ART EDUCATION SHAPING HISTORICAL NARRATIVES IN THE MISSISSIPPI DELTA: A POLYPTYCH STUDY OF CARE

BY

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DISSERTATION

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The Charleston Arts and Revitalization Effort (CARE) located in the rural town of Charleston, Mississippi positioned along the Mississippi Delta in Tallahatchie County is the subject of this dissertation’s inquiry. By placing a microhistorical focus on the cultural-historical geography contexts of CARE, this study answers the central research question: How does art education shape historical narrative? Three supporting questions guide the research: (1) What are the conditions and contexts that produced CARE? (2) What is CARE performing? (3) What is CARE producing? These questions are unfolded through polyptych methodology which opens multiple points for engaging the data including archives, oral histories, visual and material culture, and arts-based research.

Within the oral histories of members and leaders of CARE that were collected for this project, four primary themes emerge. They are: (1) Programming, (2) Meeting Needs, (3) Access, Exposure, and Opportunity, and (4) Bringing Together. Through an analysis of these themes, art education, which is a pedagogical process of how to see and how to represent, is understood to operate as more than in the effort to create wholeness within systemic gaps, absences, and inadequacies. In doing so, the research demonstrates how art education shapes historical narratives that reinforce dominant cultural values.
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To the land of the South and our complicated relationship
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“If you want to learn about something, you need to take your body onto the land and do it” (Simpson, 2014, 17-18).

I want to learn more about art education in the South and how it intertwines with history, culture, and geography, how it unfolds into new or continuing narratives. This dissertation is the start of this lifelong learning project.

After finding the Charleston Arts and Revitalization Effort (CARE) through internet searching, I reached out to the director who invited me to Charleston, Mississippi to learn more. So I took my body to the land. The first time I drove to the small town of Charleston, Mississippi was on August 20, 2019. I came in from the I-55 exit, turning west towards Charleston. Unfamiliar with the area, I relied on GPS navigation to guide me onto County Highway 32. Expecting the flat expanse of the Delta, I was surprised to be in Hill Country. The green rolling hills were almost caricatures of themselves in the intensity of their summer greenness and the way they layered against one another from foreground to background. Bucolic and

The Charleston Arts and Revitalization Effort (CARE) in the rural town of Charleston, Mississippi is located in a narrow stone building. The front of the building has a shallow façade flanked by faux ionic columns two stories tall in a Classical Revival style. The columns support a large stone expanse on which “Bank of Charleston” is engraved. Following the columns down to the main entrance positioned symmetrically between them, “CARE” is spelled out onto four stained glass panels above the doorway. Each letter is a different color, green, red, purple, and blue, respectively, all unified by the warm yellow background of pieced-together fragments of glass. The panels’ message encompasses the name of the organization and the desired atmosphere of the space once the double doors are pushed open. No longer a bank, but a space for CARE. The former’s stamp is still featured predominantly and permanently on the exterior though the building’s purpose has changed. The juxtaposition of the

Figure 1.1. J. Stokes-Casey. (2020). CARE Building. Photograph. The CARE Building sits on the Square in Charleston facing east with the setting sun and the Mississippi Delta at its back. It faces the courthouse, which is in the center of the Square.
picturesque, the hills occasionally offered views of grazing cows and red barns.

Charleston is about three hours south of the house I grew up in and where I developed a deep affinity for the gently rolling farmland scenes of the greater Mississippi River Delta. In its way, this dissertation project intersects multiple temporalities and places for me. It is simultaneously a return or revisiting of a past that drives my present curiosity and forages a path for future research. It is both a familiar space and a place I had never been before this inaugural drive; it is both a place and a representation of place(s) I return to in multiple ways, not always physically.

On this late August day, the drive was full of feelings or, rather, I was full of feelings on the drive — excitement for the start of a new project, nostalgia for a romanticized, reminiscent past, and great sadness. I’ll always remember that drive, because just before leaving my hotel in Batesville to make the thirty-mile drive to Charleston, I listened to a voicemail from a friend telling me that our mentor had lost his battle with bone cancer. Only a few days prior to leaving for Charleston, I emailed to see if he would be up for a visit since he was in New Orleans and since I was headed

historical space of banking and commerce alongside the contemporary use of it as a place of caring and creativity is symbolic to this study. Like CARE within the old bank building, the study situates art education within predominant, fixed structures like commerce and capital that are sometimes rendered invisible.

In this dissertation, I unpack some of these structures which situate arts organizations like CARE within cultural, historical, and geographic contexts. I examine the role of art education as a shaping force within the historical narratives that unfold from those contexts. Founded in 2003, CARE’s mission is “to foster the economic growth and redevelopment of Charleston, Mississippi through the arts and community involvement while preserving the historical significance and heritage of the town” (careatrms.com, n.d.). Through this dissertation, I ask what it means when art education is deeply intertwined with a mission of history and heritage and seen as a catalyst for economic growth and community building.

The CARE building, also referred to as the Charleston Arts Center, is a beginning example for thinking through this problem. CARE is interested in utilizing art education to put forth effort to revitalize the town. Etymologically, effort is a laborious attempt. It is a kind of exertion which requires the voluntary willingness to force one’s strength towards the task. Revitalization is to return, back or again, to vita, life. The word implies an absence, illness, weakness, or even an end to something. For CARE, revitalization is to bring the town of
that way...but he said he wasn’t feeling well and promised to fill me in in a later email that would never come. Thank you for everything, Dr. Robert Connolly. You are missed. And so, the drive marked an ending and beginning.

Preoccupied with the news, I did not document this initial drive into Charleston, yet parts of the scenery loop by in my memory. The landscape of Hill Country was beautiful. The geography and topography of Charleston’s positioning on a bluff, as the “Gateway to the Delta,” as half in the Delta and half in the Hills began to shape my understanding of the place. I recognized my first drive into Charleston as one of significant meaning-making for my understanding of the place and of no less importance than meeting the CARE board members that day. I was meeting the land, too, and would come to know it a little better through the course of the project.

Traversing country highways is a staple of my real-imagined South. In rural places, drives are inevitable, and the practice becomes pedagogical. For example, it is a way to learn how to operate vehicles, to familiarize oneself with the mapped routes to and from destinations (and the spaces in between), and a Charleston towards future growth, towards a return in a new way. CARE’s effort involves using the arts and arts education as the way to bring new life into or to bring back what was lost in Charleston. In doing so, art education becomes a part of the town’s history and affects the unfolding of the story of the place. Yet, CARE is operating within past and present structures which create sometimes invisible and often unyielding structural parameters. One example of this is the organization’s location within a building which still boldly proclaims its past identity as the Bank of Charleston, a sign which dwarfs CARE’s stained glass logo above the entrance. Can CARE, through all of the laborious effort and time that the members’ regularly contribute voluntarily, use art education as a means to reshape the building from its past perception towards a changed future?

Cultural-historical geographic context is crucial for understanding the question. The Bank of Charleston was built around the turn of the century, in Mississippi, on the edge of the Delta. By law, the bank was one of many places only accessible to White citizens up to 1964 with the federal Civil Rights Act. After that, cultural and social segregation continued in many institutions. The following anecdote collected during an oral history interview for this project explicitly demonstrates what is at stake for CARE as an organization operating from within its cultural-historical geographic context and its physical location of the old bank. A former director of CARE who identifies as a White woman told about an interaction with a man who identifies as Black at a shopping center outside of Charleston. She was wearing a CARE t-shirt and the man, who turned out to also be from Charleston, recognized the organization and the two struck up a conversation.

CR: Just super nice guy, and we were talking about Charleston, and then he finally said, “Wait a minute, you’re CARE, aren’t you? I’ve seen you around.” And he asked, “So what do you think about CARE?” And I said, “Well,” I said, “You know, obviously I like it and I think a lot of it. But what do you think about it?” And he said, “Well, do you want me to be honest or do you want...”
lesson in time management. It is also an artistic practice in which the route taken and determined is chosen based not only on convenience, but also on aesthetics and sometimes wandering.

Aside from the containment within a vehicle and distance traveled in time, it is not unlike the walking practice of the Situationists’ Theory of Dérive (Debord, 1956) in urban settings or walking pedagogies (Springgay & Truman, 2018). One can choose to take the familiar, fastest, or routine route to their destination and build a connection to the passing landscape and sites. Speed, route, windows up or down, music, conversation, passengers and a multitude of other elements create choices on how to experience these inevitable drives.

I said, “I definitely want you to be honest.”
“And you won’t take anything the wrong way?”
I said no.
And he said, “Well, I don’t know if you run into this problem as far as getting people in the building, but, you know, as a little boy…” I’m going to say he was probably in his early 40s… “You know, there were certain buildings walking around town that my mom said, ‘son, you don’t go in there. You’re not welcome in there.’ And I know it’s not like that anymore,” he said, “but that’s so ingrained in the back of my head.” He said, “it’s hard to step in those doors” (C. Roark, personal conversation, January 21, 2021).

While the vision of CARE is a welcoming and open space promoting art education, this anecdote provides insight into how it is unable to fully separate from its situatedness within a building associated with historical, cultural, and social segregation. CARE is an organization operating within cultural-historical problems which are specific to the geographical location. The structures created by these many historical folds, including the ongoing manifestation of a long history of racial inequality and segregation create a plethora of parameters which CARE operates within and against through a utilization of art education. The former Bank of Charleston is a manifestation of those structures.

While CARE has shifted the building’s function into an organization for art education and a space of caring, the history still permeates through cultural memory. How does art education operate in this situation? Can it begin to shape a narrative towards a new history of Charleston? Will the CARE Building / Charleston Arts Center be shaped into a place remembered as welcoming rather than restricted?

As their conversation continued from the scene above, the narrator recognized and was frustrated by the deep-seated division that permeates the town, particularly in buildings like the Bank of Charleston-cum-CARE building. The man was invited to CARE and reminded that it is open to him. The invitation to join CARE, enter the space, and participate in the
There are no hotels in Charleston, but maybe a couple of bed and breakfast options. At any rate, I stayed in Batesville each time I traveled to the area. I learned that I favored traveling the local road to Charleston instead of the Interstate. It is more personal that way. The pace is a bit slower and two lanes rather than four means more land and less asphalt. It’s a thirty-minute drive down Highway 35 alongside bluffs and the Delta. I made that drive probably 15 or 20 times; it would have been more had the COVID-19 pandemic not hit, abruptly halting all travel.

Figure 1.4. J. Stokes-Casey. (2020). Highway 35 facing south. Photograph. This tree-lined stretch of Highway 32 gives a sense of enclosure though the highway and the Delta beyond the trees on the right stretch out into a vast expanse of land and sky.

The route and my vehicle became pedagogical materials, teaching me about the geography, how to see it, and a bit about how to represent it. I invested in a dash camera, recorded the trip over multiple days, and created written reflections about the experience of driving that highway. My real-art education programming it offers is a part of how the cultural production of CARE and art education becomes normalized and invisible. It is similar to the colonizing practice of evangelical Protestantism which invites guests into the culture and beliefs of the space of the church, but has difficulty looking outward and thinking critically about its position of power and influence. Like this brief example from Protestantism, the arts and art education are imagined to be separate from or beyond the cultural-historical narrative and practice of segregation. The underlying belief is in the neutralizing power of the arts and art education’s ability to solve these problems and change the narrative towards one of inclusion. However, as the anecdotal conversation from the narrator demonstrates, CARE and its use of arts education are not neutral or separate from their cultural-historical context.

This study of the cultural, historical, and geographical contexts within which CARE operates, unfolds evidence of how art education is utilized to shape historical narrative and why our current historical moment asks art education to be mobilized in this way.

Background to the Study: A Real-Imagined South

Alessandro Portelli (1991), a prominent oral historian and folklorist, points out that sometimes in an oral history interview, the narrator shapes their narrative to what they believe the interviewer wants to hear. Portelli (1991) writes, “The interviewees are always, though perhaps unobtrusively, studying the interviewers who are studying them...trying to identify with what the narrator thinks is in the interviewer’s interest...” (p. 54–55). In doing so, their stories also contain insight on who the narrator thinks the interviewer is. I think research is like this. As we engage with it, it not only provides data to study the phenomena, but it also tells us, the researchers, about ourselves. In developing this study, I knew I wanted to work in the southeastern part of the United States, most commonly known as The South, partly because I wanted to find out what narratives it holds in relationship to art education.
and partly because for personal reasons I needed to be in dialogue with the place. I wanted to know more about how my home, the South, and my research and career in art education spoke to and about me, and how I would speak to and about it.

The South is both real and imagined depending on the geographical, cultural, historical, personal, or additional contexts in which one is considering it (Cobb, 1999 & 2005; McPherson, 2003; Cobb, 2005; Binnington, 2013; Ferris, 2013; Brasell, 2015; see also Southern Cultures special issue “The Imaginary South,” 2020). Each of these contexts shapes the narratives of real-imagined Souths, sometimes into an indistinguishable intertwining of identities of people and place. I am using real-imagined to blur the binary between the terms and recognize that one informs the other through socio-cultural-imaginings and through historical-systemic-realities.

The South, within the context of this dissertation, refers to the geographical southeastern region of the United States and the ways in which it has been romanticized, villainized, and (re)imagined historically and socio-politically.

To narrow the study down geographically, I turned to the location that regional historian James Cobb (1992) labeled “the most Southern place on earth,” the Mississippi Delta, in search of art educators who would be interested in participating in a study. Cobb’s (1992) label of “most Southern” is applied due to the Delta’s history of plantation slavery, convict leasing and penal farms, poverty, racial oppression, and other socio-historical factors which, he argues, are more prevalent there than in other parts of the South and whose negative legacies continue to influence the region.

Finding CARE

The Mississippi Delta (formed by the Yazoo and Mississippi Rivers) is composed of eighteen mostly rural counties between Memphis, Tennessee and Vicksburg, Mississippi. Through online searches and with limited success, I combed the counties looking for public schools whose websites were discernible enough to identify art teachers in the district.
Twice, I charted a route around all of Tallahatchie County. Starting from my hotel in Batesville in Panola County, I headed down Highway 35 into Charleston. The highway can take you into Charleston on the Square where it becomes Highway 32, the route I took the first time I came to town. My route around Tallahatchie started at the CARE building. From there I created a circuit around the county that I will now detail to not only share reflections, but to bring you, reader, along to experience the place.

From the CARE building, I backtracked a little headed west on Main Street (Highway 32) before joining Highway 35 during the search, I came across the website for the Charleston Arts and Revitalization Effort (CARE).

The CARE website (careartms.com) features images of and schedules for a variety of art and dance lesson opportunities for all ages, a page of local Artist Council members of CARE, and information about an exhibition on loan from the Mississippi Museum of Art called Narratives of the Land (2017). A deeper dive led me to CARE director Carol Roark’s artist website where on the homepage it is noted that she “specializes in the Southern landscape” (carolroark.com).

Soon after finding the CARE web page, I made a cold contact through Roark’s artist website. Her response was positive and welcoming, a pattern I’ve found through all of my interactions with CARE organizers. We exchanged a few emails then arranged a call to become better acquainted. She invited me to a board meeting; I accepted and the research project began.

Statement of the Problem

The posed problem in this study is a historical one which seeks to understand the role of art education in the shaping of historical narrative. In many histories of the field of art education, the narrative of art education is positioned in response to broader cultural-historical shifts. For example, prominent art education historian Arthur Efland (1990a) argues that there are *streams* of broad cultural philosophies that shape art education. The problem is the assumption of art education as supplementary and passive and leads to question if art education has influence on shaping the broader cultural philosophies.

According to a document on the history of the organization, the Charleston Arts and Revitalization Effort was founded in 2003 by like-minded citizens who came together to help foster the economic development of Charleston, MS through the arts while maintaining the heritage and valuable history of the community. CARE determined that it...
headed south again. This stretch of Main St. is bustling for a small town. There are a few shops, a grocery, a gas station, and a couple of restaurants as well as clubs and hangouts. Once I got back on 35 due south, though, all of that thinned out to rural farmland after crossing over Tillatoba Creek. On the left are trees and bluff lands and on the right is flat delta with countless rows of crops. A few plots of bailed hay and occasional residencies or churches dot the 20 or so miles to cover. Because Tallahatchie County is shaped oddly along its southern border, following the road to the Tallahatchie National Wildlife Refuge leaves the county for a bit going west on Highway 8 before returning to the county and going north onto a gravel road into the refuge.

could save this little rural community by wrapping itself around the ARTS—a place where color, age, religion, and financial status matters not (History of CARE document provided by the organization, 2019).

From this quote, a sense of the real-imagined place and the narrative of CARE begins to emerge. The “little rural community” of Charleston, Mississippi creates a scene, a real-imagined place which is in distress, but can be saved through CARE’s wielding of the arts as a unifying wrap. The quote alludes to how the arts (and art education) are utilized as more than – more than community service, more than historical programming, more than learning to paint, draw, or dance. For CARE, art education is accessible and equitable, a solution to economic development, and essential for historical preservation. The statement creates an imagined singularity, or unified narrative, of history and heritage. It is a positive call for unity, to consider that the two, history and heritage, are shared by all. It gives power to art education to unify real-imagined history into a narrative which can be inherited, (re)produced, and shared. CARE positions art education as a mode for caring for the town of Charleston and the broader Tallahatchie County and in doing so, shapes historical narrative. It positions art education as a historical moment.

Art education in this study is a pedagogical practice which teaches one how to see and how to represent. Teaching one to see includes training the eye to distinguish formal elements such as composition and variants of color and shape. It also includes forming aesthetic opinions including the kinds of things considered to be desirable to look at or how the environment, subject, or space should be looked upon. Teaching one to represent is similar to the formal and aesthetic pedagogies of sight only the instruction is on how to re-present what is being seen or the preferred aesthetic way of seeing.

Historical narrative in this study two-fold. First, it is conceptualization of the past which is traditionally shaped by power and dominant ideology. How narratives are constructed and who constructs them are responsible for not only shaping
It also encourages the return of ducks each year to the swampy ecosystem. The Refuge is a place I visited nearly every opportunity I had to be in Mississippi for this dissertation research. There is a visitor-friendly boardwalk path over a section of the swamp. Young cypress trees and knees shoot up from the murky shallow waters. I appreciate the quiet there, enclosed in the trees with the opportunity to look down into the marsh below.

From there, I aimed west along Highway 8 following the odd curve of the county shaped by the Little Tallahatchie River until hitting Highway 49E which carried me north-ish. Along these stretches, I traversed miles and miles of shockingly flat land filled with countless parallel rows of crops such as cotton, rice, soybeans, and corn. Sometimes there were signs indicating turn offs for plantations. I didn't follow any of those, but when I came to a sign about the Emmett Till Historic Intrepid Center (ETHIC), I took a right off of the highway into the village of Glendora. Glendora has a population of around 300 and a notorious history. The history is critically examined and put into question through the efforts of ETHIC.

ETHIC is housed in an old cotton gin which was previously owned

Central Research Question

The central research question is: How does art education shape historical narrative? The question is concerned with how art education is conceptualized and utilized within the telling of history. In the case of this research, the historic narrative is microhistorically (Dehne, 1995; Ginsberg et al., 1993; Stanley et al., 2013; Wierling, 1995) focused on the Charleston Arts and Revitalization Effort in the town of Charleston within Tallahatchie County, Mississippi. The microhistorical approach consists of a local history which is temporally and geographically concentrated on specific actors whose lived encounters and experiences inform the study and emerging narrative.

Supporting Questions

The research includes three supporting questions: What are the conditions and contexts that produced CARE? What is CARE performing? What is CARE producing? The questions are inspired by Miranda Joseph’s (2002) framing in Against
by J.W. Milam and sits behind the former site of Emmett Till’s uncle’s house where Milam and his brother-in-law (White farmers in their 20s and 30s) kidnapped the fourteen year old Black boy visiting from Chicago in the middle of the night, took him away, and brutally beat then murdered him, dumping his body in the nearby Black Bayou of the Little Tallahatchie County River anchored by an industrial fan taken from the cotton gin that is now the ETHIC Museum. The museum was founded by long-time Mayor Johnny B. Thomas.

ETHIC’s website describes Thomas’s founding and work on the museum as personal since his father was implicated in the Till murder as “one of the five African-American men [all under the duress of the

the Romance of Community. Joseph uses Marxist theory and a feminist lens to argue that community (social formation) is a performance which results in production (of activities and of objects/products) and in turn produces identity and community. The text and resulting three supporting questions for this study inform the structure of this research. They are tied into the historical interest of this project and interested primarily in how art education is mobilized through the work of CARE. An explanation of the supporting questions in relationship to the central research question follows in the parameters of the study section below.

Parameters of the Study

The supporting questions situate the parameters of the study. What are the conditions and contexts that produced CARE? This first question is historical/temporal and geographical. The study takes into account several historical moments that create the conditions in which CARE was founded and in which it operates. The study is interested in major moments throughout the region’s history recorded in books and newspaper headlines to provide context leading up to the founding of CARE in 2003.

What is CARE performing? This second supporting question is concerned with what CARE does as an organization, how it uses art education in the operation of the organization, and how the work of the organization is described. Due to the limited availability of archival materials, data to answer this question is mostly composed of oral history interviews. Narrators/interviewees were recruited through snowball sampling, in which interviewees provide suggestions on recruiting and locating additional narrators interested in sharing about their work and involvement with CARE. The parameters for data collection in the case of this question are reliant on the oral history participants. In other words, though I approach each interview with semi-structured questions (Appendix A), the responses of the narrator, unfolding of the narrative, and
Jim Crow south] listed as an accomplice to the killing and brutal murdering of Emmett Till” (glendorams.com/our-mission, 2018). Purple historic interpretive signs placed around the interpretive center detail, almost move-by-move, the violence that befell Till in Glendora. One sign at the River Site is repeatedly vandalized with bullets holes tearing through the marker and ETHIC has replaced it, most recently with a bulletproof redesign. The palpable racism and traumatic violence haunt the landscape and continue to influence how culture and history unfold within this geographic space of Tallahatchie County.

ETHIC reclaims the physical gin and ensures the narrative of Till’s death is accurately crafted and displayed, a pedagogical representation, how to see the story that, as evidenced by the ongoing violent vandalism of shooting at the river site sign, is a point of deep contention and something that vandals do not want to see.

These layers of historic and ongoing racial violence must be seen to fully understand the cultural palimpsest of haunted strata over the land, rivers, and fields. They caution against romantic trappings of the scenic landscapes. They whisper, remember there is more here framing of the interview are co-constructed (Patti & Ellis, 2017; Portelli, 1991). Each interview is partial (Thompson & Bornat, 2017; Perrmond, 2001) and context dependent (Abrams, 2017; Sangster, 1994). Therefore, the parameters of the interview are determined by the context, the doing of the interview, and what the narrator chooses to share (or not).

What is CARE producing? There are two approaches to answering this third supporting question. The first is literal and relies on the visual and material culture about, produced by, and related to the Charleston Arts and Revitalization Effort. The parameters are bound by available visual and material cultural objects including artworks made by students and members of CARE, social media posts, the CARE building, and exhibitions. The visual and material objects produced by CARE are evidence of the kinds of work CARE performs in tangible form. The second approach is figural and informs the primary research question. Figuratively asking what CARE is producing is to attempt to understand how CARE creates a broader impact within its cultural-historical geographic contexts. The question becomes, “what does the work of CARE mean?” Answers may be found within the oral history interviews, in the visual and material culture, and potentially in newspaper stories about the organization.

**Significance of the Study**

To better understand what the work of the Charleston Arts and Revitalization Effort means to the founders and organizers is to better understand the relationship of art education to historical narratives. The study contributes to the field of art education by placing emphasis on two marginalized geographical contexts, the rural and the South, and by presenting a microhistory (Dehne, 1995; Ginsberg et al., 1993; Stanley et al., 2013; Wierling, 1995) to speak to the broader phenomenon of understanding art education’s role in shaping historical narrative.

Additionally, the study overlaps rural education scholarship. In “Resisting Awayness and Being a Good Insider,”
than the eye can see. There is a deep sadness embedded in the land for what harm people have done and continue to do to one another and to the land itself. The flat, endless rows of crops cover the land where once towering hardwood trees and impassable brushy swamps composed the landscape. Catharine Biddle, Daniella Hall Sutherland, and Erin McHenry Sorber (2019) call for rural education researchers to “articulate the ways in which their topics are critical to rural communities (rather than inherently rural)” and that “these studies must speak to how power manifests across space” (p. 10, emphasis in original). As an organization with the mission to grow the economy, involve the community, and preserve the history of its town and county, CARE provides an excellent model for analyzing how rural communities may perceive and implement art education across the geographic space and temporal history. Research on CARE’s role in the rural town of Charleston may prove as significant and useful to towns in similar situations who are interested in better understanding how art education may be implemented there.

Most importantly for the field of art education, this study offers a framework for understanding how the discipline is understood within our current historical moment. CARE was created in response to the specific problems of its context and chose art education as a tool to unify its work and revitalize the local economy, reshape and establish the historical narratives, and build a more unified community. CARE’s is a narrative against deficit and injustice in which art education is credited for bringing solutions. CARE is a microhistorical example, but the broader problems it faces including social and economic injustice, consequences of systemic government austerity measures, and scarcity of resources are not endemic to its specific context, but more widely experienced throughout the United States and many parts of the world. We can learn from CARE how it frames art education and how it expects art education to reframe and revitalize the historical narrative within this moment in history.

Summary and Design of the Study

The study design utilizes polyptych methodology (Garnet, 2015a, 2015b, 2017a, 2017b) which is a multifaceted methodological approach to historical research. The methods incorporated within polyptych methodology in this study

Figure 1.8. J. Stokes-Casey. (2020). Rows of Cotton in early Autumn, West Tallahatchie County. Photograph.
provided brief glimpses into the long history of the place.

I made the trip a little bit longer for myself by looping back to Tallahatchie County on 32 towards my original route so I could make a quick stop in Sumner. Sumner and Charleston are both county seats of Tallahatchie County. I have not been able to locate a satisfactory explanation of why a county whose population is around 14,000 has two county seats.

Each of the county seats has a courthouse. In Sumner, the courthouse is restored to the condition it was when the trial for the murder of Emmett Till took place in 1955. His murderers (two White men from the county) were acquitted. Despite their full confession being sold and published in a magazine only months after the trial, they were never convicted. The Sumner courthouse is used as an interpretive center for the Till case which is largely credited as a key event that ignited the Civil Rights Movement.

Sites of resistance are layered thickly onto the landscape of the Delta. They are as powerful as bucolic nostalgia, but risk being absorbed into romantic reminiscence. They are exciting in their historicity, their tragedy, their romance.

include archival research, oral history, visual and material culture analysis, and arts-based research. The polyptych, meaning many folds, is generally in the form of a painted object with many panels which can be arranged or viewed in multiple ways to create infinite possibilities. In other words, this study design is one possibility among unlimited potential pluralities which recognizes from the outset that it is complex, multifaceted, and fundamentally impossible to complete.

The form of this chapter and a few other chapters throughout the dissertation document practice a polyptych approach through the use of columns and captions. This design is influenced by Lucy Lippard’s (1997) *Lure of the Local* in which she incorporates a running narrative of her traversals of local places alongside her scholarship and uses extensive image captioning to thicken the narratives presented on each page. The column running alongside the academic content offers a narrative to situate myself within the project and details my interaction with place, particularly land and landscape. It also provides an alternative method for the reader to engage with the text and for me as a practicing historian to approach narrative creation. These are only some ways in which this content could be constructed. There are infinite pluralities of alternate ways to present, interpret, and interact with the histories.

In light of such complexity, the study is designed with a concern for CARE through care *all the way down* (Haraway, 2021).
The care all the way down design is a consideration of how to do care throughout the research. It is an intentional recognition of who and what comprise the cared for within the research. In this case, the cared for is the organization CARE and those involved in it, the history of the place which I unfold through cultural-historical geography, and the visual and material culture employed as data for the study. Chapter Two provides examples of a care all the way down theoretical approach in the contexts of the oral history interview process used in this study. In addition to providing a theoretical foundation of care all the way down and of cultural-historical geography, Chapter Two provides an overview of literature which informs the framing of the central research question.

Chapter Three defines and provides the foundations of polyptych methodology as used in this study. The chapter builds on the gaps within polyptych methodology by providing previously uncited influences from feminist theory including the concept of situated knowledges (Haraway, 1988, Harding, 1986, 1992; Hill Collins, 1990). Within polyptych methodology in this study, four different data types are collected and analyzed. They include archival research, oral history interviewing, visual and material culture analysis, and arts-based research. This study involves the creation of a polyptych assemblage composed of objects of visual and material culture. The assemblage is intended to explore the connectedness and unfolding of potential pluralities of historical narratives through an art medium in addition to academic writing. The chapter describes how each of these methods are used, the materials and resources from which they are constructed, and the mode of analysis.

The study design relies on Applied Thematic Analysis (Guest et al., 2012) which allows for identifying themes across multiple types of data. Applied Thematic Analysis will be used in archival research, oral history transcripts, and visual and material culture analysis as a way to locate and define themes within each of these data sets and as a foundation for interpreting the data in subsequent chapters.

Figure 1.10. J. Stokes-Casey. (2019). Sumner, Mississippi Building on the Square. This building faces the Sumner Courthouse where the 1955 trial for Emmett Till’s murder was held and where his murderers walked free. In front of the courthouse, facing this building is a monument to confederate soldiers erected in 1913 that is boldly engraved with “Our Heroes.” The soldier on top looks out into the town holding a salute. There is a similar monument in front of Charleston’s courthouse. It is taller, the soldier on top looks older and does not salute, but grips a gun and looks out at the town below. Romantic language about the “grand old southern cause” is engraved above the “our heroes” block letters.

This storefront in Sumner is clearly not in use. The windows are boarded up, the plywood preventing the reflective windows of the store from returning the gaze of the courthouse and saluting confederate soldier. Not only does it not return the gaze, but it invites us, and maybe the courthouse and rebel soldier into a different scene of a cypress swamp at sunset. The viewer visually passes over a wildflower patch of blue pansies, black-eyed susans, and queen anne’s lace into a calm green swamp-lawn dotted with cypress knees and new growth. It invites us to walk off into the sunset rather than look behind us at the courthouse and the soldier, though they continue to look over and at us. This imagined scene, layered onto an abandoned shop, a sign of declining economy, situated within a historic Square notorious for injustice, framed by a live tree, is its own piece of a polyptych that exemplifies the real-imagined, romanticized, palimpsest of studies of the South.
And I know that I, too, am a part of this. How do I embrace and resist and remain critical and practice care and create, teach, and theorize what it all means? It is not one narrative. It is many. Many that stem from me, but so many more beyond my experience.

In Chapter Four, I apply polyptych methodology to address the first supporting question: What are the conditions and contexts that produced CARE? The chapter is a historical framing which offers themes and historical vignettes to bring together moments from Charleston and Tallahatchie County history which are influential in constructing a cultural-historical geography narrative. I anchor the chapter within a polyptych assemblage which I constructed as a way to think through the folds of contexts in which CARE is situated. I offer self-produced images and captions instead of archival reproductions in order to question the constructed nature of history, of what is real and what is imagined or produced in the creation of historical narratives. The form of the chapter enacts a polyptych mode of interaction through embedded hyperlinks which redirect the reader to different parts of the text creating additional paths of inquiry and connection for the reader. Occasional directives prompt the reader to insert themselves and their own understandings within this unfolding of history in recognition of the co-constructed nature of crafting narratives and the impossibility for complete or comprehensive presentations of history. The chapter situates CARE within the systemic structures which rendered it necessary. CARE exists because of these conditions, and its work is a response and attempt towards providing solutions.

In Chapter Five, I begin to unpack data from oral history interviews, archives, and visual material culture to address the second and third supporting questions: What is CARE performing, and what is CARE producing? Through Applied Thematic Analysis, I propose the data offers four themes to consider: (1) Programming, (2) Meeting Needs, (3) Access, Exposure, and Opportunity, and (4) Bringing Together. Chapter Five addresses the first two, Programming and Meeting Needs. I offer the term more than as a way to understand how CARE mobilizes art education and what the organization expects art education to perform. This builds from Rubén Gaztambide-Fernández’s (2013, 2020) work on the rhetoric of effects and the rhetoric of cultural production. Further, I draw from Miranda Joseph’s (2002) work which argues that

Figure 1.11. J. Stokes-Casey, (2019). Self Portrait with Rows of Cotton in October. Photograph. I pull over along Highway 35 on the way to CARE to capture this scene of a cotton field before harvest and situate myself in the shot. The rear view mirror allows me to see both where I’ve come from and where I am. With the aid of the mirror, the camera captures what’s behind, who’s looking, and the scene before it. The road points to where I may travel, but the gaze is directed slightly off of the path. It is one scene, presenting multiple subjects, creating many folds for interpretation.

After Sumner, I began a loop back to my hotel in Batesville, northeast of the Tallahatchie county border which meant heading towards Tutwiler on 49E. In Tutwiler is another small arts organization made up of the Tutwiler Quilters who
African American women use their skills of quilt making to help support themselves as well as to preserve a quilting style that is indigenous to the African American people in the Delta area ("Tutwiler Quilters," 2020). Just north of the town of Tutwiler is the for-profit Tallahatchie County Correction prison run by Core Civic. I did not bother making the detour to see it.

I felt like I was learning more from taking my body to the land, but all of it was a temporary engagement with place from the bubble that is my vehicle with only brief moments of pause to walk around. The images I captured and then chose to share shape the reader’s experience with the place, unless they, too, have been to Tallahatchie County. Otherwise, I am creatively constructing a reflection of my experience and an introduction to the place through narrative and images. I am using creative practices as informative, pedagogical tools to invite the reader into a better understanding of the place, land, and contexts that shape the conditions that created and sustain the formation of CARE. Further, it is because I want to understand more about the broader region I call home and what lessons the place still has for me.

Community building, especially when constructed through the work of nonprofits, is a form of upholding capitalist systems that rendered the nonprofit services necessary. In Chapter Five, I argue that CARE’s use of art education is embedded in a quest for wholeness which is in response to the gaps and holes left by the systems and structures that produced the conditions and contexts that shape CARE. We see this unfold within the organization’s art education and history events, exhibitions, and the plethora of programming CARE offers in order to meet a wide variety of needs.

In Chapter Six, the themes Access, Exposure, and Opportunity and Bringing Together are analyzed. I argue that the rationale given about providing access to the arts and art education to create opportunities and exposure to an idealized art education is grounded in whiteness as a mode of cultural production. As such, whiteness determines what is considered to be good, important, and valuable within the culture and renders them invisible and normalized. CARE’s efforts in bringing the community together is understood as a solution for social, cultural, and historic racial segregation. Art education programming is used to shape a narrative of progress, one that solves racial division through providing access to a shared culture of the arts. Yet, the arts based on whiteness as a mode of cultural production cannot achieve wholeness. Therefore, the historical narrative art education shapes normalizes the culture and reinforces the dominant narratives found in the cultural-historical geography of Charleston and Tallahatchie County.

In the conclusion chapter, I summarize the study and offer contributions to the field as well as recommendations for future work.
The central research question in this project, how does art education shape historical narrative, is broad in scope. In this chapter, I attempt to frame the question with a review of existing literature in the fields of art education, cultural-historical geography, and the feminist theoretical lens of care all the way down (Haraway, 2003, 2016; Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017). My study focuses on a rural community arts organization called the Charleston Arts and Revitalization Effort (CARE) in Charleston, Mississippi. The organization uses arts education as a tool for economic redevelopment, community building, and historic preservation. Rooted in a strong sense of place, CARE provides a site for a microhistorical (Dehne, 1995; Ginsberg et al., 1993; Stanley et al., 2013; Wierling, 1995) study addressing larger questions about the role of art education as an actor in shaping historical narrative. By microhistorical study, I mean a concentrated focus on a geographically specific organization which considers the lived experiences of those involved. A microhistory is a part which can be compared to a broader (macro)history. Where microhistory concerns the specifics of CARE, Charleston, and Tallahatchie County, the study considers ways in which CARE is an example for understanding a broader narrative.

In this chapter, I first situate the central research question as a historiographical question for art education. Next, I describe cultural-historical geography as a lens that allows for the consideration of place and geographical context as influential to the central research question. Finally, I turn to feminist studies for the theoretical lens of care all the way down (Haraway, 2003, 2016; Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017). For Donna Haraway (2003, 2016) and Maria Puig de la Bellacasa (2017) the all the way down concept in their science-based work means a recognition of the lack of hierarchy throughout a web of interdependent living/non-living materiality. In a simplified example, Haraway (2003) writes, “There is no foundation; there are only elephants supporting elephants all the way down” (p. 12). Puig de la Bellacasa (2017) applies the all the way down approach to the concept of care as an ethical and speculative approach for more than human ecological worlds. In the case of this research, there is not an origin point or termination point for caring; it is caring all the way down, positioned as interdependent within the study. Later, I clarify this using Puig de la Bellacasa’s (2017) Matters of Care as a guiding practice for the dissertation research and a context within which to analyze the organization CARE.
This study investigates how art education shapes historical narrative. Historical narrative (White, 1972, McCullagh, 1987, Lemon, 1995) in the context of the central research question describes how the present is conceptualized in comparison to the past. Traditionally, the narrative is shaped by those in power and influences a dominant ideology. In this context, the relationship or role of art education is considered in the conceptualization or crafting of historical narrative. It seeks to uncover how art education may enforce, align with, break from, and/or reform history, and/or our ideas of how history unfolds. It is not necessarily a presentation of the history of art education, but of art education as an influence on doing history. This is a slight variation from a practice of art history which positions art(works/ists), rather than art education/educators, as in relationship to, as shaping, and as shaped by history. Although, I will first turn to an example from art history, landscape painting, to clarify what the central research question is asking and provide some framing of historical and theoretical themes within this dissertation. In the following section, I will attempt a brief, non-comprehensive unfolding of the genre of landscape painting as it shapes historical narrative.

**Beyond Picturesque Scenery**

Landscapes, as a genre rather than backgrounds for history paintings, became popular in the Netherlands in the 1500s as more people became landowners of small plots of real estate. The region was experiencing a change from Catholicism to Protestantism and a rise in capitalism as well. Ann Jensen Adams (2002) argues the function of landscape paintings, which were plentiful and affordable in the 1600s Netherlands, was to “naturalize” controversial subjects (like religion, politics, and money). She argues the power of images, such as landscapes, are their ability to provide viewers “a sense of affiliation with or difference from others, an individual identity in relation to a variety of communally held identities” (Jensen Adams, 2002, p. 66). This argument demonstrates how artwork or objects such as landscape paintings influence not only individual viewers, but also creates groupings of viewers. To elaborate, landscapes as visual culture create a we through a shared aesthetic. Nature and the commons, including land, trees and plants, rocks, natural water sources, etc., are thought to belong to all and, therefore, not take race, class, gender, religion, or other such domains into account. In other words, nature as the commons is perceived as neutral. Representations of a local commons create a we which is also imagined to be neutral. The neutral we is formed by a shared aesthetic and distinguishes the we from others.

The landscape painting genre further developed as the British Empire expanded its colonial
rule (see Büttner, 2006 and McAleer, n.d.). Landscapes served as neutralizers for domestic English politics (Bermingham, 2002) and to homogenize empire (Auerbach, 2004). In this way, landscapes became an influential part of politics from which traditional historical narrative is constructed (Burke, 1992, 2001; Bolin et al., 2000; Munslow, 2010; Garnet 2015a). In the United States, landscape representation became a source of developing national identity and justification for expansive colonization (Daniels, 1993; Miller, 1993; Snyder, 2002). The quote by Frances K. Pohl (2012) provides a succinct interpretation:

Through displays of the heroic wilderness or the cultivated landscape, American artists attempted to formulate an image of nationhood that accommodated God’s wonders while at the same time promoting the expropriation and exploitation of the land crucial to the expansionist plans of America’s political and industrial elite (Pohl, 2012, p. 141).

This quote illustrates how the connection can be made between landscape art and historical narrative. W. J. T. Mitchell (2002) argues landscape is a verb, “a process by which social and subjective identities are formed” (p. 1). The question then is not: what is the history of landscape painting? but: how do landscape paintings influence history? This is what I am asking of art education. How does art education shape historical narrative?

**Art Education as Shaped By or Shaper Of**

Some art education historians have asked similar questions. For example, in “Art Education as Social Production,” Kerry Freedman (1987) presents four intertwined historical strands of art education’s perceived role in influencing culture and history within systems of education. The strands include: (1) art education to promote labor of the lower classes for industrial needs, (2) art education to support middle class values and beliefs as a leisure time activity, (3) art education as a social tool to develop moral character and aesthetic taste of individuals, (4) art education to promote creative self-expression, child development, and health. By presenting these threads, Freedman connects them to larger historical shifts in ideologies within society. She points to art education’s history within these four strands as continuing to influence the way art education, particularly in schools, continues to be conceptualized through curriculum. Her work suggests the role of art education shifts with historical narratives as influenced by changes in history, but also that it acts as a cultural tool to promote and support shifting ideologies.

Donald Soucy (1990) makes an argument similarly aligned to Freedman’s (1987) observation
in his essay “A History of Art Education Histories.” He positions art education as having a “unique role in the process by which culture transmits itself across generations” (Soucy, 1990, as cited in Bailyn, 1960, p. 12 & 16). If art and education transmit culture, then they may influence cultural history, thus shaping historical narrative. The nature of art education may be to enforce cultural ideology through visual culture, teaching styles, or subjects taught. For example, many of the chapters in Revitalizing History edited by Paul Bolin and Ami Kantawala (2017) uncover histories of women and African American art educators whose practices subverted hegemonic and authoritarian education; as a consequence, they were, until recently, placed in the margins of art education history (see also Bolin et al., 2000). Their efforts to not enforce cultural ideology in addition to their racialized and gendered status positioned them as outsiders in art education.

