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JAYCIE J. THAEMERT

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IN SEARCH OF THE EMERALD CITY: LIFE NEXT TO A KANSAS SUPERFUND SITE

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BY THE COMMITTEE CONSISTING OF

Dr. Lucas Bessire, Chair

Dr. Misha Klein

Dr. Daniel Mains

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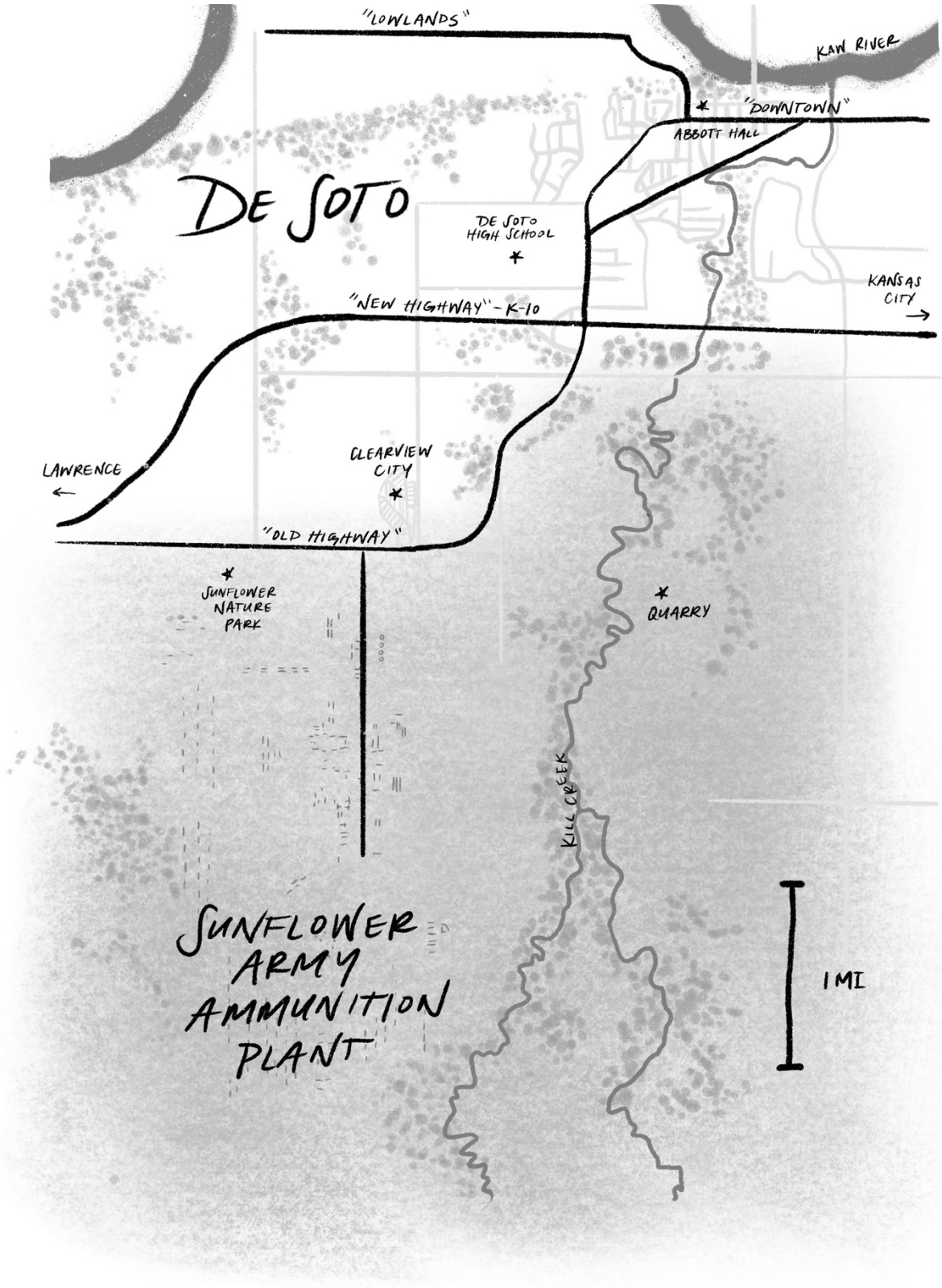
Abstract

This thesis is an ethnographic investigation of the Sunflower Army Ammunition Plant and the surrounding town of De Soto, Kansas. I argue that the ammunition plant has produced not only embodied impacts in the form of industrial contamination, but also affective experiences which have influenced certain populations' sense of belonging and self-understanding. The ammunition plant serves as a point from which to view many repressed historical violences within the town, including settler colonial dispossession and land seizure, Ku Klux Klan activity, and weapons production itself. In conducting my research, I drew upon several interconnected methods, including interviews with plant workers and town residents, historical documentation and oral histories, and self-reflection as a resident of the town. I attempt to problematize the notion of "remediating" this toxic land, tying contamination to issues beyond those of land use and redevelopment.



Map of De Soto, Kansas

Note to the Reader

De Soto, Kansas is a small town about thirty miles west of Kansas City. I grew up in this town for most of my life, knowing little about its past and even less about the ammunition plant that operated there for over half a century. After leaving for Oklahoma to pursue my undergraduate education, I returned to conduct my master's thesis research on De Soto and the affective and embodied impacts of its toxic ammunition plant.

This thesis is written as a series of stories, histories, and reflections on the Sunflower Army Ammunition Plant and its relationship to the town of De Soto. Sunflower is one of several World War II-era Army installations throughout the American heartlands, whose toxic impacts often remain understudied and unacknowledged. The problem with this lack of acknowledgement is that these forms of toxicity are allowed to proliferate, producing not only the capacity for physical harm, but also emotional experiences of othering along racialized, gendered, and classed lines. U.S. military violences, industrial contamination, settler colonialism, and racialized marginalization tend to be thought of and studied as separate things. In places like De Soto, though, these destructive processes overlap. By bringing these elements into a single framework, this account aims to relate the town's ammunition plant to larger histories of violence and disjuncture and to break the cycle by which such harms subsist in the subsoil of people's lives.

There is a danger in telling a singular story about De Soto. A number of ongoing scientific, governmental, and legal processes seek to do exactly this. But analyses of the ammunition plant based on thresholds of contamination, zoning processes that cleanly delineate pieces of non-toxic land, and definitive narratives of town history all miss important elements of life lived in and around De Soto throughout the past and present. Thinking of these elements separately means missing their larger entanglements with people and politics and obscuring the ways they might overlap to sustain particular forms of violence. Importantly, this lets responsible parties off the hook: if the forms of violence produced in this place can never be adequately characterized, they never have to be dealt with.

The structure of this piece is thus an attempt to grapple with the layered complexity of this place: narratives weave in and out with one another, never reflecting a coherent body of understanding. The point is the incoherence of historical characterizations, the way things do not fit: De Soto cannot be singularly characterized by its racist past, by its ammunition plant, or by its boundaries or governance alone. Part of this incoherence also lies in the relationship between the past and the present; the events herein are not presented linearly, but are placed alongside one another to draw upon thematic connections. It is my hope that this piece provides a deeper engagement with the variety of historical and present processes which have intermingled to produce modern-day Sunflower and De Soto.

Completing this ethnographic work and writing about it has also been a process of reflection. While it is common to position oneself within ethnographic work, I found it particularly important to include reflections on my own time in De Soto prior to beginning this project. Comparing my experiences growing up in the town with those of returning as a researcher has allowed me to rethink what my home has meant to me and how I have engaged with its histories. (Indeed, the lack of belonging I felt within De Soto and the tensions around class, race, and

gender were not as singular as I had once imagined). This project is an attempt to grapple with both the profound devastation that has occurred in a place I called home, as well as to wrestle with how I may have been complicit in the larger colonial and imperial projects which brought De Soto to its present state.

Repressed historical memories, racism and insularity, and military-industrial contamination, of course, exist on a much broader scale than the five-thousand person town of De Soto, Kansas. These issues relate to some of the most urgent questions of the contemporary—what solutions to injustice should look like, who should be responsible for them, and how we can best carry them out. Still, these politically salient issues are commonly ignored in places like De Soto, which are often characterized from the outside as homogenous. In actuality, these places contain historical contours which make belonging, self-understanding, and "home" into pertinent existential questions. Engaging with these histories, then, provides a foundation for envisioning what a more equitable and sustainable future may look like—within De Soto and beyond it.

IN SEARCH OF THE EMERALD CITY: LIFE NEXT TO A KANSAS SUPERFUND SITE

Home

"FOLLOW THE ROAD TO SAFETY," reads the dilapidated billboard to the right of the main entrance road for the Sunflower Army Ammunition Plant. A young Dorothy, her brunette hair in a braid flowing down her back, walks with her companions arm in arm down a now-less-than-yellow brick road. They strut together towards an Emerald City that has since disappeared from view in the top right corner, peeled away by the passage of time. Though the sign has lost much of its original vibrancy, it remains colorful in comparison to the grey cast of the sky over the ammunition plant buildings. The grass on the sign remains greener than that beneath my feet, the aqua sky a contrast to the nebulous mass of clouds above my head. The only rainbow I've ever seen in De Soto, Kansas erupts on the left side of the panel from a seal I can no longer read, and ends on the right where the Emerald City would have been.

On the fence adjacent to the Wizard of Oz billboard, that which separates the grounds of the since-condemned ammunition plant from the road, there is another, much smaller sign. This one reads quite unapologetically "NO TRESPASSING: HAZARDOUS CONDITIONS." It is one of many which are plastered along the miles of fences that surround the ammunition plant boundaries. Every few yards, there is another sign on the fence, all variations on this same theme and reminders that I need not consider going beyond these fences: "NO TRESPASSING: VIOLATORS PROSECUTED" and "CAMERAS IN OPERATION 24/7. VIOLATORS WILL BE PROSECUTED."

Beyond these fenced boundaries, I can see the remnants of the ammunition plant that once dominated the landscape of prairie hills. Nothing about the area is pastoral: the four white water towers march toward the two-lane highway like soldiers, reaching out from their stalwart post, trapped in time. They remain as sentries over the buildings that have yet to be burned in the cleanup efforts: some metal-walled barracks, some guard towers, some small house-like structures with off-white siding. The original guard gate stands further down the entrance road, its only perceptible updates being the warning signs that now plaster its front. The view from the entrance road is not enough to suggest the enormity of the place, with its few buildings and water tower soldiers. In reality, its acreage numbers more than ten thousand.

Across the two-lane road north of the ammunition plant grounds lies the cinderblock neighborhood of Clearview City. Several long, tan stucco buildings parallel the large silver barracks across the street, and like the barracks, each of them (a former post office, grocery store, and movie theater) has been condemned. Further into the neighborhood, there are livable homes. They are each the same faded tan stucco or siding, constructed with military-grade consistency. They face their streets, Lanes L, M, N, O, and P, in orderly lines, with little resistance. Their only individual identifiers are those placed by their residents—an occasional carport, a Barbie bike, a basketball goal, a faded lawn chair or a set of string lights.

Between Clearview City and the ammunition plant lies the new highway. It comes from the west,

appearing as though it extends that direction forever, even though it only runs that way for a measly six miles. Driving east on the new highway, I pass the ammunition plant and its Wizard of Oz sign and curve to the left, heading north towards the main part of the town of De Soto. As the road curves, I pass cows grazing in fields beyond more "NO TRESPASSING" signs, the since-vacated New Village that was once an addition to Clearview City, and an old machine shop, its dirt-covered windows peering out at the two-lane road.

Continuing north, I pass newer additions to the town: its single stoplight, which sits at the intersection of new and old gas stations, a new Burger King, and an old Pizza Hut; the high school, which has been built onto since I graduated; the football field, which has remained on the top of the hill overlooking the cemetery. Turning onto the old highway off the newer one, I continue north, the lazily curving road lined with new-old neighborhoods. The old highway slopes gradually downward toward the Kaw river, as though remembering that the town is indebted to this river for its very existence. The houses that line the highway stand in stark disagreement with one another—some have seen more history than others.

De Soto's original downtown hasn't been a true downtown for a number of years. The "first" home in the town, a two-story limestone building bearing the name of its owner, Abbott Hall, serves as a reminder that as deep as the memory of this town goes, there is seemingly more that remains unremembered. There are attempts at revitalization despite the lack of life among the failing buildings. Wanda's Cafe still serves breakfast three days a week out of the defunct Dollar General. A new pizza shop has opened up just as the old Chinese buffet has closed. City Hall remains in the same place on a side street, despite multiple break-ins and a brief incendiary event where half of the original building was lost.

At the end of the old highway lie the lowlands, an area which served as the backdrop for my childhood. The occasional train still runs through the station where the old steel mill operated, but the rest of the area has been a park for as long as I've been around—the tee-ball games in the ballfields, the triangle-dome where I split my head, the concrete basketball courts that were never repaved, and the house that once exploded because it was a methamphetamine lab.

The lowlands are home to the one annual community event which, to my knowledge, is the only one that draws the attention of nearly everyone in town. The De Soto Days festival is simultaneously a marching-band-Lions-Club-mayor-in-a-convertible parade, a three-day carnival, and a food festival. On summer nights when the festival would occur, my brother and I would walk ourselves down to the park. We would follow the creek to the new highway, and the new highway to the lowlands. It would be warm and moist and muddy, and it was home.

—

DE SOTO, KANSAS IS my home. I spent most of my formative years in the town, walking back from the elementary school to our little neighborhood just north of the highway. I cannot recall at what point I became aware of the ammunition plant—it was there, a part of the town just as

much as anything else, and there did not seem to be anything particularly strange or interesting about it. I had few interactions with Clearview City and with the ammunition plant until I was in high school, when I developed my passion for astronomy. I spent many nights out in the darkness of the plant grounds, pointing my borrowed telescope towards the sky.

However, the lack of awareness I had about the plant while growing up is peculiar. Quite frankly, not many other people in town pay it any mind either. There is a startling lack of literature about the outcomes of the production or its effects on the two creeks that run through the area, the natural wildlife, or the cows that now graze on the land. There is little curiosity among residents of the town about the clean-up process and the motives behind it. And there is a completely expected disregard for some of the people who would experience the most direct consequences of the plant and its clean-up process: the residents of Clearview City.

A single history of De Soto and its ammunition plant remains difficult to construct. There is no number of perspectives that constitutes a "whole" image of the town, in its past, its present, or its future. Collective remembrance of the town and of its ammunition plant is always partial, fragmented, and augmented, continuously influenced by and filtered through the normalization of life adjacent to and within a military-industrial installation. There are surely aspects of De Soto's history which are more forgotten than others: its colonization of a Shawnee reservation, its deeply rooted racism throughout much of the twentieth century, its active participation in the destructive tendencies of war. A rose-colored narrative of life in a small town obscures the contradictory nature of violent histories which are still active in the present.

Even as there are attempts to "diminish the affective brightness of traces of violence" (Gordillo 2014: 82) the contradictory nature of these repressed histories becomes increasingly difficult to ignore in the presence of their physical remains. Abbott Hall, a site of Ku Klux Klan meetings during the 1930's, still stands downtown as a museum for the town's history. The increasingly frequent floods of the lowlands near the river evidence long-lasting forms of environmental degradation. The ammunition plant still retains authority over the town's economic success, its ruins a consistent reminder of its prior and ongoing environmental devastation. The Old Village, now Clearview City, is most difficult to ignore, as violent histories are inherited by those living directly upon a site of toxicity.

Memories of a place operate mainly on the level of individual experience, but there are surprising resonances between individual memories and composite histories (Stewart 1996). These resonances reach a fever pitch when juxtaposed with the physical remnants of a place's past—some levels of the composite become harmonious, while others remain dissonant. Individual memories, thus, can be said to constitute a history, one that is bound by a particular place and time, but always filtered through experiences leading up to the present. Some can be combined into coherent compositions, while others remain, more interestingly, distinct.

Memory is as much an affective experience as it is a cognitive one. When past experiences are recalled and filtered through physical remains of the present, memories become concentrated around what Raymond Williams called "structures of feeling;" they rest "at the very edge of semantic availability," and involve "meanings and values as they are actively lived and felt" (Williams 1977: 134, 132). These structures of feeling can take many forms, but have coalesced for many of my interlocutors as a formation of nostalgia. This nostalgia appears as the mourning

of a collective loss of better days, of booming wartimes and economic growth, but these kinds of nostalgia are privileged. In reality, there were no such better days for particular groups of individuals who lived in De Soto or faced the consequences of its wartime production.

Histories are created from memories in tandem with their recordings. Recording these memories is, thus, an act of historical power. Michel Foucault expressed that historical knowledge is often "made for cutting," but I would also argue that it has the potential to be made for illuminating (Foucault 1971: 88). My recordings herein, of course, are of a particular moment, of a particular subset of individuals, always partial and located, but they do connect to broader understandings and deconstructions of our located pasts.

This has been as much a process of reckoning with the past for myself as it has been for my interlocutors. I grew up with very little concept of how De Soto came to be what it was in the present. I am not what older locals would refer to as a town *native,* someone who locates their family history here. It was a place in which I lived, but I was not engaged with its past. I grew up with a sense of innocence—a lack of knowledge which made it less likely that I would perceive the colonial and imperial legacies of the town. While I existed quite literally among the physical reminders of these pasts, I did not perceive them as significant.

In turning back to De Soto for this project, it is now impossible for me to ignore these legacies. A large part of my own coming of age has been reconciling with this past and engaging with the conditions that made these events and their effects possible. Coming of age in a small town such as this one often means leaving completely or remaining indefinitely. For me, it has meant leaving for my education while simultaneously coming to recognize that there is something deeply unsettling about this place that compels me to reconsider it. This has meant I have not completely stayed and not completely left the town of De Soto, Kansas, but rather have turned back towards it to produce a more complex understanding of the town's histories and how I have inhabited them as I grew up there and returned as an ethnographer.

I had always perceived the ammunition plant as an object from a past that was not mine. It was locationally and temporally distant, disconnected from the making of the contemporary. In looking to present-day De Soto, its history, and my own experience, however, I came to recognize that its essence permeates the town. It weaves itself along the new and old highways with new-old houses, living in toxic residues, physical remnants of plant production and wartime, memories of workers of the plant who still reside in the town, the buildings downtown, the river, and Clearview City. It resides in these spaces and through the town's residents, whose perceptions of it lie closer to indifference than active interest.

I am in search of these indefinite, yet durable connections—between the plant and the town, the past and the present, the physical and the affective. Dorothy's search for the Emerald City, its essence shrouded in murk and mystery, was made in an effort to leave her circumstances. Mine is above all a return to fully inhabit them, a consideration of how the ammunition plant's legacy lives in my hometown, in its residents, and in myself.

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THE SUNFLOWER ARMY Ammunition Plant opened on March 26, 1942. The town of De Soto was in a period of rapid modernization, partially brought on by the construction of the ammunition plant. De Soto was not unique in this phenomenon among Kansas small towns: following the events of December of 1941, there were nearly twenty other Army establishments within the state of Kansas constructed in 1942 alone. From airfields to ammunition plants and from Dodge City to Parsons, these establishments created cities across the state which were inextricably tied to the activities of the U.S. military (Ford 2008: 3).

Prior to the establishment of the ammunition plant in De Soto, other forms of modernization were underway. Electricity and air conditioning became standardized, and a locker plant, a drug store, an animal hospital, and filling stations had all been established in the town during the 1930's. Memberships in social groups became commonplace, some more nefarious than others; the town has a storied history with groups like the Freemasons, the Jaycees, and the Ku Klux Klan. Social status based on family name became more significant as an influx of people moved into town to work in the ammunition plant. The supposed real residents of the town, or those who resided there before the construction of the ammunition plant, knew if you belonged there or if you had come up from Arkansas or rode in on the train from Kansas City that dropped off plant workers each morning (Ashlock-Longstreth 1957: 91).

The population of the town grew rapidly—from less than 400 to more than a couple thousand—with the establishment and subsequent growth of the plant. The center of city life moved south, towards the ammunition plant, and the new highway was built as a perhaps-deliberate separation between those who lived in town and those who moved in to work in the plant. An uncertainty fell over the town's residents about the way life would be in this new town—before, production had been centered in the steel mill on the river and merchants made their stable living downtown. There were not nearly enough houses to accommodate the amount of people who would come. Army appraisers would take over land, more than a hundred and fifty farm sites, not only for the construction of the plant but also for the villages that would house its workers (Ford 2008: 6).

Town residents of the 1950's apparently remember most the traffic that descended upon the town during these years. The trains that originally brought people into town for work gave way to buses, which were backed up on the old one-lane highway for miles each morning and afternoon. A newspaper headline from 1953 reads "A JAM IN DE SOTO," the article nostalgic for days before the "horde" of outsiders descended upon the town during the war boom, days when ride-in traffic did not clog up the highways, days when one could sit outside peacefully on Main Street, days when garages did not have to be opened up as extra rooms, days when so-called "Arkansans" did not sleep in the open pastures, days when business owners were not worked to the bone (Ashlock-Longstreth 1957: 90).

In 1945, an article titled "Hell's a-Poppin' in Kansas" was published in *Reader's Digest* juxtaposing the ammunition plant's enormous productive capacity with its relatively few major accidents. "This factory is one of the largest powder plants in the world, packed with sudden death. Yet it has the lowest accident rate in American industry," the opening paragraph reads. The article notes that nearly "sixty percent of the operators are girls," who work to produce "the most treacherous powder ever made." The scene set is one which is filled with the simultaneity of terror and excitement, fears giving way to pride in the production of gunpowder for the nation (Kearney 1941).

After the 1950's, some remember the town going through cycles—production flowed steadily during wartime and came to an abrupt halt during standby periods. The population continued growing, but the plant did not. A skeleton crew of maintenance workers were kept on to service the buildings and produce acids for other types of industrial work, but most workers were laid off for years at a time. Traffic slowed down, businesses near the workers' housing closed, and the newer half of the buildings in the village—the New Village—were physically relocated, their foundations and streets left to nature's course. The Old Village remained and became subsumed by the city proper, but remained distinct in character.

The Old Village, now Clearview City, was constructed in the 1950's, meant as overflow housing for workers in the Sunflower Army Ammunition Plant. Soon, even these homes were not enough to accommodate the number of people who worked in the plant. A few years later, the Army built the New Village. Parallel to the Old Village, it served a similar purpose, but was comprised only of small frame houses. Residents lived in a mostly self-sufficient town—there was a post office, a movie theater, a grocery store, and a bright pink school. After the plant went on stand-by after the Korean War, there were no longer enough residents to fill both of the villages. The frame houses in the New Village were slowly relocated to other cities in the area, while the cinder block homes in the Old Village remained for the workers who were left ("Sunflower Village" 2).

By the 1970's, most people who worked in the ammunition plant lived in the city of De Soto proper, and the Army sold the village to Jim Insley, a young man from Oklahoma. The Old Village, at this point, became suited to its name—for a period of time, it served as a community for the elderly. After changing ownership once again, the Old Village got a new name, Clearview City, and the units became available to anyone who wanted to rent them. Some residents, including some of my own interlocutors, noted that during this period Clearview City had more "riff raff," as compared to the center of the town. It was thought to be in better condition during the time it was operated by the government, and then fell into a relative state of disrepair over time ("Sunflower Village" 2).

After nearly fifty years of operation, the Army shut down the ammunition plant in 1992. Another skeleton crew remained onsite to handle the small number of renters brave enough to use some of the land for their cattle. Its fifty years of operation had surely made some parts of the land toxic, but the Army believed the surrounding area to be generally safe. Despite numerous attempts to sell the land after closure, munitions removal, and some building decontamination, the Army could convince no buyer to undertake the costs necessary for the cleanup and infrastructure repair. Throughout the late 1990 and into the early 2000s, potential plans included building an outdoor outlet mall, developing an agricultural center for use by the state's universities, constructing a new NASCAR speedway, and (most infamously) creating a massive Wizard of Oz theme park (Dobson 2000).

However, as one commentator noted in 2000, nearly a decade after the plant's official closure, "following the yellow brick road can be a bummer; the longer it gets, the harder it is to distinguish fantasy from reality" (Dobson 2000). Neither the outlet mall, nor the NASCAR speedway, nor the Wizard of Oz theme park developers could prove to city and county officials that they would be able to accrue the necessary funding for the site's cleanup. As a result, no development occurred on the land, and it began to take on a ghost-town-like quality. The

remaining skeleton crew was fired one by one, and only one security guard continued his post out at the plant into the early 2000's.

Redevelopment plans and budgets were complicated by the fact that "no one seem[ed] to know" the levels of contamination at the site (Dobson 2000). Throughout most of the 1990s, city and county officials remained opposed to the Army transferring the land to the General Services Administration (GSA) for remediation (De Soto City Council: 1997). Even after the deals for the development proposals had fallen through, many maintained that given enough time, they would find a competent buyer, believing that the contamination was "no worse than spilled diesel fuel" (Jones 2008).

Immediately following the plant's closure, the Environmental Protection Agency had begun to make a determination of the extent of contamination at the Sunflower site. As years went by, the total remediation estimates surged from $38 to nearly $500 million (Dobson 2000). By 2001, it was evident that the cleanup would be far too extensive for any private company to undertake. Still, the Army remained hesitant to take responsibility for the contamination cleanup project—towards the end of the negotiation process with the Wizard of Oz developers, GSA administrators were frequently critiqued for having operated "behind closed doors" to push through the Wizard of Oz deal. Forcing the remediation to be done by a private company would only encourage the company to complete it poorly; after all, a state senator noted, "no miracle technology exists to turn rocket propellant and gunpowder into gold" (Dobson 2000).

