129).

He adds to this statement a graph comparing "Cost of house when purchased" to "Predicted selling value" at a certain cut-off point in time (1993:130). In this interpretation of Smith, the rent gap is merely the profit gained (or anticipated) through investment in a single property, regardless of any prior disinvestment which might draw capital toward a particular geographical location as opposed to another, and regardless of any broader political economic event which might free up capital for investment in the

built environment in the first place. In my view, such an interpretation drains the rent gap theory of its explanatory power, leaving it essentially meaningless. If the rent gap merely stands for the (positive) difference between purchase price and sale price, and if we accept the rent gap as a defining aspect of gentrification, then any owner whose property appreciates over time is a gentrifier. Without the vacuum created by disinvestment acting as a sort of gravity well pulling capital toward landscapes that are “underused” in rent-generating terms, the theory loses any specifically geographical significance. Without the sectoral switching of capital from manufacturing to real estate in historical context, the theory loses its political economic significance. Without the neighborhood effect or some other mechanism which contextualizes a de- or revalorized property within the geographical context of nearby de- or revalorized properties, the theory loses its socio-economic significance. There is a geographical, historical, economic and social *specificity* to the rent gap theory as posited by Smith, the combination of which allows it to hold theoretical water. I believe that if we are to move beyond reductive cultural explanations of rural gentrification, the theory must be tested in the countryside in its entirety rather than piece-meal. This does not necessarily mean that a potential “rural rent gap” must operate in exactly the same way, or that it must be a product of precisely the same forces, but that, at the very least, an analysis of the local-level investment driving rural gentrification must be situated within the broader context of uneven development. The questions which follow for the Adirondacks are then (1), whether the same logic of locational switching is at work within the wilderness landscape or between that landscape and some other, and (2), whether or not wilderness

landscapes, and in particular, *this* wilderness landscape, serve the same purpose as a receptacle for capital-dumping during periods of industrial crisis.

In the first place, it is important to note that the Town of Webb itself contains no urban areas. The relationship between the hamlets and their outlying areas are not exactly analogous to the relationship between a city and its suburbs, either in terms of historical development or political economy. Neither can Webb be considered a “suburb” of anyplace else. Unlike many Adirondack border towns, it is located deep in the heart of the mountains, a 90 mile drive in either direction from the nearest city. It is not a commuting town or a bedroom community, and it is not someplace one merely passes by on the way to someplace else, unless the destination is even further into the reaches of the wilderness. This particular rural locality, then, is well outside the confines of that “urbanization of the countryside” which, through the process of equalization, “progressively reduces all society to urban society” (N. Smith 1996:84). This is not to say that the Adirondacks should be viewed as disconnected from the process of capital accumulation on a larger scale; indeed, quite to the contrary, as noted below, but that gentrification in this region does not necessarily have anything to do with the logic of locational capital switching between the city and the suburbs that Smith finds so crucial to urban gentrification. There is, in other words, something unique about the historical development of cities, particularly with relation to the capital accumulation process, that has no immediate parallel in the rural writ large and in the wilderness specifically. If the Town of Webb can neither be considered a microcosm of the urban-suburban relationship nor a mere geographical extension of the metropolitan sphere itself, then it

stands to reason that the locational switching so central to Smith's concept of disinvestment is not at work here – or, at least, not at work in the same fashion.

Despite the absence of localized disinvestment in Webb, the Adirondack region has nonetheless offered an investment opportunity via devalorization on a broader scale. For a developer who typically deals with high-priced real estate transactions in places like New York City or the Hamptons, the bargain-basement property prices typically found across the Adirondack Park must make the entire place seem disinvested, and indeed, New Jersey fast-food tycoon Roger Jakubowski called Adirondack real estate “the last nickel bargain in America” after snagging the majestic Marjorie Marriweather Post Great Camp for under a million dollars in the mid-1980s (Kunstler 1989). The large-scale geography of capital investment counts. For buyers such as Jakubowski, or real estate magnate Henry Lassiter, who purchased 96,000 acres of pristine Adirondack woodland for a mere \$17 million in 1988, the relatively low cost of Adirondack land makes disinvestment at the neighborhood scale a moot point. For large-scale development capital, the highly localized devalorization so necessary to gentrification in the urban sphere is irrelevant in a landscape which has long embodied quite low amounts of capital investment to begin with. In other words, capital investment in the built environment of Webb never accrued to the point where it “caused a physical and economic barrier to further investment in that space” (N. Smith 1996:85), thereby driving further capital investment outward to some underused rent landscape. Capital didn't abandon the area because there was no investment buildup deflecting its insemination of the wilderness to begin with.

