Responsible Portrayal of Clean Energy Development Within Fiction

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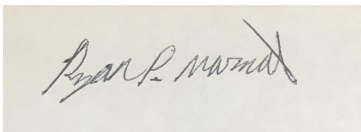

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Title:**Responsible Portrayal of Clean Energy Development Within Fiction**

Eco-literature tends to linger in the pessimist and nihilistic range. Often writers take a critical view not only of environmental policy but of the reasons people may be apprehensive of radical changes toward environmental policy whether it be industrial, energy, or agricultural. Works that take this approach often wander into auras of dystopia and leave readers with feelings of fear rather than understanding and hope. Literature should be an escape and should be the exaltation of the very best-case scenarios that academic study can forecast for us; or at least some should strive for this. This project is a short story that seeks to entwine the ideas of Environmental Science and Energy equity with a literary take that is optimistic and empathetic.

Academic science has been widely repeated and accepted, a clean energy transition is necessary. However, many policy approaches fail to account for the reason why this transition may not be feasible under current economic, political and social conditions. Climate change and its roots in fossil fuel consumption cannot simply be spent away by governments and people. I feel that it is important to note that while this is a creative fiction piece, I want to create something that is above all rigorously grounded in the academic consensus of both social and academic sciences when looking at idea policy approaches

The outlining and world building process of this project is derived from research into academic consensus and real world case studies. Whereas the literary themes and techniques are drawn from award winning full length novels, namely *The Road* by Cormac McCarthy and *Salvage The Bones* by Jesmyn Ward.

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Responsible Portrayal in Eco-Fiction

INTRODUCTION

This project started with a summary review of some existing eco-fiction. Simultaneously a brief review of academic literature regarding equity in the clean energy movement and the usage of eminent domain for the purpose of energy infrastructure development was assembled. This project required collection of data and background knowledge of both peer reviewed scientifically minded articles about energy, primarily the idea of energy poverty, externalities. And equity as a whole. This data collection will ensure that my presentation of scientific consensus is not only accurate but reflects current and modern numbers and situations. In addition, the review of creatively derived literature serves to provide background for how these ideas and concepts are discussed within the context of recreational literature and media. This avenue of data collection will serve to inform writing techniques and styles that I could employ when presenting energy equity arguments and situations with the proper sensitivity and inclusion.

In collecting this data, the first step was an extension of the literary collection and review of the sources that I have acquired so far, these represent a wide variety of peer reviewed scholarly articles as well as past projects that reflect a similar goal. The peer reviewed sources culminate data and information on things such as investment, energy poverty, and residential and utility scale clean energy developments with their associated policy. These articles will be culminated by browsing various academic databases and journals. After this I will identify strong common themes that persist

across the variety of sources. This will ensure accurate data is presented in my writing. The next step was to review recreational literature with the goal of finding short stories, poetry collections and longer forms that entertain these themes if not explicitly mention or comment on them. With the works from this step I was able to determine what literary techniques authors are using and their efficacy in conveying themes about problems and complications within energy equity that people are facing. I will be able to use this to inform my writing style and figure out if there are any elements that the scientific community has identified that the literary community has not. This will allow me to create a final product that while informed by existing methodology is unique in the story that it tells and strong in its critique of the failings of contemporary literature.

In its success this project faithfully discusses valid social reasons why environmental policy may be inaccessible or undesirable to some people for reasons beyond a lack of environmental concern or understanding of climate change. The themes of a successful project will dwell more in the aura of optimism with a holistic view of the impacts of bold environmental policy. Perhaps more importantly there must be robust academic grounding in the purpose of the work. I do not want to simply build a world. I want to build a world that faithfully incorporates what I have learned about the social, political and ecological implications of Energy policy. It is important that both the literary rigor and ES academic rigor are paramount throughout this project.

Throughout my time in Allegheny's ESS department the idea of equity has always been paramount in the classes I have taken and the discussions I have partaken in. Policy solutions always are appealing in concept but reality has shown that policy often neglect's root causes of systemic environmental problems. There are many reasons why bold policy has not always had broad public support. This phenomenon manifested in artistic literary commentary often gets stuck in dystopian pessimistic views. I wanted this project to reframe this perspective and profess what I find to be a more realistic view of the reality of environmental policy. The fact is opposition to progressive policy is not because people are bad, capitalist, or apathetic; some circumstances simply

prevent people from interacting with policy in a way they would should all barriers not exist.

PROOF OF CONCEPT

To understand why energy developments are becoming more and more frequent within residential areas it is necessary to understand the prevalence of the problems they seek to solve. Simultaneously it is crucial to be aware of the impacts these projects leave on communities. Although widely successful in many views the political and social fallout can have lasting harmful effects on communities. This task can be broken into two essential understandings, the ubiquity of energy poverty and the common externalities of energy development. Energy developments often see themselves as a solution to the former with the ability to minimize the negative part of the latter while realizing its tangible positives.

Ubiquity of Energy Poverty

Looking at the clean energy transition access it is important to understand what the current landscape of energy development looks like. Across countries, climates and economies in a variety of circumstances renewables like solar and wind have proven to be the most cost effective. Beyond their ever increasing affordability, renewable energy offers unprecedented opportunities for historically low income communities to develop the building blocks for generational wealth through energy investment. Due to this utility scale energy developments have been increasingly finding their way into the heart of communities across the globe.

The transition to clean energy has been lauded for its potential to alter the landscape of social, economic and political equity with its demand for new infrastructure and new enterprise models. This venture is in its implementation and exercise in equity. Equity in the opportunity to provide reasonable energy prices, access to investment, and a proportional share of all externalities created by the project.

Energy equity is often reflected as energy poverty which is defined primarily as a household being unable to afford energy for proper heating, this definition is sometimes extended to include cooking. This phenomenon is quite prevalent, as for example, roughly 10 percent of UK households, many of them elderly or with young children, fail to attain this basic standard (Roberts 2008). This shortfall is also found in the United States with significant percentages of households at risk of harm due to heating and cooling shortages were eligible for government assistance, “dataset of 6002 households, 871 qualified for LIHEAP and 1,553 qualified for WAP using their respective income threshold” (Cong et. al 2021). While the gross total numbers are concerning, it does not tell the whole story of the the risk factors for energy poverty

In efforts to address this common problem more and more rural communities find themselves as targets for energy development, particularly renewables. energy projects, a 2007 study was notably positive about the opportunities community utilities could bring saying it “offers a tangible and proximate link between energy supply and use that is beneficial for raising awareness, education and the promotion of environmental citizenship” (Walker 2007). Regardless of the explicit political or economic motivations case studies are heavily saturated with rural communities, in an analysis of 105 case studies from around the world researchers found almost all developments to be in rural communities, out of 105 random cases 94 were in exclusively rural communities (Johnson et. al 2020). Building upon this idea of ubiquity it's important to note that these households are also often the ones experiencing extreme health complications due to a lack of indoor climate control, or air conditioning. “In 2009 and 2010 alone,over 8,250 emergency room visits in the US were caused by heat stroke, with low-income, minority, and elderly populations being disproportionately affected” (Cong et. al 2021). The understanding that harms are not being equally or proportionally shared marks a core element of the opposition these developments may run into.

Common Externalities

Utility scale clean energy developments often create externalities that are left unaddressed in favor of maximizing profit or avoiding negative public perception. Often these externalities are predominantly passed on to low income or minority communities who do not receive the benefits of the development's existence in the first place, whether those benefits are monetary investment returns or stable and affordable energy supplies. Often these communities don't have a sizable voice in the larger political and economic systems that allow such development to occur. The lack of energy access in the communities constitutes a limitation of social status and economic opportunities. “Further still, community energy is increasingly linked with a wide range of benefits, including: sustainable income streams, fuel poverty alleviation, skills development, promoting social cohesion…” (Forman 2016) . The needs of these communities have been severely overlooked through no fault of their own as motivations for developmental policy focus on deliverables other than equity. This circumstance not only degrades the current conditions of those communities but stalls progress of addressing climate change as those affected by this type of policy lose interest and community support for green initiatives. “The resulting disparate social impacts threaten to erode popular support for a key component of global efforts to mitigate anthropogenic climate change” (Mormann 2019). As demonstrated there is in essence what amounts to a balancing act between aggressive development to meet the energy demands and challenges of both today and the future as well as moderate development to avoid frontloading consequences on communities. Too hard of a lean towards either direction threatens progress made as well as future plans.