One complicated example from Revitalizing History is Elise Chevalier’s (2017) research on the art teaching practice of Dorothy Dunn at the Santa Fe Indian School in the 1930s. Dunn, a White art teacher, “sought to expose the fallacies of assimilation” in her art education program for Indigenous students by insisting students create all artworks in Native American aesthetics (p. 86). Dunn’s intention was to break with the visual/cultural ideology of the dominant Western art education aesthetics. However, as Chevalier (2017) rightly points out, “Dunn’s desire to foster a uniquely Native American style may have restricted her understanding of the authentic in her students’ work” (p. 86). The example demonstrates art education’s role as shaped by and shaper of history. On the one hand, art education was shaped by a dominant Western aesthetic which Dunn recognized and attempted to subvert. In doing so through her art teaching practices, art education became a shaper of the Santa Fe Indian School’s Studio program and what came to be associated as its students’ Native American aesthetic. Dunn’s successor and former student Geronima Cruz-Montoya continued to build the art education program, encouraging Indian Art aesthetics, and producing successful artists (see Shutes & Mellick, 1996). The example is complicated, because despite Dunn’s attempts to subvert assimilation, her use of art education enforced a White perspective on what is considered traditional Native American aesthetics which her students were expected to perform in their artwork.

Joni Acuff (2013) critiques and offers pedagogical solutions to disrupt the Eurocentric, White master narrative presented as the history of art education (see also Acuff et al., 2012). In “Discursive Underground,” Acuff (2013) writes, “Art educators need to begin to interrogate and consider how art education plays a role (or fails to play a role) in delivering such dynamic, complex educational opportunities” (p. 220). She advocates for a re-transcribing of the master narrative history.
of art education through using critical multiculturalism as well as an awareness that art education itself has the ability to frame and re-frame its history.

Although, many art education historians write around this question as how art education is shaped by outside histories (of politics or broader educational history) rather than an active shaper of. For example, in A History of Art Education, prominent art education historian Arthur Efland (1990a) concludes, “Throughout the century art education was strongly influenced by ideas emanating from general education as a whole” (p. 262). Efland (1990a, 1990b), writes about changes in perspectives and philosophies in educational history, or streams, which he identifies as: romantic idealism, expressionism, and reconstructionism. Particularly in the United States, the streams shift between “liberal and conservative forces that parallel the larger drama in American society” (Efland, 1990b, p. 117). The history of education shifts in this way (in the United States) as education policy changes with election cycles and broader political leanings. Efland goes on to claim that such streams are neither fully liberal or conservative, but each promotes its own political-leaning outlook. The streams flow together on some occasions. They do not dissolve but reemerge under different names throughout historical narratives. Efland presents the streams as broader sweeping changes of philosophy in culture and how art education is shaped with them.

In her paper “From the Aesthetic Movement to the Arts and Crafts Movement,” Mary Ann Stankiewicz (1992) demonstrates how art education was shaped by contrasts within the two movements. She states that her “goal is to attend to aesthetic as well as economic factors of influence on art education” (p. 165). Stankiewicz reminds us of the arts’ role in promoting taste and in the creation and manufacturing and consumption of goods in the late nineteenth century. Art education’s purpose was to supply lower- and middle-classes with knowledge of the “correct look and style” (p. 167), which emulated upper-class preferences, so that they would be better, more informed consumers. The Aesthetic Movement though, Stankiewicz argues, focused on the superiority of beauty over “wealth and all virtues,” but nonetheless relied on the possession of fine objects as a signifier for “moral and spiritual superiority” (p. 168). Thus, market demands determine the role of art education. Teasing out this history, art education is both a utilized tool within the movements and shaped by their perspectives.

In The History of American Art Education, Peter Smith (1996) emphasizes the importance of recognizing the influence of broader historical narratives on art education history. Instead of a history focused on “well-recognized” art educators and major debates within the field, Smith pushes art education historians to consider the “intellectual, historical, economic, or political currents” (p.
which shape the individuals and debates. Smith encourages art education historical researchers to consider the context so that their work is not anachronistic.

Smith (1996) draws attention to Clyde Watson whom he interviewed for The History of American Art Education. Smith (1996) claims Watson promoted a dismantling approach to art education which would require “teachers, artists, critics, and historians – the whole art world – to ask what assumptions underlay all their talk and all their actions...not a change in rhetoric or activities...[but]...to build new foundations” (p. 203). Through Watson’s words, Smith offers the suggestion that art education should not be relegated as permanently affected by outside circumstance and instead be recognized as having a role of affect. To recognize this, new foundations must be established which dismantle how art education is discussed and the types of activities it is considered to include. This intriguing proposition is not fully taken up in Smith’s text, but I will return to it later in a discussion of the work of Gaztambide-Fernández (2013) who proposes a rhetoric of cultural production to replace a rhetoric of effects. The rhetoric of effects aligns with the underlying assumptions that art education is supportive rather than active.

Patricia M. Amburgy (1990) offers a historical reason for art education’s perceived role as acted upon, supportive, and subordinate. In “Culture for the Masses,” Amburgy (1990) discusses how art education in the eighteenth-century United States experienced a psychologizing which she historically unfolds as the separation of art education from work (as industrialization overtook the Arts and Crafts Movement) and from morality (as “modern work evolved into forms that could bear increasingly less moral scrutiny”) (p. 108). Amburgy (1990) goes on to demonstrate how the progressive movement in education created a new paradigm for art education, which continued to separate art from “moral knowledge, skilled-craft work, and control over one’s own labor” (p. 113) in favor of personal expression and child-centered development. The psychologizing of art and art education essentially “rendered it harmless, making it irrelevant to both the social realities of the modern workplace and the social ideals of a democracy” (Amburgy, 1990, p. 113). This kind of shift in perspective portrays art as unquestionably good (particularly for children’s self-expression) and harmless (to systems of labor and capitalism). Amburgy’s argument of innocuous psychologizing shifts art education to a position which is more influenced by the outside streams (Efland, 1990a) than an influence onto them. Arts education then takes up a supportive role in the education of children and is perceived and advocated for as an intrinsic good.

Elliot Eisner (2001) demonstrates how art education is positioned in a supportive role in the microcosm of schools. In order to maintain its existence within schools and districts, art
education must adapt to the metrics (standardization) and language (of proof and accountability) of subjects deemed as more important while showing its function of support (the ability of the arts to raise test scores, etc.). Historically, the field of art education often considers its position within a broader narrative, pushing against a purely supportive role. Eisner’s (2001) title asks, “Should we create a new art education?” In other words, should art education become visual culture studies instead of creative self-expression or a joyous interaction with art media? After debating the points, Eisner argues for a combination of the two by integrating visual culture into art education practice rather than putting visual culture studies in its place. He writes, “Education in our schools should look more like the arts, rather than the arts looking more like our schools” (Eisner, 2001, p. 9).

This article highlights a historical philosophy of the role of art education: that it has great potential to influence the schools, but its reality is art education is influenced upon by the schools. Though he is an advocate for art education, Eisner’s (2001) question in the article title asks how the field of art education can or should change (to accommodate school). This question can be argued as demonstrative of the psychologizing of art education that Amburgy (1990) discusses. It shows that art education recognizes itself as acted upon (within the micro-example of schools and the macro-example of historical narrative) to the point of dismissal of a question about how art education might act upon or influence them.

To make the point clearer, I would like to turn to arguments made outside of the field of art education by Miranda Joseph (2002) about community and by Claire Bishop (2012) about participatory art. Both of these authors look critically at their subjects and unpack their perceived roles as unoffensive and universally good. They critically examine how their subjects act as supportive of a capitalist system which renders their existence necessary and harmless. As the reader recalls the example of the organization of CARE within the Bank of Charleston building, it can be considered through the work of Bishop and Joseph which creates parallels for understanding art education as psychologized (Amburgy, 1990) as good and invisibly used as support of larger systems.

In Against the Romance of Community, Joseph (2002) positions the rhetoric around and function of “community” as supplementary to capitalism. As she unfolds her argument, she posits a metonymic relationship between nonprofits (and other forms of volunteer organizations) and “community.” In other words, community is created by and imagined as the recipients of the (often voluntary) labor of nonprofits. These organizations function to serve where capitalistic systems have failed. She is not arguing for us to see community-based organizations or communities which arise from organizations as bad or negative, but to question our assumption that they are unequivocally
good by recognizing how they support a system which renders them necessary. Joseph (2002) writes, “Nonprofits often articulate desires not met by capitalism for specific goods—religion, education, health care, arts, social services, or social change—but also often for an alternative mode of production, namely, gift exchange” (p. 72). Instead of dismantling it, questioning it, or challenging it, nonprofits as communities ultimately support the system of capitalism through gifts such as care and voluntary labor.

In *Artificial Hells*, Bishop’s (2012) argument aligns with Joseph’s point that *community* (often in the form of nonprofits) supports the system of capitalism by filling in the holes left by capitalism including social services like education, childcare, healthcare. However, Bishop takes it one step further by claiming that the *social inclusion agenda* is less about community and even more about the individual accepting the responsibility for upholding neoliberal capitalism. As a result, “all members of society [should/will] be self-administering, fully functioning consumers who do not rely on the welfare state and who can cope with a deregulated privatised world” (p. 14). In her argument, participatory art is a tool of the social inclusion agenda. For Bishop (2012), the history of participatory art is one which suggests that art is the next responsible entity to improve societies after “social agencies” fail; art is “obliged to step in” (p. 275). However, Bishop argues, art and socio-political objectives should never be considered as interchangeable. Instead, they should always be in tension with one another. Art can and should be an instrument not only of social critique, but also of experimentation, preventing art from becoming a structural part of society.

The arguments from Joseph (2002) and Bishop (2012) contextualize the dangers of Eisner’s (2001) positioning of art education as accommodating and supportive of the broader school system. It sheds light on the historical *psychologizing* of art education that Amburgy (1990) describes and presents critical questions about the historically perceived role of art education. The narrative of the history of art education may be written as primarily and inescapably shaped by outside influences such as capitalism and neoliberalism or *streams* (Efland, 1990a, 1990b) of changes in sociopolitical thought. The broader question here is whether art education history allows for a narrative of art education as shaper/narrator.

Gaztambide-Fernández (2013) argues for a new perspective on the arts within education boldly titling his work, “Why the arts don’t do anything.” He notes works of art education scholars such as Eisner (2001, 2002) and Siegesmund (1998) as advocating for the arts by presenting them as instrumentalist approaches which do an action for an outside purpose, mainly in support of schools and schooling. This rhetoric, Gaztambide-Fernández (2013) claims, flattens the complexity of
the social and cultural contexts within which arts activities unfold. He argues for “a more robust language” to understand art education beyond its position as “a priori both good and predictable” (p. 214). For Gaztambide-Fernández (2013), the arts are a “discursive construct” which requires reflection on “the complex ways in which discourses of the arts are mobilized to particular ends” (p. 215).

To illustrate this point of the mobilization of arts, Richard Florida (2014) boasts of the arts in urban neighborhoods as key to boosting economics by attracting a creative class of residents to an area. Florida’s (2014) work shapes much of the rhetoric of creativity, including the arts, as tools for the (economic) revitalization of places, specifically urban places. In art education, Amelia Kraehe and Tyson Lewis (2019, also Herman et al., 2017) have explored such rhetoric relating it to the arts in urban schools and as advocacy for policy reforms for arts education programs. Tyler Denmead (2019) critically positions the mobilization of arts within the rhetoric of creative cities as a “racist expression of urban life, one that reproduces racial inequalities particularly for young people of color” (p. 225). The mobilization of the arts and arts education into creative cities and, in alignment with the earlier point on landscapes, demonstrates how, instead of objects of neutrality, they were deployed to circulate a message which normalizes and continues to enact imperial colonialism. Considering the arts as a discursive construct, the question “what do arts do?”, may become “what are the arts imagined to do?”

Through this framing, a “rhetoric of effects” becomes what Gaztambide-Fernández (2013) calls a “rhetoric of cultural production” (p. 216). It asks what the context is and how it shapes the experience of creativity, learning, or schooling (or history). Art historian Lynda Nead (1992) argues the female body, in art as the nude or otherwise daily life, is always mediated by culture, “always already in representation” (p. 16). The body is “inscribed with symbolic value” from culture and social formations from which it cannot be outside of (Nead, 1992, p. 16). A viewer of the body cannot separate viewing from a socio-cultural influenced gaze. The body itself cannot be unmediated by culture. For Gaztambide-Fernández (2013), “all educational experiences” are like Nead’s argument of the female body; they, always, “are situated in social and cultural contexts that demand a deep understanding of culture” (p. 220). Gaztambide-Fernández (2013) explains the rationale for the significance of recognizing this situatedness:

My intention is to illuminate and interrupt how the concept of the arts shapes the way we think and talk about [the broader landscape of cultural practices, processes, and products] in order to provoke a different way of thinking, one that perhaps requires that we abandon
the concept altogether (p. 215).

In order to understand the historical narrative of art education, its always-already-culturally situated-ness, its supportive role, and its psychologized status must be considered. These historical narratives and theories are taken into account in my central research question, how does art education shape historical narrative? By considering the historical concept of art education as a *rhetoric of cultural production* (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2013), I seek to understand how art education can then be implemented as a shaping device for historical narrative. To approach this broad question, I focus specifically on a rural arts education organization, the Charleston Arts and Revitalization Effort (CARE).

CARE’s mission of economic redevelopment, community building, and historic preservation relies on arts education. Inspired by Joseph’s (2002) *Against the Romance of Community*, I constructed three supporting questions to help frame the study: What are the conditions and contexts that produced CARE? What is CARE performing? What is CARE producing? These questions allow consideration of how arts education is used for CARE’s mission and for shaping historical narrative. Not only are the conceptual contexts of the history of art education influential in this study, but also the geographical and historical contexts of CARE, the town of Charleston, Mississippi, and the surrounding Tallahatchie County. Therefore, I turn to cultural–historical geography to further frame this dissertation research.

**Cultural-Historical Geography to Break with the Linear**

Cultural-Historical Geography (CHG) is a combination of two subsets in the fields of cultural geography, culture studies, historical geography, and history. Cultural-historical geography has roots in anthropology, the social sciences, and what is often referred to as human geography. This heavily interdisciplinary combination of fields makes it difficult to pinpoint an agreed upon definition of the practice. In this section, I will provide a working definition for cultural–historical geography as I am conceptualizing and applying it within this dissertation project. I attempt to situate cultural–historical geography as the lens through which I am crafting and exploring *historical narrative* in the central research question, how does art education shape historical narrative. Earlier, I defined historical narrative as the conceptualization of the past traditionally shaped by dominant ideology and those in power as influential on how the present is perceived in relationship to it.

Part of this dissertation research is a construction of historical narrative for the context in
which CARE is situated. This is the foundation for the first supporting question, what are the conditions and contexts that produced CARE? The other supporting questions consider the historical narrative of CARE as told by participants through oral history and by visual and material culture. In the construction of these narratives, geographical place as specific and significant context is paramount in understanding the culture which is produced from it. That is where cultural-historical geography contributes to the research.

When the CHG field was in the early stages of conceptualization, geographer Carl O. Sauer (1941) claimed, “The culture area, as a community with a way of living, is therefore a growth on a particular ‘soil’ or home, an historical and geographical expression” (p. 8). Sauer tightly weaves the connection between cultural studies, anthropology, human geography, and history to argue for the position of significance of specific place, soil or home as he described it, within the production of culture. For Sauer (1941), the personality of place (culture) can be best approached systemically through the materials of the place (homes, roads, and commercial structures, as well as fields, woods, mines and “productive land” (p. 7). He goes on to argue that the origins of the material objects are essential to their understanding and therefore require historical reconstruction. Thus, the field of historical geography is formed.

More recently, historical geographers have argued for a consideration of not only the material culture as objects of study, but also social relationships which are connected to geography. In the introduction to Key Concepts in Historical Geography, John Morrissey, David Nally, Ulf Strohmayer, and Yvonne Whelan (2014) place core importance within the doing of historical geography on “deep asymmetries of both human history and historical representation” (p. 2) in order to closely examine marginalized groups, the lives of “ordinary people,” and the transposition of power and authority onto the present. There are many cultural-historical geographers whose work examines issues of race and ethnicity (Livingstone, 1991, 2002; Bonnett, 1997; Nally, 2009, 2014; Amin, 2010), gender and feminism (Rose & Ogborn, 1988; Blunt & Rose, 1994; Massey, 1994; Duncan, 1996; Brown, 2000; Bondi & Davidson, 2003), class (Gregory, 1984; Thrift & Williams, 1987; Smith, 2008; Strohmayer, 2014), religion (Kong, 1990; Livingstone, 1994; Holloway & Valins, 2002; Brace et al., 2006), and art (Mackintosh, 2005; DeSilvey, 2007; Hannum & Rhodes, 2018). Further, Eve Tuck and Marcia McKenzie (2015) argue for critical place inquiry which prioritizes a deep understanding of place as it unfolds through space, lived experience, and more-than-human inhabitants or that which “fully considers the implications and significance of place in lived lives” (p. 1). Their work expands the field beyond a study of material culture and recognizes the potential pluralities of creating historical
narratives which critically examine power structures in relation to geographical place. The work of historical geographers uncovers context which Ulf Strohmayer (2014) explains, “has been objectified and ‘naturalized’ in ensuing historical narratives, whether they were about capitalism, globalism, or colonialism” (p. 97).

Strohmayer’s quote about the work of cultural-historical geographers seems to closely parallel the push for a rhetoric of cultural production argued for by Gaztambide-Fernández (2013). This suggests that CHG is useful for critically examining the role of art education in historical narratives. Few art educators and art education historians have recognized cultural-historical geography in their work. Donald Soucy (1990) calls for “more attention” to be paid to “geographic concerns” (p. 15) as well as rural data. Blandy and Bolin (2003) give a brief nod to cultural geography by citing it in a list originally crafted by T. J. Schlereth (1985) of fields related to material culture studies in art education. Most research in art education related to geography is typically in regards to art teaching practice in the form of psychogeography (Gude, 2004; Pérez Miles & Libersat, 2016; Phillips, 2004; Springgay, 2011; Springgay & Truman, 2018), place-based learning (Bertling, 2015; Bertling & Rearden, 2018; Graham, 2007; Manifold, 1999a, 1999b; Rearden & Bertling, 2019; Rowson Love & Goldberg, 2003; Sanders-Bustle & Williams, 2013; Villeneuve & Sheppard, 2009), and ecological advocacy (Bertling, 2013; Dean & Bertling, 2020; Bertling & Moore, 2020; Blandy et al., 1998; Blandy & Fenn, 2012; Blandy & Hoffman, 1993; Hicks & King, 2007). These studies demonstrate that while there is overlap in the field of art education, geography, and a relationship to land and place, little has been written about the relationship in art education and cultural-historical geography.

Landscape painting and land art emerge within art education scholarship within discussions of ecological advocacy and place-based art education. A few Art Education instructional resources (Krulick, 1995; Moats & Wodzicki, 2000; Reese, 1997) and SchoolArts lesson plans (Frank, 1992; Paradis & Phelps, 2018) promote landscapes as useful for art historical and art technique lessons, but only a few engage in a deeper discussion about the cultural and historical significance of landscape and geographical place. One example includes an article in Art Education in which Molly Neves and Mark Graham (2018) delve into elementary lessons on landscape and the students’ sense of identity. The piece is full of student artwork exploring relationship to place. Otherwise, in this vein of landscapes in art education literature, the article “Art Education and the Aesthetics of Land Use in the Age of Ecology” by Charles Garoian (1998) is one of the most conceptually applicable to this study.

In the article, Garoian (1998) describes a pedagogy of landscape as metaphorical illustrations
of the “historical objectification and stereotyping of the environment through landscape art” (p. 244). Through an analysis including pictorial space, linear perspective, and the sublime landscape, Garoian (1998) aims to build an empathetic pedagogy of ecological care through dismantling the “antipathetic” (p. 245) Westernized notion of landscape. To do so, he argues, would be to remove the “sanctioned authority of Western culture over nature” (Garoian, 1998, p. 245). For example, Garoian (1998) argues that linear perspective is metaphorical for the Westernized objectification of landscape, because it places the viewer as surveyor, present within a fixed scene whose gaze is returned by the “doubling back” (p. 247) of the vanishing point. The vanishing point moves the viewer into the scene and back to the self by following the line of perspective. In the context of this study, rather than imagining it as viewing a landscape from a linear perspective, cultural-historical geography provides broader contextualization, breaks with the linear, and allows for a more caring than distant surveyor approach.

CHG’s combined interests in place, material culture, and critical consideration of historical narrative provide a model framework for my dissertation project. Within my central and supporting research questions, each of these factors is taken into consideration. In the first supporting question, what are the conditions and contexts that produced CARE?, historical geography provides a lens to construct a historical narrative of the geographical place and culture in which CARE is situated. Through CHG, a historical narrative can be woven which takes histories of indigenous peoples, agriculture, flooding, timber industry, race relations, religion, recreation, and the arts into consideration in the discussion of specific place(s) – Charleston, Mississippi and Tallahatchie County in the Mississippi Delta. Using CHG, I argue that the cultural-historical geographical contexts are significant influences on CARE. Understanding this influence and the role of art education within CARE is crucial to attempting to answer the central research question, how does art education shape historical narrative? A “key tradition” of historical geography is its “ability to situate localized research in broader, comparative contexts” (Morrissey et al., 2014, p. 3). This specificity of a study of CARE through the lens of cultural-historical geography may provide knowledge about the broader context of art education as a tool for shaping historical narrative.

**Care All the Way Down**

In the context of this dissertation research, cultural-historical geography situates place as significant. As the location of the Charleston Arts and Revitalization Effort (CARE) in Charleston,
Mississippi in Tallahatchie County is in the US South, it faces unique challenges, including perceived deficits and stereotypes of the region and people who inhabit it. This study relies on narratives, place, and people sharing their stories; therefore, I attempt to frame the study design and interactions between myself as researcher and all involved as matters of care, through an anti-deficit, anti-stereotypical approach. The supporting questions, what is CARE performing? and what is CARE producing? rely on oral histories and visual and material culture for answers. To conduct oral histories requires a relationship of trust which is founded on care. To analyze visual and material culture, which in this case includes the personal artwork of people involved in CARE, requires care. In this section, I rely on literature of care to position the theoretical lens as well as philosophical approach to this study.

Carol Gilligan (1982) and Nel Noddings (1984, 2013) were among the first feminist scholars to bring matters of care into critical discourse. In their work, care is an ethical consideration which is founded in the “psychological logic of relationships” (Gilligan, 1982, p. 73) rather than a moral or ethical judgment based on shared principles, norms, and values of a larger group or society. Caring is personal. Noddings (1984, 2013) notes that relationships with others is an “ontologically basic” (p. 4) human experience requiring both parties (the one-caring and the cared-for) to contribute for the relationship to be caring. This means that while relationships are a basic part of being, not all relationships involve care. For Noddings (1984, 2013), one way to form a caring relationship is to practice “feeling with” (p. 30) another person, to listen carefully to their experiences and not interject your own interpretation of what the other is sharing.

For this dissertation, I use oral history as a method to inform my supporting questions, particularly the question, what is CARE performing? For a researcher to engage in an oral history interview is to enter into a relationship with a narrator and therefore requires care. Relationship-building work happens before, during, and after the oral history interview is conducted. For this reason, approaching the study with care all the way down (Haraway, 2003, 2016; Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017) is crucial. Without prematurely unfolding the methodological process of this research project, I would like to illustrate care all the way down by briefly describing how it appears in the before, during, and after stages of the oral history interview and how it relates to literature on care.

**Before**

There are many factors influencing the relationship between the oral history narrators and
me, the researcher, before we meet. Here I will describe two. The first is the highly researched relationship of power between the researcher and the narrator. The other is the situatedness of place within culture and history as an initial and ongoing test in trust.

Oral historians (Grele, 1991; Portelli, 1991; Yow, 1995, 1997; Abrams, 2016; Perks & Thompson, 2016; deSouza & Latha Belliappa, 2018) are among the numerous scholars who discuss the relationship of power between researcher and subjects. Lynn Abrams (2016) writes “At every stage of the [oral history] process – from transcription and interpretation to publication – the researcher effectively holds the power, whatever one’s intentions to maintain a collaborative relationship with one’s subject” (p. 165). From this quote by Abrams, it is important to note that the power dynamic is not exclusively in the before, but all throughout the process. To recognize it at the outset and throughout is a form of care, because embedded within care is an effort to recognize positions of power and attempt to balance it.

Unique to this dissertation project is the consideration of cultural-historical geography. It is a present factor in the pre-interview stages of relationship building, because an understanding of the region’s cultural-historical geography may be influenced by stereotypes and deficit narratives. Deficit narratives define a region by its problems rather than its assets. They highlight deficiencies and position the subject of the narrative as in need of saving by an outsider. I will elaborate with a few examples. The historical and continuing stereotypes of ignorance, stupidity, backwardness, dirtiness, and the like are often placed on poor Southern White populations by an elite class of wealthier Whites in the South and North who imagine themselves morally, culturally, and intellectually superior (Cash, 1941/1991; Huber, 1995; Isenberg, 2016; Wray, 2006). In a broader look at shared cultural norms, multiple studies illustrate this phenomenon including Karen Hamilton’s (2009) dissertation, Y’all Think We’re Stupid: Deconstructing Media Stereotypes of The American South and Ariel Miller’s (2013) The Construction of Southern Identity Through Reality TV: A Content Analysis of Here Comes Honey Boo Boo, Duck Dynasty and Buckwild. Stereotypes and deficit narratives greatly affect Indigenous, African American, Chinese American, Mexican American, and immigrant populations in the South historically and continually. However, White supremacist culture renders these plights nearly invisible compared to popular media about and catering to White populations (Robertson, 2015; Wallace, 1990; Wong, 1996). In addition to real, historical barriers, the Southern stigma impacts those from the region in many ways. For example, Jason Clark, Cassie Eno, and Rosanna Guadagno (2011) present research demonstrating the negative effects of intellectual performance on those who identify as Southern. Such research can be connected with the work of Richard
Valencia (2010) proving deficit thinking significantly impacts students’ (particularly Black and Latinx students) learning and educational outcomes.

The deficits seem to compound in narratives of Mississippi. The negative label for Mississippi is so palpable that repeatedly attributed to former president Lyndon B. Johnson is the quote, “There’s America, there’s the South, and then there’s Mississippi” (spoken by Lawrence Guyot in Spies of Mississippi, 2013; see also Grant, 2015, p. 12). The quote others the South from the United States and then further others Mississippi from it all. Historically and in the contemporary moment, Mississippi is a hotbed of deficit narratives on issues such as healthcare (Lower Mississippi Delta Nutritional Intervention Research Consortium, 2004; Jack, 2007; Zoellner, et al., 2011; Sison et al., 2013), education (Poliakoff et al., 2020; Sansing, 1990; Span, 2009), civil rights (Andrews, 2001, 2004; Dittmer, 1994; Hale, 2016), and poverty (Folwell, 2020; Ownby, 1999; Wright Austin, 2006) all of which are intersected with systemic racism (Moses & Cobb, 2001; Smith, 2005). In comparison with other states, Mississippi tends to be statistically worse-off in these issues as well. From a state ranking in U. S. News & World Report, Mississippi is ranked 48 of 50 overall. It is number 50 in healthcare, 48 in economy, 46 in education. Though, interestingly enough, it ranks as 11 of 50 in the natural environment category (“Where Does Mississippi Place in the U.S. News Best States Rankings?,” 2020).

As if this weight weren’t heavy enough, Mississippi is further geographically divided by culture and historical narrative to make the Delta into an “other.” To Lyndon B. Johnson’s attributed quote, Martha Foose in Dispatches from Pluto is said to have added “and then there’s the [Mississippi] Delta” (Grant, 2015, p. 12). Southern regional identity historian, James Cobb (1992) labeled the Mississippi Delta as “the most Southern place on earth” in his book of the same title. His argument is the culture and history which makes the South (with particularly heavy consideration given to the history of chattel slavery) is most concentrated in the Mississippi Delta, which in the state of Mississippi is eighteen counties along the northwestern part of the state comprised of the deltas of the Mississippi and Yazoo Rivers. I will further explore the history of the Mississippi Delta as it pertains to CARE, Charleston, and Tallahatchie County later in the dissertation. For now, its mention serves to underscore the heavy layers of cultural-historical geography present in the before-interview stage. Negative and deficit narratives of the South, Mississippi, and the Delta compound with the power dynamic of outsider-researcher before the initial interview-recruitment call is even made. It creates the potential for mistrust and skepticism on the part of the narrator. For example, upon hearing about my project more than one Charleston local has asked with an air of bewilderment
why I would be interested in this place and CARE as an organization. “Here?!” they ask as they wrinkle their noses.

To build relationships requires an approach of care. I situate myself as an interviewer, careful to note that while I’m not from the Mississippi (Yazoo) Delta, I spent most of my life about three hours north in the broader Lower Mississippi River Delta in West Tennessee. Situating myself as a researcher and within the context of this research project is a significant and ongoing act of care, because it resists the normalization of power dynamics present within the research by making it visible. It is of key importance to theoretically framing this dissertation work through a feminist lens as a Matter of Care (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017). The process continues during the interview.

**During**

Once a narrator has agreed to an oral history interview to share their knowledge about the founding and ongoing work of CARE, the process of care continues. The power dynamic of researcher-narrator is still present. By this point, they have agreed to be interviewed which offers some sense of trust on the narrator’s part, even if it’s still a cautious trust. The negative and deficit narratives remain ever-present. With semi-structured interview questions, the narrator has more power to speak to the topics and stories of their choice. Some narrators interject caveats like, “I don’t want this to be used out of context” and “don’t twist up my words on this.” These occur in the pre-interview stage as we are developing trust and sometimes during the interview if the narrator is attempting to articulate something that may be considered controversial or complex, for example, issues of race, poverty, and education. Our developing “ontologically basic” relationship (Noddings, 1984, 2013, p. 3), meaning it is a fact of human existence, becomes the context for an epistemological discussion as I ask about the founding of and reasons for CARE.

Sharing this narrative is an act of trust, because it is a sharing of ownership of the narrative. A part of the power dynamic of researcher-narrator includes the potential to (mis)represent or (mis)quote or (mis-)contextualize the interview. CARE is well-loved; it is a community created organization with a larger mission, to use art education for economic redevelopment, community building, and historic preservation. By sharing the narrative of CARE with a researcher, the volunteers and creators are relinquishing control of the narrative. To interview with care requires listening as feeling with (Noddings, 1984, 2013). It means not interrupting or imposing as a researcher, but an openness to feel with and understand how the narrator is shaping the narrative of CARE. It is a recognition of
the threat of deficit narratives and the imbalance of power and “staying with the trouble” (Haraway, 2016) nonetheless. *Staying with the trouble* is being “truly present” and entwining with “unfinished configurations of places, times, matters, meanings” (Haraway, 2016, p. 1).

During an interview, the researcher demonstrates care by feeling with the narrator and recognizing the situatedness and the unfinishedness of the narrative within the larger context of history and living. This may be enacted through careful listening, thoughtful questioning or prompting, and respectful engagement with the narrator’s shared story. Paul Thompson and Joanna Bornat (2017) advise the researcher to “keep showing that you are interested throughout the interview” (p. 323). The authors remind narrators to situate themselves in the interview context and recognize social class, race, and gender as potentially unspoken stereotypes within the social interaction, the basic ontology. Importantly, the interview experience done well and with care, should conclude peacefully without [emotional] harm to either party (Cave & Sloan, 2014). Puig de la Bellacasa (2017) reminds us, “listening, like speaking is not neutral” (p. 58). To listen with care, she argues, is “an active process of intervening in the count of whom and what is ratified as concerned; it affects the representation of things, adding mediation to mediations” (de la Bellacasa, 2017, p. 58). In other words, while listening with care as a researcher during an interview, it is important to keep in mind the situatedness of both researcher and narrator and the influential roles of race, class, gender, etc. within this situatedness.

**After**

In the *after* stage the power imbalance is still present. If the original interview is understood as ontological and produced by the narrator and the interviewer, then through mediation, interpretation and (re)presentation of the interview, the researcher creates a second ontology of the interview. While the narrator has an opportunity to edit and revise the transcript of the interview, they have relinquished the control of their narrative to the researcher to use as data. The analysis of the narrative and the decisions made in the representation of it provide a mediated experience which attempts to preserve the integrity of the initial interview. Due to the impossibility of recreating the interview, it becomes enfolded in the research as a second ontology. Therefore, a care all the way down approach considers the material-matter or visual and textual manifestation of the interview as a second ontology. How the interview is contextualized, what is used, emphasized, or removed from the transcript, how it is positioned alongside other interviews, and other considerations necessitate care.
There is a temptation at this stage to rely on a progress narrative, a narrative of growth and positivity inherent to colonialist narratives (Haddour, 2000; Hemmings, 2010). Azzedine Haddour (2000) describes how colonialist narratives will present the view of the colonizer as continual progress while also excluding, flattening, and erasing the histories of the colonized, creating imagined superiority of the colonizer in the praise of its progress. Clare Hemmings (2010) explains that a progress narrative is positive to the point of enthusiasm and has a clear chronology. It establishes continual improvement without critically engaging with deficit narratives, other than to claim their position in the past or as something negative which has been overcome by positive change over time. Such enthusiasm in this narrative of positivity and progress may present the appearance of a caring approach; however, progress narratives become entangled with the real-imagined. The issue with progress narrative is a flattening of the past which relegates counternarratives and their challenge to dominant/master narratives to the margins and ignores embedded complexities. While there may be real and positive change occurring within the situation, the narrative of a clear, uncomplicated, linear path to progress is imagined.

In this study, an example of progress narrative might resemble something like a claim that CARE has solved all problems in Charleston or that before CARE there was despair and through the work of the organization, things have been completely improved. To be clear, my inquiry is not whether or not CARE has a positive, negative, or neutral effect on Charleston. Nor am I claiming that there is no positive, enthusiastic progress as a result of CARE. I am concerned with what organizations like CARE can teach us about the influence of art education on historical narrative. This means that after interviews, when shaping a second ontology of the material collection of oral histories and the basic ontological relationship, I intend on “staying with the trouble” (Haraway, 2016) as an approach, a Matter of Care (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017). It is an effort to not flatten the second ontology through a progress narrative, to recognize the unchronic (Portelli, 1991), non-linear unfolding of narrative, and to recognize how art education is threaded throughout.

**Throughout**

The temporal framing of ‘before-during-after’ helps to situate and specify what care might look like throughout the process of an oral history interview project. In actuality, however, approaching this research with care all the way down means it happens throughout the entire process of dissertating, of asking and answering the central and supporting research questions. It
is a *Matter of Care*. Matter of Care (MoCa) is used by Puig de la Bellacasa (2017) as a *doing* which not only thickens the layers of reality/study, it calls attention to devalued care labor through a *doing* which generates care. She situates MoCa in contrast to the modernist, dissection-based quest for purity labeled *Matter of Fact* by Bruno Latour (2004). Matter of Fact, Puig de la Bellacasa explains, overly relies on criticality and critique without making room for non-binary possibilities. *Matter of Concern*, also drawn from Latour (2014) by Puig de la Bellacasa is an in-between which changes a Matter of Fact critique by introducing concerns, and connoting “trouble, worry, and care” (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017, p. 25). A Matter of Care not only considers and is concerned with but *does* care within thinking and knowledge creation. It does not replace concern but enhances it through the doing. A Matter of Care all the way down means thinking throughout how to do care in the research. In the next chapter, I will describe my use of polyptych methodology (Garnet, 2015a, 2015b, 2017a, 2017b) which when contextualized within feminist theory, applicable methods, and analysis lends itself to an approach of care.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter I framed the central research question, how does art education shape historical narrative? I used the example of the landscape genre as an analogy for understanding the historiographical perception of art education. Like landscapes, art education appears or is initially imagined to be neutral. Upon critical review of its history and of the *rhetoric of effects* (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2013) with which it is discussed, art education may be understood as actively supporting larger systemic frameworks such as schools and schooling. However, recognizing the ability of art education to actively shape these frameworks, such as historical narratives, requires a shift towards a *rhetoric of cultural production* (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2013). This shift provides critical analysis to the field and unveils the perception of imagined neutrality.

For the purposes of this study, cultural-historical geography as a lens positions art education’s role in historical narrative alongside the real-imagined context. In other words, the construction of place [the Mississippi Delta, Tallahatchie County, Charleston, and CARE] through culture and historical narrative is taken into consideration to understand the intertwined operations of art education. To do so complicates a metaphorically linear perspective of history and place by offering a broader contextualization which requires a caring approach. Approaching through a lens of care is to continually situate and frame, both theoretically and in practice, relationships and the
representations of those relationships throughout the study. This blurred line between theory and methodology positions caring at the forefront. It offers a better understanding of the Charleston Arts and Revitalization Effort and its use of art education in relationship to caring for people and place in the process of shaping historical narrative. In the next chapter, I will discuss polyptych methodology as theorized by Dustin Garnet (2015a, 2015b, 2017a, 2017b) to unfold the approach of this study of CARE.
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This study utilizes polyptych methodology, a multifaceted methodological approach for historical research theorized by Dustin Garnet (2015a, 2015b, 2017a, 2017b). The diversity of methods within polyptych methodology are applied to the central research question, how does art education shape historical narrative? What unfolds is a better understanding of the phenomena within the specific context of the Charleston Arts and Revitalization Effort (CARE) in the rural town of Charleston, Mississippi. Three supporting questions inspired by Joseph’s (2002) Against the Romance of Community are used to organize the study and the methodology of the research. They include: What are the conditions and contexts that produced CARE? What is CARE performing? What is CARE producing? Polyptych methodology allows an approach to these questions about CARE that observes the potential pluralities of constructing historical narratives.

Potential pluralities is a term that I use in this research to mean the multiple possibilities for emergent historical narratives when interpreting data. Telling a story of history is a recognition that the story can be told in a variety of ways depending on the teller/researcher, the available data, the participants, the focus of the study, and many other factors. With each presented narrative, there is potential for infinitely more narratives. For example, some may focus on gender and others race; some may focus on neither. Others may present dates and names while others still focus on symbolism and culture, and so on. By historical narrative (White, 1972, McCullagh, 1987, Lemon, 1995), I mean the story/stories told about the past told by those in power which become a part of the dominant ideology. It shapes how we interpret the present and envision future events. Historical narrative influences what stories are told and how they are interpreted. It acts as a shaper of identity, as Liu and Hilton (2005) write, “History provides us with narratives that tell us who we are, where we came from and where we should be going” (p. 537). Historical narrative is a lens through which to perceive present phenomena as in-line with or breaking from interpretations of the past. In the case of CARE, this study asks how the organization conceptualizes itself and the work it does in order to understand how art education is used to shape historical narrative.

In this chapter, I unfold my use of polyptych methodology as it is used to answer the central research question while also considering my supporting questions. I define and clarify terms I use as a part of polyptych methodology as well as build upon gaps in Garnet’s work, namely the lack of recognition of feminist practices such as situating knowledge (Collins, 1990; Haraway, 1988;
Harding, 1986, 1992). I will present the methods that I used to collect data including archival research, oral history methods, visual and material culture collection, and arts-based research methods. Each of these methods inform the narrative of CARE presented in this dissertation and situate it within its historical, geographical, and political contexts. Each of the forms of data is analyzed through Applied Thematic Analysis (Guest et al., 2012). The analytical approach is explained within each data methodology section. I describe my approach as a matter of care (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017) which considers power dynamics between actors including researcher and participants within the methodology and analysis. The theoretical lens of a matter of care is combined with cultural-historical geography (Sauer, 1941; Morrissey et al., 2014) to recognize the centrality of history and place as well as the influential socio-historical structures of gender, race, and class.

Polyptych Methodology

Dustin Garnet (2015a, 2015b, 2017a, 2017b) conceptualized polyptych methodology as a metaphorical and methodological tool for situating the creative work of the historian. The method was designed in part for his dissertation, “A Storied History of Art Education: The Art Department at Central Technical School, 1892-2014,” as a solution for addressing the complexity and the plurality of narrative possibilities in history and for creating new histories (Bolin 1995, 2009). Garnet’s methodology builds from the work on historying of Greg Dening (2006) and Alan Munslow (2010). Below, I provide a brief overview of the concepts: polyptych, new histories, historying, and feminist theory including situated knowledges. Then, delve into a larger discussion of the use of the polyptych methodology in this research project.

Polyptych

The term polyptych is from art history and translates to mean “many folds” (Garnet, 2015a). The folds in the case of the polyptych object are literal as many polyptych objects such as altarpieces can be positioned either open or folded shut. Folds can also be understood as metaphorical or metaphysical (Deleuze, 1993) to mean points of (physical or metaphysical) contact for objects (like material culture) and ideas (such as historical narratives) which create meaning. Garnet uses the term and object as visual, architectural, and conceptual framework for his polyptych methodology. A well-known example of a polyptych artwork is the Ghent Altarpiece completed in 1432 by Jan van Eyck.
The altarpiece is constructed of a series of panels attached by hinges to a central, focal set of panels which allow the altarpiece to be displayed closed or opened to reveal the painted panels of the exterior or interior. When closed, the altarpiece consists of eight panels. The central set depicts an annunciation scene and includes an elevated view of a partial cityscape of Ghent from the window. The cityscape situates the local place as integral to the artwork and connected with the religious message of the piece. When opened, twelve panels painted with painstaking detail provide visual allegorical and metaphorical narratives from the Bible. The intricate detail in van Eyck’s painting provides specificity for the audience and a tool to connect the larger religious themes within the work.

Despite the elaborate detail of the panels, the artist does not dictate how viewers approach the work or shape the narratives presented in it. Each panel is its own narrative and each panel constructs parts of the overall narrative. Generally, the viewer’s eye is drawn to the center of the work, but the choice of how to approach the art is ultimately the viewer’s decision. In other words, there are multiple entry points and ways of looking from panel to panel that allow for a viewer to imagine and construct the narrative.