If we understand the Adirondack landscape to be devalorized in a general sense – and therefore a potential “well” for capital investment – then what indication is there that investment has indeed begun to gravitate? The first chapter of this dissertation described two waves of capitalistic interest in the Adirondack Park: the Great Camps-era of colonization of the Gilded Age and the middling development schemes which began to appear on the horizon in the late 1960s. Adirondack historian Barbara McMartin adds a layer of complexity to this schema, arguing that in fact the last forty years have witnessed *two* distinct waves of development proposals: the large-scale subdivision plans described in Chapter One, which began in the late 1960s and early 1970s and acted as a catalyst in the creation of the Adirondack Park Agency and its Private Land Use and Development Plan, and a second wave of development proposals bred by the freeing up of large timber tracts across the Adirondack Park beginning in the early 1980s. In terms of the rent gap and disinvestment, I am primarily concerned with the earlier wave, although I will consider the possible significance of the latter, whose effects have not yet completely played out, in the final section of this chapter.

There is little doubt that the Adirondack Park caught the eye of large-scale developers in the late sixties and early seventies. Table 5.1 summarizes some of the more notorious of these schemes. Investment, however, is only worthwhile if one can expect a return on it. And this is where the peculiar production of nature in the Adirondack Park sets it apart from not only from the inner city, but from other rural landscapes as well. I believe that parts of the Adirondacks, including the Lake Placid-Saranac Lake area, Bolton Landing to the south, and portions of Lake Champlain to the east in addition to

the Fulton Chain, *could have* provided fertile ground for large-scale rural gentrifiers had the creation of the Adirondack Park Agency and the implementation of the Land Use and Development Plan not discouraged such investors from exploiting the Adirondack landscape for this purpose. Certainly by the early 1970s the impetus was there.

Development corporations circulated plans and filed permit applications, following on the heels of the rural development boom in Vermont across the Champlain Valley, but the State of New York headed them off at the pass.

Table 5.1					
Adirondack Development Proposals: Late 1960s-Early 1970s					
Developer	Date	Location	Size	Subdivision	Outcome
Great Northern Capital	1967	Indian Lake	280 acres	300 lots	Pre-APA; "Abandoned for economic reasons" - McMartin
Great Northern Capital	1970	Webb	10,000 acres	5,000 lots	Pre-APA; "Abandoned for economic reasons" - McMartin
Horizon Corporation	1972	Clare & Colton	24,300 acres	6-10,000 homes	Permit denied by APA; subsequent lawsuit failed
Paparazzo/Ton-Da-Lay	1969	Altamont	18,386 acres		Permit denied by APA
Paparazzo/Jordan Estates	circa 1970	Altamont	1,400 acres	140 lots	Permit denied by APA; subsequent lawsuit failed
D'Elia	1971	Loon Lake	Expansion of older resort		Permit denied by APA
Wombat/Hammond	1974	Black Brook	22,000 acres	10,000 homes	Permit denied by APA; subsequent lawsuit failed
Sources: <i>Adirondack Life</i> 2002; Graham, Jr. 1978; McMartin 2002 and 2004; Terrie 1997					