Any form of energy comes with its benefits and consequences, no matter if these are renewables or fossil fuels at any degree of modernization or technological advancement. Among all frontiers of energy investment, none have a unique ability to internalize all of the cost benefits created, “Today’s crop of clean energy policies creates winners and losers not only across competing technologies but also among ratepayers, taxpayers and other stakeholders” (Mormann 2019). ASs these winners or losers realize these gains the importance of local control become more and more important

"Energy system interventions at more local scales have the capacity to foster greater energy justice. It contributes insights into distribution and procedure in community energy *ownership*, as one aspect of *accessibility" (Forman 2016)*. When accessibility is discussed most conversation goes to price, whether about policy or actual production price dictates paradigms around energy development. When explanations are sought for the rapid expansion of energy particularly renewables into communities look no further than price, as the "average price a household pays for energy use correlates positively with energy burden, which indicates that diversifying the residential energy supply and improving energy efficiency can help reduce households' energy burdens" (Wang et. al 2020) All in all the realized gains can be maximized while minimizing harms when there is both local investment and control.

LITERATURE AS METHOD OF DISCUSSION

It is reasonable to take this approach of fiction as it has been demonstrated that audiences who are accepting of anthropogenic climate change are likely to internalize arguments made in eco-literature, whether they be affirming of science or apathetic towards organizing and action (Schnieder-Mayerson et. al 2020). Knowing that people are open to environmentally conscious issues allows for the assumption this consideration will be extended to renewable energy developments. Taking this assumption in my fiction requires readers to be at least somewhat open to the idea of the negative externalities created by energy development. Regardless this pattern of understanding is demonstrated along different themes and genres, readers follow and accept clear arguments of a worldview they are open too. This phenomenon extends to cinema as well, with critics now considering films to have the same societal impact as the likes of Rachel Carson's "Silent Spring". Such in depth analysis once only found in written literature are now found in film as "it is impossible not to confront intricate networks radiating from the shot to how it was produced: not only where, when, and often why, but also with what devices it was made" (Monani et. al 2012). This leaves the

challenge creating enticing literary arguments in favor of progressive environmentalism while at the same time creating appealing conflicts and characters.

This is not a project about specific forms of renewable energy. This project is to tell the story about the complex relationships between communities and perceived promising opportunities. While my fiction focuses on solar energy development it is informed by energy developments as a whole. In a review of the relationships of the fracking lease agreements signed by low-income landowners significant portions of the surveyed populations many who welcomed. Similarly, this element of perception was analyzed across socioeconomic backgrounds in proximity to Lake Erie wind farms (Gazis 2012). Along this same vein in an exploration of the similarities and differences between high and low income solar energy adopters, low income expressed similar enthusiasm for the savings as well as environmental stewardship opportunities possible through solar energy adoption (Wolske 2020). While the enthusiasm for solar adoption is present there is a shortfall of opportunities for the existing demand. To this end the overall willingness for outside investment is low as the strictly financial incentive is low as a study of renewable financial indices demonstrated to "not find that the renewable energy indices act as an economic instrument to advance the transformation of the energy system, (Rezex et. al 2016). While volatile on its own, clean energy has promise when traded in concert with commodities. When commodities function as a hedging asset, clean energy investments can provide diversification benefits and risk reduction (Ahmad, Rais 2018). This investment principle has led many firms, townships and cities to research or adopt their own clean energy utility investments in the form of utility stations.

The driving theme across this project is this idea of what true equity looks like and why a homologation of academia and literature will be able to advance awareness for the realities of the clean energy transition. In summary efforts to make information including through literature can only help to increase trust and awareness, "Transparency can be achieved by making production practices viewable and traceable, with techniques including clear labeling and marketing" (Hall et. al 2013). Once again to obtain favorable outcomes degrees of transparency need to be achieved and

respected. This point reaffirms the importance of literature particularly journalism as a way to further discussion and disseminate knowledge.

The writing process also utilized knowledge from other forms of literature such as eco cinema. While environmental literature is well understood, cinema often presents complicated ideas about a variety of social topics and issues in a more abstract way. In many ways, cinema is similar to literature in this regard but also has some key differences, mainly the scale of production; however this difference is not significant enough to dissuade me from considering its lessons about how people interpret environmental messaging presented in the format. Mainly because of the way eco cinema focuses intently on expanding paradigms outside of a local scale (Chu 2016). Applying this principle to my fiction allows me as an author to keep the theme consistent with the global reality of clean energy developments.

PRECEDENT OF EMINENT DOMAIN

Since the story I have created is told with a situation and conflict of eminent domain it is necessary to understand at least the basic legal implications and standards as well as the functional implementation through history. “while there have been no comprehensive accounts of federal eminent domain since 1978” (Baude 2013) The federal government may hold the supreme right to forcibly acquire land but many states do frequently engage in eminent domain proceedings for various purposes. The fear of this specifically for energy has led to legislation being introduced in some states to explicitly prohibit the use of eminent domain for this purpose. For example in Missouri lawmakers have introduced HB 1052 prohibits solar and wind farms from engaging in eminent domain seizures (Bush 2023). When analyzed in concert with each other it becomes clear that while federal appetite for seizure through eminent domain is low, states are finding an interest in alleviating residents' fears of their ownership or development rights being compelled by the state.

CONCEIVING SETTING AND CHARACTERS

Furthermore it was crucial that my research included people that are being directly affected by the developments regardless of the statistics and cost benefit analysis laid out by academics. The way humans interact with their community is very complex and understanding the complexities of their personal views and choices is very important to understanding the way simply supporting or opposing is not without its negating factors. For example, over the course of the past several years a 2,400 acre solar farm in Wisconsin has been in development. Despite residents being heavily compensated for their land resources some still feel slighted by the development, “Lund, 51, has agreed to lease about 500 acres of his land for the project, which will generate far more income than his crops without selling off his most valuable asset” (Hubbuch 2021). Additionally, this interview highlights a theme among people that should be considered: there is a pattern of people who do have a concern of climate change but feel they are unfairly burdened by the proposed solutions. If these concerns are addressed regardless of the redress given communities can realize significant gains as, “ Energy projects have an important role in offering communities a route for generating income that can sustain local services and facilities” (Addams et.al 2014). When taking this into consideration it became apparent that the way I insert conflict into my fiction needed to present some dynamic attitudes. Whether this was in characters aligning where they don't one hundred percent agree or through shifting attitudes there needs to be a real representation of the complex nuance that is found in real world examples.

While this project does not directly work alongside a stakeholder to address their concerns it is important to constrain the scope of the project as energy developments look very different depending on where they are implemented. With this central concept I began to think of my setting as a representation of stakeholders. Moving forward with that principle with the knowledge I gained from researching for this project I determined that the great lakes region is the best and most mutable setting for storytelling. Due to both its wealth of culture, community and resources the Great

Lakes region presents a real opportunity for relatable storytelling especially as I myself grew up 20 minutes from the shore of Lake Ontario. Through the research process I familiarized myself further with the communities affected by energy policy and development through interview based studies. It has been useful so far in familiarizing myself with writing the real people whose stories that I want to tell in this project. Furthering this point,I found numerous examples of community activism and organizing against energy projects. Mainly this was in the form of localized journalism pieces that were the most useful and insightful for both the context of the pursuit of an energy development as well as the dynamics of the social paradigm that rises around them. Most importantly these journalism pieces allowed me to identify similarities of social responses across various methods of development. The way concerns were expressed contained very similar sentiments, for example following objections to a wind farm in the great lakes many residents expressed real concern for how the development would change the way they currently interacted with their lake. Explicitly residents were quoted as saying, “It'll tear up the lake, it'll upset the lake bed, it'll interfere with the bird migration. The view, we don't want to obstruct the beautiful view. And for the recreation of boaters, it would be a bad thing” (Wilson 2022). What is important to note here as well from the other journalism as well is how intelligent the people are even when you distance them from endless stats, regressions and models favored by statistical academia. There is a real depth to the personality that is expressed in journalism that informs the human condition more than academic writing ever could. This point was further illustrated by the continued coverage of a solar farm being built on farmland in Wisconsin. Two years ago the coverage was mainly centered about the way sentiment was being formed towards the project with passion among residents centered mainly on the fact that to many of them their land is an investment asset rather than simply property (Hubbuch 2021). Recently however coverage has shifted towards the way battle lines have been drawn between residents with regard to support or opposition to the construction. Farmers and landowners are taking extremely measured and thoughtful approaches towards dealing with the development some taking more that a year to consider and negotiate terms for land leases driven by more than their personal motives their status in the community is at stake, with the director of Wisconsin based SolarShare going as far as to say “He hears stories of

neighbors refusing to speak to or interact with other neighbors because of local disagreements" (Sunnucks 2023). This degree of discontentment is profound and even found among people who consider themselves favorable to clean energy can become disillusioned by developments and unsure about the impacts they will face. (Kuzman 2020). Through this journalism I modified my authorial voice to present characters who embody these conflicts. While it is not feasible to give each example from these pieces an entire testimonial in the confines of my work, I can inform my characters and their situations with this understanding of the way conflict manifests.