Garnet (2015b) writes that narrative connections between the panels of polyptychs “are
constructed by the viewer’s imagination in an in-between space, engaging the viewer as an active contributor or narrator” (p. 959). In this way, viewers approach polyptychs as historians approach their data, creating connections to the images/data depending on how they look at and relate to the work, and what they construct in their minds while looking at the work. Polyptychs are the visual example and architectural form of Garnet’s polyptych methodology, but the foundations of this thinking come from historical scholars and theorists of new histories and historying.

**New Histories**

Garnet (2015a) positions new histories (Bolin, 1995; Burke, 1992, 2001; Munslow, 2010; see also Himmelfarb, 1989) as the theoretical framing for polyptych methodology. For Garnet, traditional history attempts to appear empirical and objective in presenting singular, authoritative, [imperial] narratives of monumental events, dates, and actors (see also Burke, 1992, 2001; Munslow, 2010). New histories, however, recognize the plurality of history, resisting a singular narrative of greats and making space for counternarratives or counterhistories and for what postcolonial theory has named the subaltern, groups of people not recognized or underrepresented in society due to disempowerment by colonizers (Spivak, 1988; Chow, 1993).

According to Peter Burke (1992), new history is a historiographical approach to questioning the “paradigm” of a “common sense” doing of history as a focus on politics of the governing power (pp. 2–3). New history is a recognition that history happens beyond the politics of the powerful. History happens in daily lives, in objects, in culture, in spaces and places, in experiences, in “speaking and silences” (Burke, 1992, p. 3). Gertrude Himmelfarb (1989) argues for history to truly be new and reconceptualized it will not suffice to write a history of x (women, Chicanos, LGBTQ, et. al.) as an addition to “real”/traditional history. New histories should destabilize a “central” history by troubling or complicating it with possible narrative pluralities. However, she warns historians to consider how new histories especially of marginalized or subaltern social histories are approached. She cautions the historian to present a “faithful interpretation” of the experiences of the subjects of the history as opposed to one imagined or influenced by politics of power (Himmelfarb, 1989, p. 669–670, quoting John Stewart Mill).

Garnet interprets new histories through Foucault’s (1977) genealogy which questions the origins of history. Genealogy through the Foucauldian lens resists histories which appear to stem from essential truths in linear narratives in favor of highlighting history as multiple unfolding events...
and discourses as influenced by power. Such genealogies “re-assess and re-evaluate the discourses and knowledges [of history]” (Garnet, 2015a, p. 41). In his project, Garnet reexamines official records of the one-hundred-plus-years of history of the Central Technical School for untold and parallel narratives as well as considers new contributions from oral histories, archival documents, and material culture. Within the genealogical approach, Garnet (2015a) presents new histories and complicates old narratives, demonstrating the “arbitrary nature of [traditional] history” (p. 42). For Garnet (2015a), polyptych methodology challenges singular perspectives which in turn highlights structures of power that have shaped prior narratives as well as the individual and collective experiences of his historical and contemporary subjects. Such creates a new histories approach to narrative construction.

Bolin (1995) writes about new histories in art education as an opportunity to explore the field beyond “contrived disciplinary boundaries and conventional methods of historical investigation” (p. 49). In other words, new histories give permission (Lucero, 2011, 2013) to art education historians to recognize not only the materiality of history, but also its plurality. For Lucero (2011) permission is granted through an encounter with something (artwork, aesthetic, action, etc.) which, gradually, the researcher recognizes as a new possibility for approaching work (any form of practice) and ultimately informs their work/practice(s). For Bolin, new histories break from traditional history providing an example and, therefore, permission for historical researchers/narrators to approach their work and practice of doing history in new ways, like through arts-based methods and historying.

**Historying**

As Garnet (2017a) describes it, historying is “a mode of artfully rendering the past” (p. 40). It is the manner by which history is created and determined by the narrative choices of the historian. The term comes from Australian historian Greg Dening (2006) who defines it as follows:

‘Historying’ is a moral act in more ways than one. History – the past transformed into words or paint or dance or music or play – is our noun. Historying is our verb-noun.

Historying is the unclosed action of making histories. History, the noun, is closed, shaped, a product. Historying is process, never done, dialectical, and dialogic (p. 6).

Dening’s definition makes two claims. First, shaping history involves ethical and moral consideration. This is a complex claim which is beyond the scope of this dissertation to unpack, nonetheless, ethical considerations inform the methodology of this dissertation research. To briefly
explain, in this process of historying, I have not only worked with the Institutional Review Board (IRB) and oral history best practices to ensure an ethical approach, but I also attempt to be intentional about situating myself as a researcher and doing research with, through, and as a matter of care (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017). I recognize the data I collect, how I collect it, as well as the ways in which I analyze and interpret it are enfolded within the historying process and are susceptible to be morally/ethically critiqued. Such critique may stem from the reader, but it is also a cyclically reflective process of the research(er)/historian. It is a process of doing which pays attention to interconnectivity of researcher and all that is researched, an approach of care all the way down (Haraway, 2003, 2016; Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017).

Secondly, Dening (2006) notes the work of historying is never complete. Each approach results in its own (in)complete history/product. In this case, it is this dissertation which will be a complete product, but an always incomplete history. Historying as doing history highlights the impossibility of a singular, complete history and recognizes the decision making of historians.

Alun Munslow (2010) builds on the work of Dening (2006) with theory from Hayden White’s (1973/2014) Metahistory. On historying, Munslow insists on the importance of recognizing the voice of the narrator/author/historian as one which emplots events into a narrative. Otherwise, it may appear to be a neutral presentation of the past when it is in fact a focused and edited telling of events. White’s (1973/2014) seminal text, Metahistory, was one of the first to present the idea of the historian as an active agent in poetically shaping (through metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, and irony) and emplotting (through romantic, tragic, comic, or satirical modes) events in history. Emplotment is defined by White (1973/2014) as “the way by which a sequence of events fashioned into a story is gradually revealed to be a story of a particular kind” (p. 7) which builds from Hegel’s theory of historical emplotment in The Philosophy of History (1920). From Hegel, White conceptualizes the narration of history as creative choices made by the historian, like choices made by novelists to develop their plots.

Munslow (2010) moves the argument further by claiming that history is an artwork complete with formal properties, an aesthetic (which promotes an aesthetic experience for the viewer/reader/audience) and imbued with the historian’s authorial voice (including emotions). Munslow (2010) writes, “So, we exist in a world of apparent and abundant realities but we also possess the aesthetic hunger to constitute what it all means. All art – or so it seems to me – is how we ‘figure’ our judgement” (p. 143). In other words, in shaping history, which is to make art, is to ‘make sense’ of the multiple potential narratives of the past through acts of selecting, situating, and aestheticizing.
What is absent from polyptych methodology as constructed by Garnet (2015a, 2015b, 2017a, 2017b) is the recognition of feminist scholarship. Feminist and queer theory scholarship should be credited for many elements of polyptych methodology such as: the need to note the plurality of possible narratives (Hartman, 2007, 2008), to challenge a singular perspective (Spillers, 1987), the consideration of power structures uncovered by non-hierarchical genealogies (Wynter, 2003), and the situatedness of the researcher (Collins, 1990; Haraway, 1988, Harding, 1986, 1992). Taking these studies into account provides a stronger foundation for polyptych methodology. The consideration of these studies framed within feminist and queer theory makes polyptych methodology a stronger form of addressing power, genealogies, and the influence of the historian in the construction of historical narratives.

For example, Saidiya Hartman (2007) constructs a grouping of possible narratives for the life and death of a girl who was only mentioned in old trial notes about the destruction of a slavery transport ship called *The Recovery* as “the supposed murder of a young Negro girl” (p. 137). Hartman (2008) explains, “We only know what can be extrapolated from an analysis of the ledger or borrowed from the world of her captors and masters and applied to her” (p. 2). And so, Hartman uses her position as historian and researcher to shape potential plural historical narratives about the circumstances of the young girl. This process of historying is, as Dening (2006) describes it, a moral act because of Hartman’s (2007) decisions as a historian to “save the girl” from “oblivion” (p. 137). To do this, she reconstructs beautifully tragic scenes of the young girl’s last moments from the conflicting perspectives of three men in the trial (the captain, the surgeon, and the abolitionist) who speak for her. For Hartman, historying is also a creative act, because she relies on her work as historian to construct these narratives. In the end of her chapter “The Dead Book,” Hartman (2007) gives the girl’s perspective a presence in the narrative and a dignified death (a moral act of historying) before acknowledging “If the story ended there, I could feel a small measure of comfort” (p. 153). The moral and creative narrative choices by the historian are balanced by a rigorous study of history which uncovers how power shapes historical narrative. Hartman’s work demonstrates the power of historying as an uncovering or unfolding of potential pluralities of historical narrative which polyptych methodology also seeks to do.

In addition, Hortense Spillers (1987) should be counted among the scholars of new histories

In order for me to speak a truer word concerning myself, I must strip down through layers of attenuated meanings, made an excess in time, over time, assigned by a particular historical order, and there await whatever marvels of my own inventiveness (p. 65).

In other words, the narrative of history and the language of history is not sufficient to tell Spillers what she needs to know, which is who are African American women and how are they conceptualized in history. Her piece creates a psychoanalytic account of how gender is used as a tool to transform a person into a thing, degender to disregard. Her work presents a new history by destabilizing narratives through repositioning the role of gender. She highlights the fallacy of gender as that which determines the status of (non)human and makes it strange. Spillers (1987) writes, “This different cultural text actually reconfigures, in historically ordained discourse, certain representational potentialities for African-Americans” (p. 80, emphasis in original). It challenges a singular perspective by troubling and questioning prior historical narrative. If polyptych methodology seeks to challenge singular narratives, Spillers’s work is a supportive example of how that may be done.

Garnet (2015a) claims polyptych methodology is a form of new history which is founded in a Foucauldian framework of genealogies. By this, he means polyptych methodology is intended to question and dismantle the singular narratives of history which are shaped by power into a hierarchy or genealogy, taking permissions from encounters with new histories. Sylvia Wynter’s (2003) “Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation--An Argument” is an argument to rethink the genealogy of “human.” This massive historical project, which she manages to fit within eighty pages, uncovers power structures through the use of non–hierarchical genealogies. Wynter’s writing style in the piece is a continually folding, unfolding, and doubling back of text which uses the form of run-on sentences to deliberately put hierarchy and linear genealogy into question. Wynter’s work provides an encounter with form and genealogy scholarship from which doing polyptych methodology may take permissions.

Finally, I would like to call attention to one of the key claims of polyptych methodology: that context of the historian and data influences the research analysis. This claim owes acknowledgement to Haraway’s (1988) work on situated knowledge and to standpoint theory (Collins, 1990; Harding, 1986, 1992). The debates of situated knowledge and standpoint theory stem from questions of politics and bias within the sciences, but the epistemological questions can be applied broadly. In Situated Knowledges, Haraway argues for the lived, academic, and embodied experiences of scholars and
researchers to be not only taken into consideration in research, but to also be positioned alongside and on equal leveling as positivist and empirical knowledge. Acuff (2018) brings attention to Black feminist theory in an article of the same name to insert standpoint knowledge of Black women into art education discourse and history “to open the field’s knowledge production” (p. 204). Situated knowledge is opposite of absolute knowledge in that it does not claim to be all knowing, but it is not lesser than for it; it is equal. It is more self-aware. The question standpoint theory and situated knowledges asks us to consider are: from where (socially, politically, with what knowledge and privilege, positionally) does a researcher approach, understand, and create knowledge, and how is the knowledge created within or affected by the where? These questions apply to polyptych methodology which keeps the creative, historical-narrative-shaping decisions of the historian at the forefront.

Data: Methods, Sources, & Analysis

Garnet incorporates three main methods of data collection and analysis within his creation of polyptych methodology (archives, oral history, and material culture) and borrow from a fourth (arts-based research) in his research of the Central Technical School. In researching the Charleston Arts and Revitalization Effort (CARE), I also found these methods of data collection to be helpful in answering the three supporting questions of this study: What are the conditions and contexts that produced CARE? What is CARE performing? and What is CARE producing? Below I describe how I approach each method (archives, oral history, visual and material culture, and arts-based research) within polyptych methodology and as they pertain to the questions. I present how I collect sources and data within each method. I also describe the modes of analysis used within each method of data collection.

Though there is some variation dependent upon the data and method, Applied Thematic Analysis (ATA) is the primary mode of analysis. Greg Guest, Kathleen MacQueen, and Emily Namey (2012) describe ATA as “a rigorous, yet inductive, set of procedures” (pp. 15-16) which can be applied to various forms of qualitative data. Johnny Saldaña (2009) calls the process “theming the data” and that it is intended to identify “what a unit of data is about and/or what it means” (p. 139, emphasis in the original). Catherine Reissman (2008) provides exemplars of thematic analysis applied to narratives found in interviews, archives, and ethnographies to demonstrate its range for significant findings across data types. ATA provides a method for identifying and coding themes
within the collected materials for this research project. However, the codes will not necessarily be designed to cross themes. For example, codes used for archival materials will not necessarily be the same codes used for oral history transcripts.

Archives

As repositories for historical and often rare primary source materials, archives are integral to any historical research. My first supporting question is, what are the conditions and contexts that produced CARE? It is a historical question whose answer is largely dependent on archival information. However, accessing archives for my project proved to be challenging not only due to travel restrictions, but also to lack of materials within the archives. Due to travel restrictions with COVID-19 shelter-in-place orders, I canceled many plans for in-person research in Mississippi. However, there were three separate travel opportunities afforded throughout the duration of this project in August and October of 2019 and then in September of 2020 which was brief and followed strict safety guidelines. During the 2019 opportunities, I perused some of the archival holdings and the small collections at the Tallahatchie County Library in Charleston.

Their collection offers little in regard to historical archives aside from a few large binders of cemetery logs. There are a few typewriter-produced documents on historical and geographical facts about the region. One, Mississippi Counties, was produced by a library director the Pike-Amite [Counties] Library System along with Mrs. Jane Bryan and student helpers in 1973. Some documents, like a collection of scrapbooks containing newspaper clippings, suggest the Tallahatchie County Library absorbed some archival collections from an old, now closed library on the east side of the county in Tutwiler, though the collections are still extremely limited. The newspaper clipping scrapbooks provided a brief glimpse of the visual arts from the region in the 1970s. They include several clipped stories of White women visual artists standing with their artworks on display in the former Tutwiler Public Library. From the images, artworks include landscape paintings, a few still-lifes, a couple of animal portraits, and one quilt which depicts

![Figure 3.2. J. Stokes-Casey. (2019). Photo of a scrapbook page in the Tallahatchie County Library in Charleston.](image)
buildings of the town of Tutwiler among traditional quilt square patterns. One clipping byline by staff writer Ben Pryor features the title “Tutwiler Library Exhibits Mrs. Nabors’ Pretty Pictures.” This tiny historical recorded of the visual arts in Tallahatchie County suggests the arts were mostly dismissed as a frivolous pastime for White women. However, no conclusive arguments can be made from such a small sampling.

From this limited and very dated collection, it appears archival collections are not important to the mission and work of the county’s library, or perhaps it is not within the capacity of the library to collect and maintain such archives. Further, the information within the collection is not relevant to the goals of this study. Therefore, I expanded my search to the available online databases of the State of Mississippi Department of Archives and History (MDAH). Using the search terms “Charleston Arts and Revitalization Effort,” “Charleston,” and “Tallahatchie County,” I compiled a list of potentially relevant holdings. The list included about seventy-five items, many of them images and postcards of Charleston’s history. There are also a couple of history books on the town and county self-published by local historians and a few collections of personal papers whose relevance remains to be determined. The collections also include around eleven microfiche collections of newspapers from Charleston ranging from 1885 to 2005. Only one item in the collection pertains to CARE; it is a cookbook produced by the organization titled Cooking with C.A.R.E.: A Collection of Recipes by Charleston Arts and Revitalization Effort. In September of 2020, I had two brief days to review these materials at MDAH in Jackson, Mississippi and made notes and took photos of relevant materials.

The purpose of this archival search was to build a broader understanding of the recorded history of Charleston from which to construct a polyptych narrative in answer to the first supporting question of this study, what are the conditions and contexts that produced CARE? I used microfiche reels of newspapers and perused the headlines looking for front page, major news stories and any materials related to the work of CARE. I also gathered information from the limited history books on Charleston in the MDAH collections. Though the books’ historical focus range from the late 1800s to around the 1950s, they established a shared narrative among them and provided starting points for continued research.

Following a recommendation of one of the oral history interview participants in October of 2020, I contacted Grady Hillman, a consultant who was hired in 2003, the early stages of CARE’s formation, to research the history of the town and conduct his own set of oral histories. Hillman and I emailed and arranged a phone call, and we shared notes about our historical findings. His work
gave me several leads on narratives which I had not located within the formal, public archives. He generously sent me a package containing the recorded oral histories he conducted with Charleston residents during his consultation. Finally, he shared the cultural plan document which was the product of his consultation work and provided a historical record of the initial conceptualization and planning of CARE’s work as an organization.

From the archival collections of the Tallahatchie County Library in Charleston, the State of Mississippi Department of Archives and History, and the private research of Grady Hillman as well as a few assorted documents shared by CARE board members, I was able to use Applied Thematic Analysis (ATA) (Guest et al., 2012) to identify and interpret historical themes from within the materials and apply them through polyptych methodology.

**Polyptych Methodology as a Recognition of Archival Absences**

Polyptych methodology foregrounds the researcher’s control of the historical narratives they present and the plurality of alternative possibilities of the narrative. Approaching polyptych methodology through feminist situated knowledges (Collins, 1990; Haraway, 1988, Harding, 1986, 1992) and considering matters of care (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017) means that within the approach, I am taking the sources and the situatedness of the sources into consideration while constructing an answer to the question, what are the conditions and contexts that produced CARE? For example, my method for approaching the holdings of the State of Mississippi Department of Archives and History not only analyzes what is there, but also what is absent.

Genealogies of scholarship prove the construction and existence of archives as colonial power structures (Foucault, 1977; Spivak, 1988; see also Said, 1993) which include silences and omissions within the archival collections of equal significance to what is included (Arondekar, 2005, 2009, 2013, 2015). One point to consider is that rural places are assumed to be historically incongruent with urban narratives (Swierenga, 1981). The ruralness of Charleston and Tallahatchie County may account for the limited collection of archival documentation. If the geographic and population ruralness of place means less historical material is collected and archived about a location, then the potential for diversity of narratives within the collection is also affected. Situating the available collections as objects of power in shaping historical narrative, it becomes apparent that Indigenous, Asian, and African American populations of the area are silenced and ignored within the archives. Using the polyptych methodology as a tool for unfolding, recognizing, and situating historical
narratives provides a framework to include awareness of the presence and absence of information about or produced by these marginalized groups.

**Oral History**

The issue of difficulty in accessing institutionally collected, archived history is not uncommon in rural areas (Beel et al., 2017; Matusiak et al., 2019). However, a wealth of historical knowledge may still be found. Despite the absence of public archival material about CARE, collective knowledge of the organization is still available. Private collections in attics, basements, and personal devices store local history in varying levels of completeness. The private nature of these collections makes them incredibly difficult to access, even assuming the researcher is aware of their existence. There are also stores of history embedded in memories and embodied by everyday people. To learn more about CARE in the absence of archives, I decided to employ oral history, a form of gathering narratives and histories from individuals who have witnessed and/or participated in events, as a method for collecting the history of CARE from people who founded and continue to run the organization.

Collecting oral histories of CARE is a method which best answers my second supporting research question, what is CARE performing? It is asking about the goals and actions of the organization. It is also concerned with how the narrators describe the organization and make meaning from it. Within are sub-questions like: What does CARE do? How does it operate? Who is involved? Who is it for? These not only address the organization’s history, but what the history and function of the organization means. Importantly, understanding what CARE does and what it means provides insight to understanding how art education is mobilized and how it is expected to function within the context of CARE and potentially more broadly.

**Recruiting and Interview Process**

I drafted a list of nine semi-structured interview questions (Appendix A) and gained approval from the IRB to begin a study. The questions ask about the person’s role and connection to CARE, their participation in CARE events, the goals of the organization, the perceived impact on the community, and how the organization may fit within or be influenced by a larger context of regional history. Once IRB approval was received, I was invited to visit Charleston and attend a CARE board meeting where they kindly gave me a little time on the agenda to share the project with the board.
Four members signed a consent form for an interview at that meeting, and we planned for phone interviews.

The phone interviews begin with a brief overview reminder of the project and consent form and time to discuss any questions the narrator has. Then, I begin the recorded section of the interview and ask questions from the semi-structured list, leaving opportunities for the conversation to flow into whatever direction the narrator takes. When we conclude the interview, I stop the recording and let the interviewer know to expect a copy of the audio as well as a transcript, which they can edit before it is finalized. As a part of my process of snowball sampling, I also ask if they have recommendations and contact information to others who would be important to include in the collection of oral histories of CARE.

Eight interviews were conducted for this dissertation research. Many more were scheduled and recruited, but due to COVID-19 travel restrictions, varying degrees of access to technology, my position as an outsider not from Charleston, and a variety of other potential reasons, those interviews were not realized during the time of data collection. Regardless, within the eight interviews collected a point of saturation is located. Each of the interviews corroborates what the others say about the founding of CARE, the ongoing work, and its significance to Charleston. However, it should be noted that all of the eight interview participants identify as White. As such it must be assumed that while the interviews as they are offer a point of saturation, additional interviews with diverse narrators will undoubtedly offer new perspectives than the ones able to be collected during this collection period.

Four of the narrators are men including the president of the board of CARE, a philanthropic supporter and former resident of Charleston, a member of CARE who also is a high school art teacher outside of Tallahatchie County, and the former director of CARE. Four of the narrators are women and include the early founder and first director of CARE, a teacher who was active in many of CARE’s summer art camps, another early founder who continues to support the organization and has served in positions on the board including president, and the most recent director of the organization. All of the interviews were conducted by phone or video call.

**Recognizing Situatedness**

In the process of recruiting for and gathering oral histories of CARE, I considered my own situatedness within the project. Though I am not from Charleston, Tallahatchie County, or even
Mississippi, I share some geographical and socio-cultural understandings with those who are. I am from the broader Mississippi Delta in West Tennessee – only about three hours north of Charleston by car. I am a White, cisgender female from a lower-middle-class background, raised as Protestant Christian by regular attendance in a Southern Baptist Church, and grew up in the country outside of small rural towns. I have an arts education background having worked in K-12 schools as well as museums and now in higher education. Along with these experiences, I have a deep interest in the land and landscape in rural areas. These factors informed my initial interest in this study and inform the approach of care in the construction of the study. Some if not all of these factors likely facilitate access to oral history narrators associated with CARE, because they present similarities between me as interviewer and the potential narrators. However, in some cases my situatedness as a White woman, academic studying in a university in the “North”/Midwest, an outsider of Charleston, and within the position of perceived power as a researcher create hesitancy and barriers to recruiting and accessing potential narrators. I suspect this situatedness is at least partially why I have been unsuccessful at securing non-White participants.

These factors are present within the context of the oral history interviews, shaping how questions are asked and the narrator’s responses. Oral historian Alessandro Portelli (1991) writes, “Researchers often introduce specific distortions: informants tell them what they believe they want to be told and thus reveal who they think the researcher is” (p. 54). This quote makes the researcher present within the oral history interview. Like polyptych methodology’s recognition of the historian’s role in shaping narrative, oral histories are also influenced by the researcher/interviewer. This is one of the points in which oral history and feminist theory and methodology overlap.

Oral history as a method is both “doing and interpreting” (Abrams, 2016, p. 1). Narrators/interlocutors provide historical information to the interviewer/historian in an oral history interview, but the information provided is only part of the oral history. The framing and context of the information, the interview, the narrator, and the historian all factor into the narrative. “Signification, interpretation, and meaning” (Abrams, 2016, p. 2) are all intertwined with the historical narrative presented in an oral history.

Oral history is often theorized and aligned with feminist methodologies (Berger Gluck, 1977; Berger Gluck & Patai, 1991; Srigley et al., 2018) and theories like situated knowledges (Halbwachs, 1992; Summerfield, 2000). Oral historians recognize the co-constructed nature (Patti & Ellis, 2017; Portelli, 1991) of an oral history interview. The researcher and narrator/interlocutor contribute to the unfolding of the narrative within the framing of the interview and recognize that the interview
is partial (but no more so than other historical datasets) (Thompson & Bornat, 2017; Perrmond, 2001) and influenced by context (Abrams, 2017; Sangster, 1994). Thus, the oral history interview is a situated doing and interpreting (Abrams, 2016), which results in one of many possible narratives. It is also open to many possible interpretations as it is dependent on and shaped by multiple contextual factors including the situated knowledges of the interviewer and narrator (Collins, 1990; Haraway, 1988, Harding, 1986, 1992).

**Analysis of Oral Histories**

Upon completion of the recorded interview and typed transcript, I revisited the material and close read for emergent themes to help me answer the question, what is CARE performing? Through Applied Thematic Analysis of the interview transcripts, I considered the unfolding of the narrative about CARE’s formation and operation by identifying emergent themes in the interviews. To do this, I closely read the transcripts and identified potential themes based on the responses to questions, the frequency of recurrence across interview transcripts, the phrasing used to narrate stories, events, and ideas. *Theming the data* (Saldaña, 2009) is an interpretation of the interview by dividing it into abstract categorizations/themes. I created themes based on my interpretation of the narrator’s response as well as the recurrence of similar responses across interviews.

I pulled quotes from across interviews and sorted them into a codebook created in Excel separated by concepts/themes. I added interpretation alongside the themes for rationale, notes about the context of the quote within the interview, and analysis on how the quote aligns with other quotes within the theme. I looked for how these themes are presented by the narrator as well. For example, themes could unfold in story form, as metaphor, directly, or with layered meanings. To quote Haraway (2016), “it matters what stories we tell to tell other stories with” (p. 12).

From my analysis, four themes were identified. They are (1) Programming, (2) Meeting Needs, (3) Access, Exposure, and Opportunity, and (4) Bringing Together. From these themes which are taken up in Chapters 5 and 6, I attempted to stitch together the stories within stories of the collected oral histories to frame a broader narrative of CARE, realizing that all narratives I present are partial. The polyptch structure and methodology allow for a recognition of the potential pluralities which exist, but are not directly engaged in the presented narrative. My interest is not in an empirical study proving CARE as an organization is successful or unsuccessful or even identifying metrics to do so. I am interested in what CARE means, what it is doing, and how art education acts
within the narrative. Analysis of the oral histories provided some answers, or at least speculative answers to the supporting question, what is CARE performing?

The recordings and transcripts are not only provided to the individuals who participate in interviews, but also to CARE. This includes the oral histories conducted in 2003 by Grady Hillman. It is important to think about the collected oral histories of this project as building an archive of CARE, because they are a part of the organization’s history and some of the earliest historical documentation and preservation CARE participated in. When perceived as an archive, the data is susceptible to the same critical concerns and considerations of silences and omissions. This is another intersection inserting care through a feminist theoretical lens. To again quote Haraway (2016), “it matters what stories we tell to tell other stories with” (p. 12). This means that not only should the oral history collection be thematically analyzed within this dissertation research, but also that the data should be situated as an archival collection with the recognition of its incompleteness, its potential pluralities, and its ongoingness (Haraway, 2016).

Visual and Material Culture

Visual and material culture is the broadest data set in this study and is used to triangulate archival and oral history data. Visual and material culture in this study includes artwork and photographs (visual culture) and objects from the land or from the place including the commons (land, trees and plants, rocks, natural water sources, etc.), buildings, and public spaces (material culture). I consider the elements of nature in the same category as objects of visual and material culture in order to recognize a cohesion of natureculture (Haraway, 2003). I blur the boundaries to recognize the interconnectedness of people, place, landscape, and the objects each produce. In The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness. Vol. 1., Haraway (2003) repeatedly describes natureculture with examples including the relationship between humans and dogs and, relevant to the purposes of this study, the artwork of Andy Goldsworthy. Goldsworthy’s work is made from objects from the land into temporal-sculptures. In his work, the natural object becomes a visual/cultural object which is often designed to return to its natural state over time. It is both nature and culture. Haraway (2003) writes, “[Goldsworthy’s] art is relentlessly attuned to specific human inhabitations of the land, but it is neither humanist nor naturalist art. It is the art of naturecultures” (p. 24).

For my purposes, I make only slight distinctions in visual and material culture from human
production versus naturally made. That is the difference in representation and representative of land and place. I identify images such as landscape paintings as representations which are situated historically and by the decisions made by artists in the representation of land and place. Whereas objects from the commons of place and landscape are representatives of the place. They are a sampling of objects from a landscape, an example of place. They are not intended to tell a story, though they are useful symbolic starting points for narrative creation, unlike landscape paintings or photographs which are composed by an artist with intention of some form of communication.

These objects of visual and material culture act in two ways in the methodology of this study. First, they provide tangible data objects not available in archives or oral histories which help to understand the phenomena of interest, how art education may play a role in the shaping of historical narrative. Analyzing visual and material culture, even speculatively, aims to answer the third supporting research question, what is CARE producing? This question asks about physical objects produced by and in association with CARE, but it is also a historical and speculative question. By this I mean that the question is asking about the role CARE has in producing history through its performance, how it fits within the contexts which created it, and how it is defining or shaping how those contexts are viewed. The question is also speculative in that answering it may provide more questions and lines of inquiry than “provable” answers.

The second methodological use of visual and material culture as data in this study is through an arts-based research approach used to understand this study as polyptych methodology. In an attempt to visualize this research, generate questions, and juxtapose the data, I created a polyptych assemblage artwork using visual and material culture from CARE, Charleston, and Tallahatchie County. In this section, I will further unpack what visual and material culture objects are considered and the methods used to collect and analyze them. I will also expound on the polyptych artwork, its methodological function as arts-based research, and its use of visual and material culture.

To collect and identify visual and material culture (VMC) about CARE, I utilize the CARE website and online presence on social media as well as site visits to Charleston and Tallahatchie County. I also use collections from the Mississippi State Department of Archives and History which include several photographs and postcards of the town and county. From CARE’s digital presence, I view images of artworks, photos of events, event postings, videos, exhibition announcements and openings, and photos of students engaged in art educational activities as part of VMC. Their website links to several personal artist pages of members of the CARE Artist Council which provide more data describing the visual culture of CARE though the artwork the members produce. Many of these
works are regional landscape scenes.

A site visit to the CARE building unfolds more VMC data including the building itself. On the front of the building, CARE displays three collaborative artworks, some of the first artworks created with a teaching artist and local students at CARE, that CARE members call murals. They feature three individuals associated with Charleston and/or Tallahatchie County who achieved fame and recognition for their work in the arts (actor and resident Morgan Freeman, jazz pianist Mose Allison, and bluesman Sonny Boy Williams). The inside of the building, the classrooms, and exhibition space are materials which influence the culture of the organization. The building itself, an old bank of Charleston, sits in the town square behind the courthouse surrounded by markers commemorating soldiers from several wars including a confederate monument. Through CARE’s efforts, surrounding the courthouse are brick sidewalks, park benches, and planters, as well as painted storefronts facing the courthouse. CARE also provided flags and banners that line the main thoroughfare into town.

CARE also maintains regular exhibitions either on loan from institutions like the Mississippi Museum of Art and Tuskegee University or of local artists’ work which can be considered VMC. For example, I use the exhibition list from Narratives of the Land, an exhibition by Mississippi Museum of Art hosted at CARE from June 16 to August 19, 2017 as a data source in this study. I also consider works displayed by local artists in the CARE gallery as objects of VMC. Some of these artists include landscape painter and the director of CARE, Carol Roark, and a folk artist who has served as a teaching artist for CARE, Joe Wrenn. Accompanying some of the exhibitions are art educational workshops. Influenced by the 2017 Narratives of the Land exhibition and a grant from the Mississippi Delta National Heritage Area, CARE designed and led the 2018 summer art camp themed around the land and landscape. The organization produced a self-published book of the camp titled Delta Life: Through Our Eyes which includes images of students working and of their artworks. This book is another VMC resource used for this study.

The site visit research extends beyond CARE VMC as well. There are no hotels in Charleston, so all visits required a hotel stay in Batesville, MS, which is a thirty-minute drive away. Driving to and from CARE from the hotel in Batesville allowed me to gain a better understanding of the geographical and physical landscape which surrounds Charleston. Occasionally, I record short bursts of video of driving down the highway or pull over for photographs to use as VMC.

I drove a circuit around the county to stop at geographically and culturally important sites including: the Tallahatchie County National Wildlife Refuge (an effort to revitalize the delta
swamplands and cypress groves), Glendora (the town marked with purple historical signs narrating a nearly step-by-step account of Emmitt Till’s murder), the county line crossing into the strip of road around historically notorious and still-in-operation Parchman Prison which forbids drivers from stopping, the second courthouse in the county in Sumner where Emmitt Till’s murderers were acquitted by the jury, markers for plantations such as Equen Plantation Home in Minter City whose kitchen was used for scenes in the movie The Help (2011), and countless rows of cotton fields. Along these routes, I stop to collect objects, usually small bits of the commons (rocks, tree bark, soil and dirt, water) which are taken with care and minimal disruption to the natural environment. These pieces from the land join the collected VMC as data for this study.

Material culture of place may move beyond representations of the land and include the land itself. As such, divisions in natureculture, a recognition of the interdependent relational web of humans and other species including more-than-human which requires care (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017), are dissolved as one informs the other. However, the material culture collected from the commons are only partial fragments of the full landscape. They are not representations but representatives of the physical geographical environment. Polyptych methodology reveals the partialness and situatedness of historical narratives by calling attention to the researcher’s partial and situated creative choices and the unavoidable incompleteness of data like archives and oral histories. VMC is no different.

A painting of the landscape describes the place, but only partially as it is based on the artist’s choices and situated perspective as viewer and interpreter of the scene. An object from the land is a representative of the natural elements but is not the full story. Nonetheless, these objects of VMC juxtaposed with one another present more information in which nature in the form of natural objects can inform culture in the form of artistically produced objects, and vice versa. Together, they present more possibilities for shaping historical narrative. The relationship (whether real or imagined) between material-nature and culture-art unfolds through landscape paintings and asks how people act on land and how land acts on people in creating community and art. Polyptych methodology provides an opportunity to juxtapose the varying parts of VMC with one another and
with archival and oral history data to present a plurality of possible historical narratives of CARE.

**Visualizing Findings through Arts-Based Research**

To visualize juxtapositions, realize connections, and generate questions about the history of CARE, I turn to arts-based research. Garnet (2015a, 2015b, 2017a, 2017b) argues that the historian’s creative choices in shaping narrative is an arts-based method which informs polyptych methodology. A single definition of Arts-Based Research (ABR) is highly debatable at best. Generally, scholars agree that ABR is a practice-based methodology (Rolling, 2010; Irwin & Springgay, 2008; Macleod & Holdridge, 2006), where art making is a practice of the researcher (Leavy, 2014), methodologically emergent, divergent, and derivative (Rolling, 2010), imaginative and diverse (Mulvihill & Swaminathan, 2020), and in constant renewal (Lucero, 2016).

In “The Art of Research,” Graeme Sullivan (2014) begins with a metaphorical lesson made apparent through a work of art by Rashad Alakbarov called *Looking at Two Cities from One Point of View*. The piece is made from a seemingly random assortment of found objects which when positioned by the artist and harshly lit creates a shadow-silhouette of two cities on the gallery wall. For Sullivan, this artwork exemplifies the complexity and plurality of engaging with what initially
seems simple and straightforward. He writes, “Same source—different place; same forms—different meaning; same raw data—different information. It depended on the point of view” (Sullivan, 2014, p. 272). In other words, the viewer’s positionality/situatedness factors into how they perceive the data and its arrangement into artwork. Artworks like Alakbarov’s piece and arts practices allow for viewers and creators to generate “fresh questions” (Sullivan, 2014, p. 281), because their perception of the work determines their engagement with it.

In Garnet’s polyptych methodology, visual mapping (2015, p. 50) and renderings (2017a, p. 44; 2017b, p. 66) illustrate the unfolding of the research design as a representation of his method. He describes the process of the construction of the mapping as contributing to the conceptualization of his methodology in which the arts-based orientation moved away from a positivist approach into an “artful expression” which recognizes the complexity of the institutional history (Garnet, 2015a, p. 50). In my use of polyptych methodology, I decided to also consider my research questions and available data through arts-based inquiry. Inspired by polyptychs like van Eyck’s *Ghent Altarpiece*, I created a polyptych assemblage from a series of panels which can be stacked and reconfigured depending on how I or a viewer wishes to interact with the piece and interpret/unfold the narratives presented within it.

The piece is composed of eight wooden boxes which form the panels. Within each of the panels, a combination of artifacts and facsimiles of visual and material culture explore facets of the place (Charleston, Tallahatchie County, and Mississippi) and the organization (CARE). Each of these panels are simultaneously independent artworks (assemblages) and parts of the whole polyptych assemblage. Chapter 4 offers detailed descriptions of items within the artworks as well as what they are intended to signify. Chapter 4 also experiments with form to create a polyptych experience for the reader.

Building from and moving beyond Garnet’s visual mapping, my project introduces assemblage as a visual exploration of polyptych methodology through arts-based research. Briefly stated, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1987) developed assemblage theory in their book *A Thousand Plateaus* along with multiple definitions of the theory which move beyond and intersect *assemblage as an object* to *assemblage as relational/social*. They write, “An assemblage is necessary for the relation between two strata to come about. And an assemblage is necessary for organisms to be caught within and permeated by a social field that utilizes them” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 71). In other words, by placing objects within an assemblage, the relationships between them become more prevalent. Further, the structures (physical, geographical, historical, social and otherwise) within
which they are located are recognized not only as acting upon but acting through the objects. Manuel DeLanda’s (2016) work further explores assemblage theory to demonstrate how relational and social assemblage unfolds. Assemblage theory and art historical landscape theory inform the analysis of historical narrative(s) presented within my polyptych assemblage and the relationship between the objects of visual and material culture as data in an artwork, produced object, designed to unpack the question, what is CARE producing?

As a representative of the polyptych methodology, the assemblage provides a visualization of the study which also encompasses the other supporting questions, what are the conditions and contexts that produced CARE? and what is CARE performing? By unfolding the many folds of the polyptych through analysis, with care, and with the recognition of the partiality of knowing, the role of art education in shaping the historical narrative of CARE and the cultural geography of Charleston and Tallahatchie County begins to emerge.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, I presented how polyptych methodology will be applied to my central and supporting research questions in this study. I built from the methodology’s incorporation of new histories and historying while arguing for the recognition of feminist theories which were previously uncited in relationship to polyptych methodology. I showed how data collection is situated within four methods enfolded within polyptych methodology. They include archival research, oral history methods, visual and material culture collection, and arts-based research methods. I explained how Applied Thematic Analysis is adapted for each of the data sets to identify recurring motifs and as a tool for evaluation and interpretation of the data. Finally, I returned to the theoretical lens of care incorporating the matter of care (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017) approach as a method for identifying power as it unfolds through the methodology, analysis, and broader study.
CHAPTER 4: POLYPTYCH ASSEMBLAGE, CONDITIONS AND CONTEXTS

The Charleston Arts and Revitalization Effort (CARE) was founded in 2003 in Charleston, Mississippi in Tallahatchie County. Charleston, known as the “Gateway to the Delta,” is located, as its nickname denotes, on the edge of the Mississippi Delta and Hill Country. CARE is situated within the cultural-historical geography of the region. Through a microhistorical (Dehne, 1995; Ginsberg et al., 1993; Stanley et al., 2013; Wierling, 1995) approach, the study is concentrated on the specific organization of CARE and the unique history and culture of Charleston and Tallhatchie County. Microhistory is concentrated on particular actors in a definite place whose lived and documented histories are the materials for the unfolding narrative(s) presented. A microhistorical focus on the cultural-historical geography of Charleston and Tallhatchie County is unfolded within this chapter in order to situate CARE and answer the first supporting question of this dissertation research: What are the conditions and contexts that produced CARE?

Despite the narrowing of location and actors afforded by microhistory, the presentation of a single narrative in answer to the supporting question is impossible. The plethora of potential pluralities in historical scholarship are likewise present within this microhistorical study. Often the telling of history is presented as a temporally linear unfolding. Scholars of new histories (Bolin, 1995; Burke, 1992 & 2001; Garnet, 2015a; Himmelfarb, 1989; Munslow, 2010) recognize history as infinite pluralities of possible narratives rather than a singular chronology. With inexhaustible potential ways of conducting historical accounting, scholars (Dening, 2006; Garnet, 2017a; and Munslow, 2010) encourage a creative approach to representing the past called historying. Art education historian Dustin Garnet’s (2015a, 2015b, 2017a, 2017b) solution to the challenge of recognizing plurality within doing history is polyptych methodology. The polyptych, meaning many folds, is a structure open to interpretation and provides a visual, architectural, and conceptual framework for historical information/data.

Polyptych methodology provides the structure for research and presentational form of this chapter. Through the use of formatting, fonts, images, and hyperlinks, I attempt to present an interdependent, interwoven narrative of the history of Charleston and events in surrounding Tallahatchie County. Additionally, I created a polyptych assemblage and
use it throughout the chapter to create anchoring points and breaks between themes. The materials, images, and arrangement within the polyptych assemblage are a form of inquiry through which connections between symbols, objects, and historical findings are made. I decided to produce images for the chapter rather than publish historic, archival materials. This is a creative decision to explore the concept of *historying* (Dening, 2006; Garnet, 2017a; and Munslow, 2010) which recognizes the historian’s role in the production of historical narratives. It questions the constructed nature of history and blurs the separation between what is real and what is imagined into constructed real-imagined historical narrative. Finally, there are moments within the chapter which invite the reader to contribute to the narrative through prompts. These interactions create the potential for the reader to correct, redirect, and insert into the narratives presented.