We must be exceedingly careful in characterizing the impact of state regulation, neither minimizing nor underestimating its affect on the Adirondack land market. In the first place, the Adirondack Park Agency's denial of large-scale development permits

occurred during a period when the Agency was still struggling to define its role in legislating the Park, and in the context of heavy lobbying on the part of many environmental groups, both national and local, to tamp down development, as well as counter-demands to shut down the APA altogether and allow development to proceed (McMartin 27-35; Terrie 1997:168-174). In the second, while the State certainly did not *prevent* development from occurring, it did act to hold down the *scale* of development, effectively discouraging corporations which profit precisely from economies-of-scale from bothering to pursue Adirondack ventures. The investment activities of lesser capitalists (including local owner-occupants who subdivided their land for seasonal rental purposes), operating in a market whose profits derive from the small-scale development of individual rental properties, were curtailed to a lesser extent by State regulation, because they pursued projects which are acceptable within the density-limit rules set by the APA. Corporations which profit from the production of hundreds or thousands of rental units at a time were essentially precluded from triggering the sort large-scale gentrification process which might have turned the Fulton Chain region into a landscape resembling Bar Harbor, Maine, or Aspen, Colorado. McMartin lays the blame for large-scale development failure at the feet of a variety of culprits, including State land management but also popular opposition and economic risk:

All of the first development proposals for large forested tracts were blocked. Most of the large subdivision proposals occurred in the late 1960s and early 1970s, about the same time the Adirondack Park Agency (APA) was establishing its Land Use and Development Plan for private lands. There is no question that public opposition to development proposals, channeled through emerging environmental groups, and the

growing strength of the APA were partly responsible for the failure of these developments. The other reasons why they failed [include] the economic climate, the lack of public interest in non-waterfront lots of which to build, the remoteness of the tracts, and developers' problems in raising needed funding...(McMartin 2004:198).

Full-blown rural gentrification, I would argue, never got underway because it was precluded by the state at the very historical moment when it became a lucrative possibility – the moment when the rent gap might have begun to manifest. In a sense, it might be more accurate to describe the Adirondacks as a case of *curtailed* gentrification.

In one sense, purposeful disinvestment did play a role in the gentrification of the Adirondacks, but it was a disinvestment engineered by the State, and once again, it has a great deal to do with the issue of ground rent. The cordoning off of large swaths of wilderness space by State land purchases constitutes a form of disinvestment not seen in the city. In some cases, such purchases involve the outright destruction and removal of fixed capital from the landscape, as when the state purchases a piece of land and razes all structures occupying it. Even when this does not occur, State monopoly control over the Forest Preserve at the very least constructs a barrier to all further investment on that individual piece of property. But in broader social terms, the prevention of investment has a pronounced effect upon surrounding properties, for it serves to protect the potential ground rent they stand to gain by virtue of the way in which nature has been produced in that particular area. For researchers familiar with recent patterns of rural development, this is not news. At least one study (S. Phillips 1999) has established a correlation between higher residential real estate prices and proximity to protected wilderness in Vermont; others (Rasker and Glick 1994) have documented similar

patterns near Yellowstone National Park. In the Adirondack Park itself, a study by economists Roth and Carr found that "...the state's Forest Preserve land creates a positive externality to private land located within one mile which translates into an increase in land value by a magnitude of \$2088 per acre...Parcels of land located within one mile of state land increase in value by 34 percent..." (Roth and Carr 1995:1 and 20-21). If disinvestment has played a role in Adirondack gentrification, it has not been disinvestment on private property engineered by residential landowners through purposeful structural neglect, but disinvestment as a production-of-nature strategy engineered by the State of New York. However, as I shall explain below, this type of capital barrier is sometimes produced by private interests as well.

