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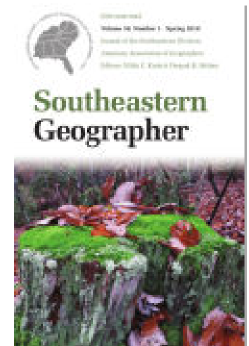

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"You're out of your place": Black Mobility on Tybee Island, Georgia from Civil Rights to Orange Crush

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"Wade in the water
Wade in the water, children,
Wade in the water
God's a-going to trouble the water."
African-American Spiritual

Tybee Island, Georgia has a problematic racial history. During the Jim Crow era, the popular beach town was segregated and off-limits to Savannah's majority African American population. More recently, Tybee officials have actively worked to end Orange Crush, an annual spring beach bash attended mostly by students from Historically Black Colleges and Universities from within the region. Partygoers and promoters of Orange Crush have engaged in ongoing clashes with residents and Tybee officials for nearly 30 years, charging them with racial discrimination and profiling. Residents express frustration with traffic, trash, crime, and noise and have put forth measures that seek to put an end to the annual event. Utilizing archival research, semi-structured interviews, and participant observation, this study will situate Orange Crush within a larger framework centered on tourism, mobilities, and black sense of place. In this piece, we will examine historic and present-day efforts to control the mobile black body through policing and measures put forth by Tybee Island to end the event. Finally, we will consider how the 30-year story of Orange Crush is part of the geography and sense of place of many African Americans in the region, despite actions by Tybee Island to limit access.

Tybee Island, Georgia tiene una historia racial problemática. Durante la era Jim Crow, el reconocido pueblo de playa fue segregado y puesto fuera del alcance de la población afro-americana de Savannah. Una serie de protestas de vadeo a principios de los años 60 trataron poner a fin la política de segregación de la playa. En los últimos años, las oficiales de Tybee han trabajado activamente para terminar con Orange Crush, una fiesta anual de la playa asistido principalmente de los estudiantes de las facultades y universidades históricamente negras de la región. Los fiesteros y promotores de Orange Crush han participado en peleas con residentes y oficiales de Tybee por casi 30 años, acusándolos por discriminación racial. Los residentes expresan su frustración con el tráfico, la basura, el crimen y el ruido y han puesto medidas para terminar con el evento anual. Usando una investigación de archivos, entrevistas semiestructuradas y observación del participante, este estudio situará Orange Crush dentro de un esquema más amplio centrado en el turismo, las movilidades y un sentido de lugar negro. En este artículo, examinaremos los esfuerzos históricos y

actuales para controlar el cuerpo negro móvil por la vigilancia y las medidas avanzadas por Tybee Island para terminar con el evento. También consideraremos las maneras en que Orange Crush sigue a pesar de estas tácticas racistas. Como último, consideraremos como la historia de 30 años de Orange Crush forma parte de la geografía y sentido de lugar de muchos afroamericanos de la región a pesar de los esfuerzos de Tybee Island para limitar su acceso al mismo.

KEYWORDS: black geographies, mobilities, sense of place, tourism

PALABRAS CLAVE: geografías negras, derechos civiles, movilidades, racismo, resistencia, sentido de lugar, Turismo

INTRODUCTION

In 1960, 11 African Americans led by Morehouse College student Amos C. Brown piled into cars in Savannah and set out on a dangerous and daring mission to "wade in the water" (the very song they sang as they made the trip) in an effort to desegregate Savannah Beach located on Tybee Island, Georgia (Brown 2016). Nearly 60 years later, Tybee Island continues to be a site of racial struggle as black college students assert their right to access the public beach for their annual Orange Crush Beach Bash attended mostly by students of Historically Black Colleges and Universities. The nearly 30-year story of Orange Crush, however, is part of a longer-term record of white supremacy on Tybee Island, Georgia, an island that has a deeply-rooted racist history and continues to be a site of struggle as people of color seek to access the beach.

