Community Assessment Methodology

Eastern North Carolina was selected as the eighth of nine communities chosen for this project by the Steering Committee of the Institute on Domestic Violence in the African American Community (IDVAAC) for several reasons: its rural southern location, its southern heritage, and its unique population demographics. Eastern North Carolina is a prime example of the "New South"; it is an area that has attracted major industry and is experiencing rapid population growth in a few areas while also experiencing serious out-migration.

The 40 counties that constitute eastern North Carolina presently have an estimated population of 2.36 million (NC QuickFacts, U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2005). The estimate compares with a population of 1.97 million in 1990 and 2.27 million persons in 2000. The region is growing at a 9.9% rate for this decade (2000-2009). Three of the eastern counties experienced negative population growth in 1990s while eight are now estimated to be losing population through a combination of natural decrease and/or out-migration. Most of the population growth is centered in five counties, Brunswick, Cumberland, Harnett, New Hanover and Pitt. Approximately half of the population growth in the region was accounted for by in- migration numbers, which have been especially notable among African Americans returning to their birth communities after years in the Northeast, Midwest, or other regions of the country (Reeves, 2005).

The population of the eastern counties racially is 61.6% White and 30.2% Black (U.S. Census Bureau, 2001). Five counties in the east have majority Black populations and four others have over 40%. Several of these counties (Bertie, Edgecombe, Halifax and Northampton) are the same counties experiencing population decline and associated out-migration. The east and the state have nearly the same Hispanic composition (4%) but this segment has grown rapidly since the 1990s. The American Indian population is the most significant race in the remaining racial balance accounting for over 3 per cent with three counties having the largest concentrations.

The housing picture of the forty eastern North Carolina counties reveals a 4.2% substandard rate (overcrowded/incomplete plumbing) for year-round, occupied housing units. Over 37,000 of the housing units fell into this category in 2000 while the state's rate of substandard housing was determined to be 3.8% (NC State Data Center, 2005).

Eastern North Carolina is a prime example of the "New South"; it is an area that has attracted major industry and is experiencing rapid population growth in a few areas while also experiencing serious out-migration.

Economically, the income and employment picture is sobering as the eastern counties' Median Family Income average in 2000 was $38,723, over 16 percent below the state average of $46,335. Unemployment in the eastern counties averaged just below 6% in 2004, while the state level was 5.5 percent (NC Employment Security Commission, 2005). Still, the Census Bureau reports that in 1997, 10.8 percent of businesses in the region were minority owned. Most of the unemployment has been accounted for by manufacturing losses experienced in textile-related plants and some agricultural-related business categories in the past six years (Bureau of Economic Analysis, 2005).

Forty-three African American men and women formed a pool of respondents who were nominated by the Eastern North Carolina Community Advisory Group. This group was formed to learn more about the minority community, organize logistical resources, and facilitate introductions in preparation for the community assessments process approximately nine months prior to IDVAAC's arrival in Greenville, NC. The advisory group identified persons who were invited to participate in six domestic violence focus groups in the Greenville/Pitt County area. Six affinity groups to which they were invited included: (1) members of the Human Services Community, (2) the Faith Community, (3) the Law Enforcement Community, the (4) Children and Youth community, (5) GLBTQ (Gay, Lesbian, Bi-sexual and Transgender Community representatives, and (6) Community Advocates. Forty-three African Americans participated in the six focus groups mentioned above. A description of all participants in the four assessment groups is presented in the tables below.

Table 1: Assessment Group by Gender (N=43)

	Gender Females	Males
Assessment Group	**(n=30)**	**(n=13)**
Human Services	5	1
Faith	8	2
Law Enforcement	3	2
Children and Youth	5	3
GLBTQ	3	3
Community Activists	6	2

Table 2: Assessment Group by Length of Time in Eastern North Carolina (N=43)

	Years in Eastern North Carolina 0-10 yrs.	11-20 yrs.	21+ yrs.
Assessment Group	**(n=3)**	**(n=9)**	**(n=31)**
Human Services	1	--	5
Faith	--	2	8
Law Enforcement	--	1	4
Children and Youth	--	2	6
GLBTQ	1	2	3
Community Activists	1	2	5

Table 3: Assessment Group by Home Location (N=43)