Wilderness Gentrification and Post-Productivist Theory

In the final section of this chapter, I would like to consider the relevance of "post-productivist" theories of the countryside for the case of Adirondack gentrification. The assortment of ramifications of shifting regimes of rural capital accumulation have been explored at length by scholars of British rural studies, including Goodman and Redclift (1991), Kneale et.al. (1992) Lowe et.al. (1993) Marsden et.al. (1993), Thrift (1989) and others. Here I would like to explore the concept specifically in light of (1) the above discussion of the rent gap, particularly the significance of barriers to capital investment in the process of uneven development, and (2) the wilderness character of the Adirondack Park, which sets it apart as a particular type of rent-generating landscape from those (largely agricultural) landscapes described in the British literature noted

above. In this regard, the (later) work of Martin Phillips does provide some broader sense of scale:

At a more abstract level, the notion of a “post-productivist countryside...can be interpreted in terms of the shifting valuation of rural land and resources. In particular it can be seen to relate to the de-valorisation of land and building with respect to agricultural capital and its uneven revalorisation with respect to other capital networks. Gentrification can be seen as one form of the revalorisation of resources and spaces which have become seen as unproductive or marginal to agrarian capital, and indeed a variety of other rural capitals (M. Phillips 2000:5-6; see also 2004:14).

Can the Adirondack Park be described as a post-productive landscape? What of the Fulton Chain? In a very general sense, the answer to both questions is a qualified “yes.” While the primary and secondary sectors of the Adirondack economy are not yet wholly extinct, they have been largely supplanted by tertiary and quaternary activities revolving around the production of nature for tourist consumption as well as a hodge-podge of public service functions. The *Adirondack Atlas* describes the North Country economy in terms of a new regime of accumulation that has all but replaced the old:

The Adirondacks have at least three main economies: a resource-based, industrial economy; a tourist economy centered around lodging, food, and services, and a public service economy, largely nonprofit, centered on schools, local governments, and prisons...the old economy of mines, mills, woods-work, and farming, while neither extinct nor unimportant, has to a great extent been replaced by a new economy of hospitality, professional work, and service. The new economy is still resource-dependent and, to the extent that it requires a supply of developable land, still consumes and depletes resources. But it is no longer, and probably never will be again, primarily based on extraction and manufacturing (Jenkins and Keal 2004:169).

Farming, in particular, has declined dramatically since the 1960s as a source of income, followed closely by mining and manufacturing (126). When employment is broken down by industry, government (on multiple scales) is the largest single employer in the Park, providing some 12,000 jobs (out of a workforce of approximately 92,860) while “Agriculture, mining, and forestry, which fifty years ago were some of the largest Adirondack employers, now provide only 700 jobs, less than 2% of the jobs in the Park” (121-122). Predictably, the trade and service industries make up the bulk of the rest (providing some 7,000 and 11,000 jobs, respectively), with manufacturing (around 3000 jobs) a distant fourth and construction, real estate, and finance combined providing another 3,400 jobs (122).

Census statistics for the Fulton Chain region (including Long Lake, which contains the hamlet of Raquette Lake within its borders) reveal a similar though not identical picture (see Tables 5.1, 5.2, and 5.3). The government on various scales employs a full quarter of Fulton Chain workers. Broken down by industry, the primary and secondary sectors, if taken to include agriculture, forestry, fishing, hunting, mining, and manufacturing, together employ only 6 percent of Fulton Chain workers. Significantly, construction in and of itself employs 11 percent of the working population of the Chain (which is a far larger percentage than indicated by the *Atlas* for the Park as a whole), as does retail trade. The two largest categories by industry are the arts, entertainment, recreation, accommodation and food services industry, employing 26 percent, and the education, health and social services industry, employing 18 percent. In terms of

occupations, incomes and employers, most workers in the Fulton Chain are in the same boat as their compatriots in the rest of the Park: few Adirondack locals *make* things, or extract the resources from the surrounding environment that will be *used* to make things later on, with the significant exception of construction, which employs around 2 percent of the Parkwide working population but 11 percent of workers on the Chain. Most workers at either scale make a living in the messy arena of the “service” sector writ large,

