Introduction _____

SINCE SMOKING PREVALENCE has waned in the United States, it is often presumed that tobacco farming has gone by the wayside. North Carolina has long been the country's leading producer of tobacco. Now the state has a new economy of biomedical and pharmaceutical research to brag about. There is the Research Triangle near Raleigh, and Durham, once a premier tobacco town and headquarters of James B. Duke's global cigarette monopoly, is now home to Brightleaf Square, a converted tobacco warehouse district that offers an array of restaurants and shops in the downtown area and is close by one of the great medical care and research complexes in the world.

The fact is that tobacco remains the seventh most valuable agricultural commodity in the United States. Each year's crop is worth about $1.5 billion. Although lacking any nutritional value, tobacco is worth far more as a commodity than most vegetables produced in the United States. Tobacco's market value is triple the value of the country's sweet potatoes, about the same as the value of the orange crop, and slightly more than tomatoes. It is worth six times as much as the cucumber crop. It is more valuable than artichokes, asparagus, cauliflower, cabbage, spinach, and squash combined. The tobacco cultivated in the United States is worth twice as much as the country's entire onion crop.[1]

Tobacco can be terrifically profitable, with growers netting several hundred dollars per acre. Tobacco's intensive managerial and labor requirements mean that this remains a crop where small farms sit beside large operations, although major changes in tobacco agriculture in the United States in the past few decades have promoted waves of consolidation and mechanization. In spite of this industrialization process, tobacco is produced in North Carolina on farm operations that are considered to be family businesses. Nearly all growers trace their farms back at least a few generations. This is important for them. But to satisfactorily appreciate what the growers and families have at stake in these businesses, the story must go beyond a simple notion of heritage or a basic economic calculus. An explanation of why growers cling to and defend tobacco amid thinned profits, thickened clouds of ethical suspicion, and intensified industry power requires a fuller historical and anthropological account of what it means to be a successful tobacco farm business owner and operator. This includes what growers stand to gain or lose, their efforts

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[1] These data are taken from regularly updated reports of the National Agricultural Statistics Service, United States Department of Agriculture.
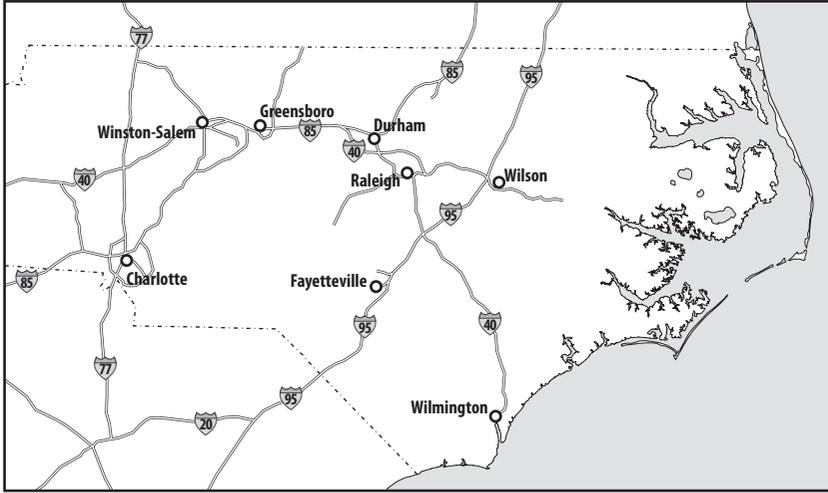
Map I.1. Map of North Carolina

to mechanize and expand factory farms in order to remain profitable in the present—which may be motivated by a mixture of both ambition and need—and the process of how potent meanings of citizenship and patterns of social and political affiliation have been produced on North Carolina tobacco farms alongside billions and billions of pounds of leaf.

Tobacco was cultivated by large numbers of African American families in the past. Tobacco farms are now owned and operated by white men in all but a few cases. As tobacco farms have become like factories, what growers do and their relationships to employees have also changed, with the workforce rescaled to an international level. Traditional work relations involving tenancy, debt peonage, swapping help, and family labor have been replaced by a system of seasonal labor that involves mostly undocumented migrant workers from Mexico and Central America who now do the bulk of the grueling manual work and live in notoriously squalid labor camps. Migrant workers sit at the bottom rungs of this harmful industry. Meanwhile, growers with lots of pride and emotion bundled up with tobacco leaf face intense levels of economic competition and uncertainty, not to mention looming ethical and political questions about the dependence of their agribusiness operations on a vulnerable workforce, decades of special government protectionism and financial assistance, and a cash crop that contains the addictive chemical nicotine and many carcinogens. The vast majority of growers employ undocumented workers in businesses that produce the main ingredient in cigarettes, and smoking is the leading cause of preventable
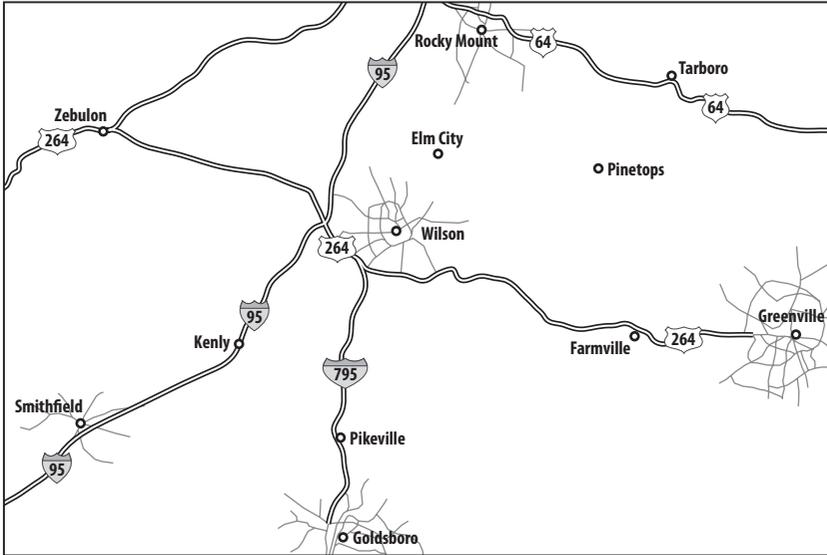
Map I.2. Map of Wilson County

disease and death in the United States and worldwide. Consequently, these growers experience the stress of a long economic downturn in a context where they are already primed to feel somewhat defensive about their livelihood.

This book examines decades of social change and industrial decline in North Carolina, where I have conducted years of research with tobacco growers and workers, farm labor and immigrant rights advocates, union organizers, and public health groups. My study of tobacco agriculture and the tobacco industry has been centered in Wilson County, the largest and most active tobacco-producing region in the country, and is set against the backdrop of the antitobacco movement, the globalization and industrialization of farm and food chains, and the intense political struggles over immigration. This book scrutinizes what public health policies related to smoking and tobacco industry strategies look like in rural North Carolina and their impact on communities that have long been dependent on tobacco revenues and structured around distinctive racial meanings and social and economic disparities linked to tobacco production. Based on twenty months of anthropological field study and archival research conducted from 2002 to 2010, my goal has been to produce an account of the production and supply side of the tobacco industry that is richly informed by historical understanding, critically attendant to political economy, and deeply appreciative of subjective experience.

In the process of narrating broad stories about industry power, agrarian change, and the science and politics of public health, I zoom in on everyday life and social relations in tobacco farm workplaces and households, migrant labor camps, and erstwhile tobacco communities. I am especially interested in how and why structural transformations in the international tobacco leaf trade have tended to yield intensely antagonistic and divided social conditions in this region. International market shifts driven by the pursuit of cheap foreign leaf by tobacco companies have posed and continue to pose a serious threat to the financial solvency of North Carolina tobacco farms. Growers experience changing business conditions as a challenge not just to their financial situation but more holistically to the social, cultural, and historical conditions that are bound up with their livelihoods. Aspects of farm livelihood that may be threatened include the masculinity that over time has become embedded in tobacco farm management, the idea that this livelihood is the foundation of families that are icons of normalcy and part of an imagined mainstream, the material signs of being middle-class and the way that tobacco money permits access to things like new trucks and brick houses, and the values of heritage and tradition having to do with the longevity of family tobacco businesses. The racial division of labor, which for centuries has marked those who own and manage tobacco operations as distinct from subordinated groups of tobacco workers, may also be threatened. The lens through which I apprehend the impact of the international tobacco trade in North Carolina focuses on the subjective experiences and social lives of growers, who sometimes respond in ways that aim to maintain social boundaries, hold on to class status and cultural distinctions, and reassert existing power relations.

Apart from the antagonized relations that I document on farms, a major component of the moral experience of tobacco growers—how they feel threatened and how they respond—has been the more public articulation of a politics of "plighted citizenship," where growers claim to be or are said to be the victims of undue hardship. They commonly feel that various outside forces conspire to attack and undermine their life and work. By virtue of involvement in a harmful industry, tobacco growers sometimes feel compelled to wrestle with society's changing attitudes about tobacco in ways that are often deeply personal and difficult. This moral and emotional experience is not the automatic result of the fact that antitobacco sentiment exists at the national level or that tobacco farming involves increasing levels of financial instability and failure. Negligent local newspaper reporting and tobacco industry propaganda have goaded the grower ranks into a collective feeling of being conspired against, even though there isn't any evidence of a concerted attack on tobacco livelihoods waged by the government and public health groups.