DERIVED FROM LONG FORM FICTION LITERATURE

At face value energy is expensive and for many people sufficient energy comes at the cost of something else, perhaps it is not making it to work one day or it might be not getting food on the table that night. Perhaps this is best exemplified by "The Road " by Cormac McCarthy which deals heavily with our choices and how people have to make choices even when they know them to be less than ideal for more than just themselves. An important distinction to make is the fat that these fiction works, despite being fiction, are undoubtedly social commentary about the real world. In a study of the growing equity implications of the adoption of clean energy it was noted that modern policies are creating" ...winners and losers not only across competing technologies' but also among rate payers, taxpayers, and other stakeholders" (Mormann 2019).
In summary the academic community has identified multitudes of methods to approach the idea of equity and policy implications

Additionally, the drafting and outlining process consisted of relating these academic sources with their artistic eco-fiction counterparts. Particularly "The Road" by Cormac McCarthy is very useful for exploring dialogue and relationships in the face of ecological disaster. In another vein "Salvage the Bones" by Jesmyn Ward follows a poor teenage girl living with her family in a predominately black Mississippi town in the path

of Hurricane Katrina explores themes of inequity and hints and some social and economic reasons one might have of being wary of policy, despite everything equal opportunity is something that is severely lacking in the world today. We should all be so privileged to have the resources and time to care about the environment but for many, there are more tangible things that many must concern themselves with.

Being a white male writer I feel obligated to take extra tact with the way I create characters. I want characters I create to feel authentic to an experience I am removed from. I grew up in an affluent suburb as such there is a degree of discomfort presenting stories particularly of rural and minority characters. For this reason I really appreciate the work of Jesmyn ward. The main character of Ward's book is Esch, a pregnant black teenager being raised in a family of brothers without her mother. Esch's family is caught in hurricane Katrina, and her circumstance drastically colors how she perceives her reality as well as how she thinks about the danger of the hurricane. Ward exemplifies one of the greatest lessons I have learned as a writer during my time at allegheny; you can write whatever you want so long as you are self aware. This allows writers to engage with rude, taboo or uncomfortable topics in a responsible way. I think this is best personified in the way Ward portrays the physical intimacy of young love, having healthy fantasy while yanking back into reality, "I loved his shoulders and his neck most of all. I want to open my mouth on his neck just once. He is the lightest thing in the clearing…But he looks at Randall, and he half grins" (Ward 2011). It is very responsible writing to not allow these children to become excessively sexual. Instead there is a realistic portrayal of the comforts and discomforts of young love. This work reminds me to be conscious of the way characters of certain identities will perceive the world and are perceived in the world. Being conscious of this promotes retention and relatability from readers, which has as discussed before is shown to promote positive attitudes towards environmental themes in literature (Schnieder-Mayerson et. al 2020). While performing this work to promote dynamic and multidimensional characters Ward as a warrior in her optimistic outlook she gives Esch and her family after all their trials and tribulations. The peace and safety Eschs family is given in the end in the wake of the hurricane is a real reminder of the peace we can find in the most dangerous and seemingly hopeless circumstances. In a tranquil moment Ward writes

> "We will sit until we are sleepy, and then we will remain until our legs hurt, until Junior falls asleep in Randall's arms, his weak neck lolling off Randall's elbow. Randall will watch Junior and Big Henry will watch me and I will watch Skeetah, and Skeetah will watch none of us" (Ward 2011).

From Cormac McCarthy I found an interesting way to allow characters to work through complex feelings and understandings they have about their circumstances. McCarthy tells his story through frequent conversations between a father and his son, they both work through the complexities of why they make the decisions they do. The son just wants to know "why" and the father is constantly searching for concrete rationale for his seemingly routine decisions. This often takes the form of dialogue in extremely short turns, often only a few words before a retort from the respondent, this style allows the reader to feel the turns and revelations of the speakers almost in real time. This is a really important technique for the confines of this project. For example,

> The boy didn't answer.
>
> That's the best deal you're going to get.
>
> Okay
>
> Okay means okay. It doesn't mean we negotiate another deal tomorrow.
>
> What's negotiate? (McCarthy 165 2006)

As a reader I feel the back and forth between these speakers with each landing a critical line that builds logically on each line before it. This form of dialogue represents an interesting way to present an interview situation that has both conflict and tension between two parties. Through this style dialogue grows on itself leading to visible growth of the relationship between the two parties by the culmination of the interview. As this story is told through the perspective of a journalist narrator including interviews allows their personality to show through the text.

Bad People Live In Hallmark Towns

There is something beautiful to be said for small town America, yet left to its own devices it may very well rot back into obscurity and the earth. Some have adapted to change well, growing from mule paths to highways. Others hide perpetual political gridlock behind festivals and craft stores.

LCD screens have the tendency to sear themselves into your retinas at about the 9 hour mark, but then again at nine hours chances are you have either earned a break or are hopelessly stuck. I've been hopelessly stuck for five years. I have been stuck covering bizzarro small town politics for too long.I jump around town to town never more than a couple months before finding a room the next one over,part of our big three year expose on the "Towns that Drive American Ingenuity". As per the email from my editor, I nail this one and I'll get my pick of Smart Cities to cover, New York, London… Amsterdam; real innovation. Tangible progress. Actual pinnacles of humanity. More than that, a chance to get an office; with a window! I can finally be done with top ramen financed by illustrious fluff pieces that could be easily covered by a second-rate freelancer. Part of me knows I should still be gracious that I'm not one of those second-rate freelancers anymore. The other half has an ego the size of Jupiter, so there's that. I just don't understand why anyone is interested in this place.It's hardly home to anyone notable, if the gates of hell opened here you might not even feel it two towns over.

As close as that all feels, I'm sitting on dilapidated couches tapping out inflated grandeur out about best in show hogs and first place cherry pies, praying for someone to sleep with a secretary or to slap the principal. Reality journalism, one hundred percent objective, one hundred percent fact, and about as useful as reality tv. I learned the hard way even if you get paid to cover politics, politics is only as interesting as the people it screws. So if you need to empathize with Ms. Johnson over her blue ribbon pie before you want her to keep her farm or write her and the book club off as some sleazy

ditzes so-be-it. I make them human, my articles get clicks, I get paid, and I get a ticket to Amsterdam.

My editor finally agreed this can be my last assignment in this Sleepy Hollow. Small caveat, I have the small task of making people care that small town USA doesn't want solar panels. No big deal, just make people care about country folks who don't want those delicious corn subsidies to go anywhere. I can see the title now, "you know those burlap sacks you go shopping with now? Come here where we make cake with crude oil instead of olive. Haha get fucked tree hugger". Crude paradigm but polite doesn't get clicks. At this point wine, cheese and caviar dreams are the only things I have to cling to as the days are slowly crossed out on the calendar.

Believe me I am chomping at the bit to finish this. I think if I stick myself here two more days than I have to I might build my own mid century ranch with the detached garage and bluestone patio. Ironic considering the hanging baskets, chalkboard easels, and shop windows drive me mad the second they go brown, chip, and go out of season. Maybe they grew on me, it's cute and quaint for about 7 weeks out of fifty-two.

These people don't want me to tell their story because if they aren't selling to schmucks the hick comes through strong, loud and bold. They have been abrasive and rude, like I would treat a Jehovah's witness at my doormat. I speculate the crassness originates from blind hope that someone is bound to admire their adherence to those picturesque brochures that litter the highway stops at the state border. I've made sure to pretend that I do. We get along now.

It is hard to stay objective when the only thing you get to cover is selfish obstructionists. It shouldn't be this draining; these are good people here. They want to work, build their lives and be left alone for the most part. Maybe that's why it's a fly over now. I can't quite fathom what industry could make its home here, the fields are still turning up slate two hundred and fourteen years later, the creek runs red in the spring still silted by condemned mines, and the highschool only graduated sixty-two students. Its not even that I get interviews with bad people, its bookstores and

waitresses not warlords and republicans. The worst part is the correct option is obvious to anyone who ever left Fucksville for so much as a day. Just take the money.