The terrain of large spring break events has gone largely unexamined in tourism literature and more specifically the discipline of geography. Geographers have yet to fully analyze the racial politics of historic leisure and travel in the South, where these contested mobilities continue to inform and guide travel today (Carter 2008). The purpose of our paper is to examine the historic and present-day racialization over beach access and how the mobile black body continues to be seen as a threat on Tybee Island. But more importantly, we want to draw attention to the everyday forms of African American resistance as seen through antiracism mobility that has also resulted in a deep sense of place despite efforts by Tybee authorities to end Orange Crush.

In order to do this, we will first describe our methods, then turn to our guiding theoretical framework centered on tourism, black geographies, and mobility. After a brief history of the development of Tybee Island as a racialized space, the substance of this piece will shift to the case study of Orange Crush, with a greater exploration of three themes: public space, policing, and resistance/black sense of place. In the conclusion, we will discuss the ways this case study diverges from the literature on black travel patterns and how Orange Crush is a form of everyday resistance against larger efforts to impede black mobility and access to space.

METHODS

The exploration of Tybee's disturbing racial history first began as an undergraduate research project in an upper-level Tourism Geographies course at Georgia Southern University, formerly Armstrong State University, with the recommendation of the course professor (second author). Following the conclusion of the semester,

both professor and student decided to move forward together to further explore the topic in greater detail. In order to do this, we incorporated a multi-method approach, relying largely on newspaper archives, online media, and semi-structured interviews (Crang and Cook 2007). In addition, the first author utilized participant observation focused on Orange Crush 2016 (Watson and Till 2010). We will draw upon those observations and experiences throughout the piece.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In light of the mobilities turn (Cresswell 2006), recent work in geography has begun to engage with historic and present-day racialized mobilities (Cresswell 2008, Inwood et al. 2015). Alderman and Inwood write,

> Access to mobility and its accompanying opportunities is not socially neutral but historically embedded within the unequal distribution of rights and racialized hierarchies of power, including white supremacy (Seiler 2007). In other words, movement in the United States is always geographical and is always racialized (2016, p. 5–6).

Tourism scholars have also shown how African American travel patterns (mobility) diverge from other racial groups and are shaped by the legacy of segregation and racism (Philipp 1994). [1] During Jim Crow, for example, the control over the movement of black bodies rested on an open system of spatial control (Lipsitz 2007; Alderman and Inwood 2016). The *Negro Motorist Green Book* (published annually from 1936–1965) served as a guide for middle class African American travelers seeking to avoid discrimination by identifying welcoming accommodations that would serve blacks. The book stands as a testament of modes of resistance during this time period (Alderman and Inwood 2014). Some scholars even argue this legacy of racism continues to shape travel patterns today. African Americans tend to visit destinations specific to African-American heritage, travel shorter distances within larger groups, and prefer structured and organized travel patterns. African American travel patterns can be conceived as a defense mechanism against potential racial discrimination (Philipp 1994; Carter 2008).

In a special issue in the *Southeastern Geographer* devoted to black geographies, Adam Bledsoe, Latoya Eaves, and Brian Williams argue that particularly in the South where racism has prevailed, the production of southern spaces is created by "Black survival and resistance" (2017, p. 7). Katherine McKittrick argues for a greater consideration of a black sense of place and the forms of everyday resistance to white supremacy. She writes, "A black sense of place can also be understood alongside Massey's (1994, p.149) 'sense of place'… This point concerns not merely the issue of who moves and who doesn't… it is also about power in relation to the flows and movement. Different social groups have distinct relationships to this anyway differentiated movement: some people are more in charge of it than others; some initiate flows and movement, others don't" (2011, p 949).