This way of thinking is similar to that of religious groups who say that Christianity is under attack in the United States, which rouses political and social defensiveness among adherents. Fantastical scandals of lost privilege, where victimhood is claimed by relatively advantaged constituencies who now feel negatively marked or valued, provoke sometimes dangerous responses and policy perspectives (Berlant 1997).

As tobacco growers experienced increased levels of hardship since the 1980s, they pursued more government assistance, and cultural resources were used to convert the economic and ethical paradoxes that define this business into contexts of injury and unfair treatment. Growers adopted a particular kind of Face and used it to pursue entitlements. A public discourse heavily influenced by the tobacco industry lit a fire under cultural issues and matters of citizenship, like welfare and the composition of families, coaching growers to see themselves as model citizens, victims of the state and aggrieved racial minorities, plighted citizens, an inherently innocent company of people deserving of a kind of social assistance that is not stigmatized, not a handout, not special treatment, and not what stereotyped others receive; in other words, a kind of social assistance that is legitimate, what national icons have earned. This cultural politics of citizenship was promoted by the tobacco industry to foment the allegiance of southern growers as a strategy to help contain the reach of public health regulation in the United States and deflect attention from the powerful role of corporations in offshoring the tobacco economy of states like North Carolina.

At a more general level, this book is about racial power and racial projects, and the meaning and politics of innocence and responsibility in the United States. I hone in on the vernacular use of the word "sorry" and seek to understand the values and meanings that are invoked when white tobacco growers refer to each other as sorry farmers, especially when the aging black men and women and the Mexican and Latino migrants who do the bulk of the manual tobacco labor are routinely called sorry. While being in the company of innocence has been most at stake for white tobacco farm families in past decades, I develop a broader analysis of white claims to victimhood and struggles over entitlement and justice given the nation's historical burdens. As a way of setting an ethnographic stage for these discussions, this introduction describes my research on tobacco farms and develops the concept of plighted citizenship.

The Triangle

In North Carolina, tobacco accounts for nearly one-third of the economic value of agriculture. This most harmful crop continues to be produced

with vigor just a couple of highway exits outside of the Research Triangle. But the residential gentrification and forms of remembering that have occurred there tend to make tobacco history into something consumable and ornamental.

The public Face of North Carolina has a little white devil on one shoulder and a little white angel on the other. The devil is holding a lit cigarette and coughing, his chest cavity exposed, as in an anatomical atlas, to reveal blackened lungs and a strangled heart. Maybe he wears coveralls and rides around a tobacco patch in a junky pickup truck surrounded by faceless workers. This scene is in black and white, and it is recessed into the background. The eyes of the big, stately public face are happily staring ahead into the foreground at the high-definition scene of an angel wearing a lab coat, a little rendition of pharmaceutical research backlit by other scenes from the suburban lifestyle that symbolizes the Triangle. There are office buildings, a man with a stethoscope, families on their way to the Whole Foods Market, a dinner party at Brightleaf Square— all ethical consumers and investors who would not dare step foot on a tobacco farm. People from all kinds of backgrounds are in these scenes, including lots of northerners who like the fact that there are four seasons but no severe winter and who work in pharmaceuticals, where they perhaps design nicotine patches; youngsters on a fieldtrip at the Duke Homestead and Tobacco Museum located in Durham, who look lethargically at a diorama of an old-timey tobacco farm scene; and college students unpacking SUVs, moving into dorms, and practicing on the sports fields at Duke University in the August heat.

The state of North Carolina hires public relations firms to design brochures (placed at highway rest stops) that promote economic investment and residential relocation, but what these brochures disclose of the actual history of tobacco and its part in creating North Carolina is, of course, excruciatingly narrow. They do not depict a professional tobacco grower or a migrant worker as "the Face." On their way down Interstate 95 from New Jersey, Duke students do not receive brochures that tell them that just a few exits from their dormitories and athletic fields are neighborhoods that were built up and then gutted by the tobacco industry, and further still that there are active tobacco farms where some of the most grueling kind of work on the planet is being done. Their first-year orientation does not go beyond the trivial fact that the university namesake was the great tobacco magnate, much less describe how the state's and the nation's economy were from the beginning soaked with blood spilled for the sake of tobacco. The brochures for the Duke Homestead and Tobacco Museum attract motorists from the highway and give them the impression that tobacco is gone with the wind. Not entirely out of the picture, tobacco is carefully packaged so that the stark racial order

built on segregation and violence, which tobacco production (and Duke) helped make, seems aeons from the sparkling scenes of life in brochures for the Triangle and the university. Attending a university like Duke can instill in the student critical reflection about who gets to attend, how disparities are made and reproduced, and the uneven distribution of material resources, access to education, and health, safety, and security in a society where there are people who are working hard or slouching in every strata. But it does not necessarily, perhaps not usually, have this effect.

Things get lost in the Triangle. There is so much that the placards with white lettering that indicate what lies off the exits mask. Loblolly pines and sound barriers also mask empirical realities that many people would just as soon overlook anyway. If it were my tobacco road, I'd put up a sign that indicates that right there in the Triangle, as elsewhere in the United States, a disproportionate number of racial minorities smoke cigarettes, have higher rates of cardiovascular disease and cancer incidence and mortality, and have worse access to the healthcare advances being pioneered around the corner. Instead of celebrating the presence of unskilled workers in North Carolina as a lure for investors and businesses, my brochures would discuss the history of how labor surpluses and socioeconomic disparities have been made and the role of international free trade agreements, like the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), in inducing economic instability and change in the United States and south of the border. Highway signs that point motorists to the museum do not point them to active tobacco operations where dependence on foreign labor mixes with anxieties about the changing composition of rural communities. Highway signs are anti-ethnography machines that could point in many directions, indicate critical information, and provide a different tour of history and place than the tourist traps.

There is no sign that indicates that North Carolina has much lower tobacco-control funding than other states and one of the highest smoking rates in the country. Off these exits 12,200 people die each year from smoking. Off these exits 200,000 children and adolescents currently living in North Carolina will one day die from smoking diseases. Whereas $2.5 billion is spent each year in North Carolina on the treatment of diseases caused by tobacco use, the state government spends a paltry $18.5 million on public health programs to limit tobacco use (only one-sixth of the amount of money that is recommended by the Centers for Disease Control for the state's population). No highway signs indicate that almost all smokers begin smoking when they are adolescents, that the tobacco industry continues to aggressively and strategically market to youths, or that the federal government collects about $7 billion per year from cigarette excise taxes but annually spends more than $50 billion through its healthcare programs on the treatment of smoking disease.

No highway signs indicate that the financial burden of tobacco-caused health costs for governments in the United States amounts to $600 in taxes per household, smoking-related mortality results in $100 billion in lost productivity in the national economy each year, and the tobacco industry contributes more than $2 million annually to federal political candidates and political parties and spends $25 million on congressional lobbying.[2] For that matter, no highway signs indicate that in 2004 Republican politicians in North Carolina and tobacco companies worked in conjunction to undermine federal efforts to infuse money into the state to help communities to transition away from tobacco livelihoods and develop a more diverse and stable economy. No sign states the fact that they kept literally billions of dollars in federal funds from reaching tobacco-dependent communities because the industry had an interest in keeping rural people tied to a livelihood that is increasingly unpredictable and, like it or not, harmful.

Motorists driving eastward from the Triangle probably consume the rural expanse of North Carolina's flat coastal plain as a string of convenient stopping places for home-cooking cafeterias, gas stations, and gift shops. Professionals who live and work in the Triangle see the sandy loam that stretches out to the Atlantic Ocean not as soil in which exceedingly high-quality tobacco is still grown but as a smoking section of red-state reactionary politics bypassed on an air-conditioned getaway to the Outer Banks. When motorists pull off to fill their tanks, a phenomenology of perception, bent on commodity fetishism, envisions the cigarette packs behind the counter as nothing more than a consumer product. They do not see the cigarettes, or the bags of chips and soft drinks, as products that come from actual places, or that they are designed and marketed to induce further consumption, processes relegated and legitimized by a pervasive and misleading ideology of informed adult choice when it comes to terribly harmful and costly behavioral health issues. Cigarette packaging conceals the fact that tobacco and profit are not all that is produced on tobacco farms, but that identities and relationships are produced, too. There is no book on tape that describes how over centuries tobacco agriculture has been the basis for the formation of a cultural ideal of legitimate personhood, or, more specifically, legitimate white manhood, in rural North Carolina. No book on tape tells motorists how this model of the human arose within a steep division of labor, or that the positive ideals about the livelihood and hard work to which tobacco farmers have dedicated themselves encode ideas about racialized blackness and whiteness and the tacit assertion that tobacco farm livelihoods are white heritage.

[2] National Institute for Tobacco-Free Kids (2007, 2010b, 2011).