In 2001, the Army declared the land as "excess property" through the GSA. Following this decision, residents of De Soto urged the GSA to begin the cleanup. The group of residents filed suit against the GSA for their role in neglecting the site (Sullinger 1995). Army officials, however, resisted listing the site on the EPA's Superfund list for over a decade, likely due to the fact that listing the site as a Superfund would require stricter cleanup stipulations and more legislative oversight (Sullinger 1995). As a result of a 1986 Congressional amendment, the EPA has little ability to regulate the decontamination of military-related sites.[1]

In 2015, the Sunflower Army Ammunition Plant was finally declared as a Superfund site by the Environmental Protection Agency. The Superfund program allocates money for the clean-up of sites of toxic contamination, transferring sole responsibility from the Army and the GSA to the EPA ("What Is a Superfund?") The Superfund designation is more commonly associated with spectacular disasters—those Chernobyl-like breakdowns, oil spills, or massive and visible explosions. Unlike these sites, the contamination at the Sunflower plant was not quite accidental—in fact, the plant prided itself on having the lowest accident rate of any ammunition plant in history during the time of its operation—but rather was a naturalized byproduct of munitions production. Its contamination—of lead, mercury, nitroglycerin, nitroguanidine, and other substances—was less visible, less quantifiable perhaps, and made it less likely that it would be listed as a Superfund.

With the Superfund funding available, the site now remains in ongoing cleanup. This remediation, completed mainly through the deconstruction of buildings and the transport of dirt, is a process of removal. In his work on "rubble" in the Argentine Chaco, Gastón Gordillo writes about the persistence of particular materials due to the ways in which people relate to them. Gordillo writes of these materials as "stubborn"—even if they can be successfully removed or

displaced, their residues may still permeate sites (Gordillo 2014: 213). Remainders of history are dependent not only on their "physical presence" but on the "socially contingent receptivity" of the people who encounter them (Gordillo 2014: 211). Sunflower's contaminated materials are not limited to land and buildings, but to plant workers, Clearview City residents, cleanup employees, and town residents. Thus, while removing these materials may constitute a reduction of the site's toxicity, it may not provide a complete reckoning with the past.

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"I BELIEVE IT was '42 when they opened it up. My dad worked out there, and then after that, you had the Korean War. Then it ran for about five…probably five or six years. And then he'd get laid off each time because he was in production. And then, you know, Vietnam came in '65, and he went back again."

I sat engulfed by Larry and Brenda's enormous grey couch on a warmer-than-usual Saturday afternoon. The two of them sat across from me in matching recliners, only a small side table separating them. They were each other's second marriages, both of their first spouses having died fairly early on. Everything Brenda was, Larry appeared to be her inverse. Brenda wore a black vest embroidered with several colors of flowers, her silver hair and makeup done up as though ready for a church group outing. Larry's button-up blue shirt and dark wash jeans were the only things that accompanied his brown work boots, which remained crossed on the footrest of the recliner. Everything Brenda spoke was emphatic, punctuated by the rapidity of her thoughts. Larry spoke slowly and deliberately, either deep in remembrance or acutely aware of my notetaking. I couldn't help but feel a sense of relief, considering it had taken quite a bit of effort to get here—the usual five-hour commute from school in Oklahoma to De Soto, and more than a few calls to the house before Brenda finally checked their voicemail and messaged me on Facebook.

For as much effort as I had undertaken to have the opportunity to talk with Larry and Brenda, I found it exceptionally easy to talk *to* them. I would ask Larry a question about his experience with the ammunition plant, and he would respond with several stories. I rarely had to lead him to the next topic—his thoughts would meander from his childhood and his dad's work in production during the second World War to Clearview and back. Whenever he said something that Brenda didn't know about, she would furl her brows and gently probe him further about it, before apologizing to me for "taking my interview." Each time she did, I'd laugh and tell her she was a natural.

Larry and Brenda lived in a new house on the old highway, close to the middle school and their Baptist church and relatively far from Larry's childhood farm across from the ammunition plant. Brenda said they had lived in a much older house closer to the old downtown, but had finally made enough money between the two of them to move to a nicer place. And it was—I had to admit the hardwood floors, the large light stone fireplace, and the barstools in the kitchen were all nice touches. There were several shelves of books in the living room where one would have

expected a television to be. Two fluffy dogs waited by the back door eagerly for my exit, which would signal their entrance back inside.

For a while, Larry told me about growing up out near the plant. He mentioned the bustling city that De Soto became during the early years of the plant production, going to school for half a day to accommodate the influx of children from all the new residents, sitting on the floor in the local theater for government-subsidized movies, and going to the post office in the Sunflower Village, which would become Clearview City.

“You had a lot of folks come up here from Arkansas. And you could just know, you knew they were Arkansans when they came to work. They didn't look right. They’d have all this stuff out in their yard, cars, a bunch of junk, just all over the place.”

After the migration of workers died down, and the housing was no longer needed, the government sold it to a man from Oklahoma:

“See, his name was Insley, he made a lot of money on it. He sold it to Hansen, and then they started having the people move out of there, and then it went to a kind of retirement community, but that didn’t work out.”

Hansen, for his part, apparently tried to fix it up, before his tragic death in the infamous skywalk accident in the Hyatt in downtown Kansas City. His son ran the place after that.

“Is that when it became Clearview City?” Brenda asked, placing a hand on her mouth and then mouthing a “sorry” in my direction. I smiled. I would have asked the same question.

“Yeah, that’s when they changed the name. See, back when the government had it, they kept it up pretty good, but after that, you had so much riff raff that moved in there from every place. Just the name, Clearview, was kind of a…”

Larry trailed off for a moment, searching for the right words.

“Up through the 80s, you had a lot of welfare people. It was the cheapest place. But the law spent more time out there, you know, there were so many things that were going on.”

“Back then, you had people from everywhere,” he continued, “when the government had run it, it was kept up and you had a different class of people. A lot of your upstanding citizens….a lot of them have probably died now, but you had a lot of them that moved up here in De Soto. They were pretty well-to-do people, good jobs, and respectable, but you know, it wasn’t like that when they reopened it up.”

I jotted down the words that Larry used for denoting the social and racial differences among Clearview residents, like *riff raff* and *different class of people,* struck by his seeming juxtaposition of the groups throughout the decades. The military people had been like his father—good, upstanding people with honest jobs—and the people who came after hadn't been.

“Well, so when does it become nice?” Brenda asked.

“It don’t.”

Later on, I asked Larry about work in the plant: “Were most of the people that worked out there white?”

“Hm, no.”

“Really?”

“Yeah, well, there were a lot of Black people that worked out there. They'd ride in on the bus from Kansas City and ride home at night. Couldn’t live in town though, because you still had the Klan that was around.”

My eyes widened. I had heard whispers of the town’s history with the Ku Klux Klan throughout my life—something about a quilt with members’ names downtown, something about the ways in which secret societies had figured into the town’s present—but I hadn’t known to what extent the Klan activities had been present. The answer was, apparently, to a great extent.

“Oh, wow. And that was, so that was still in the 50s and 60s?”

“Yeah. Well, they went out and do more stuff when my dad was still working out there. But they, yeah they were still around into the 60s.”

As if this was something that Larry considered to be normal, he transitioned into talking more about work at the plant. The interview continued with Larry’s stories, an occasional question from me, and Brenda periodically jumping in to ask for more information about something before apologizing.

At one point, Larry mentioned an aspect of his work in production at the plant that was the same as something I had been told previously.

“Well, I worked several different things out there. I was working in the warehouse for a while, in the 50s.”

“He was in the Army for a while,” Brenda interjected.

“Yeah, I was working out there when I went into the service. And they gotta hold your position for you when you’re gone. And then when I came back, I actually worked out there, I went straight out there when I came back here because I knew they had a job for me. So I worked out there.”

“And when was that?”

“Back in the 60s, they made the Mighty Mouse rocket. That was the name of it. And they shot those out of helicopters in Vietnam. And actually, it’s a propellant, and they would put them in these tubes, and there’s like 200 of them in a crate, and they would send semis of them to McAlester, Oklahoma, and they'd put the warhead on them. They assembled the rocket there, but we made the propellant here. They'd send the tubes back here, we’d fill them up again, and send

them back there."

"The Korean War, they made a macaroni powder. And then, I worked in the nitroglycerin area. See, they had it…there's such a process, and a lot of women worked out there. I don't know the whole processes, but in the nitroglycerin area, we'd make that nitroglycerin, and we got these, they call them an Angel Buggy."

"I've heard that before, where does that name come from?"

"There was one guy, that's why they called it an Angel Buggy, because he was pushing it and he had, it went off this little ramp and it blew up! That nitroglycerin is pretty unstable. And they've got these structures on them so that it blows straight up, instead of out."

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THE SUNFLOWER ARMY Ammunition plant was first tasked with producing more than 200 million pounds of rocket propellant for World War II. The first rocket powder that was produced at Sunflower was a 50% nitroglycerin powder, this proportion much higher than the previous standard of 20% in American weaponry. It was reportedly based upon a formula which the British had stolen from the French and Germans; however, the Americans desired to make the process much quicker for higher yield, introducing greater amounts of risk and necessitating more elaborate safety precautions. For instance, the British had perfected a method in which the powder would be dried for a full 24 hours before rolling, but "our men reasoned that by heating the rollers it could be dried and rolled in one operation" (Kearney 1941).

The process of this 50% nitroglycerin powder production was begun by treating cotton with nitric acid to produce nitrocellulose. The nitrocellulose was then mixed with nitroglycerin and agitated into a "slurry" which would be placed in large tanks with rubber-bladed beaters. When the slurry left the mixing facilities, it was transferred into the roll houses. As the name suggests, the powder slurry was poured onto the heated steel rollers. The rolls compressed the slurry into a sheet which "resemble[d] a black rubber blanket" (Kearney 1941).

Next, the mostly female operators ("wearing a trim white uniform, safety shoes, gloves, a turban, and a plastic mask") of the roll houses would retreat back to the door of the roll house bay, where an exit door connected to an external boardwalk. They would start and stop the rollers several times until all the powder had been evenly distributed. As the powder was dried and compressed, fires would often occur—in a typical 24-hour period, for instance, around 150 fires would be sparked. The fires would be preceded by an "ominous crackling," which would be the operator's cue to utilize the exit door. The fires would produce tremendous gas pressure, releasing clouds of yellowish smoke, but never stray beyond their point of origin—in less than a second, the protective sprinkler system was triggered. Very little powder was often lost from these small fires. The remaining unburned powder, after being entirely dried and pressed, would be loaded onto the Angel Buggies and transported along the railroad tracks and far across the ocean during World War II (Kearney 1941).

As Larry had said, in the 1960's, the plant transitioned into the production of powder for the Mighty Mouse rockets deployed in Vietnam. The Mk 4 Folding-Fin Aerial Rocket, nicknamed the Mighty Mouse after a cartoon character, had been utilized throughout World War II as a mode of air-to-air combat with German aircraft, but proved to be a less-than-desirable weapon in terms of accuracy: the multiple rockets would spread out over hundreds of yards after launch. Still, its blast was powerful enough to warrant further production—while the Mk 4 was retired in air-to-air combat, it was frequently launched out of helicopters in Vietnam ("Missiles of 1958").

As a result of growing Cold War fears, weapons production heightened in the U.S. during the early 1960s, and Sunflower was brought out of standby once again. In this period of production, as Larry had stated, the plant began to produce what was known as "macaroni powder." This new powder recipe based on German recipes developed during World War II contained substances the plant had already produced in the past, such as nitrocellulose and ethyl carbamate, but also contained a high proportion of a high-velocity, low-sensitivity compound called nitroguanidine.

Throughout the following decades, the factory modernized and several new facilities were constructed for the production of nitroguanidine. These facilities were some of the first of their kind in the U.S., allowing for the production of high quantities of calcium cyanamide and ammonium nitrate, combined to produce a paste, and sulfuric acid, used to dehydrate the paste into the nitroguanidine powder. After this, the nitroguanidine would be rehydrated and combined with the other compounds to produce another paste. Dissimilar to the original smokeless powder, this paste would not be rolled into sheets on the heated rollers, but would rather be packed into cylindrical tubes for drying, giving the powder its distinctive "macaroni" shape ("U.S. Strategic Bombing Survey").

Each of these powders produced violence which radiated outward to a global scale—it is estimated that during World War II, the plant produced 200 million pounds of propellant; during the Korean War, nearly 166 million pounds; and throughout the Vietnam War and into the 1970s, nearly 145 million pounds. These powders were shipped from De Soto, Kansas to other domestic plants to be placed into weapons ranging from the Mighty Mouse to the larger tank shells, which were then deployed everywhere from Germany to Korea to Vietnam. The human impact of these weapons is nearly incalculable—for instance, only a million pounds of powder would account for the production of 166,000 Mighty Mouse rockets, and the ammunition plant produced several hundred times that amount of powder ("Missiles of 1958").

The violence produced by the nearly fifty years of production at the ammunition plant was not experienced only through the destruction and death caused by the weaponry itself. There was also a violence inflicted upon the workers in the ammunition plant, who were continually exposed to carcinogenic compounds and dangerous fires. The more than 150 fires per day required the mostly-female operators to work with an amount of diligence and attention that was the difference between literal life and death. One of the workers described her experience being pinned against the wall inside the roll house during one of the fires "as if a giant had grabbed [her] and slammed [her] against the boards" (Kearney 1941). The workers lived in a perpetual state of cognizance about the reality of their work—it was dangerous and mistakes meant lost or permanently-altered lives.

The violence perpetrated by the Sunflower Army Ammunition plant did not begin with its production or cease when it arrested production in the 1990s. The violence continued in the toxic residues of production that continued to be present within the site and which, for many years, eluded registers of perception. Those who remained to work on the site and those who continue to live near the site face a contaminated form of what Rob Nixon has termed "slow violence"—referring to a number of global environmental catastrophes, Nixon defines slow violence as a "violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all" (Nixon 2011: 2).

Slow violences are in many ways more insidious than quicker ones—they are not "explosive or spectacular in space" and they do not have "sensational visibility" (Nixon 2011: 3) The lesser-known toxic impacts of ammunition plants fall into this category of violence, obscured by visions of rocket explosions but no less harmful. In addition, these toxic harms are "patchy"—they are part of a planetary story, but importantly distributed unequally, their impacts most felt by marginalized populations (Nading 2020: 212). There is no shortage of instances in which the U.S. military has been the producer of these unequal exposures (Masco 2006, Lyons 2016, Johnston 2007).

Slow violence is intrinsic to the way that U.S. domestic militarization operates: if military contamination eludes perception and characterization, it is difficult to demand accountability for the entire range of violences that are perpetrated by the U.S. military, both within the nation and outside of it. Toxicity, after all, is difficult to characterize—sometimes, as Alex Nading states in an overview of "toxic worlding," "toxic effects are more like affects," perceptible more through people's sensory experiences of them than through scientific investigations and thresholds. Thresholds obscure toxicity too; at times it is a question not of whether exposure will occur, but rather "how much exposure is acceptable, and for whom" (Nading 2020: 213). This slowness, unequal distribution, and elusiveness of toxicity is perhaps what makes the violence of contamination so easy to ignore in the case of the Sunflower Army Ammunition Plant.

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"BUT, YOU KNOW, I know that plant, I mean I've been all over that plant, many different times. And it's not that contaminated. I think it's okay. There's all sorts of developers that would love to get their hands on that land out there…the Oz people, they thought they had it. Fell through though. I don't think anybody trusted them with the money."

Larry's comment was not the first I had heard about the plan to turn the ammunition plant land into a Wizard of Oz theme park. When the ammunition plant was closed in the early 1990s, the Army focused more on courting potential buyer-developers of the land than on the cleanup of the site. Immediately following closure, the EPA had begun to conduct studies to determine the extent of contamination within the site, and early estimates for cleanup ranged from $25 to $38 million. Even coupled with the cost of the land itself, a private company could potentially handle

these remediation costs.

The most successful of these redevelopment bids for the Sunflower land was, on its surface, the "Land of Oz" theme park. According to the Los Angeles Times, the plans for the Wizard of Oz theme park were created by a Los Angeles attorney named Robert Korey, whose entertainment group had proposed the park-resort to a group of influential Kansas politicians. Korey had contacted the Landmark Entertainment Company about producing plans for the theme park, known for their themed creations of Caesars Palace and Universal Studios. The park would consist of a thousand-acre complex with attractions and rides as well as a hotel and golf course. "The Land of Oz" would be an Emerald City: a destination for Oz enthusiasts from far beyond the state of Kansas (Lippman 1992).

There was a catch: the development of the theme park hinged on the outcome of the EPA's feasibility study. Evidently, Korey stated that the first stages of the project would cost around $300 million dollars, not inclusive of the amount of money it would take to remove the existing buildings on the property. The Kansas State Legislature created a development incentive by earmarking the first $250 million for the project, so it seemed that Oz was well on its way (Lippman 1992).

As months went by, however, the original estimate began to climb. The land had been offered for sale rather cheaply, but its clean up would not be. After further assessments of the site, it would require extensive environmental remediation—thousands of tons of soil would need to be removed and buildings would need to be decontaminated, removed, or burned. Though Oz would take up only about a tenth of the complete ammunition plant site, the funding necessary to complete both the cleanup process and the construction would total nearly a billion dollars.

Residents of De Soto seemed more concerned with the overall "shadiness" of the deals with the out of town developers than with the GSA's failure to clean up the Sunflower site. In 1998, a group of De Soto residents formed an organization known as "TOTO" (Taxpayers Opposed to Oz) and began to contact representatives and spread negative public sentiment about the park's construction. Public mistrust in Korey's monetary calculations grew with the number he gave—the project seemed increasingly less likely to be a success (Lippman 1992). As Larry had told me in our conversation, the developers were simply "shady" guys, and their money did not seem to be in order. TOTO eventually brought an unsuccessful suit against the GSA, not for their failure to remediate the contamination within the site, but for the "backdoor" agreements the government officials were making with Robert Korey and his employees (Dobson 2000).

"The Land of Oz" seems to have been complicated by both the toxicity of the site and the mistrust that locals had for outsiders. Well into the nineties, people who came from out of town were still perceived as less trustworthy than people who had been there for generations. Though Robert Korey's estimates were likely honest (and based on the EPA's growing estimates of the contamination) it was his perceived character and coastal position that doomed his project.

Ideas about responsibility and accountability for the site's remediation were also at issue in the discourse surrounding the Oz proposal. The GSA and the Army, eager to shed responsibility for the site, attempted to sell it as soon as possible. Residents of the town, however, were also opposed to any of their tax dollars being used for a private company's remediation of the site—

the idea that Robert Korey would be getting tax subsidies for the cleanup/development was TOTO's primary misgiving about Oz. These debates still leave the question at hand—who should ultimately be responsible for the site's remediation?

The Army and its contracted operator, Hercules, may be most directly implicated in the production of contamination at the site. Still, it is difficult to hold these organizations accountable for the remediation project. A 1986 Congressional Amendment reduced the EPA's ability to regulate the decontamination of military sites, giving the Department of Defense sole control over non-Superfund environmental restoration projects ("Defense Environmental Restoration Program.") This "Defense Environmental Restoration Program" was advantageous for the U.S. military in that it allowed the Department of Defense to potentially conduct remediation activities that were not fully aligned with EPA standards, while the EPA would have no legal basis on which to challenge them ("Defense Environmental Restoration Program.") Thus, until the site was declared a Superfund, the U.S. Army was not legally required to take much responsibility for the Sunflower remediation.

As Joseph Masco has noted in his work on nuclear weapons production in New Mexico, legal structures are just one of the myriad ways in which the U.S. military has obscured its involvement in the production and maintenance of spaces of toxicity. Through "strategic manipulation of 'threat'," exposures come to be viewed as more of an "individual" matter than a direct product of military-industrial production (Masco 2006: 288, 300). The important result of this obfuscation of involvement is that it "artificially separates the day-to-day management" of the site and its impacts from a "macrolevel investigation of its causes" (Nading 2020: 215). Thus, it becomes perfectly reasonable for town citizens to trust a Los Angeles businessman less than the Army, for workers to believe that land couldn't be "that" contaminated, and for town residents to be more threatened by "outsiders" than toxicity.

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LARRY BELIEVED QUITE strongly that the military was looking out for his and his coworkers' safety. Between the Angel Buggies, the monthly physicals by doctors the Army would send out to the plant, and the safety ratings that the plant continually received for its extended periods without major incidence, Larry felt safe. If you asked him, the more severe threat seemed to be from the *riff raff* and the *Arkansans* that moved into town, threatening its otherwise peaceful existence.

Larry's breadth of experience with all of the different components of the town made our conversation particularly illuminating. Larry had transitioned almost unconsciously from one subject to the next, giving me a good sense of the importance of his upbringing next to the ammunition plant, his work there, his perception of the town's change, and Clearview City in both the past and the present. His account seemed consistent with some of the things I had heard before, and contradicted others. His perception of the ammunition plant itself was that it was safe: after all, it was a place that had provided both himself and his father with stable

employment for numerous years. Several of Larry's statements were surprising to me, but seemed as though they were simply accepted parts of life in his mind.

Despite the dangerous nature of his work in the plant and the active presence of an organization like the Ku Klux Klan throughout his childhood, Larry's understanding of the town of De Soto was that it had been better in the past—before the *riff raff* moved into the homes in the village, before the *Arkansans* had come into town for work, before De Soto had become the exurb of Kansas City that it was today.

The nostalgia that Larry had for the town and for his time working at the plant was mainly in the realm of immediate experience. His mostly peaceful existence creating weapons of war was disrupted only by the threat of outsiders, its presence maintained by the divorce of weapons production from its ruinous effects. It is safe to infer that Larry knew what happened to the weapons after they were packed in crates of 200 and shipped to McAlester for final touches—his understanding of the Mighty Mouse rockets was that *they shot those out of helicopters in Vietnam.* The human costs of the action of shooting those weapons out of helicopters, however, were not at the forefront of Larry's mind.

A peculiarly familiar type of cognitive dissonance is at work here. This type of nostalgia is not innocent; it is that type of nostalgia that obfuscates violent images of the past, absolving the military-industrial complex responsible for death and destruction from its own culpability and placing blame for destruction of lifeways on a constructed "other." It is a nostalgia that constitutes a "more ambivalent and charged form of melancholy that disavows the past" while simultaneously "demonstrating its active presence" (Stoler 2013: 150).

In her work within a coal-mining region of West Virginia, Kathleen Stewart writes of the process of othering through nostalgia as a site of social imagination. Within this site, a supposed loss of potential becomes blamed on the "tense occupation" of a place by a different subset of person (Stewart 1996: 42). Ideas based on stereotypes—not consciously around lines of race or class, but certainly influenced by them—serve to construct an "other" which becomes a scapegoat for an imagined decline. This imagined decline becomes a basis for exclusion and evacuation of blame from the broader powers at work; in this case, the military industry and its economic approval of modes of destruction.

Larry's nostalgia is predicated on an imagined more glorious history, one that involves the understanding that Clearview City was home to a different class of people during the early years of the ammunition plant's operation. It only became "worse" when the government no longer operated it; that is, when it was sold to private owners who rented it out to low income people because it was located adjacent to the plant. The ammunition plant transformed the town of De Soto economically, demographically, and politically, bringing new residents of varying races and socioeconomic statuses. The place's character has been understood in terms of how it has been "occupied"—or in this case, rather, by *whom* it was occupied. Thus, phrases like *riff raff* became a shorthand mode of othering premised on the fact these people were "different" and somehow did not belong within this place.

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LARRY'S MEMORIES OF Clearview City were not the only sites of othering in De Soto's past. I had made an appointment at the Johnson County Archives after having found a number of article titles online, and had come to read the ones that mentioned Sunflower. Alongside archived documents, newspapers, and photos, I found a collection of typewritten oral histories, recorded in the 1990s by a director at the Johnson County Library.

While the articles provided a look at the circumstances surrounding the ammunition plant throughout time, the oral history collection detailed workers' experiences inside the plant. The collection, entitled "Citizen Soldiers on the Prairie," was to be placed within an exhibit for the county museum, perhaps meant only to give casual museum viewers a cursory overview of social life at Sunflower. Still, the fifteen transcripts total over 200 pages, full of details on everything from daily life to larger considerations of munitions work.

As a composite, the interviews are illuminating. Matt Gilligan, the interviewer, had asked a number of questions of the plant workers, their tenures ranging from the 1950s up into the 1990s and the plant's closure. The experiences of both Black and female workers within the ammunition plant seem to be at once similar and distinct from Larry's account. Matt asked most participants about the "relations" between groups—how did men and women get along at the plant? Black and white people?

An interview with one couple, Ray and Barbara Dennis, highlighted the ways in which the relationships between these groups were both seemingly settled and contested. Barbara Dennis noted that the demographics of the plant gave it a "reputation:"

> Sunflower had a reputation for not probably the best people in the world working there. And this was in the 50s. A lot of the black population were coming in from Kansas City to work and farmers were working there and housewives, all elements of our social system were working out there. (Ray & Barbara Dennis, 2000).

