

## **Alternative Landscapes and “Rootlessness” in a Suburban Community**

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### **Abstract**

*This paper explores ways that different communities of stakeholders conceptualize the same geographical space as home, and specific strategies employed to counter feelings of rootlessness associated with development and demographic change. The geographic space of reference for this research is the Tamarack Triangle community of Silver Spring, Maryland. Prior to this iteration of community and landscape existed the semi-rural African American community of Smithville. Through the preservation of the Smithville School, and the utilization of Internet technology (i.e. Facebook), stakeholder communities preserve landscapes of memory and provide each other a sense of mooring to counter feelings of rootlessness.*

**Keywords:** Community, Facebook, Home, Landscape, Rootlessness, Memory, Rootedness

### **1. Introduction**

Many suburban communities are inhabited by residents with no historical connection to the place where they live. Thus, efforts to preserve memories of, and/or historic landmarks in, these communities are often initiated by dispersed populations that refer to the particular community as home. However, the home that they refer to often existed in a different era wherein the community resembled little of its present form or population. Such is the situation exemplified by the Tamarack Triangle community of Silver Spring, Maryland, The Tamarack Triangle neighborhood is a single-family home development located on the eastern edge of the unincorporated Colesville community. Colesville is but one of the several communities that make up the larger area known as Silver Spring, Maryland. Although Silver Spring sits adjacent to Northwest Washington, D.C., Colesville is situated approximately seven miles away from the downtown Silver Spring area and therefore has a much more suburban character.

From an aerial view, the neighborhood does literally look like a triangle (bordered by Paint Branch Park to the west and Fairland and East Randolph Roads to the northeast and southeast). Homes in the Tamarack were built as early as the 1950s and as late as the 1990s, with the bulk of homes built in the 1960s. These are generally two and three storied homes (including basements) that upon first glance, signal an unpretentious, middle class lifestyle. They are generally well-kept and situated on manicured lawns. Originally built as starter homes for young families moving out of the city, most houses in Tamarack do not boast luxurious amenities such as large master bedrooms with walk-in closets and large master bathrooms, two-car garages, and large kitchens.

For a passerby (and there are many as East Randolph and Fairland Roads are heavily travelled arteries), there is nothing to distinguish Tamarack as unique. In this largely unnoticeable suburban community, homes are bought and sold regularly with few, if any, markers to signify any characteristics of the previous owners. Many children grow up to find jobs in other cities as their parents may also move elsewhere to retire or to continue with their careers. Overall, there is not an intra-family, intergenerational appeal to homes in the community. Unlike many communities found in semi-rural and rural areas, these homes are not homeplaces that intertwine land with familial and communal identity vis-à-vis the rest of the world. Instead, these houses are more aptly characterized as tools used by owners to position themselves comfortably for a stage of their career and family life.

A deeper investigation into the community, however, reveals not just the present dwellings, but also a landscape that has had varied realities and points of significance for those who have called it home over different periods of time. For some, the landscape embodies the memory of a community of African Americans who, once freed from slavery, forged a family-centered, farming community and collectively labored for the construction of their Smithville School.

For others, the landscape of the current housing development evokes memories of struggles to integrate and stabilize a suburban, middle class community during a time when housing integration was becoming a reality in Montgomery County, Maryland. And in more recent years, Tamarack is a landscape that includes the stories and achievements of immigrant families from various countries throughout the world.

Each of these collections of memories reveal different stakeholder communities that are inextricably linked to the historical and developing landscape of the Tamarack Triangle; however, each population conceptualizes this landscape in different ways. In this paper I will discuss the landscape as recollected by stakeholders of the Smithville community and the landscape as recollected by those who experienced the early years (1960s to early 1970s) of the integrated Tamarack Triangle development. For the no longer existent Smithville community, a space for the embodiment of historical memory exists in the form of the preserved Smithville School. For those associated with the Tamarack Triangle neighborhood, suburban rootlessness is countered through the mechanism of Facebook.