Highway signs function as "anti-politics machines" (Ferguson 1994) that make places seem natural and timeless. Exits are places with food, gas, and lodging (and perhaps something quaint like a museum) and towns where people go about their lives. Motorists do not realize that the product in front of them at the gas station is related to botanical ancestors that helped to make the Atlantic system and plantation slavery, and that these towns have long been connected to distant places largely through the medium of tobacco exchange and labor migration. Motorists do not think about the complex relationships that are stuffed into, say, a bag of chips. The subsidized price of corn for midwestern farm operations makes the chips too affordable, while international free trade agreements displaced many Mexican farmers who are now forced to compete with cheap U.S. grain. The ensuing northward migration has helped sustain the tobacco farms in North Carolina that contribute leaf to the cigarettes behind the counter, minimizing the labor cost associated with tobacco products and making cigarettes only that much more affordable. In the meantime, out on the highway, motorists snacking on their corn chips do not smoke and believe they have no relationship to tobacco, the harm it causes, or the histories and structures that surround tobacco products. Not venturing beyond the gas pump, where they would see the dangerous and depraved labor camps, motorists stay out of old tobacco boomtowns where there is unseemly unemployment, poverty, and housing problems. They do not realize that tobacco products are linked to forms of human and environmental harm even before being smoked. The mileage markers that lie between Richmond, Virginia, and Wilson, North Carolina, are not accompanied by signs indicating that decisions made up there, at Philip Morris headquarters, have a complexly adverse impact on farmers and farmworkers down here. There are no signs that describe the intricate ripple effects of the intense corporate power that rains down on North Carolina farms and communities. Mileage markers quantify distance, while a qualitative understanding of the histories that make places and the practices that unmake histories seems way too complicated to include on highway signs. How many books on tape are not lulling machines that facilitate a mode of travel geared toward using the highway as the most direct path, even though it is not the most interesting one? Getting to the beach no longer means driving through every little tobacco town on the way. Forget the nostalgia about all the cozy diners that dotted the state roads—much more is now bypassed than quaint eateries. Billboards convert the existential surge of wanting to enter rather than exit, wanting to get to know "a place on the side of the road" (K. Stewart 1996), into a consumer impulse to stop and buy something. Places seem connected to other places in terms of mileage and the marked distance between consumption options and rest stops. Predicaments of place and personhood in this smoking section are not advertised as phenomena that

might interest motorists. They are not entirely pleasant, and their intricacies make them unavailable to being diagrammed in a museum, blurbed on a billboard, or sold in a gift shop.

Residents of the Triangle who may never want to enter a labor camp nonetheless feel compelled to join boycott efforts that seek to improve working conditions for farmworkers. Right now activists in the Triangle are working to ameliorate historical burdens. Farm labor advocates are in camps and communities, attempting to raise awareness of the vulnerable workforce on which tobacco corporations depend. Scholars are doing the important historical analytical work of connecting dots, discrediting the facile idea that the world that tobacco helped make is left in the dust, and reflecting on the precarious position of populations that have been affected by and remain dependent on the tobacco industry. Motorists are feeling the ethnographic surge of being on the road, which is to say, getting the heck off the highway. They want to understand themes and topics having to do with politics and the economy in terms of lived effects and experiences out in the actual community, not just what they have learned in classrooms. They go to local libraries and are swallowed up by microfilm machines and books about the history of the tobacco industry, the history of the South, and the politics of entitlement. They find work on farms and hang out in labor camps, attend all kinds of church services (because this is a good way to get to know people), and smoke cigarettes to break the ice. They make friends with people who grow a harmful product and doubly break the law when they house undocumented workers in substandard camps because it is cheap. They scrap their idea of recording a book on tape called *When Good People Do Bad Things* because there are already lots of other books with similar titles. Month after month spent working on tobacco farms, the motorists meet no devils and angels, only humans who wrestle with particular ideas about what it means to be human in the context of broad relationships that are sustaining or threatening. Time spent on tobacco farms and at the microfilm machine leads the motorists to sense that the book ought to be about responsibility in a complicated world, what it means to live a moral life and claim to be worth something, and a unique politics of race, innocence, and citizenship that is implicit in everyday economic and moral pursuits and social relationships off these exact exits.

Almost all tobacco research is focused on consumption. In the United States, policy makers and healthcare professionals have historically paid little attention to tobacco growers and lacked cultural knowledge about their communities (Altman et al. 1998: 381).[3] However, production and

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[3] I want to acknowledge other recent anthropological studies of tobacco agriculture, especially Ann Kingsolver's study (2011) of Kentucky farms and David Griffith's work (2009) in North Carolina.

supply issues, as much as health behavior, are important public health matters. The tobacco industry does not want signs posted along the highway that detail occupational health and safety problems related to industrialized tobacco production, the problem of farm livelihood loss and fragility, or the exploitation of immigrant workers. This book expands tobacco's public health picture beyond a focus on smoking to include critical perspectives on the global tobacco industry and the social and health issues and forms of structural violence that are related to industrial agriculture and labor migration. Historical and ethnographic research on tobacco farming broadens and sharpens the critical understanding of the tobacco industry's impact on humans and the environment. As is beginning to happen in some parts of the world, the traditional public health focus on the regulation of smoking behavior finds a useful complement in research and advocacy concerning labor conditions, farm livelihoods, and industry strategy and propaganda. Attention to these issues enables a critique of the structural foundations and capitalist dynamics of the tobacco industry and must be a central part of a comprehensive tobacco-control agenda.

Negotiations and Love Songs

I first pulled off the highway in North Carolina tobacco country in the summer of 2004. I drove an old red pickup truck to a tobacco farm in Wilson County, where I moved into a tenant house that the farmer rented to my wife and me for a few hundred bucks each month. My wife, who is also an anthropologist and comes from a tobacco farm background, assisted with aspects of the fieldwork, while working part-time for a local nonprofit organization. Her late father was a small-scale tobacco and cattle producer in Appalachia on a farm that had been in their family for several generations and that utilized mostly family labor. During visits there, I was comfortable helping with the farmwork, baling hay and working cattle mostly, although I really had no choice (the suitor's obligation). In my suburban New England upbringing, I imagined that this—riding on a shaky wagon pulled by an old tractor, blisters busting my hands open as I heaved hay bale after hay bale into the cold, hardened fields for the cattle to feed on—was what farm life ought to be like. It was small, family-oriented, and hands-on, and we would go out, my wife's father and I, and castrate the young calves, jumping off the four-wheeler and plunging a hard knee into their throats to restrain them, tossing the testicles to the side for the farm dogs. Later we would get into the chute to bolt tags into the ears of calves pissing and shitting all over a uniform of rubber coveralls. This way of life appealed a great deal to my sense of what is decent and virtuous in a certain kind of agriculture.

At the farm, everyone pitched in with the tobacco. We stripped gummy leaves off stalks and ordered them by color, stalk position, and texture to make bales, an artisanal aspect of tobacco agriculture that has historically been an important basis of pride among tobacco farm families. Meanwhile, I was thinking, *Who really cares which leaf goes where and what the grade is? What does quality mean when it comes to tobacco? And was this really happening? Was tobacco really being manufactured there in the winter months on holiday visits with a family where only one man is allowed to smoke?* Lots of things go into thinking about a romantic relationship, and there were fleeting thoughts about whether the family's involvement in tobacco should have any impact on my feelings about my future wife. But I was in love, and I also felt some guilty pleasure, a legitimate way to have my hands all over a product that my parents (and my wife's parents) would never want me to consume. There, in a small metal-sided farm shop heated by a wood-burning furnace, no one talked about where the product wound up. We willed commodity fetishism. Tobacco's social life was never discussed. These were not cigarettes that we were helping to make at Christmastime.

Her father smoked and I daydreamed, riding about with him on the farm, of bumming a cigarette, smoking together, like Marlboro Men. In itching for nicotine I wanted to have something in common in a fantastical rural scenario, but also to just light a cigarette and demand to know how this familial politics of prudish behavior was not hypocritical. *It's okay for other people and other people's kids to smoke?* But the eager scholar and suitor in me kept quiet.

It was in the context of coming to know my wife's family that my research project began. I was interested in learning about how tobacco farmers like my wife's folks, who see themselves as good and decent people, think about the ethics of what they do for a living. I had just gone through graduate seminars where we read about the social life of things (Appadurai 1986) and ethics in a globalized world (Ong and Collier 2005). The expansion of media influence in the modern world has heightened the visibility of problems and amplified the public nature of ethics. There are "fundamental disjunctures" between local worlds and larger regulatory systems and ethical frameworks (Appadurai 1996: 32–33). Such disjunctures affect how people see themselves as part of larger social constellations. Broadscale political and ethical impulses often challenge the social norms and identities that have taken shape in particular locations or networks.

Now I realize that my interest in tobacco stems from my personal experience in coming to grips with the rather common dilemma of how we justify doing something we know is bad. We make excuses, provide rationales and reasons, or claim that it's temporary. And yet there is also the

recognition that people's actions are so constrained by political economy and other pressures that they are unlikely to do right, as in the complicity of raising a family of nonsmokers by raising tobacco leaf, exploiting a migrant worker while railing against the threat of illegal immigration, or, in my case, sneaking off to light a cigarette at an academic conference. My study of tobacco has the flavor of being closely involved with tobacco growers, but also the critical recognition that powerful inducements and constraints affect what one does, what one can do, and how one feels about it, so that ambivalence, coping, defensiveness, and strategy are defining tensions and dangers of moral life rather than its aberrations.