Building on this work, we turn again to the mobilities research of Derek H. Alderman and Joshua Inwood whose case study on African American race car driver Wendell Scott highlight how mobility and movement is a central form of resistance

(2016). At the heart of their mobility work is an understanding of *black mobility* and *antiracism mobility*. Black mobility, in their study, "refers to the range of movement-controlling practices that are reflected in the production of white supremacy" and antiracism mobility "refers to the meaningful countermobilities that subvert racism and that have long served as an important political organizing strategy for African Americans" (p 602). Focusing on Scott, a figure not typically associated with the Civil Rights movement, they show how a rereading of his role in a white dominated sport is an important step to understanding more nuanced struggles for spatial mobility. Scott's efforts to compete against white drivers is evidence of the everyday spatial struggles of African Americans.

Utilizing the framework of black mobility, antiracism mobility (Alderman and Inwood 2016: 602), and black sense of place, this research will analyze the historic and present-day struggles for people of color to access the beach on Tybee Island. This research is part of a larger call by geographers who argue for the need to "recover and explore aspects of black working-class life and politics that have been relegated to the margins" (Kelley 1996, p. 4; McKittrick 2011; Alderman and Inwood 2016). In the next section, we will briefly explore Tybee Island's racialized history.

HISTORICAL GEOGRAPHY OF BLACK MOBILITY ON TYBEE ISLAND

Tybee is a barrier island off the coast of Georgia that lies at the mouth of the Savannah River. Historically, it was an early colonial borderland, serving as a strategic location between Spanish and British America (Piechocinski 2003). Unlike other colonies, slavery was initially banned with the founding of the Georgia colony in 1732. This decision was later reversed and two decades later in 1768, Tybee became a quarantine station for enslaved Africans and other immigrants. A Georgia historic marker on Hwy 80 reads, "104 acres of Tybee Island was purchased from Josiah Tattnall for a quarantine station starting in 1768 for enslaved African and other immigrants, before being dispersed across the New Colonies. The building was situated on the western most tip of Tybee at the mouth of what soon became known as Lazaretto Creek" (GHM 025-64 1958). By 1785, the quarantine station had fallen into disrepair and a new one was constructed on Cockspur Island (location of Ft. Pulaski).

In the 1800s, Tybee fell in line with the larger trends in U.S. tourism at the time (Nelson 2017) and developed its economy to serve middle-class Southerners as a seaside resort to help combat asthma, allergies and other ailments. However, it was not until 1887 when the Savannah-Tybee Railroad (Figure 1) was completed that the infrastructure for tourism developed, and the 1923 construction of Tybee Road provided even greater access for tourists traveling by automobile (Ciucevich 2005). But not everyone was welcome to swim in Tybee's waters. A 1930 brochure serves as a reminder of the racialization of Tybee Island:

> Two million *white population* can reach Savannah Beach[2] by automobile in far less time and with far greater comfort than a few thousand could not many years ago. To those who are

Figure 1. Advertisement for train fare to Tybee Island. Source : Tybee Island Historical Society

> not automobile owners exceptional railway facilities, with low summer excursion rates, offer opportunity to visit this resort, either for single day trips or week-end visits, or for more prolonged enjoyment of its unceasing pleasures. (Ciucevich 2005, p 110, italics ours)

While Savannah and more expansively the Southeast's white population could swim in Tybee's waters and stay on its shores, Savannah's African American families were prohibited from accessing the beach and had to travel the greater distance to Hilton Head Island for a beach day (Kahrl 2012). The region, outside of Tybee, is generally an anomaly in terms of the larger trend of socioenvironmental dispossession and exclusion of African Americans from many beaches during the 20th century because of its unique history (Kahrl 2012). The surrounding islands in Georgia and South Carolina were historically home to the Gullah/Geechee[3] culture, the descendants of enslaved Africans, who to this day share a deep sense of place for the sea islands. This culture is increasingly under threat as their ancestral lands on coastal

Figure 2. The first wade-in on Savannah Beach (Tybee Island) took place in the summer of 1960. Source: with permission of the Don Teuton Collection, United Press International Telephoto

islands face increasing property values as a result of tourism and land developments on the barrier islands (Faulkenberry et al. 2000). Unlike nearby barrier islands, "the beach on Tybee Island was a pleasure place for white folk, not for black. It was understood. Any black on the beach was on the job, working for clubs and hotels" (Stifter 2001). Musicians of color, however, were able to temporarily overcome Tybee's racial barriers with notable performances at the Tybrisa by Louis Armstrong and Cab Calloway. Some were even bands in residence during this period (Ciucevich 2005).