Still, Barbara noted that it was a "good job for a woman." Though the wages of women were lower than men at the ammunition plant, they were higher than those of most other positions women could hold. More than 65% of the workers at Sunflower during World War II and the Korean War were women (Ford 2008: 8). Women in the plant were ostensibly treated as equals seemingly not because of any belief in gender equality, but because men viewed them as "valuable workers" in specific capacities:

> Women were not a problem. Very good workers. You know, the husbands were in combat, the wives were trying to help in the way that they could working at the defense plant. (Ron Thornton, 2000)

> It required a very precise touch to get it aligned just like it was supposed to be and those ladies really knew what they were doing and they used women more because men didn't have the detail it took. (Leland Burnett, 2003)

Issues surrounding race seemed to operate with a similar oscillation between tension and stability. Chuck Jarrett, a Black man who worked in production and later in demolition, recalled the way that some race relations had played out in the plant:

> I don't want to say people were ignorant, it's just what you are is what you were when. However you were raised and the values that were instilled in you at that time, they carry on through your adult life unless there is a significant event that changes that thought pattern. Everybody's got their own prejudices. Yes, there were some out there. Now, I left in 68 and came back in 70 which was when most of the heat was around this area. So, I missed a lot of that as far as being exposed to it and so forth. But, it happened. But just like I explained to you, what you are is what you were when. (Chuck Jarrett, 2000)

He discussed the fact that when he was newly hired, his supervisor had to "warn" him about the potential for racist comments from his coworkers—"He was just trying to prepare me for some of the things I might run into." Once he got to know everyone, though, he said, they "worked well" with him.

Other workers recalled different experiences interacting with different racial groups at the plant—many of the workers interviewed stated that they "didn't notice" any racial tensions at the plant if they existed or "wouldn't have gotten involved" in anything controversial. Some stated that the relationships were "good" and race "didn't matter" at the ammunition plant. Leland Burnett, however, recalled that the jobs themselves were somewhat segregated by racial categories:

> They were busing minorities out of Kansas City. They would send a bus around to pick them up and bring them out there and it didn't last very long. The nitroglycerin area was where a lot of them worked. You probably have never even smelled nitroglycerin. Don't do it. Anyway, the minorities didn't care much for that. (Leland Burnett, 2003)

Still, Black workers of the plant couldn't own land in De Soto and, in earlier cases, couldn't live or eat anywhere around De Soto. Chuck and his wife lived in Olathe, as did another couple who had worked in the plant named Joe and Mary Person. Joe recalled their home buying experience in Olathe, as well as their experiences in other nearby towns:

> We lived on the wrong side of the tracks, and that's where we stayed. When they started busing the kids to the Lincoln school, things were still bad. Because you know sometimes the blacks outnumbered the whites in certain areas so they had big signs. But in Lenexa they had a sign, 'N--, read and run.' (Joe & Mary Person, 1995)

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THERE IS A tension between the oft-cited "family environment" of the ammunition plant and the realities of gendered and racialized work in the ammunition plant. While many, even workers who were Black or female, stated that "the people were the best part of the job," it is still evident that there were stereotypes from the white, male workers about the "type" of workers these people made: the (Black) individuals who were bused from Kansas City were not the "best people in the world," the women were good workers because of their "precise" touch and attention to detail. These "types" of people were placed within their roles as a result of their perceived capability based on these categorizations of identity—women never worked in the acid area as it was assumed to be too dangerous for delicate sensibilities, Black workers were placed in one of the more dangerous areas of production but "didn't last long." As Chuck said, even white individuals had racial biases that the Black workers needed to be aware of, but looking back, he attributed the prejudices to the time period—*what you are is what you were when*. The relationships between different groups who are gendered and racialized in particular ways was likely not completely without conflict, then, as the "solidarities" between these groups are "not stable, fixed, or constant," but temporally and contextually dependent (Miraftab 2016: 74).

Issues of marginalization and othering along lines of race and gender lay not only in the relationships between workers in the ammunition plant, but also in the broader structural context of wages and the inequities present in individuals' lives outside of work. Even if conditions inside the plant were not outwardly hostile to female or minority workers, their living conditions outside of work were vastly different from those of their white male counterparts. As mentioned previously, Black workers of the ammunition plant could not own land in De Soto, having to live elsewhere and often commute to work. The long-ranging history of the Klan presence meant that daily encounters for the Black workers were fraught with danger and uncertainty. As Joe mentioned, surrounding towns were not much more welcoming, and people willing to serve Black individuals at a restaurant or sell them property were few and far between. There were also differing expectations for women who worked in the plant: one female worker also recalled the first time she could purchase a home in De Soto, in 1975, the first year a single woman could apply for a mortgage.

Thus, while working in the plant ostensibly made these individuals "good citizens," there were still processes of racist and sexist ideology that worked as exclusionary principles at Sunflower. Being a "good citizen" did not and does not protect these workers from the exclusionary impulse inherent in the universality of the term.

As Adriana Petryna and Karolina Follis have written about in their deconstruction of the concept of citizenship, "citizenship" does not merely entail having "full rights" or "no rights," but rather there exists a "spectrum of statuses" along which people who are identified in particular ways find themselves (Petryna & Follis 2015: 402). This is a historically situated act of "boundary-making" that occurs sometimes spatially, other times affectively or governmentally. Situated in relation to the state, being a "good citizen" is often contingent on specific forms of economic participation, many of which are made near-impossible for individuals of certain groups—being prevented from owning land, for instance, or being expected to be a full-time mother and a full-time worker (Petryna & Follis 2015: 406).

Even if there is a potential for common ground to be found through toxic and explosive work, it is necessarily precarious—not only did the world and the town outside of the ammunition plant make more difficult the notion that all workers were the same, but the dangerous nature of the work made these relationships more difficult. As most workers stated in regard to the accidents that occurred while working in the plant, most of these incidents were attributed to personal mistakes–not to the nature of the work, not to the company, but to an individual and their own responsibility for their safety.

Unions were present, as the ammunition plant was considered a federal enclave even as Kansas was a right-to-work state, but they were highly contested entities. Disagreements about union activities lay not only along lines of race and gender, but also within groups of worker and types of work. Consistency was difficult to maintain in general, as the peak work population during wartimes meant that there were constantly new hires who required effort to be brought on. Chuck Jarrett mentioned that there was a general "disheart" amongst Black workers about the unions, as many supposed that no matter the activities, they would not receive higher wages. There were also conflicts between production line workers and office workers—as Gayla Frazier, who worked in the safety office recalled, the office workers had "better benefits" than the line workers did, alongside the fact that their jobs were less dangerous overall because of the lack of exposure to toxic and explosive materials.

Solidarity at Sunflower was thus made difficult by a number of conditions: marginalized workers faced the reality of lower pay and lower levels of opportunity in life outside of the plant, the idea that the work was "safe" and the company was beneficent meant that it was easy to shift blame for accidents onto those affected by them, and additional conflicts surrounding the unequal distribution of risk and benefits rendered possibilities for action more contentious. While the dangerous work had the potential to bind, fault lines emerged around social difference.

Sediments

"SAFETY WAS NUMBER one at Hercules."

The same line appeared over and over, in interview after archived interview. Larry was apparently not the only ammunition plant worker who felt that the military and the company which operated the plant had his safety in mind. Each question about safety was met with the same refrain: it was "number one" to Hercules Powder, the company that ran the ammunition plant for the entirety of its operation. Many of the interviewees stated that Hercules placed a huge emphasis on safety, requiring intense contraband screenings at the entrance each day and hosting monthly safety meetings to update workers on new protocols and policies.

"The company, Hercules, I think did an excellent job of pushing safety. It was a safe place to work. The people were not reluctant to observe safety," said Ray Dennis, who worked in the plant during the Korea and Vietnam Wars.

During the course of the same interviews, however, the former workers could identify a number of accidents. At first, I thought perhaps these were overlaps: different workers discussing the same set of accidents multiple times. However, as I read further, I began to recognize that this was not the case—workers were instead referring to completely different accidents. Each individual was unfamiliar with some of the other accidents that had occurred during their tenure. The workers described a number of incidents:

> The first week I went to work there, there was an accident with a fatality, but it was an off-plant company that had brought a tank and somehow they got a blow torch to cut the tank up. They were in the process of trying to cut it up and the alcohol evidently doesn't go away and it blew up. It killed one guy and hurt someone else. (Naaman Greer, 2003)

> My father-in-law told me about the time the nitroglycerin separator in the storage house blew up and killed two workers and he had to go down and work and pick up body parts after that. After I left, one of my best friends was injured and the injury resulted in death out there. This was during the start of the demolition of the plant. (Rich Powers, 2002)

The list of accidents grew—one worker mentioned an instance in which a pole fell on an electrician who later died, others recalled several different explosions whose shrapnel wounded and killed several individuals, and still others remembered crane accidents and fires. Astonishingly, the fifteen workers interviewed could each recall a deadly incident separate from all of the others.

Even beyond the explosive elements of the plant, there were other aspects of daily work that seemed somewhat at odds with the message of safety pushed by Hercules. Gary Mikkelson recalled the way that workers would get "severe headaches" they had to get "acclimated to" from the nitroglycerin fumes. One of his coworkers, he said, "never got acclimated" and had to take medicine just to survive his work (Gary Mikkelson, 2003).

In addition, it seemed that the Hercules company in some sense acknowledged the dangers of weapons production, for instance, in the fact that there was a full hospital on site:

> It was actually a complete hospital. It had an operating room. We had two wards. I don't remember how many beds, probably 8 or 10 beds in each ward. During Vietnam, there was two doctors, probably 10 or 12 nurses, lab technicians, x-ray people, the whole thing. There would be straight weeks where we'd have people injured every day. I'm out front, driving the ambulance and getting the doctors to the injured person. Some of them got bad injuries. (Bud Jenks, 1998)

Reading these accounts, I began to wonder how the idea of safety as a priority squared with the amount of injuries and deaths reported by the workers. I remembered something during that occurred during my own interview with Larry: each worker outside of those who worked in security was not allowed to venture beyond their individual station at the ammunition plant. The sound of distant explosions was commonplace, so there was no reason to suspect injury or accident from sound alone. Much of the time, it seems, individual workers were not privy to the activities of the plant as a whole, as they were bused to their specific work areas.

Nancy Davis recalled the way that the workers were transported to their respective buildings: “You went through the gate. Then you went out and got on the bus, an assigned bus. It took you out to your house, and the crew coming off duty would stand there and wait until we got out, and then they would ride and the bus would bring them back to the gate. You wasn’t supposed to go out of your area. You couldn’t go over to another building unless you were sent over there to help them. Otherwise you stayed in your own place” (Nancy Davis, 1997).

Ultimately, though, in workers’ remembrances, the purpose of this separation and strict adherence to assigned roles and positions was not nefarious, but was also in the service of worker safety—"you didn’t have time to know what else was going on. If you didn’t know your own stuff, your own procedures, you know, you were in big trouble.” According to the workers, sabotage from outsiders and espionage were also of great concern, meaning that it was safer to have individuals know only pieces and parts of production practices; as one of the former plant managers stated, “we had enough to worry about with the safety of the people inside. We didn’t need other threats too.”

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DESPITE THE NUMBER of accidents the ammunition plant workers could recall, they were attached to the idea that Hercules Powder cared about their health and safety. Even faced with examples in which immense harm and loss of life was perpetrated as a result of the company’s productive actions, they still adhered, some of them decades after their work at the plant, to the idea that their safety and wellbeing were the most important priority for Hercules. This idea was particularly persistent among those who had worked at the plant during the World War II production days. As one of the workers recalled in an archival interview, “That generation of Hercules people worshiped Hercules. The company could do no wrong. The company watched out for you. The company took care of you. And it was almost a religion, it was” (Naaman Greer, 2003).

Because the workers believed the company to be concerned with their own safety, many felt a deep devotion to Hercules. Several workers noted that working at Hercules felt like everyone was a part of a “family.” Sometimes this was literal, as generations of workers tended to follow in the footsteps of fathers, mothers, aunts, and uncles. Most of the time, though, this was a commentary on the relationships workers forged at the company—their favorite thing about the job became “the people,” as they cited over and over again. Perhaps this sentimental solidarity became confused with loyalty to the company itself through the affective experience of long-duration careers, or perhaps it was related to the company’s perceived beneficence in providing a living and stable wage to people who were mostly formerly farmworkers. In either case, this feeling of “family” and “home” at the ammunition plant meant that it became difficult for the workers to criticize Hercules or feel that the company did not have the workers’ best interests in mind.

Another reason for this seeming contradiction between the perception of safety and the frequency of fatal accidents is that corporations like Hercules, which produce and perpetuate harmful environments that impact wellbeing, are skilled in manipulating their roles in this production of harm. As Stuart Kirsch wrote about the Ok Tedi mine in Papua New Guinea, corporations "strategically misrepresent" the impacts of industrial production through continual "surface-level commitments" to "safety" (Kirsch 2014: 189); in the case of Hercules, the company hosts monthly meetings to ensure that there were no accidents, they rewarded "safe" behavior with lunches and wages, and they provided continual reassurance to workers about their bodily health through the provision of company-run physicals.

In addition, this contradiction may be worsened by the atomization of the workers in their specific roles. The company isolated its workers, making certain that they were familiar only with their piece of the production process, in an attempt to conceal the fact that accidents were more frequent than they would have perhaps liked to admit. This "restriction of access to information" serves to produce uncertainty as individuals seeking to hold the corporation responsible or to gain a more "detailed perspective" on the matter of their safety cannot corroborate reports in this "regime of confidentiality" (Kirsch 2014: 197). As a result, they are left with what they detailed above: what each worker believed to be the only accident in their tenure, but what was actually one of several which occurred during their period of work.

All of these factors—the seeming devotion of the company to its workers through a "family-like" environment, the manipulation of information about safety, and the relegation of workers to their specific roles and locations—contributed to the evacuation of blame from Hercules for these weapons production deaths and workers' negative health outcomes. When asked about the causes behind injuries and deaths, none of the interviewees or my own interlocutors connected these events to the dangers posed by weapons production. The outcomes were sometimes described as "tragic accidents," but even more often described in terms of human error:

> They was not supposed to be using cutting torches on the tanks, but they'd got away with it. Well, bad choice, because there was contamination in the tank. Then using the cutting torch, and boom. So that was a horrible accident, it was a terrible thing and it was a thing we used as an example to tell people, 'this is what can happen.' (Gayla Frazier, 2003)

> You've probably heard about the accidents, but it was a pretty safe place to work generally. All the accidents when I was there, to my knowledge, were because someone didn't follow the safety procedures (Ray and Barbara Dennis, 2000)

The blame and responsibility for deadly accidents that would be placed on the company is instead redirected onto individuals—the accidents become narratives of personal responsibility, conceptualized and deployed as "examples" of one-off bad behavior and not as outcomes of working with explosive materials. This "downscaling of responsibility for managing industrial harms" both allows the company to obscure its role in the production of this harm and implies a responsibility on the part of the individual for their own care and protection (Nading 2020: 216, Shapiro 2015).

There is an important tension here: while outwardly claiming to care for its workers and keep them safe from bodily harm, the company simultaneously places the onus on the individual for their ultimate protection. Thus, one of the many reasons it may be difficult for plant workers to articulate the role of the company in these incidents is that the understanding of these deadly occurrences as "individual accidents" constitutes a discursive "double bind" (Nading 2020: 215). In stating that these accidents are matters of individual responsibility, there is an implicit recognition that the company's alleged safety measures are entirely dependent upon the individual's own "self-discipline" and "strictly regimented" behaviors (Nading 2020: 215). Hercules, then, is not what is keeping its workers "safe;" rather, the workers are doing that themselves, a fact which is only made apparent when this self-discipline goes awry.

The worker's self-management for safety is, of course, only necessary because of the dangerous nature of the work. It is evident that these "accidents" are not the isolated events they are made out to be when they are viewed collectively. The reasoning behind the need for severe safety protocols, the need for an on-site hospital, or the need for monthly physicals is not the beneficence of Hercules and its devotion to its employees, but rather derives from the fact that weapons production is inherently dangerous and violent work. The feeling of "safety" operates in the register of affect and deploys "compassion." As Didier Fassin has written, organizations with ostensible "humanitarian" aims have the ability to reconfigure "moral sentiment" to their advantage (Fassin 2011: 5). Through claiming its investment in mitigating workers' suffering, Hercules obscures its role as the entity putting them in the way of harm.

Through this process, the workers' precarious lives are brought into particular forms of governance; namely, continued control, discipline, and surveillance of their bodies. Because Hercules has so (apparently) utilized their resources to protect their workers, the workers do not demand better treatment, but rather are "expected to show the humility of the beholden" (Fassin 2011: 4). All the while, this ostensible protection is in service of maintaining capable worker-bodies and its necessity is a result of the dangerous nature of munitions production. It is, above all, the danger of the work itself and the company's need to maintain working bodies for production that beget the intense focus on safety and continued focus on workers' health. Safety is only "number one" because it has to be.

Safety, while presented as a necessity, is deployed here with a moralizing sentiment attached to it. The memories of safety, too, have an affective dimension of "care" and "protection." The workers' remembrance of these incidents is filtered through what is "safe" for them to remember about their work at the ammunition plant—too much thought about their safety may lead to a realization that things were not as "safe" as they recall.

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AT THE END of my conversation with Larry and Brenda, Brenda looked at me with teary eyes. Though I had stopped my recording, I can remember she thanked me for interviewing her husband and said that she was grateful, because she had learned more about Larry's life than she

had known previously. Larry's recall of these events had evoked something powerful for her—a sense of connection between the two of them, a sense of their relationship to each other and to the town they had always inhabited. Before I left, Brenda handed me a book, insisting it would help me with my research. Bound by black plastic rings, its small cardstock cover read "De Soto, Kansas is 100 years old."

Later that night, I leafed through the book. The book was self-published, written by Dot Ashlock-Longstreth in 1957. In compiling the book, Dot's purpose was to give herself and others a "sense of place" in the "community known as De Soto, Kansas" (Ashlock-Longstreth 1957: 13). Dot framed her own search for information much like I conceptualized a "recovery" of histories long suppressed. The more I flipped through the book, however, the more I wondered how my historical research matched Dot's—which pieces were foregrounded, and which were minimized, and which were left out entirely.

Flipping through the pages of Dot's book, I came upon a section which mentioned Abbott Hall. The building was the original home of the former mayor of De Soto James Abbott, who was by all accounts an active member of a number of groups within the town. Dot's book mentions little about the building itself, other than to say it was an important meeting site for many "social groups." The building, now a city museum, still contains many of De Soto's important historical objects, including a number of "Indian artifacts" and the "somewhat controversial Ku Klux Klan quilt" (Ashlock-Longstreth 1957: 65).

In many respects, Abbott Hall stands as an irrefutable reminder of the legacies of violence which are woven through De Soto's past. Not only does the building itself evidence the ties between powerful citizens and historical prejudice—its namesake, James Abbott, both town mayor and later Klan member—but its collection of artifacts documents the town as an exclusionary settler colonial project. As Keith Basso wrote in regard to his work on Western Apache placemaking, place has the potential to remind us of "our connections to *what happened here*"—the violent histories of colonization and racist violence remain lodged in Abbott Hall, their present impacts simultaneously near-obvious and unremembered (Basso 1996: 4).

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THE MENTION OF the quilt transported me back to my one experience entering Abbott Hall. One afternoon in seventh grade, we had made the mile-long trek along the old highway from our middle school to Abbott Hall. As we approached the top of the hill the building sat upon, our teachers had told us the building was an official De Soto museum. Walking through the wood-paneled lower level, there were several objects in glass cases: old furniture, telephones, and glass bottles. In the upstairs bedroom, there was a single bed, the Klan quilt laid delicately on top of it. I could remember that the quilt was red and white, but little more than that.

A photo of the quilt is posted on the De Soto Historical Society's Facebook page in which the quilt is hung from a rod close to the low ceiling of a room. The quilt is framed with a deep red fabric, which is also used to delineate repeated one-foot-by-one-foot squares in a grid. Inside

each of the squares lies a shape which looks like a symmetrical flower in various dark fabrics; some blue, some purple, some patterned with small designs. In the center of each flower, the negative space forms a cross with four equal arms. Written inside the crosses are the Klansmen's names.

During my middle school encounter with the quilt, I can remember feeling unsettled, but I could not place the quilt within its greater context. I cannot recall it being presented as a remnant of evil, or being told that the Klan had had an exceptionally lengthy tenure in the town of De Soto, or even being taught more broadly about the activities of the Klan. It remained in its place, a simple household object on a bed in a household-turned-museum. It was not out of place, and no one else acted as though it was so profoundly disquieting.

The quilt was fashioned to be an object of the realm of the home, of comfort, of nurturing, of security, of peace. But this quilt cannot be one of the innocent and innocuous home. It is one which represents the violent ideologies and actions of the Klan: the attacks, the attempts at extermination, the cruelty, the murder, the erasure, the inhumanity—each in the service of protecting this imagined home.

As Larry had hinted in our interview, and as is evidenced by the existence of the quilt, the Klan had been very active in De Soto's past. Its presence is never quite addressed: it is always perceived as something that is entirely of the past, entirely unrelated to the town's present and entirely unimportant for the town's future. Even in my conversation with Larry, he had mentioned the Klan and moved past it breezily—I had asked him whether the people that worked in the plant were mostly white, and he had responded that there were lots of Black people who "couldn't live in town…because you still had the Klan that was around."

Dot's book notes the first recording of the Klan in 1925. The De Soto Klan, as far as I am aware, was most active during the 1930s and 40s but remained in existence until at least the 1960s. De Soto was a "Sundown town"—where Black people had to leave before nightfall or risk being threatened with violence (Loewen 2005).

The only other mention of the Klan in Dot's book is where she says that it "came to" town and "turned it wrong side out and upside down" (Ashlock-Longstreth 1957: 63). This understanding that the Klan "came to" the town is interesting, as it posits that the Klan was an entity separate from and external to the members of the town. Given that a town mayor was indeed a Klan member, and that I had a friend who pointed out their ancestor on the quilt, this seems unlikely. Rather, De Soto appears as one of a number of small, rural Midwestern towns whose histories are intimately tied with those of the violent actions of the Klan, but who consistently picture the Klan as "outside" through processes of simultaneous "knowing" and "not-knowing" (Giorgio 2016: 2). In this move, town residents are able to acknowledge the existence of the Klan without implicating members of the town (even if they are explicitly named) within it.

What is most obviously missing in this understanding is a thorough engagement with the harms perpetrated by the Klan and a reckoning with how those harms came to influence the present. What of Dot's conclusion that "most of the wounds have been healed?" Perhaps the legacies of this extreme racialized violence are gone, but perhaps more likely is the fact that it is uncomfortable to do the work of remembering these histories. While it is fulfilling to believe that

the small town has no ties to the troubles of the past or of the contemporary, there is evidence otherwise in the artifacts at Abbott Hall, in the county sheriff's family ties to the Klan, and most of all in De Soto's astonishingly low Black population (1.4% at last Census count) (U.S. Census Bureau 2018). To think of the present impact of the Ku Klux Klan would require a deeper engagement with these current circumstances and their precedents.

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De Soto's history with the Klan illustrates the difficulties of "knowing;" even if there are physical reminders of past violence, they can be explained away as "uncharacteristic" or "external." With this idea in circulation as a dominant mode of discourse, an understanding of these violent events as atypical is "deepened, amplified, and tacitly affirmed" over time (Basso 1996: 40). The physical remnants of "what happened here" remain severed from their larger contexts, from a current or even a former *us* who could not possibly have been responsible.

Knowing is layered, especially in a place like De Soto, whose histories are also numerous and layered. Sedimentary violences—of contamination, of ammunition and imperialism, of racism, and of colonialism—have accumulated here over time. These accretions are difficult to tease apart and fully apprehend because of their sequential consolidation; as layers are added, they become muddled and entangled with the politics of everyday experience, with labor, and with affect and identity. It is often simpler to ignore them or to forget them than to try and tease them apart.

However, remembrances of this place which obscure its past violences do not mean that these histories are unrecoverable. In De Soto, social differentiations live in the land itself—the soil and what is built upon it carry physical residues of the violences produced here. These residues are "affectively charged," circulating alongside "structures of feeling," which have at varying times meant people have recognized their implications or have ignored them (Gordillo 2014: 188). Affective ties to these violences—memories of them—need not be outwardly or apparently recognized for these spaces to "exert palpable pressure" and to produce new understandings of these histories (Williams 1977: 133).

Both the Sunflower plant and Abbott Hall, among other reminders of De Soto's history, are what Gastón Gordillo has termed "bright objects:" they have the potential to illuminate something formerly unnoticed, something forgotten (Gordillo 2014: 185). Forgotten need not mean "lost." What is forgotten—and *why* it is forgotten—is of primary importance in making sense of this place. *Why* white residents choose to forget or downplay the Klan's existence is as significant as *what* the Klan has been responsible for.

As Keith Basso has noted, understanding why people make sense of these places in a particular way, then, can be a mode of "reconstructing history itself, of inventing it, of fashioning novel versions of 'what happened here'" (Basso 1996: 6). That a certain construction of the past has come to be accepted as "credible or convincing" does not mean these histories cannot be "imagined anew" (Basso 1996: 6). Re-understandings of place are ways not only of "reviving"

former times, but also "revising" them—thinking of how, "just possibly, they might have been different from what others have supposed" (Basso 1996: 5).