## **2. Landscapes of Memory and Rootlessness**

Several anthropologists have contributed to discourse concerning the cultural significance of landscapes (Anico & Peralta 2009; Bender 1993; Hirsch & O'Hanlon 1995; Moles 2009; Stewart & Strathern 2003). One insightful perspective on the constructive usefulness of landscapes for anthropological investigations comes from Moles (2009, p. 131), who explains:

Landscapes are made up of events, acts, times, places and people that have passed by and through them. [...]. The ways in which memory and landscape intertwine produce different experiences of place and different meanings associated with the place. Landscape is the hybrid product of biography and location(s), constructed into a narrative that makes sense. [...]. When spaces are allocated significance according to one understanding, they can be important markers of versions of identity, inclusive and affording of a sense of belonging, but at the same time they become exclusionary and closed to alternative readings and understandings associated with the place.

This view of landscapes acknowledges that the complexities of memory inform conceptualizations of place and “local distinctiveness” (described by Clifford and King (1993) as often taken for granted, subtle details that provide for the richness of place) held by different sets of stakeholders. Memory, as Pierre Nora (1989, p. 8) explains, is constantly changing, likely to be incomplete, and “vulnerable to manipulation and appropriation.” Thus, to understand the meanings that stakeholders assign to remembered physical and structural aspects of a landscape, it is important to understand (inasmuch as possible) why certain memories are privileged and incorporated into a generally agreed upon historical narrative while others are not. For those intimately acquainted with a place, rapid changes and/or fear of loss can accelerate selective aspects of remembering and the desire to cling to those cultural resources that provide a sense of mooring (Lowenthal, 1996, p. 6).

The proliferation of grassroots efforts to preserve segregation-era African American schoolhouses provides such an example. Although aware of the value of their work for the broader understanding of the African American experience, many amateur preservationists seeking to preserve segregation-era schoolhouses have the additional motivation of preserving once revered community institutions that are the physical embodiment of local landscapes endangered of fading from memory.

Many of these communities were very similar to Smithville in that they existed as rural farming enclaves begun by former slaves. However, a critical difference is the lack of overwhelming change, such as occurred in Smithville where the original community no longer physically exists. An example of one such community is Bealsville, Florida, a small, family oriented, African American enclave about thirty miles outside of the city of Tampa. There, African Americans preserving memories through the preservation of the Glover School are working from a sense of rootedness. As modern lifestyles and urban sprawl challenged the traditional social cohesion of this multigenerational, family oriented, semi-rural community, residents (almost all former teachers and/or students) bonded together to save the dilapidating, no longer operating schoolhouse which they saw as the heart of their community (Klugh, 2004).

The memories and sense of meaning lodged in this school represent a heritage of past cooperation for community survival that current residents seek to build upon.

Undergirding their efforts is the strong attachment to homeplace felt by a network of close and distant relations in and far away from the community's geographical boundaries. For them, home is aptly described by Schneider (1988, p. 162) where he defines "the American cultural concept of 'home'" as bringing "the ideas of place, kinship, and community into a single unit." Indeed, the concept of a homeplace provides an incalculably important reference point for many. This esoteric sense of station, steeped in land and kinship, is so strong that several authors have reported the main goal of economic activity in rural homesteads to be the maintenance of land and family ties (Eller, 1982, p. 38; Halperin, 1990, p. 144; Stack, 1996, p. xv). This devotion to place appears admirable; however, it is a level of connectedness that is largely inaccessible to those living in modern housing developments located in transient suburban communities.

## 2.1 Rootlessness

The central question inspiring this research is, 'How do different stakeholders of the Tamarack Triangle area work to counter the sense of rootlessness associated with transient suburban communities?' The value afforded to feelings of rootedness are likely to vary according to the individual, as some may prefer the anonymity of modern life while others might find it dreadful. Concerning feelings engendered by a sense of rootlessness, Howard Thurman, a leading theologian of the twentieth century, wrote: "It is a strange freedom to be adrift in the world of men, to act with no accounting, to go nameless up and down the streets of other minds where no salutation greets and no sign is given to mark the place of one's own" (Thurman, 1998, p. vii). Expressing related sentiments, Thomas Gieryn, a sociologist, commented that "to be without a place of one's own—*persona non locata*—is to be almost non-existent" (Gieryn, 2000, p. 482).