Table 5.2								
Employment by INDUSTRY								
Town	Webb		Inlet		Long Lake		Combined	
Employed Civilian Population, 16+	860		209		377		1446	
Total Workers/Percent of Workers	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Agro-For, Fishing, Hunting, Mining	23	3	8	4	12	3	43	3
Construction	93	11	17	8	54	14	164	11
Manufacturing	35	4	4	2	8	2	47	3
Wholesale Trade	7	1	0	0	8	2	15	1
Retail Trade	100	12	28	13	34	9	162	11
Transportation, Warehouse, Utilities	25	3	8	4	17	5	50	3
Information	14	2	7	3	5	1	26	2
FIRE/Rental & Leasing	45	5	21	10	8	2	74	5
Professional	32	4	0	0	6	2	38	3
Education, Health, Social Services	164	19	18	9	77	20	259	18
Arts & Rec, Accommodation, Food	242	28	55	26	85	23	382	26
Other Services	33	4	3	1	16	4	52	4
Public Admin	47	5	40	19	47	12	134	9s
All percentages rounded to the nearest whole number								
Source: U.S. Census Bureau/Census 2000 Summary File 3 (SF 3)								

whether private or public. From the perspective of employment, therefore, both the Adirondack Park and the Fulton Chain can accurately be described as post-productive. Employment, however, is only one window through which to view the concept of a “post-productive” landscape, and in and of itself can only tell us so much about the implications of particular accumulation regimes for gentrification. One significant silence in these data is land use. A multinational corporation such as International Paper, for example, might lock up thousands of acres of land while employing fewer people to log them than were required a century ago, or none at all in order to allow for regrowth. The logging industry has become far less labor intensive with the advent of technologies from the chainsaw to the motorized skidder, which have rendered the concentration of manpower manifested by the nineteenth-century lumber camps essentially redundant. Mechanization, in other words, has meant that dozens of men are no longer required to log hundreds of acres. In addition, the advent of scientific forestry management, as well as State laws enforcing particular kinds of lumbering practices, have affected the way in which this particular type of resource extraction is carried out, as have an assortment of shifts in the markets for various types of wood and wood products. Changes in both logging practices and lumber markets can in turn have a profound effect upon decisions to hold, sell, log, lease or let lie vast stands of forest – effects which are not necessarily reflected in employment statistics. Other industries, such as agriculture, fishing or mining, might reveal similarly unique trajectories. It is important, therefore, to distinguish between a post-productive *economy* and a post-productive *landscape*, the former referring to the manifestation of accumulation regimes in economic terms (from wages to profits to

employees to capital investment), the latter referring to the manifestation of accumulation regimes in geographical terms (as the amount of land being used for that particular purpose as opposed to others). While a certain amount of overlap is to be expected, the concepts are non-identical, and pertain differently to the theorization of rural gentrification.

Table 5.3								
Employment by OCCUPATION								
Town	Webb		Inlet		Long Lake		Combined	
Employed Civilian Population, 16+	860		209		377		1446	
Total Workers/Percent of Workers	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Management, Professional & Related	268	31	53	25	124	33	445	31
Service	188	22	54	26	77	20	319	22
Sales and Office	206	24	64	31	72	19	342	24
Farming, Fishing, Forestry	20	2	8	4	7	2	35	2
Construction, Extraction, Maintenance	103	12	17	8	55	15	175	12
Production, Transp., Material Moving	75	9	13	6	42	11	130	9
All percentages rounded to the nearest whole number								
Source: U.S. Census Bureau/Census 2000 Summary File 3 (SF 3)								

In light of the above discussion of the rent gap, the question to be asked of the Adirondack case pertains to the possibility of a post-productivist landscape, although the post-productivist Adirondack economy is relevant to wilderness gentrification in a different way, as discussed below. Did the second wave of development activity described by Barbara McMartin, occurring in the 1980s and involving the sale of large timber tracts across the Park, result in their subsequent purchase and subdivision into

residential real estate, as feared by environmentalists and the State – constituting, in essence, the removal of a physical and economic barrier to capital flow into the built environment of the Adirondacks? The short answer is no. In the first place, the same barriers to subdivision which plagued the earlier developers still applied. Many such tracts fell under the strictly-regulated category of Resource Management, which allows for only 15 principle buildings per square mile. In the second, by the 1980s the series of failed lawsuits brought by early developers against the State of New York had