Type of Location	Urban Greenville/Pitt County	Rural More Rural County
Assessment Group	**(n=14)**	**(n=29)**
Human Services	2	4
Faith	3	7
Law Enforcement	1	4
Children and Youth	--	8
GLBTQ	4	2
Community Activists	4	4

Table 4: Assessment Group by Age (N=43)

Age	30-39 yrs.	40-49 yrs.	50-59 yrs.	60+ yrs
Assessment Group	**(n=11)**	**(n=15)**	**(n=13)**	**(n=4)**
Human Services	1	3	1	1
Faith	--	3	4	3
Law Enforcement	1	2	2	--
Children and Youth	2	4	2	--
GLBTQ	5	1	--	--
Community Activists	2	2	4	--

Table 5: Assessment Group by Education (N=43)

| | Level of Education | | | |
	High Sch.+	BA/BS	MA/MS	Ph.D./M.D.
Assessment Group	**(n=10)**	**(n=17)**	**(n=14)**	**(n=2)**
Human Services	--	4	2	--
Faith	3	2	3	2
Law Enforcement	1	2	2	--
Children and Youth	2	3	3	--
GLBTQ	2	2	2	--
Community Activists	2	4	2	--

Table 6: Assessment Group by Marital Status (N=43)

| | Marital Status | | | | |
	Single	Partnered	Married	Separated	Divorced
Assessment Group	**(n=11)**	**(n=3)**	**(n=20)**	**(n=1)**	**(n=8)**
Human Services	--	--	4	--	2
Faith	2	--	6	1	1
Law Enforcement	--	--	4	--	1
Children and Youth	4	--	3	--	1
GLBTQ	4	2	--	--	--
Community Activists	1	1	3	--	3

Community Assessment Discussions

Community assessment discussions were conducted in focus groups, which were the primary methodological tool used to obtain participants' perceptions of domestic violence. The focus groups provided participants with a safe place to share their perspectives and with a competent facilitator skilled in the group process. The strength in using focus groups is that they systematically encourage each member to share information that builds the discussion; and, focus groups allow a diverse group of people to share their insight on an issue (Krueger, 1994). Each focus group session was audiotaped to ensure the accuracy of the information obtained and systematic data analysis.

A member of the IDAAVC Steering Committee facilitated each focus group session, using the same semi-structured questionnaire to solicit comments and guide the discussion. Each focus group lasted from 1 1/2 to 2 hours in length. Based on the project's objectives, the questionnaire included open-ended questions which examined (1) types of domestic violence, (2) relationship between domestic violence and other social issues, (3) causes of domestic violence, (4) factors contributing to domestic violence, (5) consequences of domestic violence, (6) solutions to addressing domestic violence, and (7) barriers to addressing domestic violence solutions.

Data analysis of the focus group sessions involved several steps. First, the audiotapes were transcribed with transcriptions produced for each focus group. Second, the transcriptions were compared with the groups' discussions, which had been captured on paper in the seven areas described above by scribes or group reporters. Third, an independent researcher analyzed the data. Fourth, themes were identified, coded, and plotted on a large flipchart. Fifth, once the themes were identified, they were collapsed into the six categories described above. Data were analyzed within each group and later, across each focus group. Sixth, reports were produced for each group, which were reviewed by each group's facilitator and scribe.

Across Group Findings - Types

Greenville area participants were able to name a wide variety of violent acts taking place within their community. They discussed their ideas, reporting observed trends in violence and giving their opinions of its priority as a community problem due to factors of both frequency and prevalence.

One category set forth by respondents was that of family violence, including acts perpetrated against members in the home such as children or the elderly, violence between siblings and violence between partners or spouses. Several groups expressed concern about the growing number of reports received of children perpetrating acts of violence against their own parents.

Another pressing issue for the many of the groups was the surge in gang violence in the Greenville, North Carolina area. Participants felt that gang violence was moving from the cities and trickling into the surrounding suburbs and rural areas. Group members decided that youth violence incorporated the idea of gang violence in certain instances, and that kids often repeat the violence they have witnessed previously in real life or seen in the media.