The editors have been hounding me for an update, difficult since they haven't decided how many words I'm getting in the Friday issue, or for that matter what section I am writing in. Last time I checked some of them were still worried an editorial would ruffle too many advertiser feathers. I settled on a brief half and half, half editorial, half responsible interview.

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I recently sat down for dinner with Katherine Diaz, COO of Venture Equities, to discuss H.R. 451 and its plans for a new Solar Energy plant in rural Western New York. While anything abutting Lake Erie may seem like inopportune weather for utility grade solar development, Venture Equities has experience with the lake effect precipitation, having operated a experimental facility along I-79 near Buffalo Airport.

Crucially, we discussed Venture Equities to break ground for this facility on what is currently privately held land in the town of Greenswalk. Venture Equities is currently lobbying the town and the state to seize the development rights through Eminent Domain. Diaz seemed quite receptive to concerns and objections raised by residents both those who have seen their land staked and painted as well as those raising empathetic objections. I was taken aback by how upfront she was acknowledging the intrusion the company was making into the community. While she undoubtedly speaks for the company line there is something comforting about her blunt honesty despite the callousness of their position.

And if they choose the editorial option,

First, it's free. Second the state is subsidizing the taxes and third, they could really use the money. We have learned that any argument other than you get rich doesn't do much to move people. It becomes frustrating watching the more things change the

more they stay the same. These people have a golden ticket, save money, make jobs, and give the kids a reason to stay. Seems like a no brainer no? And that is before we take into consideration the jobs and young adults we can keep in the community.

I'm certainly not winning Venture Equities any new fans with this one, I might even be taking a nice bite out of their PR budget. I get ahead of myself. H.R. 451 a town proposal to grant one hundred and fifty acres of development rights on land so flat its no wonder the people here think the earth is. “Grant " being a subjective word, most of it is contained in founder deeds, held now by a dozen or so families and various relatives. Rumor has it they were even offered their own appraisers and retention of the mineral rights. No confirmation of that as of now. A couple options of sources who may comment. I get why it’s a sore subject, you don’t usually see forceful acquisition by towns like these, it's usually states and cities for buried utilities or other public benefits. To be fair sometimes it's corrupt; almost impressive how many can cite you case numbers for that.

All the lawyers and appraisers I’ve spoken to where quite emphatic, eminent domain seizures usually get messy. Someone always feels they got force-fed the short end of a shit tipped stick. It’s hard to see who that would be here. A week ago when I got an off-the-record with the half of the board that doesn’t loathe me, apparently profit shares and resident oversight were being discussed. Take that with a grain of salt though, honestly the whole thing could have changed to digging a scale model of the Panama Canal and I not only wouldn’t know but I also wouldn’t care. At this point, I am just hoping they make a decision so I can write about it. I'm sure adding a couple dozen voices will really make the negotiations more concise. That usually works. Totally has worked at some point. Nothing ever went wrong from listening to everybody.

Tonight was the first town board meeting since the proposal had passed the committee and is now in discussion for amendment. Of course I had staked out a spot in the back row, far enough away to avoid eye contact, but not too far as to be unable to read scorns, acknowledgments, and grimaces. Gambling on this being a long one, I crammed some extra granola bars between some notepads. Coming to these meetings for a year and change I learned a couple things, one snacking is always a good idea, two

always argue even if you agree and three object to quite literally everything. Half my notes are doodles and chicken scratch, maybe out of two hours of meeting and comment I get twenty or so useful words. It makes for slow writing. There is a reason the only thing people know about this town in pie contests and hog shows. Because they don't do anything else. This argument has been going on through five contractors and two mayors. Hard to believe the offer is still being tabled. I am coming to believe they are afraid more than anything, nothing else is even plausible at this point. There is opportunity, change, and growth but comfort always wins.

The city council normally meets in the hall, a more grandiose affair, gilded fasces and solid oak desks to remind the people who really work for who. After a couple decades they don't even look out of place. Like a gold tabernacle in an earthen church; it doesn't really make sense but who can stomach the energy to care at this point. Fortunately for us they have been relegated to the high school. Pesky ordinances decree that all people should have the opportunity to give comments on the town's governance. Begrudgingly they traded their elevated balcony for a chipped composite folding table, their chairs for whatever the janitors could drag out of the basement. Pale hard plasticized folding chairs where a fair cry from the Herman Miller's honorable board members Mr. Distracted and Mrs. Clueless sat on. I heard leather is gentler on cashmere, though I really don't think anyone in this room is qualified to complain about a wrinkle or two. For such an opposed constituency, it's a shock all these board members run unopposed.

There is an old splintered podium sitting in the front left of the room, its edges have been slowly delaminating for the past several decades. No one has ever thought to replace it, or even submit the work order, it still works for the four times a year someone needs a political pulpit. "Needs" might be a stretch; it's always the same old objection, perfect to a point where it passes legal muster for a corporate form letter. Sitting almost a kitty corner towards the folding tables that will tonight serve as the council's pulpit, anyone speaking from there will have to strain their neck to address anyone but the yellowed exit sign in the far corner.

The back row is lightly populated with high schoolers just here for the extra credit, a few had crinkled notebooks balanced precariously across their laps. Too smart to not care, too dumb to realize no one else does. I can't help but smile seeing red is still the folder color code for social studies. I have to imagine that more than a handful of them are here for some form of extra credit. Civic engagement cannot possibly be what kids do for fun around here. The rest of the gym is a veritable who's who of what I have dubbed the lone stoplight mafia. A collection of Mothers, shopkeeps, farmers, and contractors, everyone that Hallmark is sure to cast one of in every movie. I recognize the couple sitting in the front row on the right side far away from the aisle. They frequent the diner where I have taken to as my lunch spot where I've worked my way around the menu twice at this point. In Front of me is a gaggle of moms who weren't able to convince their husbands to sit anywhere but their TV facing recliners tonight.

As the room fills up more and more the air gets unreasonably stale and sticky, near gluing two day old jeans to my legs. After taking careful note of the growing congregation I decided to take a brisk walk through the hall to stretch my legs. Noticing the sheriff has a couple of men in blazers clustered around him. Hushed voices and worried looks peak my interest. Putting on my concerned citizen facade "is everything alright sheriff?" The unmistakable wash of cotton over polyester amplifies and radiates from each man as they turn to face the curious outsider they recognize but cannot place.

Perhaps less eager to indulge me than desire to avoid dealing with me later the mayor nods him on,

Dismissively arrogant and with a wave of the hand "some kids set some fireworks in some conduit" turning towards his group and back to me, "nothing serious"'.

Willing to let this sit for just now "oh, well I am glad it's handled" fully intending to throw my tentacles into the mix.

It reminds me of a story my father used to tell me, seeing his classmates murdered over their protest to an oil pipe through their town. I keep a cutout from his journal in my wallet

> Bias be damned, I see the bodies, crumpled against their chains. In the absence of any blood or mangled limbs, it seems like a crowd crush. I know what my headline is going to be, “eco-terrorists”. I would still like someone to explain to me why anyone would be chaining themselves to train tracks and overpasses in opposition

He wrote in his college application, recalling what it was like seeing his mother negotiate with corporate lin walkers cutting pre-determined checks

> When the charming door to door corporate salesmen could get easements signed, they went to the state. They went to Albany with a list of properties they needed to cut through. New York law mandates Carbon Neutrality by 2035, it was hard for anyone to argue it wasn’t in the public's interest to subvert that self-imposed benchmark. Bureaucratic red tape wasn't just cut, it was unceremoniously slashed with a golden sword.

Walking back into the gym I wandered over to my favorite accomplice ,Linda the old town secretary who was easily convinced to show me her ledger with its chicken scratch record of who had registered to provide public comment tonight. I picked up several hospitality tips on my town hopping, one of those being first names still get you way too far with people who shouldn't like you. I trust Linda, between the church gossip and the town archives she's proven herself useful. There were some names I recognized from the roads and historical markers but most were new to me. It is curious to me so many people I have never heard of, especially considering how much I tend to be in the know of the going-ons around here mostly thanks to Linda. It’s a lot simpler when you remove the people from the equation. Records tell a better story than they can, by now I know to grab comments when I need them and no more.

The usual administrative jargon bubbles over the dull murmur of what I guess could be a small crowd. Minutes, budget, thank yous, and special acknowledgements nothing anyone needs or will miss. It's a bastardization of legalese that passes for this

room when said behind a full chest and robust syllable. Again, I use “crowd” relative to the size of the room in a place like this, otherwise the word would never be used.