What happens, though, if the layered materials which carry these complex histories are displaced? If there are "moral dimensions" to space, what happens when the material substance of a place is altered or removed (Basso 1996: 24)? Remediation, for Sunflower, means removal—removal of toxins, but also of layers of soil which evidence the deeply colonial violences that happened here. What does it mean for understandings of De Soto's past that the goal of remediation is to leave a more "pure" landscape? At Sunflower, what could justice truly look like—what would it mean to fully engage with who "rightfully" inhabits this place, in its past, present, or future?

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AMONG THE ARTIFACTS on the first floor at Abbott Hall, there was also an old rifle. It sat in a glass case next to a mechanical cash register and a paint-peeled statuette of a brown horse. At the front of the case, a yellowed slip of paper on which was typed the name "Charles Blue Jacket" in typewritten font.

Before De Soto was De Soto, it was part of the Shawnee Reservation. Before it was the Shawnee Reservation, though, the land was inhabited by the Kaw tribe, who lived near the river later named for them which gave them access to extensive resources and trading networks. While some remained in Kansas after the Louisiana Purchase, many moved south as other tribes, including the Shawnee, were relocated to the area (Smith 2012).

During the Civil War, the Kansas-Missouri border became highly contested. De Soto was in part of the area known as "Bleeding Kansas," the land between Lawrence and the Missouri state line where many of the battles were fought. The Shawnee had been allotted plots of 200 acres each, but the war became so disruptive and dangerous that many are said to have sold their land and "fled south to Oklahoma" (Smith 2012).

Charles Blue Jacket and a small group of Shawnees, however, did not. Blue Jacket, a Methodist minister, and both of his sons served as members in the Union Army for the duration of the war; their rifles, of course, were necessary artifacts of their service. There is little mentioned about the Blue Jackets' involvement in the war besides this a brief account in Dot's book, nor is there much else that speaks positively about the Shawnee living in De Soto when it was founded.

The only Shawnee mentioned by name in Dot's narrative is John Possum. He had apparently sold his land "peacefully" to settlers for a profit—nearly $15 an acre, evidently a "handsome sum" for the time. Everything south of the township remained in the Shawnee Reservation up until World War I, when Indian Agent Harry McBride moved the tribe further south to open more room for farmland.

John Possum's cabin remained on the south side of the Kaw River, adjacent to Kill Creek; the majority of the Shawnee were still close to the newly established town. Alice Smith-Dow, remembered her "Indian encounter" in the 1870s:

> My brother and I were left at home. We played about for a while, and all at once saw two Indians, with shaved heads and feathers stuck in their calflocks, coming towards the house, carrying bows and arrows. We locked the doors and pulled down the curtains and climbed into Mother's bed, where we lay, shivering, under the covers.
>
> Indians never knock at doors but walk right in. They tried them and when they found them locked, tried to open the windows. Although terribly scared, we thought we'd better show ourselves. So, we went to the window. They made signs for us to let them in and showed a paper they had. But we shook our heads and they finally left. In a little while, Mother came. The Indians had gone to the Donation Party and when Mother saw them, she had visions of my brother and me murdered and scalped. She was sure happy to find us safe and sound.

Few accounts in the collection speak positively of the Shawnee people, describing them as "beggars," "usual drunks," "lying on the floor much like hogs in their pen." Other mentions of the Shawnee center mainly around the Methodist missionaries who worked with them, who gave them religion and "good things to eat" (Ashlock-Longstreth 1957: 55).

Ironically, Dot's book contains an entire section of the town's firsts—first birth, first marriage, first doctor—all among settlers, all without consciousness of the births, marriages, and doctors that had existed before settlement. There is a list credits the important people who "built the town;" all but one, John Possum, are settlers.

Though at first the book's account reads as a form of what Patrick Wolfe has termed "settler amnesia," it is not quite the same (Wolfe 2006: 387). It does require the same evacuation of memory, which can be seen in the use of words such as "first" and "native" to describe the settler histories. However, this lack of acknowledgement of the Native people who resided on the land does not so much yearn for a past that has been destroyed, but abandons it as if it had never taken place. It focuses on the changes in the town as though they were inevitable, as if history itself is a secular march towards modern progress.

The most gaping absence in the narrative is perhaps the almost complete evacuation of memory surrounding the events that led to the Shawnee being forced out of their historical reservation land. The violence of the Civil War, the treaties made under duress, the greed of the federal government in creating the allotment process to open up more lands for white settlement, all are missing from this account. In the case of De Soto and of most of Kansas, removal of tribes was for a very specific purpose: to open more lands which had allegedly been mismanaged by the tribes for individual agriculture.

Though the historical violence of De Soto as a settler colonial project remains underacknowledged in this narrative, its existence is still made apparent in its physical residues—the house of John Possum is memorialized with a sign by the river, and the collection of rifles still resides in Abbott Hall. The dispossession of the Shawnee land for the purpose of white settlement was just one example of the numerous instances of Native dispossession that was "naturalized" by the U.S. government, a process that, as Patrick Wolfe has noted, has been claimed again and again to be "voluntary" but which was in reality enforced by a "multiplicity"

of layered state and individual violences (Wolfe 2011: 18).

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IN 2001, THE Shawnee tribe sued the United States for its land back. The U.S. Army had officially declared the Sunflower Army Ammunition Plant as "excess property," and while the categorization of the land as "excess" solved some problems, finally putting to rest the numerous failed attempts at redevelopment, it created another set of unsettling questions. If the GSA would not take responsibility for the remediation of the site, and the private companies who wished to do so could not raise the funds, the site would likely become a Brownfield site, a designation requiring piece-by-piece cleanup through the acquisition of smaller grants ("EPA Brownfield Grant Funding Summary.") With the former proposals falling through, it seemed unlikely that anyone would wish to shoulder the burden of this cleanup.

"Excess" determination, then, was not simply change in the legal definition of the site. Rather, it meant new considerations about ownership, remediation, and accountability would have to occur—who, after all, would be able to fully remediate the site? Who was truly responsible for its contamination, and who should be responsible for its cleanup? And how, if at all, could the site be effectively returned to its rightful owner?

Seeing that the Sunflower property was to be declared as excess, the Shawnee Tribe appealed to the GSA to have the land transferred to the Secretary of the Interior to be held in trust for the Shawnee. U.S. Federal Code Title 40, Section 523 requires that if property is declared as excess by the GSA and is located "within the reservation of any group, band, or tribe of Indians," it must be federally recognized to be held in trust for said tribe by the Secretary of the Interior. The federal-tribal "trust" agreement is one that has evolved over decades, but in its present form amounts to the federal government transferring certain property rights to the tribe and holding the land as inalienable from the tribe for the period of a quarter century (Getches 2017: 36).

After the Shawnee tribe's submission to the GSA, the GSA's independent investigation determined that the area "no longer lies within present-day boundaries of the Shawnee's reservation, and thus the Shawnee were not entitled to a transfer of the Sunflower Property." The tribe appealed to the district court, which concluded that "the Shawnee reservation was disestablished in an 1854 Treaty between the Shawnee and the United States." The tribe then appealed to the federal court *(Shawnee Tribe v. United States)*.

In *Shawnee Tribe v. United States*, the decision of 10th Circuit Court began by noting that the Sunflower property is located within the historical boundaries of the Shawnee reservation. However, the court states, "the Shawnee's Kansas reservation was affected by the encroachment of this country's western expansion and a rapidly increasing non-Indian population in the area." Thus, they write, the U.S. found it beneficial to "limit the tract of Shawnee land" through an 1854 treaty (*Shawnee Tribe v. United States)*.

It is worth noting exactly who the "rapidly increasing non-Indian population" was during this period of time. The two decades leading up to the Civil War produced especially violent and tumultuous action in the exact location of the Shawnee reservation—this was the era known as "Bleeding Kansas," where pro-slave Missourians and abolitionist Northerners were flooding to eastern Kansas in hopes of bringing the state to their respective ideologies. It is thus evident that this treaty was made under some level of duress, including threats to lives and livelihoods ("Bleeding Kansas.")

The 1854 Shawnee Treaty was part of a series of treaties that were made specifically with the goal of allotting tribal reservations to individuals. The stated intent of these treaties was allegedly to protect against the "collectivism" and "communism" posed by collective tribal land ownership, which were alleged to be "holding the indigenous peoples back" from "advancement." While this may have been the purpose of some allotments, the main achievement of the allotment era of federal Indian policy was to dispossess the tribes of some of their land and open it up for white settlement (Getches 2017: 64).

In the Shawnee allotment treaty and many others, the land of their reservation was said to be "ceded" to the United States, and then "re-ceded" to the Shawnee people as individuals. Shawnee individuals had to place their name on rolls to receive a 200-acre parcel of land within their historical reservation. The rest of the "unselected lands" would be considered "surplus" and sold to any buyer (*Shawnee Tribe v. United States)*.

The Shawnee land claim was further complicated by the fact that as many Shawnee continued to move south to Oklahoma to avoid civil conflict, they negotiated an agreement with the Cherokee Nation in 1869. The Shawnee had agreed to be "incorporated into the Cherokee Nation" (*Shawnee Tribe v. United States)*. The Shawnee, thus, for over a century, were not considered to be a federally recognized tribe. The tribe was, however, re-recognized as a sovereign entity shortly before this case was brought before the court, meaning that ultimately this difference in recognition was moot (*Shawnee Tribe v. United States)*.

With issues of recognition and history sorted, the 10th Circuit Court hinged their decision about the Sunflower land on the question of whether or not the Shawnee reservation was effectively disestablished in the 1854 Treaty. Indeed, the court found, the treaty language of "cession" and the "pattern of settlement" following allotment was compelling enough for the reservation's diminishment. The Shawnee, then, would not receive their land back.

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THERE ARE A number of significant legal precedents at work in the 10th Circuit Court's decision. In a series of allotment and termination era decisions before the 1970s, the Supreme Court significantly reduced tribal sovereignty and tribal land claims. In *Hagen v. Utah*, for instance, the court established that surplus lands sold would no longer constitute pieces of tribal reservations, and in *Lone Wolf v. Hitchcock*, it was established that Congress had the unilateral authority to diminish reservations. A later decision, however, in *Solem v. Bartlett,* complicated

this understanding of allotted lands and reservations. In *Solem*, two tests were established: first, a reservation is only disestablished if Congress has explicitly stated an intent to diminish the reservation; second, diminishment is inferred when "non-Indian settlers" make up the primary population of the land and the land has "long since lost its Indian character" (Getches 2017: 33). Textually speaking, this "intent" as written in *Solem* is nonspecific—intent to disestablish a reservation could occur in any number of words, open to argument and ultimately, the discretion of individual judges.

In this case, the court looked to "the language used to open Indian lands" and the "pattern of settlement" following the decision to determine whether the reservation was diminished. The court recognized, however, that this was a "potentially unreliable method of interpretation" and said that considerations of the "obvious practical disadvantages" of returning the land as Shawnee reservation land were important in the decision process.

What is perhaps most interesting about the outcome of this case is its temporal dependence. The *Solem* decision occurred in 1984, serving as a guide for reservation disestablishment for 36 years, until being rendered effectively useless by the *McGirt v. Oklahoma* decision in June of 2020. Post-*McGirt*, no longer is the land's "character" or pattern of settlement relevant to the disestablishment of a reservation (*McGirt v. Oklahoma*). In addition, the language utilized by Congress now needs to be more specific and targeted to effectively diminish a reservation's existence. In 2020, the outcome of this case might have been entirely different.

The nature of changing federal Indian policy and attitudes toward Indigenous sovereignty in the United States convey a strong sense of the power imbalance between the U.S. and the tribes. While this relationship looked much more obviously paternalistic and colonial in the past, these attitudes still impact the ways in which legal dealings with Indigenous nations are negotiated.

Shawnee Tribe v. United States is at its core an issue of self-determination and recognition; while the decision itself centered around the tribe's reserved rights, its right to define itself as an entity was also placed into question. For tribes like the Shawnee, recognition by a colonizing entity is a double bind: while recognition means access to certain rights and benefits, it also means to an extent legitimizing the colonizing entity's authority. Recognition as a form of settler governance becomes a way for authorizing bodies to "solve" conflicts of "nested sovereignty" by claiming beneficence while "extending forms of settlement" through "impossible but seemingly democratic inclusion" (Wolfe 2011: 32).

Legal systems within settler colonial states like the U.S. often deal with Indigenous sovereignty as a "practical test to the limits of Western norms of acknowledgement." As Audra Simpson has written in her own experience and fieldwork around Kahnawà:ke Mohawk border issues, Indigenous polities, like the Mohawk or the Shawnee with their land claim, test circumstances that most perceive as "settled," the land "dispossessed" and its owners "absorbed" (Simpson 2014: 11).

Recognition of the political autonomy and reserved rights of tribes by the U.S. raises questions about its legitimacy to recognize—"What is their authority to do so? Where does it come from? Who are they to do so?" (Simpson 2014: 12) The ability of the United States to recognize or

delimit the boundaries of the sovereignty of tribes is thus an extension of the centuries-old "paternalistic governmentality," which sought to "apportion" tribal governance alongside tribal lands (Wolfe 2011: 3).

The Sunflower plant's existence, as well as its court battles, are reminders of the way that this dispossession has been carried out and maintained—while previously physical violence was the primary way the settler state maintained its power, now the state seeks to place limitations on Indigenous sovereignty through forms of governance (land claim cases, membership quotas, federal recognition, resource distribution.)

This is not to say that the state does not still maintain its power through physical and material violences, fast and slow. It is worth asking whether the results of this case would have truly benefitted the Shawnee if they had received the land back—decades of contamination would still mean that their original reservation land would be uninhabitable for quite some time, their water supplies would need to be outsourced, their infrastructure built from the ground up. The "sovereignty of waste" in contested lands remains an important question: who bears the impacts of toxicity, and who is responsible, governmentally, for its remediation? (Masco 2006: 145) The process of weapons production in this place mirrors the broader processes of U.S. settler colonialism: through "forgetting and reinvention," this place has been made over by toxicity, which will take millions of dollars to remediate, if complete remediation is at all possible (Masco 2006: 100). The Sunflower land, once an inhabitable home, has become a harmful place for living.

—

BOTH THE ORIGINAL removal of the Shawnee from their reservation land along with the denial of the legal request for the land back clearly perpetuate settler colonialism by the United States government. These legally-sanctioned processes of allotment, removal, and denial also gave the U.S. the ability to bring about its imperialist aims; the land was seized once by the government from the Shawnee, but then was seized again before World War II for the construction of the ammunition plant. This time, the land was seized with a different set of aims, a different "other" to mobilize against, a different set of violences produced from the ammunition itself. This exercise of eminent domain not only served to reinforce the colonial power of the United States, but would also allow for the production of mass weaponry which would be utilized to continue U.S. imperialist aims in other places, particularly in wars like Vietnam.

Many of the workers in the plant expressed some cognizance of the fact that the weapons produced in the site would be used to inflict harm abroad. Larry told me which types of weapons would be used in which bombers for which wars, and a number of the archival interviews convey an "it's either them or us" attitude about the ammunition's eventual detonation: the plant's production was directed towards "protecting" our men, rather than harming others, "saving democracy" and the world's moral order, rather than disrupting it.

Ammunition, conceptualized in this way, becomes a salvation technology for Americans engaged in war within some ostensible "elsewhere"—it is something that keeps "our" men "safe," regardless of its impacts on others, irrespective of the oft-imperial reasons for our intervention abroad. Ann Stoler and David Bond have argued that U.S. empire functions primarily through its "production of exceptionalism"—the state is never at fault, its "violences [are] always temporary," its "humanitarian visions excuse and distinguish [its] interventions" as necessary, not "excess" (Stoler & Bond 2006: 95).

De Soto is thus a town whose history demonstrates both the colonial and imperial tendencies of the United States government. It is important and significant that the two remain separate—U.S. colonialism and imperialism—because while the two have worked in tandem and in a mutually constitutive way, "the slippage between what is 'colonial' and what is 'imperial' about the United States" is exactly "how U.S. empire works" (Stoler & Bond 2006: 94).

I can think of no more important place to distinguish between these terms than in this discussion of the Sunflower Army Ammunition Plant. The deeply colonial processes of removal are what have brought about the existence of the ammunition plant and its furthering of U.S. imperialism, but these are above all separate processes. They impact and "other" different groups of people in differing and important ways, perpetuating different forms of violence and different potentials for embodied outcomes.

The uncertainly between the terms, however, may be fruitful for thinking about the way that the U.S. government, as well as the U.S. military, have created and maintained spaces of "partial exclusion" that remain "exempt from scrutiny." Through processes of removal, like the allotment of the land which would become Sunflower, tribes like the Shawnee ceased to be totally "external" to the state and were rather reconceptualized as being "progressively contained" and "dependent"—interior to the state, but not conceptualized as having full citizenship (Wolfe 2011: 18).

The spaces in which these partial exclusions occur may be blunt, as in categorizations of citizenship or nationality, but they may also operate within a more elusive and intimate register. These elusive exclusions operate within and outside of the bounds of the United States: these are the kinds of actions that partially include women and minority workers in the ammunition plant without giving them the same wages as their white male counterparts, the kinds of actions that allow minoritized groups to enlist in the U.S. military without providing them the same benefits upon return to their homes, the kinds of actions which colonize places like Guam and Puerto Rico without conferring of U.S. citizenship. These are the productions of "exempted spaces," exclusions of "others" and "exit strategies" from international accountability (Stoler & Bond 2006: 100).

These processes, even as they are at work nationally and internationally, are also important to recognize within a place like the Sunflower Army Ammunition Plant. An evacuation of memory, or a disconnection from the larger colonial and imperial projects in which the place is implicated only serves to reproduce its violences.

Though it may not be extremely widely produced or circulated, Dot's book contains exactly this disconnection. Towards the end of her description of the ammunition plant, her tone becomes

more impassioned. The pacing picks up, and more positively-connoted words are used in the descriptions. She describes the ammunition plant as a “prosperous endeavor,” one which stimulated local businesses and added mostly-upstanding citizens to the population. Exclamation points and capitalized phrases such as “HISTORY IS BEING MADE!” and “TIME MARCHES ON!” punctuate the narrative (Ashlock-Longstreth 1957: 113). She ends with what I imagine would be compelling denouement if read aloud:

“THIS is De Soto today, my own beloved HOME SWEET HOME!”

—

ON A SATURDAY afternoon, I made my way to Montee Lewis’s house. Located in one of the older parts of town, it was on the same street I had traveled on every week for several years for my childhood piano lessons. Ascending a half-flight of stairs, I knocked on the door. Montee answered, leading me into a front sitting room with a large collection of angels. There were paintings on the walls, numerous Precious Moments, and tiny glass sculptures covered in a single layer of dust. On the wall of the dining room, a collection of long-barreled rifles sat behind a glass panel. Montee’s wife offered me a glass of water as I sat down near him in a dark red recliner.

I learned that Montee had only worked as an employee of the plant for a single year. Both him and his brother, too young to be drafted for the Korean War, had gone to work in the plant. One day in the spring, the building where Montee produced nitroguanadine within flooded. He and one other employee had been stuck—they both camped out on a table, not wanting any of their work to be destroyed. They had received word that someone would come get them, but at the end of the day when no one came, they both fell asleep. The next morning, an officer found them asleep, and they were fired on the spot. Montee, more upset about being wrongfully fired than being fired in general, did not fight the decision.

Not one to be easily discouraged, Montee quickly found a new form of employment at a construction company. This job, he insisted, he liked a lot more—in his old post, the Army wouldn't allow him inside of any of the buildings, save for the one he worked in. He thought they were trying to keep things from him. In his new post, he still technically worked in the plant, though not for the Army, and so without some of the previous stipulations—he could go inside of other buildings and check out what was happening. He had more freedom, which he liked, and spent less time answering to people he thought were dumber than he was.

At one point, Montee described coming home from work after being at the plant all day. The powder was difficult to shake:

“That stuff...that stuff would get up in the crevices of your body and your boots, and you’d strike your boot on the ground, you know, and it would smoke.”

I asked Montee if this was something that scared him.

“Hmph. No scarier than going to war.”

Montee was likely one of the few people in the ammunition plant who could make that comparison—after working in the plant in construction for several years, he and his brother both enlisted in the Army towards the middle of the Vietnam War. He was deployed and described the war as being anxious:

“I thought that, you know, it was going to be more straightforward. But it was people in the village who didn’t like us. It was more like ambushes than anything on the patrols. It was more hidden, in the trees, smaller fights than big ones.”

Still, Montee said, he realized the importance of the war with a sense of pride.

“You know, in the end, I was happy to serve. I was.”

—

LIKE MONTEE AND Larry, many of the plant workers interviewed for the oral history collection cited a sense of patriotism and pride in the nation as their cause for returning to work in munitions production each day. A number of the other plant workers discussed a “willingness” to “be a good citizen” and “help the country.”

Many of the workers displayed an affective tie not only to the nation, but to the individuals at war—referring to Vietnam, Gary Mikkelson recalled that Sunflower likely “shortened the war and saved our guys” (Gary Mikkelson, 2003). There was a sense of being bonded not only to fellow American workers in the ammunition plant, but to assisting the American soldiers deployed outside of the country.

“To make sure the powder was good…was a real honor,” said Nancy Davis. She recalled feeling even more proud of the production when her son was in the Air Force—she felt a “double duty” to protect both her country and her child (Nancy Davis, 1997).

Others framed the action as patriotic because it was not “working for the man”—as Rich Powers stated, working in private industry meant that your boss was “making all the money.” But at Sunflower, he thought, “you’re working for your country” (Rich Powers, 2002).

Ammunition plant work as an affective expression of patriotism helps place the Sunflower plant into the larger context of U.S. national military imperatives. Discourses surrounding U.S. weapons production tend to be along these lines—that weapons production and stockpiling are a necessary part of “national security,” that being a “good citizen” means contributing towards militaristic aims, that this work “helps” the country and its soldiers.

For a country which has never fought its most recent wars on its own land, there is an abstraction

of the costs of weapons deployment "overseas." The workers know on some level that the weapons will produce harm, but there is a "banalization of U.S. weaponry in everyday life" as a result of the knowledge that the weapons will never be deployed here, that United States citizens who are not soldiers will not endure the deployment of ammunition (Masco 2006: 5). Consequently, weapons production can be viewed as a source of patriotic pride, a mode of maintaining "security" and "protection" of the U.S. soldiers.

U.S. citizens are thus positioned in and reproduce a discourse of (in)security, maintained by the state, which, as Joseph Masco has pointed out, operates through a "strategic manipulation of real or imagined 'threat'" in order to justify its continuation of weapons production and deployment (Masco 2006: 288). These discourses surround and inform the "necessity" of violence from weapons and the maintenance of the U.S. as a global military superpower. Even for those who work within the scope of ammunition production, weapons production becomes a structure whose impacts are mainly visible in "moments of crisis" abroad, even though this production has also necessarily created "military and cultural" effects that are actively ongoing locally (Masco 2006: 5).

Still, there are moments of potential for those involved in both weapons production and military action to recognize the ways in which U.S. citizens are mobilized for particular aims in relation to discourses of "national security." Randy Wells, who worked at the plant after being drafted for the Vietnam War, recalled feeling conflicted, but ultimately proud of his service:

> I was proud to serve, but like all Vietnam veterans there was a little anger about the way we were treated when we returned. The bad things about living in Lawrence, KU [the University of Kansas] was protesting and they were blocking streets and all the college students didn't want to serve, they were angry about the war. And you know, I have mixed emotions about being the world's police and taking care of it but if people need help, I am proud to be an American and I was proud to serve (Randy Wells, 2000).

As is evident in Randy's hesitation, weapons production and American military mobilization can create space for the "possibility for new understandings" about the "consequences of nationalist violence" (Masco 2006: 9). There is a tacit conflict Randy faced upon return from Vietnam, even if he stated that he was overall "proud to serve"—the anti-war protests were surprising and angering, and Randy admitted he had "mixed emotions" surrounding the U.S.' role in world policing.

Randy had not volunteered to serve, but had voluntarily worked in the ammunition plant. Asked about whether his continuation of work in the ammunition plant was a result of an "increased" patriotism from his service. Randy again stated his difficulty with the war upon return, mentioning vaguely that it was "different when you knew what was going on over there."

"I was able to get by all of that, though."

—

DIGGING THROUGH THE documents in the Johnson County archives, I came upon a series of interviews with police officers. I had known that Sunflower had its own security throughout its operation, but was previously unaware of its connections with local law enforcement agencies. In one interview I read, an officer had told his interviewer about working the area out by Sunflower during the 1970s. I found the retired officer, Myron, on Facebook and messaged him asking him to give me a call if he would like to contribute towards my project.

I answered the phone call from Myron on a Wednesday afternoon, sitting down at my parents' kitchen table with my computer, ready to take notes. With a surprising amount of energy, he told me all about his time working for the Johnson County Police Department—back in the 70s and 80s, he said, there was very little dissatisfaction with the police department, especially compared to the present.