At the base of these ruminations about unanchored, disconnected lives is a profound lack of social capital. Rooted communities like Bealsville are rich in social capital that is steeped in generations of family, community bonding, and cooperation. Whether rooted in urban or rural communities, individuals reared in social capital rich landscapes face much discomfort when that landscape is disrupted. Examples of this are found in the research of Susan Greenbaum (2008) and Mindy Thompson Fullilove (2004). Greenbaum (2008) documents the social capital disruption that occurred as a result of the Federal Government's HOPE VI program, while Fullilove (2004) takes a personalized, and even medical, view of the trauma experienced by African Americans who had their "mazeways" (understanding of how to navigate the local environment) disrupted as a result of Urban Renewal programs. Both of these authors, although focusing on involuntary rootlessness, emphasize the important role that place plays in the maintenance of social capital and local identities.

Carol Stack (1996, p. 197) expounds upon the effects of rootlessness (whether voluntary or involuntary) on social capital where she writes:

Many millions of Americans lack a place to go home to. Their families are no longer rooted in a particular piece of American ground, or never did put down such roots.[...]. Rootlessness is one of the many costs of migration. Marriages are strained beyond endurance, children are torn repeatedly from their friends and the nest, generations are scattered, never to meet again. The community of trust supporting civil society is undermined; social capital is squandered. Efforts to maintain love and friendship and ordinary neighborliness must be started all over again from scratch.

The ill effects of rootlessness that Stack (1996) describes can be lessened through involvements in various kinds of social capital building civic and religious organizations; however, the kin-based, multigenerational sense of rootedness found in communities like Bealsville are likely unattainable (if even truly desired) in more transient suburban neighborhoods like the Tamarack Triangle.

## 3. Alternative Readings of Place

A broadened view of various stakeholders with claim to alternative physical and conceptual landscapes in the Tamarack Triangle could include, among others:

- Descendants of Native Americans who hunted and traded in this area (Bayley, 1999, pp. 2-4)
- Descendants of former white landowners (including those of Dr. Washington Duvall who owned much of this land, and several slaves) (Bayley, 1999, pp. 102-103)
- Descendants of former slaves who formed the Smithville community and later created the Smithville School

- Blacks and white families who bought homes in the new Tamarack development in the 1960s and early 1970s
- Those who were children in the early years of the community when integrated living was relatively new for this area
- Individuals who worked at or attended school at William Tyler Page Elementary School (centrally located within the Tamarack Triangle)
- Those, like myself, who grew up in the neighborhood when black/white integration was no longer phenomenal and the community was becoming more multicultural
- And, various first and second immigrant families (due to the diversity of the Washington, DC metro area, there were always some immigrant families in the Tamarack Triangle; however, residents reported seeing a notable increase in African born residents starting in the 1980s, and currently, an increasing number of Latino families).

Some of these stakeholder groups could be further divided into subgroups still likely to narrate a story emphasizing different points of significance within the landscape. And, few are likely to be fully aware of alternative conceptualizations of place held by others.

### **3.1 Smithville**

Smithville existed on the eastern edge of Colesville in Montgomery County, Maryland. Because this was a shallow rural community, residents benefited from their proximity to Washington, D.C. (approximately 8 miles) and other nearby urban areas. The social, educational, and occupational opportunities of nearby urban environments, however, brought on development that eventually engulfed and overran the Smithville community. Today, all that remains to attest to the memory of this settlement is the ‘Old Smithville Colored School’ (a building preserved by the local chapter of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc.), a short, dead-end street named Smith Village Road, and a few older homes inhabited by descendants of those who did not sell all of their homeplaces. Indeed, one could live a full life in the Tamarack Triangle and never know that Smithville existed, or that remnants of the community still exist. However, the story of Smithville reveals insightful knowledge concerning the social, economic, and educational histories of African Americans in this part of the country during the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries (Klugh, 2004).

The founding of the Smithville settlement can be traced back to a land purchase made by Mr. George Smith. During slavery, George Smith “drove team” on the plantation of Dr. Washington Duvall “as his wife, Mary, worked in the Duvall house” (Bayley, 1999 p. 107). In their *Northeastern Montgomery County Black Oral History Study*, Fly and Fly (1981, p. 133) report that after slavery, George Smith “was given the opportunity to purchase approximately” 17 acres of land from his former owner. Mr. Smith was soon joined by other family members (including his four sons who bought “parcels totaling nearly 100 acres” (Bayley, 1999, p. 107)), and by members of the Johnson, Jackson, and Warner families who also purchased land – forming “the first really cohesive sub-community of the area” (Bayley, 1999, p. 164).