The line behind the podium isn't sickly nor oppressive, it snakes and weaves loosely around the room slowly filtering past the microphone. most aren't worth noting or remembering. Some deserve a subtle ponder. One can only hear “poor me” so many times, someone just please offer something anyone will care about. Sure enough as the clock ticks past the line seemingly stagnates despite the constant flow of the one-hundred and eighty second hard limit. Hard being an operative word as there is only so much a gavel can do.

In my head, mocking the first couple speakers in lockstep word for word. Predictable as always, family has been here for generations, but the view from my porch, and my personal favorite, what does that mean for our robust economy (of dead end jobs). It is pathetic, maybe a sign I have been here too long. It seems the hours and hours of expert town halls debates have yet to sink in. However I will say the frustration building on some of the faces gives reason to hope. Although the misguided apathy yanks those away just as fast. I’ll let these people tell you how much they hate Katherine, you’ll blame her but not because I made you. Venture Equities might be your villain but you will hate this town nearly as much, but when this turns into five hundred thousand clicks, I'll be in Amsterdam.

Public comment on the 26th of April went on well past the budgeted two hours, with loud protest being recorded at each attempt to adjourn. Comment was registered from community members of every generation born here that is still kicking with objections being raised over environmental, economic and personal grounds. Resounding protest was levied at speakers regardless of their expressed position

By the time I flipped to the last page of my notepad and reached the bottom of a bag of pretzels the meeting had adjourned. I have gotten pretty good at timing them almost perfectly. A quiet shuffle of moms organizing playdates and dads pretending they remembered their daughters have a recital next wednesday almost makes me want to smile. “I’m ready to go” I had almost forgotten I had promised I would take Linda for

fish fry afterwards. She will probably try to pay again, a thank you for trying to bring her son back.

The following day was much like any other recent thursday. I wake up about at nine before whipping up some hurried eggs and toast with a few minutes allocated for a brief breakfast studying mainstreet out the bay window of my loft. More and more it's a ritual I look forward to rather than ignore. It's not a window anymore, it's actually a window. Back home I have a 4th floor apartment with a gorgeous view of a parking lot and a fairway. Believe it or not there isn't much going on either at 9AM on a weekday. Days like today are much less stressful, nothing on the list but get a couple thousand words done in the hope of gleaning a couple hundred good ones. Nothing much to do but my phone has reminders for about two dozen Be On The LookOut for various emails, mayoral, executive, editor, ect. People of varying degrees of important unimportance, or usefulness. Linda, Is useful enough to have earned a spot on my contacts list, Mr. Mayor on the other hand will handle it perfectly fine through professional channels. Or his secretary will at least.

Today however my morning toast is accompanied by warning bells of cherry pickers installing banners for the end-of-spring carnival. I will have to come back someday and figure out how this place can afford a carnival for each season but that's more of a Sunday fluff piece. Honestly, I will never write again if I can help it. Linda thinks it's funny to read some of my old articles, like in a proud grandmother kind of way which is quite strange considering we have only known each other for a couple months. Last night it was a wonderful "Top 10 Kimchi Restaurants in Rochester " after a brief lesson in the object horror of Kimchi she decided that I shouldn't have to take a taste test for work anymore.

Four months ago my commute would have consisted of ostensibly and offensively long traffic lights and concrete off ramps. Today a brisk rain or shine walk takes its place. Down past McArthur's Bookstore, cutting through Miller's feed store, and ignoring Polly's Pastries brings me to the surprisingly still standing original town hall. Red

sandstone blocks make up the ever weathering entry way. Almost poetic how the rounded edges are beaten into further and further submission by nothing more than gentle repeated strikes from perfectly unassuming natural forces.

I have taken to writing in the basement level of the town hall, if you spilled some rubbing alcohol in here it wouldn't be hard to mistake it for a doctor's office. The basement level of the town hall is famously unremarkable. Bland grey polypropylene carpet runs wall to wall, lightly broken up with temporary cubicle half walls and glossy rubber baseboard. The drop ceiling has been up long enough that the middle of each panel is severely sagging, some carry water stains, others are simply crusted with years of passive grime and dander. Linda has been slowly colonizing the five workstations that are abutted kitty corner from the outside stairwell. Pictures of her grandchildren, dogs, and cruises remind you that the sweet old public servant is still a human. Cruel how some people allow themselves to forget that.

Today she has pulled some old maps and title deeds, before failed track housing and condominiums subdivided family farms and Gentleman's agreement public access forests. For my purposes each tea stained page is nothing more than a primary source and hard proof of land transfers and subsequent valuations. Not for these people though, each one was a hard copied legacy. Linda would tell me who they were and when they left in between getting people their fishing licenses and construction permits. Some old plantations had weddings for 3 generations of the same family, the smiths had a private graveyard dating back to the 19th century, Culvers kept hogs on what is now the airport.

I have come to enjoy doing work down here, Linda was gracious enough to let me occupy a vacant desk on the public side of the office. It is a nice change of pace rather than spending every waking hour in that studio that was rented for me. Especially now, since I've been here long enough I am getting on a first name basis with enough people to where I actually get acknowledgements instead of the glares and hurried walking.

The chronic paperwork filers seem to have taken to me well at this point, I mostly stay out of the way. I have tried to not take up too much space, I'm perfectly happy with my

music and laptop typing away. I step out every now and again to make phone calls or chase down interviews or what not. Today it hit me but I hadn't realized how much I've diverted from my old practices. Locking myself in a dark windowless office for hours on end was a crutch to meet deadlines I guess.

In her hand was a well creased and yellowed title deed outlining land allocations in the then newly incorporated town land. One name stuck out to me, Otis Pillison, I can't put my finger on it. Sensing my confusion Linda aggressively taps my laptop screen, which at this point had a surveyors map of existing gas well locations as well as minimum spacing markers and proposed dig sites. At a second inspection the fourth parallel of the grid runs straight along route 47. That is the latest target of Venture equities solar pipe dream. The last land parcels they need finally claim the largest Solar farm in the country, top 5 in the world. Maiden names are confusing sometimes, the Pillison farm was Linda's birthright given up for a marriage certificate.

I'm not blind to the fact Linda is pushing her slant into my articles. I have to admit I do respect the loyalty she has to this place and the people. I can't imagine a place so self contained and so hopeless being worth lying or dying for. Admirably or perhaps annoyingly she has broken me down enough to agree to talk with her granddaughter. From what I have heard about Sarah from a self described "biased source" She was incredibly smart, actually finished her degree before moving back to raise her daughter, Linda's only great grandchild. The source was Linda by the way, about as unbiased as a grandma can be.

Sarah asked me to meet her at the main street diner, someplace I had been before. That's not to say it was something special or even noteworthy. A mom and pop train car that had been there since the fifties. Steak and eggs, a copious amount of sandwiches

She had to be at the diner when her daughter got off the bus. I've seen her shadowing her mother around town every now and again. Pigtails bound with teal pom-pom hair

ties bounced with levity everywhere she bounded, struggling to keep up with the adult strides. Cute little thing that was just a little bit too young to be home alone.

Linda helped me with all the logistical things, it's pretty impressive how intimately she is acquainted with everyone around here. What they like, who they don't like , and why they do. Everyone needs a Linda. Granted I was more worried about who was going to open their door for an interview than what kind of cookies everyone was going to offer me once I was there. I guess sometimes the best answer is soft eyes and a gentle smile.

The thing about interviews I have found is that you need to be wary of the ones who are just a little bit too excited to tell you everything. Those are the ones that have a hair too much embellishment. The only time I ever. I almost wonder if it's an act of desperation just to be grateful to have a chance to tell their story.

I have done interviews with quite the cast of people in the past, some of those that I've sat down with. Some remind a grandma who loves everyone but insists her favorite cashier at the grocery store is a "very nice negro woman".

It's about two-thirty when I round the corner to Mill street, about a seven-minute walk from the loft I have been renting across the town square. I think it used to be a psychologist, or a hypnotist I am not sure and it seemed like the landlady was confused at the difference between those two. Regardless, two o'clock is hardly a rush hour anywhere you go, a couple truckers take up stools and booths. Most of them are nursing what seems to be a third cup of coffee or some fountain drink concoction. Not so much as a head turns to acknowledge the obnoxiously high pitched ringing of the bell above the door as I enter. Which is good, I would have been embarrassed to walk into this place with a stitched briefcase pressed slacks.