Violence perpetrated against women, between or against acquaintances, and against animals were other forms mentioned by focus group members. In addition, community violence between races (white on black or black on white crime) was mentioned as an observed pattern of violence. Sexual, verbal, emotional and substance abuse-related violence were also reported. One group mentioned that health abuse was a problem, when elderly members of the home might be neglected and not provided with the proper care to meet their needs.

The Human Services group discussed another form of abuse: the kind that is inflicted through the legal system. Members cited police brutality as an issue, as well as the abuse of political power for ones own gain.

Overall, every group saw the differing types of violence listed as being interrelated, and believed that violence was one of the most pressing concerns relevant to their community. They believed that acts of violent behavior take place often, can be underreported, and that several acts may go on in one particular household. Greenville respondents thought that violence was just as big an issue for the African American community as unemployment, poverty, and education.

Greenville respondents thought that violence was just as big an issue for the African American community as unemployment, poverty, and education.

Across Group Findings – Causes

A younger generation of parents raising their own children was seen as a risk factor for violent behavior.

Discussants named several probable causes of violence. One broad category described deficiencies within the community. A lack of knowledge as to the proper behavior within the family and the meaning of manhood was seen as one issue that causes abuse in the home. This lack of knowledge is then reinforced by a lack of education being passed down to future generations, thus contributing to an intergenerational cycle of violence where children emulate the behavior they have learned in the home. In addition, a lack of coping skills and a lack of awareness as to the alternatives to violent behavior mean that when stress or conflict builds in certain individuals, they manage by releasing the stress through physical aggression. The low self-esteem of perpetrators was another problem. Being the abuser gives some people a sense of power and control in a certain domain when they may be powerless in other areas of life. Finally, the inability to communicate and resolve conflicts in a healthy manner was discussed by the group as another deficit in communities that experience domestic violence.

Parenting of children in today's society was another causal factor explored by groups. A younger generation of parents raising their own children was seen as a risk factor for violent behavior. Respondents thought that essentially a generation of children was attempting to parent children, and the results were less discipline in the home, little knowledge being passed down through the generations, and a lack of supervision and mentoring occurring at home.

The GLBTQ focus group had concerns specific to being in gay or lesbian relationships. They cited partner envy, the silence associated with having same-sex partners, and a lack of respect by the outside community. The control and power struggles that may occur within any relationship take on a unique form within this particular group, and they believed that as a GLBTQ community, they faced stressors that the rest of the population might not confront.

The changing face of the community was a final factor that nearly all the groups discussed. Tracing a legacy of violence back to the days of slavery and oppression, some members cited the roots of historical violence, noting that the community today is a product of people who were owned by others. In addition, in recent years the breakdown of the neighborhood has occurred. Community members are less apt to look out for the concerns of their neighbors, and more likely to have a mentality that people should mind their own business. Neighborhoods are also lacking role models that provide guidance and inspiration to the younger generation, and kids are more likely to have a desire for instant gratification, a lack of foresight and are susceptible to involvement with drugs.

Across Group Findings – Consequences

The Greenville area groups discussed the destructive consequences of domestic violence in their community. The following areas of impact were mentioned: image, community development, the family, and the pervasive feelings of fear or frustration.

Domestic violence has inflicted damage to the image of the African American race as a whole, as well as to the image of the African American man. Not only does violence perpetuate societal stereotypes, but it also influences self-perceptions and self-esteem, according to respondents. Group members explored the idea that men who enter the criminal justice system as a result of battering also suffer from the stigma associated with their race.

The whole community suffers the effects of domestic violence, respondents believed, and development and betterment of the area cannot occur when violent acts are taking place among neighborhood inhabitants. The economy is influenced, as people do not want to enter an unsafe area, and thus businesses are either driven away from the area or are not interested in operating in such locations. One group cited damage to future citizens, that violence takes away lives and potentially productive and instrumental men and women.

The Faith community believed that violence segregates people. They discussed this segregation in relation to black violence, media portrayal and racial competition. Other groups talked about fear separating people. The elderly population was noted as a people group that suffers from isolation and imprisonment within the home due to being afraid to venture out into their own neighborhood surroundings.

A pervasive atmosphere of frustration was also named by some groups. Participants described a feeling of helplessness and despair where individuals cannot gain access to educational opportunities or employment and live in communities unable to attract businesses, neglected by the involvement of the government, and characterized by high rates of crime, teenage pregnancy, and school-age dropouts.