Because the majority of the residents of this small, African American farming community were Smith’s, the community was called “Smith Town,” and eventually “Smith Village,” “which was shortened to Smithville in the early twentieth century” (Fly & Fly, 1981, p. 133). These families farmed their land, and interacted with other black enclaves through religious observances, school, baseball games, and informal get-togethers.

In the latter 1940s, through the 1950s, and intensifying in the early 1960s, urban sprawl impacted the Colesville area. As a result, developers were desirous of property upon which to build and sell single-family homes. Given the increased value of the land and the lack of farming due to increasing educational and occupational alternatives, several individuals in Smithville decided to sell at least parcels of their land. As most of the new housing in Montgomery County was made off-limits to blacks (Sween, 1984), certain individuals within the Smithville community exercised agency by purposefully selling some land to African American families. These decisions laid the foundation for Tamarack Triangle to develop as a community containing both black and white middle class families (although first existing in segregated enclaves) years prior to when Montgomery County blossomed into the multicultural metropolis that it is now. Thus, Smithville was important not only for the residents that practiced community there, but also for the eventual racial makeup of its supplanting community.

### **3.1.1: Everyday Life**

Although important, the larger issues of how Smithville came to be, and how it impacted the community that supplanted it, are not the kind of everyday memories that prevail when former residents discuss the place that they once called home. What is remembered are the details of everyday existence – once taken for granted details that made up the “background noise” for the experience of place (Clifford & King 1993). These details are at times folded into narrations meant to express an underlying strength of the community. Such is the case when former resident, Clara Smith (a great granddaughter of George Smith), speaks about the theme of self-sufficiency that emanated through various daily routines when she grew up in the community in the 1930s and 1940s:

The local store was Truman Sissel's store right at the corner of Randolph and New Hampshire Ave. - opposite corner to where the Giant [supermarket] sits now. He had a country store there and when we went it was basically to get maybe sugar or cheese or salt and this type of thing. All of the other things we produced on the farm ourselves. We had pigs so you had your own lard or we'd go there and buy Crisco or something like that. But we had cows and they milked the cows and made their own butter. We had chickens - you had your own eggs. They raised pigs and chickens and turkeys. We planted our own gardens - all kinds of fruit. Plus all these foods were canned during the summer.

In the winter months - we would pick pears and apples in the fall. In the barn we'd put them underneath the hay. So we had fresh fruit all winter long. Also we would pick the tomatoes green and we'd wrap them in newspaper or wax paper and we'd put them in a basket down in the cellar. And put straw around those so they would ripen very slowly - so we had fresh tomatoes up to maybe about February of March.

We had a good life. It was a hard life but we had a good life. We made our own clothes. My grandmother - uncles - or my fathers - when they no longer needed one of their suits or whatever- she would take them and pull them apart and make clothes from them for us. All the women in the community - they learned - everybody could sew (C. Smith, personal communication, July 15, 2003).

Ms. Smith narrates this description of everyday life with a noticeable sense of pride. Occurring in the midst of a time when there was rampant prejudice, discrimination, and denial of privilege by white America, remembrances emphasizing the ingenuity, resilience, and self-sufficiency of her birth community take on a greater importance.

Beyond the details of life outlining a theme of self-sufficiency, Ms. Smith tells of social events such as summer dances, movie nights, hog killings, and church activities. She recalled how her uncle would host dances outside on Saturday nights on a platform that he would construct. She also told of how women in the community would meet at each other's houses to fellowship and share information on household activities such as quilting, canning, and making preserves.

For other children of the community, such as Vernon Jackson and Louis Kelley, a point of significance in the remembered Smithville landscape is the place where the old baseball field once was (now a residential street). Vernon Jackson (2003) recalled, “Every community had a baseball team and you played one another. Colesville had a good team, now. We didn't say we won all the time but we won a lot. We were always known for good ball teams. Just about every young man played ball” (V. Jackson, personal communication, July 10, 2003). These memories of place still root children of the community, like Clara Smith, Vernon Jackson, and Louis Kelley, to the no longer existent landscape of their youth.