At the height of the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s, activists organized a successful economic boycott in neighboring Savannah (18 miles from Tybee Island and also in Chatham County) that lasted from March 1960 to 1961 (Tuck 2001). Because of this boycott, Savannah was one of the first cities in the state to desegregate public lunch counters (Tuck 2001). Inspired by the lunch counter sit-ins, activists led a series of wade-ins in 1960, which began in Biloxi, in an effort desegregate public beaches (Butler 2002). Inspired by these events, Amos C. Brown and 10 others led a wade-in on Tybee Island on August 17, 1960 (See Figure 2). Brown reflected in an interview conducted by the second author at his San Francisco church his belief that the beach wade-in pushed a different kind of boundary in the Civil Rights movement that was in many ways more intimate then simply sitting at a lunch counter:

> And particularly for the males to be around, be in the presence of the white woman on the beach that was suicidal. Because at the bottom of this thing of race has always been the issue of sex. So even when we just reflect and think about what we did [laughs] it was like taking your life in your own hands. (Brown 2016)

Figure 3. A lifeguard tries to remove black beachgoers during the wade-in of 1963 at Savannah Beach. Source: with permission of the Don Teuton Collection, United Press International Telephoto

Brown recalled interacting with the stunned white beach goers who "hurled racial epithets and vulgar language. Used the "N" word. 'You're out of your place.' And of course we ignored them" (Brown 2016). After the police arrived, the swimmers were arrested and taken to jail, charged with disrobing in public.[4]

In 1963, Savannah's NAACP staged another wade-in on July 15 that led to the arrest of six African Americans (See Figures 3 and 4). This same summer, Tybee's prison camp reopened to house African Americans participating in demonstrations in Savannah, echoing an earlier era when Tybee confined enslaved Africans. "About two weeks ago the camp was cleaned up and prepared for possible use during racial demonstrations" (*Savannah Morning News* 1963, p C1). Tybee was eventually desegregated the following year in 1964 without much fanfare (Davis 1998). Tuck writes, "In the end, it took the fear of potentially explosive conflicts in the summer of 1963 as a climax to the three years of protest to force white community leaders to the negotiating table" (Tuck 2001, p 132). Savannah desegregated eight months ahead of the national Civil Rights Act. When the 1964 Civil Rights Act[5] eventually passed, activists tested the motels along the strip and were "warmly" received (Davis 1998, p 187).

Tybee's reputation as a popular tourist destination was already losing strength by the time the beach was desegregated in 1964. The Tybrisa property, the centerpiece of resort Tybee, sat vacant from 1963-1967 (Ciucevich 2004).

> The destruction of the Tybrisa and the failure to redevelop the site during the decades that followed left Savannah Beach without a major resort attraction. As a result, Tybee no longer

Figure 4. Angry white beachgoers jeer and curse black swimmers who were later arrested during the 1963 wade-in. Source: with permission of the Don Teuton Collection, United Press International Telephoto

> attracted the throngs of out-of-town visitors it had during its hey day. Savannah Beach began a gradual, decades-long decline into a sleepy little beach town, largely overlooked as a regional seaside resort destination. (Ciucevich 2004, p 131)