**Data & Analysis**

Data for this chapter came from written cultural and environmental histories, newspapers from the 1880s to present day, archives, articles, music, and visual and material culture. Another significant source was a collection of oral histories conducted with life-long residents of Charleston by the scholar and consultant Grady Hillman, who was hired to create a Cultural Plan for CARE in 2003. The plan, supported by the Mississippi Humanities Council and the Forestry Department, USDA, presented CARE with potential cultural projects to pursue based on the historical, archival, and oral history research conducted by Hillman. Some of those projects included music and food festivals, outdoor trails and historic markers, and educational programming.

In Hillman’s research, and in my own, the available historical data was very similar. Both of us were reliant on histories and documents compiled before or during the period (mid- to late-1930s) when the Works Progress Administration (WPA) provided funding for historical record culling and preservation. Only a few texts on the history of the county exist including *Eskridges’s Early History of Tallahatchie County, Mississippi* (1905), composed of early newspaper stories and a small book published from the WPA files, and a few articles in *The Mississippi Sun* by members of the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR), Tallahatchie County Chapter, Lillie Neely Henry and Jean Conger May (1960).

These sources within archives make clear that the only officially preserved and documented history is that which is written from a White perspective. While I have made intentional efforts as a historian to insert the voices and narratives of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC)
into this polyptych assemblage of narratives, the resulting information is not comprehensive. It is the nature of historical research to be riddled with gaps and omissions whether intentional or not. It is not possible to present an omniscient narrative. Rather, inclusive and diverse or multivocal and polyptych sets of narratives create more accurate histories. Systemic historical record-keeping, and archival structures privilege the White perspective and by design exclude BIPOC stories (Foucault, 1977; Spivak, 1988; see also Said, 1993). The violence of silencing voices within records extends beyond record-keeping practices and has resulted in social and even physical violence against resisters who share their narratives or speak truth to power resulting in a continued silencing of BIPOC narratives. I do not have a breakdown of race from the collected oral history interviews conducted by Hillman in 2004 and shared with me, but they do include African American participants. Those interviews have been invaluable in leading to sources about Black histories which were otherwise absent in the available archival data.

Additional data collection was done over two days at the Mississippi Department of Archives and History (MDAH) by skimming quickly over decades of Tallahatchie County newspapers on microfiche. I worked backwards from the most contemporary formation of CARE (2003) to as far back as I could go in the time allowed (1969), focusing primarily on front-page stories for the last year of every decade. In 1969, the local Charleston paper, *The Mississippi Sun*, changed titles to *The Sun-Sentinel* by the early 1970s and continues to be printed under that name. I chose the last year of each decade, because several of the contemporary papers include a decade in review of major news stories in the January/December issues. While unavoidably incomprehensive, the information within this chapter attempts to provide a broad perspective of the conditions and contexts which produced CARE in order to understand how the organization is situated within its cultural-historical geography and, later, how these contexts influence and shape the work of the organization.

Through Applied Thematic Analysis (Guest et al., 2012) of the data, underlying cultural-historical structures are identified and labeled into three interconnected themes: real-imagined actors, shaping of land, and social inequality. The themes create the foundations for understanding the cultural and historical structures or conditions and contexts which shaped CARE. The themes are simultaneously intertwined and distinct.

*Real-imagined actors* are anecdotal characters and stories which use metaphorical or representational imagery to make sense of historical and cultural phenomenon. They appear in oral and written histories; thematic analysis draws them forward. In this chapter, I identify some real-imagined actors including Religion, the Planter, the Resisters, and the Benevolent Corporation.
Shaping of land acknowledges the significant environmental and ecological impact made by natural and human forces which leave indelible marks on the landscape of the Mississippi Delta. It is presented within the chapter under the subthemes of Water, Fire, and Land. The category of Land is further subdivided into Indigenous Shaping, Colonial Shaping, Corporate Shaping, and Contemporary Shaping to provide some temporal structures and influencing actors.

Such changes in the land and landscape are deeply intertwined with social inequalities which include treaties for the removal of Indigenous peoples from the land, agribased systemic structures such as slavery, sharecropping, and convict leasing which create and perpetuate racial and economic violence and which implicates and affects all residents. Through the theme of social inequalities, subthemes include Indigenous, Plantation <-> Corporation, Very Real Violence, In the Schools, and Prison Culture.

Form

It is not possible to present complete narratives of the conditions and contexts that produce and continue to influence the work of the Charleston Arts and Revitalization Effort. Therefore, the form of this chapter invites the reader to interact with images and text to shape their own path through the presented historical information. The polyptych assemblage is an anchor point between themes within this chapter. Hyperlinks are embedded within images and link to related images and text within the chapter and dissertation. You may prefer to note the page number you are on before interacting with links as they are not in chronological or page order and may take the reader far away from their original destination. If you click on a link that takes you to another linked page, that destination will not necessarily send you back where you started. This is intended to immerse the reader in an interconnected web which unfolds the history not as a linear narrative, but as a series of connected ideas, images, and themes (see Appendix B for an overview map of the hyperlinks). The polyptych methodology, assemblage, and chapter formatting through hyperlinks and headings are an experiment with historying (Dening, 2006; Garnet, 2017a; Munslow, 2010) and a form of arts-based inquiry to explore not only the first supporting question (What are the conditions and contexts that produced CARE?), but also the central research question (How does art education shape historical narrative?) through a praxis of theory and form.
REAL-IMAGINED ACTORS

Real-imagined actors are not specific people, but representations of groups that have influence over the culture and history. They act within historical narratives as forces and sometimes figures. Four real-imagined actors are identified in this chapter. They are the Religion, the Planter, the Resisters, and the Benevolent Corporation. They are real, because they represent cultural-historical phenomenon and are occasionally named, made tangible. They are imagined because they are representations which at times resist specificity. By labeling them as real-imagined they merge distinction and abstraction as they act upon and within historical narrative. These actors are a part of the power structures which shape the historical conditions and contexts that produced CARE.
Religion, specifically Protestant Christianity, is an influential actor shaping the cultural-historical geographic contexts of Charleston and Tallahatchie County. Religion is such a powerful actor in the culture and history of the Delta that the form of the polyptych created for this research is heavily influenced by religious objects such as prayer altars in triptych and polyptych forms. There is no question that the culture of religion shapes the context in which the Charleston Arts and Revitalization Effort (CARE) was formed and continues to operate. I noticed at the few events I attended at CARE including a board meeting and the Gateway to the Delta Festival, the events opened with Protestant prayer. It is not uncommon for CARE to turn to churches to find volunteers and disseminate flyers or word of mouth invitations to CARE programming. Churches are highly active religious and social spaces in the Delta.

Historical and culturally ongoing proverbial lessons are disseminated through churches and through the town through things like the local newspaper. The lessons are designed to ingrain shared values, deeply rooted in Protestant Christianity. For example, the front page of *The Tallahatchie News* on Thursday, April 18, 1889 contains seven columns. Three are dedicated to a sermon. The remainder are for foreign gossip from Berlin (reported 100,000,000 passengers transported horse-cars), Britain (salary of the Grand Falconer), China (the teenage Emperor with a speech impediment), home and farm (“If you are careful to keep the furrows straight you will do faster and better plowing”), pith and point (a collection of proverbial sayings), and a column of anecdotal short stories. This format, privileging...
religious messages, is typical of many early newspapers from Charleston and Tallahatchie County. Anecdotes, psalms, and quick tips make up a great deal of the front-page material. Though the location of the content moves from the front page to distributed among internal pages, contemporary papers from the area contain similar subject matter, continually enforcing a system of shared cultural values.

The first chapter of the DAR members Neely Henry & Conger May’s (1960) book on the history of Tallahatchie County is titled “Faith of Our Community Fathers,” and centers Christianity as the unifying factor for “battl[ing] the wilderness, the wild beasts, privation and hardship [which] paid off in the present-day prosperous businesses and pleasant homes of our communities” (p. 5). By prominently positioning the Christian religion as an integral part of the early settlers’ shaping of the county, the authors clearly situate the history within a Protestant, White, colonizer perspective. This perspective is continually enforced through the lack of diverse recorded histories and through cultural practice which prioritizes Christianity, such as collective prayer before secular business meetings, hosting the National Day of Prayer at the town courthouse, and the importance of participating in church communities and congregations.

Protestantism is a shared culture and a potentially/occasionally unifying factor between racial groups in Mississippi (Sparks, 2011). For Black communities, the church historically and continually acts as not only a place for community and worship, but also for social and labor organizing, resistance, and collective systems of care rooted in mutual aid practices (Ferguson, 2012; Giggie, 2007; Watson & Stepteau-Watson, 2015). Margaret Block, longtime activist and educator in the Delta and Tallahatchie County, said in an oral history interview:

I always asked mama, White people got a different God than us? I thought there was a Jesus for the White folks and a Jesus for the Black folks, a God for the White folks and a God for the Black people. I told mama I don’t want to go to the heaven the White folks are going to (Blanc, 2015).

While religion is culturally shared, it is also divided.
REAL-IMAGINED ACTOR
THE PLANTER

The Planter, or planter aristocrat, or planter class is a real-imagined actor produced by the deep-seated racial, social, and economic injustice which fueled the plantations. Historically, the planter is White. The planter is male. He is part of a small populace, but of large reputation. He is not common but is commonly known. The historic planter is the one who enslaves laborers, not the one who plants (see Giesen, 2009). His title of deference and recognition, “planter,” is only one way he benefits from the invisibility of forced laborers. The planter lives off the profits and the spoils of the suffering of enslaved labor. The planter proclaims a Protestant, Christian faith. This proclamation is a narrative intended to absolve him of the cruelty and wickedness of enslaveing others; it generally allows for narratives which enshroud him as benevolent, a benefactor, a generous and “kind master” (Leach, 2019). Despite the animosity felt towards the planter/planter class, the planter aristocracy answer only to King Cotton and King Corn. Ante- and post-bellum, the real-imagined planter lays so heavily on the history and culture of the geographic Delta that he does not dissipate. He continues to rule. He (in)forms the narrative and the land. Put another way:

The planter, who loomed as large in Delta folklore as the family farmer did in that of the Middle West, was accepted, though not necessarily admired, even by those over whom he was master. The social system of Mississippi, which has been observed to contain as much inertia as that of any state, undoubtedly was a factor in perpetuating a system that among other people in other places was unacceptable (Hudson, 1979/1982, p. 40).

The last sentence is a direct reference to the institution of slavery and the power the planter continued to gain long after it was made illegal. The bold claim of Hudson’s last sentence is not only evidence of the power imbalance in the region, but also of the real-imagined “othering” which frequently occurs in narratives about Mississippi. This sometimes results in deficit narratives, or a defining of the region by its problems. It can position the narrator as superior and, sometimes, a savior. In this quote and in other uses of this type of narrative, the finger pointing at the social system of Mississippi acts as the devil in blues songs. In the blues, the devil is an “adaptable and effective lyric instrument for saying what needs to be said” while acting as an “icon for Black southern bluesmen entrapped by that system [of Jim Crow segregation]” (Gussow, 2017, p. 1-2). While the devil is a metaphor for the planter and his structures of power, it is also a way to protect the lyricist (to an extent) from ramifications for critiquing the planter and his power system. The devil can take
the blame for the blues man’s metaphorical and lyrical critique of a violent system. The devil in a spiritual, Christian understanding is a figurehead of evil over which humans have no control. Thus, the devil in a blues song is an indirect address of violent and unjust systemic structures, the cause of those structures, and the controller of the bluesman, who must not be blamed for the critique as *the devil made him say/do/sing it*.

Further, pointing to the othered-backward, real-imagined Mississippi serves to absolve “other places” (Hudson, 1979/1982) of the power imbalances their cultural-social systems perpetuate. They declare distance from Mississippi where they consider the real devil to reside in perpetual systems as a way towards an imagined absolution. The planter, who is not geographically or socially distanced from the Mississippi Delta’s systems and devil(s), but who is in fact a structural part of them, proclaims a Protestant faith and racial superiority in his efforts to be absolved of the devil’s evil, except in scenarios of profits gained. Hudson’s (1979/1982) claim suggests everyone in Mississippi was under the system of the planter and was accepting of it to the point that they continually perpetuate it. However, contrary to the claim, Mississippi has a long history of resisters organizing against the systems of the planter.

*Figure 4.4. J. Stokes-Casey. (2020). Tractor with Confederate Flag along Hwy 35. Photograph. The historic planter is not necessarily a direct, genealogical ancestor of the modern farmer. However, this display suggests the structures of White supremacy and racism are still influential and integral to some agricultural practitioners.*
Counter movements, counternarratives, and resistance are as old as systems of oppression. Acknowledging the Resisters means speaking truth to the very real violence they faced, but not causing more violence or (re)traumatization. The historical narrative presented in some of the collected oral histories for this project or even the Cultural Plan (2004) overlooks and sometimes omits not only Resisters, but also the risks they faced through their resistance. To insert their stories is an act of care which claims space and situates them into the narrative. This insertion is partial as unknown movements and unnamed resisters still largely haunt the history. Nonetheless, this recognition of stories of resistance is an essential, if under-recognized, reality of the historical-cultural geography or the conditions and contexts that produced CARE.

“Mobilizations and countermobilizations” of “the region’s African American, Native American, and poor White communities” continue to “transform the policies of the plantation bloc and inform daily life” (Woods, 1998, pgs. 2 & 4). Through understanding systemic oppression, Resisters work to not only dismantle oppressive structures, but to find creative solutions for subversion and survival. For example, Hyman (2018) describes how groups of African Americans shared deep knowledge of the ecological structure of the Delta, its soil, and its timber to create pockets of autonomy and economic prosperity outside of the system of plantation slavery. Perdue (2012) argues that Indigenous resistance to dispossession continued through organized political campaigns.
for cultural and political sovereignty and reparations promised in past treaties, their presence breaking the Jim Crow, Black and White binary of the region (see also Osburn, 2008, 2014, 2016).

The rise and decline, ebb and flow of power shifting towards and away from the plantation mentality, or attitudes of racism which “perceived fear and dependency among other African Americans” (Green, 2007, p. 2), mark the creative and artistic culture of the Delta, most notably through music like the blues (Woods, 1998), gospel (Darden, 2004), and hip-hop (Neff, 2009). Some messages within the music establish resistance to social and cultural structures. For example, Robert Johnson frequently embraced the legend of pacts between the bluesman and devil as a mode of defiance using the devil as a trickster invoking African diasporic folklore roots and the subversion of the dominant religion in the Delta, Christianity. Barlow (1989) explains it best: “[Johnson] makes a deal with Satan because he has nothing to lose. But there is also an element of defiance […] of the dominant white culture that enforces its social constraints with the help of its official religion, Christianity” (p. 50). Where Hudson (1979/1982) argued the social system of Mississippi perpetuated the Planter’s system of power, the music tradition makes space for cultural systems of Mississippi to operate against power structures.

One example is the annual inaugural Birdia Keglar Legacy Day which was organized by The Birdia Keglar Legacy Committee on June 1, 2006 in Charleston, MS. The inaugural event featured guest speaker Congressman Bennie Thompson and a day of reunion and fellowship. The organization, day of celebration, and committee were formed to “break the [forty year long] silence” (“Legacy of Birdia Keglar,” n.d.) after a suspicious accident that killed the long-time activist. Keglar was an ardent organizer in Charleston and Tallahatchie County for African American communities and voting rights. She was the initial coordinator to organize and found the Tallahatchie Chapter of the NAACP. The organization in her name provides an annual scholarship to a deserving female student, a bi-annual legacy award for community betterment recognition, and contributes to local schools and community partners to encourage civic engagement. The organization maintains her legacy and inserts her story into historical narratives of Charleston, Tallahatchie County, and of the Civil Rights Movement.

There are many other stories of resisters from Charleston and Tallahatchie County. Some are

*Early this morning when you knocked on my door,
I said, “Hello Satan, I believe it’s time to go.”
Me and the Devil was walking side by side*

*Robert Johnson (1937)
Me and the Devil Blues*
more known than others, like Reverend Willie Blue who has also dedicated his life to advocating for civil rights alongside historic groups and organizers such as the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), Freedom Riders, Bob Moses, and Stokley Carmichael/Kwame Ture. Margaret Block was a well-known activist who spent several years working with SNCC in Tallahatchie County. Her work stretched from the Mississippi Delta studying under another well-known activist, Fannie Lou Hamer, to California where she worked with the Black Panther Party and back to the Delta where she continued to share her stories and work tirelessly for justice.

**AN INVITATION**

More stories of resistance and resisters are in the archives of memory and in the many folds of historical narratives. The reader is invited in the space below or in your own spaces where historical narrative is explored to contribute stories of resistance.

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*It took me a long time, to find out my mistakes, but I bet you my bottom dollar, I'm not fattenin’ no more frogs for snakes.*

Sonny Boy Williamson (1957)
Fattening Frogs for Snakes
REAL-IMAGINED ACTOR
THE BENEVOLENT CORPORATION

Benevolent stems from the words “bene” meaning well and the verb “velle” meaning to wish. Benevolence or wishing well is associated with the idea of charitably gifting materials or kindness in an effort to do good. Thus, the benevolent corporation as a real-imagined actor is one which attempts or appears to do good while seeking its own corporate agenda which in most cases is maximizing profit. Combining benevolence which is associated with willingly giving rather than seeking profit with corporation which is primarily profit-seeking initially seems oxymoronic. However, if it is labeled a nonprofit corporation, the contradiction appears less obvious. In the attempt to uncover real-imagined actors within the cultural-historical and geographic context of this study, the Benevolent Corporation is representative of a few different corporate iterations.

Primarily, the term as it is used here is interested in a specific profit-oriented corporation which thrived in Charleston at the turn of the century, the Lamb-Fish Lumber Company (Lamb-Fish) which was in operation from 1905 – 1923. Lamb-Fish is of interest, because it is one of the largest corporations in Charleston’s history and potentially one of the only major ones, as noted by Gordon (1982) the time of Lamb-Fish’s operation was, “Charleston’s only conspicuous period of industrial prosperity” (p. 3). As one of the largest timber mills in the nation in the

Figure 4.7. J. Stokes-Casey. (2020-21). Polyptych Assemblage Panel: Benevolent Corporation. This anchoring panel of the polyptych addresses CARE most prominently with a suspended miniature replica of the stained glass sign over the entrance to the CARE building/the Charleston Arts Center. The bridge is a cut out silhouette of the historic Lamb-Fish lift bridge. It is one of the only intact remnants of Lamb-Fish Lumber Company’s presence in Charleston in the early 1900s. This panel positions Lamb-Fish and CARE together as historic organizations that shaped, and continue to shape the history of Charleston and Tallahatchie County. A map of Mississippi anchors the background. Tallahatchie county is enlarged and a map pin marks the town of Charleston. Natural elements in this panel are pine needles, a pine cone, and a magnolia seed pod to reference prominent tree types in the state. Finally the blue-ribboned pig is representative of Scissors, the two-time (1917 and 1918) world champion hog from Charleston whose custom build home was one of the first historical preservation projects of CARE.
early 1900s, Lamb-Fish brought jobs, new buildings including mill-related facilities, housing, retail, and economic prosperity to Charleston and therefore the surrounding towns. This boom of success may seem to be for the benefit of the residents of the local community, and when the corporation is credited with success it accepts ownership of the praise. Any peripheral benefits to the community or employees are received and considered kind rather than to generate corporation profit. The Benevolent Corporation is an actor which, through bringing prosperity only during a brief moment in the long historical narrative, is warmly recounted and often (incorrectly) credited with (re)solving social ills and injustice. However, the corporation is designed to seek profit, to benefit only and primarily itself.

![Image of Lamb-Fish informational display](https://example.com/Lamb-Fish_display.jpg)

*Figure 4.8. J. Stokes-Casey. (2019). Lamb-Fish informational display on the Square in Charleston. Photo Assemblage.*

Therefore, when the corporation ceases to make profit and as a result withdraws from the community, drying up previous prosperity it is not seen as a betrayal, but business. The historical narrative is shaped to recall the time of the Benevolent Corporation and its prosperity warmly, without bitterness. The Benevolent Corporation’s absence leaves a hole in the land from uprooted ancient trees, in the economy with joblessness rising, disposable income dwindling, shops closing. The desegregated work environment’s temporary façade of employment equality fades away and makes visible the ever-present inequality and injustice. Yet, the Benevolent Corporation casts a warm, golden glow on the collective memory of the town, still present in oral stories and historical displays. It is true that the existence of the lumber company brought development and prosperity to the town and it is also true that it did not.

Additionally, benevolent corporations include nonprofit efforts in Charleston and Tallahatchie County such as the Charleston Arts and Revitalization Effort. Without the profit generating, job
producing industry on the scale of Lamb-Fish, gaps are left within the economic health of a town. Without the corporation’s credited benevolence, other organizations begin to take shape and fill in the gaps after a decline in economic prosperity. They are further stretched to meet additional needs not only left by the exit and extractivism of corporations like Lamb-Fish, but also by unsupported or significantly underfunded social needs due to practices of austere cuts in government funding. It is these conditions in which CARE was formed.

CARE is one of many efforts by citizens in the town to organize in an effort to fix longstanding problems. Another example is the Charleston Rotary Club, a branch of the Rotary International whose mission is to “provide service to others, promote integrity, and advance world understanding, goodwill, and peace through our fellowship of business, professional, and community leaders” (rotary.org, 2019). Several members of the Rotary Club are also involved in the work of CARE.

Many grassroots organizations originated and continue to flourish by efforts of the Black community of Charleston and particularly are influenced by the work and leadership of Black women, for example, the Birdia Keglar Legacy Committee. The National Charleston Day Organization, also called the Charleston Day Club was founded in 1974 by the late Dr. Ethel Greene who was born in Charleston in 1921. The organization serves Charleston, but also meets and serves in multiple major cities including Atlanta, Chicago, Detroit, and St. Louis to name a few. The Charleston Day Club grants scholarships, organizes reunions, and enacts its mission to “contribute to the education, cultural development, health and welfare of the citizens of Charleston, Mississippi and the surrounding area” (Thomas, 2012). As these ongoing efforts continue, more organizations for the care of Charleston emerge, such as the Charleston Community Center established in 2018 by Concetta Wells whose mission is to “strengthen and meet the unmet needs of families and individuals of all races and ages in the community by providing life skills, youth development, parenting classes, workshops, tutoring, mentoring, and job readiness skills with quality and compassion” (charlestoncommunitycenter.org, n.d.).

When broadening the search to Tallahatchie County, a variety of other community care focused organizations are actively working. One example is the Tutwiler Quilters within the Tutwiler Community Education Center which is west of Charleston, in the Delta, and near the Tallahatchie County border. The Tutwiler Quilters was founded in 1988 where, “African American women in the Mississippi Delta area use their skills of quilt making to help support themselves and their families, as well as to preserve a quilting style that is indigenous to the African American people
in the Delta area” (TutwilerCommunityEducationCenter.org, n.d.). The Tallahatchie County Alliance, Inc. is a nonprofit whose stated purpose is to “mobilize citizens of Tallahatchie County to improve the towns in which they live” (Tallahatchie Alliance Facebook page). The organization partnered with the Emmett Till Interpretive Center in 2017 to create mosaic art sponsored by a grant from the Mississippi Arts Commission (The Sun-Sentinel, 2017). Both of these examples of community organizing use the arts as a tool for their work.

Each of these are benevolent nonprofit corporations whose organized efforts are of good will and whose work aims to fill holes and gaps within social support networks such as education, health, and other forms of care. CARE is one organization created with the purpose of responding to these conditions of need.
SHAPING OF LAND

The shaping of land recurs temporally and geographically throughout the region’s rich history. Historians of the Delta (Cobb, 1992; Hudson, 1979/1982) are adamant that readers understand the deep wilderness, old-growth forest, and flooded swamplands that were the Delta. Even as late as 1880, “millions of undrained acres were mainly a hardwood forest swamp ruled by snakes and black bears” (Hudson, 1979/1882, p. 69). Today’s vast expanse views made by rows of cash crops and occasional tree lines are very different from the original tree-filled, cane reed-packed, dense swampland. The fertile land, the richness of the soil, supports large crops year after year, but its proximity to the Mississippi River, its overflowing tributaries, and the absolute flatness of the Delta lands make it prone and vulnerable to flooding. From early burning and clearing of forests, to mound building, to bonanza era (Fickle, 2001) timber capitalist-extractivism, to agrotechnology’s assistance in expanding farmland, these human-produced changes to the environment impact the visual presentation of the land. They form the vistas and views that inspire today’s landscape artists.

Figure 4.9. J. Stokes-Casey. (2020-21). Polyptych Assemblage of CARE, Charleston, and Tallahatchie County. Mixed media. Approx. 28” x 15”.
There is no denying the power of the Mississippi River. The Mississippi Delta is formed from the floodplains of the Yazoo and Mississippi Rivers. Varying smaller rivers and tributaries thread across the flat land, making it susceptible to flooding. Tallahatchie County’s name comes from the river and the earliest inhabitants of the land. Tallahatchie is Choctaw for River of Rocks.

Water is not only a real force and even threat with temporal consistency throughout the history of the region, but it frequently seeps into the subconsciousness of the culture, manifesting as fear, friend, and foe. The disastrous Great Flood of 1927 seeps into historical psyche as a reminder of the threat of high water (see Barry, 2007). Though 1927 marked the great one, flooding is a constant and recurrent event. Water significantly overtook the Delta as recently as 2019 causing around $20 billion in damages and twelve directly-related deaths (Willis, et. al., 2020). The power of water on the land and on the culture is evident in histories of the region, newspaper headlines, and countless pieces of music, literature, and art (see Carter, 1942). Water continues to shape the land and the ecological environment in the region as do humans.

The water rising from its place in the riverbed and claiming people unable to escape its currents are the root of the fear and anxiety of the power of the water. Sometimes, however, the water claims people who are brought to it. Most infamously, the Tallahatchie River was where Emmett Till’s body was found, weighted by a gin fan wrapped around him with barbed wire after he was brutally beaten and murdered in August of 1955 (see Houck & Grindy, 2008; Till-Mobley & Benson, 2004). A few months later, in December of 1955, “authorities pulled black schoolteacher James Evanston’s corpse from Long Lake, in Tallahatchie County,” still...
an unsolved murder (Newton, 2010, p. 113). In her song *Ode to Billie Joe*, Bobbie Gentry (1967) sings:

Seems like nothin’ ever comes to no good up on Choctaw Ridge
And now Billie Joe MacAllister’s jumped off the Tallahatchie Bridge.

It is speculated that the indifference with which the community in Gentry’s song reacts to the suicide of the fictional Billie Joe is a representation of the White community’s response to the murder of Emmett Till (Spiesel, 2019), letting the water take him and going about their business.

From the Protestant Christian perspective which over eighty percent of the adult population in Mississippi reportedly practices (Pew Research Center, 2014), water provides the substance for submersion baptism ritual as a form of spiritual cleansing, the *washing away of sins* sometimes in the river (see Ferris & Ferris, 1973; Jackson, 1997), letting the water take them, making space for the Holy Spirit.

The water is mighty; it takes. It also gives, churning up deep-time layers of ancient alluvial life source hydrating the rows of mechanically planted crops, occasionally reclaiming land and space with rising waters and receding back to its banks, an ever-present reminder of the give and take of the water.

Before the swinging axes of loggers, the Delta lands were burned by the Indigenous peoples to clear patches for residency and agriculture. In the area now known as Tallahatchie County, those people were predominantly Choctaws and Chickasaws, though many other smaller groups inhabited the region. There may be something poetic in the historical narrative with regard to fire. After Lamb-Fish Lumber Company of Charleston ceased operation in 1923, it had cleared the region of many of the indigenous hardwood trees, particularly red sweet gum, and moved on to extract more trees elsewhere. The mills were then run by Turner, Farber, and Love until 1930 when they sold the equipment and moved out. The mill and many of the surrounding buildings which were a part of the *bonanza era* (Fickle, 2001) economic boom of Lamb-Fish Lumber Company’s time in Charleston were all destroyed in a “mysterious fire” (Gordon, 1982, p. 5) in 1932. The poetry is in the cycle of destruction, fire for Indigenous clearing, mass extraction of trees for capital, fire destroys the source of extraction. It is difficult to say whether or not the burned mill makes the Benevolent Corporation more enticing as romantic nostalgia for the prosperity experienced by the town in its full operation or if it makes it more tragic. The tragedy of the company extracting the trees from the earth, then leaving which extracted jobs from the region, then burning down which ultimately meant the removal of the railroad tracks, a tool for economic exchange, leaves Charleston with a gaping hole but shining memories of the former prosperity.
From long ago ("Migration Story," 2020) to the treaty of 1830, the earliest inhabitants in Tallahatchie County were primarily Chickasaw, a smaller band of people who split from the Choctaw and moved north from Nanih Waiya, the Mother Mound, Great Mother, shaped by the hands of the Choctaw piling Mother Earth into a more-than-human, more-than-architecture, sacred earth art, still standing about 130 miles southeast of CARE. Emerging from the earth in a cave below Nanih Waiya (Bounds, 1964; Gildart, 1996), “The Choctaws have shaped history in their turn by requiring it to flow around them” (Galloway, 1995, p. 36).

From the Choctaw, the Chickasaw branched north populating what is now north west Mississippi, West Tennessee, and parts of eastern Arkansas. They, too, carried the tradition of shaping the earth into mounds. According to Brown (1926), ancient mounds, which he also refers to as earth works, are found throughout Mississippi. He lists several uses of different mound sites including burial, ceremonial, residence, military operations, look-out posts, and places of refuge for people and domestic animals during times of flood – the ever-present threat of water.
A Mississippi Historical Commission official marker in Charleston explains the county was officially formed in 1833, after the *third* Choctaw cession, or the Treaty with the Chickasaw also known as the Treaty of Pontotoc Creek, was signed on October 20, 1932. This removal of Indigenous peoples led to an in-migration of White prospective planter/colonizers and the enslaved Black laborers who were forced to clear the land, prepping the soil for the era of plantation slavery in the Delta. The Delta is *plantation country* (Hudson, 1979/1982) and has been since the first Choctaw cession. The phrase is as much about the physical land as it is about the cultural environment, the latter actually a stronger influence on the cultural-historical geography (see the Planter).

In the antebellum period, the system of plantation slavery created a patchwork of agricultural colonization throughout the geographic space. As settler-colonialism and plantations increased, the larger portions of acreage, full of old growth timber and thick swampland, deposits of overflow from regular flooding of the area, were left uninhabitable. Postbellum period taxes meant government seizures and railroad surveyor purchases of a vast majority of Delta land (see Cobb, 1994; Hudson, 1979/1982; Saikku, 2005). To turn a profit, much of the land was leased, and occasionally sold, to the timber industry. The timber industry’s clearing the land of massive swaths of giant old-growth forests created a dramatic change to the landscape (Eisterhold, 1972; Fickle, 2001; 2004; Hickman, 1962).

In *Trials of the Earth*, Mary Ann Hamilton’s (2012) recollections about moving into the Mississippi Delta with her logger-husband make her one of the first recorded White women in Tallahatchie County. Hamilton, who lived from 1866 to 1936, witnessed the clearing of the Delta timber (and later the construction of Parchman Farm which today lies five miles west of the Tallahatchie County border). Hamilton (2012) recalls, “They had from six to eight log wagons going all the time; eight-wheeled wagons...from eight to ten oxen a wagon. Many of the logs were so large they couldn’t get but one on a wagon” (p. 67). “Work hummed,” she writes, “the men were clearing out the timber fast, and we could hear them working on the new railroad” (p. 146). James Fickle (2001) refers to this period as the *bonanza era*. The role of the lumber workers in narratives of the region are painted as legendary “ruthless exploiters” (Fickle, 2001, xii) who clear the trees, haul them away, then leave the earth bare and wounded.

Fickle (2001) argues the lumbermen were not “inherently evil,” but acting within the historical “social climate, technological and scientific knowledge, and financial structure of the times” which
included practices that were devastating to the forests (p. xii). A technoscientific futurity where the future is progress guided by speculative extraction of future economic value leaving a permanent anxiety through fostering uncertainty and expectation about imminent breakthroughs (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017) is only partially descriptive of the *bonanza era* which was founded on immediate extraction for immediate economic value, avoiding taxes which accrue with time and hinder profits, “taking only the best timber and leaving the inferior trees behind” (Fickle, 2001, p. 65).

**Figure 4.12.** J. Stokes-Casey. (2020). Cypress at the Tallahatchie County Wildlife Refuge. Photograph. The refuge attempts to restore some of the timber, swampland, and wildlife.

**Figure 4.13.** J. Stokes-Casey. (2019). Delta cotton field with distant tree line. Photograph.
LAND
CORPORATE SHAPING

Charleston’s elevated location on a bluff overlooking the Mississippi Delta offered a solution to the problem of flooding mills. The easy access to large timber and flood-resistant elevation drew Lamb-Fish Lumber Company to establish a large business on the bluff. The difficult labor of felling and milling trees drew in an integrated group of laborers looking to take advantage of the opportunity for employment, ranging from 1,500-1,700 workers during peak times. Running from 1905 to 1923, Lamb-Fish increased the population of Charleston from 300 to ten times that amount (Gordon, 1982). The lumber company’s quickly increasing wealth and workforce led to major economic development of the town of Charleston. A junction in Charleston with the Yazoo and Mississippi Valley Railroad line expanded access to and from the town, for timber, businesspeople, and a special hog. The 1917 and 1918 world champion hog, Scissors, had his own train car and home, the latter of which became the first historical restoration project by CARE. Lamb-Fish Lumber Company built Lafisco, a hotel, rare in the region, to welcome prospective business partners. A candy factory and shops provided spending opportunities for those with disposable incomes and whose White skin allowed open access to such places.

In this moment of prosperity, contemporary memory of Lamb-Fish Lumber Company becomes perceived as a benevolent corporation. It is praised for its economic contributions to the town. It elevates the town with employed workers, a variety of retail shops for disposable income, rail-lines, and a hotel which mark it as a destination. It is praised for its desegregated hiring practices, though Jim Crow laws permeate all societal structures of the region during this time. The corporation, through an imagined perspective of leveled labor, is incorrectly considered a solution to centuries of racial and social injustice (Fickle, 1999).

While across town, “they [store owners] took the tables out of the ice cream parlor” rather than let the customers be integrated (B. Daily interviewed by G. Hillman, March 2004). Segregation isn’t really solved by the Benevolent Corporation, but the corporation gladly takes credit for it while also extracting resources. The corporation shaped the land by clearing and milling timber and shipping it away on railways as the old growth forest rapidly vanished. It acts as an imagined remedy for societal ills such as racial inequality and violence, overburdening poverty, and unemployment. It became its own folkloric trope, the Benevolent Corporation and its golden years, worthy of nostalgic admiration. It is temporary. It is a distraction. It is imagined to gloss over real social injustice.
Contemporary shaping of the land of Tallahatchie County is heavily reliant on the abilities of agri-technology for smart farming to support the largest ongoing economic generator of the region – agriculture. Multiple educational programs at colleges and universities in the region train students in technologies for field crops, weed science, entomology, water use, etc. in order to boost crop yields and work with the land and technology to ensure ongoing production. The vast, flat spreads of Delta farmland are significantly different from the earliest descriptions of the region's impenetrable swamps of cane and hardwood.

There are some areas of the Delta like the Tallahatchie County Wildlife Refuge that seek to restore native bottomland forests which were previously drained for agricultural use. One of the biggest incentives in these efforts is to provide habitats for migratory birds, particularly waterfowl (“About the Refuge,” 2014). The return of the migratory birds was quickly recognized as a lucrative source of income encouraging private hunting lodge businesses to pop up across Tallahatchie County and the Delta. Tourists come from across the globe to kill ducks in the Delta.

Figure 4.14. J. Stokes-Casey. (2020-21). Polyptych Assemblage Panel: Land Shaping. Under the blazing heat of a golden sun pine branches tangle together, adorned with clocks marking the temporal presence of trees, land, and wildlife (past, present, and future). A catfish swims a surreal path through the branches and a duck sits at the bottom. Is this then a water scene? Their existence is profitable. They are a part of the culture and the capital. The bag’s contents are unknown.
SHAPING OF LAND

AN INVITATION

Navigating over and through space is a form of shaping the land and of shaping one’s relationship to the place. The impressions on the earth and even air and water from traveling shape the environment. Traversing the space also shapes the traveler. As a part of understanding the conditions and contexts that produced CARE, I documented my travel to and from Charleston as well as driving around Tallahatchie County. The brief video featured on this page is an assemblage of clips from some of those trips and also of generated and combined sound to help situate the real-imagined place.

I invite the reader to consider the sights and sounds of navigating through your own familiar or unfamiliar spaces. How does contemporary travel (like driving rural highways) situate the traveler in connection with present and past places? How does our experience of the place inform the narrative we shape?

Figure 4.15. J. Stokes-Casey. (2020-21). Polyptych Assemblage Panel: Driving Video and Sound Assemblage Panel.

Figure 4.16. J. Stokes-Casey. (2019-2020). Video and Sound Assemblage of driving around Tallahatchie County Highways. Driving and documenting the drive, then layering an assemblage of sound is a mode of shaping the land and place through a real-imagined experience.
SOCIAL INJUSTICE

The shaping of land is inextricably intertwined with another significant and recurrent theme, the social and cultural history of the region. Disguised as agreements, treaties were used to force the removal of Native Americans, claim land for production by White colonial-settlers, many of them participating in and all benefiting from the system of slavery, and establish as well as enforce a culture of White supremacy (Perdue, 2012; Usner, 1992). With the influx of White settlers came those they enslaved from African and African American descent whose forced labor and trauma continue to shape the cultural-historical geographical region (Beckert, 2014; Cobb, 1992; Woods, 1998). Plantations were only small plots of land patchworked into the larger Delta, but the magnitude of the injustice of slavery followed by convict leasing, denied restitutions, sharecropping, denied civil rights, systemic racism, and poverty compound into contemporary culture, opening space for the real-imagined Planter to emerge as a figure of power, earning the region the title “the most Southern place on earth” (Cobb, 1992). For example, Woodruff (1994) argues that following the period of plantation slavery and sharecropping, when mechanization replaced primarily manual labor around the 1940s, “paternalism with business acumen [sought] to reform the plantation without changing the power relations that defined it” (p. 263). In other words, shaping of land is intrinsically intertwined with power and social injustice, thus resulting in a plantation country (Hudson, 1979/1982) even after the era of plantations passed.
The Chickasaw were some of the earliest inhabitants of Tallahatchie County. Their history is enfolded with some of the earliest forms of social injustice in the region and simultaneously with significant resistance movements within the historical narrative (see Osburn, 2008, 2014, 2016; Perdue, 2012).

The Chickasaw battled with other Indigenous populations (O’Brien, n.d.) leaving marks on the land and on others in order to survive. They supplied prisoners of war and conquest to the Carolina English, acting as slave catchers in the Indian Slave trade of the late 1600s and early 1700s. The Chickasaw raided groups like the Ibitoupas and Taposas who resided around present-day Tallahatchie County, taking them to Charleston, South Carolina to trade for weapons/guns, ammunition, horses, clothes, and other items (Barnett, 2012). Perhaps this sinister trade route from Tallahatchie County to the Carolina coast is an undercurrent in the naming of the town of Charleston, Mississippi. The history of the Chickasaws’ relationship to land and people, profiting from violent kidnapping and raids of communities (Gallay, 2002) and their forced removal from the lands by White settlers, is complex and multifaceted.

In the few histories of Tallahatchie County (Eskridge, 1905; Neely Henry & Conger May, 1960), the mention of the Chickasaws and Choctaws is focused on their removal after the signing of the Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek in 1830. A “treaty” being the law of the land. In this case, the document, historically reported as a mutual agreement between White and Native parties, permitted White settlers to claim Choctaw land in exchange for a forced migration to land on Oklahoma Indian Territory, though their story does not end here. Chickasaws and other Indigenous communities within the Mississippi Delta continue to advocate for their rights and protections and resist ongoing colonization through political activism (Osburn, 2008, 2014, 2016; Perdue, 2012).
This colonial clearing of Indigenous people (though many bands of resistance remained) made space for White nostalgia for the appropriation of imagined Chickasaw culture. Around Charleston, Mississippi, a once thriving (1924–2003) summertime and outdoor retreat, Camp Tallaha operated under the Chickasaw Council of the Boy Scouts on Indigenous land. Young boys roaming over the land for seventy-plus years learning basic survival skills, killing snakes by the lake, and sharing mess hall meals and sleeping quarters created mostly White male adults with yearning nostalgia for a real-imagined experience akin to a fanciful appropriation of Indigenous culture.

It’s Camp Tallaha, a Boy Scout camp that helps make men. That’s my Camp Tallaha. It may have left us, but it will never die, hundreds of boys who became men will keep it alive (Stowers, 2017).

Nostalgic and real-imagined connection to the land and place creates a shared cultural experience for Charleston’s former Boy Scouts. The camp not only promoted a connection to place but also promoted cultural ideals of manhood and masculinity positioning them as most potent when in proximity to nature, an imagined survivalist-ruggedness to master and conquer the land (Hantover, 1980). However, in 2003, the Chickasaw Council (the title of the Boy Scout leaders who ran the camp) closed and sold the camp; the buyer planned to use it as a hunting resort. The site changed hands again resulting in a stripping away of the land’s timber and resources. “It became nothing that it was,” Stowers (2017) laments, but the cultural-historical cycle of this plot of land follows a pattern of social injustice, ecological extraction, and sentimentality for lost imagined ways of being that threads throughout the history of the Delta and therefore Charleston and Tallahatchie County.
The plantation is not contained within a plot of farmland but extends into the social and cultural construction of the Delta region. Plantations began shaping the land and unjust social systems of the Delta before and after the Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek was signed in 1830. It is impossible to summarize in this context the extent to which plantation culture is embedded, except to state the obvious, that plantations were run by the Planter and labor was forced upon enslaved Black people (and later sharecroppers and renters) creating a system of social injustice, of racial hierarchy supporting White supremacy, of generational economic disparities, of political disenfranchisement, and continues to shape contemporary society and culture (Blackmon, 2008; Cobb, 1992; Douglass, [1845] 2003; Gallay, 2002; Giesen, 2009; Hudson, 1979/1982; Leach, 2018; Oshinsky, 1997; Woods, 1998; Wright Austin, 2006).