Fieldwork

Tobacco grower Frank Warren was skeptical of my motives for wanting to interview him. Over the phone I introduced myself as an anthropologist interested in the history and culture of tobacco in North Carolina.

"Too busy; find somebody else," he replied, and hung up the phone.

Later I met Frank at a wintertime farm meeting. Another grower whom I already knew introduced us. Doing his friend a favor, Frank agreed to talk with me for "five minutes only." Frank produces roughly one hundred acres of tobacco, a typical, medium-size operation for the region, as well as rotational fields in corn and soybeans. He lives in a modest house, where he was finishing his morning coffee when I arrived. We wound up talking for a full hour. He spoke about how neighboring farmers had gone out of business and his contentions with reduced tobacco leaf prices and intensified competition. Owned and operated for decades by his parents and grandparents and the handful of tenant families they employed, his family farm business is less stable than ever. Media accounts and tobacco growers tend to blame the public health tobacco-control movement for conditions of economic hardship and uncertainty. In fact, these conditions are the direct result of the international trade dynamics and tobacco industry strategies described later in this book.

"That five-minute rule was a bluff," Frank admitted to me as our interview wound down. "I was expecting a journalist. They just care about smoking. The interview begins: 'Do you smoke?' Question two is: 'Do you want your kids to smoke?' When you say 'nope' each time, they get around to it: 'Well, isn't that hypocritical?'"

The "critical medical anthropology" perspective, focused on industries and the global trade regime as vectors of disease, is a dominant paradigm in studies of many harmful commodities, including tobacco (Baer et al. 2004; Stebbins 2001). My goal has been to balance the critical consideration of industry power and government neglect with an apprehension

for local experience and the sociocultural context of tobacco dependency (Nichter 2003). During interviews I often found myself wanting to interject my ideas about what is disturbing about the tobacco industry and the contributions of industrial agriculture to significant public health problems. But I listened to growers and let them lead the way. Beyond appearances (including skin color, gender, and other forms of embodiment that have allowed me to socialize felicitously with tobacco grower families as if I were not completely suspect or strange), my rapport involved the openness that defines ethnography. I asked how they got into farming, how and why they have continued, and the major changes that farm families have faced, only to have them start talking about the contentious ethical and health issues without me even bringing it up.

The anthropologist Matthew Kohrman's (2004, 2008) ethnography of Chinese physicians who smoke offers striking similarities with my study. These are people who struggle to come to grips with a coherent and decent subjectivity at the crossroads of competing value systems and regimes that define what is normal and acceptable. What results, according to Kohrman, is a social and personal struggle to negotiate a "fraught identity." The content of how these different groups reflect on their tobacco dependencies and what is at stake differ completely, but in both cases the public health approach to tobacco is experienced in terms of a potential loss of national belonging and the feeling that antitobacco regulatory impulses jeopardize not only a livelihood, but also a sense of personal worth and a level of social standing that is deserved because one feels responsible, professional, and acceptable. "The perception is that just because you grow tobacco you are prosmoking," Frank tells me, insisting on his own normalcy and mainstream morality. "That's not how it works. You can grow tobacco and be sensible about smoking." When growers talk about tobacco, they are also talking about other values and relationships that are at stake for them. This book is about the active construction of morality in a historical context influenced by industry, which ends up looking a lot like a dominant model of consumer citizenship and familial politics in the United States at large.

Few studies have examined what tobacco growers believe about their participation in the industry given its public health toll. Here is what Frank says, as we leave the house and ride in his pickup truck to scope out his summer crop:

> Tobacco farmers are the most despised people around. You'd think we were drug dealers. Every day there's an article in the newspaper about a new study that says that smoking is bad for you. We get the message. It's not like I disagree with that. But I'm proud of what I do. I'm not going to apologize for growing tobacco. It's legal and it's up to adults,

> if they want to smoke or not. I don't want my kids to smoke and I talk to them about it. I feel like other people might think I'm the worst person in the world because I grow tobacco. But they should look at my family and the business that I've grown. I've got two kids in college. And there are more serious problems in society and things that are illegal that are being done. I wonder where the focus on those things is.

He pulls up beside a field where tobacco harvesters run and the truck idles. This is what he does most of the day: driving, sitting, and supervising. A cassette tape of country music hits has probably been playing on a loop in this truck for a decade. I wonder what part of his comments (the pride in tobacco, the no apologies, the claim to be a victim, and the contrast with other social types) reflects real emotional turmoil versus a strategic appropriation of victimhood to mask relative advantage—all that the chasm between this air-conditioned pickup truck and manual field labor symbolizes and entails—or the influence of tobacco industry propaganda. My interviews with tobacco farmers involved lots of this talk. There is the hypocrisy of a government that promotes public health and collects taxes on cigarette sales. There is the bias of media sources that "pay no attention to how tobacco helped make this country, I mean look at Duke University," Frank tells me. There is the misguided focus on tobacco farms when "just look at the inner cities." The decent and hardworking families take all the heat, it seems, and what really threatens the nation is the illegitimacy of so many families and social groups, not the aggressive industrial efforts to get people hooked on harmful and useless products.

My goal is not to quantify what degree of this discourse about disrespect and unfairness, which is also amped on the conservative talk radio, reflects actual feelings of disrespect versus a strategic politics of victimhood. My point is exactly that the experiential context of real farm loss, foreclosure, and going out of business has been coproduced alongside stories and images of plight that nudged growers to adopt a language of victimization and envision the state and public health as enemies because a harmful industry sought to cultivate loyalty and fantasy at the grass roots.

Tobacco-state newspapers and politicians were of little help, usually functioning as nothing more than public relations vehicles for the tobacco industry. As part of my research, apart from working on tobacco farms and conducting interviews, I read every edition of the *Wilson Daily Times* since its inception in the late nineteenth century. Perhaps thousands of articles and editorials were published in this newspaper and other tobacco-state newspapers in past decades, where the government is depicted as the enemy of tobacco farmers. In 1971, the *Wilson Daily Times* ran the following editorial:

> [T]he mystery remains as to why the relentless attack on tobacco continues. There is insufficient evidence pertaining to the health aspects of bright leaf and in view of the traumatic effect its extinction would have on the economy nationally when that is in a pitiful condition is unbelievable. Tobacco has suffered a crippling blow at the hands of those who would protect us from ourselves. (Graham 1971: 15)

The public health approach to tobacco control has been depicted as a "relentless attack," a misleading notion—largely promulgated by the tobacco industry itself—that frames government regulation as the cause of the hardships experienced by farm families and masks the impacts of international market forces and the ambition of multinational tobacco companies to globalize their operations. This contrived image of an attack also contradicts the fact that the public health regulation of smoking in the United States has actually been woefully underdeveloped given the massive epidemiological toll caused by tobacco consumption. And yet another editorial published in this newspaper in 1983 suggested that the public health focus on tobacco is unnecessary because smoking risks are "already known" and "the public has been informed of its dangers." Leadingly entitled "Another Tobacco Fight," the editorial argued that more legislation concerning the "health aspect" is "harmful" to the "economic factor" (*Wilson Daily Times* 1983a), thus reiterating the deceptively false argument that tobacco control directly hurts tobacco farm families. There was no mention of the role of international market forces and the globalization of industry that decimated tobacco as much as textiles in the old confederacy.

To Washington

On March 17, 2003, an individual identified as a white male drove a John Deere tractor into the shallow pond at Constitution Avenue Gardens on the National Mall. He squatted between the Washington Monument and the Lincoln Memorial for two days. Decked out in olive drab fatigues, "tractor man," as the press called him, flew an upside-down American flag (a conventional distress signal) and another flag depicting golden tobacco leaves (Copeland 2003; Nakamura and Lengel 2003a).

Dwight Watson, fifty years old, wore an ill-fitting military helmet, like the one he wore decades earlier while deployed as a marine in Vietnam. He had driven up the interstate from his home in North Carolina where he was the owner-operator of a family tobacco farm. Like thousands of other growers, he had recently gone under. In Washington, he sought to publicize what he called the "plight" of tobacco growers and the gov-

ernment's failure to respond with relief and assistance (Fahrenthold and Lengel 2003; Nakamura 2003).

Watson claimed to possess chemical fertilizer, enough to "bring D.C. to its knees" and "leave a mark on the Mall never to be forgotten." The Mall was evacuated, federal buildings, concession stands, and monuments shut down (Nakamura and Lengel 2003a).[4] Watson did all he could to intensify fears, driving out to an island in the pond where he "moved the bucket on the tractor up and down, smashing it into the island," official reports note.[5] He alluded to incidents in Ruby Ridge and Waco (Nakamura 2003: A6). He told reporters, "They can blow my ass out of the water. I'm ready to go to Heaven" (Nakamura and Lengel 2003b: A1). He claimed to have deposited explosive "Easter eggs" at Philip Morris headquarters in Richmond that would detonate if dampened by an early spring rain. He also claimed to have mailed hazardous materials to the offices of each state's attorney general, the offices from which the major public health litigation against the tobacco industry in the 1990s was spearheaded.