### **3.1.2 The Smithville School**

The most poignant memories about growing up in the Smithville community appear to revolve around the Smithville School. Although an earlier school for blacks did exist in Colesville, the facilities had become so poor that it was closed in the early 1900s (Clarke & Brown, 1978, pp. 36-37). Schooling for blacks did not occur again within Colesville until the latter 1920s, when Montgomery County utilized money from African American county residents and the Rosenwald Fund to erect fifteen primary schools (Clarke & Brown, 1978, pp. 44-5). Because of the community initiative, efforts, and contributions of Smithville residents, this school stands as a landmark of the strength and self-sufficiency that Clara Smith discussed.

Clarke and Brown (1978, p. 45) report that on July 13, 1927, “the Smithville (Colesville) delegation requested that a new school be located there.” Deed records from the Land Records of Montgomery County (Liber 287, Folio 285) show that later that same year, a total of two acres of land, “more or less,” was actually sold for the nominal sum of \$10 to the county Board of Education on September 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1927 by Charles L. Johnson, his wife, Jannie Johnson, and Benjamin H. Kelley. Records in the Rosenwald Fund archives at Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee show black contributions of \$500 for each of the eight two-teacher type Rosenwald Schools in Montgomery County. Additionally, Rosenwald Fund contributions averaged \$500. Although these records do not outline the exact amount contributed by residents to the Smithville School, it is very likely that the contributions for the Smithville School resembled those of the other two-teacher type schools in the county. Additionally, it is important to note that this was a significant sum of money for a community such as Smithville to raise at that time.

Former Smithville School students remember various details about everyday existence there. Such memories include various characteristics about teachers, unwelcomed visits from the dentist, having to use books formerly used by white students, special events, and details about the daily routine. Beyond the subtle humiliation of having to use the old books of white children that she knew, Clara Smith (personal communication, July 15, 2003) emphasized her appreciation for the individual efforts of teachers who taught beyond the information provided in books – especially in regards to African American history. In fact, she could still recount her teachers from when she was a student in the 1930s:

Ms. Evelyn Taylor was the first teacher that I can recall that was at Smithville School. And she stayed at my grandmother, Alice H. Smith's home. And she also had night school classes to teach the older members in the community. Mrs. Hyson was the most senior in age at that school - she taught my mother and father in elementary school. And, Mrs. Thelma Wheeler, Mrs. Gladys Boston - and then Mrs. Edith Hill Owens is my first cousin. She taught me from the 4th grade to the 7th grade. As I can recall - Mrs. Wheeler, Hyson, and Boston were the teachers at Smithville when I started in elementary school.

These recollections are grounded in the fact that her teachers appear to have taken active roles in the community, and were likely to be socially connected to residents in various ways. Louis Kelley (personal communication, July 10, 2003) and Vernon Jackson (personal communication, July 10, 2003), students at the school when it was closed in 1952, also recall Ms. Wheeler, Ms. Edith Hill Owens, and Mrs. Gladys Boston, who was then the principal.

Former students also remembered several school events to which parents and others in the community were invited. These included school plays, Field Day, and May Day. Louis Kelley (personal communication, July 10, 2003) remembered Field Day as a special day during the year where students would play sports and compete for first-place ribbons in various track events. Janet Dorsey (personal communication, July 6, 2003) remembered both May Day and in-school plays as events that parents of students in the community would attend. In terms of what was taught at the school, Clara Smith (personal communication, July 15, 2003) explained:

Mrs. Owens came in and started teaching. She taught me from the 4th grade to the 7th grade. We went to school. We had the Lord's prayer. And we had the pledge allegiance to the flag. Maybe sometime someone might read one of the Psalms from the bible. And that's how our day got started. We started our day and we would sing maybe one of the anthems - like God Bless America. We had the reading, writing, arithmetic, history, geography; it was interesting, going through geography at that time. I remember that even the boys were taught spool knitting. And we had a kitchen where the girls learned some cooking and sewing and that type of thing.

Along with the more bible-centered and gender specific teaching of that era, discipline was also stressed at the Smithville School. Both Louis Kelley and Vernon Jackson reported that teachers would discipline students by pulling ears, hitting knuckles with a ruler, or taking a child “in the back” for slightly harsher punishment. Notes home and further discipline from parents often accompanied these punishments.