His involvement with Sunflower started in 1969, when he was a new officer on the force and his patrol area was around the ammunition plant and Clearview City. "It wasn't a nice place to live." Echoing sentiments I had heard elsewhere, he had said that because of the fact that Clearview was "no longer in the hands of the Army," and because it was "cheap," the people who lived there were "from out of town," it had fallen into relative disrepair. As a result, the police presence was increased, even though in Myron's opinion there was not much crime—"mostly petty theft, a couple of suicides" in his recollection.

However, there was one event that stood out in Myron's mind about his time working out near the plant. A couple years after he started patrol around the plant, he had noted growing resistance to law enforcement and to governmental action in general.

During the Vietnam War, he said, "it seemed like everybody was anti-government. And that included the schools 'cause suddenly the schools didn't want us there, and the students didn't want us there, and we were the bad guys."

Amidst this growing anti-government sentiment, the county office received a call one day. "It was from a guy, he said he had a friend who was going to blow up the Sunflower Ordnance Plant."

My eyes widened. I thought I had a solid grasp of the extent of the violence that permeated the Sunflower site, but there was evidently always more to discover. "Wow. Did he have a reason?"

"You know, it was active during the Vietnam War. Making rocket powder I think."

Myron detailed how, believing this information was reliable, the police got a warrant to search this man's house. Upon entry, they found several cases of dynamite and received a full confession that his plan was to blow up the entrance and impede the flow of ammunition out of the Sunflower plant.

“He was a student at [the University of Kansas], which had a pretty good amount of anti-war, um, sentiment.”

I asked Myron what happened next—was there more security at the plant? Did the police begin looking for more potential bomb threats?

“So we were successful in recovering the cases of dynamite, but it also stressed the need of additional equipment for the department.” As a direct result of the Sunflower bomb threat, he said, the Johnson County Police Department received funding to purchase “state of the art” bomb detection equipment, including protective suits and a trailer to haul explosives to safe locations.

“And you use all of this?”

“So, we got called in for all sorts of things after that. Not just around here, we would go down to Fort Scott, to Lawrence, anywhere in the eastern part of the state. We had the most sophisticated training and equipment.” Patrols were also heightened out at Sunflower, he mentioned, but he didn’t know the details as he hadn’t worked out there much longer after the bomb threat.

I hung up and wrote down several notes from my conversation with Myron. Above all, I sat for a while with the fact that there was a credible bomb threat which was mentioned in only a single interview, hidden away in a box in the small archive. Even the workers at the plant hadn’t known about the extent of the anti-war sentiment and the threat of eminent violence. It was on some level infuriating—where were the news articles, the town gossip, the fear about what the bombing could have meant? No matter how many attempts there were to contain it, it seemed that violence would always inhabit the Sunflower Army Ammunition Plant. Perhaps it was safer to forget this near-miss.

—

THE SUNFLOWER ARMY Ammunition Plant is caught within a dialectic of order and disorder, of violence and containment. Its historical ordering prevented some forms of violence from occurring, while actively releasing others in external places. Its present rendering attempts the same, with its thresholds of “safe” contamination and unequal exposures.

The plant itself conveys an illusion of military perfection—the perfectly aligned roll houses, the identical water towers, and the alphabetically-named streets of Clearview City are all evidence of this imposed order. The process of creating ammunition necessitated order and containment: in a place where thousands of pounds of ammunition can explode with a singular mistake, disorder is equivalent to disaster. In military production dependent on manpower, order is a necessity, since individualism breeds unwelcome critique. The ammunition itself comes to be regarded as a salvation technology for the global moral order when deployed in the “right” places by the “right” state, continually reifying and reimposing the imperial power of the United States.

This necessity for order arises from the fear of the consequences of disorder. There is that

conception of the disordered primitivity of the prior inhabitants of the land (those Indians who "never knock at doors") and the perceived need to modernize in order to rid the town of this past. There is the unwieldy nature of the explosives themselves—if allowed to be disordered in any way, they are liable to explode; if allowed to be produced by the "wrong" states they sow further international discord. There is the disorder and potential disruption of the humans themselves—it is the untrustworthy behavior of the workers that make weapons production dangerous, and the company's focus on "safety" maintains its visage of proper containment. And there is the disorder of the natural world itself; the land must be contained and utilized to provide the most economic gain for its inhabitants.

As Michael Taussig warns, drawing from his work along the Putumayo river in Colombia, the process of "flattening contradiction and systematizing chaos" always has the potential to reproduce the very violence it seeks to contain. Violence and terror thrive in the epistemic murk produced by the creation of "feeble fictions" of objectivity and order (Taussig 1987: 27-28). In this case, a fear of disorder results in the perceived necessity to control and order the fundamentally disordered nature of explosive ammunition. In these attempts at imposing order upon disorder, further forms of disorder, dissonance, and violence are unleashed.

This, of course, is the trickery of violence. The violence itself is perceived as a necessary mode of maintaining moral order, a sacrifice for the "good" of society. The violence produced by and within the ammunition plant stabilizes moral hierarchies among citizens of the town during production by creating economic roles and generative differentiations along gendered and racialized lines, and additionally further justifies global hierarchy through imperial military action. State power is enacted and reinforced through this violence, rendering reality "inherently deceptive, real and unreal at one and the same time." Still, this enactment of power through violence creates a "nervousness"—it gives rise to particular forms of social understanding, of resistance, and of cracks in containment—it creates "a thoroughly nervous Nervous System" (Taussig 1995: 113).

The containment of this violence is intended to confuse and mislead. The registers of the destructive violence of the ammunition plant must thus be understood in terms of their differing levels of "physical disruption, violence, and different forms of speed" (Gordillo 2014: 82). For workers in the ammunition plant, the "dramatic and abrupt" violences instantiated by warfare are evident even in the space the ammunition occupies before it is supposed to be deployed: there are Larry's memories of the Angel Buggies, the roll house operator in the plant who was pushed against the wall in an explosion, the numerous accounts of explosive accidents, of workers fleeing harm, of smokeless powder on boots. This is violence captured in images, its harm potential immediate, direct, seen, felt, and embodied.

Plant workers have a more difficult time conceptualizing the obliterating violence of the ammunition when it is deployed elsewhere. There is Larry's understanding of where and how the different types of ammunition were used, the inconceivable numbers of pounds of powder produced. The oral history interviews detail a similar experience:

> And we were told, during this peace time there is no need for Sunflower Army Ammunition Plant anymore. We didn't have support from our Congressional leaders, I think. They didn't want to go to war. And that's just my personal opinion, that is the reason

> the plant is not out there right now. (Naaman Greer, 2003)
>
> We were in a funny position because we were employed because we needed materials for the war effort. And yet, we didn't want to be at war forever, so we were conflicted all the time; we were glad to be able to do something, but sort of sad that our jobs depended on it and so everybody there sort of worked as if it were temporary. (Gayla Frazier, 2003)

There is some tacit recognition among plant workers that the plant's existence, their employment, and above all Hercules' profits, were contingent on the continuation of U.S. military actions and thus the perpetuation of violence abroad. Inherent in this understanding of destruction-as-profit is that the violence produced by the ammunition plant is not truly contained, regardless of safety or containment practices in the plant itself. The violence of explosive ammunition is "sheer negativity"—the violent destruction of space and people as an "end in itself" (Gordillo 2014: 82).

For the U.S. military industry, this form of violence can be displaced and imagined. As this displacement occurs, the physical and existential order at "home" remains fundamentally dependent on violence unleashed upon an ostensible and unviewable "elsewhere." These violences remain untranslated into human costs, never viewed in their full context of destruction. As a result, they are able to be viewed within an imaginary, disconnected from the activities of their origin even as they result from the destructive processes of military production.

The apparent violences at home and the un-imagined violences abroad, however, are not the only forms of violence produced by the plant's attempts to systematize the chaotic object of ammunition. Other forms of violence produced by the ammunition plant are deceptive not because they are perceived to be necessary or moralizing products of modernization, but because they remain unseen and unremembered. These forms of violence become part of the amnesia produced in the process of crafting a secular, linear narrative of historical progress and modernization. The settler amnesia surrounding the colonial violence of founding the town and forcing the Shawnee's second relocation becomes a forgotten step in the town's lineage. The violence of the physical contaminants in the place remains unperceived because of a lack of robust testing and poor communication to residents who may not be attuned to its effects. These unseen violences live in residues, their contradictory effects more difficult to perceive than the captivating violence of explosives.

Many studies of violence, including Taussig's, focus on violent extremes. These forms of violence may arise slowly, but their effects are pointed, severe, and discernible. Ammunition plants are, on the one hand, created to produce the horrifying violence of war. Images of soldiers in combat, explosions in civilian areas, and limbs and lives lost sear collective memory. Even if far removed and imagined from the context of the ammunition plant itself, the horrifying nature of war is fairly well understood.

The slower violence produced by the contamination of the plant is not quite as memorable. There are no distressing images produced by this violence, little attention paid to its effects. The evacuation of memory surrounding this second form of violence stems from the fact that it is less remarkable than the imaginaries surrounding the striking violence of war. It is also less able to be measured—the process of making scientific determinations about embodied experiences of harm

and contamination are difficult, if not impossible, often leaving even more uncertainty in their wake. These simultaneously spectacular and completely unremarkable forms of violence are layered with one another, coproduced, and yet one invariably receives more attention than the other.

The order imposed by and upon the ammunition plant is thus filled with contradictory forms of disorder and violence, whether seen, unseen, or imagined. Flattening these contradictions only creates more space for their violent effects to take hold. When colonial and racialized violence takes place, it is deliberately unremembered. When measures of "safety" fail, they are blamed on individuals rather than understood in terms of inherently violent ammunition production. When contaminants are produced, their impacts remain largely undetected and unacknowledged.

The presence of the disordered violence of war within the ammunition plant is perhaps not surprising. It is worth noting, however, the ways in which its production and containment serve to obscure another register of violence. Beneath the appearance of safety and order resides a slow, somewhat banal form of violence, continually evading true detection and remediation. Engaging with these deceivingly subtle forms violence requires a different sort of analysis without reduction of complexity, and a deeper look into the entanglements of the past, the present, and myself.

Refractions

WHEN I WAS younger, the Sunflower Army Ammunition Plant was one of my favorite places on Earth. It was my stargazing spot—before I could drive, my mom and I would head out to the parking lot on chilly winter nights, stopping at McDonalds for hot chocolate. I was enamored by the stars and by all things scientific. I had read everything I could find on black holes and nebulae, and slowly but effectively memorized the locations of the stars.

After my sophomore year of high school, I started going out to Sunflower by myself more often. In the summer, I would drive out with my windows completely down and my radio completely up. I would lie on the still-warm asphalt, listening to cinematic music and wondering about my future. In my home, I had little space to myself, but out at Sunflower, it felt as though I had all of it.

Growing older was frustrating. I had to begin narrowing down my always varied interests, and had to figure out how it was that I would leave De Soto. I felt I could do something important, if only given the space—it was at this point that I had begun to develop my political commitments and to hold tighter to my own opinions, which had clashed significantly with my parents'. Our frequent arguments, coupled with the fact that I had to take the time to reconceptualize who they were as people, led me to seek more silence to think.

So, I would take the telescope I stole from my school and I would turn it towards the sky, hoping that someday I would join the small collection of people who had set foot on the moon. Looking back, I don't think I was destined to go to space. Feeling a profound lack of belonging within my

family, I had been desperate to prove that I could be and do something different from them. The younger women in my extended family were teachers, the older ones mothers and wives to farmers. Every female cousin of mine, though not much older, was already married and living in the same small Kansas towns, teaching or mothering or both. I could not, at the time, envision myself settling properly into any of those roles.

I felt a fierce determination to break from them and to become a different "type" of woman. For high school me, that looked like becoming a female scientist—I would make my way into a male-dominated field and perhaps change things for the better. When I later clung to my major in astronomy despite a tremendous boredom with my physics education, I was attached to this same desire: to shed things that were typically associated with women I knew in favor of those which were not.

While the tensions between me and my parents circulated throughout my coming of age, there were points at which they "snapped" into sharper focus (Stewart 2007: 2). When I began my college search, for instance, my mother asked me if I would consider going to school somewhere that I would be close to my high school boyfriend. I scoffed, and she told me if I wasn't careful, I would "feminist my way right into loneliness." (She had not, notably, extended the same critique to my brother in his dating life).

It is only in retrospect that I am able to recognize my stubborn adherence to being a scientist as resistance against a gendered expectation of me, and that the tension I often experienced between myself and my parents was a result of our subscriptions to differently conceived gender ideologies. Part of the reason I had trouble identifying this difference between us is that it is so "ordinary"—the experience of not-quite-fitting, of non-belonging, is not a unique affect among teenagers.

As Kathleen Stewart points out, though, "ordinary affects" are illuminating precisely because of their "broad circulation"—they take hold in "desires," in moments of "pleasure or shock" or "profound disorientation," and "literally hit or exert a pull on us" (Stewart 2007: 2). These affects, for me, were an early primer to gender roles, and an early resistance to them.

Another part of the reason I could not identify many of our exchanges as gendered is that they did not match the marginalizations of gender I was familiar with—the "central interpretive devices" applied to things like sexual violence did not yet apply to my experiences, thankfully (Steedman 1978: 5). Much as in Carolyn Steedman's recognition of the tensions in her own working-class English upbringing, this disjuncture between the expectation and the ordinary reality of banal sexism led me to have only an amorphous understanding of the "unfairness of things"—*some*thing was unequal, but I could not yet translate it into political understanding (Steedman 1978: 9).

I understand now that my becoming a scientist would not have remedied the problems I thought it would, that it would not have shielded me from patriarchy or mended the deep disconnection between myself and my family. It serves as an example, though, of an awareness—a "sighting of fractures" within a larger system—that is available even when it may not be named.

Most ironically, the science I clung to for so long is now the primary object of my critique. Most

space scientists within the U.S. are employed by the Department of Defense, and the U.S. military remains as one of the biggest polluters on earth (Crawford 2019). The contamination of the Sunflower plant has been sanctioned through scientific means, by those whose apparent identities come to matter little in comparison to their perpetuation of harm.

I had headed out to the parking lot next to the ammunition plant to view the stars because it was the darkest place in the area. There were no lights for miles, as the entire 10,000 acres of the plant remained on standby before cleanup. It was only over the course of this project that I came to realize that this reprieve from light pollution existed only because of the presence of a different form of pollution: the chemical contamination of the plant.

Sunflower was thus my favorite spot only because of the presence of military toxins. Enamored with that which was millions of miles above me, not once had I turned my attention towards my environment and engaged with the conditions that had made my exploration possible. In this place, I perceived only opportunity and potential change, not destruction or danger. I knew little of its history, and I did not desire to know more.

—

"Yeah, that place is super weird," my friend Lexi stated matter-of-factly, setting down her coffee mug. She looked at each of us with wide eyes for dramatic effect as she launched into a story. Her mom had known a rancher who had kept some cattle on the ammunition plant land and a bunch of them had been born with deformities.

"Their brains and everything were just messed up."

It wasn't surprising to me that this was the first response to my announcement to my friends that I would be doing a project on the ammunition plant. We had all grown up hearing the fantastical stories that circulated among people of all ages in the town.

Sitting next to me, Samuel added, "I know Kelista and Nate and them used to break in there." Some kids who were older than us used to sneak into the main part of the plant, and they had reported back to their friends (and by way of the rumor mill, the entire high school) that the ammunition plant was as weird and as creepy as anyone had expected. There were buckets of toxic chemicals, buildings that looked to be inhabited by ghosts, spaces trapped in time and a relative state of disrepair.

Unlike the rest of us, my high school best friend Morgan's parents and grandparents had grown up in town. Her family had been around when the plant was still operating, and her parents had told her stories over the years of people getting sick from the "radiation" of the plant. She didn't specify a type of sickness, but insisted that her grandpa knew people who had been sick or died from working out there.

"You know, I think they were producing nuclear weapons out there," Lexi interrupted. "I mean,

think about it. Like, we wouldn't know."

She had a point, I had to admit. For all the preliminary research I had done, there was relatively little information on the expansive nature of the plant—it was nearly 10,000 acres after all, and seemingly anything could have happened out there. Finding images of the site was relatively straightforward, but finding maps with labels for what was happening where had proven significantly more difficult. Without any real information provided by the town officials or the Army, it was up to us to craft our own narrative of the place.

Nothing was ever confirmed; all was speculation, imbued with fascination about the mystery and exciting danger of the prohibited space. There is a certain level of privilege in being able to imagine fictions about this place. It implies that one will never have to actually experience the detrimental effects of the contamination—these are the people who have not and will not have to live in a place adjacent to the actual site, who will not have to participate in the clean-up process, who have never worked there.

Still, like many conspiracies, these stories circulate around the notion that "something is wrong" (Lepselter 2016: 2). The site is not just fascinating or exciting—things are *messed up*, people are *sick*, and there's something *being kept from us.* There may be differences between the stories and the specifics of "what really happened," but these accounts are important for the way in which they foreground the site's troubled past and present. Susan Lepselter, in her work with U.F.O. conspiracy theorists in New Mexico, notes that these conspiracies are related to the ways in which a place is "haunted by its own historical crimes and wounds" (Lepselter 2016: 157). While the historical injustices present within the Sunflower site—around experiences of settler colonialism, race, gender, class, and toxicity—may not themselves be on the edge of semantic availability, they appear in these "uncanny" social imaginaries, disrupting any sort of narrative closure (Lepselter 2016: 157).

Thus, in retrospect, our lack of knowledge of the ammunition plant was more complex than pure privilege. Part of our lack of knowledge of the site was our lack of interaction with the ammunition plant, but another part of it resulted from a more general repression of historical trauma within De Soto that the Sunflower plant makes almost-apparent. Our participation in discourse surrounding the site was an attempt for us and for many others to grasp the particular blend of desire and nostalgia, real and nonreal, and uncanny and ordinary that the ammunition plant poses (Lepselter 2016: 11).

This near-awareness of the site's history was surely an effort at grappling with the site's past, but also the manner by which that past has influenced De Soto's present, and consequently, our own places within it. The stories were thus also an attempt to understand ourselves and our identities in relation to the spaces in which we grew up. For myself, coming of age has been a matter of navigating the tensions inherent in figuring out in which places I belong—literally and figuratively—as a woman, and as one who questions.

I cannot say I have always belonged with my parents, or even within the town of De Soto. A tremendous amount of my reflections on returning home to De Soto have regarded the ways that I am fundamentally different from my parents, the ways in which I do not belong in the town itself. A few months into my research, my mom had told me that my brother was like them; he

“would be happy living in a small town for the rest of his life.” The direct implication was that I would not (granted, I would not), but the larger implication was my mom’s recognition that I was distinct and apart from the three of them.

Each time I return, I feel in a sense that home is not home. That I have grown in ways that seem incompatible with this former-self. I no longer sleep in my own room—it is no longer mine; it has been turned into storage. I’ve come to see my college house as my home, as it holds many of my more important items and memories.

Coming of age, leaving the town of De Soto, and now returning has also been a process of determining how my past-self fits among my current-self, determining in which senses I have changed and in which I have remained the same. I will always hold a reverence for my stargazing space, as it was where I worked out many of my plans, where I formed pieces of my identity, and where I dreamt of far-off futures.

—

THE FIRST TIME I ever entered a home in Clearview City, I was a buck-toothed seventh grader in search of a new best friend. At Dollar General, the closest thing De Soto had to a grocery store at the time, a cashier named Kim had told my mom about her friend whose dogs had had a litter of puppies—chihuahuas, she said, and the cutest little things she had ever seen. She paused at the register, pulled out her phone, and showed us a photo of one of the dogs—it was white with a small black spot on its back, about the size of a guinea pig. My mom was not a big fan of chihuahuas, but ever the crowd-pleaser, she told me we’d think about it. Our childhood dog, Angel, had taken up residence with my maternal grandparents (bless her soul) and it had left a rat-terrier-sized hole in my and my brother’s daily lives. Knowing we wouldn’t rest until we had a new creature to terrorize, my mom figured this might be a simple way to sate us.

And so we went.

My mom and I, in the red mini-van, embarked on our two-mile journey to Clearview City. In typical football season fashion, it was darkening earlier and earlier and my dad was up at school coaching later and later, so we figured it was just as well that we went ahead and got the dog. In the dark, my mom took the curve of the two lane road leading out towards the ammunition plant more slowly than usual, watching for deer as I watched for the familiar steel barracks and four white water towers of the plant. After the curve, we took a right turn by the condemned bar and the sign that read “Clearview City.”

We passed the leasing office, heading downhill into the neighborhood. In the dark, it was difficult to find the exact tan stucco building that we were looking for—Lanes L, M, N, O, and P looked similar enough during the daylight hours, let alone under the guidance of the hazy glow of the yellowed streetlights. After weaving through the uniform streets for a while, we found the house—building, rather—that we were looking for. We parked, and I stepped out next to a silver sedan on cinder blocks. My mom had always talked about how people just left things they didn’t

want out here, so it was not so shocking.

I ran towards the door, my mom following close behind. She knocked gently at the door, and a light was flipped on inside. A woman whose eyes looked much older than the rest of her peered through the small window, her dark hair tied back in a ponytail. She opened the door and we stepped into a dimly lit kitchen which seemed like it could not fit much more than the essentials, as it was no larger than eight feet on each side. The building was no more and no less than meets the eye: the walls on the inside were the same faded tan as its exterior, the ceiling lamps the same dull yellow as the streetlights.

Through another opening, only slightly larger than the front door, we headed into a small living room. On the far side of the room, a brown loveseat sat up against the wall, and a flatscreen TV as large as a couch took up a sizable portion of the room in the opposite corner. Two men sat on the couch; one simply acknowledged us as we walked in and continued eating his noodles with his feet up on the small coffee table, but the other glanced at us, stood up, and headed somewhat quickly towards a back room.

The woman said something to the man in Spanish, and he smiled at us. “Puppies?” he inquired, and I replied with an animated “yes!”

The one we had seen in the photos—the white one with the tiny black spot on its back—had already been adopted, he said, much to my chagrin. I looked around at all the wiggling furry blobs running around, following a particularly energetic one into the hallway. The hall, no more than ten feet long, connected to a small bedroom and bathroom without any pretensions; the organization of the place almost rudely utilitarian.

I steered the tiny brown ball of fur back towards the living room before it could get to the bedroom, following it as it headed back to its siblings. I picked it up before it could burrow back under the couch, likely trying to escape my menacing twelve-year-old grasp.

“This one!” I said excitedly to my mom, setting her back down on the multicolored blanket on the floor to have one last moment with her numerous siblings. One of her parents, an old white mutt of some sort, now rested on the couch next to the man, who continued to eat his noodles. On the floor next to all of the balls of fur laid a small brown dog—decidedly a chihuahua—on a stained pillow without a case. The rest of the room remained quite sparse—a few crosses hung on the wall, but no photos or posters adorned the rest of the room. Few possessions rested on the small coffee table, other than the man’s boot-adorned feet.

I crouched down to the brown carpet, picking up my tiny brown ball of fur once again and swaddling her in the towel my mom had brought. The woman smiled at me and asked if I liked her, to which I nodded and smiled again. My mom asked how much they wanted for her, to which the woman responded “Just twenty.”

My mom pulled out the forty dollars she had brought and peeled off a twenty dollar bill. “Thanks!” she said, and the woman smiled in response.

The woman thanked us and gestured to her husband. He smiled and gave us a goodbye wave, the white dog still resting on his lap. I swaddled the tiny dog in her towel as she let out a shaky sigh.

The woman led us back into the tiny kitchen and out of the front door, where we were bathed in the dull yellow of the streetlight again.

Leaving the neighborhood proved to be easier than finding our way into it, though I didn't get the sense that that was true for everyone. We passed the tiny man-made pond, the same rows of buildings on Lanes L, M, N, O, and P, and the leasing office, and we were back on the narrow divide between the neighborhood and the ammunition plant grounds. I hugged my new companion and turned my attention towards the night sky, a black expanse watching over the silver buildings.

—

THERE ARE NO real mansions in De Soto, and there is no real homeless population. Income inequality is not so apparent in this way as it appears in other cities. For the most part, class inequality can be perceived in terms of neighborhoods and their proximity to the site of the ammunition plant. The further north and east from the neighborhood that one resides, the more likely one is to be wealthier. The neighborhoods on the northeast side of town, with their large yards and even larger houses, are quite new; they exist only because of the expansion of the town, reaching out in pursuit of connection to the closer suburbs of Kansas City. The neighborhoods that are north of the highway, but further south, are solidly middle class. Their residents are teachers, like my parents, or nurses, technicians, and construction workers. Furthest South, adjacent to the plant, of course, lies Clearview City.

Because of these delineations, I was not often forced to confront the sharp class inequality that exists in De Soto. I had no reason to drive out towards Clearview City until the night we picked up my dog. I was initially surprised not only at the conditions which existed here, but also at my parents' reaction to it. There was no clear sign of danger, but they perceived being in this place as more dangerous. This perception continues to this day: when I returned for the first time to do research, they told me it was dangerous to go there alone, their perception seemingly based more on stereotypes of poor or Hispanic people than the actual reality that there is little crime there.

It was in this place that I first became truly cognizant of the ammunition plant and its relationship to this inequality. It is no coincidence that the population of this place is disproportionately made up of marginalized people. The U.S. has a profound history of environmental inequality linked both to race and class, placing marginalized populations in spaces that have been disregarded.