The family unit is also a recipient of the consequences of domestic violence. Groups were concerned with the fact that many African American families are single parent homes due to domestic violence resulting in separation, divorce, or the incarceration or death of a parent. Violence in the home breaks down foundational relationships and causes physical and emotional distress. Children who act out the violence they see at home can suffer at school and in the community. Family violence has a ripple effect, influencing the spheres of each individual as well as spreading to future generations.

Participants described a feeling of helplessness and despair where individuals cannot gain access to educational opportunities or employment

Across Group Findings – Solutions

The solutions that group members proposed to ending domestic violence in their community were numerous. Overall, increased opportunity and increased education were their main concerns. Opportunity in the form of more access to education and more employment available to lower-income individuals would be helpful. Education offered in the school system at an early age for conflict resolution and anger management was another strategy proposed. The faith community thought that education on domestic violence should be mandatory for those families who deal with abuse or violence. Education in the form of social outreach (ie, fatherhood or parenting programs) and community awareness campaigns for the general public were also mentioned.

Faith-based interventions were suggested by a number of groups. The church was seen as a valuable resource that could be utilized, particularly for the African American community. Unity within the church and collaboration among different churches should be supported so that various programs can reach those in abusive relationships and not duplicate efforts or compete with each other. Ministers should be educated, participants believed, and then provide education to their respective congregations and supportive counseling to parishioners.

Dialogue was seen as vital to progressing towards the end of domestic violence. More community forums, bringing together members from different sectors could lead to more collaboration between service providers, leaders, and community figures. Many groups believed that a current deficit of leadership was harmful to eradicating violence in the community, and they expressed a need for more strong leaders out of the African American community to step up and be prominent voices in the public arena.

The Human Services focus group encouraged a holistic approach to treating the whole family in response to domestic violence crises. This group wanted to see each affected family member receiving counseling and education as to their experiences of violence, the associated feelings or trauma, and how to live a more healthy life.

The Faith community was especially concerned with the hospital in the Greenville area offering a domestic violence program and providing information for those receiving medical services. They wanted a coordinated effort involving the chaplaincy, the hospital security, and the psychological staff that would address the domestic violence reports and cases that hospital staff encounter.
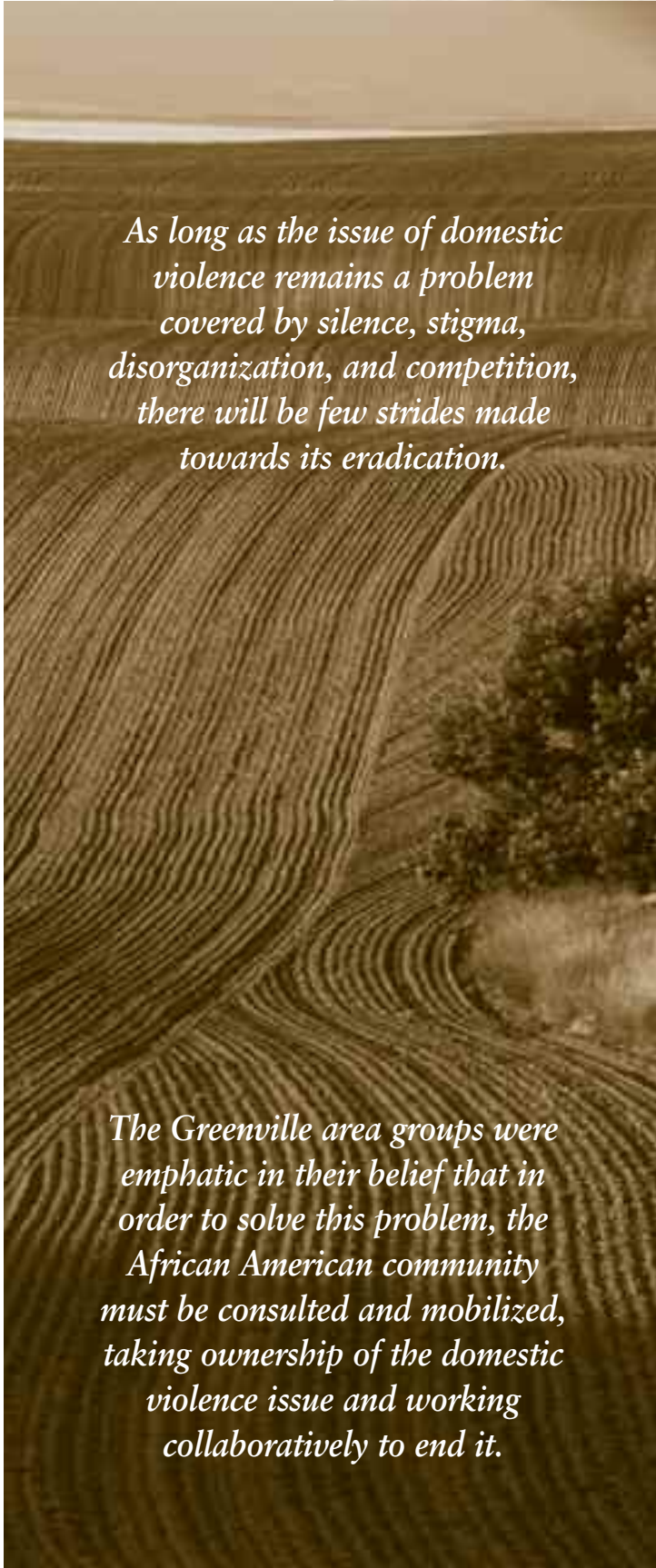
Across Group Findings – Barriers