By the 1980s and early 1990s, Tybee had a reputation as a rundown, backwater beach destination, with such nicknames as Mayberry on Acid, Truck Stop by the Sea, and Redneck Riviera. Tybee's fortunes changed, however, when Atlanta was selected to host the 1996 Summer Olympics and the island "was rediscovered" (Ciucevich 2004, p 134). This spurred the Chatham County Board of Commissioners to construct a new pier, which was completed in the spring of 1996 in preparation for the thousands of visitors that would travel to Savannah and the surrounding area.[6] More recently, there have been renewed efforts in preservation on Tybee, which currently has three National Register Historic Districts. A 2015 report from the Historic Savannah Foundation boasts, "The year round citizens of Tybee are clearly committed to maintaining the unique character of the Island" (p 53). Given Tybee's previous nickname of "Mayberry on Acid" and that the fictional Mayberry was a utopian paradise for white America, this supposed "unique character" has come through the historical and ongoing exclusion of African Americans (Alderman, Moreau, and Benjamin 2012). This brief historical geography of Tybee

Island illustrates a problematic racialized history that serves as a foundation for understanding the present-day conflict over Orange Crush.

ORANGE CRUSH

In the decades following Tybee's decline as a tourist destination, Orange Crush made its formal debut in 1988 as a beach bash for Savannah State University students celebrating the end of the school year (*Savannah Morning News* 2001).[7] In its early years, Orange Crush attracted a few hundred college students whereas more recently it draws in the several thousands. When the event was sponsored by Savannah State Student Government Association, it featured a Mr. and Mrs. Orange Crush swimsuit competition voted on by students, a volleyball competition, and music on the beach (Graham 1991). More recently, Orange Crush is a word of mouth event (fueled through social media) attended by mostly black college students from around the Southeast. Fliers and event websites promote parties at clubs in the area that are held Thursday, Friday, and Saturday nights. Saturday is the official beach bash on Tybee island, which has included past appearances by Kash Doll and Black Chyna, car and bike shows, and DJs equipped with generators for a dance party on the beach.

Savannah State University withdrew its support after the 1991 Orange Crush witnessed a dozen arrests, a stabbing, and a drowning (*Savannah Morning News* 2001). At the time, acting Savannah State University president Annette K. Brock wrote a letter to the media declaring Savannah State's retraction of formal sponsorship of the event. She wrote, "Even though the students of Savannah State College were responsible for cleaning the property on the beach, having this activity is a big responsibility" (Williams 1992, p 5). Despite early and ongoing setbacks, Orange Crush continued to grow and now attracts students largely from Historically Black Colleges and Universities within the Southeastern United States.

Since the early 1990s, Tybee Officials have explored measures that would put an end to the event. Tensions over Orange Crush center on Tybee residents' complaints over an increase in crime, parking, and beach litter, while Orange Crush organizers and partygoers contend they are racially profiled through unfair police checkpoints and experience general hostility from local residents and businesses (Morekis 2015). Rather than provide a detailed history of Orange Crush, we want to instead draw renewed attention to the present-day racialization of Tybee's beaches through an exploration of three themes that emerged from our archival analysis and interviews: the debate over Tybee's beaches as a public space, the longstanding use of heavy policing at the annual event, and Orange Crush as a both resistance and part of a regional sense of place for African-Americans despite ongoing racist encounters.

Public space

In order to understand the debate over Orange Crush, we must first examine the ongoing efforts by the authorities on Tybee Island as they have sought to limit black mobility and ultimately access to a public space—in this instance a beach. For Don Mitchell, "'Race' itself is a project of the ordering and controlling of space—and of ordering and controlling

the movement (or 'travel') of people. For many whites, safety is defined precisely by making others invisible. And if that is not completely possible, then efforts can be made to assure that everyone knows her or his place, that movements are strictly controlled so that the lives of the privileged are not unduly disrupted" (2000, p 258). In its nearly 30-year history, Tybee officials have sought on several occasions to finds ways to cancel the unofficial event and limit access to the public beach.

In May of 1993, Tybee Councilman Burke Day sent a letter to state Attorney General regarding public access rights to the state-owned beach. Day writes:

> I'm challenging a prevailing assumption that Tybee Island must allow unlimited public access to state-owned property (the beach.) In a nutshell, my argument is this: No one possesses the inherent right to access a public beach solely because it is state-owned. I cite as examples Stone Mountain State Park, Georgia State Patrol buildings and even the State Capitol. (Lauer and Skutch 1993, p 11)

Day is attempting to use an argument over access to other state-owned properties to justify exclusion of Orange Crush beach-goers to public recreational space.