Employment by CLASS								
Town	Webb		Inlet		Long Lake		Combined	
Employed Civilian Population, 16 Yrs+	860		209		377		1446	
Total Workers/Percent of Workers	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Private Wage & Salary	589	69	138	66	181	48	908	63
Government	165	19	56	27	135	36	356	25
Self-Employed, Non-Incorporated	96	11	13	6	60	16	169	12
Unpaid Family	10	1	2	1	1	0	13	1
All percentages rounded to the nearest whole number								
Source: U.S. Census Bureau/Census 2000 Summary File 3 (SF 3)								

consolidated the legitimacy of APA regulation, rendering the possibility of successful legal challenge dubious. McMartin describes an attempt by the Patten Corporation to skirt subdivision rules by proposing lots of sufficient size to slip under the radar of the APA, but the project came to a doubtful end as the Park Agency approved some proposals and denied others and the company itself encountered financial difficulties (McMartin 2004:199-200). The vast bulk of these timber tracts, according to McMartin,

did not fall into the hands of residential developers in the traditional sense, but became the target of a variety of forest management schemes ranging from outright State acquisition to easement agreements to TIMOs (Timber Investment Management Organizations, which treat timber tracts as investment funds for groups) to non-profit preservation to sporting club common-use purchases (see McMartin 2004:199-231 for details). The outcome for any transition to landscape post-productivism varied: some tracts continued to be logged by their new owners, and therefore remained in the accumulation regime of resource extraction, while others became prime tracts for recreational hunting, fishing, hiking and boating, and therefore left the primary sector, some of them for good. But the widely-feared spectre of subdivision for residential development has not, at this point in time, materialized.

This outcome is interesting for several reasons. To begin with, we might draw a connection between Smith's rent gap theory, particularly as it pertains to uneven development on a broad scale, and post-productivist theories of the countryside. According to Smith, the accrual of capital investment in the built environment can act as a barrier to further capital investment, driving capital toward the shallow topography of low-rent districts, variously conceived. I have stated above that the built environment of the Adirondack Park has long been underused in rent terms – in a sense, disinvested, at least as compared to real estate markets outside the Blue Line – but the consolidation of vast swaths of timber tracts in the hands of the forest industry might logically be conceived as a similar sort of barrier which acts to deflect capital investment. In theory, the freeing up of such tracts might have signaled a disintegration of that barrier, but for

one problem: regardless of how the tracts came to be utilized in terms of value extraction, they remained, in effect, *consolidated* – thereby precluding the rush of residential development capital into the ostensible void. In effect, this turn of events points to a rather glaring weakness in the applicability of post-productivist theory for the Adirondack case: the particular *use* by which a landscape is exploited for purposes of capital accumulation (or, indeed, for any other purpose) is far less significant than the *patterns of ownership* which characterize it. As long as large-scale tracts of Adirondack wilderness remain in the hands of a few landowners, the fragmentation of landscape required for profitable residential development cannot occur.

The continuing phenomenon of large-scale private land ownership is relevant to gentrification for another reason. I have argued in the preceding pages that State land acquisition for the Forest Preserve has exacerbated the problem of gentrification, particularly in towns such as Webb, where the State keeps a considerable portion of land out of the realms of both circulation and production, by simultaneously creating a produced scarcity of private property and preserving those scenic vistas which developers find so lucrative for rent extraction on nearby private tracts. But in essence, any large-scale landowner can perform the same function, particularly as those inside the Blue Line have little choice but to obey the land management guidelines set up by the State for the very purpose of preserving the wilderness character of the Park. It is an ironic situation in some respects: the ancient “enemy” of the wilderness – the logging industry – has in many ways become the savior of latter-day environmentalism through its propensity for keeping the forest intact.