A corner booth along the back wall kitty corner to the managers office affords some degree of privacy, catching the shadows of near two dozen angles light sources, anyone's eyes would be satisfyingly hidden. I have come to appreciate these dark little

corners around here. It feels, at least to me, that they hide my judgment or perhaps it's just making it harder to feel the passing glances and the lingering glares.

My dad always used to tell me if you needed a good meal that you were supposed to find a diner. “Never had a bad meal in a diner” was his exact wording. I guess that deserves some credibility, he did travel a lot. Although I'm not sure how many times you can go to a place before it ceases to be considered traveling. The regularity of his “travels” was near clockwork, quarterly for some, bi-yearly for others. He was a traveling medical physicist compliance with radiation levels in imaging equipment and what not. Not sure what the importance of compliance is though when your range is a very hard to miss plus or minus thirty-five percent. He spent most of his time in small underfunded hospitals, since the big ones had enough money to hire some PHd to run their monitoring in-house. Maybe that’s why he latched so hard on the whole small town romanticism, I remember he would come home from road trips talking about his favorite diner he hadn’t been to in 3 months or the new corner store that used to be a movie theater. When he retired his office became plastered with well-wishes photos of various groups of nurses who never left their hometown and doctors that bought the largest estate they could afford in the state. People he swore by every year.

I however to this point have not inherited such blind idealism. Whether that’s because I write about the real world and he lived in places where a murderer is given the same care as a baby girl with leukemia. I have given this place no such tolerance, or benefit of the doubt. However, right or wrong I hold no qualms about taking advantage of the deference and benefit this place has afforded me. An outsider, whole heartedly intending to give this place no such care at any turn.

I first noticed Sarah at a town hall a couple weeks ago. She spoke passionately and emphatically about the project. It was incredibly nuanced and in my opinion it seemed to be one of the few testimonies that actually got the board to hang on, even if for just a second. She spoke passionately about the radical local reorganization the project would bring. Professionally speaking it was a very impressive speech all things considered.

I knew from old highschool yearbooks in the library that she ended up attending Boston College, I don’t really understand what all came of that, and I get mostly cagey responses to that line of questioning. I don't plan on making much of a personal connection by the time I actually write my articles. There are plenty of smart people in places like this but the intelligence is rare enough it will be the only thing that gets read if you write it. It's nearly two-fifty by the time enough pie and coffee has been served that it's time to call for the day.

Collapsing on to the vinyl of the booth with an exasperated but reasonable and understandable deep exhale, pushing an entire day's stress out and upwards towards the ceiling. Not sure if it's out of empathy, shyness or curiosity but I let this moment linger over the table, just giving enough slack for her to take what she needs. I need her to remember she is doing me a favor, this shouldn't be stressful. Free and relaxed honesty gets me a lot further than polite boredom. Intentionally and obviously my phone begins an audio recording…

“Busy day?” I'm trying to feel out and establish a comfortable level of formality

A high pitcher “hmmpfh” accompanied by a slow blink and a long breath, a very informal conversation to say the least.

“I heard you were who I needed to talk to about the route 47 parcels” setting up the first of an insultingly long list of queries and curiosities.

“Linda?” I can gather that I wasn't supposed to hear everything I had been told

“Yes, Linda. Your grandmother right? She talks quite a bit about yall”

Are you acquainted?” as she looks past my eyes

“You could say that. She is very helpful with documents and lets me work in the office on days that don't start with a M or W. I think she's under the impression I am going to stop anything” Purposely leaving out the hand fighting over wednesday night fish dinner specials.

“That sounds about right, I guess that would make you the very nice city man”. The retort is neither accusatory or disarming

“I guess I can be, once I find my way back to one” Met with silence small talk had gotten boring

I have been studying Sarah so far, hopefully subtly or if she's too tired to care I could take that as well

“You speak very eloquently at the town halls, but you don't seem to fall neatly onto either side we having going at it”

“What side? The give me money and a job or the leave us alone doesn't seem like either has a winning argument”

Do you?

“Probably not. You’ve seen our T-shirts.

Queue my confused look ‘t-shirts? I don't follow”

“The blue ones, yellow lettering…? I’d imagine she's referring to the ladies with the bake sales and notepads that stake out almost every event nowadays.

“I guess I never noticed what people were wearing. Im trying to recall any of the town fall factors running colors but none really comes to mind

“Half of us think the buyouts are a sham, the other half want none of it, yet somehow there is a third half that conjured themselves a yay for jobs a nay for actually doing anything for those jobs”

“Sounds like a lot of people either intentionally confused or unintentionally uninformed”

With palpable ridicule, “curious isn't it. Everyone objects, to entirely different things but unified in their objection”

“Aren't you in that boat?”

Cocking her head and playing with a wrapped straw, “I could care less, but someone needs to be an articulated liaison”.

I notice Sarah has been increasingly enthralled with checking her phone, screen on intense study, screen off, repeatedly and aimlessly folding a napkin seemingly to calm herself.

“Is everything alright?”

Shrugging it off with a hint of condescension, “How are you going to write this?”

Taken aback, ‘Honestly”

With a gentle scoff “it's not that simple”

Sarah drones into an incredibly level headed one sided debate. She talks of the Johnsons and their gas wells, old man Kenny’s propane filling station. Apparently there are several gentlemen's agreements to build houses for some recently married sons and daughters across from the south hill, right where Venture wants to put a parking lot.

It's alarmingly human to get lost in time, I can't remember the last time I have actually been challenged conversationally by someone. I mean I enjoy my time with Linda and her cohorts but that’s more out of decency and entertainment rather than any tangible intellectual satisfaction. Finishing up and finally releasing what now was a tightly wound monkey's fist of napkin as a young girl bounds through the door clanging the bell that hangs admittedly way too low on the door frame. An adorable scan of the room like the world's cutest periscope, before continuing her bounding towards our corner booth. Backpack bigger than her torso nearly throws her into every corner she takes. With the silent joy of a mother Sarah closes her eyes and savors the shuffling and jostling. The first hint of a smiler creeps over her face before the little monster climbs up next to her practically clawing its way into her lap.

“Walk with me, we go past the billboards on the way home” undoubtedly referencing the large “coming soon" signs that had been plastered every 2 miles off the interstate.

Partially shocked by the invitation, my undoubtedly embarrassing shuffle to gather belongings is not enough to change her mind. “Alright,” not really expecting where this is coming from or going too

I remember once reading a theory about the perception of time, essentially the premise stated that each year we live feels shorter because it makes up a smaller percentage of our lives. Who woulda thought that would apply so depressingly to this 3 road excuse of a town. I notice that the walks to pick up a paper bound bundle of beef cuts are less of an eye twitching annoying compilation of overly friendly butchers and excessively adorned sidewalks and more thought inducing palate cleansers. Fully taking advantage of every last hour of surprisingly accommodating deadlines, it's disturbingly appealing to treat them more as dead-suggestions.

A less evolved professional would have slammed a couple hundred milligrams of caffeine and knocked out an interview column before two A.M. Perhaps more reasonably now, my articles are for people not subjects.

Many members of the town have publicly raised concern about many elements of the construction process, one of them Sarah Pillison insinuating the level of concern in private is disturbingly higher than the public face. Ms. Pillison has become somewhat of a face of local resistance, matching t-shirts and living room potlucks aside, the Boston College grad speaks for these people. Bravely articulating their economic, environmental, and personal concerns in both political and legal circles.

In Spite of what many would consider admirable leadership, Her activism has made her a target of what she suspects to be corporate funded private investigators. Heavily tinted cars at her child's school, her work, as well as their home. Venture Equities vehemently denies this accusation saying that they “aggressively and

wholeheartedly support and encourage healthy debate and public comment from communities"

I was volun-told that I should entertain the offer of a personal official tour of the site in its current state. Something suggests to me the PR heat got a little to how and this is their way of proving they are entirely above board. Not that I am looking forward to it but it is nice to get even a little bit of air away from the heart of the town. It is quite a ways off the main roads to get to the construction access roads for the current borders of the plant. The drive isn't anything particularly memorable, conservative ranches on dozens of acres turn into large tudors with private orchards the further you get from the inner housing tracks. Don't ask me what the purpose of having 5 acres is if you can see across the next twenty into another four backyards. It always struck me that after shelling out thousands to get foundations dug and poured in what used to be a soybean field, these people were content just to have a pretty house in the middle of nowhere. One could argue it's a beautiful festering blight.