Another poignant school memory was the visit from the dentist. Louis Kelley, Vernon Jackson, and Janet Dorsey all remembered lining up in front of the Dentist's air-stream trailer to have their teeth checked. Vernon Jackson (personal communication, July 10, 2003) described his experience:

He'd come and check everybody. He'd go in there to see if it looked bad – maybe you had a filling that needed to get filled or whatever. Then he'd write all this information down and a certain day he'd take you in for your work. He'd stay there until he was finished with everybody's teeth. And then he'd go to another school or whatever. You'd see that [his trailer] and everybody would get sick in the stomach. The guy – if he had anything to numb your mouth he didn't give it a chance to work because he would start working on you right away and you'd be in pain. You know, you'd be hollering and everything else. That was a bad experience – that was probably the worse experience going to that school.

Although, unpleasant, the fact that dental service was made available to students is significant. My parents both attended segregated schooling in South Carolina, and neither had ever heard of a dentist making school visits. The Smithville School, although also servicing students from surrounding areas, was an integral part of the Smithville community. Residents had requested the school and contributed to its erection and maintenance. The school also employed a few individuals from the community, and was likely a place where others volunteered. As the only building within the community that was not a private home, or privately owned, the Smithville School was a center for community activity.

Despite its importance to the immediate community, the overall condition of the school was poor and it was closed in 1952 when Montgomery County consolidated black schools into larger, better-equipped buildings (Clarke & Brown, 1978, p. 128). The old Smithville School building remained the property of the Board of Education until the mid-1950s when several former black schools were transferred to the Montgomery County government “for a nominal fee of one dollar” (Clarke & Brown, 1978, p. 129).

Residents requested that the school building and the two acres of land be deeded back to the community, but that request was denied. Instead, the county decided to use the Smithville School property as a bus depot and storage facility (MacMaster & Hiebert, 1976, pp. 347-9). Fortunately, the property was never sold to private developers and the buildings, although altered, were not destroyed.

It was not until the late 1990s that Montgomery County showed an interest in letting go of this property. That is when members of Iota Upsilon Lambda (I.U.L. -- the Montgomery County, MD chapter of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, INC.) approached the county and were able to strike a deal wherein they purchased the school for the nominal sum of \$10 - with the understanding that they would adaptively rehabilitate the historic building by creating a museum to depict the history and achievements of local African Americans. Members of I.U.L. made this deal because they were looking for a permanent place to meet and hold activities, but more importantly, because they readily recognized the value of the educational heritage embodied in this school. Although none of them actually went to the school, several members attended similar schools in other southern states.

When asked her opinion of the ongoing preservation efforts at the Smithville School, Clara Smith (personal communication, July 15, 2003) stated:

I am sorry that they're just getting around to it now because in the early 1960s - after the desegregation law was passed - my father, Howard Smith, and my Aunt Leila Lee, went to Rockville and asked them to give that school back to the community so they could use it as a community facility. And they didn't do it. So therefore, it's not that the people in the community didn't have an interest to get that school - we were told we couldn't have it. But it's better late than never. I'm glad to see that they are going to do something with it. And I also would like to see that the information being put in there - that it will reflect back on the people in that community who are responsible for building it. Because the people who are there now - they're not the ones who built it.

For Clara Smith, and other former students, this school is an important site that represents not only the education that took place, but the spirit of the community that built it.

### **3.2: Tamarack Triangle**

The landscape of Smithville changed dramatically once full-scale housing development began in the early 1960s. Within the span of a few years, this semi-rural, family-oriented community was displaced by over 800 homes and the brand new William Tyler Page Elementary School.

Most of these new residents were young, white professionals with small children. They chose this community for reasons including: the relatively comfortable (at that time) commute to Washington, DC; the good reputation of Montgomery County's public schools; the scenic beauty of the area; and the affordability of spacious new homes with yards for children to play in. The characteristics that drew young, white middle class families to the Tamarack Triangle were also a draw for a growing black middle class population resulting from increased educational opportunities and the Federal Government's efforts to desegregate its workforce. Like most Americans, middle class African Americans desired homes and neighborhoods that equated with their hard won social status. In step with social and ideological forces of their time, and faced with the impetus to move from declining urban housing, they sought homes in neighborhoods that were "recognizably middle-class" (Wiese, 2004, p. 100). They too bought into the idea of the "suburban dream" which included "detached single-family houses in a semi-rural environment" (Weiss, 2004, p. 69), good schools, quality municipal services (Leigh & McGhee, 1986, p.31), yards for children to play in, well maintained properties, and neighbors of similar social and economic status (Grier & Grier, 1958, p. 18).