Respondents provided insightful commentary into the barriers their community faces as they seek to eliminate the problem of domestic violence. One comment made pertained to the idea that the lack of unity among the programs and services within the community was crippling. Participants expressed the idea that in order to make progress in ending such a large problem, they must stand together, without competition or territoriality and without intimidation.

The negative attention and the stigma garnered by violence in the African American community was another hurdle that participants noted. In the GLBTQ, they experience the additional stigma that comes with their sexual orientation. GLBTQ respondents shared that when professionals interact with members of their community in response to reports of domestic violence, there is often confusion as to who the victim is. Sometimes, participants noticed, the officials responding exhibit homophobia, which can be frightening to members of the gay or lesbian community.

The community lacks negotiators and mediators to help address hostility or friction between organizations, and to effectively interface with officials and common members of the neighborhood. A deficit of resources is another liability, with limited funds, few leaders who are equipped to educate and implement and organize, and a lack of accessible, publicized programs designed to meet the needs of victims and perpetrators of all walks of life.

Finally, denial, silence, and shame were viewed as roadblocks to ending domestic violence. By remaining quiet, the cycle of violence is perpetuated and solutions are not sought to end the abuse. Shame can exist in any battering relationship, but was explicitly mentioned in gay or lesbian relationships, or in situations where males are being battered by their female partners. As long as the issue of domestic violence remains a problem covered by silence, stigma, disorganization, and competition, there will be few strides made towards its eradication. The Greenville area groups were emphatic in their belief that in order to solve this problem, the African American community must be consulted and mobilized, taking ownership of the domestic violence issue and working collaboratively to end it.

As long as the issue of domestic violence remains a problem covered by silence, stigma, disorganization, and competition, there will be few strides made towards its eradication.

The Greenville area groups were emphatic in their belief that in order to solve this problem, the African American community must be consulted and mobilized, taking ownership of the domestic violence issue and working collaboratively to end it.

Greenville - Law Enforcement

Violence that occurs within the home often leads to the involvement of individuals and families with the legal system. Those individuals who work in the criminal justice field are regularly called upon to address reported incidents of violence. Their professional experience provides them with important insight into the effect of violence on their particular community. The members of the Law Enforcement focus group were asked to explore the topic of violence in-depth and respond to questions related to the types of violent acts of which they are aware, their frequency and impact, the related consequences, and the potential solutions and the obstacles that stand in the way of change.

The Greenville, North Carolina Law Enforcement focus group consisted of five respondents. Three women and two men participated in the discussion and they varied in age from thirty-three to fifty-four years old. These group members held the following occupations in the law enforcement arena: police division commander, safety director, magistrate, detective, and police officer.