You can see the fences and dust clouds for several miles out but as of now construction is strictly bounded to acreage privately purchased by venture enterprises. Temporary chain link panels run for miles, briefly interrupting shanty towns built from storage containers, offices and trailer bunkhouses. Needless to say, you would be forgiven if you didn't think it was the citadel of innovation it has been hailed as. Even from near a quarter mile away the first central tower of the facility menacingly abrupts what used to be rolling hills, now beaten and scraped into submission. It is strange the double layer fencing, almost like a mote. The inner perimeter being the court enforced boundary as to not encroach on the acreage currently being disputed.

Before I can get my keys out of the ignition I'm nearly entirely surrounded by suits. Looking at their faces it's clear my visit is neither welcome nor known. I flash my index finger through the window, gesturing "one second" before leaning over the center console to fiddle with the glove box. Since I have been here, if my face didn't suffice, a simple "I'm with *Traveled Economist"* has gotten me just about everywhere I was

supposed to be, or needed to be perks of. My credentials badge should be in here, I haven't needed to use it but I would like to think myself competent enough as a journalist that I wouldn't lose it. "Shit" I think to myself, getting a little more frantic as one of the suits begins to rap on the glass with his knuckles. Finally I get a grab of the pouch that's holding my owner's manual and subsequently registration, insurance and credential badge. I try not to think about what my father would say if he saw the state of disarray. Straightening back into the driver's seat I'm left sheepishly half smiling with one hand on the wheel and another death gripping my badge. Seemingly satisfied, the suit takes a step back, just enough to allow my door to open. Stepping out I am reminded that the smiles and cookies twelve minutes down the road are irreconcilable with corporate dogma.

I've heard through the grapevine that a lot of people have been iced out from comments and clarifications the further this project goes. Still, you have to admire the corporate willingness to stick your head in the sand and ignore the noise. Seems that every day now my email inbox is full of colleagues asking for connections and where they can go to get interviews. That part is the weird part, feeling like you are the "in person" if you told me a couple years ago that a second page bottom of the barrel assignment would be getting cover shot nods and poaching threats I would probably both said, please take it it's yours as well as no way people care.

With an agreement of nods from the suits, who I can only assume to be some form of security contractors, I'm allowed to take a step on to the worksite. Packed and cracked earth charading as a parking lot would forgive you for thinking there was any assumption of permanence around here.

Currently my editors approved an entire subsection on the expedited construction. Especially strange for the permits to have been distributed piecewise instead of once the entire land parcel had been escrowed and acquired.

“I have to say I was surprised by the invitation” I quipped with a jestful reference to Venture’s last press conference. Legally of course they maintained their entitled presumptions. However I have come to not expect too much emotional intelligence towards the court of public opinion.

Making her way down some hastily installed code compliant steps from the foreman's office the retort is an abrupt reality check. “off the record, damage control. Nothing more”.

A fresh bit of honesty is always welcome. “If you where that desperate for some good press you could have asked”

“If I asked you would have recused. We both know your subjectivity is objective”

I can't help but wince at that one. I am by no means Matt Taibbi but I'd like to think I have a reputation of at least competent integrity. Feigning humor, “Where would you like to start?” I'm willing to let her take the lead, maybe it plays into my fantasy of ending up face down with no teeth in a ditch for covering the wrong story, maybe it's simply I have no clue what I am looking at.

Silently extending her arm towards a small fleet of golf carts, a slight head nod nudges me towards the first one, passenger side obviously. No intention of letting me control where we go. Colloquially understanding tells me I am in for a somewhat sanitized tour of whatever they want me to see. Likely their plan is to give me enough information that it would be a waste to look and write about anything I don't see.

We start down the dirt road, briefly flanked by piles of conduit, sediments, and stacks of cable spools. Not much effort has gone into hiding the actual efforts, regardless of the official status of the site. As of today that reads: Permitting and Review. Lines of utility flags and surveyor markings beg to differ.

“I thought the injunction stopped the construction” loud enough to not be mistaken over the crackle of tires on gravel. My spiral pocket notebook flipped back to last week confirming the date of the issuance.

“Construction, yes. Yet we are well within our rights to continue staging operations”

Woefully inadequate brakes slide us to a stop at a cross shaped concrete foundation. What I can only assume is some form of maintenance or operational building, we are far enough away from any established facility that logistically onsight equipment storage would be expected if not required.

Hoping for a telling inflection, “Isn’t it a little presumptuous to be laying foundations for arrays you don't have land rights for yet” as I gesture towards several concrete footings and empty forms that march exceedingly towards the site fencing.

It clearly an affront to at least some degrees of decency. I know better than to try an snap any photographs, best I can hope for is a timely update to google earth and maybe and expert comment, but for now

Touring the site with Katherine (as she prefers to go by) it was clear that despite legal hurdles and restraining orders construction at the central site is continuing as much as it can without running afoul some civil penalties. In its entirety the site is marked into modular zones, central hubs servicing two to four arrays, with the foundations for some of these poured despite the distinct injunction against the development rights of the entire project footprint

One thing is for certain, the wheels of capitalism have been set in motion and they have their treads trained on any land deemed suitable and necessary. At this moment that land is titled to ancestral farms and historical notoriety. Yet this has not stopped the buzz saw coming for this town and shows no sign of offering much resistance.

l, more shocked that they managed to alter the approval without so much as a dulled whisper making it not even to me but anyone really. For the past 2 years every development had been targeted with sprawling Panel arrays. Hence the land acquisitions and the constant temporary restraining orders against seemingly every

party in the valley. More shocking perhaps is that geographically speaking this array would most likely service the north side arrays, the ones front and center of the row bordering route 47. Last time I checked, the same array Sarah managed to secure an injunction against. With her stone face and eyes trained solely on the road it was not clear to me whether to what degree I was supposed to ignore what I saw and what was a test of my discretion.

This morning the sun betrays the weight of the day, bathing an entire county in surprisingly comfortable warmth. There is a palpable disconnect between the sky and the people. I am nearly being choked by a starched collar properly cinched tie, in the back in the county courthouse, a stuffy overly pagented stained oak grand room A stark contrast to the obnoxiously hot high school gym this lawsuit was served in. Something fitting it gets batted down in gradious fashion, Marie Antoniette would be proud. Most of the gallery had repurposed their sunday best, could be out of proper deference or just a desperate cry to be heard. Some of the residents had swapped their orange T-shirts for some matching lapel pins. Ironic solidarity, all things considered. With a packed gallery of a hundred and twenty or so spectators, Judge Jodi Reese considered final statements from both parties. Seemingly ready to render her decision today appears to be more of a formality than anything impactful.

The scene in the courtroom was something out of a movie. Counsel for Venture Equities being described as unmoved and stone faced. Meanwhile many residents considered themselves worried and frightened yet optimistic of the impending decision. Members of the local group "Our Land Our Choice" traded in their slogan clad T-shirts for matching lapel pins that depict a simple orange circle, a show of solidarity and not an endorsement of any specific opposition

I am stuck awkwardly half perched against the rear wall to the left of the double doors of the public entrance. Stuffed into a box with a gaggle of reporters and journalists clearly segregated into the "has no horse in this race" section of Judge Jodi Reese's courtroom. Not so subtly pacing the room are an excessive number of bailiffs I don't

know out of ego fueled paranoia or simply professional propriety. Something about it just feels wrong, like they are expecting a coup from some shopkeepers and highschoolers. I am puzzled by the way the town has split among the sides of the courtroom, Linda is handing out butterscotch to the defendants, but I can see her sure to save one for Sarah when she is done organizing the plaintiffs. It's quite comical when you know that they took the same car to get here.

The past four years an entire town has been bound by aggressive and occasionally offensive litigation. On May 5th, 2024 Judge Jodi Reese Rendered her final decision in the matter of the seizure of not just development rights but the title deeds through aggressive eminent domain. Siding with the…

There is a tangible release in the air as she reads aloud her verdict. Linda is a few rows in front and to the right of me, gently rocking alternating laughs and tears as she clutches a white handkerchief dabbing tears of unknown origin. She once told me how much her son hated his management job in the city five exits down the highway. Empathetic embraces break out on one side o the courtroom, while huddles and dull murmurs break out on the other

One thing has been made clear by the stoic residents, they welcome a seat at the table and are more than willing to hear anyone out. All they have asked is the same in turn. For now checks will be cut and construction is going to resume.

Sarah is methodically filing legal pads and scattered papers into accordion folders and briefcases, without so much as a flicker of regret or doubt on her face. There is not much I can do while keeping objectivity. I am so close to this deadline, and my deadline gets me to Amsterdam.