Although a handful of established, all-black, middle class suburban communities existed elsewhere in Maryland (Wiese, 2004, p. 5), many African Americans believed that they needed to seek integrated housing to achieve their goals. One motive for this conviction, based on prior experiences, was the belief that whites in decision making positions would persistently direct more resources to majority white communities (Orfield, 1986, p. 21). More significantly, choosing to integrate suburban communities "signaled an implicit assertion of equality" (Wiese, 2004, p. 9). When prodded about the decision that he and his wife made to seek integrated housing, one respondent (in 1966, the first African American in his section of Tamarack Road) commented, "Well, we just figured somebody would have to be first. Maybe we were too young to be intimidated. We were both in our twenties at that time. And we knew what we wanted, and we were determined. We just felt that nothing was going to stop us" (A. Klugh, personal communication, April 18, 2003). Another long term resident saw living in an integrated community as a way to achieve a greater mutual understanding between blacks and whites, and as an occasion to disprove "the stereotypical myth that our mere presence kills all the trees and all the grass" (J. Offord, personal communication, July 2, 2003).

Like many other communities, white fears of neighborhood decline could have been exploited by conniving realtors to start a wave of blockbusting as more African Americans moved into the Triangle. However, the changing racial dynamic of the 1960s coupled with the more liberal mindedness of many young, white middle class residents of Montgomery County, MD, proved to be formidable obstacles for those with plans to disrupt the Tamarack Triangle. Instead, black and white neighbors, both interested in protecting the value of their recently purchased homes, banded together through the auspices of their newly created Tamarack Triangle Civic Association (TTCA) and informed local realtors that they would collectively boycott those who attempted blockbusting and/or racial steering in their community.

This collective effort to stabilize an integrated neighborhood laid the foundation for interracial cooperation that became routine when carrying out community activities for years to come. The early years of the TTCA newsletter, the "Tamarack Bark," detail several activities that residents collaborated with each other to carry out. These include activities such as a drama club, little league softball, an annual Fine Arts Festival, a career program for teens, and spring and fall dances. Although most of these activities had ceased by the 1980s (my time growing up in the community), the positive memories associated with them still root individuals to the Tamarack Triangle. In fact, on June 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2007, a newspaper article appeared in the *Washington Post* entitled, "Many Happy Returns, and Still Room for More." This article discusses the fact that several original families have remained in the Tamarack Triangle community, and a few children that were reared there have since grown up and decided to also buy homes in the neighborhood (Straight, 2007, p. G01). Although there are some residents still in Tamarack Triangle who have lived in their houses since they first bought them over forty years ago, many of these couples and individuals are at an age where the lure of a retirement community may be more appealing than maintaining a single-family home.

As these remaining original homeowners leave the community, their homes are bought by younger families, increasingly first or second generation immigrants, who have no connection to the landscape of experiences living in



the minds of older community residents. And, as most children who grew up in the community's early years live outside of the community, and many outside of the state, the small number of returnees highlighted by Straight (2007) increasingly find themselves living in a community with a very different social and racial composition. This is the generation likely confronting a sense of rootlessness. Although the houses and streets are basically the same, the change in population allows former residents to be anonymous when visiting the community where they grew up.

Using Howard Thurman's words, they (as I increasingly do when visiting the community) potentially feel the strangeness of going "nameless up and down the streets of other minds where no salutation greets and no sign is given to mark the place of one's own" (Thurman 1998, p. vii).

For those to whom the memory of Smithville is significant, there is the Smithville School. There, memories of the Smithville community are purposefully preserved (through the collection of artifacts and an oral history project) as a means to showcase local African American history. For those who grew up in the early years of the Tamarack Triangle, there is no landmark or physical repository of memories. What does exist, however, are virtual communities by means of Facebook groups entitled "Tamarack Triangle Neighborhood Reunion," "I Grew Up in Tamarack Triangle," and "W.T. Page in the 80s."