Often, the Planter was treated as if he were above the law if not a part of law enforcement. One example of this is the thriving culture of juke joints on plantations where the law would not interfere in illegal gambling and drinking. The Planter determined when and how law was enforced on his land. Law enforcement would not interfere unless the Planter thought activities were getting too wild. In an oral history interview with Grady Hillman, Richard “Pig” Garner describes juke joints as:

an old house. Didn’t have no electric lights; we’d have a couple, three or four lamps around there. And then have some guy would be there with a guitar playing the blues. Word would get around that Little Milton might be at this place or Sonny Boy would be over here. We’d go there and they’d charge fifty cents, a dollar, or something. You’d have gambling tables out there and sell a little home brew…We are living in the edge of the Hills. Once you go out about a mile and a half west, you’re in the flat land, you’re in the Delta. They would have more fun over there than we would here in the Hills, because those Plantation owners would not let a sheriff come out to their plantation. So actually, we just had our fun over there. Wasn’t nobody to mess with us or anything (R. Garner interviewed by G. Hillman, March 2004).

The juke joints promoted the culture of the blues which are spoken of fondly in narrated histories, but neither would exist without the plantation. The stories are forms of art education which through blurred descriptions of real-imagined places (a guy with a guitar in an old house lit by a
couple of lamps) transport the listener to a version of the time and place where they can participate in the magic of the memory, the imagined, and muddy the details of the real experience. It is an invitation to view the past through a particular lens – that which the narrator thinks the interviewer most wants to hear (Portelli, 1991). In an oral history interview with local civil rights activist Willie Blue, Hillman asked similar questions about juke joints and Blue gave the same descriptions of the café and plantation shacks for listening to the blues, but with one key difference:

Back then, we hated the blues. We didn’t want to hear it. We wanted to hear Nat King Cole. Now it’s become very profitable and everybody’s talking about it. But we didn’t want to be bothered with the blues. Now it’s, “Hey that’s your culture” …It ain’t mine! (W. Blue interviewed by G. Hillman, March 2004).

Both Garner’s and Blue’s experiences are true, but the former is more often told than the later, because it’s a stronger-embraced story to love and accept the blues. The blues brings the tourist dollars, the real-imagined culture, the acceptable narrative…It ain’t mine. It shoulders the devil with burdens, not the systems which rendered its existence…it ain’t mine.

The Planter and the slave-run plantation were temporary in history, but their influence continues in culture and society. When the timber industry moved in and through the Delta, it inevitably benefited from many of the power structures put into motion from the plantation. Notorious cultural shaping practices churned under the surface of the Benevolent Corporation, polite society, and proverbial newspapers. It is widely known that the candy factory was a work around for sugar rations and actually used to make bootleg alcohol rather than quality candies (B. Dailey, interviewed by G. Hillman, March 2004). Many of the surrounding counties were dry, but Tallahatchie County allowed for the sale of beer, drawing in soldiers from nearby Camp McCain (R. Garner interviewed by G. Hillman, March 2004). Liquor sales, however, were illegal unless local law enforcement was willing to turn a blind eye or accept a “black market tax” (B. Dailey, interviewed by G. Hillman, March 2004). Charleston’s reputation attracted people from the broader regional area. During cotton season, several stills were in operation; “Whiskey was the number one cash crop, as long as you kept chopping the cotton and kept your mouth shut” and “if you knew which door to knock on, you could get it in this town” (W. Blue interviewed by G. Hillman, March 2004).

Two African American narrators, Blue and Gardner, describe the café on West Main Street, just off of the Square which offered three “levels” of access: the store front for sandwiches and soda pop, the kitchen for a quick whiskey nip and inconspicuous return to the store front, and the back for drinking, staying a while, and gambling. When the café closed up for the night,
some parties ventured west into the Delta, looking for juke joints, which were usually located on plantations.

Juke joints, the café, and ration-bypassing distilleries with a candy factory façade show the power of both the Planter and the Benevolent Corporation and the ease with which they manipulate or disregard the law to suit their interests. It is an offering of fun and unmediated shenanigans in exchange for the recognition of their real-imagined power. The resulting stories are romantic and mischievous and often told with pride of place. Such stories can lull the listener and invite them into a colorful past in which the power structure, racial injustice, and systemic violence are given permission to continue without critique. The Benevolent Corporation and the Planter thrive through shaping their deviance and power into stories of nostalgic and romantic scenes, neither of them taking any responsibility for a story that may not benefit their profit or power…it ain't mine.
SOCIAL INJUSTICE

VERY REAL VIOLENCE

Juke joints, a café with three tiers of trouble, and a sugar ration-skirting “candy” factory are fun stories, but the power structures which made space for their existence eliminated any room for dissent and resistance. For example, a gathering on a plantation at a juke joint for gambling and profiting the illegal whiskey trade was allowed, but a gathering for liberation theology or labor organizing was extinguished with swift violence including anything from threats to lynching before it could get started. In spite of this, the Resisters continued their work to challenge systems of oppression and organize people in the effort. One of the most notorious and well-known cases is the murder and trial of the murder of Emmett Till, which has repeatedly been credited for launching the modern Civil Rights Movement (Houck & Grindy, 2008; Till-Mobley & Benson, 2004), and happened in Tallahatchie County.

Emmett Till

Beyond Charleston and even Tallahatchie County, Emmett Till’s story is a historically significant pivotal moment and often considered the catalyst for the Civil Rights Movement. Till’s mother, Mamie Till, a teacher, understood the power of images and shared photos of her fourteen-year-old son’s face and body, brutally beaten into disfigurement. She knew that images would teach about how Black and Brown bodies were perceived as objects, less-than-human, and whose lives were not valued and would inspire action for justice, opposition to racial violence, and rejection of the systems like segregation and voter suppression designed to uphold White supremacy. The trial (held in Sumner, Tallahatchie County’s other county seat) brought international attention and media to Tallahatchie County.

As far as Charleston, also a county seat, an FBI report (2006) mentions Charleston’s jail was searched by the prosecution after rumors that the two mysteriously disappeared African American key witnesses had been

kidnapped and held there making them unable to testify. The report determined the men were not there. Nonetheless, the Till trial’s notoriety touched everyone in Tallahatchie County in 1955. The Chevrolet dealer in Charleston recalls selling murderers Bryant and Milam the green pick-up truck only days before it was used to transport Till’s body to Money, Mississippi to be disposed of in the Tallahatchie River (Dailey/Hillman Interview). “Pig” Garner said tensions were high around the time of the trial and recalls seeing the murderers at his workplace where he repaired farm equipment. It’s possible the time frame of selling the vehicle and the sightings are misremembered, but they speak to the real-imagined personal relationship to the monumental violence of both the murder and the dishonorable and unscrupulous court trial.

Ongoing Violence and Black Women’s Resistance

Due to its position as nationally historic, the Emmett Till case cannot be ignored or excluded from the practiced historical narrative, but it is far from the only instance of violence, racism, and systemic injustice in the culture and history of Charleston and Tallahatchie County. The Ku Klux Klan (KKK) had an active presence. “Tallahatchie County?...Notorious,” said Reverend Willie Blue who later continued:

They didn’t fool around with no [burning] crosses in Tallahatchie County, they just burned your dang house down, beat you, throw you in jail if they didn’t kill you and you didn’t look back once you got loose. You just headed north. You didn’t look back. And that’s just the way it was, they didn’t fool around with no crosses and all that, they just set your house on fire and if that won’t make you go, they’ll do something else from violence to somebody personally and that’ll make you get going. How they do it; they persecute you into going away. I ain’t going nowhere unless the Lord says something. I’m still agitating (W. Blue interviewed by G. Hillman, March 2004).

A few recorded instances of Klan violence in a “campaign of terror” in the mid-1960s in response to Black resistance and voter and civil rights organizing include a February 1964 brutal beating with pistol-whips and axe handles of two Black youths in a “White-owned grocery store” in Charleston which left the victims hospitalized (Newton, 2010, p. 136).

Other racially-violent acts which may or may not be tied to the Klan include the cold-blooded 1955 shooting of Clinton Melton in his workplace in Glendora (the same southwest Tallahatchie County town where Emmett Till was taken from his uncle Mose Wright’s house in the middle of the night). Melton was shot by a White motorist when he “put more gasoline than requested into a
customer’s tank” (Newton, 2010, p. 113). The motorist pleaded self-defense and was not prosecuted. Also, in December of 1955, “authorities pulled black schoolteacher James Evanston’s corpse from Long Lake, in Tallahatchie County,” an unsolved murder (Newton, 2010, p. 113).

Birdia Keglar was a tremendous organizer in Tallahatchie County, offering her home to Freedom Riders, Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) members, and other civil rights activists. Most notably, Keglar was involved in an ongoing effort to win her voter registration rights, which she did in 1961 (Klpofer, 2005), and she led the effort to form the first NAACP branch of Tallahatchie County. Tragically, she did not live to see its formation. The mysterious deaths of Birdia Keglar and Adeline Hamlet, who were killed in a car “accident” on their way back to Tallahatchie County from attending an organizing event involving Senator Robert Kennedy in Jackson, Mississippi in January of 1966, have long been suspected as orchestrated foul play by a White driver in a second vehicle (Newton, 2010, p. 169; “The Legacy of Birdia Keglar,” n.d.).

Keglar’s activism ensured the survival of a new generation of Resisters in the case of SNCC field secretary, Margaret Block. In the early 1960s, Block took an assignment coordinating voting registration in Charleston, MS where her life was threatened on multiple occasions. The first time was in front of the courthouse by a klansman with a knife and she “was pulled away by a justice department agent [who] usually didn’t protect us” (Klpofer, 2005). The second time Birdia Keglar learned of a plot against Block by a group of klansmen. Block recalls, “I was handing out voting pamphlets downtown and a man came running up to me and said I needed to go to Birdia’s office right away. She managed a funeral home and when I got there, Birdia sneaked me away in the back of a hearse. Someone had called Birdia and warned her that the Klan was on the way to get me” (Klpofer, 2005). Jonathan Odell (n.d.) shares a clip of an oral history with Margaret Block who talks about a Sharkey Road shoot out. Sharkey Road is a place mentioned several times in Hillman’s tapes, particularly in connection with Resisters organizing and also with plantation juke joints. In the oral history clip, Block discusses preparations and actions to defend the group of Resisters from a group of klansmen shooters. She describes having spotlights to blind the Klansmen and shooting over their heads which proved successful in forcing their retreat. For her safety, Block eventually moved to California and worked as an educator but returned to the Delta later in life and continued to educate and advocate about civil rights and the freedom struggle. Keglar, Hamlet, and Block are only a few examples of fierce Black women Resisters who, at significant risk to themselves, lead the way to reform and educated others along the way.
In the Schools

Birdia Keglar’s grandson, Willie Keglar, was the first Black student to enroll in East Tallahatchie High School (now Charleston High School) in 1965 (Bellamy Terry, 2014), over a decade after the Brown vs. Board of Education (1954) decision ruled schools should desegregate with “all deliberate speed.” It was not until the 1970-71 school year that schools in Charleston were fully integrated (Bellamy Terry, 2014). Elizabeth Keglar (the sister-in-law of Birdia Keglar) taught fourth grade when the schools were practicing a pseudo-integration. In an oral history interview with Hillman (2004), she describes being bussed with her Black students to a White school, going into a White teacher’s classroom without the White students, and teaching a lesson to her Black students, then being bussed back to her regular school. Still, she shared, “[integration] went very well here.” In almost the same breath, she says, “We didn’t have any problems. We didn’t have any problems…I reckon we did too, because they sent some of our children to Parchman [Prison]” (E. Keglar, interviewed by G. Hillman, March 2004). “But,” she added, “they didn’t stay there long.”

Throughout Keglar’s interview, this hesitation to critique systems or injustice is a common theme. It is intertwined with the plantation mentality (Green, 2007), or a learned suppression of expressing criticism or pointing out injustice based on the power of the Planter culture and the Benevolent Corporation culture. To respect the systems of power and not criticize them or else face potential violent punishment as exemplified over and over again throughout the repressed and more silent historical narrative. When asked about her sister-in-law’s death and the speculation of there being foul play and a forced accident, Keglar responded, “I don’t know, all I know is they were killed” (E. Keglar, interviewed by G. Hillman, March 2004). It is certainly fair to not speculate in the absence of hard evidence. In his interview Willie Blue shared that the survivor of the accident “would never tell what happened.” He continues:

It makes me think it wasn’t just a normal wreck, but they were scared, and they just let it go. She was trying to get the NAACP established here. That’s been the big problem. We couldn’t even have NAACP here; we would get persecuted out of town just for talking about that (W. Blue interviewed by G. Hillman, March 2004).

The incident Ms. Keglar discussed happened in 1970. The high schools in Charleston were integrating, but it was an “artificial desegregation plan wherein classes and activities remained segregated within both schools” (Department of Justice, 1972, p. 20). Black students demonstrated and protested the situation. Eventually, the Tallahatchie County sheriff was called in and arrested
125 Black students who were immediately incarcerated in the notorious Parchman Farm/Mississippi State Penitentiary about thirty miles from Charleston and over the county line. Most were there for three days, but “many of them chose to remain in Parchman to continue their protest” (Department of Justice, 1972, p. 20). After a series of difficult and unsuccessful local grievance processes, federal Community Relations Services mediated and eventually, concessions were made including integrating the cafeteria, classes, and extracurricular activities as well as adopting the Black school’s mascot for the combined schools (Department of Justice, 1972). However, that would be far from the end of issues of segregation within the schools. In 2008, five years after CARE was founded, Charleston resident and well known actor Morgan Freeman’s offer (issued every year since 1997) to pay for prom if the high school would integrate it, was accepted. A documentary crew followed the unfolding event producing the film *Prom Night in Mississippi* (2009).

### Prison Culture

Prison culture rose in Mississippi as convict leasing replaced the legal institution of slavery (see Blackmon, 2008). Parchman Farm, formally known as Mississippi State Penitentiary, is “synonymous with punishment and brutality” (Oshinsky, 1997, p. 1). Parchman is located five miles west of the Tallahatchie County line and approximately thirty miles west of Charleston and houses around 3,500 inmates on 18,000 acres (“State Prisons,” n.d.). It was designed originally for Black men and continues an integrated operation today. As of September 2020, 1,370 Black, 638 White, 15 Hispanic, and 4 Asian men were incarcerated at Parchman (MDC, 2020). Early in its operation, Parchman would lease out “convicts,” including women and many, many children. From 1880 “at least 1 convict in 4 was an adolescent or a child — a percentage that did not diminish over time,” (Oshinsky, 1997, p. 47). They were leased to plantation owners or timber companies or whomever was willing to pay Parchman for the unpaid labor of “convicts.” The contemporary website not un-proudly describes the “100,000 hours of free offender labor” the penitentiary provides each year (“State Prisons,” n.d.).

Like many entities in the Delta, Parchman Farm has a folkloric, real-imagined identity which through some historical accounts, songs, and popular films is romanticized, taming its horror, turning it into a shared culture or a less threatening monster. Mary Hamilton’s (2012) *Trials of the Earth* is a record of one of the earliest White women settlers in the Delta who at a few different points in the narrative lived near Parchman Farm. By her recollection, “Even the ‘cages’ themselves, where the convicts were housed for the night, looked nice on the outside. I couldn’t say about the
insides, but from the way the convicts would sing and yell going in from work in gangs of fifty, they must not have been bad" (p. 257) and later “there were hundreds of people scattered over that country that almost always depended on those Negro convicts to keep them up” (p. 259). She expresses a common myth of the happy-to-work Black convict assuming field hollers, chants, and work songs as positivity rather than toil (see Ahmed, 2010; Douglas, [1845] 2003; Du Bois, [1903] 2005).

These kinds of songs were recorded at Parchman by folklorists and photographers John and Alan Lomax (see Jackson, Wood, and Lomax, 2015). Popular culture perpetuates the legend of Parchman through songs made like “Parchman Farm Blues” by Bukka White (1940), “Parchman Farm,” a 1959 jazz tune by Charleston’s Mose Allison and featured in films like Life (1999) starring Eddie Murphy. One of the Lomax recordings “Po’ Lazarus” (1959) was used in the Coen Brothers film Oh Brother, Where Art Thou? (2000). The prison is further romanticized in the book Down on Parchman Farm: The Great Prison in the Mississippi Delta (Taylor, 1999).

Parchman has a long-running presence in the Civil Rights Movement, locking up Freedom Riders including John Lewis (1961) for nearly two months to “break their spirits” (Oshinsky, 1997, p. 235). Approximately 125 Black high school students from Charleston (1970) spent three nights at Parchman in 1970 for protesting segregated conditions in their allegedly integrated school.

In 2000, a multi-million-dollar private prison was built in Tallahatchie County, the Tallahatchie County Correctional Facility (capacity for 2,672 male prisoners) run by CoreCivic, one of the largest correctional firms in the country. It is an official U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) detention facility. As of March 2020, approximately 300 incarcerated people were brought there from massive workplace ICE raids that took place throughout Mississippi in 2019 (Gallagher, et. al., 2019; Zhu, 2020) who now, in addition to the separation from their families, face threats of deportation and coronavirus.

In many ways, the Planter’s power has melded into the Prison Industrial Complex (see also Alexander, 2010). The power of the Planter has always been intertwined with the power of
law enforcement; in some instances, like plantation juke joint operations, it has surpassed it. In contemporary Delta culture, the Prison is nearly indistinguishable from the Planter of the past. At Parchman Farms, incarcerated men literally work in agriculture, planting and harvesting under the watchful eye of guards and the superintendent. At Tallahatchie County Correctional Facility, men are shipped into the prison from ICE raids or from out of state:

PRIVATE PRISON AWAITING 1,400 ALABAMA INMATES

“I’m just overwhelmed and exceedingly glad, because jobs are much needed here in Tallahatchie County” the Tutweiler Mayor (2003). Charleston Sun-Sentinel. July 3. No. 27.

This is parallel to a point made in one of Hillman’s recorded oral histories when the narrator described:

In them days, when I was a child, the big planters, that owned the plantation, they would go to different plantations and get Black people and bring on their plantations (E. Keglar, interviewed by G. Hillman, March 2004).

Many private prisons capitalize on the number of inmates through government stipends paid for by tax dollars. CoreCivic donates to political campaigns including Mississippi governor candidates (Liu, 2020) – an assurance of power and profit.

AN INVITATION

In this space, you are invited to respond to what you have read about social injustice and resistance in this chapter. What thoughts did these narratives spark for you? What narratives should be added?

"...we place special value on landscapes with lakes or reflecting pools. The reflections exhibit Nature representing itself to itself, displaying an identity of the Real and the Imaginary that certifies the reality of our own images" (Mitchell 2002, p. 15).
Conclusion

Using the methodological and literal framework of the polyptych, the reader is invited to unfold and explore multiple narratives composed of archival, historical, and oral history interview data. What emerges are three interdependent themes: real-imagined actors, the shaping of land by natural and human forces, and social injustice. The visual and material artifacts contained within this chapter further push the reader to consider what is real and what is imagined in the interweaving of historical narratives.

This dissertation is interested in how art education shapes historical narrative. While the primary subject of study is the organization the Charleston Arts and Revitalization Effort (CARE), the question is also asked through the shaping of the research into dissertation form. The dissertation itself, and particularly this chapter, is a claim on the historical narrative of Charleston and Tallahatchie County. It inserts stories where there were archival silences and creates openings for additional perspectives, arguments, and narrative threads by using the polyptych, assemblage, and reader-prompts. Prompts, not unlike pedagogical activities a visitor might experience in other educational materials, give the reader an opportunity to reflect, observe, and create alongside the content. This component is one attempt at embedding art education within this historical narrative and as an experiment in form.

By recognizing historying (Dening, 2006; Garnet, 2017a; Munslow, 2010) as artmaking, or further, as art educating, this chapter presents a form-based answer to the central research question, how does art education shape historical narrative? The answer to the question situated within this chapter is that art education as a creative and pedagogical practice [of learning to see and represent] gives permission (Lucero, 2011, 2013) to create new histories (Bolin, 1995; Burke, 1992, 2001; Garnet, 2015a; Himmelfarb, 1989; Munslow, 2010) in which narratives are seen and represented as complex, multifaceted forms which blur the separation between the real and imagined. This is not to say art education encourages imagined histories in the sense that they are false, fake, or fraudulent. Imagined here is combined with the real [real-imagined] to recognize the creativity present in memory, archives, narratives, and oral histories which shapes the real into a romanticized, nostalgic, blurry, metaphorical trope. Representing real-imagined narrative(s) is the work of the arts. The historian, as educator, arranges/shapes the representations to show readers how to see.

This chapter aimed to answer the first supporting question of this dissertation; what are the conditions and contexts that produced CARE? Through presenting this polyptych assemblage of historical narratives, oral histories, and artifacts of Charleston and Tallahatchie County, the
chapter situates CARE within its cultural-historical geographical context. This situatedness is vital to understanding from where the organizers of CARE are speaking. It teaches us how to see CARE from its positionality in history, culture, and its current moment. It recognizes the historicity of the now (Smith, 2019), or how the contemporary is only imagined to be separated from history. The polyptych layers and complicates the narrative by demonstrating that CARE is not just an arts organization that grew from nothing. It is a collaborative effort of volunteers responding to their situatedness within cultural and historical structures of the region through organizing.

The theme of real-imagined actors in this chapter explored how power structures are shaped and determined by the Religion, the Planter, Resisters, and the Benevolence of Corporations. Religion, specifically Protestant Christianity, is an overarching actor shaping the culture and contexts of the Delta, Charleston, and Tallahatchie County. For CARE, it is a context that surrounds its operation, present in opening prayer at meetings and events. It is arguably one of the philosophical forces behind volunteers who participate in CARE’s work and organizing. It is with a spirit of giving, generosity, goodness, and care that may stem from cultural philosophy rooted in Protestant church teachings. The Religion establishes cultural and shared values such as a general expectation of conservative or traditional behavior, tastes, and outlook. Of course, there are exceptions.

The Planter, while overlapping with the Religion, is a different type of power structure that shapes the contexts within which CARE operates. The Planter is representative of a class of elite power and wealth stemming from White supremacist foundations. The Planter represents a power structure rooted in the historical plantation system of agriculture. Because of its wealth and power, the planter system is a dominant factor in shaping the culture; one way is by influencing aesthetic preference through financial support. CARE’s formation is not aligned with the power structure of the planter, but is within the context of it, as is much of the Delta. Further, fiscal resources may occasionally come from this kind of wealth and power class which means the power structure continues to shape the kinds of programming and culture created in the geographic region and at CARE.

Resisters are working against the power structure of the Planter and its elite, exclusive, unjust, and exploitative methods of implementation. The persistent work of Resisters shapes a more inclusive culture, though it is working against dominant structures making the pace of change slow. While CARE’s positionality is not necessarily aligned with resistance, the organization attempts to be more inclusive and sensitive to power dynamics which have historically and culturally prevented marginalized people to access and shape culture in dominant spaces.
The Benevolent Corporations may include for-profit extractivist corporations like the historical Lamb-Fish Lumber Company or nonprofits like CARE. The for-profits corporations are as the name suggests, profit driven and occasionally provide economic and social benefit to the town with the appearance of well-wishing benevolence, rooted in capitalistic ventures. Lamb-Fish was a major corporation and employer in Charleston, but when the timber was all extracted, the company left. Charleston has not had a comparable industry on the scale of Lamb-Fish, with potential exception of the current Tallahatchie General Hospital or correctional facilities. Nonprofits generally seek to organize in an effort of revitalizing or generating solutions for larger issues which are resultant of underfunded, austere, and unsupported social, health, educational, and the like services. These are the conditions which produced CARE. As suggested by its name, the Charleston Arts and Revitalization Effort and its acronym, CARE is an organization aiming to create solutions to the conditions of non-care the town of Charleston and Tallahatchie County faced due to the historical and cultural contexts. While they are not the only nonprofit organization attempting to fill gaps and find solutions to problems in Charleston, their emphasis on the arts is what makes CARE appealing to this research.

In the theme *shaping of land*, connections are made between the *real-imagined actors* and *social injustice*. Land is not only the geographical context within which CARE is situated, it is also culturally significant as a frequently represented subject in the work produced by CARE and its members and students. The history of the land which is explored within the theme shapes the physical, cultural, and historical contexts within which CARE is situated. CARE is produced by this history and produces an ongoing dialogue with the land through art education or pedagogical instruction on how to see or view and understand the land, town, and county as well as how to represent it through artistic mediums including painting, drawing, and choice of subject matter.

*Social injustice* is threaded throughout the history and influences the context and conditions which led to the formation of CARE. There is a long, violent history of racialized oppression against Black, Indigenous, and People of Color populations within the Delta and in Tallahatchie County. It is intertwined with and impacts social structures, class hierarchies, and access to many forms of care. CARE is an effort that attempts to address some of the inequities and injustices that affect the people of Charleston and Tallahatchie County; it is operating within the cultural and historical systems of social injustice. CARE does not directly confront these structures in its mission which is “to foster the economic growth and redevelopment of Charleston, Mississippi through the arts and community involvement while preserving the historical significance and heritage of the town” (careatrsms.
com, n.d.). CARE does not position itself as a Resister. Yet, the organization does recognize social injustice in the culture and history of the town. In the following chapters, an analysis of the oral histories collected for this dissertation offers insight into CARE’s recognition and unfolds how arts education is mobilized in response.
CHAPTER 5: ART EDUCATION AS MORE THAN, SHAPING WHOLE NARRATIVES

In order to explore how art education shapes historical narrative, this dissertation focuses on the work of the Charleston Arts and Revitalization Effort (CARE) and its situatedness within its cultural-historical geographical (CHG) context of Charleston and Tallahatchie County, Mississippi. The previous chapter explored history in the form of polyptych methodology to answer the first supporting question: What are the conditions and contexts that produced CARE? Through unfolding many layers of historic events, anecdotes, oral histories, and visual and material cultures, Chapter 4 presented three interdependent themes including real-imagined actors, the shaping of land by natural and human forces, and social injustice. Understanding CARE within its CHG contexts provides a foundation to analyze what CARE is performing and producing through the art education and history programming it offers.

This chapter answers the second and third supporting questions, what is CARE performing and what is CARE producing, by providing examples of the kinds of programming CARE offers and how CARE works to meet the needs of Charleston and Tallahatchie County. In this chapter I focus on two of the four themes which emerged from the eight oral histories collected from CARE members for the purpose of this dissertation project. Through Applied Thematic Analysis (Guest, et. al., 2012), or an iterative process of analyzing, coding, and theming the data, four themes emerged: Programming; Meeting Needs; Access, Exposure, and Opportunity; and Bringing Together. Each of these themes provide insight on how CARE uses the arts and art education to shape the historical narrative of Charleston and Tallahatchie County. This chapter focuses on the first two themes of Programming and Meeting Needs using data collected in the interviews, archival notes from newspapers and private collections, and visual and material culture. The following chapter will explore the remaining two themes.

What is CARE Performing?

The second supporting question for this dissertation is: what is CARE performing? Performance or performing means conducting, accomplishing, or carrying out tasks. It is something
that is accomplished or fulfilled often based on a goal that the performance is working towards. To successfully perform is to complete the task. Additionally, the performance of this task or the process of completion are also a part of the meaning of the word performance. In the question, “What is CARE performing?” “performance” is used to mean the activities of the organization CARE and the process in which the tasks are carried out. For CARE, its performance is largely situated within its mission statement, “to foster the economic growth and redevelopment of Charleston, Mississippi through the arts and community involvement while preserving the historical significance and heritage of the town” (careatrms.com, n.d.). To meet its mission, CARE performs a variety of activities that place arts education at the center, or at least, as a unifying factor in the performance.

The Role of Art Education

This raises another question about what art education is expected to perform, how it is mobilized, and why it is centrally situated within the mission of CARE. Art education historians (Efland, 1990a, 1990b; Freedman, 1987; Smith, 1996; Soucy, 1990; Stankiewicz; 1992) demonstrate how the field shifts to meet the needs of historical movements and educational theories. In some cases, art education is positioned as innocent (Amburgy, 1990) or supportive / supplemental (Eisner, 2001). These theories have led to a rhetoric within the field of art education that the arts are inherently progressive, that they are independent actors that innately solve problems. Rubén Gaztambide-Fernández (2013) calls this a rhetoric of effects, defining it as the way the arts is spoken of attributes the arts with abilities to do things, like solve complex issues. Instead of imagining the arts as inherent actors of problem solving, the arts should be recognized as “something we do through…symbolic creativity or creative symbolic work” (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2020, p. 6) in an attempt to solve problems. The “we” here is a stand-in for people, but the publication of the article in the Journal of Curriculum Theorizing suggests the “we” is aimed at educators and scholars within education. As evidenced in the arguments of Gaztambide-Fernández (2013, 2020) and in the historiography of art education, we as educators and scholars of education and the arts have perpetuated and advocated for a narrative of the arts and art education that it can inherently and innately solve problems. We ask art education to act as more than. The conversation is recognized by organizations like CARE in communities like Charleston who also ask art education to do this work.
More Than

If art education in this study is considered a pedagogical practice of teaching how to see (identifying formal elements and shaping an aesthetic opinion) and how to represent (the thing being seen or the preferred aesthetic way of seeing), then more than art education extends its purpose beyond learning to see and represent.

Paul Bolin and Kaela Hoskings (2015) offer a reflective tool for educators and institutions to begin to consider the broader beliefs embedded within their arts pedagogical practice. Bolin and Hoskings (2015) list fifty different purposes of art education that they consolidated from over one hundred and fifty years of writing in the field of art education. Some examples from the list include, “(1) develop a sense of appreciation and ‘good taste,’ (2) increase vocational possibilities and contribute to the workforce, (3) grow in their independent and divergent thinking, (4) discover and develop their artistic talents, and (5) cultivate and express a sense of beauty” (Bolin & Hoskings, 2015, p. 41). The authors situate the list as a tool for understanding an individual’s or institution’s priorities or fundamental beliefs of how they mobilize or seek to use art education in their daily practices of instructing and educating learners. That art education has at least fifty identifiable purposes demonstrates a longer narrative of arts education as a means for satisfying a plethora of needs.

For CARE, art education needs to be more than and relies heavily on the arts as an inherent solution, an understanding formed by the rhetoric of effects (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2013). The following passage from a document about CARE’s history illustrates the point:

Charleston Arts and Revitalization Effort, Inc. (CARE) was organized in 2003 by like-minded citizens who came together to help foster the economic development of Charleston, MS through the arts while maintaining the heritage and valuable history of the community. CARE determined that it could save this little rural community by wrapping itself around the ARTS—a place where color, age, religion, and financial status matters not. Charleston has no Chamber of Commerce. It has no community center for large gatherings. It has little culture to offer unless one gets it at home, school or church. One has to drive 40 miles or more to see a movie...or to find a stop light! Charleston is a poor community with little work opportunity. Most of the population is undereducated, receives some type of welfare, and struggles with obesity, other health issues, and teenage pregnancies (CARE Bio, 2019).
In the passage, the arts and art education are positioned directly against the deficits the community faces and situated within the cultural-historical geography of Charleston, Tallahatchie County, and the Delta. The first sentence is CARE’s mission statement and explicitly identifies the arts as the mechanism through which CARE will engage in economic development, community involvement, and historical preservation. Immediately, the arts are positioned to be *more than* — more than community service, more than historical programming, more than learning to paint, draw, dance, etc. CARE’s capitalization of the ARTS in the quote is representational. It is a forming or shaping of the word to literally emphasize it within the sentence, but also signify importance. The capitalization means, as the rest of the sentence states, that the author/CARE positions “the arts” as transcendent over social hierarchies of race, class, age, and religion, as *more than*. Implying that while these social hierarchies have the potential and the effect of divisiveness, “the arts” are exceptional, unaffected, and are actually solutions to problems of division. The concepts of art education as a solution to racial division will be further analyzed in the following chapter.

In the passage of CARE’s history, the arts are established as the binding agent of CARE’s work for the community of Charleston and Tallahatchie County. With the language of *wrapping around*, the arts are considered to be simultaneously all encompassing and central. It can be available to all and at the center of the work of the organization. The community is wrapped around the arts; the arts are wrapped around the community. By doing so, the arts are imagined to create a non-discriminatory environment. The arts are imagined to fill the absences of a chamber of commerce, community gathering spaces, educational opportunities missed in school and church, wealth or lack thereof, employment, and health. Depending on how it is quantified, there are around twenty needs claimed in the passage that art education through CARE may address. Quantifiably, that compares to nearly half of the fifty-item list presented by Bolin and Hoskings (2015). Through the work of CARE with the arts as a core of the organization, art education is imagined to be a supportive, uplifting envelopment of people in Charleston and Tallahatchie County which fills the holes and gaps left by systemic social injustice and capitalist extractivism. Arts education when deployed as *more than* is imagined to lead to *wholeness*.

**Wholeness**

Wholeness or whole is completion and unity; it is not lacking any parts, nor is it broken. Miranda Joseph’s (2002) *Against the Romance of Community* claims nonprofits often create imagined
communities to fill in the holes left by capitalist systems in unprofitable social structures such as healthcare and education. Wholeness is not attainable in structures that are broken or lacking, and solutions to repair the gaps may continue to uphold the structures that rendered them necessary.

For example, like many schools in the Delta, the schools in Charleston do not currently have art instructors, though Charleston Elementary School had one for a brief period of time. A significant portion of funding for arts programs in Mississippi has come from the Mississippi Arts Commission’s (MAC) branch the Whole Schools Initiative (Whole Schools). MAC is a state grants and service agency for the arts funded by the Mississippi Legislature, the National Endowment for the Arts, and private funds (“Agency Overview,” n.d.). Whole Schools is a division of MAC that offers funding and professional development to integrate the arts into classrooms. Their website explains the two essential components of the initiative as, “[1] the use of arts teachers and visiting artists in the areas of dance, drama, music, visual art, creative writing and folk arts to strengthen the place of the arts as a core academic subject in its own right; and [2] the integration of the arts in all academic subjects in order to increase student success in these subjects,” (“Our History,” 2021). Through funding and professional development, it is at once an advocacy program for the autonomy of art education and a program to implement the arts into non-arts specific classrooms and subjects.

As the name suggests, the Whole Schools Initiative is a recognition that schools are not complete, or unwhole, without access to arts education. Further, the MAC as an extension of the state is tasked with securing and proffering government and private grants in support of short-term engagements with schools in the state in order to make them temporarily whole. In an attempt to sponsor art education within schools, Whole Schools continues the cycle of under- or not funding arts education programs on a permanent basis for students in Mississippi schools. It does this by filling in structural and funding gaps in educational systems as Joseph (2002) argues nonprofits tend to do for capitalist structures which fail to support social services.

In Charleston, CARE’s early work involved a Whole Schools Initiative grant to offer arts education to local students in the Charleston schools. Most of these interactions took place after school hours, between school dismissal and bus pick-up, and were not evenly accessible to all students. One of the original founders and continuing volunteer explained that she did a lot of visual art teaching for CARE: “I went to the school. It was like an after-school program where the kids had to stay there until the bus came and I taught art just right there. I did mostly drawing is all I could do in that part. It was fun doing that at the school” (J. Jones, personal communication, October 5, 2020). CARE’s representatives volunteered time and labor in order to provide arts
education services to students when possible. Securing the grants required additional work on the part of school administration, teachers, and community volunteers from organizations like CARE to compete for funding opportunities during the short-term limits of the grant. Though not for lack of effort, CARE is no longer able to directly collaborate with Charleston schools and with the grant period over, students are left without access to arts education specialists at the school.

CARE works to offer pay to artists-teachers, financially affordable or free programming, and after school and summer camps hosted at the CARE building, also called the Charleston Arts Center. In doing so, they also assume all responsibility for the operating costs, labor, and seeking out additional funding which is generally dependent on volunteer hours. CARE's mission is service, and it is reliant on volunteerism and occasional grant funding. Because the organization is willing to volunteer labor and self-fund, it also unwittingly supports the systems which render it necessary (for example, unwhole schools).

Returning to the passage provided by CARE about the organization and issues faced in Charleston and Tallahatchie County, CARE depends on art education to fulfill the promise of more than perpetuated by the rhetoric of effects (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2013). Through art education, CARE not only seeks to offer solutions to a plethora of problems it identifies in the paragraph, but also to shape a narrative of wholeness. The narrative put forth is of coming together, repairing the economy, preserving history, and providing solutions.

Shaping a narrative of wholeness is crucial when combatting a narrative of deficits. Yet, whole or complete historical narratives are fundamentally impossible given the unlimited potential pluralities of the many folds. Polyptych methodology demonstrates the myth of wholeness and singularity. Thus, the cultural–historical geographical context in which CARE was produced is crucial to understanding what CARE is performing and producing. For CARE, Charleston, and Tallahatchie County, the arts and art education need to be more than in order to meet the organization's mission of economic growth, redevelopment, community involvement, and historical preservation in addition to the multitudinous tasks CARE has taken ownership of to support the gaps in social, municipal, health, and other systemic challenges and failures affecting the citizens. All of these challenges and failures are situated in historical contexts stemming from decades of systemic social injustice and exploitation of labor and land. While CARE is not the only organization in Charleston working to address long standing issues of injustice, it is influential in producing a narrative which uses art education to rectify the issues to lead to a narrative of wholeness within the organization and the people and place it serves.
What is CARE Producing?

The third supporting question of this dissertation project is: what is CARE producing? In addition to understanding the historical narrative CARE is producing through art education, the question analyzes the role of tangible visual and material culture created by CARE and its members. The question seeks to understand what programming, workshops, and the resulting objects and artworks teach and how it influences the participants’ perception of cultural-historical geography, ultimately shaping the historical narrative of Charleston and Tallahatchie County. The products of CARE corroborate the performance of CARE as described in the oral history interviews. They also provide data for material analysis. There are two goals for an analysis of the visual and material culture that CARE is producing. The first is a matter of care. The second is to recognize materials as products of or producers of history and culture. There are two conceptual approaches to this recognition which include a literal presentation and analysis of the materials produced by CARE and a figurative approach which is interpretive of the materials to better understand what they mean for the broader work of CARE.

The Material of CARE as a Matter of Care

To spend time with this question of CARE’s production is an effort to stay with the trouble (Haraway, 2016) and practice care. To consider evidence beyond the words of narrators in the oral history interviews by including visual and material culture as points of analysis is a form of care because it distributes the data between people and objects lessening the potential for personally-felt negativity that may come from critical analysis. In other words, the intent is not to criticize the oral history narrators, but to critically understand the work of CARE which includes how it is conceptualized through oral and written data as well as how it is actualized through material objects.

By staying with the trouble (Haraway, 2016), in this instance, I mean that taking the material objects into consideration alongside the oral histories is to recognize the influence of visual and material culture alongside the work of CARE members and volunteers. By staying with the trouble, Haraway (2016) means to be cognizant of how we as researchers and oral history narrators are all intertwined within the study and the historical moment. It is a form of making kin which Haraway (2016) explains as “unexpected collaborations and combinations” (p. 4). In the case of this study, kin is made between an organization, its people, and the materials they create in order to analyze
and understand the outcome or production of this kinship on historical narrative within its cultural-historical geographic contexts. It is an attempt to be present as a researcher and to recognize multiple presences within the research with the trouble. Trouble in this instance means no singular narrative, but the polyptch possibilities of a multitude of potential pluralities for interpretation of the data. It is not a comprehensive analysis, because completeness of all data, histories, narratives, and objects is an impossibility.

**Producing/Products of History & Culture**

The artworks, programs, and objects of CARE are not only products of the organization, but the materials and records of them become a part of CARE’s history as well as the broader history of Charleston and Tallahatchie County. The objects or artifacts create a visual culture around CARE and the broader cultural-historical contexts. For example, CARE created t-shirts, posters, and artworks to brand their annual *Gateway to the Delta Festival*. Those products and the festival itself introduce and establish an aesthetic and tradition for which, after ten years, Charleston is known. The materials and the event are forms of symbolic creativity (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2013 & 2020) which lead to a production of local culture. The posters and t-shirts are created to promote and brand the festival; they are products of the festival. The festival, created each year, is a product of CARE, but an event which generates visual and material culture which become historically archivable materials; it is a product of and a producer of local history and culture. CARE’s ongoing work to produce the festival has made the festival a part of Charleston’s history and identity.

**Narrators and Themes**

While I have not been able to reach, record, or speak on record with all of the individuals involved in CARE, the eight oral history interviews included in this analysis offer a point of saturation, meaning many of the interviews reiterate and confirm the others on the topic of CARE. There are gaps in the research that I am critically aware of while conducting the analysis of interviews. The predominant one is that all of the narrators in the oral histories collected are White. This is not for a lack of attempting to contact and interview diverse narrators, but it is a reality of the data that is taken into account. Secondly, not all of the founding members of CARE were available for interview. However, the interviews that were collected for this project do offer the point of saturation for novel
findings as compared to one another.

Narrators included in this analysis are: CARE President of the Board (in 2019) John Ball Burnett; former director, former president of the board, founder, and board member Glenna Callender; former president of the board, founder, and board member Jackie Jones; former Charleston citizen and financial sponsor of CARE Ed Meek; frequent art camp instructor Jamie Montgomery; most recent director and arts educator, Carol Roark; former director, art camp instructor, CARE Artist Council Member and volunteer Jason Williams; frequent art camp instructor, CARE Artist Council Member and volunteer, Joey Young.