EPILOGUE THE PRICE OF GENTRIFICATION

The ideas presented here are based upon the fundamental assumption that capitalism operates the same regardless of what sort of landscape it is working upon. Profit-driven competition compels the continual process of capital accumulation in both rural and urban industries, including real estate. Yet I would add an important caveat to this assumption: capital accumulation may be forced to conform to peculiar conditions in certain settings if it is to take place at all; thus even though the underlying mechanism remains constant, the process itself may take unique historical trajectories in different geopolitical situations, resulting in an uneven geographical expression of a similar underlying logic. In this case, the “peculiar conditions” are a direct result of the production of Adirondack nature by the State of New York. This is a very specific peculiarity: rural spaces are not merely different from cities, they are different from each other. Gentrification manifests differently in the Adirondacks than in many typical urban settings not simply because the location is *rural*, but because it is a *park*, with a unique set of legislative restrictions on capital flow into the built environment.

If the city cannot teach us precisely what goes on in the countryside, it can, at the very least, inspire us to ask particular questions of it, and ultimately to inquire how far below the surface their conspicuous differences truly run. This is not to suggest that there is no difference between the city and the country. Cities are, of course, different from places like the Adirondacks, with a multiplicity of quantitative densities which add up to qualitative singularities. In the end, it is not the geophysical *result* of capital

accumulation which unites the urban and the rural – and the gentrification of both – but the underlying logic of the process itself. The opening up of both routes – the one which pulls political ecology into the city and the one which pulls urban social theory into the hinterlands – leads us in turn to call into question the old modernist shibboleths which reify the purported solidity of the boundaries between the landscapes themselves, and to postulate a more dynamic and dialectical synthesis based upon something that both hold in common: the levying of rent under the capitalist mode of production.

In Marxian circles, gentrification is something of a dirty word, and for good reason. Students, theorists, activists and tenants have witnessed first-hand the brutal consequences of gentrification-induced displacement for the inner-city working class. Gentrification can uproot, disrupt, and damage the lives of real people for the sake of capital accumulation. Apologists for gentrification point to its purported virtues. Developers, landlords, politicians, and even many academic theorists extol the salvage of historic buildings, the “revitalization” of declining neighborhoods, the economic boost gentrification brings to many cities. I recently attended a class on urban social theory, populated by progressive graduate students, amongst which one asked bravely and with all candor, “Well, if it saves beautiful old buildings and preserves historic landmarks, is gentrification really such a bad thing?” It was an important question, and it has a corollary in rural gentrification, at least in upstate New York: is small-scale, localized gentrification too high a price to pay for preserving a lovely and historic wilderness? As an unapologetic devotee of both old houses and old forests, this author confesses to hypocrisy with regard to both urban and rural gentrification. I would no sooner see the

Adirondack Park become an overdeveloped wasteland than I would an historic urban neighborhood fall into ruin.

And yet, to my own mind, both questions are red herrings. The preservation of history, culture, landscape and architecture in gentrified neighborhoods, whether in the urban or the rural setting, are merely ancillary benefits of an accumulation process which actively employs such benefits as an ideological cover for the brutalization of the working class populations which stand in its path. The myriad decisions made by landlords, developers, real estate agents, construction companies and states which lead to the gentrification of a landscape are not always based upon a conscientious choice to preserve something of social worth outside the realm of exchange value. If the destruction of a landscape stood in the best interests of capital accumulation, then destruction would override – and *has* overridden, many times in the history of industrial societies – any impulse to preservation or fleeting moment of regret on the part of the agents of capital who have no other choice, under pressure of competition, to increase profits. This is the essence of creative destruction, the seemingly endless cycle through which capital produces and reproduces space, nature and landscape in the drive to reproduce itself. While the immediate results of gentrification, whether displacement or preservation or both, may be simultaneously appalling and impressive, it is the underlying process of capital accumulation leading to periodic and inevitable crises of overproduction, and the cyclical immiseration this process produces, which should concern us. The question is not whether preservation – rural or urban – is “worth” the price of displacement and violence, but how long humanity can or will tolerate a mode of

production within which anything of social worth bows before the dictates exchange value, even when those dictates produce something decent along the way.

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