The "Tamarack Triangle Neighborhood Reunion" page has a description that reads: "Family, friends and neighbors from the Tamarack Triangle neighborhood in Silver Spring, MD. Our reunion is open to everyone especially those who graduated HS from 1975-1985." Although growing, there are currently 173 'friends' in this group. The friends are representative of the neighborhood's early diversity (mostly white and black). And many, like myself who graduated high school outside of the 1975-1985 window, have joined the group regardless of age. In a few cases, some who joined the group never actually lived in Tamarack but were so socially connected to residents there that they are seen as members of the community.

The creator of this page, Shelley Nuttall Martinez, a 1980 graduate of the local Paint Branch High School and former Tamarack resident now residing in Albuquerque, New Mexico, originally made this page as way to announce an actual neighborhood reunion/party that occurred in 2007. Her intent in using the 1975-1985 window was to target people whom she felt would be familiar with the names of those coordinating the event. As of this writing, a fourth reunion is being planned and the Facebook page has achieved permanence as an ongoing virtual reunion - filling a void that many had not previously recognized.

Speaking about the upcoming Tamarack Reunion, Ms. Martinez (personal communication, July 25, 2010) commented:

I plan on being there this year. Touching base with those old friends gives me a sense of home. At the time, I don't think we knew our special our neighborhood was. We knew it was the spot to hang because whenever there was a party in the neighborhood people would come from all over the area. I had 2 parties at my house and probably close to 200 people came through. We were close-knit & would generally go to parties at White Oak Armory or Montgomery College or DC house parties in a large group. The parties didn't really get started until the Tamarack crew showed up.

The willingness to travel from New Mexico to Maryland for a neighborhood reunion is significant. For many, the current population of the neighborhood is irrelevant to what they remember. Their parents and almost everyone that they knew when growing up may have moved years ago. In fact, reunions are not likely to take place within the neighborhood but rather at the home of someone from the neighborhood that still lives in the area. Although the physical landscape of Tamarack Triangle remains very similar to what it was in the 1970s, for those like Mrs. Martinez, place exists in memories and those memories can be effectively celebrated online or at gatherings outside of the community.

This group is important because it gives an otherwise largely disconnected and increasingly rootless population an open line of communication with others who share similar experiences. Through creating, joining, and participating in this Facebook group, individuals who grew up in a different era of the Tamarack Triangle have found a way to combat the suburban rootlessness that denies them recognition in the very neighborhood they once called home. Groups, such as the Tamarack Triangle Neighborhood Reunion, allow individuals to find mooring in the continual association with others who retain the same landscape of memories and experiences.

#### **4. Conclusions**

The alternative readings of the Tamarack Triangle landscape illustrate how the same geographical space can be of different interpretive value in the minds of individuals with different landscapes of experience and memory. For those who were part of the Smithville community the remembered landscape details struggles of African Americans who, once freed from slavery, forged a family-centered, farming community and collectively labored for the construction of the Smithville School.

Routine remembrances include raising pigs, chickens, and turkeys, growing and canning fruit, sewing and mending clothes, and attending the local Smithville School. Special memories include movie nights, hog killings, summer dances, and community baseball games. Significant throughout is the self-sufficiency displayed by residents in carrying out daily activities and community events and initiatives. Recollections from the early years of the Tamarack Triangle include stories of housing integration, efforts to begin neighborhood institutions (such as the Tamarack Triangle Civic Association and the William Tyler Page Elementary School Parent Teacher Association), and participating in various community activities (such as the drama club, little league softball, an annual Fine Arts Festival, a career program for teens, and spring and fall dances). For both African Americans and whites from this era, the landscape of the current housing development evokes memories of growing up in an integrated suburb during a time when integrated new housing developments were not the norm in Montgomery County, Maryland.

This paper illustrates ways that each of these stakeholder groups is able to actively counter the rootlessness that comes along with development and demographic changes. Through participation in the preservation of the Smithville School and the ongoing oral history project, those who remember Smithville are able to lodge their stories within a community landmark that stands as a monument to their past experiences. Although lacking the comfort of a physical repository for their memories, Individuals who grew up in the early years of the Tamarack Triangle neighborhood are advantaged in that the community still looks much like it did in their past. The difference, however, is the lack of recognition and rootedness due to the transition in population. For them, Facebook has emerged as a means to have an ongoing neighborhood reunion in which stories, pictures, and information can be shared, and yearly reunion parties can be planned.

## 5. References

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