With the verdict having been delivered my assignment is done, I can finish the rest of this article on the flight back to the office. I'm not in any particular rush, the magazine will send movers to pack up the apartment and send it to the storage unit I gave them.

Sarah and Linda speak for most of the town. I'll call it a pyrrhic victory for the both of them.

At the end of the day the only thing Linda wanted was for her son to have a reason to call this place home again, maybe we judge her too harshly for how utterly simple and human her thinking is. The self described level headed Sarah truly lives up to that. The hours I sat with her she helped anyone and everyone with their objections, filings, and requests. Never did I see her align overtly with anyone, just quiet support

Within an hour of sending the transcripts and drafts to the editors I have a plane ticket and a hotel reservation in my inbox. I can't stop reading the final line above my boss's signature "congrats on the verdict" He attached the dossier for Nuon/Vattenfall. I guess its time to break some of these roots off and grab a dutch dictionary, after all you need to be able to understand what people say to feign objectivity at their absurdity.

Measure of Success

The single strongest guiding principle for the creation of this work was how I can effectively convey ideas of intersectionality of energy policy and socioeconomic complexity. I drew heavily on the stylistic command of McCarthy and Ward for mainly the purposes of dialogue as well as reasoning. For example what I really admire about the work of Cormac McCarthy is the way he creates two characters who have a distinct power dynamic yet both are presented as reliably and responsibly perceptive of their reality. This is done through a father and son relationship that is demonstrated through thoughtful conversational dialogue.

Similarity I thought about why I was so drawn to Esch, Jesmyn Ward's main character in *Salvage the bones*. I thought deeply about why Esch was so subtly relatable despite the chaos that is introduced by the vehicle of the story being surviving a natural disaster. I came down to the fact that it was Ward's subtle inclusions of a common life experience or interest into the foundation of the character. Namely, Ward gives Esch a fascination with Greco-Roman mythology; for example "when Meada falls in love with Jason, it grabs me by my throat. I can see her" (Ward 38). Esch grows through and survives her confusing and ultimately very human experience through her perceptiveness, demonstrated by her careful observation. This technique was used frequently throughout the exposition phase of the novel. It comes into play whenever Esh is showed to be

Salvage The Bones is very much a story of family. Ward achieves this by mirroring Esch's brothers and father with a dog and her puppies. Their misbehavior and deaths of the puppies serves to provide tension and conflict between Esch's family. My fiction takes this approach to family and employs multiple generations together each with different perceptions and paradigms. Neither Linda, Sarah or her daughter have overlap in why they have a stake in the lawsuit against Venture Equities; this adds depth and body to the story and demonstrates just how complex this issue is.

In my attempt to replicate this technique in the aggregate I employed the character of Sarah and developed a relationship between her and Linda. While Linda serves to allow for the perceptive innocence that Cormac McCarthy employs Sarah is much more robust in her understanding yet takes a more passive role to allow for their character to be seen and developed through how they interact with their world. In the case of “Bad People Live in Hallmark Towns” this is Sarah's seemingly one horse race to represent her coalition of residents. For example in their interview Sarah is very point blank with the narrator, I gave her a voice of neutrality but not quite apathy. In this way Sarah is very much Esch-esque in that her personal constitution speaks more for her character rather than any specific goals or desires. This has the effect of creating a relatable character to help the reader move through the story.

Circling back towards what I took from the McCarthy novel, mainly I drew inspiration for the dialogue. As I mentioned before I admired how McCarthy created a deep aura of real caring and love between the father and his son. The father is conscious of his words to articulate a function of their reality and the son provides very little pushback because he has real tangible trust in his father to lead him. I tried to replicate this through the interactions between Linda and the narrator. I made the intentional choice to abstract that relationship by switching the way age intersects with the roles of the characters and having this older conventionally wise character be entirely trusting of a person with potentially unfair ulterior motives.

Furthermore in measuring the success of this body of work as a scientifically sound understanding of both the socioeconomic and political realities of the clean energy transition. The portaryl of corporate attitudes regarding the cultivation of a benevolent image that resonates with those outside directly affected areas represents the commonplace idea in environmental fiction of the real perception of externalities and public opinion. The opposition of the town's residents is quite varied as Sarah is mentioned to merely articulate for a conglomerate of various ideas. Through this Sarah embodies the effect of protest where regardless of personal stake simply showing up to amplify affected voices at the very least will show solidarity and potentially can force change.

The methodology of presenting a story that is first and foremost interesting and appealing to the reader while simultaneously being soundly based in the reality that is presented in academic understanding.
As I discussed in the introduction of this work of fiction I aimed to tell this story through my characters, with each of them representing a way that this type of development and proceedings can affect people and their community. Each of my characters represents elements of both the reality of energy developments as well as lessons I took from Cormac McCarthy and Jesmyn ward respectively. Linda is what many of those looking in see when they look at poor rural communities, friendly naivety. She takes the relationship dynamics McCarthy employs between the father and son and flips the age and authority to provide a refreshing take on a conventional dynamic. In addition to this Linda is what some would call a “one issue voter” she is very enthralled by the economic opportunity that the development by venture equities would bring to her community. She is interested in the economic benefits in the form of jobs, hoping that it will encourage her son to move back to his home town and find gainful employment. Beyond how her character and interactions are influenced by McCarthy Linda presents the functionality presented by these energy developments. Linda engages heavily with academic ideals best summarized in various risk assessments,”Energy projects have an important role in offering communities a route for generating income that can sustain local services and facilities, while also making a contribution to carbon reduction targets and energy supply security” (Adams Bell 2014). Linda engages heavily with the narrator in both personal and professional capacities

I employ the character of Sarah on the other hand to provide a nuanced look into these small communities themselves. Sarah is explicitly entered into this fiction as a single mother picking up shifts at the local diner despite her college degree. Implicitly Sarah is everything these communities have to lose and stand to gain. Her law degree allows her to aid these residents in an ultimately futile attempt to stall, prevent, or delay the granting of development rights through eminent domain. She is never out to gain for herself only to amplify and give a voice to this community. Which as our narrator finds

out is not always black and white obstructionists. Sarah challenges the notion that opposition to clean energy progress is rooted in ignorance or misunderstanding. The way to measure Sarah's success as a character is how she embodies the idea of reflecting reality as it is on the ground, and not sensationalizing real experiences of people. While writing the Character of Sarah I kept important inclusions"The energy burden metric targets households who limit other necessities to meet energy needs but misses out on those who limit energy spending to meet other needs" (Cong 2021).

In my fiction I weave in blocks of italicized text to illustrate the progress the narrator makes on their assignment, while also allowing me to write in a style that feels out of place in fiction. It is a more professional style that gives the self censored opinions of the narrator. Through this I found a way to point blank say what I wanted my readers to think about. For example in writing about their interview with Sarah I have my narrator write, "Bravely articulating their economic, environmental, and personal concerns in both political and legal circles" admittedly blunt Sarah has given both the narrator and the reader a point of consideration for her position.

This narrator is the pure academic unwilling and unable to homologate what she has seen and learned from her assignments and interviews with her view of the world. Strictly transactional, everything is good, bad or a means to an end. My narrator is intentionally abrasive, existing as that jarring criticism of the failings of statistics and academics despite her task of bringing humanity out of this community through her journalism. In no wasted words the narrator embodies the need for journalism, and specific, locally based journalism at that. Her journey brings readers into a small part of this community where they feel not horror or enthusiasm but understandable apprehension.

These characters build off their relationships with each other in an organic way that represents more than the tangible facts of which this fiction is founded upon. Those facts are expressed through the depiction of corporate PR as well as legal proceedings regarding eminent domain. The discussion of eminent domain represents the multiple stages that such an undertaking must go through before reaching an operational or

completed state. Much like as was demonstrated by the previously discussed journalism, the fear of eminent domain is not the only fear people have, fears about economy and local culture inform the way the residents experience the conflict.

In conclusion the methods of character development represent a unique combination of academic work alongside the intrapersonal aspects of energy development and eminent domain often found and internalized in journalism. The characters of Linda and Sarah act as true surrogates for readers in their journey through my fiction. Readers are challenged to analyze their preconceptions and judge the narrator's thoughts and actions. Intentionally abrasive the narrator guides readers to empathetic considerations. My fiction is robustly grounded in reality in all definitions of the word. What is presented in “Bad People Live in Hallmark Towns” has all happened in part to various communities around the world bringing benefits and consequences that deserve thoughtful consideration and evaluation.

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