After three days, he finally surrendered. No explosives or hazardous materials were found (Fahrenthold and Lengel 2003: B1). In custody, Watson "erupted into an angry tirade against the government and its policy toward tobacco farmers," according to the presiding judge in his trial:

> [Watson's] rage was palpable and he displayed absolutely no ability to control himself. It is clear to me that his crusade against the government has overwhelmed his judgment and self-control. After witnessing such an outburst, and appreciating the crime charged and his apparent willingness to destroy himself and others to make his point, I find that the defendant is a danger . . . to any community.[6]

Watson was convicted for threatening false information concerning the use of an explosive and destruction of government property. He was sentenced to six years' imprisonment, a punishment that was reduced after Watson offered a formal apology to the court (Leonnig and Lengel 2004).

Stiffed

The social critic Susan Faludi (1999) would probably argue that Dwight Watson went to Washington because he felt "stiffed" or "betrayed," and that his protest exemplifies the backlash of white men who feel disre-

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[4] *United States v. Watson* 253 F. Supp. 2d 1 (2003).
[5] *United States v. Watson* 376 U.S. App. D.C. 22; 483 F.3d 828 (2007).
[6] *United States v. Watson* 253 F. Supp. 2d 1 (2003).

spected and victimized. Her book *Stiffed* is a journalistic study of what she calls the "betrayal of the American man" in the last several decades. Interviews conducted with all sorts of disgruntled men—former dockworkers, chauvinist gang members, weepy born-again Christians, and many other groups—led Faludi to argue that being uncertain about who one is and where one is going is the definitive problem in the lives of the majority of white men in the United States.

All that these men wanted in life was "to be dutiful, belong, and adhere to the roles society had set out for them as men," Faludi writes of the "peculiarly modern American perception that to be a man means to be at the controls and at all times to feel yourself in control" (9). Promised were the far reaches of space, the glories of combat and the heroism of coming home, and the distinctive feelings of power and independence that defined the Marlboro Man and John Wayne. Alas, things did not work out. The civil rights movement, the demands of feminism, waves of industrial decline, the historical and moral failures of war and imperialism, and the end of cold war certitude undercut the symbolic foundations of white manhood. Men not only lost their "jobs, homes, cars, families," Faludi writes, but also "lost their compass in the world" (9). The backlash against women and minorities often exhibited by white men of different backgrounds is explained as a response to fraught masculinity and unrealized expectations of modernity.

This argument is onto something empirical in linking social conflict to broadscale societal and structural transformations. Decades of neoliberal economic policies have meant major changes in nearly every facet of American life (Holland et al. 2007: 5). Social welfare safety nets have been eroded, farm programs altered to benefit agribusiness, including in tobacco, collapsed industries replaced by impermanent employment, and labor markets rescaled to an international level. These processes have left lots of people with less control over life chances, including new and unprecedented levels of downward mobility in the middle classes (Newman 1988, 1993; Storper 2000). However, there are several important limitations to this account. Faludi walks a fine line between social analysis and naturalizing stereotypes. Her discussion of the historical inflation of a gender ideal at times participates in this inflation, romanticizing the masculinity of great expectations and space travel and the silver screen at the expense of a more intricate account of how engendering discourses have intersected with race and class structures in different locales. Tobacco farmers like Watson probably came of age looking up to ideals embodied in the Marlboro Man advertisements and the cowboys of black-and-white television programs. But this level of analysis skims over rich historical and cultural details of how manhood has been defined in places like rural North Carolina and leaves us feeling somewhat stiffed

in terms of how to comprehend what was at stake for the tractor man on the National Mall. While similarities may exist in terms of what defines conservative backlash at a general level, I am interested in the specific ethnographic and industrial conditions in which such a politics becomes preferable and widespread. For example, the sociologist Michele Lamont (2000) argues that dignity is often what is at stake for working- and middle-class Americans who face job loss as a result of industrial restructuring. As a sense of pride and self-worth related to doing a particular kind of work and belonging to a vocational group is threatened, so too are the racial boundaries and senses of social distinction that are traced around class affiliation and employment. The white men that Lamont studied have tended to respond to industrial restructuring by blaming foreign workers as the cause of job displacement. Narratives of victimhood among white men are powerful constructions of fundamental "differences between themselves and others," Lamont writes, explaining the impacts of structural adjustment and the international economy in terms of cultural problems and felt disrespect (2).

A major limitation in Faludi's account of betrayal is the lack of attention paid to the politics of victimhood. Her account lumps many historical and societal processes together as the cause of white male disgruntlement, an argument that seems appealing on a general level but leads to confusion about the dynamics of social conflict. The civil rights movement did not cause feelings of betrayal. Rather, the discourse of betrayal itself emerged as part of a conservative cultural politics that has sought to contain civil rights claims and has appealed to white men who may be experiencing real adversity. Whereas Faludi takes the subjective experience of feeling betrayed at face value, my strategy is to more fully assess these claims to victimhood, disrespect, and betrayal as part of a political project. Many people who presently claim to be victims are not "stereotyped peoples burdened by a national history but icons who have only recently lost the protections of their national iconicity," the literary scholar and social theorist Lauren Berlant writes. They are, she continues, "white and male and heterosexual people of all classes who are said to sense that they have lost the respect of their culture, and with it the freedom to feel unmarked" (1997: 2). This politics of what Berlant calls "imperiled privilege" reflects a social strategy of reasserting and maintaining structures of comparative advantage and discrediting policies that aim to bring about a more equitable and just society as excessive concessions to undeserving constituencies and grave threats to the tacitly white family as the national icon (Lipsitz 2006: 454–56; Berlant 1997: 6). Watson's protest involved these assertions of power and entitlement at the same time as it was fueled by farm loss and the feeling that power is slipping away.

Plighted Citizenship

The central concern of the modern state is to foster the life and growth of the population, what the historian Michel Foucault calls "biopower" (1980: 143). This partly means providing social assistance to disadvantaged constituencies. However, the provision of assistance has often been linked to the skeptical idea that if you just give money to people, they will use it in unproductive ways (Barry et al. 1996; Gordon 1991; Foucault 1991; Hall and Held 1989). That citizenship is a legal right guaranteed by law does not mean that in practice all citizens receive equal treatment and have equal access to government or community support. Anthropologists understand citizenship as a context of group membership that is configured in terms of social norms, cultural values, and political strategies (Greenhouse et al. 1994; Rosaldo 1997). The kinds of citizenship that are deemed valuable to the nation reflect "underlying assumptions about the relative moral worthiness of different categories of subjects" (Ong 2003: 9–10). One of the most important aspects of Foucault's work was to demonstrate how the universal, even unconditional precept of social assistance that defines a formal social contract has been actualized in more narrow ways that involve the moral classification and evaluation of social groups. With relief or assistance guaranteed by moral evaluation rather than legal right, questions of normalcy and the social construction of citizenship have become the basis for economical distribution and political recognition (Petryna 1999).

Foucault refers to the "duty of man in society" in discussing the need for citizens to be certain kinds of people in order to seem deserving and valuable to the nation. He writes that the distribution of assistance is guided by the "semi-moral, semi-psychological analysis" of the morality of citizens, rather than "a definition of contractual obligations" (cited in Gordon 1991: 23–24). It is thus not surprising that the media is chock-full of stories about the appropriate reach of compassion, the limits of pity, the kinds of people who are deserving and undeserving, and the kinds of sympathy and solidarity, as well as indifference and apathy, that are considered acceptable or preferential.

A dominant model of citizenship in the contemporary United States casts citizenship as a "condition of social membership produced by personal acts and values, especially acts originating in or directed toward the family" (Berlant 1997: 1, 5). The relative worth of citizens to the nation and their ethical responsibilities are measured in terms of parenthood, participation in lawful activities, and the social stability and mobility of families. One broad political effect of this modal citizenship is to contain the scale of civic engagement. Although played out in public, spectacles

like Watson's protest are symptomatic of the domestication of American politics (K. Stewart 2005). It was symbolically important that Watson stylized the national dream gone awry in terms of the family farm under attack. His claim was not that structural adjustment policies have made life precarious for all kinds of people or that the federal government has failed to meet contractual obligations to whole swaths of citizens. He was asking to be recognized as someone who is due recompense on the basis of who he is, what his family and lifestyle are like, and the news that these bedrocks of the nation are jeopardized.

This model of the ideal citizen as a family member who is inherently worthy and unfairly damaged is what I mean by "plighted citizenship," a vernacular form of the politics of imperiled privilege and backlash that is so evident on a societal level. Plight is an explanatory model and cultural model of citizenship that became dominant in the vocabulary of tobacco farm politics in the last several decades, although it embeds meanings going back to the plantation period, and even further. As a social construction, plight refers to a situation of misfortune and disadvantage where these conditions absolutely do not index personal or familial blameworthiness. The plighted citizen is an innocent citizen and others are to blame. The plighted citizen is a hardworking person who is "said to feel that they have lost access to the American Dream" (Berlant 1997: 2). Look at the juxtaposition of stylized agrarian family values and urban moral decline in Frank's language. Tobacco farm families seem harangued by public health, which instead ought to be thankful that such families exist because "look over the other shoulder at the more serious problems in society," he says. Then look at the burden of disease attributable to smoking as compared to illicit drug use (see figure I.1).