Through Applied Thematic Analysis, I noticed common themes within the oral history interviews that aligned with the mission statement of CARE, which is “to foster the economic growth and redevelopment of Charleston, Mississippi through the arts and community involvement while preserving the historical significance and heritage of the town” (careatrsms.com, n.d.). Using the mission statement as a point of triangulation between the oral histories and analysis of them, four themes emerged: Programming, Meeting Needs, Bringing Together, and Access, Exposure, and Opportunity. This chapter focuses on the first two themes of Programming and Meeting Needs. Programming and Meeting Needs give a foundational understanding of what CARE does, the kinds of events and art education activities it offers. The themes Bringing Together and Access, Exposure, and Opportunity offer insight to why CARE engages in its work and will be explored in the following chapter.

Programming

Art education composes the foundational structure of CARE’s programming. Additionally, the organization incorporates a variety of other educational, particularly history-based, events. Within the theme of programming, I provide examples of programming from written, oral, and visual and material culture as data. This theme serves to contextualize CARE by providing examples of the organization’s work. The programming CARE offers is both a performance or action of CARE and a product in the form of events and materials. Not only is CARE situated as an organization by looking at examples of its programming, but through written and verbal descriptions of the events an analysis reveals what the organization means and the real-imagined understanding of what it does. While CARE offers a plethora of community service programming, which will be further explored in the Meeting Needs theme, to streamline the Programming theme, I pull from examples
of art education programming and history-based programming.

**Art Education: Afterschool, Summer Arts Camp, & Programming for Adults**

From information collected in the oral histories, website, and informal conversations, CARE’s art education programming, featuring opportunities for children to practice art making skills and techniques, is key to the organization’s efforts. In the beginning of CARE’s formation, the organization worked regularly within the schools to offer occasional art lessons in the window of time between school dismissal and bus pick-up. These lessons were supported temporarily by grant funding, but with changes in funding and school administration CARE has not worked within Charleston schools for the past few years. Instead, afterschool programming has continued at the CARE building. It is typically offered for a one hour per week and divided by age ranges, 7-9 years old on one day and 10-18 years old on another day. There is a one-time supply fee of $10 and a $10 per class charge; historically, the fees can be adjusted or waived if interested students cannot afford the fees. In response to COVID-19, CARE’s director teaches free art lessons through social media streaming. On average, the instructional videos have around 235 plays suggesting a wide audience is reached through the online platform. The videos and in-person lessons primarily offer a foundational skills-based approach to artmaking with learning drawing exercises, value and shading techniques, color studies, and composition for all ages.

CARE’s annual Summer Arts Camps offer a range of arts instruction including visual arts, dance, music, and performance. The following quote provides insight on what well-funded art camps looked like at CARE:

We also tried in our art camps to include it all. You know if you’ve got enough funding, it was so fabulous. We had the two rooms upstairs. For two hours, I would have one artist on one side maybe teaching painting and another artist on the other side maybe teaching yoga in the dance studio. Then the next day, they would have one artist teaching how to make a banjo, a cigar box guitar and somebody in the other room teaching drawing. Then we had gymnastics in one room and collage making in the other. Then the children would have about an hour and a half and switch; go to the other artist. Then you have say ten or fifteen in each class, with help if the artist needed help. Then they switched. They would experience two artists a day, five days a week, so they had experienced ten different artists and ten different creative talents or venues. Then we would have a show at the end (G.
Not every year’s budget could support the hire of ten artists, but this quote illustrates the kinds of arts education activities that unfold during the summer camps. Another narrator explained that generally the camp participants would be divided into two groups: one for younger children and one for older children and teens. Many of the oral history participants had teaching experience at CARE’s summer art camps, including the narrator in the following transcript segment, Jamie Montgomery, who talked about one of her memories of a project she led with the group of younger children.

JSC: Is [painting] what you teach mostly at the art camp, or do you just kinda teach anything?
JM: At art camp, I would kind of try to gauge that group that I would have based upon what their capabilities would be for their age. So, you know, several times we worked with charcoal, drawing still lifes. We did do some painting. We worked with oil pastels. We created a mural for the CARE walls.
JSC: Do you have any, like, memories from teaching at summer camp that just stand out to you?
JM: Mostly just that all the kids were super grateful for the experience that they got. None of them seemed uninterested. They were all very much dedicated to whatever project we were doing and they could not wait. Because the camp itself would last a week, so they would say, “what are we doing tomorrow?” They were super interested in what the next project was going to be or what the other artist working with me was going to do. They were just super invested in camp itself.
JSC: Yeah! Do you have any favorite projects that you did with them?
JM: I would say that probably that mural. I mean, it was very outside my norm of what I usually do, so I think because it was kind of exciting for me, it was exciting for the kids also because, you know, I sort of transferred my energy onto them with that, but it sticks the most to me because and know just because, you know, creating something different, but the fact that it hung in CARE and that kind of became part of CARE’s decor.
JSC: Yeah, like the building itself…What was the mural of? What’s the subject?
JM: The one that we did was kind of like the most important parts, things that we could think of from Mississippi itself, like, you know, catfish and guitar or the blues and just kind of symbols of Mississippi. Things that are associated with Mississippi in a positive way.
JSC: Yeah. And the kids came up with the symbols?
JM: Yeah, I kind of had them create a rough draft of their mural or what they individually wanted to kind of create or like contribute to the mural.
JSC: That’s really cool that they could, they came up with the whole soup to nuts concept. That’s really cool.
JM: And we kind of gave them some ideas of like what Mississippi was kind of known for and not just like, you know, ‘what’s the state bird?’ Of course, we did add a magnolia. That’s our state flower. Stuff like that, you know, kind of starting a conversation about it. Then we did rough drafts. Then we started the actual mural.
JSC: Yeah. Why was it important to focus on symbols of the state?
JM: I guess because CARE is obviously like such a big part of based off the history of Charleston, so we wanted to contribute something that was important based on the history of Mississippi.

![Figure 5.1. J. Montgomery. (date unknown). Photo used with permission from Jamie Montgomery. The artwork/mural described in this exchange is hanging on the left in the studio classroom of the CARE building. In this artwork the participants have included a fishing pole and large catfish in the upper right-hand corner. The mouth of the catfish overlaps a magnolia flower. The tail directs the viewer’s eye to two large green eighth notes. They overlap a peeled ear of corn hovering above deer antlers. In the right middle to upper corner is a blue and red guitar. Behind it is a star and below it is a cotton boll. A large, orange sun fills most of the bottom center of the composition.](image-url)
This project example is pertinent not only to the question of CARE’s performance of teaching art and the production in the form of a mural, but it begins to address the dissertation’s central interest in art education as a shaper of historical narrative. First, at the end of the quoted segment, this narrator reiterates a key point in CARE’s mission statement, which is its interest in preserving and teaching the history of Charleston. CARE situates art and history as integral and interwoven parts of its mission. Secondly, this segment of transcript about the creation of the artwork and the artwork itself calls attention to the relationship between representation and cultural-historical geography. When students participate in a project like this mural, part of the take-away lesson is a sense of place and pride in place and a reflection on how to identify and represent the things that make the place unique.

CARE’s art education programming for adults combines the foundational skills taught in afterschool programs and the focus on local subjects and themes in advanced classes held in the CARE building. In the past few years, CARE has offered guided painting classes in which participants follow an instructor to paint a specific image as well as workshops including camera/photography basics, beginner/intermediate oil painting, foundational drawing skills, intro to watercolor landscapes, and plein air painting. Based on these offerings, the educational philosophy of CARE is to provide foundational representational skill-building workshops with frequent practice using the land and landscape as a subject. Through the educational philosophy and focus on landscape, CARE is shaping a shared aesthetic with the children and adult students which is founded on a Western tradition of formalist instruction and aesthetic appreciation for realistic representations. This is not to say that formalism and realism are the exclusive modes of teaching and representation within the art education programming CARE offers, but that they are of significant and primary importance. The emphasis is further recognizable in many of the art exhibitions displayed by CARE at the Charleston Arts Center/CARE building.

**Art Exhibitions as Programming**

In the main floor of the CARE building are floor-standing display panels along the two longest walls. CARE has a regular display of artworks, mostly paintings and occasionally photographs featuring places in Charleston like the Lamb–Fish Lumber Company bridge, details from the Square, and the CARE building. Sometimes the panels feature works produced by students of all ages who participate in the art education programs, workshops, and classes hosted at CARE or exhibitions of
CARE members and local artists. The display panels make it possible for CARE to host exhibitions from lending institutions. For example, when I visited in August 2019, the panels displayed large photographs by the African American photographer P.H. Polk from the Mississippi State University Libraries in partnership with Tuskegee University. The exhibition, titled *Unframed Images*, included a reception and program at CARE in which the Tuskegee University Archivist gave a talk. CARE Director, Carol Roark is quoted in a news report about the exhibition stating, “Polk was an artist ahead of his time. He never let all the odds stack against him or stand between him and his passion for photography,” she said. “He is as much of a role model now as he was then” (Steinberg, 2019).

Given the quote and the lecture programming, CARE is interested in exhibitions which offer meaning and significance beyond form and beauty of the works. In this case, the photographer’s identity as an African American artist, born in 1898 and working in the South as a photographer in the 1920s to his retirement in the early 1980s, suggest he faced struggles due to systemic racism which marked most of the years that Polk was a photographer. Before becoming a photographer, Polk was discouraged by Booker T. Washington at the Tuskegee Institute from becoming a painter and sought out an education in photography (Lomax, 2019). For CARE, not only are the photographs in the exhibition beautiful, but they also signify persistence in the biography of the artist, a cultural credo of individual tenacity and self-sufficiency rooted in conservative and neoliberal values.

*Unframed Images* connects directly with historical narrative because it provides insight on how CARE sees itself and wants to be seen. Both of these perspectives are forms of art education with the display of the works as a pedagogical tool of how to see and what representations are valued. CARE provides Charleston with an exhibition of photographs of African Americans taken by a historically significant African American photographer as a role model for those who may see the exhibition and as an attempt to represent potential interests of the majority African American population. This is an important move in CARE’s efforts for the arts to be *more than*, because the majority African American population of Tallahatchie County has long been excluded from institutions and social organizations through historic segregation and its continuing social impact, which in large part compose the cultural–historical and geographic conditions that rendered CARE’s formation necessary. CARE is attempting to shape the historical narrative of Charleston as one that sees, represents, celebrates, and invites Black citizens where before many [White] organizations had silenced, ignored, or enacted violence against them.

There is a greater point here about the kinds of exhibitions used to shape historical narrative in this way. That is, P. H. Polk is a historic figure whose photographs, at least several in this
exhibition, feature financially well off and well-dressed African Americans, though there are a few photographs of more rural and casually dressed people. It could be interpreted as representations of respectability politics, or a strategy to increase social and political voice for marginalized people that is gained through representational alignment with dominant values through appearances such as dress and mannerisms, particularly with the artist’s career and photography work deeply tied to Booker T. Washington’s Tuskegee Institute. The institute has long been criticized for its approach to Black liberation and pedagogy because the philosophy was to learn trades and build wealth to eventually win respect from White people rather than engaging in political and scholarly actions to end discrimination (Rudwick, 1957).

The tensions come from critically considering how representation is operating within artworks, exhibitions, and specific cultural-historical geographic contexts and what it means for CARE to present this exhibition as a shaping of historical narrative. The emergent narrative is one of Charleston organizations being more open and welcoming to historically marginalized and excluded citizens based on race.

On the other hand, CARE was able to access a well-crafted exhibition which continues to tour university galleries and bring it to Charleston for publicly accessible display. Perhaps taking advantage of limited opportunities as they arise is more important than the tensions between critical consideration of representation and how it shapes historical narrative, even though these might reinforce cultural respectability norms or the institutional philosophies of Tuskegee. Most of the oral histories collected from CARE members emphasize the importance of access, opportunity, and exposure of the community to the arts through exhibitions rather than sharing thoughts about the kinds of artworks in the exhibitions. For example, a former director of CARE shared:

The main goals are to bring the arts into this rural area where most people would never
have the chance to be a part of it and we use the arts to help revitalize the community… CARE has done so much to revitalize the town and that’s the goal of it. We bring art shows and pieces of art that have come from all over the country to our little town that people who live here would never have a chance to see or get to experience. That’s one of the most important parts to me. I love that they get to see artists’ work. It’s a great thing (J. Williams, personal communication, March 10, 2020).

*Unframed Images* offers insight on how CARE may situate historically marginalized and segregated citizens into a real-imagined, contemporary open and welcoming public exhibition at their organization, thus shaping the historical narrative of Charleston as one in which social spaces are more inclusive than in the past. It should also be taken into consideration that CARE’s rural situatedness and low operating budget means it may not have the opportunities or access to bring in a wide variety of exhibitions, media, and subject matter. The following oral history interview passage is about how CARE came to host the exhibition *Unframed Images*:

One of my favorite exhibits was the works of P. H. Polk, who was a I don’t know if you ever saw any of his work; I was not familiar with him. And again, you know, just God smiling on us. Starkville, the [Ulysses S.] Grant [Presidential] Library at Mississippi State had this exhibit and it was leaving there going to the University of Alabama. But there was this two-week window of kind of limbo. And so thanks to Myrna Colley-Lee, who happened to go see it and just said, well, you know, ‘I know what you could do for two weeks!’ It came to us and oh, my word! Not only that, but we were able to get the head archivist from Tuskegee to come and speak on Polk. And I mean, he knows everything Polk and he was fascinating. This coincided with Charleston Day, which is a festival that rotates. It’s for all from Charleston, but it rotates Charleston, Chicago, and maybe Los Angeles each year. And so the year it was in Charleston, this exhibit happened [2019]. So we were able to open up and because there’s so many people from out of town that come in. They come back to Charleston, you know, it’s kind of their pilgrimage. So that was exciting to have that on display (C. Roark, personal communication, January 21, 2021).

From this passage it is helpful to understand how CARE makes an effort to offer a range of exhibitions and the necessity of being open to opportunities and seizing them when they arise. The serendipitous timing of the display of *Unframed Images* was a way for CARE to offer programming to an audience made larger by an influx of Charlestonians associated with Charleston Day. The Charleston Day Club was established in 1974 and is an African American association that continues
to organize and contribute to Charlestonians. *Unframed Images* was not only an opportune exhibition of beautiful artworks, but the artist and subjects were prominently African American, and the timing coincided with a homecoming of Black Charlestonians who work to improve their hometown. Each of these are a part of CARE’s effort to encourage community involvement and offer diverse representation for diverse audiences, in other words, to create a sense of wholeness and unity.

Most of the year, CARE has an exhibition schedule, but they leave room for opportunities like *Unframed Images* that arise. Sometimes, as in the case of *Narratives of the Land*, CARE is able to choose exhibition from a handful available. For the state of Mississippi’s bicentennial in 2017, the Mississippi Museum of Art (MMA) curated *Art Across Mississippi*, a series of twelve small exhibitions from their collection to send to organizations and sites like CARE across the state. *Narratives of the Land* was one of these exhibitions that featured around twenty works from MMA collections of Mississippi scenes and largely created by Mississippi artists. I asked the director from that time, Jason Williams, about CARE’s decision to bring in *Narratives of the Land*.

JSC: Do you remember if they gave you a choice of shows, because I think it was for the state’s [bi]centennial and they had, yeah, a lot of different curated shows?  

JW: Yeah, [MMA] had several shows. I showed the board…I think they gave me three different ones that could come. I mean, it was more than that, but I think that those were the three that they wanted to offer us. And we chose the *Narratives of the Land*, because the land played such a huge part in our county. I mean, I would say some of the people who live here work on a farm or own a farm or have done something on a farm. And a lot of the artwork was the Delta fields, you know. So, I think that’s the reason we chose *Narratives of the Land* (J. Williams, personal communication, March 10, 2020).

*Narratives of the Land* is an exhibition that, I argue, acts as a pedagogical tool to instruct how to see and how to represent the culture, history, and geography of Mississippi through landscapes. It can act as a mirror of affirmation by reflecting everyday scenes of fields and farms elevated to the status of “the arts” made more significant having come from the prestigious institution of the MMA to the small-town gallery at CARE. The exhibition celebrates the land and in doing so creates a common ground for viewers, uniting them with a sense of pride in place and through the experience of viewing the exhibition. By CARE’s ability to host exhibitions it closes some of the cultural distance from the state’s larger arts centers despite the geographical ruralness of Charleston and Tallahatchie County. It means rural does not equal removed. Further, rural representations are considered valued and beautiful. They are something worth making artworks about. They are
worthy of adding to the MMA collections and of touring the state in the form of exhibitions.

Following the *Narratives of the Land* exhibition, CARE was the recipient of a Mississippi Delta National Heritage Area grant which funded the 2018 summer art camp. The camp theme was titled “The Land Where We Live,” and the students’ works from that summer were compiled into a self-published book by CARE titled *Delta Life: Through Our Eyes*. The “we” and “our” within the titles of the themed camp and resultant book creates ownership over space. It positions the students as surveyors and representors of the landscape through art education, or pedagogical instruction on how to see and represent.

*Delta Life: Through Our Eyes* includes a page of four artworks by each of the 20 or so students, a few pages of photo collages with the younger children who attended art camp, and group photographs holding their artworks. The older students’ pages are labeled with their first and last names as well as their age. The artworks don’t feature titles, but there are a variety of paintings of fields and cypress trees, drawings of wildlife, and many photographs of buildings from town, fields, trees, and waterscapes. The introduction of the book explains the camp’s goal was “to help area youth become aware of the beauty that was right in their own backyard” and “help campers discover their surroundings through art and photography and then share that discovery with others in the community” (CARE, 2018). The message of continuation is to share the celebration of place.
and land. Juxtaposed against many of the deficits faced within Charleston and Tallahatchie county, many of which CARE noted in the passage about their history, a celebratory tone of the exhibition, summer art camp, and produced book of student artworks resulting from the camp are a form of reclaiming and reshaping the narrative from deficit to beauty, creating a whole.

In the exhibition, themed summer art camp, and resulting book different phases of Garoian’s (1998) pedagogy of the landscape is unfolded. For Garoian, teaching landscape through critical questioning of formal structure rooted in Western hierarchies of aesthetics helps the viewer and artist to build empathy with the ecology of the land they are viewing and representing. Garoian’s (1998) ecological empathy sheds the “sanctioned authority of Western culture over nature” (p. 245) in order to represent and artistically respond to the land with care for its biological, geographic situatedness. For CARE, the formal structure informed by historical, Westernized aesthetics of landscape composition, color, and representation is a tool to build a connection with place and develop a sense of cultural identity.

Plein air painting is a regular format for CARE’s all ages instructional workshops. Plein air, or open air, outdoor painting, typically involves artists selecting scenes from the natural surroundings and studying the formal properties of value, color, and shape to represent the scene usually through

![Figure 5.4. CARE. (2018). Delta Life: Through Our Eyes. Front Cover Scan. Image used with permission from CARE.](image_url)
a realistic likeness. The focus on formal elements and realistic representation creates a sense of artist's neutrality as the artist is simply painting what they see in front of them. However, as there is no single, all-encompassing narrative of history, neither is there a painting without polyptych layers of history, power, and choice. A scene in front of an artist is an artist's choice. The scene has a potential for many folds (polyptych) of culture and history depending on how it is seen and represented, which are choices. The choices tend to be made invisible or rendered neutral within the process of establishing a plein air location and scene and the product as a sketch or artwork. Within the pedagogy of viewing and representing in the context of plein air workshops, formalist instruction on color, composition, value, and perspective act as a lens through which the cultural-historical geography can be neutralized in artwork.

In the tradition of landscape painting, landscape as a subject matter, particularly when it is devoid of human or animal figures, is also imagined to be neutral and free of its cultural-historical geography. However, in the cultural context of Mississippi, the Delta, and CARE, landscape is recognized as imbued with an aura or spirit of its own (see Black, 2007; Wierich, 2017). For example, the MMA exhibition title *Narratives of the Land* suggest that the artworks in the exhibitions are not the narratives but represent what the land and landscape possess inherently, representing what is already in the land without giving the land a narrative. The artists are there to capture the stories, but not necessarily create them. On the other hand, artists have the ability to shape the stories inherent in the land to suit their own perspectives and narratives. These choices are easily rendered invisible through formalism and realism. Further, the choices made in seeing, being immersed in plein air, and representing the land build a connection to the place. If considered critically, as Garoian (1998) argues, the artist's formal choices in the representation of land can create empathy with the ecology of place. Applying the same logic, an artist's critical consideration of narrative may also build empathy with the cultural and historical narratives which shape the place. In both situations of building ecological or cultural-historical empathy, the artist is adding criticality to the formal and realistic choices and de-neutralizing or rendering visible their creative decisions.

Through *psychologizing* (Amburgy, 1990), or applied sense of innocence, art education operates invisibly as it shapes and influences history. When art and art education efforts are situated within their cultural-historical geography, their power to shape historical narrative becomes more apparent. Through art education programming and art exhibitions, CARE performs three things. First, they offer knowledge of foundational arts skills, teaching students of all ages how to see in shape, value, and color and how to represent them through art media as still lifes or landscape
paintings, for example. This foundational knowledge is understood in the history of art education as a neutral pedagogical approach, but the neutrality is imagined because it privileges a Western, Eurocentric aesthetic.

Secondly, CARE is performing symbolic production, or producing symbols to represent the work of CARE as well as the history of Charleston and Tallahatchie County. Student artwork like the art camp mural and art exhibitions like *Narratives of the Land* move the perceived neutral arts education into a visual and material culture which forms a foundation of symbolic representation. This means it is a collection of symbols and objects that represent the cultural-historical geographic contexts of CARE. It moves from neutral to representational of the history and begins to shape a how the historical narrative is seen and represented.

As such, CARE performs cultural production. Gaztambide-Fernández (2020) argues that cultural production is present within “all work of symbolic creativity” and that symbolic creativity is “embedded in and the outcome of unequal power relations” and therefore “always implicated in the production, reproduction, and, sometimes, transformation of social orders” (p. 11). As CARE performs art education programming including the display of exhibitions, it is creating symbols and representations of the cultural-historical geography. By doing so, CARE is producing culture as well as shaping a historical narrative. It is creating images or visual and material culture which come to represent Charleston and Tallahatchie County within the historical and continuing moment of CARE’s operation. CARE’s work moves beyond art education programming and distinctly situates itself alongside historical preservation and production.

**History Programming as Integral to CARE’s Mission**

CARE’s programming and mission statement situates historical preservation and programming as integral to the mission. The emphasis on history ties CARE’s use of the arts to the shaping of historical narrative and demonstrates another way art education is understood to act as *more than* to encompass history.

In 2003, one of the first major projects of CARE was to hire humanities scholar and consultant Grady Hillman to research the history of Charleston and propose a cultural plan for CARE. Like the mission statement, the cultural plan document offers one of the key insights into CARE’s philosophy, and how the organization unites arts education, history, and economy. It establishes the foundations of CARE’s real-imagined performance and programming production. The Charleston Cultural Plan
goals excerpted from the application to the granting agency, the Mississippi Department of Forestry state:

We [CARE] envision a community that:

• Recognizes, supports and celebrates our community artists. It is through their work that we see ourselves honestly and clearly;
• Heals our collective wounds through open discussions about race, ethnicity, class and gender. By setting this example and through education in our classrooms, we teach our children that there is strength in diversity;
• Preserves and honors our architecture, artifacts and historic landmarks. We recognize that we are connected to these structures, and their demise would diminish our lives greatly;
• Encourages our children to become writers, historians, artists and teachers. We must educate our children to understand the culture into which they were born so that they may pass this on to future generations;
• Binds itself together to become the enriched place of our dreams.

Our plan is to hire a consultant, Grady Hillman, who is experienced in preparing Cultural Plans to research the culture of Charleston, meet with city leaders and citizens, and create a Charleston Cultural Plan that is supported by the entire community. The Charleston Cultural Plan will encompass the history of our community, its diverse cultures, architectures, and folklore. The process will include archival research, oral histories, a survey of cultural resources and ideas, and informed input from the community. The Cultural Plan will reveal the rich traditions of the area and provide the civic steps necessary to enhance those traditions and build on them in a manner reflective of all the cultures.

This segment of the plan offers many significant points about CARE’s philosophy and rationale, namely that the organization strives to use “the arts” and art education as tools for more than just producing artworks. The relationship of art education and history is one which influences how Charleston is seen and represented. A brief interpretation of the bulleted points begins to unpack CARE’s real-imagined understanding of this relationship as well as its claims for how their cultural-historical geography may be shaped.

In the first bullet point, CARE is claiming the artwork of community artists offer a mirror through which to reflect themselves. The statement may be referring to realistic paintings which depict the land or local places based on their formal properties of line, shape, and color. However, given the next bullet point, this claim seems to be understood in relationship to historically-rooted
social injustices. With no specific artists’ work mentioned, neither can be argued with certainty. Locally produced artwork does not automatically provide a cultural analysis; the suggestion that it might is an example of the rhetoric of effects (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2013) which claims the arts inherently do something. In this case, the bullet points combined suggests that locally produced artwork innately offers critical cultural analysis as a way of seeing clearly. The bullet points do not exclusively rely on the arts’ innate abilities; they call for action in the form of discussion and pedagogy specifically for children.

The second bullet point recognizes the social injustices inherent to the cultural-historical geographical context which produced CARE and charges the organization with the responsibility for not only addressing it but healing it through education. The fourth and fifth bullet points on the list echo this sentiment. Arts education is considered the solution to ongoing shaping of the culture and history of Charleston and Tallahatchie County to create unity or wholeness in place of historic and cultural division and racial segregation.

The third point in the list situates materials, specifically architecture and artifacts as structurally significant to the lives of those residing in Charleston and Tallahatchie County. They are the symbols which support and promote the culture and history of the place. CARE’s work to preserve them and create pedagogical programming about them is a way for CARE to use arts education intertwined with history to shape the historical narrative about the past architecture and artifacts to promote unity and cohesiveness of a narrative and pride in place.

CARE’s goals for the cultural plan were to create a foundation of key points in Charleston and Tallahatchie County’s history from which to develop programming. The plan offers 41 suggestions for projects, events, and building/architecture plans for CARE to consider to fulfill its mission and vision. While CARE has not implemented them all given time, budget, and labor, they have made an impressive effort in addressing the projects, events, programs, and buildings from the cultural plan as well as opportunities that arise over time. CARE hosts a myriad of history programming including a celebration and reminiscence of the historic (1926–2003) Boy Scout camp in Charleston called Camp Tallaha in 2014 and a reception reunion for USS Tallahatchie County veterans in 2015, among others.

In regard to architecture and artifacts, one of the first history-based projects CARE undertook was a historic building in Charleston, the custom-built home for the two-time (1917 & 1918) world champion hog named Scissors. In the historical narrative of Charleston, Scissors represents a period around the turn of the century when Charleston was active with timber extraction and hosted a
lumber mill, Lamb–Fish Lumber Company, which is remembered as a benevolent corporation and celebrated point in time for the town. CARE's history programming acknowledges Lamb–Fish Lumber Company and has installed a timeline of its history in a courtyard on the Square. The Lamb–Fish Lumber Company mill has burned down, but there is a standing vertical-lift bridge used for railroad transport of timber which is frequently used as an iconic structure in town and to represent the company's history in Charleston.

CARE's highly successful annual Gateway to the Delta Festival seems to be a response to a combined set of suggestions from the cultural plan. The list of suggested cultural events includes an arts and crafts fair on the Square; Band Shell on the Square; partnering with Charleston homecoming which is organized by Charleston Day Club; a gospel festival; a barbeque festival themed after Scissors; Sorghum syrup festival; and a traditional music festival.

Gateway to the Delta is one of the organization's largest funding generators and has run every year since 2010, with the exception of 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Initially the festival spanned two days, but since it is primarily a small group of volunteers who work tirelessly from sunup to well past sunset, the festival is now one full day. CARE lines up a variety of musical acts including everything from rock bands, country groups, cover bands, and gospel singers who perform on a main stage next to the CARE building, rerouting the usual circular flow of traffic on Highway 32 around the Square. Booths of local artists, food vendors, and a section of inflatable castles encircle the courthouse and fill the Square with people from Charleston and several out-of-town visitors.

Pop-up tents are erected for reunions of graduated high school classes, churches, families, and whomever else pays for a spot on the Square. The Gateway to the Delta Festival is known in and beyond Charleston and as such is a part of the cultural-historical geography of the town. The festival may even be more widely known than CARE itself as it is one of the big events in the Delta region.

Figure 5.5. J. Stokes-Casey. (2019). Scissors’ House. Photograph.

Scissors’ house was donated to CARE by the John B. Burnett family. CARE restored the historic structure in 2004 and continues to maintain the property. It’s a featured quirky story on multiple websites like OnlyInYourState.com and MississippiObscura.com and draws in a steady stream of interested off-the-beaten path travelers to Charleston.

Some people sort of, I don't know if this is the right way of putting it, but look down their nose at you when you talk about Scissors. "Scissors is just a dirty old pig." Well, that's true, but he was a two-time national grand champion and he brought a lot of notoriety to Charleston. He's an unofficial mascot, really, is what Scissors is. (J. B. Burnett, personal communication, August 20, 2019).
and plays a role in shaping the history of Charleston.

Each year, a new artwork for the festival is designed and printed onto posters and t-shirts available for purchase. There have been a few different poster artists including Maegan Speir Elliott (2013 and 2014) and Tay Cossar Morgan (2015), but the majority of them in the most recent several years of the exhibition (2016-2020) are by the artist Cristen Craven Barnard which establishes a stylistic branding or visual culture around the Gateway to the Delta Festival. Barnard’s festival artwork features a variety of Charleston icons such as the lampposts from around the Square, the CARE building façade, the courthouse façade, the county water tower, and cotton bolls among others. A generalized musician is usually featured and the palette is colorful and saturated.

Barnard’s artwork establishes a visual culture not only around the Gateway to the Delta Festival, but around CARE and even Charleston. There is a city sign heading north into town from Highway 35 that I spotted briefly during one of my visits that was also designed by Barnard. The three murals of Charleston and Tallahatchie talents Morgan Freeman, Mose Allison, and Sonny Boy Williams that hangs on the wall beside CARE facing the Square is one of the first public artworks produced by CARE and was a collaboration with Charleston students led by Barnard. These three artworks on the Square and the city sign connect CARE, Charleston, and the arts in a permanent and prominent display celebrating artists from the area.

As the 2003 cultural plan for CARE evolves into programs like the Gateway to the Delta Festival, the organization continues to shape the history of Charleston. CARE’s efforts to recognize history are intertwined with the arts and arts education in such a way that it begins to shape a visual and material culture of the town, recognizing, representing, and symbolizing buildings and
structures through artwork and by establishing traditions, like the festival, which place the arts at the forefront of cultural production in Charleston. CARE’s mission aligns the arts with historic preservation in the town. Not only that but the arts and art education become a tool for actually *saving* history as claimed in this interview quote:

> CARE decided from the very beginning that we would wrap our community around the arts as best as we could. Beautification to me is a very, very vital part of the arts, you know, saving our history. We could find all sorts of artistic ways to save our history (G. Callender, personal communication, September 23, 2019).

Art is attributed as *more than* in the statement positioning it as a kind of savior of history. The beautification the narrator is referring to is one form of programming which may be more accurately labeled as community service, but also becomes aligned with history, as it is actively shaping the appearance of the Square, moving it from the past into the present. It is an effort to repair damage and create a sense of wholeness within the physical Square and among the volunteers who participate.

*Figure 5.7. J. Stokes-Casey. (2020). CARE building with Barnard murals of Morgan Freeman, Mose Allison, and Sonny Boy Williams. Photograph.*
Early in its infancy, CARE organized several days in which volunteers from Charleston met to paint the storefronts of buildings on the Square. CARE has an ongoing relationship with volunteers from other organizations such as the Charleston Garden Club to regularly tend to planters on the Square, which were added by CARE. The organization has worked to sponsor decorative streetlights, added benches, flags, and banners along the highways through town, and replaced brick sidewalks around the courthouse with the help of a former Charleston resident donor.

CARE’s beautification efforts involving volunteers from town is a part of Charleston’s history that is documented in several editions of *The Sun-Sentinel*. It is also a pointed effort to shape history by changing the appearance of the town from broken windows and peeling paint to colorful, vibrant storefronts ready for business. If art education is a pedagogical tool for how to see and how to represent a subject, then CARE’s beautification work on the Square is a part of the organization’s pedagogical practice. By painting, repairing, and upkeep, altering the appearance of buildings on the Square changes the way the town is seen and understood by those who see it. Arts education in this case is participation in the physical and visual changing of the Square to represent the narrative and image of Charleston as one which is whole and unified. Beautification of the town is one example in which art education and historical emphasis are intertwined within the work of CARE. The next section provides more examples of how CARE works to meet needs in Charleston and Tallahatchie County.

**Meeting Needs**

Miranda Joseph (2002) argues that nonprofit organizations fill in the gaps and holes left by capitalist structures in systems such as social service, education, healthcare, et. al. in a way that upholds the structures that created these holes. In doing so, these destructive systems continue to operate while requiring and consuming the often-volunteered labor and resources. She points out that in the Westernized, patriarchal, capitalist structures such as what Charleston, Mississippi, and the broader United States operate within, gendered roles and services (like care-giving and nonprofit volunteering) are generally not recognized values whose producers (largely women) are also not recognized as valuable. The labor of these producers is rendered invisible as it operates to maintain and uphold power structures which position them as them subordinate. The reliance on the free labor and private resources is not sustainable for those providing the labor and resources. Instead, their work is consumed by the structure which demands replacement in a cycle of creating gaps and holes.
In the case of CARE, art education is mobilized through volunteer labor to meet broad needs of the community. Alongside CARE, there are many successful mutual aid organizations in the community including local churches. Grassroots efforts formed and maintained by Black citizens such as the Charleston Day Club and the The Birdia Keglar Legacy Committee address issues of education, civil rights, voting, and other services. CARE attempts to bring together leadership and participants to create programming such as concerts, exhibitions, workshops and other forms of arts pedagogy, but the organization makes broader efforts to address a variety of needs for the community. As one oral history narrator phrased it, “CARE just does everything, anything. If there’s a need, [the directors] would always find a way” (J. Jones, personal communication, October 5, 2020). From newspaper and archival research and the oral histories collected, the scope of needs CARE attempts to meet is vast. This section offers examples from oral histories and newspaper archives of the kinds of work CARE is involved in and the kinds of needs it attempts to meet for Charleston and its residents to illustrate how the organization attempts to fill the gaps to reach wholeness.

Caring for the Square Brings Business

In the sections prior, I argued that CARE’s town beautification efforts of painting buildings, planting and gardening, displaying flags, murals, and public art, and ongoing upkeep of the Square are a form of art education that teaches volunteers, participants, and citizens how to see the town and how to represent it. When approached from a perspective of meeting needs, the beautification efforts become a way to promote the economic mission of CARE. Beauty became a way to attract business as one narrator explained, “I think [CARE has] kept [Charleston] alive. It’s kept it vibrant. If you look at the Square, it doesn’t have a single vacancy. You can’t find that anywhere else in the Delta. There’s somebody in every building. That in itself is unusual” (E. Meek, personal communication, Oct. 21, 2019). The aesthetic revitalization efforts seemingly drew in business and generated private investments towards furthering the beautification. As one narrator explained:

It was almost like, people driving through who grew up here thought, ‘Wow.’ They liked to come back. They used to drive around. They didn’t want to see Charleston deteriorating like it was. And now they come back. And they’re pretty happy about the improvements they see. Several of those have been very helpful. One man never lived here. And he kept bringing his mother back to visit family and he saw improvements. And he called us up
and said, ‘I want to give you some money to fix up around the Square.’ And he did. He liked what we did and he gave us more money. And then, when his mother died, he dedicated...He built the brick sidewalk around the courthouse, had the trees trimmed, planted grass, put the teak benches, you know. Gave a lot, well over a hundred and fifty thousand, for fixing up around the court square, because he said, ‘That’s the center. That’s the centerpiece of Charleston.’ And that’s somebody who never lived here. He would come every summer to visit cousins. What happens is it gets contagious when they see improvements going on (G. Callender, personal communication, Sept. 23, 2019).

The funding to fix the Square, in this example specifically, comes from private donations. CARE initiated the start of a commerce and historic preservation-like organization called Mississippi Main Street Association (a private, nonprofit organization) to help with securing grants for such projects, but CARE is not currently included on the list of Main Street Communities, potentially because the association requires cost prohibitive dues. Thus CARE, itself a nonprofit, takes up the task of maintaining the municipal Square and securing private funding to do so. The upkeep of the Square, particularly the planter gardening responsibilities is maintained by volunteer labor, primarily women who are involved in organizations like CARE and the local garden club. Occasionally, the labor is performed by trusties, inmates who are ‘trusted’ enough by their jailers to perform work outside of the prisons or jails.

Caring for the Square creates the potential for attracting businesses and bringing economic prosperity, but it relies on ongoing unpaid labor and private funds which can be difficult to sustain. This narrator’s quote provides some insight, “When we [CARE] got started, there was no McDonald’s. There was no Subway. There was no Mexican restaurant on the Square. Now, just recently, we’ve lost those. You know?” (G. Callender, personal communication, Sept. 23, 2019). CARE’s work as an organization founded in art education produces the promise of business and prosperity and tasks itself with performing all of the labor and duties.
to bring it to fruition. The rise of businesses and economy is occasionally and temporarily realized, such as the examples of Subway and Mexican restaurants from this quote. Though these specific examples were not sustainable, and CARE is not responsible for their opening or closure, the promise and its brief moments of visible success shape a narrative in which CARE’s mission of economic progress as fulfilled. CARE continues to work towards its mission of economic development and offers workshops and programming for small business education and entrepreneurship.

**CARE Contributes to Health and Wellness**

CARE regularly offers dance classes for children and yoga classes for adults in addition to art and history programming. It’s contribution to health extends broadly into Charleston and Tallahatchie County. Opened in 2016, the James C. Kennedy Wellness Center facility is located just 1.5 miles south of the CARE building and is composed of a sustainable and state of the art building and wellness campus to promote healthy living and fitness. Its website offers the statistic that, “In 2012, Tallahatchie County was ranked 81 out of 82 counties in Mississippi in terms of health status with the highest rates of obesity, teenage pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections, diabetes and heart disease in the state” (jckwellness.com/history, n.d.) and that through its work and programming it has moved the health ranking from 81 to 52. The Wellness Center has been mentioned in nearly every oral history of CARE as a part of its history, though the organization is not officially connected with the Wellness Center. The following interview scene describes the connection.

A friend of mine, who’s helped us quite a bit, I kept mentioning to him ‘we need some help. This job [directing CARE] is getting bigger than I can do. Is there anybody at Ole Miss that can help? And he sent us Catherine (Woodyard) Moring who is the reason we have the wonderful wellness center in this community that we have. And so if it had not been for CARE and our supporting her with her dissertation and her work on her thesis and her having interviews and we’re putting her in contact with people who we thought would be honest and would be movers and shakers and help her with the needs assessment. Which is how she started, the needs assessment for Charleston. What does Charleston want and need? And she had group after group after group that met at the CARE building. She had a young group. She had an old group. She had a working group. She had a retired group. She had…she just did a terrific job with her needs assessment. From that came the need
for Charleston to get healthier. So, I feel like CARE was the umbrella or the catalyst for our having the James Kennedy Health and Wellness Center. Which of course I mentioned that when I said TGH the Tallahatchie County General Hospital and the Wellness Center is probably, if it’s not our first largest employer, it’s at least second (G. Callender, personal communication, Sept. 23, 2019).

The seeds of the employment and healthy lifestyle generating Wellness Center were rooted in CARE’s efforts to meet needs for the people of Charleston and Tallahatchie County. Thus, the narrative of the Wellness Center’s origins in the needs assessment interviews groups held in the CARE building are a significant part of the organization’s history. Further, this claim shapes a narrative of the town that situates the art education organization CARE as the seed space for progress, innovation, and growth in wellness services and job creation.

CARE utilizes the talents of its members, organizers, and their connections to create programming in addition to and alongside the history and arts education events to meet social-emotional needs of community members. One example was shared by a narrator who describes how her husband, a psychology instructor, minister, and family counselor, taught a grief seminar at CARE. She shared, “My husband did grief seminars. He had a big group of people that would come [to CARE] who had lost children or husbands or mothers or someone and were having a hard time to deal with it. He had given a bunch of pamphlets for people to take home to work on. It meant a lot for people to have a place to go and share grief” (J. Jones, personal communication, Oct. 5, 2020). This kind of service creates a shared experience at CARE. The event involved a workbook, but little is mentioned on how much the arts were incorporated into the grief seminar, if at all. In addition to the grief seminar, one of CARE’s former directors and continuing art instructor saw the art education programming at CARE as another way to provide emotional support:

And the arts are so important on an emotional level and on a mental health level in helping people deal. I mean, I know that’s what it does for me, and I’m sure it does for other people, too. So, it’s very important for people to understand it’s not just a painting class. It’s getting together and showing people how you can create something that you’re proud of and that it helps people work through things as they’re…you know? I mean, we may just be sitting there painting a flower together. But we’re doing other stuff, too. We’re showing people that were care and that we want to be a part of their lives. So, it makes a huge difference when you bring arts into the rural areas” (J. Williams, personal communication, March 10, 2020).
The need for art education and the work of CARE to be *more than* creating artworks is explicit in this quote. CARE seeks to offer and provide care. It is another service, like the beautification work, which fills in for absences and relies on the emotional and under- or unpaid labor of caregivers who gift to CARE and the community their time, care, and labor.

**CARE Closet**

In addition to arts education and social and emotional programming, CARE operated a business called the CARE Closet. Past tense is used here, because CARE Closet closed in 2020 after the costs of maintaining the building, which was offsite and not within the CARE building, and offering wages to occasional employees became too great. A former director of CARE described the CARE Closet during our interview:

CARE Closet is a thrift shop and that allows people to donate and get a tax write off for their donations. It allows us to sell the items in the thrift shop/store for one dollar, two dollars an item. Then, if there’s a fire, we just open up and say, “Come and get what you need.” If it’s any kind of emergency, you know, we just open up and say, “If we’ve got what you need, it’s free. It’s free to you” (G. Callender, personal communication, Sept. 23, 2019).