I find Petryna and Follis' concept of "fault lines of survival" useful in locating this environmental inequality. The question of which "social and political arrangements optimize paths to health," and which do not, remains central to an understanding of this place (Petryna & Follis 2015: 403). The question of who is placed in situations of greater precarity requires constructing a historically located understanding of governmental formations within this environment. It requires an engagement with this "zone of social abandonment," wherein harm is perceived as natural and blame is absolved for the causal forces.

Petryna and Follis link precarity to belonging through citizenship, which is useful in considering Clearview City in relation to its mostly Hispanic population. My parents, among others in town perceive Clearview with a "fog of danger" which relates more to the people inhabiting the space than its toxicity. The sense of danger arises from the perception of the people as less-than-citizens—when my mom remembers this experience, she relates the man leaving the room his legal citizenship status. *Riff raff* becomes shorthand for the perceived danger of the place as it relates to a *different class of people*—namely, those who are nonwhite.

Through a process of disregard beginning with its selling and intensifying with its subsequent subsidization, Clearview City has been transformed into a space of acceptable disregard. Now, it remains as a home of last resort. It is a space in which many low-income Hispanic families are made to bear the brunt of the toxicity of the ammunition plant, while because of its location away from the center of the town, the rest of its residents are ignorant of these issues. This space of disregard is created not only by the government, of course, but also by the town's residents, including myself and my parents. This inequality is never visible unless it is sought out; its effects hidden in the hills beyond the highway, in a place where memory seems not to reach.

However, a total reduction of this inequality to the sociopolitical axes of race or citizenship is insufficient for a complete understanding of this space's complexity. While there is certainly a relationship between inequality and citizenship, differentiations based on socioeconomic class are also prominent in this space.

Javier Auyero and Debora Swistun, whose analysis of chemical pollution in Argentina focuses less on the racial components of inequality, highlight the importance of placing focus on class in understandings of environmental risks and outcomes. According to the authors, many studies on poverty tend to miss the simple fact that the poor often live in "wretched environments" which have "dire consequences for their current health and future capabilities" (Auyero & Swistun 2008: 361). These environmental injustices become exacerbated by individuals in more powerful positions, monetarily and politically, who create misinformation and denial which allow people to continue living in these places.

In Clearview City, there is little messaging about the dangers of the toxicity produced by the ammunition plant, besides a singular Consumer Confidence Report I found posted on the wall in the leasing office. For many living in these homes, there is also not another option: there are, to my knowledge, no available cheaper living arrangements near the city of De Soto. Thus, class becomes a critical axis from which to view this place; not only does it become apparent that the low-income nature of the residents creates a justification for acceptable disregard, but also for the perception of the place, in my parents' and others' views, as a "dangerous" space full of looming negative potentials.

Placing these concepts in tandem, it appears that there is a multiplicity of factors contributing to the injustice of this place. Race, citizenship, and class are intermingling arrangements of social power which create a place with of greater perceived danger, further disregard, and greater precarity. Memory becomes foggy within this space of disregard for those who do not reside directly within it.

The last time I returned to De Soto to do research, my parents told me they were getting another

puppy. My mom showed me a video of her while my dad rolled his eyes ("Do we really need a third dog?") This time, though, they were acquiring her from a breeder—they would have no need to return to Clearview City.

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AS I ARRIVED in Clearview City, I felt as though a horizon was approaching me—charcoal clouds loomed to the north as I headed in their direction, off the main road by the ammunition plant and into the assemblage of standardized units. My little red car crept hesitantly down the hill on the gravel; I had been here before, but I was aware that this was in an entirely novel capacity. I had come here a number of times to look at stars, since as a result of the lack of development on the site, there was little light pollution.

I was no longer seventeen, however, and I was no longer asking the stars for answers in Clearview City. I was asking for something I might not receive—an intimate look into a life which would eventually be shared to a broader audience. As I continued heading downhill from the main road, past the leasing office and the condemned bar, the church and the looming clouds, I pulled out my phone and began dictating what I saw. The houses, all the same row by row by row. The clothing lines, the Barbie bicycles, the satellite dishes, and the basketball goals. The street signs, attached to the units themselves, with only a letter and number as a form of identification.

I pulled off the gravel road and into a parking spot near Jennifer's house, glancing across the street at the two algae-covered ponds. I was early, I realized, which was better than my more typical five-minute tardiness. Walking up towards the crimson door, the shallow porch roof buckling slightly on the right side, my field notebook and recorder in hand, I realized I looked like an anthropologist. I placed my notebook back in my pocket as I stepped up onto the porch with the two metal chairs, the small wire table, and the glass ashtray. I took a breath and sighed, a small cloud exiting my mouth, and knocked on the door.

After what was likely no longer than a moment, the door opened. Jennifer stood alone, her amber highlighted hair pulled up onto the top of her head. For a moment, I worried she hadn't been expecting me, but if she hadn't been, she had no hesitations about letting me inside. I let out a squeaky "hi!" and she welcomed me inside.

She motioned for me to follow her into the living room. We made our transit through the small door separating the kitchen from the living room, past her husband Dave in the kitchen. Steve-O, some sort of small terrier, got up off of his pillow in the corner to come greet me with a knee lick and a tail wag. Jennifer, already sitting down on the leather couch, turned the volume down on the TV. I sat down on the opposite side of the couch, sinking further into the cushions than I would have expected. The deepness of the couch seemed to swallow me, but also my phone; I spent a panicked moment looking for it as Jennifer laughed while I fished it out of the depths with my entire arm.

So we began. I told Jennifer the scope of my project and was slightly surprised when she expressed that she might not be the most helpful person to interview. This was a sentiment I would hear a number of times and would get progressively better at countering after some practice, but for the first time, I answered with a simple "That's okay, anything you tell me will be helpful." I turned on my recorder, making certain that she was all good with being on record, and we began the real work.

I asked Jennifer about moving to Clearview, about her kids growing up here, and about any experiences she had with the ammunition plant. She took frequent pauses in her responses, taking a moment to choose her words carefully about certain subjects. Though she loved her home, she stated that its condition was not the best—something she had no trouble complaining to the administration about.

"I think it was just enough people went up and complained at the office. Like we would be up there and talking about the paint that was peeling every month…and you know I'm not quiet, um, we're not quiet, so we marched right on up there and told them we wanted new paint."

After about ten minutes, I wasn't certain where to lead the conversation next, so I inquired about a tour of the place, since the workers in the front office had denied me one earlier in the afternoon.

Jennifer rose slowly from the couch, and I followed. With only few steps, we were back in the kitchen watching Dave continue with his dishes. She pointed out the small table which had three mismatched chairs and sat up against the wall opposite the kitchen sink. She told me a bit about my former classmate, her daughter Mikayla, who had gone to cosmetology school after high school. I had known Mikayla for a long time in the way that you don't really know someone at all—you see them, but not their family, their life, their hopes and goals.

Jennifer continued back through the living room, flipping on the light in the hallway, which led to a closet, a bathroom, and two bedrooms. She mentioned that there wasn't a lot of storage space in the kitchen, so much of their nonperishable food was stored in the hallway closet. I peered into the room towards the back side of the house, which had two twin beds and a boy's clothes scattered on the floor. It was clear that for much of their lives, Mikayla and her brother had shared a bedroom. I felt a pang of sympathy for her—I had shared a bedroom with my brother when I was much younger, but could not have imagined having to share a room with him as we became much older.

Jennifer apologized for the mess in her and Dave's room, and I countered her apology with an apology for not warning her that the interview would venture past her living room. She described their location in the neighborhood as on the "edge," since no other units were further north than theirs, and told me about the man-made algae ponds that just didn't seem right.

After my house tour, we moved back into the living room and sat down on the couch. I asked Jennifer broadly about her experiences over her time in Clearview City, moving from topic to topic fairly effortlessly. She and Dave had seen the neighborhood, the town of De Soto, and their children grow up over the past eighteen years. She mentioned the growth of the town she saw while she worked and the demographic shifts in Clearview City she saw at home, quite acutely

aware of the changes that had taken place.

“Most of em that’s moved in…more recently have been Mexicans.”

“So are most of your neighbors Hispanic, would you say?’

“It’s like little Mexico. They’ll just be outside, playing their music and cooking…and, they’ll leave a lot of stuff outside. It kind of looks like more of a dump around here because, you know, there’s cars that’s on cinder blocks and toys and other junk all around here. They don’t care what it looks like.”

Jennifer mentioned that there was little police presence in the area, even less than the town of De Soto itself, which did not have its own police force. In a single moment, the comfort I began to feel inside of Jennifer’s home was replaced with anxiety.

“De Soto doesn’t have many cops in general. But especially out here. You can just do anything and get away with it.”

“Is something they’re doing illegal?”

“I mean, yeah, I think a lot of them are illegally here. So they can just live out here and nobody’s gonna come get them or anything.”

“Oh.”

“I think some of them are probably selling drugs, but I think most of em are just working. In town or whatever, and then they send their kids to school and everything.”

I became momentarily lost for where to take the conversation next. Jennifer had observed that her neighbors were likely in the U.S. illegally, and had posited further that some of them were dealing drugs. I wasn’t certain what evidence she had seen for these observations, but the moment felt slightly too awkward to press further.

Taking a deep breath, I again asked Jennifer about the ammunition plant. Jennifer was seemingly unphased by my transition—the conversation continued on as it had before, though I now had a profound sense of unease. We talked a little more about the plant, about its supposed health effects, and about the clean-up process. I had gone into the leasing office before making my way down to Jennifer’s, and had taken photos of the Consumer Confidence Reports which were posted there.

“I wanted to ask you about…in the entry way the Consumer Confidence Reports.”

“The what?”

“It’s the list of things they’re worried about in the water or in the environment around you.”

“Oh, okay. What about it?”

“Just if you’ve seen or read them.”

I told Jennifer about what had been listed on the sheet. Copper, lead, and E. Coli were the main concerns. Lead was considered to be at a "safe" level, but pregnant women were urged to take caution.

"Well, shit I guess it's a good thing I'm not pregnant," Jennifer said, chuckling.

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I FELT CONFUSED leaving Clearview City. Beyond the discomfort I felt at some of her comments about her neighbors, I found it difficult to collect my thoughts on her interview because of some of the apparent contradictions in our conversation, as well as because of the fact that this interview had challenged some of my own interpretations of social class growing up in De Soto. We had touched on each of the topics I had wanted to, but the conversation had not gone in any sort of linear way; we wound around the topics of race, contamination, and life in Clearview City.

Thinking back to the interview, Jennifer's responses were not the only thing that made me uncomfortable. Despite my knowledge of the production of the conditions at Clearview City and despite my understandings of larger class analyses, I still felt ill at ease actually being in Jennifer's apartment. While I could consciously tie cigarette smoke and building mildew to larger systemic issues, I still felt discomforted by the encounter, perhaps a combination of the physical space, the awkwardness of the interview, and the necessary acknowledgement of the issues people faced within my community, typically separated from the main part of the town and removed from public consciousness.

Jennifer's responses themselves, though, were also illuminating in terms of the ways in which they related to some of the other displacements of danger and accountability I traced throughout other aspects of the ammunition plant's history. I first wondered what it was that led her to fear some aspects of her living situation more than others. She noted at one point that she had told the kids to stay away from the small ponds near her unit, and yet this level of concern was not extended to other potential environmental hazards, though she acknowledged in some sense that these hazards existed.

Partially, I think this may relate to the ways in which the severity of contamination in this space has been downplayed throughout the decades that Clearview City has been utilized as a public housing complex. Auyero and Swistun, in their work on the town Flammable in Argentina, argue that there are four potential strategies that governing bodies deploy to produce "toxic uncertainty," the type of doubt in environmental harm that Jennifer displays. I would argue that misinformation (or rather, a lack of information besides a singular Consumer Confidence report) and denial (in the process of selling the land for private ownership, the city denied there was any form of contamination) have contributed to Jennifer's nonchalant attitude towards the contamination near and within her home (Auyero & Swistun 2008: 362). This "toxic uncertainty" is certainly present more broadly within the town of De Soto in regard to the ammunition plant—in my conversation with my friends, for instance, or in the heavy restrictions

on documents released by the EPA, it seems that there is little widespread knowledge about the particularities of the Sunflower ammunition plant.

Another piece of my conversation with Jennifer seemed to be congruent with the other displacements of threat I have detailed previously. While at first, I was unsure what to make of Jennifer's mention of her neighbors' "illegal" status, I later realized that it seemed to imply that she believed them to be "other" to herself. De Soto, of course, has a history of making "others"—the displacement of the Shawnee, the racialized "othering" of Black residents and ammunition plant workers, and the displacement of ammunition violence itself.

In his piece on race as a civic felony, Loic Wacquant discusses the manner by which mass incarceration serves to reify certain forms of racism and exclusions and render particular subjects—those who are black, poor, and located in the "hyperghetto"--as "anti-citizens." Anti-citizens are those who are constructed not only as being "outside of the inaugural social compact of the republic," but antithetical to its very operation (Wacquant 2005: 136).

I find the concept of "anti-citizens" useful for considering the manners by which members of certain racial or ethnic minorities may be constituted as such by other means besides the prison system. Jennifer's discussion of the "avoidance of police" and characterization of her neighbors as "illegal" seems based on an a priori assumption that they are on some level already guilty of being non-citizens—an assumption based on their ethnicity that they are not legally proper citizens of the United States. This echoes the history of nonwhite workers in the ammunition plant, who couldn't live in town for fear of violence: both may be constituted not only as "non-citizens," or those who cannot participate in a society in the way that a full citizen might, but as "anti-," against, a threat to its very existence. The prison system and its dehumanization then is not the only manner by which citizens can be constructed as "anti"–individuals may be constituted as both non- and anti-citizens by the assumptions of participants in their social worlds.

Still, the notion of citizenship doesn't totally explain the kinds of othering present in De Soto's past and present. Partially, I thought, it may also have to do with the maintenance or construction of racialized boundary-making. Whiteness, to Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, becomes a particular form of Bourdieu's "habitus" which socializes white individuals into maintaining boundaries between themselves and people of other races, even when they outwardly espouse anti-racist viewpoints (Bonilla-Silva 2006: 236, Bourdieu 1972) Jennifer's case, as well as Larry and some of the white workers in the ammunition plant, though, are the distinct opposite of this phenomenon: they espouse what could be termed as racist ideation, but are not segregated from people of other races in everyday life. Jennifer lives in the most non-white area of her town, works in a gas station owned and managed by an Indian man, and sends her children to the most ethnically diverse schools in the surrounding area. The white ammunition plant workers worked in a highly racially-integrated workspace.

Thus, these conversations allude to the fact that Bonilla-Silva's conclusions may hold primarily for white individuals of a particular socioeconomic class status, specifically those who have the availability of choice: those who have the money to relocate to a predominantly white neighborhood, to take a job in an overwhelmingly white city, or to send their children to majority-white private schools. White habitus, then, becomes not so much a factor of only

whiteness as it is a factor of the intersection between whiteness and elevated economic status. From this instance, it is evident that class matters in this discussion of Jennifer's purported white privilege and racist ideology: the "wages of whiteness" only go so far when one's whiteness does not provide a meaningful level of benefit to an individual (Roediger 1999).

It is possible, then, that these boundaries or "frontiers" are drawn less externally. There are divisions along racialized lines in Clearview City, as there were between groups working in the Sunflower plant. While these could be spaces of solidarity, there exist instead what Ann Stoler calls "interior frontiers" which allow white residents and workers to construct individuals who are racialized in particular ways as "other" to themselves. Interior frontiers constitute a way that "individuals represent their place in the world to themselves…by tracing in their imaginations impenetrable borders between groups to which they belong" (Stoler 2018: 9).

Interior frontiers are premised on the idea that there is a "'we' who no longer feel comfortable and feel safely at 'at home'" because of the presence of an "other." Jennifer's assertion that her home has become a "little Mexico" conveys the sense that "Mexico" is other or antithetical to this place—it is a threat to a home that she must defend. Historical signs and refusals to house Black workers of the ammunition plant have a similar character: "they" are "intruders" from which the town's perceived character must be defended.

It is worth noting that these frontiers do not simply appear out of nowhere. These "interior frontiers" have arisen from decades of placements of "external boundaries" which have regulated *who* and *what* can exist *in which spaces*. In this schema of governmental regulation, low-income people are sanctioned to live with forms of contamination. It becomes even more imperative to be defensive of "home" when that home is under actual threat from contamination. Blame for this contamination, then, can be conveniently shifted away from those who actually perpetuated it through a "politics of time" (Kirsch 2014). There is continual management that goes into this process of absolution: each calculated release of information to the public states that these spaces are *only contaminated* in *some areas,* or that they are *low enough* that they *might not be expected to cause harm.*

The threat of outsiders coming into the town, then, may reasonably come to be seen as more perilous than existing environmental contaminants caused by the government or private corporations. The nationalist and patriotic appropriations of racial discourses by the recent federal administration has meant that racism "explicitly encourages those who adhere to its logic to see themselves not as racist but as protectors of the national patrimony, as 'true' and patriotic citizens of the United States" (Stoler 2016: 256). This is significant as the nation is the same party that has perpetuated environmental harm in the first place. It is thus easier to make sense of these othering comments in light of this understanding of racism and proper national citizenship: not only has the nation absolved itself from blame for perpetuating active forms of harm, but it has successfully reinforced the shift of blame to a scapegoat, made to stand in for the difficulties people like Jennifer perceive as relevant to their daily lives.

Stoler argues that interior frontiers are spaces of "refracted ruination," but I would posit that this internal ruination is no doubt influenced by the physical ruination of the surrounding space. It is, of course, one's own interior landscape that is at issue with conflicts along lines of race and class, but this interior understanding is markedly shaped in relation to the exterior. In a place like

Clearview City, unequivocally marked by devastation in the past and present, it is perhaps not as surprising after all that these internal borders would arise.

Futures

THROUGHOUT THE PAST ten years, the development plans for the Sunflower site post-cleanup have been altered dramatically. In 2008, the zoning plan for the site included a few thousand acres devoted to multi-family housing, which were intended to provide more affordable housing options and expand De Soto's population. In more recent development plans, zoning for this specific type of housing is nonexistent—Clearview City is the only place near the site to remain zoned in this manner.

Instead, a third of the site is now zoned for "mixed use," which in the city's terms includes places where people will "work, play and live" all at once ("City of De Soto, KS Comprehensive Plan," 78). A third of the site remains slotted for agricultural use, and the last third is zoned for industrial use, split about evenly between "heavy" and "light" industrial use.

Based both on the public comments from the City Council meetings which dealt with the decision to zone the site for more industrial action as well as comments on the "In and Around De Soto" Facebook page, members of the town are not largely in support of the measure. Some of the comments center not on the use of the land itself, but the matter of transporting heavy industrial materials on the numerous two-lane roads that currently surround the Sunflower site: "The road can't handle the trucks. My question is why not put these companies in the already zoned area that is a business park."

Some, however, were more in favor of the industrial zoning, since it replaced residential zoning and ostensibly meant that the town would not grow larger in terms of population. Several were upset about a threat to the perceived rurality of De Soto, despite its location near larger cities. Commenters detailed that they were worried about development of the site constituting a loss of the "small town character" of the town:

> I have lived here almost 30 years and enjoy the benefits of living in a small town. We don't need hodge podge growth or crappy new residential developments.
>
> I loved the De Soto of 10 years ago. We were still rural people. Unpopular but we do not need to grow.

Still others wished the site would be zoned for an expansion of the existing Sunflower Nature Park, offering more recreational space—after all, it "wouldn't make sense" for there to be industrial pollution bordering the park. Expanding the park would also mean that the small population of the town would be maintained, and for some, De Soto could remain a place where people can "get away from the city and its industrial noises."

Several of the commenters noted that they would be attending the City Council meetings, for many of which I read the minutes and watched the recorded streams. During these meetings, similar sentiments were expressed. Many were concerned about the feasibility of the city's plans and a potential tax rate change as the city would need to build out new infrastructure for the industrial developments. Other residents expressed similar concerns about privacy ("I had to purchase 10 acres to live out there in the first place!") Still others were concerned about the potential for this industrial zoning to "open the floodgates to something even worse," the implicit assumption that industrial development would bring more jobs and ultimately more people to the city of De Soto.

Many of these comments are clear in intentions but remain unclear about what, exactly, they like about De Soto in its current or past state. They are decidedly against development for the increase in traffic, but even if this is an issue that can be mitigated, there are still others who are not interested in De Soto's expansion in general. There are ostensible "benefits of a small town" which are not detailed beyond apparently living without heavy truck traffic. There are "enough people" and De Soto of 10 years ago was a better place to live.

The sentiments around community interestingly parallel many of the hesitations to the original construction of the ammunition plant 1941. In not only oral histories, but newspapers and city documents of the time, De Soto's "small town" feel was decried as ruined by the influx of non-resident laborers at the ammunition plant. Some expressed doubts that the ammunition plant would truly "aid" the town—businesses were already struggling to keep up with demand and housing was sparse. Perhaps worst of all, "hordes" of people would "descend" upon the town, "take over" its businesses, and change its character (Nichols 1951, Ashlock-Longstreth 1957: 55)

The most recent comprehensive plan echoes much of this language, noting that the goal of De Soto's City Planning is to maintain its character and "small town values" while promoting economic and population growth. There is an assumed coherence about the town itself and what it should and should not value. Reading these comments, though, it would appear that there is at least some disagreement about what the character of the town is, or what "small town values" truly entail—for some, it is having parks, keeping the actual size of the town the same, keeping traffic levels low, or maintaining rurality. For others, it is linked to a mistrust of imagined outsiders or economic anxieties about infrastructure and numbers of jobs. Each of these comments coalesces around the idea of insularity, of De Soto's perceived separation from other people and other places. As the Sunflower Army Ammunition Plant proves, however, the town has never been isolated from the rest of the world.

—

DE SOTO CITY HALL sits in a small valley to the south of Main Street. The eastern half of the three-story building remains covered in its original, umber-colored brick. The western half, on

the other hand, is paved with unmistakably newer, lighter bricks, having been repaired after an incident involving arson and my elementary school stalker.

I made a visit to City Hall on a blustery winter day, trudging up the half-flight of stairs to the entrance in my insulated boots and coat. Masks were good in the winter, I thought, affording protection both from the coronavirus and the elements. As I stepped inside, I looked at the walls lined with old images of the town. City Hall, the original high school. Main Street, but with carriages instead of cars. Certificates, awards, and maps, framed in dark brown frames that matched the dark tile flooring.

I turned to the right and told the secretaries I was there to meet Mark, the City Planner. Mark, from everything I had gathered from official documents, had been in charge of distributing most development-related materials for the city for the last decade or so. I had called Mark after reading through several pages of City Council minutes, agendas, Facebook comments, and comprehensive plans, for all of which I sought greater clarification.

I sat down opposite Mark in his office, scooting the chair back a few feet so I could maintain my distance, and took my small notebook out of my bag. Since he was not interested in being recorded, I took notes on his responses by hand.

I began by asking about the changes to the planned development of the Sunflower site—looking at the Comprehensive plans from the past five years, the majority of the site had changed from being zoned for multi-family housing to zoning for light industrial, heavy industrial, and mixed-use.

"That's on the Army," Mark said, referencing the U.S. Army's role in the cleanup efforts. As more of the cleanup and assessment of the site was completed, he said, the Army had given the City more information on which pieces of the site would be prepared for use and in which order. In addition, he stated, the City had done more feasibility studies on portions of the site to determine readiness for infrastructure implementation.

"It's also about jobs," Mark mentioned towards the end of his answer. Zoning for industrial use would mean the potential for new companies to consider De Soto as a viable place to build. The reasoning for allowing the initial industrial development that was the subject of a large amount of Facebook controversy was the same: "De Soto will ultimately benefit from having a business that has the potential to employ nearly 100 people and be woven into the fabric of the city."

He acknowledged the frustration and confusion surrounding much of the zoning and the cleanup, but stated that the responsibility was mainly on the Army and the federal government to communicate with the city—"the cleanup isn't our job." Though the future use of the land was of great concern to the city, the people "should be upset at the Army," not with the City Councilors. "That's not really our job here."

I moved on to the topic of the mixed-use zoning—what, exactly, did the city mean by this type of zone? Mark answered that it would be similar in setup to a neighboring town, Lenexa. The mixed-use apartments in Lenexa included high-end (almost luxury) shops, housing, and office

spaces. The plan for De Soto would be similar—the focus, he said, would be on "maintaining the small-town character" of De Soto, as well as "protecting property values" by making the city a desirable place to live. As I wrote down the turns of phrase Mark used, I asked a follow up question. What, exactly, did "small town character" mean?

"To me, you know, it's knowing your neighbor, having safe places to walk, safety in general, some natural areas, nobody having to live on top of each other." In Mark's eyes, safety, natural space, and the assurance of knowing the character of one's neighbor were the desirable qualities residents sought to preserve.

I moved back to the report to ask another question—in the plan, a stated objective is "social and cultural equity" within the city. In the city's eyes, what did that entail with the redevelopment of the site? Mark answered that those objectives focused mainly on devoting funds toward the upkeep and development of public amenities and spaces that "everyone feels they can use," such as City Hall, downtown, and expanded park spaces. "I think it's very forward-thinking with development, for the future."