The debate over public access has resurfaced more recently as Tybee officials renewed efforts to block the event. In a meeting with Tybee officials and U.S. Attorney Edward Tarver of the Southern District of Georgia in June of 2016, Tarver emphasized that any measures Tybee officials take to curtail Orange Crush, must also be adopted for Tybee's other large events like the Fourth of July.[8]

> "We would not want to send the message that *certain groups* are not welcome," he said. "You have a public beach. There are some obligations that come with a public beach. Nobody that we work with has been able to figure out how to stop an event like Orange Crush without impacting other events." (Quimby 2016b, italics ours)

The official's statement expresses a desire to not be branded racist, while at the same time attempting to prevent the beach's most significant event for African Americans from taking place.

In January of 2017, Tybee Island officials took more extreme measures and voted on policies that would specifically impact Orange Crush despite previous warnings by the U.S. Attorney of the Southern District of Georgia. The event has historically occurred in April and early May, and council voted to initially restrict alcohol consumption on beaches the months of March through early May. "Their vote followed a long discussion of the merits of the proposal, and whether it would be effective in preventing the crowds and debauchery that arise during spring break and the annual Orange Crush event, an unsanctioned beach party populated by mostly black young adults" (Quimby 2017). The final wording of the ban ultimately limited the consumption of alcohol in all public places on the island (parks, streets, sidewalks, beaches, and water) to the two weekends of Orange Crush Beach Bash, during the two weekends that coincidentally see the largest number of black visitors throughout the year (Purvis 2017). While their research analyzes debates over public space after September 11, 2001, Neil Smith and Setha

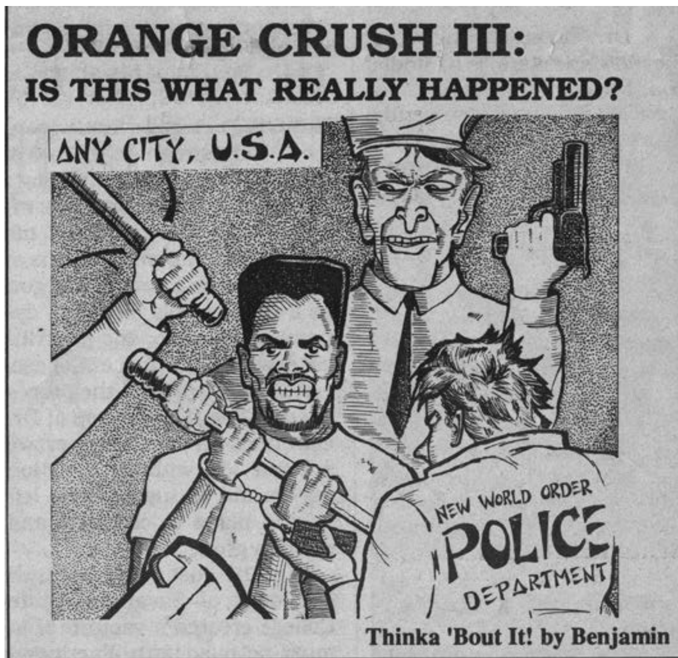

Figure 5. Cartoonist Benjamin connects Orange Crush III to police brutality across the United States. Source: (Tiger's Roar Newspaper 1991, p. 3) Courtesy of the Asa H. Gordon Library at Savannah State University

Low remind us, "the clampdown on public space, in the name of enforcing public safety … has been dramatic" (2006: 1). Conveniently, Tybee's measure centered on concern over public safety does not impact alcohol consumption during the peak summer season or affect other events on the island that draw large crowds.