CARE Closet is clearly not a profit-seeking venture of CARE. It is another attempt to creatively utilize limited resources of the town in a way that benefits everyone. Those who donate receive a tax write off. Those who shop benefit from very low costs. Those who experience crisis or an emergency are gifted the resources collected by CARE. The CARE Closet offered very low wages to employees when it could afford to and utilized volunteer labor. It was open generally on Saturday mornings and the first few days of the month when people in the community were more likely to have money due to welfare deposit schedules, as one narrator explained to me. With a poverty rate 20% higher than the national average (Data USA, 2018), affordable clothing options through CARE Closet met some of Charleston’s citizen needs while in operation.

Through Square beautification projects to generate economic growth, health and wellness efforts, the CARE Closet, and a multitude of programming, CARE’s revitalization efforts attempt to meet a wide range of needs. For an organization that situates art education at its center, CARE’s work and its effort to provide care in the gaps and absences of social structures illustrate not only that CARE considers the arts to act as *more than* but that CARE’s desire is to create wholeness. The
oral histories collectively offer a narrative of CARE’s dedication and progress.

**Conclusion**

Through the themes of Programming and Meeting Needs which were generated from the oral history interviews collected for this dissertation using Applied Thematic Analysis (Guest et al., 2012), this chapter answers two supporting research questions: What is CARE performing and What is CARE producing? To enact its mission, I argue CARE is reliant on a *rhetoric of effects* (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2013) which leads to an understanding of and mobilizing of art education as *more than* pedagogies of seeing and representing towards an ideal *wholeness*. Examples within the theme of Programming including afterschool, summer art camp, adult workshops, and art exhibitions provide visual and material culture and oral history interview segments to illustrate the kinds of opportunities and objects CARE produces. Through a critical analysis of these artifacts as symbolic production, their imagined neutrality is made visible.

The arts, art education, history, and history programming are intertwined in the work and mission of CARE shape a narrative of CARE, Charleston, and Tallahatchie County. CARE creates new events like the *Gateway to the Delta Festival* based on a combination of ideas and suggestions from a cultural plan incorporating the town and county’s history. CARE is a part of the history and makes its mark through events like *Gateway* which shape an aesthetic, cultural, and historic identity of the region. CARE’s programming and service attempt to meet an extensive range of needs including economic growth through beautification, health and wellness support, and providing affordable clothing options through the CARE Closet. Each of these efforts in art education, history programming, and meeting needs shape a narrative that through the arts, CARE is creating a sense of *wholeness* in this historical moment. However, based on arguments by Joseph (2002), nonprofits uphold the systems which rendered them necessary. This means that while CARE is able to fill some structural gaps and create a narrative of progress, the results demand unsustainable, volunteer labor, are temporary, and systems of economic injustice, austerity, and social inequality will continue to produce the conditions that CARE continually works to address.

CARE is shaping a narrative of Charleston and Tallahatchie County that position the understanding that art education encompasses *more than*. CARE illustrates how art education as understood through a *rhetoric of effects* (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2013) includes promises of progress. As a microhistorical (Dehne, 1995; Ginsberg et al., 1993; Stanley et al., 2013; Wierling, 1995) case,
CARE’s use of art education as *more than* by filling in structural gaps to create *wholeness* provides insight into how art education may become a tool for shaping historical narrative.
CHAPTER 6: PRODUCING CULTURE, SHAPING HISTORY

The Charleston Arts and Revitalization Effort (CARE) of Charleston, Mississippi in Tallahatchie County has offered a plethora of arts education and history programming since its founding in 2003. Through an analysis of archival documents, oral histories, and visual and material culture, in this dissertation, I ask how the art education efforts of CARE have shaped the historical narrative of the town and county in which it is situated. In this chapter, I continue to explore the two supporting questions: what is CARE performing and what is CARE producing? Recognizing that no singular points of analysis will fully answer the questions, I rely on Applied Thematic Analysis (Guest et al., 2012) to bring forward themes within the oral history interviews collected from members of CARE for this dissertation. Through my analysis, four themes emerged: Programming; Meeting Needs; Access, Exposure, and Opportunity; and Bringing Together.

*Programming* and *Meeting Needs* were analyzed in Chapter Five to understand how CARE uses arts education to act as *more than* to meet a plethora of needs in an effort to create *wholeness* in structures that serve Charleston and Tallahatchie County. Programming and Meeting Needs are *what* CARE is performing and producing. CARE’s programming, oral history, and visual and material culture shape historical and emergent narratives of the culture-historical geography.

In this chapter, I analyze the themes of *Access, Exposure, and Opportunity* and *Bringing Together* to better understand *why* CARE operates, or performs and produces, and what underlying assumptions about art education inform their work. The themes provide frameworks within which to situate CARE’s use of art education as a tool for shaping historical narrative, but they are not comprehensive because a variety of other potential themes and threads could be interpreted from the data. These themes are of key importance to the analysis and interpretation of the data at this moment, for this dissertation project and the questions it asks.

**Defining the Themes**

The theme *Access, Exposure, and Opportunity* is composed of frequently used words from within the collected oral histories. They appear in variety of contexts throughout the interviews, and
the meanings of these words overlap. I offer the following definitions to clarify how they are used within this theme. *Access* is in reference to CARE’s resources and programming which is believed to be equally available to Charleston and Tallahatchie County residents. Generally, more narrators talked about children’s access, but CARE’s programming serves all ages. *Exposure* is presenting new, rare, or unique programming or materials to Charleston and Tallahatchie County residents. *Opportunity* means an offering from CARE to the residents of Charleston and Tallahatchie County to experience or participate in a program focused on the arts. *Access, Exposure, and Opportunity* suggest CARE’s rationale for engaging the arts and art education is based on the belief and assumption that the programming they offer is meeting a need that is otherwise unfulfilled. By filling the need through the arts and art education, CARE is producing culture which ultimately shapes historical narrative.

*Bringing Together* is the other theme explored in this chapter. The word “together” within the context of bringing people together was used fifty-six times in the eight oral histories conducted for this dissertation. The frequency of the phrase conveys its significance in the work of CARE and further analysis situated within the cultural-historical geographic contexts of CARE reveal why the phrase is so prevalent. *Bringing* is movement towards a destination with something in tow including not only objects and materials, but also ourselves, our person, and the contexts in which our selves are situated. *Together* is the location and interaction in which these objects, and more importantly, *selves*, arrive. Art education and history programs are produced in order to encourage people of Charleston and Tallahatchie County to bring themselves to the CARE building and to situate themselves within the organization’s offerings. By doing so, CARE acts (or imagines to act) as a binding agent of togetherness for those who arrive, bringing themselves.

Art education guides the togetherness through varying activities, teaching the participants how to see/interpret and represent the subject of the event (an exhibition, an artmaking session, experiments with particular media) and the event itself as a point of coming together for a common experience in an imagined neutral place.

For example, art exhibitions like *Narratives of the Land* which was loaned to CARE from the Mississippi Museum of Art in 2017 featured several landscapes and works of art with the land as the subject matter. The exhibition itself was considered neutral and applicable to all audiences in Mississippi for whom agricultural interactions with the land and/or experiences of viewing the landscape as a resident of the state are shared experiences. CARE welcomes everyone into the building where the exhibitions are displayed. While the gesture of welcoming is one of care and hospitality, not everyone is comfortable accepting the invitation, because the building is not the
Recall the narrator’s story from Chapter One about an African American man who shared that when he was a child his mother told him some places were not for him. What his mother meant was that Black people were not welcome in spaces of whiteness due to historic laws and ongoing social practices of segregation. One place she indicated was the Bank of Charleston. Today, the Bank of Charleston is the CARE building or the Charleston Arts Center. Yet the man, though admitting times have changed, still does not feel like the space is somewhere for him, that he should not enter Charleston Arts Center. Therefore, when CARE offers art education programming, like exhibitions, and welcomes participants into the building, these shared experiences of event and place are not neutral, but always already shaped by the cultural-historical geography of Charleston, Tallahatchie County.

The participation of individuals in CARE’s programming whether active or passive is narrated as a unified experience that brings them together. This point is both real and imagined. While physical presence results in a shared space, anything beyond that such as social, emotional, or empathetic togetherness is anecdotal and unproven, or imagined. Nonetheless, the repeated claim of bringing together is a real-imagined more than function of art education rooted in a desire to solve cultural and historic social injustices, specifically around racial segregation in the Mississippi Delta. Segregation is separation, the opposite of togetherness. Overly simplified, racial segregation was law founded in White supremacy, violence, and injustice (see Berrey, 2015). When made illegal, racial segregation remained as social practice, often enforced by systemic violence including economic injustice and physical violence including murder. The cultural-historical geographic contexts of the Mississippi Delta, including the violence of segregation, shapes Charleston and Tallahatchie County and situates CARE and the work of the organization within it. CARE’s repeated desire and claim that its programs bring together represent the real-imagined more than hopefulness that by providing arts opportunities, histories of segregation will be overcome.

**Producing Culture**

Embedded within the theme of *Access, Exposure, and Opportunity* is a mode of cultural production which positions a particular set of ideals of artistic works and programs as desirable for CARE’s audiences. Cultural production is the shaping or producing of values or culture in relation to the conditions of cultural-historical geography. To analyze the theme of *Access, Exposure,
Rubén Gaztambide-Fernández’s (2013) rhetoric of cultural production is useful. Gaztambide-Fernández (2013) positions the rhetoric of cultural production as an opposite to the rhetoric of effects. A rhetoric of effects is focused on outcomes, particularly within schooling, which claim that the arts are intrinsically imbued with the ability to do things like solve problems. Gaztambide-Fernández (2013) explains a rhetoric of effects as “always caught in a positivist logic that enforces the prevailing normative and technocratic view of education” (p. 213). In other words, arts are understood through an elite perspective that shapes what is considered good art and claims that art has the innate ability to produce outcomes and solutions for a variety of issues. On the other hand, a rhetoric of cultural production is focused “on the conditions that shape [an art educational] experience rather than the outcomes” and “raises questions about whether and how we mobilize the concept of the arts in relation to educational projects committed to social justice” (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2013, p. 216). Thus, a rhetoric of cultural production acknowledges the situatedness of the arts within its context of an educational project or cultural-historical geography.

While CARE does not directly address or claim social justice as a goal or commitment, the work they do to meet needs for the community extends beyond or more than art education. This suggests their interest in providing service is oriented towards social and cultural equality, or wholeness, if not justice. CARE attempts to meet needs and fill in gaps caused by historical and ongoing structural inequalities and is reliant on the arts and art education towards their efforts. The reliance is rooted in an understanding of the arts and art education within a rhetoric of effect which means, based on the interviews and archival descriptions of CARE, the organization assumes the arts can inherently solve long standing problems like racial division. In operating through this lens, CARE is actually producing culture and historical narrative about Charleston, Tallahatchie County in which CARE is as an actor within the cultural-historical geography. CARE, through using art education, becomes an instrument for progress, meeting needs, and creating unity or a sense of wholeness. CARE is producing a cultural-historical narrative which attributes the arts and art education with progress.

In their chapter “The Arts as White Property,” Rubén Gaztambide-Fernández, Amelia Kraehe, and B. Stephen Carpenter (2018) offer:

Through the framing of cultural production, we are able to denote that, on the one hand, “the arts” operate as a way to categorize the whole range of creative and symbolic modes of cultural expression and creation and, on the other hand, “the arts” are also a set of discourses, ideologies, and modes of perception and appreciation that set the terms of
distinction for which practices and objects come to be recognized as such (p. 15).

The quote positions material, or symbolic, modes and ideological, or theoretical, modes of understanding within the framework of cultural production. For CARE to use the arts in the production of culture is not only to create artworks, programming, and visual and material culture, but also to use art education to shape how Charleston and Tallahatchie County are seen and represented as historical narrative.

**Whose Culture?**

The “set of discourses, ideologies, and modes of perception” (Gaztambide-Fernández, et. al., 2018) as “the arts” are described above are shaped by and situated within a specific cultural-historical geography as in the case of CARE within Charleston and Tallahatchie County. The modes emerge from a narrative within the field of art education which places value on Eurocentric, Westernized aesthetics and formalism. Authors Gaztambide-Fernández, Kraehe, and Carpenter (2018), through Critical Race Theory, identify the preference of the field towards Euro-Western ways of knowing as whiteness or the arts as white property. The authors clearly note that their use of whiteness in this context and as lower-cased is not in reference to individuals but indicates a structural and conceptual understanding of culture. They clarify:

“The arts,” as a marker of all that is beautiful and culturally superior, are thus implicated in, and therefore belong to, whiteness, not only because it was White Europeans who invented the concept but also because the terms by which any symbolic practice or creative object come to be considered under the category of “the arts” are themselves set by discourses and ideologies that are similarly intended to demarcate, and thus to protect, the property value of whiteness. This implication also requires institutions and arbiters vested with the task of determining and protecting what counts as “the arts” through logics that reflect the modes of being and the social and cultural orders that grant privilege to some and marginalize others (Gaztambide-Fernández, et. al., 2018, p. 17).

This means that how the arts are conceptualized and implemented into organizations like CARE is founded in an understanding of the arts that values whiteness. Whiteness is a product of colonization and the European Enlightenment’s ideology of the “transcendental, White, male, rational subject who operated at the recesses of power” (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1998, p. 5, as cited in Kallio-Tavin & Tavin, 2018, p 72). The enlightened, self-controlled, White, male subject as a naturalized,
cultural norm creates an opposite other who is non-White and/or not male, conceptualized as wild, chaotic, exotic, and lacking rationality and self-control. By this notion, the other should be educated in order to become closer to the naturalized, cultural ideal. Art education scholars Kallio-Tavin and Tavin (2018) define whiteness as an ideological framework [that] helps to produce normative ideas of the world, which are often caught up in a circuit of consumption, reproduction, perpetuation, and reinforcement, in and through visual culture. It is an ideology and way of constructing and constituting the world (p. 72).

In their definition, visual culture is the mode which disseminates and produces the ideological framework of whiteness. Visual culture is an optical form of knowledge production resulting in a cultural pedagogy of how to see and how to represent and thus construct and constitute (Kallio-Tavin & Tavin, 2018) the world around them. Art education based within this framework of whiteness is a mode of dissemination which reinforces the culture of whiteness.

Cultural whiteness as a foundation of the arts elevates the concepts of superiority and beauty as understood by Euro-Western historical canons and narratives to a place of significance and value in the shaping of local culture. The term value is important here as it is placing properties of commodification such as worth and ownership on the arts. What is valued is the perceived ability of the arts to solve issues of economy and social exclusion wherein the arts are understood through the lens of whiteness.

For example, CARE’s mission statement is “to foster the economic growth and redevelopment of Charleston, Mississippi through the arts and community involvement while preserving the historical significance and heritage of the town” (careatrsms.com, n.d.). In the mission, the arts are understood as powerful enough to encourage economic progress for the town. Like the arts, the economic growth of the town is understood to be neutral and beneficial to everyone. To an extent, this may be true. However, economic growth, particularly redevelopment, may only be of significant value to those already benefiting from wealth or ownership within the economic structure of the town. To connect it to the arts, implementing the arts through a lens of cultural whiteness benefits those who are already invested in the idea of the arts as culturally superior and works to convince others of its importance. It becomes an invisible, seemingly neutral mode of cultural production. Money and art may be inanimate as objects, but how they are used in economic redevelopment or pedagogy are situated within cultural-historical frameworks that are not neutral.

The process of neutralizing or making the arts a part of good and goodness happen through
**whitewashing.** Gaztambide-Fernández, Kraehe, and Carpenter (2018) define this in a footnote stating:

While not uniquely North American, the notion of being “whitewashed” points to the process by which certain kinds of cultural artifacts, practices, and even people are symbolically and/or linguistically re-articulated or re-positioned to appear as if they belong to, or are the outcome of, so-called White culture (Gaztambide-Fernández, et. al., 2018, p. 18).

Throughout this dissertation, the working definition of art education is teaching how to see and how to represent. Positioning this definition in conversation with the above explanation of whitewashing, whiteness can be understood as part of art education pedagogy shaping how CARE sees and represents Charleston’s historical narrative. Bringing together under the arts and art education is to unify under an assumed culture shaped and produced by an understanding of the arts’ relationship to whiteness. In a special issue of the *Journal of Cultural Research in Art Education* themed “Whiteness and Art Education,” scholars including Joni Acuff (2019), Melanie Buffington (2019), and Tyler Denmead (2019) further uncover ways art education reproduces a dominant narrative of whiteness in an attempt to “decenter and destabilize whiteness within the art education field” (Acuff, 2019, p. 8). In other words, the authors aim to make visible the seemingly neutral and invisible influence of whiteness within the field.

Whiteness is not only considered to be neutral through the process of whitewashing, but it becomes aligned and associated with goodness. Goodness is another form of cultural value or worth, determining what is considered to be good and further hiding the role of whiteness in its production (see Sullivan, 2014). While CARE is not intentionally or even consciously reinforcing cultural whiteness, a culture of whiteness presented through goodness and care is reproduced through programming in art education and history at CARE. This whitewashing develops a sense of unity both real and imagined through cultural homogenization promoted by a shared aesthetic through arts programming and shared experiences such as CARE’s annual *Gateway to the Delta Festival*.

Goodness is not only made into a cultural value through whitewashing, but further cemented through the teachings of Protestant Christianity which is homogeneous and naturalized within the cultural-historical geography. There is historical and contemporary distinction and nuance within the practices and beliefs of churches of the area. For example, African American churches in the Delta and broader in the US are frequent sites of organizing for labor, civil rights, care, and mutual aid (Ferguson, 2012; Giggie, 2007; Watson & Stepteau-Watson, 2015). Overall, Protestant Evangelical Christianity is generally a shared culture. In his dissertation “An Approach to Poverty
in the Mississippi Delta,” Andrew Dodson (2017) explains the deep connection of Christianity and culture:

We live in a culture that is fairly saturated by the basic Christian narrative. This narrative suggests Christ came to give us personal piety and save us from personal suffering in an afterlife. If we go to Sunday school semi-regularly and avoid bad things like drunkenness and affairs we are holding up our part of the bargain. This cultural understanding of what the Christian church represents is shared fairly equally by believers and non-believers alike. It is culturally normative knowledge. This understanding of Christianity is part of our cultural DNA (Dodson, 2017, p. 13).

Dodson’s description of Christianity as cultural DNA exemplifies its prominence. Goodness in this quote is associated with personal avoidance of badness and accountability through participation in church programming. Practicing goodness in the Protestant Christian religion and particularly in Evangelical practice is not only a personal endeavor as described by Dodson’s (2017) quote, but one which extends to others through service and invitations to participate in fellowship or faith-based programming and community building through the church. While CARE is not explicitly a Christian organization, its position within the cultural-historical geography means Protestant Evangelical Christianity is a part of its cultural DNA (Dodson, 2017). It is an understanding of shared culture and a set of norms that is enacted through daily operations of CARE. For example, board meetings and programming events often open with a leader offering a prayer. Members of the board and volunteers often recruit participants, audiences, and additional volunteers through multiple avenues that include church networks, through church bulletins and Sunday morning announcements. The daily operations of CARE intertwined with the cultural and institutional structure of the Protestant Church normalize the relationship rendering it invisible though it is highly influential in the production of culture and history in the town. A CARE document (2019) states that one of the organization’s reasons for operation is that “[Charleston] has little culture to offer unless one gets it at home, school or church.” This explicitly positions CARE as a cultural producer alongside the church and institutions of the home and school. It also positions CARE with the ability to correct the cultural deficit of the town and of participants through programming.

Returning to the theories of the genre of landscape painting allows for an analogous example of how the concepts of whitewashing and goodness are intertwined in the arts and art education. In Chapter Two a brief historical unfolding of the history of landscape painting presented the genre as a means to naturalize controversial subjects like religion, class, and politics when it emerged in
the 1600s (Jensen Adams, 2002). The naturalization of these subjects through landscape paintings happens by creating a common perception of place through representations of it. In other words, landscape paintings teach viewers how to see and represent place as rendered through “communally held identities” (Jensen Adams, 2002, p. 66). This is similar to the rational, White, male neutral figure as product of the historic European Enlightenment movement in that landscapes create a representation for what kinds of places and spaces are to be perceived as the norm and the other.

Further, I posed that landscapes, as representations of the commons (land, trees, rocks, plants, water sources), create a sense of neutrality because the commons are understood as belonging to everyone. Through this understanding, race, class, gender, religion, and other identifiers are rendered invisible through a representation of the commons. However, as Mitchell (2002) argues we as viewers, artists, and people within the space of landscapes are always already implicated as shaped by and shapers of place and how it is perceived. This means that identifiers do matter, significantly. They effect how we perceive landscapes and how, through representation, power or ideology is enacted. Mitchell (2002) writes, “…think of landscape […] as a process by which social and subjective identities are formed” (p. 1). What is identified as good, shared, valued, and beautiful is disseminated through art education, or a pedagogy of how to see and how to represent, by creation, exhibition, and viewing of works of art, like landscape paintings. Mitchell (2002) continues:

[landscape] naturalizes a cultural and social construction, representing an artificial world as if it were simply given and inevitable, and it also makes that representation operational by interpellating its beholders in some more or less determinate relation to its givenness as a sight and site (p. 2).

This means that artists and viewers participate in a shaping of place and shared identity through the creation and consumption of landscape paintings. The paintings are shaped by artist choice and a cultural aesthetic preference. Scenes that artists select for representation are shaped by the land’s inhabitants. Thus, an artists’ subjects are shaped landscapes. Presence of people, culture, and histories are always already embedded in representations meaning landscapes are not neutral. Yet this fact is rendered invisible. Instead, landscapes are seen as neutral places. These sites are both literal and represented spaces for viewers or participants to come together.

Landscapes create a shared visual culture of how the land is represented, act as a possession over the land through its representation, and create a shared sense of local and regional history (Mitchell, 2002). Analogously, whitewashing is like the production of landscapes in which a dominant value shapes the representation and perception of place. A culture of whiteness and goodness, like a
landscape painting, are an imagined-neutral meeting point where values are assumed to be shared. Yet, they are products and producers of cultural values that are always already influenced by broader cultural-historical geographies.

Through offering an analysis of quotes and scenes within the oral histories collected for this research, an argument for CARE’s positioning of art education as a producer of culture and a shaper of historical narratives unfolds. The themes of Access, Exposure, and Opportunity and Bringing Together unveil a rationale for CARE’s use of art education that is grounded in cultural production informed by whiteness and Christian values to ultimately shape a narrative of wholeness and revitalization.

**Access, Exposure, and Opportunity**

The following quotes are a sample of how this theme of Access, Exposure, and Opportunity manifested across interviews. Following the quotes, I analyze them further to better understand how, for whom, and what it means for CARE to provide access, exposure, and opportunity within the parameters of their programming.

Art education scholar Amelia Kraehe (2017) positions access as one of five principles of arts equity as praxis. She writes that access means the availability that people from “any social, cultural, or linguistic group” have in their choice to participate in an art education experience. One narrator explained that at CARE, “We do everything either totally free or as very low cost as we can to try and make it accessible to everybody” (J. B. Burnett, personal communication, August 20, 2019). CARE recognizes the need for no or low-cost programming in order to provide the most access to the arts for children and adults in Charleston and Tallahatchie County. In 2018, the poverty rate in Charleston was 33.1% of the population which is 20% higher than the national average (Data USA, 2018). Access to arts materials and funding needed to secure and display traveling exhibitions are cost prohibitive in areas of high poverty and need, but CARE as an organization operating under a 501(c)3 nonprofit designation is able to apply for and secure resources to make arts education opportunities available at little to no cost for those interested in participating.

While lifting the burden and barrier of financial cost is essential to providing access to arts education opportunities in a high-poverty setting, it is not the only impediment to full accessibility. Kraehe (2017) explains, “Access also depends on a person having the prerequisite dispositional, experiential, and symbolic means to (a) know about, (b) be able to take advantage of, and (c) feel at ease within the art education opportunities made available” (p. 271). If the arts are understood
through the argument of arts as property of whiteness, then while removing the obstacle of cost does provide more access, historic, social, and cultural barriers remain.

CARE is aware of the history of segregation and makes efforts towards being inclusive. One narrator shared, “CARE provides access for children of all different backgrounds, whether it be middle class or lower class, and all different ethnicities, which is not something that you normally see in such a small town” (J. Montgomery, personal communication, March 18, 2020). The narrator notes CARE’s intentional attempts to diversify as unique to rural and small towns, in this case in the Mississippi Delta. An understanding of diversity as unique to ruralness enforces the normalization of cultural hegemony centered in *whiteness*. CARE’s intervention through opening and diversifying access makes clearer that audiences and workshop participants are primarily understood as White. While CARE is opening space for diversity, the diverse participants are entering or accessing a space which values whiteness in its understanding of the arts.

Providing opportunities is another way to provide access to arts events. Another narrator shared:

[The goals of CARE] I think [are] to offer art to the community and to offer different outlets that otherwise aren’t available in Charleston, not just the visual arts, but they’ve done dance and things, so, different opportunities. Certainly, they’re there for the kids, but just for the community in general to have an art center. They do yoga classes, I believe, in the facilities. Just to have that outlet as a community, to be available (J. Young, personal communication, February 24, 2020).

Particularly in rural areas, the opportunity to experience the arts in the way that CARE presents it is not always present. In other words, the ruralness of a location does not mean there are no forms of art or art education, but that they may not be associated with or organized by an official group like CARE. CARE, housed in the Charleston Arts Center, is a venue which serves to manufacture and produce arts experiences for children and adults in Charleston and Tallahatchie County. The building is where the arts can be consumed and is on the Square in Charleston. Other such arts venues are at much greater geographic distances. Assuming the individual has transportation to visit somewhere like Memphis, TN (an hour away from Charleston) or Jackson, MS (approximately two hours from Charleston), the trip would require not only time and financial investment, but the interest and sense of belonging in arts spaces (Kraehe, 2017) in order to access other arts education opportunities or be exposed to them. CARE is one way to bring the arts to a rural location where many citizens may not be able to experience them otherwise.
CARE works to eliminate financial burdens and spatial distance so that people in Charleston have access to the arts. Another narrator mentions a reason for why by stating, “And so, what we wanted is for our children to have as much of the good things that were around us that they otherwise wouldn’t even know about, wouldn’t have the opportunity to experience” (G. Callender, personal communication, September 23, 2019). The narrator talks about the good things in relationship to opportunity and experiences for children in Charleston. Operating at the root of CARE’s work is the assumption of art education as a universal and unequivocal good. *Good thing* here means that art education is a benefit to individuals who participate and that it aligns with a cultural morality that it is desirable and approved of by those involved in CARE and the broader Charleston and Tallahatchie County citizens. Art education is therefore a tool for personal growth where the process of seeing art and making art leads to self-improvement. Moving towards *goodness* through the arts is a path towards things valued in cultural *whiteness*. Through art education, which is instruction on how to see and how to represent, arts as the *good things* begin to create a sense or an ideal of goodness, beauty, and a shared aesthetic.

In creating the perception of a unified culture through arts education, CARE is not only shaping a historical narrative, but disseminating it to appeal to current and future generations. Rural areas frequently face population declines as those who are able leave for more work opportunities or other reasons. CARE is producing arts education and historical programming in order to place more cultural value within Charleston and to work towards economic revitalization of the town. Part of this is to attract businesses. Another part is an effort against population decline, to retain Charlestonians. One narrator shared that CARE “shows [youth] that you don’t have to leave. You don’t have to leave here and go somewhere else. You can actually do amazing work in your hometown. And that’s one of the main things that I think CARE has done for the community” (J. Williams, personal communication, March 10, 2020).

As a cultural arbiter, CARE shapes not only arts experiences, but the narratives around them that become a part of the culture and history of Charleston. The shaping CARE does is towards a unified town, but “the arts” as understood through a lens of whiteness enforces division. Because of its cultural-historical structural position, *whiteness* as normalized by the arts is rendered invisible and continues to operate subversively despite CARE’s efforts in creating accessible opportunities. This is important to consider in context of the second theme explored in this chapter, *Bringing Together*, because the theme imagines CARE creates a neutral togetherness, but is always already shaped by the cultural-historical geography.
The following quotes and scenes are representative of the kinds of questions which elicited responses of “bringing together” from the oral histories collected for this project. The questions are included to situate the replies and my participation as researcher. A bracketed ellipsis represents a cut and edit in the response used to make the quote concise and eliminate tangential information. Non-bracketed ellipsis indicates a pause or trailing off of an idea. The similarities in responses provide a point of saturation that makes the singling out of individual speakers’ use of phrases less significant than the collective ideas and philosophies of CARE within the responses. I recognize the sensitivity of speaking to long histories of segregation and social injustice and do not want narrators to feel criticized nor lose their trust. I approach the interviews as a Matter of Care (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017) for the individual allowing for a closer critique of the organization. As the following quote demonstrates, the concept of “bringing together” is extremely important for CARE and is perceived as essential to its work. Further, it is repeatedly mentioned throughout and across interviews.

JSC: What are the goals of CARE?
JBB: CARE just really wants to bring our community together. We use the arts for that, music lessons, art lessons, dance lessons for adults and children […]
JSC: How has CARE impacted the community?
JBB: Well, I think CARE’s made a positive impact in the community. There are people like me, for example, who are out in the community rubbing elbows and talking to people because of what I do for a living. But there are a lot of people that just don’t get out in the community and interact very much. This is a real avenue for them to get out and interact with a different group of people than what they’re accustomed to interacting with. They may be outside of their church circle, or outside of their little work group, or whatever. So, it’s just a real way of Charleston getting together as a community and interacting together. It’s made a lot of positive impacts on Charleston (J. B. Burnett, personal communication, August 20, 2019).

This section combines two points within an interview where the narrator shares importance of bringing people together for CARE. The organization explicitly uses art education, referred to here as lessons in various arts practices as the impetus for gathering. Further, the point is made that there are a variety of non-overlapping or separate sectors within Charleston, such as church or work
circles. These circles, particularly church related, are culturally and socially understood and coded as racially segregated spaces. CARE creates a new space in which these otherwise distinct groups can be united. CARE not only creates the new space for unity, but also a motivation and pathway to arrive, show up, or participate through art education. It almost operates like the frequently (mis) quoted line-cum-business mantra from *Field of Dreams* (1989) “If you build it, [they] will come,” but instead of corn fields and baseball, it’s Delta towns and art education. The idea is that if arts education is offered, the community will be brought together.

How many people come together, who are brought together, how successful it is or not are not of great importance to this research project as it is not a quantitative study to determine if CARE’s claims are true. What is important is how CARE is narrated and how that shapes broader understandings and narrations of the present and unfolding histories of Charleston and Tallahatchie County. This quote claims a positive impact and is one of many potential perspectives, polyptych folds, in the narrative of CARE. Other quotes delve a bit deeper into how CARE’s use of art education to bring people together shapes historical narrative.

JSC: What is your role in the founding of CARE?
EM: I was a citizen of Charleston. I live about fifty miles away in Oxford. I have a great appreciation for the community. I’ve been gone since ’58, but I’ve tried to get back and be involved a long, long time. […] All around Charleston, which I love, I saw towns just crumbling and I couldn’t figure out how or what was holding Charleston together. And it seemed to me, as I looked at it, it was CARE and what CARE brought to the table. They brought together leadership. They brought together African Americans and Whites together in an interest in one thing, which to my surprise was art…and projects with children […] CARE has tried creating communications, creating a common cause, a common challenge. They’re working together. The best shot of them figuring it out is working together rather than two separate camps (E. Meek, personal communication, October 21, 2019).

In this excerpt, the narrator specifically identifies race as well as historic and contemporary racial segregation as a key issue that CARE is addressing. Two “camps” are identified, African American and White. The primary claim is that art and art education is in a unique position to bring the two racially distinct groups together in a way that other towns in the Delta have not been able to do. The narrator claims these opportunities come through leadership which for the narrator throughout the interview includes things like entrepreneurial and other business ventures,
participation in city governance, and service on the boards of organizations like CARE. From the narrator’s perspective, through CARE and art education, Charleston has shifted its cultural-historical positionality away from the path of “crumbling” and towards a “common cause.” Cause in this context of art education is understood as a principle or movement that is rooted in deep commitment and may require advocacy or defense to maintain it.

Some historic causes in Charleston and Tallahatchie County, if not primary causes in the cultural-historical geography, include movements for racial equality, such as student protests demanding equitable school integration, the formation of the NAACP, organizing for civil rights and voting advocacy. These history-shaping causes are led by suppressed populations, in this case Black citizens, against the dominant system of White supremacy, who are at great risk including violence and death. In this excerpt, art education, specifically children’s art projects, is identified as the “cause” and must be advocated for and defended due to its perceived ability to bring together. A key difference in art education as cause and movements for racial equality as cause is the imagined innocence and apolitical neutrality of the arts and of children. Where the arts and field of art education is rendered neutral through its perceived innocence (Amburgy, 1990) and its absorption into the cultural production of whiteness, movements for racial equality render the systems of whiteness and inequality visible and challenge them, destabilizing the normative, dominant narrative of the cultural-historical geography.

The arts are imagined to work by creating neutral space in which the cause is shaped into a shared effort by dominant and suppressed populations creating a we rather than an us versus them scenario. “Bringing together” is an admirable attempt at unity. Nonetheless, it cannot realize a true unity without critical address of not only the cultural-historical geography of Charleston and Tallahatchie County, but also the roots of White supremacy that “the arts” pull from in an attempt to appear neutral (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2013). In other words, arts education scenarios and spaces can bring diverse groups together into a location or within an activity, but will not inherently resolve historical injustice without critical address. Art education and art projects are not a common cause because they don’t do anything (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2013) or at least don’t operate intrinsically to create solutions to problems such as segregation. However, they are a common site or meeting place for those in Charleston, particularly ones who are interested in the arts or want their children to participate in “the arts” though it is “the arts” as shaped by White supremacy and Eurocentrism.

In art education’s history the psychologizing (Amburgy, 1990; Dewey, 1902/1956; 1910/2005) of the field, or movement of art education away from labor-based production towards child-centered,
personalized art experiences, is a trajectory towards the perception of art education as innocent. Primarily, this transition created a focus on self-growth, particularly for children’s emotional expression (Amburgy, 1990), though adults benefit too. An example of this appears in the following scene:

**JW:** You have these parts of your life where you learn things and it makes you into a different person. That was definitely my time at CARE [...] **JSC:** Can you say a little bit more about that? Like what…what about it changed you? **JW:** Well, I’ve always been, you know, especially my time at the church, the type of person that wants to help people. In the church, you’re kind of just closed in to the church. You can’t do a whole lot of work outside the church. [...] But with CARE, I got to help so many people. We had so many different programs that people could be a part of. People that I would have never come in contact with in my everyday life before then, I became really good friends with people that I never would have known if it were not CARE. But especially down here in the South, there’s...CARE really helps cross racial lines down here in the South. And I’ve made friends that I never would have made had it not been for CARE (J. Williams, personal communication, March 10, 2020).

In this scene, CARE is a site for personal growth and networking which is enfolded within a larger cultural-historical narrative. This personal testimony presents as a broader claim that people of different races converge at the site of CARE where some individuals make friends and connections with people of different racial or other identity backgrounds. Then, the narrative of historical segregation and perceptions of integration and inclusivity begin to shift. It is explored further in the following scene:

**JSC:** How do you think the ruralness of Charleston and the Delta, and also the history of the Delta, which, you know, is pretty fraught with racial tension and poverty, how does all of that influence CARE as an organization? **JY:** Hm…well, I think…how it necessarily directly influences, I’m not sure, but I think it’s something that...Well, there’s no sugarcoating the past. There’s not necessarily a direct effort to...The arts themselves are an outlet to combat that, some of those negatives, in ways for people to deal and cope with them. For one it brings people together in our community. You know, it breaks down, kind of, that racial divide. [...] CARE is an outlet where there is no judgement, everyone is welcome, and yeah…that’s what art’s about. As a center it’s providing a space where everyone’s welcome and it’s giving opportunities for
Blacks, Whites, everyone in the community equally (J. Young, personal communication, February 24, 2020).

The narrator points out the presence of a difficult past with “there’s no sugarcoating” and that it is a part of life that is recognized, mostly with “there’s no direct effort to [sugarcoat].” The metaphorical use of the term as it appears here is to lessen the severity of a harsh fact by phrasing it as gentler, kinder, or sweeter. The mention of denying direct efforts to present the past as less harsh may imply indirect efforts in sugarcoating. This is not to say the narrator is scheming or enacting indirect efforts of softening the realities of a racist past, nor are they referencing any conspiracies by CARE to that soften or ignore history. In the interview context and as indicated by tone and inflection, this comment was to say, we see our past and we don't deny it. However, there may be nuance in the understanding depending on who and what is perceived. Someone less critically aware of the culture and history will not see in the same way as someone who is and may attempt to soften the reality of it out of politeness, social custom, or shallow understanding.

Again, this interview scene shows that CARE is imagined to produce a site of neutrality and even equality through offering arts education opportunities. The narrator does not claim this, but it is worth noting that the arts and art education as perceived innocent and neutral act as a form of historical sugarcoating. Art education offers a level of perceived sweetness as it generates artworks as visual treats or pleasure, especially artworks for children which make the art products and activities more innocent. By using art education, such as lessons, lectures, exhibitions, classes, and the products of it including artworks, discussions, and audience reception, CARE is producing sugar to coat the site that it is creating to bring together people in an effort to indirectly address racial segregation. In doing so, the difficult history of racial divide can be shaped into a new narrative in which people of Charleston come together through the real-imagined cause-cum-site of art education.

JSC: Right. I mean, do you think that that, you know, race and racism underlie a lot of this, like for the community, that that’s one of the examples that we went to, but also just building empathy? Do you think that it impacts CARE in other ways, because this kind of leads into the next question, which is how would you describe the community CARE serves?

JJ: They want to serve everyone.

JSC: Right.

JJ: [...] The opportunity was there for anybody to [be president or executive director] to be a part if they were really wanting to do that. People don’t want it to be a race issue.
We just want to live. We just want everybody to and to serve the whole community. And serve, whatever, you know. And so I think CARE, in my opinion, has really tried to reach out to all. It’s all inclusive. And if you look at the things that we’ve done and promoted and helped, I mean, I really think it has [...] People have to speak up inside their part, too, with what they want, because they’re given opportunities. Everybody’s given an opportunity. [...] I think we’re just trying to do the things that make the town good and positive and draw people together in a way that’s fun and good and makes everybody a part of it. (J. Jones, personal communication, October 5, 2020).

In this scene, CARE is framed as an inclusive organization through a performance of indiscriminate service to those in the community. Inclusion in this quote can be read in two ways. One way is through the wide array of services the organization attempts to offer. The other way seems to be the narrator’s intended message of the inclusion of diverse people through the programming of the organization. Diversity and inclusion are nuanced in the quote. On the one hand, everyone is welcome and therefore included as audience for programming as well as administrative aspects of the organization. On the other hand, there is a suggestion that not everyone participates in the decisions and they should “speak up” or seize the opportunity for leadership CARE provides. From this interview scene and additional context which was edited for space, clarity, and privacy, it can be deduced that “everyone” in this context means those who are generally not involved with the organization, mainly Black Charlestonians.

This is not a malicious comment from the narrator, but is telling of some of the perplexity several narrators shared about how their hard, volunteered labor to offer the art education programming for everyone or how the welcome CARE offers is not always received in the way they hope and imagine. Namely, that while the organization is imagined to bring people together, the level of participation or the kind of participation or the number of African Americans in leadership roles are not considered adequate to the vision of CARE that is open to everyone. There is also confusion about why issues around socially practiced racial segregation are not solved through the organization’s use of art education, because art education is perceived as neutral and inherently able to solve complex issues through the promises of a rhetoric of effects (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2013).

CARE has some examples of real-imagined racial reconciliation through diverse audiences at exhibitions, programs, workshops, and the Gateway to the Delta Festival. While these events and opportunities to bring people together are perceived as progressive and may be real progress, there is only anecdotal understanding of true racial reconciliation. Within the interview scene, the
palpable discomfort with and desire to avoid direct confrontation of issues of race is accompanied by how CARE relies on its art education programming to do the heavy lifting of racial reconciliation, because it is imagined to neutralize spaces from the discomfort of historical reckoning.

It would be remiss to not include one mention of racial reconciliation programming by CARE that surfaced during one of the oral histories for this project. In 2015, CARE hosted a William Winter Institute Welcome Table mini-retreat for one night. The William Winter Institute for Racial Reconciliation is named after a Mississippi governor and facilitates discussions about race for communities. The Welcome Table is a program which engages in trust building through storytelling, listening, and education on systemic inequities. According to the William Winter Institute website, the Welcome Table program usually lasts eighteen months to two years. CARE was able to host the institute for one night. The narrator who shared this information suggested the institute continued in Charleston after that, but it is unclear how much CARE was a host in ongoing programming. This is significant to note, because it is a direct attempt at racial reconciliation by CARE that did not necessarily assume the arts or art education could resolve the problems inherently.

There is significant complexity within each of the quotes about “bringing together” in both the text and the pauses which could not be fully unpacked through limitless unfolding of the potential pluralities. The focus, then, is to address the two supporting questions in this chapter which consider what CARE is performing and producing leading to the primary research question of how art education shapes historical narrative.

**Shaping History**

CARE is performing and producing a real-imagined neutral space which is a physical location within the CARE building. Additionally, CARE is performing the creation of art education and history programming in which these programs, particularly art education, function as *more than*. Ultimately, CARE is producing a historical narrative which asserts that through art education, racial tensions from cultural, historic, and social segregation are resolved. CARE is the unique protagonist in this narrative which provided Charleston and Tallahatchie County with the arts, which is what it needs to progress and move forward.