Tobacco farmers have turned to a familiar agrarian politics, focused on the imperiled family farm, to mitigate public disapproval of what they do for a living and advance the ideology that illicit drugs, not tobacco, are the most dangerous threat to public health. They define the value of their livelihood and their citizenship in terms of parenthood and punch their ticket as part of an imagined mainstream of middle-class families with shared values. But what are understandable ways to rationalize a problematic business in positive terms also embed political assertions about what different categories of people are worth to the nation, why relatively advantaged families like tobacco households but not stereotyped others deserve assistance in the face of misfortune, and who rightfully ought to be under attack in America. What began for the motorist as curiosity about how growers reconcile the ethical ambiguities of their businesses turned out to reflect a common story about conservative backlash amid economic pains that span the social ladder and the ability of industry to encourage stressed people to fear that the threat is cultural or racial in
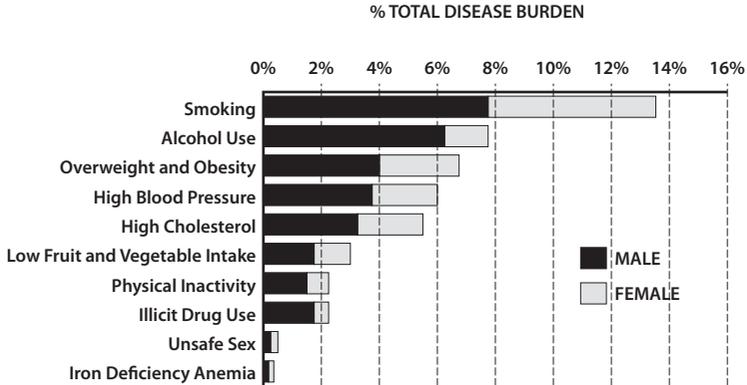
% TOTAL DISEASE BURDEN

Figure I.1. Burden of disease attributable to the ten leading risk factors in North America.

Source: Figure 7 in "Eight Americas: Investigating Mortality Disparities across Races, Counties, and Race-Counties in the United States," by C. J. L. Murray et al. 2006, PLoS Medicine 3 (9): e260.

nature, to seek to further circumscribe the scope of biopower and state assistance, and to resist progressive policy responses even though they might entail concrete benefits for them and their families.

The Politics of Plight

In the federal case brought against Watson, the process of sentencing converted an occasion to explore the widely felt problems that drove him to Washington into an assessment of individual character, a "semi-moral, semi-psychological analysis" of the "duty of man in society," returning to Foucault's terms. The media reporting and public discourse focused on what kind of person he is rather than what kind of society cultivates domestic terrorism.

"I hope you will give Mr. Watson's years as a *good citizen* as much weight as possible as you deliver the sentence," Bob Etheridge, a congressman from North Carolina, wrote in a letter to the judge asking for leniency (Leonnig 2004a: B1; my italics). Watson's family and community members sent many letters to the judge attesting to his "honesty and integrity." Perhaps as a result of these petitions, the already lenient sentence was eventually reduced to little more than a year (Leonnig 2004b; Leonnig and Tucker 2004).

A focus on the family and the supposedly independent business as the proper arenas of citizenship and political identification, and the morally

evaluative structure of the empirical welfare state, can encourage citizens to understand themselves as having no relationship to and no responsibility for problems that affect other people. Beltway commuters yawned at Watson's protest and were late for a happy hour. They sat in traffic and listened to radio hacks make fun of the tractor man. They smoked cigarettes or planned a family vacation to the Outer Banks. They called him a "redneck" (Copeland 2003: C1; Pulliam 2003). Meanwhile, Watson sat alone in his cab, not supported by other growers back in North Carolina, many of whom disparaged his extremism as a sign of personal weakness, nor by farm labor advocates, who work hard to improve the lives of migrant farmworkers but tend to personally blame farmers like Watson for the depraved living and working conditions of workers, nor by an antitobacco movement that has largely been distant from farms. Social distress and economic decline were reduced to the interiority of the tractor, indeed, the interiority of the person. The capital city's congressional delegate said, "Incidents like this bring out nuts." The county commissioner in Watson's hometown explained the protest in terms of psychological "problems of which we are not aware." Struggling to make sense of what had become an embarrassing national spectacle, Watson's neighbors in North Carolina told reporters that he was "pushed to the edge" and was not a "crazy person" or "deviant from the social norm" (Nakamura 2003: A6; Nakamura and Lengel 2003a: B1).

The tobacco industry has propagated this dominant ethics of individualism—live and let live (or die), to each their own—to pin risk assumption on smokers. Although there is a strong antitobacco movement in the United States, large segments of the general population are not mobilized around an intense desire to eradicate smoking disease, though this would lead to major improvements in the quality of life for smokers and their families, minimize nonsmoker exposure to secondhand smoke, and massively reduce healthcare costs and tobacco's burden on taxpayers. The main impediment to a broader politics of indignation about tobacco is a belief that has been strategically cultivated and disseminated by the tobacco industry for decades: the tendency to "identify the smoker as the one responsible for his *sorry* fate," in the words of historian Allan M. Brandt (2007: 444; my italics). While the tobacco industry benefits from this individualization of risk and harm put onto consumers, there is a striking parallel to how other social problems are likewise circumscribed, localized, and pinned. The dilemmas of poverty, joblessness, homelessness, drug abuse, a lack of health insurance, and violent crime all have very clear and well understood social determinants. But the common societal and governmental responses to these problems are often rationalized in terms of the individuals and populations affected being "responsible," to quote Brandt, for their "sorry fate." They are seen as inherently sorry, in

the sense of being blameworthy, and also worthless, personally or collectively guilty for conditions. The ideology of individual responsibility that has been largely constructed by industries like tobacco (think also of beer commercials that instruct consumers to "drink responsibly" as another of the countless examples) combines with increasing levels of corporate philanthropy to further underwrite the notion that harm and misfortune are basically personal or domestic problems, not fundamentally linked to efforts on the part of industries and comparatively advantaged groups to evade being responsible for historical, social, and medical burdens.

Watson's protest, like many other kinds of violent public spectacle, was made to seem idiosyncratic, a personal problem, and he utilized the language of family and heritage to pursue recognition and relief. The structural changes that underpinned his protest and the role of tobacco capital in stressing growers and destabilizing family farms remained causes never scrutinized as causes. They were domesticated as a family's sorry fate, and character was made into the moral of the story. Nowhere did reporters attempt to analyze the real predicaments of livelihood and personhood behind Watson's direct action. Law enforcement officials even told reporters it was "unclear why he was there and what he wanted," apparently overlooking the fact that Watson had received an official permit to demonstrate with a tractor on the grounds of the National Mall to provide information about tobacco farming issues (Fahrenthold and Lengel 2003: B1; Nakamura and Lengel 2003a: B1). Reporters did not adequately discuss the feasibility of alternative sources of livelihood in rural communities in North Carolina. They did not critically analyze the industrial restructuring that has made it harder for some tobacco growers to stay afloat. While the newspaper coverage tended to erroneously equate farm loss with the decline of smoking, there was little coverage of the fact that tobacco growers (and workers, for that matter) receive a much smaller portion of the revenues from tobacco sales compared to the recent past, and that tobacco companies have continued to profit at home and abroad in spite of social awareness about health risks (Capehart 2004a).

Just a few years after September 11, 2001, this was the most serious threat of terror in the United States: the homegrown terrorism of a tobacco grower who impotently promised to cause a more visible and spectacular kind of damage and destruction than the crop that used to come off his family farm. But the title *terrorist* was not used in the media reports.[7] That it plainly would have been if he were from a different background is evidence of a cultural and racial politics at work in structuring which forms of protest and political engagement seem legitimate and which categories of subjects seem inherently worthy in spite of perhaps

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[7] In the trials, Justice Department attorneys called Watson a "domestic terrorist" (Leonnig and Lengel 2004: B1), and a judge called Watson a "one-man weapon of mass destruction" (Leonnig and Tucker 2004: A1).

crossing a legal threshold. Watson was partly taken with a grain of salt in the media coverage and among beltway commuters. His performance escaped the more pronounced forms of interrogation and punishment that are predictable for other people who threaten to explode the nation's capital. All of this is evidence of the cultural and moral force of plighted citizenship as a tacitly white kind of damaged citizenship that seems legitimate and harmless, and the romantic image of a family farmer and military veteran staked out in a John Deere on the National Mall. Imagine a Muslim individual parked in a vehicle on the Mall claiming to possess heaps of explosives. Imagine reservoirs of federal funding and think tanks mobilized to explain and respond to the event. Imagine the public outcry about a clash of civilizations and the dangerous media reporting and political responses that would likely ensue but that never occurred around the tractor man.