Policing

Alarm over Orange Crush's heavy police presence has been ongoing throughout its tenure. Following the events surrounding the 1991 Orange Crush event, Savannah State's student newspaper *Tiger Roar* ran a cartoon in its spring edition illustrating a handcuffed black man surrounded by white police officers wielding batons and a gun (Figure 5). The cartoon asks the question "Orange Crush III: Is This What Really Happened? while also suggesting this type of policing happens in "Any City" in the United States."

In 1992, uniformed police were stationed on every block of Hwy 80 and along the streets leading to the beach (Lauer 1993, p 6A). The heavy police presence that year was the focus of Savannah State student Aleisia Gibson' letter to the editor who highlights the criminalization of black youth having fun (Burton 2015).

> The police squad, the S.W.A.T team and the GBI were out in force. Was

Figure 6. A cartoon by Benjamin relates policing during Orange Crush IV as described in the adjacent Letter to the Editor to the police brutality endured by L.A. motorist Rodney King. (Tiger's Roar Newspaper 1992, p 3) Courtesy of the Asa H. Gordon Library Special Collections at Savannah State University

all that actually necessary to ensure the protection of residents of Tybee Island? One major question that comes to mind is: Could the tax payers really afford such an expenditure? Those police officers probably would have found more trouble in the neighborhood doughnut shop.

From Saturday morning to late Saturday afternoon, hundreds of armed police officers combed through the sparsely crowded college beach party. They were obviously equipped to handle the mob that raided Los Angeles…Instead of getting the group of barbarian-like black students they expected, Tybee received a peaceful group of fun loving young adults. Most were there to show off the results of their new diets and their two-hour-a-day workout muscles. Violence and chaos seemed to be the furthest thing from their minds. (1992, p 3)

Gibson's letter, submitted to the student newspaper, is strategically positioned next to a cartoon depicting a white hand holding a baton emblazoned with 666 LAPD "Fit for a King"[9] (Figure 6). Both Gibson and the cartoonist highlight Tybee's problematic policing of Orange Crush while once again situating the event within a larger crisis centered on policing communities of color—in this example referencing police brutality

toward L.A. motorist Rodney King. Orisanmi Burton speaks to this tension of the threatening black body always in need of monitoring stating, "… black communities are not the subjects of police protection, but the objects of police coercion and that individuals belonging to the category of black-whether by virtue of phenotype, family history, economic status, or geographic location—are not citizens for whom the public good is extended" (2015, p 38). Despite only minor offenses reported for Orange Crush in 1992, Tybee employed 200 extra police officers at a cost of $100,000 the next year. The newspaper quoted Tybee Police Chief Jimmy Price, "We don't feel like anything is going to happen." But notwithstanding these public statements, Tybee did not reduce its police presence (Lauer 1993, p 1).

While Tybee officials and residents complain about the increase in crime and trash, statistics from 2001 provide an interesting historical comparison between Orange Crush and the July Fourth event that also occurs annually on Tybee. At that time, Orange Crush averaged about 7,000 to 8,000 people, 25 arrests the duration of the weekend, and a clean-up cost of $2,112.09 (10 employees worked 30 hours over two days). The July Fourth event held the same year brought in 7,000 to 8,000 people, had 31 arrests over a two-day period, and a clean-up cost of $3,559.50. While the attendee total was about the same, arrests and clean-up costs were greater for the July 4th event, yet Orange Crush is portrayed and treated as a bigger problem (*Savannah Morning News* 2001). A comparison of the two large events uncovers the damaging negative associations assigned to people of color when they engage in similar behaviors.

In 2016, Tybee officials swore in metro police officers to aid in law enforcement within Tybee's jurisdiction. Hotels offered free or reduced rate lodging for officers (Quimby 2016a) and police renewed traffic checkpoints even though they had been discontinued in the past because they create traffic headaches and produced accusations of racial prejudice.