The real-imagined *more than* utility of art education is a product of the narrative of the field as a *rhetoric of effects* (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2013) which ascribes the arts with inherent abilities to *do* things like solve social injustices. Without intentional use of arts education programming to
explicitly address social issues, solutions remain surface-level or imagined. Intertwined with the *rhetoric of effects* (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2013) is the hierarchy of culture situating Eurocentrism and, consequently, whiteness as superior. It is a form of cultural hegemony which positions real-imagined *wholeness* as the ultimate goal. To “bring together” would mean the creation of an ideal whole of being together that is physically and culturally situated inside of the arts space. The arts space is imagined neutral and normalized through hegemonic systemic structure which, far from being neutral, actually promotes and enforces the culture of Euro-White superiority. Rather than neutrality, the arts space, organization, and educational programming are always already shaped by the cultural-historical geography of Charleston and Tallahatchie County.

CARE is actively shaping the cultural-historical geography of Charleston and Tallahatchie County by influencing the way the place, community, and residents see and represent themselves. In the case of *Bringing Together*, the concern is primarily with indirectly resolving a long history of social injustice and systemic divide founded on racial hierarchies of White supremacy enacted through racial segregation. Through CARE, art education becomes structurally intertwined with the cultural-historical geography of Charleston and Tallahatchie County. While this structuralizing of the arts shapes narratives of the place, it suppresses any abilities for the arts to offer critique against the structures in which it is absorbed. Claire Bishop (2012) warns that art should be a form of social critique rather than integrated and absorbed as a structure within a society, because art and art education should function as instruments of critique of the structure, outside of it.

By situating art education integrally to the work of CARE without deep analysis and challenge to the meanings and association that art education possesses from its historicity means that art operates to reinforce rather than to reframe dominant narratives of White supremacy. If CARE positions art education as an agent with inherent properties that *do things* and *solve problems* without explicitly questioning and critiquing how art education is being used, then it falls back to the rhetoric of Eurocentric whiteness and reinforces rather than reframes.

Bringing together is not enough. It assumes those individuals who have brought themselves will then be personally and privately responsible for reconciliation, because the art education event is only a space or shared experience rather than a critique or direct acknowledgement of issues. Bringing historically and socially segregated communities together within the imagined neutral space of CARE is a start, but not the final solution. If a desire of the organization is to truly reconcile, then art education efforts cannot be assumed to inherently operate. Rather, pedagogical intervention through the arts requires direct confrontation with issues through critique, artworks,
or programming that challenges the norm rather than reinforces it.

**Conclusion**

This chapter provided data from oral history interviews into two themes, *Access, Exposure, and Opportunity* and *Bringing Together*, in order to address what CARE is performing and producing. I argue that the themes offer insight into why CARE operates and organizes programming, as ways to provide space for the people of Charleston and Tallahatchie County to interact. The underlying desire is to move beyond historical and social racial segregation that is prominent within the cultural-historical geography. However, rooted in *whiteness*, the arts cannot inherently provide a solution to segregation and actually, though inadvertently through CARE, reinforce and normalize a culture of whiteness.

CARE’s use of art education is intended to create a historical narrative that is whole. Its imagined shape is round and inclusive, enfolding and caring. The real narrative is far more complex, a polyptych of many folds and sides. It is unending and never complete. It is situated within a culture, history, and geography that creates inescapable structures against which CARE is operating that the organization unintentionally reinforces. While creating an imagined neutral and accessible space like the CARE building, the palimpsest of history prevents fully coming together until the layers are peeled back and addressed. This process takes time and great effort to not (re)present or revitalize old structures and ways of being, but rather to reimagine and open truer access and opportunity and togetherness, rejecting a lens of whiteness and opening space for critical examination. Art education can be used to shape historical narrative in this way, or it can reinforce structures through a process of teaching how to see and represent.
I made the loop around Tallahatchie one more time during the duration of the data collection period of this research project. It felt more familiar the second time around, because it was. I know that I miss a lot taking the highways. A truer understanding of place is found in repeated traversal of the side roads, the unlined country lanes, the boonies, the routes that take you years to feel that confident familiarity that you won’t miss the bend in the road on a dark night.

I think history research is like that; you start on the highways to get an understanding of the place but know there are endless and not always obvious alternate routes that may get you closer to a truer or richer or more nuanced truth. Each decision made unfolds paths differently. The entirety of a place cannot be captured.

It is complicated further when stories of the past/history and the culture become enfolded with the geography. And so, while I tried to learn by “taking my body to the land” (Simpson, 2014, p. 17-18) and experience

Charleston, Mississippi sits on a bluff in its location nicknamed as the Gateway to the Delta. The ongoing history of the small, rural town with a population of less than 2,000 includes vast changes to the landscape, deep social inequities, and real-imagined actors like Religion, the Planter, the Resisters, and the Benevolent Corporation. Each of these elements folds and unfolds to offer a variety of narratives, making a complete and linear telling of history impossible. Yet, a predominant narrative of Charleston’s history emerges through the work of the Charleston Arts and Revitalization Effort (CARE). Founded in 2003, CARE’s mission “to foster the economic growth and redevelopment of Charleston, Mississippi through the arts and community involvement while preserving the historical significance and heritage of the town” (careatrms.com, n.d.) began with a project of historical preservation of the home of Scissors, the 1917 and 1918 world champion hog from Charleston. During Scissors’ lifetime, around the turn of the century, Charleston experienced a period of economic success that has never been seen again in the town’s history.

As such, this is the point where CARE’s narrative of Charleston’s history generally begins, in a golden, nostalgic age of economic prosperity. While Lamb-Fish was extracting the hardwood trees of the Delta and using Charleston’s bluff as an ideal location to avoid inevitable flooding of the mills, it created jobs and businesses in the town. Often social injustices like racial segregation and violence are ignored in the narrative favor of stories like that of the excitingly illicit candy shop that was a front for bootlegging operations or of parties at juke joints on plantation property out on Sharkey Road. There are general sentiments of tough times and difficult periods, but they are generally non-specific if they are spoken. The sentiments trace a murky narrative of economic and population decline, of
the cultural-historical geography of Charleston and Tallahatchie County, I realize that my understanding is emergent and shaped by the conditions of the data points that are accessible at a given moment.

I, too, am a data point and my perspective changes with each visit. The choices I make as a historian, artist, teacher, human shape how I unfold and present narratives.

On the second trip of driving the highways in a loop around Tallahatchie County, I made many of the same stops, the CARE building and Charleston Square, the Tallahatchie National Wildlife Refuge, Glendora, Sumner, cotton fields along the highway. I took more time observing the place and collecting bits of the commons to contribute additional data to my project. Many of these collected objects are scattered throughout the polyptych assemblage I created for this research.

One place where I spent a longer time was in town in Charleston at the James F. Kennedy Wellness Center, mostly on the walking trails and park around it. This place loosely began at CARE; a researcher held needs assessments focus groups at CARE. The wellness fluctuating unemployment rates, and of daily lives in a small town. In 2003, the start of CARE, the narrative is of citizens of Charleston banding together and turning to the arts and art education in an effort to bring vitality or revitalization back to their hometown. The narrative positions CARE as a cultural arbiter that moves the story away from murky despair and decline towards a brighter and more vibrant account.

CARE works to provide access to arts opportunities as well as exposure to a variety of arts exhibitions and programs. Through CARE, kids are able to experience arts education that isn’t available in local schools. Adults enjoy concerts, art shows, book signings, and a variety of programming otherwise unavailable in their rural location. CARE mobilizes the arts and art education as more than these programs by offering a variety of social and economic supports to the town. Through volunteer labor, CARE beautifies the town Square to attract businesses. CARE ran the CARE Closet to offer affordable clothing options for people in town. CARE played a role in the early stages of establishing a state-of-the-art health and wellness center in town. CARE teaches dance and yoga, gives opportunities to share space and make art, and has hosted grief seminars, a racial reconciliation workshop, and fundraising for community members in need of monetary support for medical conditions. Through all of these programs and services, CARE wants to bring together the people of Charleston and Tallahatchie County into a shared space in an effort to not only provide art educational opportunities, but also to alleviate social tensions and long-established cultural-historical realities of racial segregation. Through offering the arts and art education as more than, CARE works to shape a narrative of wholeness.

This is the historical narrative shaped by CARE’s understanding and mobilization of art education. It is a narrative of progress in which art education programming does not critically address or directly interfere with structural absences, austerity measures, or cultural, historical, or social inequalities and yet it is perceived to provide solutions to them all. Art education, understood as inherently good and with the inherent ability to solve problems, is rooted in a culture of whiteness.
center emerged through the researcher’s ongoing work, grant writing, and development in response to the need for access to health and wellness resources that emerged from the focus groups.

To walk the trail is to experience some of CARE’s mission of revitalization realized. The trails around the Kennedy Wellness Center are lovely, encircling a pond, park play area for children, and looping through a stretch of woods.

![Figure 7.1. J. Stokes-Casey. (2020). Tillatoba Creek and Kudzu Forest in Charleston, Mississippi. Photograph.](image)

Along the edges of the trail is a kudzu covered forest. Kudzu is an invasive vining plant and is sometimes referred to as the vine that ate the South.

Running in front of this particular patch of kudzu forest, across from the wellness center is the Tillatoba Creek. If Wikipedia citing Baca (2007) is to be believed, Tillatoba is a variation on a Choctaw word “Itillittoba” that means white dead tree.

that is often rendered neutral, invisible, and normalized. Rather than creating solutions to problems embedded within the cultural-historical geography, art education, without critical engagement, reinforces whiteness as a cultural value through a narrative that appears to be shaping history as progressive.

**Central Research Question**

The central research question for this study asks: How does art education shape historical narrative? This dissertation, as a microhistorical (Dehne, 1995; Ginsberg et al., 1993; Stanley et al., 2013; Wierling, 1995) study of the Charleston Arts and Revitalization Effort (CARE), provides a perspective of how art education shapes the historical narrative of the rural town of Charleston, Mississippi. The microhistorical focus concerns itself with archives, oral histories, and visual and material culture specific to CARE and Charleston in order to understand the historical narrative present in the cultural-historical geography (CHG) and how it is shaped by art education. Art education is teaching how to see and represent. For CARE, seeing and representing are visual and philosophical. Visually, CARE trains artists how to identify formal elements of art in subjects such as still-lifes and landscapes and to manipulate media like paint to represent them. Philosophically, through its programming, town beautification, historical preservation, and exhibitions, CARE provides an aesthetic education of shared cultural values such as pride in the land, place, and history. This philosophical art education is imagined to be neutral and normal and is therefore rendered invisible. CARE’s use of art education is more than visual exercises like painting landscapes, and through the making of landscape paintings and modes of aesthetic education, dominant historical narratives are reinforced.

On the surface, art education through CARE shapes a narrative of progress for Charleston and Tallahatchie County that involves bringing people together and overcoming historic and contemporary racial segregation by access and exposure to the arts and programming. The narrative produced in the oral histories collected for this dissertation is that in this historical
I wonder, what, specifically, is a white dead tree?

The creek of the white dead tree winds along a forest of the vines that ate the South.

The environmental effects of kudzu are disastrous; it displaces animals and insects who depend on the native plants as it eats away at the trees by blocking their access to sunlight. Trees become the bones for the kudzu.

Kudzu can be alluring. It even flowers sometimes. Yet, it cannot be allowed to eliminate the biodiversity of the forests it covers. Kudzu qualifies as a colonizing plant. Technically all plants are colonizing, but according to Bazzaz (1986), “Agriculturalists have equated colonizers with undesirable and, in many cases, nonnative species that affect agro-ecosystems detrimentally by reducing the growth and yield of the desired species” (p. 96). moment and through art education, CARE offers wholeness to Charleston and its people. Wholeness is understood as a filling in of structural, social, and systemic gaps such as providing access to affordable clothing through CARE closet and creating opportunities for diverse audience and participants to engage in arts experiences. In order to offer wholeness, CARE relies on an understanding of art education that it acts as more than teaching to see and represent and is an inherent solution to solving historical and cultural problems. This dissertation argues that when art education is understood to act as more than, it reinforces the cultural-historical geography by shaping historical narratives that render the dominant voices of cultural-historical geography, particularly those informed by whiteness, invisible.

Summary of Chapters

In Chapter One, the research questions, parameters, and design of the study are presented, and the form of the chapter introduces polyptych methodology. The polyptych, or many folds, of this research are made visible with three narratives: through the main text of the dissertation, a column of personal narrative relating to the research experience, and images with captions. The form brings awareness to how the study is crafted and how I am situated within it as a researcher. Within the chapter I establish the central research question of the study: How does art education shape historical narrative? I then position the three supporting questions which guide the design of the study. They are:

1. What are the conditions and contexts that produced CARE?
2. What is CARE performing?
3. What is CARE producing?

Finally, I offer an overview of the chapters and design of the study which is further elaborated below.

In Chapter Two: Theoretical Framework, I present a theoretical framework situating the central research question as a historiographical question for art education. Using the
Currently in the U.S., kudzu is most prevalent in the South, because the climate is more conducive to its growth. But I’ve read with climate change, kudzu will make its way up through the Midwest and wreak havoc on biodiversity on a larger scale.

Is this how a dominant narrative works, like kudzu? The trees lose their nuance, individuality, and own stories as they eventually are shaped into a new role, upholding the blanketing, vine that enfolds them into a forest of unified green. A singular, pervasive narrative asks to be upheld by and in spite of the limitless, potential narratives it overshadows.

It sounds dramatic and maybe it is...

Going with this visual example of the kudzu vines as dominant narratives overshadowing and enveloping the structures which support it, perhaps there is a correlation with the CARE building housed in the Bank of Charleston.

Looking at the façade, the warm and welcoming stained glass of CARE’s sign is enveloped in the vastness of the columned doorway and the “Bank of Charleston” is prominently and permanently etched into the building’s front.

genre of landscape painting as an analogy, I argue that like landscapes, the historiographical perception of art education is imagined to be neutral. Turning to the work of scholars such as Bolin and Kantawala (2017), Efland (1990a, 1990b), Freedman (1987), Soucy (1990), and Stankiewicz (1992), the history of art education is understood in connection to shifts in history. The work of Amburgy (1990) and Eisner (2001) illustrate how art education is rendered harmless and even a supportive role within micro spaces like schools. In other words, the perception of art education is of unequivocal goodness. The goodness is understood as inherent to the arts, and the naturalization of goodness within the arts is able to do things, like solve complex issues. Gaztambide-Fernández (2013) explains this understanding as a rhetoric of effects and argues for a reframing of our understanding of the arts to include its complex cultural and social contexts that he calls a rhetoric of cultural production. The rhetoric of cultural production (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2013) is introduced as a theoretical framework through which to understand how art education shapes historical narrative.

Also in this chapter, I provide a brief review of the literature as a foundation for the use of cultural-historical geography (CHG) in the dissertation. CHG in this study is an approach which rejects a linear perspective of history and place through a recognition of a broader context that is always-already in production, unveiling the myth of neutrality which requires a practice of care. Further, the CHG of the Mississippi Delta is often approached in scholarship through deficits and stereotypes that I reject and seek to counter in this work. Therefore, I conclude the chapter by unfolding a theoretical framework of care all the way down (Haraway, 2003, 2016; Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017). The lens of care, or Matter of Care (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017), is a recognition of the interdependence of researcher, oral history narrators, and non-human research participants such as place and visual and material culture. It is also a practice and ethic that guided my study. Throughout the recruitment, interview, analysis, and presentation of the research, I consider how I can offer care all the way down to the participants in this study by engaging in critical examination of
CARE’s ‘ecosystem’ extends into a vast network of programming and volunteer labor. The organization and volunteers reshaped and rebuilt the interior of the old bank to transform it into a new, revitalized form, vita as new life.

They invite people in, offer a wide variety of arts education programming, work to meet a host of needs for the people of Charleston. Yet for some, there is a metaphorical impenetrable kudzu forest that envelops CARE making it indistinguishable from the other places and stories the vines cover. The efforts of CARE to bring people into their world, invite them to participate, and offer opportunities to experience the arts are from a place of generosity and kindness for CARE, but some the themes and ideas of CARE, but not of the individuals.

In Chapter Three: Methodology, I detail the design of the study and its use of polyptych methodology (Garnet, 2015a, 2015b, 2017a, 2017b) and Applied Thematic Analysis (Guest, et al., 2012). Polyptych methodology as conceptualized by Dustin Garnet (2015a, 2015b, 2017a, 2017b) is a methodology of many folds which allows for a recognition of the potential pluralities that may emerge from analyzing points of data including oral histories, archives, and visual and material culture. Polyptych methodology is theoretically situated in new histories (Bolin, 1995; Burke, 1992, 2001; Garnet, 2015a; Munslow, 2010; see also Himmelfarb, 1989) which emphasizes power structures and the lives of everyday people and historying (Dening, 2006; Garnet, 2017a; Munslow, 2010), which is a sometimes-creative process of doing history rather than a developed, final product of history. I expand on Garnet’s work by inserting and crediting many voices in feminist scholarship whose practices are aligned with the polyptych methodology Garnet proposes, but not cited in his work, primarily, the concept of the situatedness of the researcher, also referred to as situated knowledges (Haraway, 1988) or standpoint theory (Harding, 1986, 1992; Collins, 1990). I give further examples of how the works of Black women scholars such as Saidiya Hartman (2007), Hortense Spillers (1987), and Sylvia Wynter (2003) implement polyptych-like methodologies in their scholarship.

I give definitions and examples of the kinds of data used in this dissertation including archives, oral history, and visual and material culture. I detail the methods of collecting and analyzing the data as well. I argue that polyptych methodology offers recognition of archival absences, situates the interviewer within the oral histories, and lends itself to visualizing findings through arts-based research such as the polyptych assemblage I created as a form of inquiry. The data, particularly the oral history interviews, is analyzed through Applied Thematic Analysis (Guest, et al., 2012) which allows for coding and identification of themes as tools for meaning making.

In Chapter Four: Polyptych Assemblage, Conditions and Contexts, I answer the first supporting question of this
are hesitant to enter, because it feels like being absorbed into the kudzu forest.

Maybe the path forward is not extending invitations into the kudzu, but with chopping it back and allowing the overgrown forest of stories to reemerge, embracing the biodiversity. The polyptych narratives cannot be untangled into a singular whole, but rather work together to create an infinite unfolding of stories and histories that shape space, place, people, culture, and history.

In mid-September 2020, I attended a plein air painting workshop with the then director of CARE, Carol Roark. Plein air painting is her specialization, specifically the Southern landscape. She regularly practices her art making by going out onto the land around her home to create studies and sometimes finished works. She shares her years of practice and mastery of oil painting with students through workshops for artists of all skill levels. The three-day September workshop was small to limit participants and with great attention paid to COVID protocols to keep everyone safe. Personally, I haven’t painted in a very long time. I have only painted with oils a handful of times and can count the number of times I’ve worked in plein air fashion on dissertation research, what are the conditions and contexts that produced CARE? The question is concerned with the cultural-historical geographic context of Charleston and Tallahatchie County that influences the work and culture of CARE. I divide the chapter into three interconnected themes: real-imagined actors, shaping of land, and social inequality. Within these themes, I highlight major events and actors uncovered through archival research.

As argued throughout the dissertation, a single narrative of history is not possible, therefore the chapter takes up the form of the polyptych though three elements. First is the anchor image of the polyptych assemblage. The assemblage is rearranged each time it appears as an anchor point which resists the stagnant authority it may have if it remained unchanged. Detailed images and captions elaborate on the individual panels of the polyptych assemblage adding additional layers and narratives to the information presented. Second is the system of hyperlinks. Images are interconnected in a web of relationality. They are designed to disrupt the linear format of the document and create folds throughout the text, complicating the narrative and producing many more narratives dependent on the reader’s interaction. Third are prompts which invite the viewers to participate in the construction of the narratives presented within the chapter. These prompts challenge the single authority of the historian and make space for potential pluralities.

In Chapter Five: Art Education as More Than, Shaping Whole Narratives, I explore two of four themes that emerged from an analysis of the oral histories. The themes Programming and Meeting Needs give detailed accounts of the kinds of work CARE engages, particularly art education and history programming, but also in broader social services. For example, CARE offers programming such as art lessons for all ages, exhibitions, and events such as the Gateway to the Delta Festival which shapes an aesthetic and builds culture, traditions, and history for Charleston and Tallahatchie County. CARE also works to contribute or meet broader social needs such as the economic health of the town through beautification work and entrepreneurial workshops, caring for the physical
one hand. Essentially, I am a beginner or at least so out of practice, it’s like starting over. I was interested in learning the skills, the color theory, the techniques, and even the best way to take care of the tools and materials.

Most importantly, though, I needed to understand more about building a relationship to the land, place, and landscape through someone else’s approach. I could drive around all day long and make meaning, but it is a much different experience to stop, select a particular geographic point, and revisit it over a few days to create an image.

![Figure 7.4. J. Stokes-Casey. (2020). Photograph. By Day 3 of the Plein Air workshop I had a painting of this small cotton field just beginning to bloom. It’s not a good painting by any stretch of the imagination, but it was an experience, a learning opportunity, and a chance to participate in a new skill with a group of supportive practitioners. As far as I could tell, I was the only one to choose the view of the cotton field. I thought the rows would make an interesting composition and I wanted to engage in an exchange with this crop that shapes carries a heavy cultural-historical weight.](image)

and emotional health of the town through initial support of a wellness center and grief seminars hosted at CARE, and offering affordable clothing options through the CARE Closet. Through these programs, the expectation of CARE is for art education to act as more than. This means that the arts and art education are understood as beyond teaching how to see and how to represent, but that it uses these shaping tools to serve the town more than through art education towards things like health and wellness care. CARE’s desire, then, is to create wholeness or to fill in structural gaps and absences left by austerity measures throughout the cultural-historical geography of Charleston and Tallahatchie County. Art education actually does do more than what CARE, Charleston, and Tallahatchie County intend in that art education works to reinforce dominant historical narratives and the power structures which shape them.

In Chapter Six: Producing Culture, Shaping History, I analyze the remaining two themes that emerged from the oral histories. They are Access, Exposure, and Opportunity and Bringing Together. These themes highlight some of the reasons why CARE operates, to open the arts and art education opportunities to people in Charleston and Tallahatchie County and to bring people together, an act that is understood as a solution to a long history of racial segregation. Creating access and opportunities to expose people to the arts is a mode of cultural production, and the kinds of opportunities, art, and art education CARE organizes are rooted in a framework of whiteness. This means what is considered valuable, beautiful, and of importance to the shaping of local culture is determined by a Euro-Western, white standard that is considered to be good or of goodness. This happens through a mode of whitewashing which homogenizes or normalizes the good, white cultural values, rendering them invisible. The values are reinforced as a shared aesthetic through cultural production such as art education programming, history programs, and events like the Gateway to the Delta Festival. For this reason, the theme of Bringing Together creates a narrative of progress and racial integration, but actually fails to resolve root, cultural-historical issues of segregation. Art education is used to shape a narrative of progress; however, if it is understood
Throughout Tallahatchie County are several artists who work with the land and landscape in some form. Many of the artists work in painting, but there are also photographers, potters, and even quiltmakers. One of the more well-known artists from Tallahatchie County is the photographer, William Eggleston. He made several early-career photographs of scenes around the county and his childhood home near Sumner. His relative, Maude Schuyler Clay, lives and works as a photographer in Tallahatchie County, photographing a myriad of scenes and publishing them in books called *Delta Land* (1999) and *Delta Dogs* (2014). Following the body of landscape photographs in *Delta Land*, Clay (1999) wrote, “In all of my lifetime the Delta has been a car culture. Because of the long distances between towns and the almost total lack of public transportation, Deltans spend a great deal of time in the car... What you observe while driving becomes a significant part of what you think and who you are” (p. 88).

I get where she’s coming from – completely. My drives in the Delta were quick introductions of acquaintance to the place compared to residents, but the sentiment is very familiar to my own experiences of land and place elsewhere. At any rate, I through a culture of whiteness as a means to achieve wholeness, the historical narrative that art education shapes reinforces and normalizes a culture of whiteness. Instead, art education could shape a different narrative by critically examining, reimagining, and embracing a polyptych framework of many folds that allows greater access and opportunity for diverse perspectives.

**Contributions to Research Participants**

When this project started, the available information about CARE was limited to the organization’s web presence and private collections of documents of institutional history among members. Through this research, eight oral histories about the founding and ongoing work of CARE will be digitized and presented to the organization for their historical records. The research led to a contact who worked with CARE at its founding, created a cultural plan for the organization, and conducted interviews with long-time residents of Charleston. All of the material shared from his research will also be given to CARE. This is a great contribution to the organization, because much of that founding information was previously lost and unknown to current CARE leadership. Finally, through the process of research and discussing the project specifically within rural education networks, I have made and shared new contacts with CARE’s leadership that may open opportunities for collaboration, funding, and alternate modes of support.

**Contributions to the Field of Art Education**

Overall, the field of art education is interested in expanding knowledge about the history of art education, particularly of marginalized histories as most recently demonstrated by the 2019 call for papers for the *Mapping International Art Education Histories* conference (postponed due to COVID-19). A paper from this dissertation research was accepted to be presented at the conference, highlighting the importance of this research and its potential to contribute to the field. In addition to the conference acceptance, this dissertation
wanted to take the opportunity to learn from the plein air workshop and continue my own introduction to and discussion with the land around Charleston in Tallahatchie County.

To an extent, I think the workshop was successful in furthering that conversation with the land. Ultimately, I became more engrossed with relearning the materials and working with them and the dialogue with the land was interrupted. This meant that while taking my body into the land to learn (Simpson, 2014) was helpful, adding the representation through art media to the process changed the experience. My beginner/unpracticed status meant I spent most of my energy trying to relearn the materials, but embedded within that was a way of learning to see through practicing looking at the land in search of values, forms, and color.

We were instructed to consider the question, “What is your story?” as we chose subjects for our paintings. The question meant, where is your focus; what parts are of most concern; how are you shaping what you see into what you represent? Picking a spot to focus on in our plein air paintings, choosing what to crop out, which clouds to include is analogous to the process of historying. It is a offers several contributions to the field including research on overlooked places, an examination of cultural production, and an expansion of the theories and experimental forms of polyptych methodology as a way of engaging in historical research.

Overlooked Places

The rural and the South [Southeastern United States] are frequently overlooked places in academic research. Due to this, these places often fall victim to depictions and narratives of deficits that ignore the richness and nuance they have to offer. Through the use of polyptych methodology within this study, many layers of Charleston and Tallahatchie County’s histories were unfolded demonstrating the plethora of stories and narratives within the cultural-historical geography. These were only glimpses, and fuller, deeper engagement with the history of Charleston and Tallahatchie County, and even of CARE, could yet still be unraveled. This demonstrates that rural does not mean removed.

Without observation and examination of the rural and especially the rural South, the assumed, generalized, deficit narratives continue to be reinforced. Nuanced studies offer more opportunities to analyze the complexities of these places and may challenge stereotypical understandings.

Through this focus, I also contribute to rural education studies. Rural education scholars Biddle, Hall Sutherland, and McHenry Sorber (2019) call for research on the rural to “speak to how power manifests across space” (p. 10, emphasis in original). Situating this study within the cultural-historical geography of the rural Mississippi Delta, I argue that art education acts as a manifestation of power, specifically of whiteness (Gaztambide-Fernández, et. al., 2018) that is disseminated through CARE in an attempt to create wholeness.

Cultural Production

Understanding how culture is produced and how it continues to shape the Mississippi Delta, specifically Charleston and Tallahatchie County, is another contribution to the field.
creative choice which tells a story. The resulting painting becomes documentation of a moment and of an experience. The moment and experience are shaped by the person who documented it, the artist. The artist teaches us how to see the subject they represented in the work.

This is similar to the work of a historian. However, a historian is generally removed from the documentation of moments and experiences; they rely on archival documents in the (re)search to shape historical narratives. These archival documents were shaped by people in the past and their (re)presentation or interpretation of moments and experiences. This is one of the things I have

That is moving art education from a supportive role to an active role in shaping history. While art education historians (Efland, 1990a, 1990b; Freedman, 1987; Soucy, 1990; and Stankiewicz, 1992) are correct in their narratives of art education’s role shifting in response to broader cultural-historical movements, this study opens space for understanding art education as a mode of cultural production (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2013) and of historical production.

CARE’s use of art education provides a microhistorical (Dehne, 1995; Ginsberg et al., 1993; Stanley et al., 2013; Wierling, 1995) perspective of how art education in our current historical moment is understood and how it is asked to operate as more than. CARE uses art education to unify their work in art and history programming, revitalizing the economy, reshaping and establishing historical narratives, and resolving long-standing issues of racial segregation. Art education is perceived as against austerity and towards wholeness which shapes narratives of progress. This dissertation argues for a critical approach to understanding these historical narratives as shaped by art education and reveals that such narratives may be reinforcing rather than resolving systemic issues within cultural-historical geography.

**Polyptych Methodology**

Finally, this dissertation contributes to the field by expanding on historical research and polyptych methodology through citational practices and experiments in form. Polyptych methodology as a tool for research in art education history was theorized by Dustin Garnet through his dissertation work in 2015. However, until now, key citations of feminist scholars working in situated knowledges (Haraway, 1988) or standpoint theory (Harding, 1986, 1992; Hill Collins, 1990) were excluded from the theorization of polyptych methodology. This dissertation also positions the work of Saidiya Hartman (2007), Hortensia Spillers (1987) and Sylvia Wynter (2003) as examples towards which polyptych methodology scholarship may turn.

I further contributed to the theorization of polyptych methodology through experimentation with arts-based

![Figure 7.5. J. Stokes-Casey. (2020). This little painting was another work made during the plein air workshop outside of Charleston, Mississippi.](image)
attempted to make visible throughout this dissertation, particularly in Chapter 4.

While I did consult archival and historical materials and images, I chose to present the historical narratives through photographs and artworks that I produced through my experiences of the cultural-historical geography. My photographs and artworks were informed by historical research but were shaped by my decisions as a historian and art educator. Those decisions, photographs, collected visual and material culture shaped the polyptych of narratives presented within this dissertation.

Even in oral histories, the stories shared by the narrator are influenced and shaped by the interviewer. I determined the questions the narrators responded to. I worked to build relationships with individuals associated with CARE as a form of care and as a way to open more space for meaningful discussion in interviews. Our emerging relationships become one of the folds in the conversation. The interviews are then further shaped by the researcher/interviewer/historian through the analysis process. Finding themes within the work is a form of interpretation of the already shaped interview. It is not unlike methods in the form of assemblage and dissertation formatting. Through an assemblage of visual and material culture, I created a polyptych which allowed for ongoing exploration of the many folds of the cultural-historical geography specific to my project. Through dissertation formatting and inspiration from Lippard (1997), I worked with a graphic designer to create a document containing multiple, simultaneous, unfolding narratives to further explore the possibilities of polyptych methodology. I took the format further by combining the polyptych assemblage with hyperlinks between images and text to create a non-linear, interconnected web of information within which to present the cultural-historical geography for this project. Finally, I included a series of prompts to invite the reader as a participant in the shaping of the narrative and to further explore the central research question of how art education shapes historical narrative. Each of these contributions informs recommendations for the field and gives shape to my future scholarship.

Limitations

As historical narratives are impossible to offer complete, all-encompassing perspectives of history in that they will always contain absences, gaps, and a plethora of potential narratives to unfold, so too are dissertations. While a point of saturation was reached within the interviews collected, one of the limitations of this research was a lack of sustained access to participants due to the COVID-19 pandemic and resulting travel restrictions. I interviewed eight narrators for this research but recruited several more. The additional recruits would have given more diversity to the narrators and oral histories and potentially opened new themes for analysis. For logistical reasons, those additional interviews never came to fruition. During the project, there was some discussion about continuing the collection of oral histories about the organization for CARE’s own purposes. Due to recent changes in leadership, distance, and availability, this may not unfold.
the interpretation process a
plein air painter considers while
making decisions on how to
represent the subject or finding
“their story.”

Throughout the dissertation
I experimented with what it
means to shape narratives.
I intertwined the roles of
historian, interviewer, artist,
and art educator and attempted
to make the work of historying
(Dening, 2006; Munslow, 2010)
more apparent, specifically
how each of these roles work
to shape history. Above I
mentioned how generating
materials like photographs,
artworks, and visual and
material culture rather than
reproducing historical images is
one way of making the influence
of the historian, interviewer,
artist, and art educator more
visible. Additionally, pulling
from feminist theory (Collins,
1990; Haraway, 1988; Harding,
1986, 1992), I work to situate
myself within the project and
note the effect of my presence
and perspective on shaping the
narrative. These side columns of
the Introduction and Conclusion
chapters are the primary ways
I unfold my positionality within
the work. I use first person
perspective, reflection on my
experiences of the place and the
research, and offer speculations
and half-formed ideas to share
how I am thinking about and
understanding the work.

**Recommendations for Future Scholarship**

The use of polyptych methodology in this dissertation allowed for an unfolding of many aspects of CARE, themes
within the oral histories, and how art education and cultural-historical geography intersected. There are many potential
avenues for continuing research about CARE and the ideas
presented within this dissertation. For example, other research
methodologies would allow for further insight into the
work and impact of CARE such as ethnographic study or a
longitudinal study that follows the trajectories of those who
participated in CARE as youth. To conclude this research, I
offer recommendations for future scholarship for myself or
other interested scholars.

**Taking Care**

While an analysis of the theme of *Meeting Needs* began
to address some of the care work that CARE offers to Charleston
and Tallahatchie County, the relationship of art education and
care is an opportunity for continued scholarship. Care studies
offers a robust and wide-ranging body of knowledge. In
preparation for this dissertation, I only was able to engage with
a handful of texts on care and did not undergo research on the
discourse of care in the field of art education. As a continuation
of this dissertation project, a potential way to expand on this
relationship between art education and care is to examine the
kinds of care offered by the organization CARE and how it is
influenced by and integral to the cultural-historical geography.
Taking care into consideration with cultural-historical
geography may unfold narratives to better understand the
crucial role of gender and race in care work and in art education
in the Mississippi Delta and in a broader context.

**Gendered Labor and Volunteerism**

Further explorations into the relationship between
care and art education will likely uncover more information
about gendered roles of labor and volunteerism. Research and
theory about the invisibility of women’s work and its poor
or nonexistent compensation is ongoing. The scholarship
The side columns play with the polyptych methodology and format. They offer another narrative or fold within the overall presentation of the research. Occasionally, images and captions create multiple new folds for the reader to explore. Sometimes, those images are even hyperlinked to other passages, pages, and images throughout the document to further emphasize and slightly disorient the reader. The messiness of narratives is interesting and presents truer historical accounts than linear narratives of progress.

When I was painting, I mostly forgot and ignored the narrative and conversation I wanted to build with the land because I was so distracted with relearning the materials. How does this happen for historians or even organizations as they try to shape linear or even cohesive narratives from the materials and contexts available? One theme or thing becomes forgotten or others rise to the surface due to the plethora of materials or the focus becomes how to shape the theme or thing into the desired form.

As we work towards the creation of narrative or artworks or histories, we constantly make choices for inclusion and exclusion. What is formed at the end of the choice-making is demonstrates how obscured, gendered labor upholds the façade that renders it invisible and underappreciated. Most of the volunteers and organizers of CARE are women. A point of further research could be to ask why and examine more closely the relationship between gender and volunteerism as intertwined in art education spaces and organizations like nonprofits.

**Rural and Southern**

This microhistorical study of CARE unfolded not only knowledge of the cultural-historical geography of Charleston and Tallahatchie County, but also contributed to the often-overlooked regions of the rural and the South. Rural cultures, histories, and viewpoints are crucial to understanding the contemporary social, cultural, and political climate of the United States that affects art education and the broader landscape. The strong regional identity of the South (Southeastern region of the United States) is constantly undergoing social, cultural, and political change in which artists and arts educators are immersed. If art education is a way of teaching how to see and represent, then the field should turn more of its attention to a vast portion of the country (the rural) and a shifting, but rich cultural-historical geography (the South). Bringing more focus to these areas can help educators and scholars uncover many folds and nuances of these places and to consider how the arts are situated within them.

The Charleston Arts and Revitalization Effort is only one example of a small, rural art education organization seeking to make significant contributions to the town it serves. Throughout the South and rural United States, many other art education organizations may be found such as town arts councils and alliances. Many of these arts organizations are interested in challenging the status quo and subverting dominant narratives, especially for those who are marginalized.

In the greater Mississippi Delta, area are organizations like DeltaARTS established in 1974 in West Memphis, Arkansas, West Tennessee Delta Heritage Center & Tina Turner Museum established in 1998 in Brownsville, Tennessee, and the Delta
only another choice. What does this mean for history and for narrative and for art education and its history? How can we recognize these choices, polyptychs, and the messiness of doing history as we generate histories within the field of art education?

On the last day of the plein air painting workshop, I was walking around the turn rows and field edges where others in the workshop set up their canvases. I was admiring the paintings they created as well as collecting bits of the commons, like tiny jars of soil and cotton buds that had broken off of the plants. When I returned to my set-up, I noticed another participant placed two heart-shaped rocks on my bag. Perhaps she noticed that I was collecting things or maybe she was a collector herself, either way this gift was a gesture of kindness and care that I appreciate.

This whole experience of researching, analyzing, writing, has been art educational by opening multiple ways to see and to represent the history that unfolded of CARE within its cultural-historical geography of Charleston and Tallahatchie County in the rural South. It hasn’t always been a pretty picture or even what I anticipated seeing. It has been a process of peeling South is also home to arts organizations and schools that formed for the purposes of social and economic transformation and continue to shape the historical narrative and cultural-historical geographies. Some of these institutions have longer historical trajectories, stronger archival resources, and continuing legacies. For example, the Appalachian Mountain region is home to several folk and craft schools originally founded to encourage economic and social well-being including the Arrowmont School of Arts and Crafts started in 1912 in Gatlinburg, Tennessee and the Penland School of Craft established in 1929 in Penland, North Carolina. Thus, the question of how art education has shaped historical narrative may be approached more fully, potentially yielding rich results in these long-running arts institutions of the rural South.

Historical Narratives and Cultural Production

Exploring this question of art education as a shaper of historical narrative positions the field to a place of critical importance in historical research. It builds on the work of Rubén Gaztambide-Fernández (2013) whose rhetoric of cultural production makes clearer how the arts and art education are mobilized to craft and shape histories. It also reveals how art education is theorized in relationship to historical moments. For example, CARE’s turn to the arts is reaction to recent and contemporary moments of political discord, rural blight, and ongoing economic austerity measures. CARE, building from a discourse of art education’s inherent capability to solve complex issues, theorized that art education and its ability to serve as more than could be mobilized to repair gaps in the social structures and create wholeness for Charleston and Tallahatchie County. However, an analysis of the rhetoric or historical narrative demonstrates the (re)production of an understanding of the arts as white property (Gaztambide-Fernández, er. al., 2018), normalizing it within the culture. Further, the social labor produced by CARE through its more than programming efforts actually upholds the conditions and contexts which rendered the organization necessary (Joseph, 2002). Continuing to ask the question, how does art education shape historical narrative,
away layers of romanticism and nostalgia, and while I have not fully discarded them, I practice treating them with care and criticality. These are personal practices that situate my research practice and will continue to inform it.

and situating it within specific contexts moves art education’s position in historical research from shaped by to shaper of and opens more potential for unfolding narratives.

**Conclusion**

This microhistorical study of the Charleston Arts and Revitalization Effort within its cultural-historical geographic context offers an understanding of how an art organization is both shaped by and a shaper of the historical narrative of a rural town. For CARE, art education is understood as an innate problem solver and is therefore expected to offer solutions to social and economic problems that are more than aesthetic education. Mobilized in this way, art education normalizes and maintains a culture of whiteness by reinforcing rather than resisting dominant understandings of history, aesthetics, and culture.

Perhaps the more than mobilization of art education, while specific to the cultural-historical geographic context of CARE in this study, may also indicate the positionality of the field of art education within our broader historical moment. The economic disparity, racial tensions, austerity measures, and unjust conditions of the historical and contemporary Mississippi Delta are not isolated there or even in the South. The arts and art education as a property of whiteness (Gaztambide-Fernández et al., 2018) through a rhetoric of effects (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2013) is received by educators and art education organizations as promises to resolve these issues through a reaffirmation of the goodness of the arts. This results in a continuation of the structural inequities while shaping narratives of wholeness, progress, and change.

If considered differently, through a polyptych framework, and mobilized as critical examination of dominant and marginalized narratives, art educators and organizations like CARE could embrace an art education that shapes more inclusive historical narratives.
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APPENDIX A: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

How long have you been involved in the Charleston Arts Revitalization Effort (CARE)?
What is your role in the founding of CARE?

What are the goals of CARE?

How would you describe the community CARE serves?
How has CARE impacted the community?
In your opinion, what is the role of the arts in rural communities such as Charleston, MS?

Please describe your involvement in the events, opportunities, and contributions CARE has made to the community.

What are some of the CARE events you are involved in? What is your level of involvement?
How/Do you see these events as making an impact on the community? Can you describe the impact?
What opportunities does CARE provide for the community?
How do you see community members responding to the opportunities?

How does place, rural and in the Delta which is labeled as The Most Southern Place on Earth (Cobb, 1992), influence CARE as an organization?
How does it influence the opportunities, events, and programming CARE offers?
How/Does the regional history impact the work of CARE? In what way?
Do you see CARE as playing a part of the larger historical narrative of the Delta, which includes tensions from racial inequality, economic injustice, and difficult history?

What lessons have you learned from your involvement with CARE?
What advice would you give to other rural communities interested in using the arts to revitalize their location?
APPENDIX B: MAP OF POLYPTYCH ASSEMBLAGE HYPERLINKS