I moved onto my last and most specific question for Mark. The most recent comprehensive plan had stated the fact that the housing would utilize "thoughtful selection of tenants" in the mixed-use zoned areas. What would this mean, and which qualities made a "good" tenant?

"With part of my job, it's to consider what kind of community do we want to be in the future? The goal is maintaining a respectful and respected community," Mark replied. "Respectful" in the sense of being "good neighbors," participating in the community, and respecting city codes. "Respected" in the sense of ensuring the "quality" of the people who move into these housing units—things like having enough income to "pay their rent on time." To Mark and the rest of the City Council, then, it didn't make much sense to zone this area for more multi-family housing:

"We have lots of other affordable housing, a lot of places for people who need affordable housing….I don't think we need any more."

—

I FOUND THERE was significant overlap in the language used to describe redevelopment plans in the Comprehensive Plan, the Facebook comments, and my conversation with Mark. If there is anything that the discourses surrounding the site's redevelopment make clear, it is that worries about the site's cleanup do not coalesce around issues of environmental harm or protection, but around economic anxieties about land value, production, and "outsiders." The environment is, in fact, only mentioned in the Comprehensive Plan in relation to "sustainable site planning" of the post-remediation Sunflower land ("City of De Soto, KS Comprehensive Plan," 12).

The Comprehensive Plan discusses three primary goals for the site's redevelopment: one, to create an "outdoor greenbelt" by turning remediated lands into "recreational areas" to utilize "the

area's natural resources;" two, to promote mixed-use development of "luxury apartment complexes" with amenities "commonly associated with condominium developments and resorts;" and three, to attract "innovative" industrial development ("City of De Soto, KS Comprehensive Plan," 17). The target "market sector" for these developments are named "renters-by-choice"—mainly young, single, childless professionals.

There are a number of characteristics one can draw from the Comprehensive Plan and the arguments surrounding its implementation. For some, the best plan would be not to grow at all. If residential growth was required, however, the new community would not include a "hodge podge" of people, and they would fit in with the people who live here as "small town people." These people would be "safe." You would still "know your neighbor," who, it is assumed, has many of the same values and qualities (race, class, religion) as yourself. These new people the town would attract would not be impoverished—they would be renters "by choice," not out of economic necessity.

These ideas about the growth of De Soto are very particular. They operate with a thinly veiled expectation for the "type" of people who inhabit the town presently. These ideas about "type" are not, however, fixed norms that are actualized, as in reality there is already diversity among inhabitants of the town. Rather, as Kathleen Stewart notes, they are ideals—they act as signs to be "deployed and read" by the proper parties in the service of maintaining a specific cultural imaginary (Stewart 1996: 186). These ideals both "produce and naturalize" certain definitions, mobilizing particular histories and discourses (Stewart 1996: 187). Simultaneously, however, they produce their own critiques—the economic matters of the town remain far from settled, the goals of the redevelopment far from realized.

Issues around the redevelopment of Sunflower coalesce not only around the cultural politics of belonging, but also around the economic implications of growth. The ways in which sustainability discourses, originally made by environmental advocates, are harnessed by governmental entities for economic gain have been well-detailed (Checker 2011, Agyeman 2003). The EPA Superfund program is no exception. On the Superfund website, the program's overall mission is stated as "protecting human health and the environment," but on the same homepage, the site notes a primary goal to be "community reuse"—Superfund sites become "parks, shopping centers, athletic fields, wildlife sanctuaries, manufacturing facilities, residences, roads and more." However, "jobs are not the only way communities benefit when Superfund sites are cleaned up," the website declares, echoing the concerns of the De Soto City Council, adding that "cleaning up sites may also benefit home prices" ("Superfund: EPA.")

As Melissa Checker has written in her work on "greening" development practices in New York City, sustainability discourses surrounding development are utilized because they "appear politically neutral" while actually "subordinat[ing] equity to profit-minded development" (Checker 2011: 210). "Sustainability" talks peddled by governing bodies often appeal to "very specific and elitist visions of 'livability'," intending to attract "affluent, eco-conscious residents" such as the outdoor recreational spaces and luxury mixed-use developments proposed for the Sunflower site (Checker 2011: 212).

Checker has shown that a primary focus on this aspect of environmental protection (that is, the "greening" of space) obscures ongoing environmental inequities of other forms; namely, the issue of toxic waste and its disposal, whose burdens are unequally distributed. Sustainability is instead taken as a given in this redevelopment, the issue of toxicity already ostensibly solved. The priority is instead finding the best "technocratic, politically neutral" solution to building new parks and developments to attract new residents and produce economic gains, rather than ensuring that existing communities are healthy (Checker 2011: 222).

Ironically, the EPA Superfund program itself measures its own successes in terms of economic benefits and property values. The EPA has redevelopment data from 602 remediated sites. Collectively, these 602 sites have 9188 businesses and produce $58.3 billion in sales annually ("Superfund: EPA"). It is thus not difficult to imagine the reasons that De Soto city and Johnson County officials focus so heavily on the redevelopment of the site—it is one of the largest (if not the largest) Superfunds by land area, and thus its remediation opens up the potential for hundreds of millions of dollars' worth of economic gain.

The Superfund program site also specifically discusses the "greening" of former Superfunds as an unequivocal good, as this produces a number of "valuable community assets." Green spaces, they write, "are integral components of sustainable communities – they can help protect the environment and human health while providing other social and economic benefits." This language, again, appears apolitical, detached, and consensual, without providing details about what remediation and justice have looked like in these spaces prior to their being converted to "green" spaces.

The EPA also notes that green spaces not only protect human health and "the environment," but also have "great economic value." They support regional economies "through tourism and outdoor recreation." Lastly, and perhaps most tellingly, they note that protected green spaces "increase the property values of nearby homes by providing amenities that draw people to live and work in the community" ("Superfund: EPA.") These assertions on the website fit perfectly with De Soto's official goals and thus may constitute a form of "environmental gentrification"—between the proposed "luxury" apartments, concern about protection of property values, and greening of the Sunflower plant, it is clear that the space's remediation is far less concerned with the residents of Clearview City and far more concerned with attracting "better" residents.

—

AS LARRY HAD mentioned, everything had closed in Clearview City after the "upstanding' citizens had moved to the main part of the town. The grocery store moved downtown, the old theater closed, the small businesses moved away, and eventually all that was left was the post office, but that too closed back in the nineties.

To my knowledge, the only place that remained open in Clearview City was the Clearview Baptist Church. Originally, it had been run out of one of the buildings within the complex, until it had garnered enough funding in the early 2000's to build a new location across Sunflower

Road from the Old Village. The sky-blue church building had new siding and seemed cheerful enough. I figured that I could meet more Clearview residents at the church—or, in the case that most of the people who attended the church were from out of town, ask them what they knew or thought about the village or the ammunition plant. Either way, there was something to be learned.

I hadn't been to church in four years—not coincidentally, the same amount of time since I left for college. I say, much like many of my friends, that I was “raised Lutheran,” the inherent implication being that I no longer subscribe entirely to those beliefs. Because of this fact, my mom was surprised, to say the least, that I would be heading to church this Sunday.

She would not quite agree with the fact that it was a Baptist church, but if she had any objections that morning, she did not voice them. As Lutherans, it was fairly typical of my parents to be highly skeptical of nearly any other denomination of Christianity—though to me, they had all always appeared more similar than distinct. She knew I was going for research, so perhaps this was the reason she said nothing.

I wore the best outfit I had brought—my boots, black jeans, and a pink sweater—and I hoped it would be formal enough for a Baptist church. I didn’t know much about Baptists, other than that what they believed was wrong, according to my dad.

I took the slight curve of the road, passing the steel barracks, the and the white water towers, turning right onto Sunflower Road before I got to the Old Village. As I drove past the church, there were only two cars in the parking lot. “That’s odd,” I thought to myself, wondering if people walked over for service from their homes.

Uncertain of what to do next, I continued past the church on Sunflower. It was the same road we had run a cross country route on—I passed the six mile turn around and stopped at the stop sign at the top of the hill. I paused for a moment at the stop sign, watching three black feathers flutter downward in front of my car. Wondering if there was some sort of divine power telling me to turn around, I obliged.

After making a U-turn, I headed back towards the sky-blue church. I pulled into the small parking lot, wondering if the doors would even be open. After a moment of hesitancy, I headed inside.

To my left was the small chapel, with a few small stained-glass windows, a piano, and a fairly austere altar. Though the sign had said that service was at 10:30, it was 10:35 and there was no service to be seen. I turned to my right, looking towards the other end of the building. I entered a community room to find a small man in a suit sitting with an older couple.

The small man with small wire-frame glasses was Pastor Turk. He welcomed me in, and I introduced myself. I apologized for interrupting what looked like a Bible study, and he assured me it was no trouble at all.

More than anything, Pastor Turk looked tired. It was as if he had spent his entire life giving his energy to others, and he had little left for himself. He wasn’t quite old—maybe in his forties—but his demeanor as a pastor made him seem older to me. He told me that they did not often do

services anymore (maybe once a month) and rather spent time doing Bible studies with the members of the community who came. The older couple were some of his regulars, he noted, but typically there were a few more residents that came.

I asked him about the church—he told me his father had been a pastor and ministered to the residents in the old village (had I seen the old Village Church? I had.) After his father retired, he had been inspired to become a pastor as well, and returned to the same place to preach. The church had already moved to the new building at that time, and attendance was still rather high. Some of the attendees had been residents of the town, but many had also been from surrounding areas.

As we talked more, I felt comfortable enough to ask him why he thought that people didn't come to the church often anymore. To my surprise, he did not cite a lack of religion in modern society or among certain populations; rather, he held that people had been slowly transitioning into the services at the Baptist church downtown. Disappointing as this was to him, there was not much he thought he could do—this church was much larger, and had the resources to support a larger parish. He simply did not have the same amount of support.

After a while, I thanked Pastor Turk for his time, sensing that I had, in some ways, overstayed my welcome. Though Pastor Turk had invited me to stay, the other couple seemed to be a little more skeptical of my motivations.

I had presumed that the last public space left in Clearview City would be a clear gathering place for residents in the community, a way for me to create more relationships with residents, but perhaps they attended the churches in the main part of town. I had presumed that the fundamentalist Baptist members of the church would have something absurd to say about the ammunition plant or about modern society, but instead found a tired man among a dying congregation and a couple who wondered who the nosy blonde girl was.

There was no connection here, nothing I found that would tie Clearview or the ammunition plant to religion, faith, or fundamentalism. There was no counter narrative where I half-expected to find one.

More than slightly disappointed, I saw myself out the front door and headed west towards the nature park.

—

THE MORNING HADN'T gone how I'd expected. I had significantly more time than I'd thought, now that I wasn't going to sit in a Baptist church service for an hour and a half. I hopped in my car, squinting at the sun, as it had come out from behind its hiding place among the clouds. The sky had taken on the same hue as the siding on the church, and I was grateful for the gradual warmth that it promised.

I eased my car back onto Sunflower Road, which separated the old village from the former new one, where the solitary church building now stood. As I passed Clearview City, I saw that there

were quite a few residents outside enjoying the weather like myself. I passed the steel barracks and the four white water towers, heading West towards the nature park.

As I walked up the asphalt trail, field notebook in hand, I began speaking into my phone, recording what I saw. The morning was temperate, if gusty, and the only sounds were the occasional clicks of birds, the rustling of the trees, and my vegan leather footsteps. Meandering along the path, I passed the concrete remains of a small amphitheater, likely deconstructed when the asphalt paths were paved in new places.

“There’s an outjutting of the trail that goes towards the treeline,” I vocalized into my phone speaker over the wind.

It was a not-quite-trail, born out of the desire of path travelers. Veering left onto the not-quite-trail, I looked up towards where it was heading. The tree line ahead, unnaturally straight, concealed the barbed wire fence that I knew separated the park grounds from those of the ammunition plant. I smiled, briefly amused at the thought of creating a boundary like this—as if the contamination of the plant ceased at the fence line.

The not-quite-trail ended unceremoniously. It headed towards a break in the woods, but inside the trees there was little room to move in any direction. Turning around, I saw another not-quite-trail that ran parallel to the first. With a quick hop over some taller grasses and whatever was among them, I was on the new trail.

“The other trail leads up to the trees. They’re very tall, firs, obviously not natural.”

The second not-quite-trail ran parallel to the first, but upon approaching the tree line, it curved to the right, careful not to stray beyond it. I continued following the not-quite-trail, watching through the giant firs for the tops of the white water towers. Occasionally, there was a break in the trees—momentarily, I was able to see everything in the plant that I could see from the road—the Wizard of Oz safety sign, the defunct railroad tracks, the white water towers, and the buildings that were being utilized by the clean-up managers—but marginally closer. I took photos through the fence, wondering momentarily if I could (or should) try to climb it, and deciding that this was ultimately not in the best interest of my police record or my pink sweater.

After a moment, I continued down the path, curving with the fence and the slight drop in elevation. I wished I had worn cross country spikes instead of boots—the not-quite-trail was muddy and unpaved, a reminder of cross country races where I had to spend more time looking down at my feet to avoid tripping than taking in my surroundings. Still, every so often, I stopped to look up.

This time, I looked up and saw a tree. It was monstrous, making its residence here far before the fence was built. Unfortunately, for all the time it had spent growing, watching like a sentry over the human activities out here, the wind had finally felled it. Toppled over, it had begun to grow much of the same algae that covered the bare parts of the ground, its arms beginning to get lost among the tall grass beside the not-quite-trail.

“The tree has fallen, and crossed the boundary. For all the maintenance they do out here, it seems like it shouldn't be here.”

To continue along the not-quite-trail, I would need to climb through its enormous branches. As I began to do so, I looked to my left. The wind, having no respect for boundaries, had toppled the tree across the fence, taking with it an entire section of the fence. There were more trees on the other side, but otherwise this spelled an opening—a way onto the grounds of the ammunition plant that would not have been there otherwise.

"I will need to be careful not to get caught on the fence wire."

Before thinking better of it, I placed both feet onto a larger branch of the tree and walked down towards its trunk, toward the boundary between the park and plant grounds. I ducked under the branches of the firs that had surrounded the large tree, enveloped momentarily in their shade. As I continued forward, I recognized that I would need to find a way to recognize this patch of trees on my way back out—the opening was large enough for me to fit through, but small enough that it was unnoticeable from the other side. Otherwise, I would be stuck attempting to climb the fence and would have to face all of the unfortunate consequences that come with three strands of barbed wire.

As I stepped out of the fir trees, I momentarily felt exposed. With my presence now on the other side of the fence, the side I had no permission to be on, I was at a slightly more elevated risk. I realized then that I didn't know what the punishment for trespassing was. I wasn't here, however, to sneak into the nearly fallen ruins of an army barrack or to climb something; rather, it was simply to obtain a closer look at the things I could see from afar. It was research. It was different.

There was an out-jutting of trees that gave me temporary protection from the visibility of the road. Across the clearing, the four white water towers maintained their post, wondering if I would approach. For the amount of stress I was under, I truly hadn't gained much ground—I was only about twenty feet from the tree line.

"Following the fence towards the main part of the plant, it becomes taller, there's more sturdy fencing."

I headed in the direction of the water towers, knowing I would eventually approach one of the older buildings that the clean-up crew were in the ongoing process of removing. In the middle of the clearing, there were more remains of structures that had once existed—the railroad tracks that had been removed, posts for old fences, and seemingly random piles of concrete. As I wandered through the clearing, my heightened sense of awareness became devoted more towards the details of the environment around me, rather than the fact that I was trespassing. Consequently, I barely noticed the white police car that was driving down the road—until realizing that it being in my full view meant that I was in its full view.

I ran. Desperate not to ruin my day of research by getting arrested, I moved quickly back towards the tree line. My lungs, the soles of my feet, and my calf muscles were on fire. If I were to be seen, it would have happened already, I told myself. Mildly frantic, I searched the tree line for my tree-bridge across the fence and into safety.

With little difficulty, I found my tree-bridge back to my not-quite-trail. I continued down the same direction I had been heading initially, past the tree-bridge, along the tree line, and back onto the main trail. Here I walked, still slightly unsettled and wondering if a white police car

would be waiting in the parking lot next to my car.

As I approached the parking lot, there was a single other car in the lot next to mine. It was silver, not white, and it did not have police lights. I sighed with relief, watching as an older couple with two tiny white fluffs rounded the corner. I smiled at them and nodded, heading back to my car. I hopped in, the only remains of my adventure into the plant grounds the mud on my boots and the crawling sensation of my skin.

—

The Sunflower Nature Park was established in 1984, according to the bronze plaque at the head of the trail. With a generous founding sum from the federal government parks division, the park had been built for residents and workers of the plant to enjoy. It was unclear if people regularly enjoyed it now, however—in the few times I had walked the sunflower trail, it was exceedingly rare that I encountered another person.

According to the plaque at the trailhead, the Sunflower Nature Park was established in 1984 with funding from the National Legacy of Parks Program, a program which apportioned funds to keep public lands as open areas for public recreation. From both maps as well as what Larry has told me, these originally were grounds that were used as space for officer housing.

It struck me as paradoxical that a national program would sponsor the building of a park adjacent to (and arguably on top of) contaminated land. As noted previously, however, this is not uncommon—environmental scientists and urban planners have long noted this contaminated space-turned-park phenomenon. The process of "greening" a space or creating protected parkland is often perceived as an irreproachable "moral good" or "economic imperative," leaving little room for critique or concern.[2]

Standing at the trailhead, one can see the water towers of the plant over the enormous firs planted along the fence line. They were seemingly planted to demarcate this boundary between ammunition plant and park, between toxicity and safety, between war and recreation. However, these reminders that the environment is arbitrated still peek through—the water towers over the trees, the sign and the railroad tracks which still run through the park.

In the creation of these two separate, adjacent spaces, there is an assumption that one remains "toxic" and one remains unaffected; however, the fallen tree served as a direct reminder that the enforced and policed boundaries of the ammunition plant were arbitrary. The fence between the ammunition plant grounds and the park grounds did not constitute a physical boundary for the contamination: toxicity would not simply stop neatly at the undeviating line of the fence. The fence gave the illusion of a distinct boundary, its metal posts and tall tree line creating a barrier to entry. However, this barrier was quite easily transgressed: a singular tree, in one swift motion, exposed the boundary for the imagined barrier that it is.

In his work on the aftermath of the BP oil spill, David Bond has written about the ways in which

governing bodies seek to define and delineate clear boundaries for contamination, reinforcing the idea that "multivalent" toxicity is the result of an "unequivocally singular event" (Bond 2013: 705). The fence line around the Sunflower plant grounds makes the spaces appear as though they are atemporal, as though the toxicity here arose from a singular event which then required the demarcation of the boundary. Prior to this event, the boundary was unnecessary, and following it, the effective result is that the toxicity appears "contained" by this marked boundary line. This "environment" and the toxicity which have affected it are not given objects that have "collide[d] during a disaster," but rather demarcations that have been constituted in a political field (Bond 2013: 708).

The illusion of a singular disaster occurring within this demarcated environment is false—the toxic environment has developed over the course of fifty years of weapons production, its effects differentially concentrated among different areas of the ten-thousand-acre plant; for instance, spaces where the chemical weapons were produced would have higher levels of toxicity from spaces where workers were living. Toxic effects do not cease at this "settled domain of governance"—they are enacted in other spaces, in the forms of the people who have lived and worked in this place (Bond 2013: 695). The fallen tree is a reminder of this transgression: the boundary is not static, and neither are the forms of toxicity that the plant has produced.

—

TO PRESENT, ONLY one piece of the Sunflower Ammunition Plant land has been remediated and redeveloped. The Hunt/Midwest Sunflower Quarry is located on the furthest east side of the plant, far enough away from the road that it is only barely visible from the old highway. The quarry extracts limestone for sale, blasting multiple times during each weekend. I could hear the familiar blasts each Saturday afternoon when I returned to De Soto, the neighborhood dogs barking in unison each time the unknown sonic threat appeared.

To the west, north, and south of the quarry, there is still no development since it is surrounded on these sides by ammunition plant land. However, to the east of the plant there are both houses and the Kill Creek Nature Park, a park with a heavily-trafficked trail and a creek that flows into the Kaw River. The development of the quarry occurred almost immediately after the closure of the ammunition plant, its permits and zoning seemingly hurried through the necessary governmental processes.

In the early 1990s, a group of residents of De Soto formed the Sunflower Neighbors Group to oppose the permitting of the quarry. The group's website states that those nearest the quarry "were feeling the vibrations in their homes, startled by the blasting, bothered by the dust, hearing the noise from the rock crushing equipment, and seeing the increased heavy duty truck traffic." Others in De Soto joined the group even if they were not near enough the blasts to be significantly disturbed out of concern that the quarry bordered the Kill Creek, which flowed into a source of drinking water. These residents also claimed that the quarry "has destroyed 125 acres of rolling hills, two creek valleys, and forested areas. The quarry is also "pulling out 7.5 million

gallons of water from Kill Creek rather than installing a water line. Run off from the dusty trucks, rock crusher, and stockpiles is allowed to go back into the creek as silt and sediment" ("Join the Fight.")

The zoning for the quarry appears to have been a tumultuous and controversial process—articles ranging from 1992 to 2010 with headlines such as "Residents shocked by quarry OK," "Zoning board to reconsider quarry," "Group to sue over De Soto quarry," and "Firm rejects order to halt quarry work" belie a sense that the quarry did not gain popular support among residents ("Join the Fight.")

In 1992, the residents claim that Hunt/Midwest did not notify surrounding neighbors in accordance with their conditional use permit. By the time these neighbors were notified about the construction of the quarry, the city and county zoning boards had already hosted meetings for public hearings and decided to move forward with the quarry. In 2001, when the conditional use permit expired, the Sunflower Neighbors Group prepared to legally challenge the quarry's existence. Unfortunately, the city planning commission had already voted to approve the quarry's land use, the city attorney stating that "the public could not comment" during the supposedly "public" hearing series (*Crumbaker v. City of De Soto, KS).*

The 2001 case–in part for violation of the conditional use permit, and in part for the city illegally changing the zoning of the land from "residential" to "light industrial" to suit the quarry's needs—was brought all the way to the Kansas Supreme Court. The Court ruled both that (1) the zoning re-classification was illegal without a series of public hearings and that (2) the quarry did not prove that it had a "vested right" to "operate or expand excavation" or to "be free from zoning restrictions that should be properly implemented by the City" (*Crumbaker v. City of De Soto, KS*). Nevertheless, the quarry continued its operations after losing the case, continuing to receive support from the city all the way into the present. The site concludes, however, that the fight against the quarry is not over.

"The battle has been waged for 30 years and the residents need reinforcements. This is an opportunity to help 'David' beat 'Goliath' in the battle to ban a rock quarry in Johnson County."

—

COUPLED WITH THE other discourses surrounding the site's redevelopment, the construction and continued operation of the limestone quarry makes all the more evident the economic imperatives surrounding the remediation of the Sunflower site. As David Bond points out, "remediation" in this place is thus not just a matter of defining an "environment in need of protection" but is entirely in service of something else—even if an "environment" ostensibly comes to be defined, there are no plans to protect it (Bond 2013: 696). Instead, a new industrial order takes the place of the ammunition plant—not without controversy, but for the sake of "growth" and "progress," more destructive and pollutant-producing actions are instantiated.

The sensory experience of the quarry and its noted impacts on quality of life are significant. Ironically, the quarry site is listed as "light industry" in terms of zoning. The City defines "light

industrial" zoning as that which permits uses that "are not obnoxious due to appearance, noise, emissions, or odor; that do not require intensive land coverage; and that can be compatibly developed with adjacent districts." The quarry, as the residents nearest to it have described, does not appear to meet any of these requirements.

Instead, the site produces negative sensory experiences through extractive destruction of the land—the space is not destroyed in the sense that it is just "obliterating rocks," but rather because it is saturating the surrounding space with "rubble and poison that negatively affect people and living forms" (Gordillo 2014: 82). In this site, production requires destruction: the extraction of rock material necessarily entails the blasting of the surface and subsurface land. This type of destruction, geared toward the "production of new commodities" in the service of economic acceleration, operates through "an expansive logic of abstract space"—as in many other extractive industries, quarrying requires an understanding of a place as being "a blank, available surface to be exploited for profit regardless of who lives there and of the qualitative nature of those places" (Gordillo 2014: 82).

As Gaston Gordillo notes, of course, "those who are forced to live amid the rubble are usually not those who produce it" (Gordillo 2014: 83). The Sunflower Quarry is perhaps some indication of what is to come in regard to the development of the rest of the near-10,000 acres. The land has been remediated, only to clear way for another development which has harmed particular residents' livelihoods and health. Again, containment becomes a question: what can "containment" look like when the sensory experience of such a site—the air quality and sound—are impossible to limit to the boundaries of the site? What do we make of remediation when the intended result is not sustainable use of the land, but further extraction?

Such industrial zoning operates, much like the original construction of the ammunition plant and the refusal to reckon with its residues, an "attitude of inattention" located "on the edges of awareness" (Stoler 2009: 256). This inattention, Gordillo argues, is not a product of ignorance, but rather is "central" to how destructive production operates. Through formal means that refuse to give attention to the embodied impacts of the destruction of space, authorizing bodies (even those as seemingly insignificant as the De Soto City Council) justify destructive production for the sake of economic development.