The Law Enforcement focus group compiled a comprehensive list of the different types of violence that they know exist within their community. Disputes between acquaintances were one form of violence commonly mentioned. The other broad category of violence that was described was family violence. This topic incorporated acts like domestic disputes between intimate partners or spouses, violent interactions between siblings, and instances of child abuse. Adultery-related violence was also mentioned as a type of violence occurring within the Greenville area. One subject that was discussed by the group was the alarming increase in the number of children who perpetrate violent acts against their parents. One participant described the increase in reported parent-child violence and the prevailing belief that, with time, it is a matter that can be eventually fixed in the home:

> *I'm hearing a lot of calls with family disputes, mother and child, young children and parents. I think that the husband and wife teams that we used to be concerned about are still there, but I still think that there's the mentality that we can handle it here in the home, or I can deal with it a little bit longer. I've talked to some people that have been involved in that situation year after year after year and I can say at least five for some and they continue to come when the situation is bad but return to that same environment.*

The members of this group believed that the different types of violence experienced by individuals within the Greenville African American community were highly interrelated. Drawing from their professional experience in the field from investigating reported abuse, participants have observed that it is common for several types of abuse to occur within the same household. "They go hand in hand," one group member stated succinctly. When called to the scene of a home, investigators must be cognizant that they may find other forms of abuse, such as elder abuse, child abuse, and so forth. Participants also decided that the severity of the violent occurrences was an issue that had to be evaluated on a case by case basis.

Not only did respondents view differing violent acts as interrelated, but they also associated violence with a number of other problems plaguing their community. Lack of economic opportunity, drug abuse, and the repercussions associated with involvement with the legal system topped the list of concerns related to violence. Several issues fell under the umbrella of child or family-related problems, such as: teenage dropouts, low expectations

for children, the breakdown of the family, lack of discipline in the home, and single parent homes. Finally, violence was tied to social problems like an overall lack of education in the community and taking pride in dysfunctional behavior within society.

> *Things that were normal then and the things that you were supposed to do aren't looked upon the same way, they're not accepted today as how we should conduct ourselves. And it's just like, almost like being in a flip of what the world should be. The things that are viewed as wrong and bad are not viewed that way in the black community.*

The lack of valuing education and planning within the family was also mentioned, with the failure of parents to pass on values, morals, and foresight to their children being of paramount importance.

> *Before they even plan for the future and see the importance [of education], they're falling through the cracks. The family value and the morals, and the structure of the family within a home. I see that as a big problem, especially when… the domestic problem between the adults filters over to the child and the child goes back like a circle, back to the parents with the violence. And a large lack of insight into the future as far as what it holds for the individuals, being children. The adults, they're just consumed with what's going on right there but what's going on right there, the violence and things in the home, it just pushes the things that are gonna be important into the darkness.*

These deficiencies in parenting are part of an equation that produces children who are ill-equipped to make positive life choices and sound decisions for the future.

One group member explained that the social issues of teenage parenting, single parent homes, high school dropout rate, and education level were all related. She noted that youth pregnancy was becoming an indicator of status among teens:

> *See a lot of teenage mothers who are in school and pregnant are proud of that. …whether they are thirteen or fourteen year-olds, that is almost a status symbol here for some children. Not that, how am I going to take care of this child after it's here, how am I going to take care of myself when I'm just a child myself, but it's a big deal to be pregnant and that's like a status symbol…*

The participants were able to list numerous causes of violence. The lack of opportunity, whether social or economic, was a major cause of violence that respondents felt led to a pervasive atmosphere of frustration within the community. Although eastern North Carolina has educational opportunities in a university setting, group members related that the academic benefits are not equally accessible to all residents. Lack of finances is a major inhibitor to the African American community. One participant elaborated on how the economic condition of this particular geographical region contributes to violence, through problems like:

> *…lost jobs, the bleak look for economic development, and I would probably want to categorize that from an Afro-centric standpoint because there are people who have jobs and who are working but there's a disproportionate number of African Americans who are out of work and their economic status is such that it could be the breeding cause for some of the things that we're talking about. And I think that it's not endemic to Greenville per se, but I think that the entire eastern seaboard of North Carolina, from the Virginia line to the South Carolina line… I think that the point here is that historically eastern North Carolina for African Americans has not been a bevy of economic production.*