Reporters did note the irony that "on the eve of war with Iraq and a heightened terrorism alert," it was a "lone farmer from North Carolina" who "could so easily disrupt life in the capital," the *Washington Post* stated. What is "to stop an international terrorist organization armed with advanced technology," the editorial goes on, "let alone weapons of mass destruction? We're giving Saddam Hussein 48 hours to leave Iraq. How much longer are we going to give Dwight in the pond?" (Sandalow 2003: A1). Another reporter cynically celebrated Watson's protest as "a reminder of what makes this country unique," by which she apparently meant the right of public demonstration, stereotyping the Muslim world as inherently backward in this regard (Jacoby 2003: A12). This double-standard discourse portrayed Watson as an icon of patriotism, assimilated into a prefabricated image of what farmers are like. Tom Ridge, then secretary of Homeland Security, said the protest was not "in any way connected with the kind of terrorism" authorities "expect" from Islamic militants. At the very instant that Watson was on the Mall, Ridge announced a plan, "Operation Liberty Shield," to enhance national security by requiring mandatory detention of asylum applicants from many Muslim countries and the interrogation of Arab Americans. "We want to make absolutely certain," Ridge said, "[that] you are who you say you are" (Jacoby 2003: A12).

The media was correct in emphasizing Watson's deep personal troubles. He had recently gone through a divorce that had perhaps been influenced by financial difficulties. Leading up to the protest he exhibited signs of serious distress and was contemplating suicide (Collins 2003; Jubera 2003; Nakamura and Shear 2003).[8] Psychology was no doubt part of

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[8] Watson was deemed competent to stand trial. A clinical psychologist with the D.C. Department of Mental Health interviewed Watson prior to his hearing and found he did not "behave in a manner typical of people who are mentally ill. . . . His judgment appeared adequate, but unsophisticated and somewhat naive" (Tucker 2003: B3).

why Watson drove to Washington and risked his own life while threatening others. However, an anthropological emphasis on historical and societal contexts that influence psychological and emotional life (Kleinman 1986) deepens an appreciation of the motivations behind the protest. Rather than being guided by a concern "with finding a psychological origin" of distress, anthropologists attempt to understand, to borrow the words of João Biehl, a "sense of psychological interiority as ethnological, as the whole of the individual's behavior in relation to her environment and to measures that define boundaries, be they legal, medical, relational, or affective" (2004: 481).

Watson's commute to Washington, about a seven-hour drive from North Carolina, was made into a spectacle of familial plight, largely as a result of his own festooned performance of this appealing image. His commute to a federal prison punished the public and threatening manner in which he conveyed an experience of personal loss and jeopardy that affects people from many vocations and social positions. Meanwhile, the romantic discourse about family farms encourages a desire to commute his sentence, to pardon him. Here is what Congressman Etheridge said: "I obviously wish he had not chosen to make the statement in the way he did, but it really is an example of the *plight* we see in rural America today. Tobacco farmers see a way of life vanishing, a way of life they've lived all their life, not just a generation or two, but back to the Colonial days" (Nakamura and Shear 2003: B1; my italics).

This language of plight is a condescending discourse that limits an adequate understanding of the role of changing economic conditions, driven by the reorganization of multinational capital, in inducing hardship and difficulties in rural regions and the different impacts of these processes for differently positioned individuals, families, and groups. Reference to the plight of tobacco farmers seems congenial, as in the congressman's words, but there is a political valence that is linked to the depiction of economic crisis and hard times as a uniform, national condition, the concealment of race and class stratification, and the appropriation of victimhood and discrimination for the benefit of white constituencies. Plight is a big word on a highway billboard that packages the complex and uneven conditions of life that exist off exits as phenomena that can be consumed on the fly. It makes the stress and worry that people like Watson experience seem hapless rather than directly induced by a particular political economy; the precariousness of declining fortunes seem urgent and unwarranted, even though hardship is, in fact, the common predicament for most people on the planet; and their claims and responses, which are

sometimes quite dangerous and tendentious and often have clear strategic value, seem innocent.

Reporters did not wonder about where the idea that tobacco farm families are hapless victims originated anyway. My interest is in historicizing and contextualizing how plighted citizenship became a vernacular mode of damaged citizenship and the political and corporate interests it has served. This goal entails apprehending plight both as a set of real conditions confronting farmers and the set of ideological meanings grafted onto those conditions in order to minimize a popular sense of the determinate role of industry in making them. What I have in mind is an account of North Carolina's tobacco region as a "transitioning political and economic world," to cite the anthropologist Adriana Petryna, where the public health response to smoking disease, the government's failure to stabilize and diversify the economy of tobacco regions, and the growth of international markets have worked in tandem to bring about substantial challenges to tobacco farm livelihoods and how farmers understand themselves. By looking at how these broadscale forces are complexly realized in "human conditions and conditions of citizenship" (Petryna 1999: 6–7), I aim to explain the cultural politics of response in this agrarian setting and the extent to which meanings and acts of citizenship reflect strategies to pursue entitlements, diagram social boundaries, and articulate belonging at the farm level and the national level. Eschewing the easy narrative—good people doing bad things—requires acknowledgment of the vast social disparities that tobacco farming helps to reproduce and the fact that, however well intentioned, growers are complicit in and derive some advantage from human conditions and conditions of citizenship that adversely affect the farm labor workforce. At the same time, there is the need to remain aware that these growers are themselves at the mercy of multinational corporations, and that limiting the analysis of culture and politics to a local level misses an important chance to implicate tobacco companies in forms of suffering for which growers are often personally blamed and to locate growers as part of the larger conservative backlash that defines a volatile moment in American history. To scrutinize the language of plight is to stay close to the vernacular meanings and relationships that are at stake in a local politics of citizenship and moral worthiness, while acquiescing to the urge to get broader and broader, opening up the context of accountability for domestic terrorism, and finding that much of the backlash that Faludi attempts to explain has less to do with a generic threat to manhood than with the complex ways that industrial restructuring simultaneously destabilizes where people sit in their communities and organizes particular kinds of ideologies about

the causes of instability. Scrutinizing plight reflects a desire to convert the anomie that comes out of the massive social restructuring that intensified in the Reagan era from the private property of automobile commuters mired in a tractor or in traffic into a social fact and a basis for solidarities. Given what this anomie can do to people—driving Watson to domestic terrorism, prompting more mundane antagonisms at workplaces and in communities, or coalescing into conservative extremism—it seems just as relevant to a discussion of national security as the singular targeting of the nature and culture of Islamic fundamentalism.

To Not Be Sorry

Motorists who nestle up to the early-morning counter at the country store where farmers munch on ham biscuits and slug down cups of strong rural coffee might hear one particular word used in unexpected ways. This word might start to seem like a central thread that needs to be un- wound as part of a complex account of the history and ethnography of tobacco farms. Accumulated entanglements of power and prestige are there in its utterance.

People in North Carolina regularly call people "sorry," and tobacco growers do so in patterned ways. Workers are "sorry workers." Mar- ginal and failed farmers are "sorry farmers." The people who sit idle on their porches because they do not want to work for the meager wages paid out in *el campo* (the field) are "sorry people." The word colloquially means "no-good," "good for nothing," "worthless," and "blameworthy." It combines the idea that a person is not successful with the indication that said misfortune is that person's fault. As a result, financial success in farming (or at least its display), maintenance of a clean and modern operation, an ability to expand production and upgrade equipment, and maintenance of a good working relationship with tobacco companies are all signs that a farmer is not sorry. Farmers work hard to produce quality tobacco, fetch high grades, and grow successful businesses, but also to exhibit public signs as evidence that these pursuits stem from a personal commitment.

My wife's father helped my project in many ways. Tobacco agriculture in Appalachia looks a lot different than it does in North Carolina, where the farms are bigger and economic dependence on tobacco is usually more intense. But we had long conversations about the production pro- cess and major challenges facing people who own and operate tobacco farm businesses. He told me that a sorry person is a person who does not do a good job. It is a farmer who does not practice weed control so things

get out of hand. The fields are messy and the farm shop is unkempt. These are sometimes the older farmers who did not go to university to study modern agricultural techniques and best practices in farm management and conservation like he did, but there are also active farmers who could care less about how their farm looks and the quality of the job they do. Sorry people are essentially people who do not live up to the Protestant work ethic. Whether the fields are clean and orderly is taken as a reflection of the moral fabric of the grower, and so one aspect of the language of sorriness is about self-worth, a claim to possess real skills, and pride in doing something well and in a way that does not cut corners.

My wife's father died attempting to not be sorry, just a couple of years after I had completed my fieldwork in North Carolina. He was mowing tall grass on a hillside next to a small tobacco patch and got close to the bank where the hillside falls down into the patch. This is something he had done a thousand times, but on this occasion the wheel slipped and the tractor flipped over the bank, landing on top of him. How he died says a lot about how he lived. He did not need to mow that close to the edge. There was no impact in terms of the quality of the tobacco leaf. But it was a thing of pride. Maintaining immaculate fields was important to him—no, that is an understatement—it was an act that was part of an entire way of being, an existential act, not a means to an end but the way he did things as a matter of course. He got close to the edge because tall grass around the field would mean neglect, implying that a choice had been made to not do this extra work.