This is not to say that the space is entirely settled. In the case of the quarry, residents did mount a successful resistance through collective action. The residents produced a compelling enough case that the Kansas Supreme Court ruled in their favor. However, even though the proper legal routes for resistance were utilized, they did not produce their promised effects: the quarry remained in operation with special permission and has continued extracting limestone to this day. It is thus made increasingly apparent that the disregard of the destructive production of quarrying by the appropriate governing bodies is not ignorance, but refusal: the formal processes surrounding zoning are made to serve the interests not of people, not of health, not of environmental protection, but of capital.

—

I MET KELISTA at the Starbucks where she worked in downtown Kansas City. It's one of those buildings which looks like it shouldn't be possible—the whole thing is shaped like a long triangle, its entrance the point of where the two longest sides meet.

Kelista played the clarinet in our high school band, but as she was two years older, I hadn't known her well. I knew that her music taste was solid, that she had the longest black hair I had ever seen, and that she and a couple of her friends had broken into the ammunition plant several times before the security was ramped up after its declaration as a Superfund site. From Facebook, I had learned that she was engaged, that she had finished up her biology degree and was applying to graduate schools, and that she had cut her impossibly long hair.

"Do you want something? It's on me," she said as we sat down at a high table near the barista station.

"Oh, you don't have to—"

"It's free!"

At her insistence, I ordered a matcha latte which she promptly went and ordered for me. We sat down and started discussing our strange histories with the ammunition plant.

"Mostly I just think about how it's so small," she said of Clearview City. "It's weird. There's houses there, and then there's like an apartment complex, and that's it. Lotta churches and stuff. It might be interesting, just to like…"

"Go to church?"

"Yeah, well, no, that wouldn't be interesting," we both laughed. "But no, but to like as a leader of the church. Cause I think if I remember right there's literally, when we would go there we would park at a church parking lot. In the parking lot right across from the entrance. It would just be…cause they stare at it every day. Cause it's like close to De Soto, but we're not like staring it in the face every day."

After discussing Kelista's history with the town, I began asking her about her experiences breaking into the plant.

"I don't know exactly when we started going there…I don't think we really knew at the time that it was like, like we knew it was 'dangerous' but were didn't know that it was…that like the soil is contaminated. I like, would go inside and to the barracks and stuff and if I found something cool I'd bring it home. Looking back I'm like, that's such a dumb idea."

We laughed again. She spoke rapidly, as if one thought led her to the next in a frantic sort of dance. She gestured widely with her hands, reaching up often to adjust her glasses or stroke her ponytail.

Speaking more from my own experience with the plant, I said "But nobody ever told you, you

know?"

"No! No, no, no. We were just kind of exploring…thought we were really fun, thought we were really cool."

With only a moment's pause, she began recalling details from the times they had broken in. Kelista and her friends would go in through the main entrance, near the four white water towers and the guard house. No one worked there at the time, and no signs warned of video cameras. They would enter some of the barracks, positioned as though they were frozen at their point of closure; mattresses and desks still abounded, and a child's drawing was taped to the wall in one room.

She described entering one building of the plant that had a descending staircase:

"We found this weird staircase in one of the buildings and went down into it and there was just barrels…of….I'm assuming chemicals, and like random hazardous waste. We would just go to that building, the barracks, the water treatment plant. So that's where it started."

"So that's where it started?"

"So that's where it started. But then, good ole Nathan decides, he starts researching and he's like 'this place is huge guys, we can go further.' We followed the train tracks to go further into it, which just led us to basically the same stuff, more barracks, more of the actual facilities."

The tracks on which the Angel Buggies delivered their products were still there, weaving among the hollowed buildings for miles.

"But I do remember, especially once you get in further, it becomes very…silent. To the point where it's almost a bad silent. Like there are no, there's some bugs and a few animal tracks, but not to where you would expect in that big of an uninhabited area, you know? Like, the lower trophic animals were just not there. Like you would expect if you just go into uninhabited barracks it would just be, like, infested with rats, but like, mice and rats, I just did not see any of those animals there at all. And we spent a lot of time there. So, like, looking back, that's kind of weird."

I sat momentarily stunned. Her statement had reminded me of everything I had ever read about Chernobyl—that the most fascinating part of it all had been the *silence*. The absence.

Kelista had been to the plant at a truly significant moment in time, between its operation and its newfound identity as an EPA Superfund site, a point when they wouldn't be caught exploring, because no one was paying attention:

"There wasn't a single living soul out there. Like literally, it felt like nothing had been touched since people left. Nothing had been graffitied on or anything. People didn't go out there. You see an abandoned house in the city and that's almost instantly covered in graffiti, people are living in it, or it's being used for something. So….but that's just not the case."

Kelista pulled out her phone and searched for a site map. She pointed out areas on the map where

she had been, areas where the pollution had been dumped in trenches, and lists of the various facilities.

I was interested in learning about how the site had changed since she had been out there—the site received Superfund designation in 2015, meaning that there should be active cleanup operations going on.

“It’s debatable how much they're actually doing anyway. I don't know what…like there’s no go-to method for cleaning up chemical waste. Like there really….there’s been big things like this that have happened, and when big, large scale projects like this happen, it’s difficult to do it in the right way. Cause sometimes you can clean it up and make it worse, or you think you’re making it better…and it’s just the same as it always was”

I had forgotten about Kelista’s biology degree. She would likely have more insight about the cleanup process than I would.

“I think currently, part of their plan, when I was reading about it online, is just hauling out truck tons of dirt.”

Kelista paused for a second.

“Where do you put that?”

—

THERE IS LITTLE information available about the Sunflower Army Ammunition Plant on its EPA Superfund site page. On its homepage, the site gives its name, address, status, and “incident category,” of which Sunflower is listed as “military related.” Under another tab titled “Operable Units,” splitting the site into smaller units for different phases of clean up. One contact is listed for the site, but the phone number is either listed incorrectly or the person simply does not answer her phone. (“SAAP Site Profile,” EPA, 2017).

Conspicuously missing are the pages under the tabs “Contaminants,” “Administrative Records,” and “Reports and Documents.” The only data I am able to find on exactly what type of contamination is present at the site is from a news article in the Kansas City Star, which states that “the main contaminants were lead and propellant components such as nitrocellulose, nitroglycerin and nitroguanidine. It was in the buildings, soil and groundwater (Hardy 2019).

No documents on the site are available for public viewing, but a link to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention website directs viewers towards their website for the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR).

According to the ATSDR, the contaminated dirt from the Sunflower site is taken to a landfill at NW 1/4 SEC 13 T13S R21E nearly ten miles down the road from the plant, located outside of

Eudora, Kansas. Try as I might to decode this address, I could only find the large quadrant of the county in which the landfill was located, not its specific location. The landfill was previously used as a biowaste facility for the University of Kansas and also declared as a Superfund, before being removed after a decision indicating that no further cleanup would be taking place.

Under the ATSDR's profile of the ammunition plant, there are a number of conclusions listed. The full report was only available for public viewing for a month, but now remains unavailable to the general public. The following conclusions are listed:

> "ATSDR does not expect that people living around the site are being exposed to harmful levels of airborne asbestos or lead generated during open burning operations of explosive-contaminated buildings.
>
> Environmental sampling of surface water and sediment detected contaminants, but concentrations were below levels which might be expected to cause illness for people during recreational use of Kill Creek, Spoon Creek, and Captain Creek.
>
> While soil in many areas of the site is contaminated, access to those areas is restricted by fences and only occasionally will people be exposed to that soil. However, since future use of the site is uncertain, ATSDR recommends continued soil sampling and appropriate remediation before the general public has access to those areas.
>
> The groundwater at the site is contaminated, but the water is not used as a source of public drinking water. Off-site, there are 22 private wells within one mile of the site. Data is available for 13 of those wells indicating that groundwater contamination from Sunflower is not influencing the drinking water quality. ATSDR cannot evaluate the remaining nine wells until additional sampling data is available" ("Public Health Assessment.").

Each of the ATSDR's conclusions are couched with qualifying statements. ATSDR *does not expect* that people will be exposed to *harmful levels of pollution.* Sampling *detected contaminants,* but they were *below levels which might be expected to cause illness.* Soil in many areas *is contaminated,* but access to those areas is *limited.* The groundwater *is contaminated,* but *some data* indicates that *some of the wells* are not contaminated.

In each of these cases, the risk of contamination is presented as being low but always nonzero. Contamination is presented as being "low enough" that it will not affect human beings or "restricted" enough that only a select number of people will be exposed to it. This type of messaging is meant to create a perception that the risk is too low to cause harm, based on benchmarks of toxicity. Through misinformation about the contamination in messaging, responsibility that gets shifted from the producers of the toxicity to those exposed, and risk blindness, a form of toxic uncertainty is produced (Auyero & Swistun 2008: 366).

Because of the imperceptibility of slow violences, it is often difficult to ascertain their effects or ascribe them to specific causes. These effects, enacted in the body, occur over "protracted timelines and with low velocity," which makes them difficult to name or even conceptualize (Shapiro 2015: 388). Kelista's description of being inside the plant is something that can be *felt*—a silence not necessarily conceptualized based on test levels of contamination, but rather

the sense that something is *wrong.*

Uncertainty about this form of slow violence leads to a perception that it is insignificant. Even among residents of Clearview like Jennifer, even among workers in the plant like Montee and Larry, and even among people who live in De Soto, this uncertainty contributes to the sense that the ammunition plant is a historical issue, not an ongoing one. Sunflower's declaration as a Superfund site, twenty years after it produced its last chemical for warfare, seems less motivated by concern for contamination and more by a need to erase the past and develop the land for economic gain. But the debris is still there; its effects live on.

—

WHILE THE SUNFLOWER site still currently contains thousands of contaminated acres, it is estimated that much of the contamination will be removed from the site by 2030. While I have taken these remediation processes themselves to be a question, the bodies responsible for this remediation process have not. If the site is remediated—in the terms of the scientific and legal thresholds set by the EPA—in the next ten years, what remains of the area and what happens to it next becomes tremendously important. I worry that this "non-contaminated" land will be taken for granted, its remediation marked as complete and any consideration of its past judged as unnecessary.

The forgetting associated with a "complete" remediation process has the potential of making the place's layered violences seem further away than they actually are, both spatially and temporally. The violences of the Civil War and settler colonial occupation of the Shawnee reservation are barely 150 years old, and the *Shawnee v. U.S.* case demonstrates that settler colonialism is an ongoing process within the contemporary United States. The relative recency of Klan activity means that there is still an incredibly small Black population in De Soto. The ammunition plant itself ceased operation less than thirty years ago, and many of its products (including the forms of toxicity it engendered) are still in global circulation. The legacies of these historical processes are ongoing, and the physical remediation of the site does not ensure that they are resolved.

The formal remediation process itself—its recorded histories, delineations of space, productions of scientific thresholds, and processes of legal ownership—also provides an incomplete understanding of the Sunflower Army Ammunition Plant. Each of these recordings focuses on constructing a particular definition of the site and operates with a specific purpose in mind, whether that objective is redevelopment, the absolution of slow violences, or the production of historical amnesia. Because these particular forms of "knowing" privilege the development of an actionable definition of the site (one that can be written down, funded, remediated, and redeveloped), they simplify "real space and time" by substituting a "classificatory" mode of understanding (Stewart 1996: 71). They do not get at the fundamental "layeredness" of the place, of its inhabitants, and of its histories, and in this process, contribute to its ultimate forgetting.

When remediation is defined strictly in a material sense, this is its inadequacy: contamination is not only a material problem. Breaking the site apart via scientific and legal processes misses the intimate affects that surround lives lived in and around it. Toxicity is not a linear problem with a strictly rational solution—it is wound through and bound up with concepts of home, of belonging, and of self-understanding. There are affective and "moral dimensions" to this place, and all others, beyond those which can be measured or apprehended through scientific or legal means. Issues of contamination are tied to family histories, to colonial violences, and to anxieties about "others," whether they are next-door neighbors or people across the world. What would it mean for remediation to include a more complete reckoning with these particular histories, and a more expansive understanding of our obligations to people who will inhabit the land in the future?

For myself, an ethnographic engagement with Sunflower has provided me a way to move beyond the constraints of historical, legal, or scientific structures. In writing about this place ethnographically, I have endeavored not only to synthesize and critique the current forms of classification that have characterized this site, but also to draw out the deeply affective and personal implications of toxicity. As João Biehl has noted, the relationship between ethnographic and theoretical work can be fraught—as a result, this thesis has aimed to attend at once to the "political, economic, and material" structures of the place while also attuning to the physical and emotional experiences of individuals and the ways they understand and make themselves and others (Biehl 2013: 574).[3]

Ultimately, this ethnography is an attempt to think through the ways that materials and affects are mutually constituted: historical affects, displacements, and violences produce material residues, which in turn produce new subjectivities and affects. This is an important understanding of place and history beyond only those that are categorized as "toxic" or those which have been heavily militarized—for each place that has a measurable toxicity which reminds us of its past, there are others with even less obvious violent histories that do not have apparent residues to aid our memories. This is why I find it so important to consider not only materials and affects, but the interactions between them: without an understanding that considers how they are mutually produced, it is unlikely that we will be able to take full responsibility for the past and for the future.

Ethnographic work is particularly well suited for a project with these contours. As Lila Abu-Lughod points out, "ethnographies of the particular," or those that focus on the intricacies of everyday life, allow practitioners to locate individual dilemmas within wider political conversations. This is not a "privileging of micro over macro processes," but rather is born from an understanding that "the effects of extralocal and long term processes are only manifested locally and specifically, produced in the actions of individuals and their particular lives' (Abu-Lughod 1996: 145). Places like De Soto lend themselves to ethnographic work because of the fact that other analyses have a tendency to reduce them and produce exactly the disconnection between individual and extralocal processes—through homogenized notions of political views, "safe" thresholds for living, or governmentally defined boundaries, De Soto is portrayed as insignificant and uniform place, on the margins of broader social life. Of course, specific lived realities are always more complex than they appear and cannot be separated from larger historical, social, and political processes.

In this case, ethnographic methods have allowed me to attend to these individual contradictions and tensions without a compulsion to resolve them. The point is not to flatten difference, but rather to think through new possibilities for where common ground may lie, however deep they may be. Attention to these differences allows us to re-understand where particular perspectives are rooted and work across them. In my own case, understanding these perspectives has offered me the ability to rethink my own experiences and assumptions about the ammunition plant and about belonging in my hometown. Beyond this, though, this project may contribute to larger conversations about forging common ground in difficult conditions. Solutions to some of the widest problems of the contemporary, including those of environmental injustice, political divisions, and racialized violence, will require solidarity, and creative ways to build it.

A large portion of this work is also historical; I draw from a number of historical accounts and archival resources throughout. Although my fieldwork opportunities were limited by the COVID-19 pandemic, this project would have required a thorough engagement with historical materials regardless of circumstance. Ethnographic work may be carried out in the present, but this does not mean that the present reality has arisen from nowhere. Even before beginning this project, I recognized how active historical processes were in De Soto's present—there are clear connections between the historical existence of the ammunition plant and its present contamination, but there are also less-visible residues I uncovered through this historical work. The inclusion of historical sources within ethnography also gives the ethnographer context from which to think about their present interactions—without prior knowledge of the town's history, it would have been difficult to ask questions that elicited illuminating responses from my interlocutors. Finally, while history is always situated and partial, particular kinds of documents, interactions, and objects have the potential to unsettle what is most commonly known about a place's past.

Writing about the place I call my home has come with its own set of considerations. Being both "inside and outside" the reality I describe has meant a near-continuous stream of reflections on what it has meant for me to inhabit the town of De Soto at various points in time, as a child, a student, a woman, and an ethnographer (Behar 2007: 150). Choosing to return to De Soto forced me to critically examine my own engagement with violent histories and military residues, as well as the entanglements and culpabilities of many of my family and friends.

I still feel an uncomfortable tension around the fact that the place which animates my political critiques is also that which has been the site of my self-making. I don't know that resolving this tension is a goal of mine; it has propelled me towards the completion of this project and a deeper confrontation with unsavory historical legacies. As a genre of research, critique, and writing, ethnography is a method which has allowed this tension to remain unresolved: I am able to engage powerfully with this set of personal and political problems without seeking to stabilize or simplify their forms.

All this is not to say that my ethnographic work constitutes a complete engagement with all of the problems and potentials of the Sunflower Army Ammunition Plant. Rather, it is meant to open the possibility for more expansive definitions of "contamination" and "remediation," to rethink what environmental justice might entail, and to reflect on the ways that everyday lives

are implicated in broader historical processes. It is incomplete, a starting point from which to reflect on our responsibilities to the earth, to each other, and to the future.

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AS OF A recent count, there are 1344 active EPA Superfund sites across the United States ("Superfund: EPA.") Their types range from what is typically considered an environmental catastrophe, such as oil spills or commercial chemical cleanups, to ammunition plants across the country. Each of them carries with itself a similar but particular set of disruptions and potentialities. Each of them has caused substantial damage to its arbitrated environment, to its people, and to those it has displaced. The particular formation of ammunition plant Superfund sites is complex: their impacts exist in both the past and present, the violences they produce simultaneously globalized and localized, spectacular and unremarkable.

There are also several sites across the nation that have similar impacts but will never reach the arbitrary threshold set by the EPA to become Superfunds. These sites enact their own slow violences through contamination that does not meet proffered government thresholds and remains undetectable, uncertain, and unremediated.

I, like many others, have been complicit in the production of a settler colonial state, the maintenance of a military-industrial complex, and the creation of near-irreversible environmental harm. Memories can create a sense of amnesia and an unwillingness to reevaluate a singular narrative of progress that does not include these less-than-ideal pieces of history.

Certain forms of remembrance can flatten the past into a linear narrative which approaches the present in a logical manner. Memory can operate to obscure danger in both the past and the present, continuously reinscribing antagonistic effects onto vulnerable people. It can flatten contradiction, seek too much to explain, and attempt too much to rationalize violence. Memory filtered through forms of violence is abruptly fractured by the arresting nature of explosive forms of violence, and distorted by the diffusive nature of slow violences.

I have learned, however, that memory can also be a valuable tool in recovering and understanding aspects of the present. Collective memory, entangled with the physical remainders of a space in the present, can offer a mode of understanding that is productively nonlinear. Nostalgia can flatten the past, but it can also retrieve it.

Friedrich Nietzsche has argued that "living a joyful existence requires some healthy levels of forgetting (cited in Gordillo 2014: 206). Certainly, it is impossible for a society to remember *everything*. Collective remembrance and forgetting, especially around sites of toxic contamination, however, pose a distinctly political question: "why *some* events and not others, why some places and *not* others, are forgotten" (Gordillo 2014: 206). Perhaps it is because they are less spectacular and memorable, but perhaps it is filtered through a desire to forget the less-than-ideal parts of the past, the mistakes and injury and violence.

Unremembrance in the town of De Soto can be seen as a layering of analytical failures in multiple registers. The toxicity produced by the plant often eludes scientific perception, since there is little information about the toxicity itself and the impacts it produces. It eludes the registers of bodily perception for people like Jennifer, who are able to believe that the harm is marginal. It eludes the collective memory of the town, whose forms of remembrance are fundamentally tied to and filtered through residing in the place itself. An accurate remembrance likely lies somewhere between the normalcy of life in a small town and the instability of international warfare.

The process of cleanup, however, has problematized attempts to forget the contradictory forms of violence produced by the Sunflower Army Ammunition Plant. Attempts at erasure by outsiders building "The Land of Oz" have failed, doomed by mistrust and the toxic remnants of the site itself. Attempts at further development have been complicated by the complexity of the cleanup process itself; it involves viewing impacts far beyond their original locational or temporal context, and is a site which does not lend itself easily to a coverup. Still, there has been an impulse to remove the site swiftly and completely, rendering more invisible its impact in active memory: with every physical remain of the space burned, the land recultivated, and the contamination "contained," perhaps the town would be able to move on without having to address the troubled past of the site.

This future in which the plant is forgotten, though, may not be available as soon as remediators hope. As long as there are people who actively experience its effects, people who recall its operation, people who live upon the land and question their own inhabitance, and people who investigate on a deeper level, there may be ways to recover what has largely been forgotten.

—

TURNING THE MAGNIFYING glass upon the Emerald City itself has offered me a way forward. Addressing preconceived notions of our environments and of our own structures of memory offers us a way to reckon with forms of settler amnesia and nostalgia. The reconstruction and reconstitution of a more complete history begin with a deconstruction of knowledges of the past. In a sense, I have sought to construct a series of histories of De Soto, alternative to any singular categorization or notion of unquestioned progress.

When I left for college, I did not expect to return to De Soto in any significant capacity, and from what my mom told me, it seems that no one else expected me to return either. My understanding of myself, my childhood, and my own memories has been dramatically reconstituted through this process of engaging with the deeper legacies of this town and its ammunition plant. The process of coming of age has allowed me to reconcile my own identity with the ways in which it was filtered through my experiences in this place—what was at some point a place of comfort and escape was also harming me and those around me. What was my home was also a place to which I felt profoundly disconnected.

Coming of age for many seems to be a process of growth and progress, with nostalgic images of

an unmarred childhood transitioning into a straightforward adulthood. In some sense, it seems to require the same kind of evacuation of memory that is required for the process of constructing a linear narrative of a town's history. But my memories of a golden childhood are disrupted; they are filtered through this place of violence and injury, some of which I perpetuated and some of which were inscribed and inflicted upon me.

My sense of belonging within the community of De Soto, Kansas has become unmoored with the undertaking of this project. Belonging is something that is also fractured by both remembrance and forgetting, as well as by coming into contact with the violences of the past and present. Still, I have found this my sense of belonging, uprooted as it is, in unanticipated places—in my reflections about my friends and my time among the stars, in my conversations and engagements with Sunflower, and in my writing. In myself.

—

ON THAT CLOUDY afternoon, I stood looking at the Wizard of Oz sign for quite some time. Eventually, I took some photos, unsettled by the still-existent sign and its presence next to the warning of contamination. I wondered if it would remain indefinitely at its post between the ammunition plant, Clearview City, and De Soto, a congruence between the past, the present, and the future. *Could one ever be "safe" in an environment that was premised on the production of violence?*

A few weeks later, I came upon a photo of the sign in its younger years. The paint was not chipped, the colors of the rainbow still shone bright, the yellow brick road was its original golden hue, and Dorothy and her friends optimistically trotted down the path. However, one thing rather curiously remained missing: the Emerald City. The paint was no longer peeled in the upper right corner, but where the Emerald City should have been, there was instead a familiar image of silver buildings and four identical white water towers. They were never on the path to the Emerald City—much as in Dorothy's original encounter, it was never here.

Notes

1. The United States Congress passed the Superfund Amendments and Reauthorization Act (SARA) in October of 1986. SARA renewed funding for the Superfund program, but also established the Defense Environmental Restoration program as a separate entity, through which the federal government would deal with military-produced hazardous waste sites. As a result of this legislation, all legal responsibility for cleanup of military-owned sites was transferred into this program, located under the Department of Defense. Technically, the Department of Defense is required to follow EPA standards in its cleanup practices, but the EPA retains few modes of legislative recourse if the Department does not.

2. Checker's "greening" discussion is supplemented by literature in urban planning and political ecology, including Agyeman 2003 and Anguelovski 2016. The repurposing of grassroots-created discourses, originally created to call attention to toxic exposures, has often been appropriated by local, state, or federal governments and NGOs in the service of ostensibly "sustainable" development practices.

3. For more explicit elaboration on ethnographic methodology, particularly as the project was conducted mainly during the COVID-19 pandemic, please see Appendix.

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Appendix: Reflections on Pandemic Fieldwork

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, I was able to complete far fewer in-person interviews than I had planned to do at the beginning of my project. Many of the interlocutors with whom I was in contact were elderly, and I did not want to risk traveling back to Kansas often myself. The pandemic made near-impossible any sort of participant observation, which is a hallmark of most ethnographic accounts.

I am tremendously grateful for the in-person interviews that I was able to conduct. The five interviews represented within the body of the thesis were chosen explicitly because of their coverage of different areas of interest surrounding the ammunition plant: those within the plant, those near its present toxicity, those curious about it, and those in charge of its regulation. Each of these perspectives adds to the multifaceted understanding of the ammunition plant site and its relationship to the town in its past and present. I found my interviewees via a post on the town's Facebook group, in which I received a number of responses and tips on who to contact. Some of my interviewees were people I knew, but not closely—for the most part, these were individuals with whom I had little prior connection.

I was fortunate enough, and am indebted to, the Johnson County Archives and the interviews conducted by Matt Gilligan over the 1990s-2003 for the collection of oral histories about workers in the ammunition plant. This was a fortunate find, as I was able to find answers to questions I would have asked of much older ammunition plant workers.

The thesis also contains a large amount of historical research. This is meant not only to supplement the ethnographic work, but is a critical foundation of the project. Part of what is at issue within the Sunflower plant is the depth of the site and the ways in which its past and present activity has permeated the land and the people around it. In addition, the history of the place begins well before the building of the ammunition plant, and well before the founding of the town of De Soto; while toxicity is one of the residual violences that are present here, the legacies of colonization and land seizure, and the later residues of racialized violence, must not be overlooked. These historical processes are active and ongoing, so an ethnographic engagement with the present alone would have constituted a less complete and less grounded view.