His death was horrible, coming suddenly. My wife and I rented a car and immediately drove back down the highway from Boston. Family members struggled to make sense of the accident. Why did this happen to such a good man? At the funeral, everyone talked about what a meticulous farmer he was and how his fields were the neatest and cleanest, his tobacco the prettiest in the area, and he was such a good husband, father, and friend to so many. Everyone knew this was the proper eulogy, and they did not have to use the word sorry to say that he was definitely not that.

The cause of death was trauma related to the off chance that the hillside was slippery that day. But that's just one explanation. The concept of "moral experience," as developed by the anthropologist Arthur Kleinman, has been central to my approach. This concept refers to "what is locally at stake" for a given population. It refers to the local meaning of such values as "status, relationships, resources, ultimate meanings, [and] one's being-in-the-world" and the experience that they are being threatened or transformed for one reason or another (1999: 360–62). Moral experience refers not to a universal morality but to the immense diversity of values across social locations. It refers to the process whereby particu-

lar values, relationships, and meanings come to matter deeply and where there is a great deal at stake in maintaining or losing them.

What was at stake for Dwight Watson on the National Mall? What model of the human was he attempting to convey, inhabit, or uphold in his own sorry way? What model of the human is worth dying for because doing a good job matters? I am convinced that the appropriate historical and ethnographic context for understanding what is at stake for tobacco farmers and what has them often on edge is sorriness. This does not mean that my father-in-law's death was not an accident—just that an active investment in a value that makes mowing a field more than just mowing a field, the value of not being sorry, linking the aesthetics of farm tidiness to the "duty of man in society," was part of what made the accident happen. The little things, like mowing each and every blade of grass, like throwing oneself into the shoot to tag the calves—these acts reflect commitments to household and family, and to models of the moral person that are irreducible to but often bound up in political strategies.

Sorriness is multivalent. The whole analysis becomes trivial unless the multiple layers are held together. There is the positive side to sorriness, where not being sorry is an expression of self-worth and pride. The presentation of a hardworking self is an important moral defense for farmers given the uncertainties of the weather and market volatility, the ups and downs of fuel and other input costs, and the possibility that despite heaps of effort no rain (or too much) will leave a farmer with what is called a "sorry crop of tobacco." Tactical displays of hard work and industry help secure a social reputation and mitigate the moral hazard that the sorriness of a crop will be taken as evidence of the sorriness of the grower. However, leaving the language of sorriness there, as positive terms for talking about work, misses the important political valences. "From an ethnographic perspective," Kleinman writes, "what is at stake, what morally defines a local world, may be, when viewed in comparative perspective, corrupt, grotesque, even downright inhuman. That is to say, the moral may be unethical" (1999: 365–66).

Not all farmers have equal access to these values or their public display, owing to differences of farm size, market access, and the race and class disparities in the tobacco farm landscape that government rural modernization efforts did nothing to challenge. The word is used to denigrate vulnerable people like farm laborers, farmers with limited finances and limited access to the newest and best equipment, the handful of active black tobacco farmers, and failed farmers reluctantly forced out of business. The word designates that these groups are culpable for and deserving of their comparative disadvantages and vulnerabilities. In rural North Carolina, the language of sorriness is also deleteriously racialized, sometimes equated with blackness.

Some farmers, like my wife's father, a decent man, take pride in expressing pride through work, out on the tractor, and not in huddled circles at the farm shop or the tobacco warehouse. Their ability to not be sorry hinges less on the attribution of negative qualities to other people in the intimate recesses of whiteness. But for many farmers, positive displays of self-worth are the flip side of talking shit. My sense is that things are different in Appalachia, where my wife's father farmed. In rural North Carolina where I did my fieldwork, perhaps reflecting deeper historical linkages to plantation slavery and more visible and intense realities of and political struggles around racial disparities, sorriness is the everyday white discourse used to naturalize inequalities in terms of the essential moral decrepitude of racialized populations and the innate work ethic and national value of the person who uses the word in this way. It is heard in passing conversations at the corner store, in the complaints of the farmer who comes home from the farm and sits down to a stack of bills, and in my interviews. One of the central arguments of this book is that white farmers call black people sorry to reroute blame onto them and justify illegal but economical dependence on undocumented migrant labor. This dependence is said to be necessary because black people are "sorry," meaning indolent. As blame shifts onto black people, the white people who are breaking laws do not have to say, "I'm sorry," because they seem victimized by a government that is said to unfairly sanction the sorriness of racial minorities, while their own pursuit of largesse and their lawbreaking are rationalized in terms of the flaws of these others. It is as if the sorrier other people are, the more the self seems innocent and valuable, capable of discerning and discrediting the sorry sorts said to threaten the nation and claiming to be plighted by the added burden of having to employ and manage them. As is seen across the United States, the cultural politics of imperiled privilege and backlash often takes the form of "rage at the stereotyped peoples who have appeared to change the political rules of social membership" and "a desperate desire to return to an order of things deemed normal" (Berlant 1997: 2).

Media accounts assimilated Watson as a generic figure of rural disgruntlement at the same time as they made him seem truly idiosyncratic: clinging to a dying way of life and completely off his rocker. The time I spent in Watson's stomping grounds—he farmed just a couple of exits from Wilson County—pushes me to challenge these facile accounts. His protest originated in a particular historical and sociological context of accountability where relationships to the government, the tobacco industry, and the farm labor workforce have been sustaining but have also implied blame or dependence. Heritage and a vague notion of plight understandably seem like what is at stake when the media solicits sound bites for the sake of a consumable story like a driver eager to get where

they are going and so only stopping to get gas and snacks. In praising and ridiculing Watson at the same time, the media never took him seriously. What if he drove to Washington to not be sorry because this feat matters back home? What if what it means back home has a great deal to do with the overtones of having done something wrong, being a sorry person, perhaps needing to apologize for something, representing, like the other stereotyped groups, a threat to the nation and no longer national iconicity? Perhaps this is why Watson called the *San Francisco Chronicle* a year before his protest to voice discontent about predicaments affecting tobacco farmers but also a claim about innocence. "If you grow tobacco, everybody thinks you're evil," he said. "I'm not down here manipulating nicotine. I'm following the laws of the federal and state government" (Ryan 2002: D4).

What if he were not so much protesting as insisting that he was hard-working, a good farmer, and a good person who did not have to apologize for anything? Maybe he was claiming to not be sorry. Maybe this is why his neighbors stressed to reporters, "He is a meticulous farmer. His fields are immaculate" (Nakamura 2003: A6). This claim to not be sorry involves both these local diacritics of industry and management and a larger claim about national belonging and iconicity. For people facing the real possibility of failure and status loss, a claim to not be sorry, a claim to be worth something, which sometimes comes at the expense of others and targets them, can be a deeply moral act. When farmers told me that they would never apologize for growing tobacco, and then when I heard frequent attributions of sorriness around the workplace, I came to understand that these are two sides of a broken record. Growers are also unlikely to apologize for illegal labor recruitment, dependence on government largesse, or the sometimes hostile treatment shown to workers. Contrition is difficult when vernacular idioms that subtend ideals of legitimate national and local belonging make the phrase "I'm sorry" a personal indictment more than a mere apology.

This book tracks the politics of innocence on multiple levels of the tobacco industry, including the abdications of accountability that are part of corporate strategies, the new kinds of consumer responsibilities that are built into the expanded federal regulation of tobacco products, the serious issues raised by farm labor advocates about noncompliant agricultural employers and a neglectful government, and the ways that growers wrestle with but mainly take distance from the moral ambiguities of producing a harmful product and being part of a farm labor system built on vulnerability and exploitation. Rather than converting the ambiguity that defines the subjective experiences of cultivating tobacco into a billboard, where there is only room enough for a simple story about good people doing a bad thing, a focus on sorriness forces a more sweeping

format that places the ethnographic present of farm loss, contentious racial politics and tensions, the public debate about immigration, and the conservative backlash against the backdrop of historical trajectories in the rural South and the influence of the tobacco industry in making many rural residents at once economically dependent and socially defensive.

This book is comprised of interrelated sections, the first having to do with the history of the tobacco industry and public health politics, and the second having to do with farm life and labor. The story of the rise and fall of tobacco agriculture in this region provides an important set of reference points for thinking about the structures of race and class and engendering discourses that have all along been produced alongside tobacco. Only by looking at the historical trajectory of tobacco agriculture over centuries is an adequate understanding of the politics of plight and entitlement possible, since this politics builds heavily on values—especially those having to do with race and innocence—that have considerable historical depth. This combination of materials discourages a view of tobacco grower defensiveness as parochial, generic, or natural, encouraging instead a thorough historical explanation of how a preference for claiming victimhood came to define the relationship of growers to their governments. Sorriness is multivalent and puts transverse force relations into play, a keyword where realities and representations are enveloped, the ideological imagery of farm loss and agrarian decline pulsing with the felt plight of financial duress, social power steeped in anxiety. The claim to not be sorry and that others are sorry is a claim to self-worth that is linked to gendered and racialized notions of deservedness buttressed by powerful mythologies of agrarianism ensconced at the Jefferson Memorial, just a short walk from where Watson was camped.