> But Bryson said this time his department has started making such safety checks a monthly occurrence, which eliminates the appearance of singling out Orange Crush participants. He's said Tybee police will continue to hold such checks on a monthly basis, even after Orange Crush ends. (Quimby 2016a)

One of the authors, who identifies as an African American male in his early 20s, attended Orange Crush 2016. His observations bear witness to the heavy police presence on Hwy 80. In his drive out to the island, which he described as tense, he observed police collapsing highway lanes and pulling over cars at random. Parking was limited on the island because the primary parking lot contained military-type police vehicles. Police used drones to fly over the crowd gathered on the beach.

An anonymized interview the authors conducted with one of Orange Crush's organizers in 2016 in Savannah reminds us that not much has changed concerning the criminalization of black students. His sentiments echo the observations of Aleisia Gibson 24 years earlier in her letter to the editor.

> It just makes you think, it makes you think how they view the event overall. And they don't see any positive in it whatsoever. It makes you feel as if you are a threat when you know are not. Makes you kind of look at authorities kind of funny. Not in a necessarily horrible way. But just as in like wow, how are you doing this? These are thousands of college students coming from wherever that are educated, young leaders of tomorrow being looked at as if they are naturally criminals when they are not. Majority of them will go on to be doctors, lawyers, teachers, and valued members of the community and yet they are not treated as such for whatever reason. It just makes you feel like we're not moving forward at times we are moving backwards. And that's sad. That's honestly very sad. (2016)

The use of uniformed police to oppress minority citizens in a demeaning way on Tybee Island is an ongoing problem and one that reflects larger societal issues related to police tactics and people of color (Alexander 2012).

Racist encounters, resistance, and sense of place

While research on African American travel patterns suggest that there is a tendency to avoid destinations that could draw out racial conflicts when traveling (Phillip 1994; Carter 2008), Orange Crush persists despite very blatant racist encounters. Orange Crush partygoers engage in boundary transgressions, entering what Carter refers to as "White-coded places—where they will be viewed as Others" (Carter 2008, p 273). The vast majority of Tybee's population identifies as white. The 2015 census recorded the total population at 3,025 people with a white population of 96.3 percent and a black population of 2.7 percent. In comparison, the city of Savannah's 2014 population of 144,352 is 53.4 percent African American, 34 percent white, and 6.7 percent Hispanic. The island experiences a dramatic shift in its racial demographics when thousands of black college students attend Orange Crush.

Tybee's mayor contends that the efforts to curb Orange Crush are not racially motivated but the islander's tactics of opposition suggest otherwise. Comments in the 2015 local media coverage (including online newspapers and local television news) are filled with derogatory descriptions of the college students referring to them as "natives," "wild hogs," "savages," and "apes." These descriptions fall into a longer history of problematic representation of Africans and those of African descent used to justify slavery, oppression, and acts of racism (Alexander 2012). Orange Crush 2016 also witnessed efforts to intentionally confuse partygoers with erroneous directions. An unidentified person placed a handmade sign painted orange on Johnny Mercer Blvd encouraging partygoers to turn right off Hwy 80 when they should have continued straight on Hwy 80 (WSAV Staff 2016).

Tybee accommodations will often undergo "maintenance" to avoid renting to students, and businesses (including restaurants) will close the weekend of the event (*Savannah Morning News* 2001; Evans 2016). In her article focused on the media representations in the popular press of Freaknic, a spring break event for black college students, Krista A Thompson found similar hostile efforts by local

businesses and hoteliers in Atlanta. "Many local stores and restaurants closed their doors for the weekend. Hotels refused to rent rooms. The city of Atlanta, renowned for its 'Southern hospitality,' practically shut itself down and assumed an openly confrontational stance again the students' presence in the city" (2007 p 24).

Trash debris has in many ways become a metaphor for race as it is often a major point of contention for residents who increasingly use social media to shame partygoers. One resident of Tybee, Tony Russo, for example posted a YouTube video in 2012 where he filmed the trash around him. He is recorded saying, "They basically destroyed our beach. We're out here picking up trash… This is horrible" (tonyfrg 2012). In order to counter the negativity simmering over trash, college students from Savannah have annually organized a beach clean-up following the bash called Green Crush. These types of clean-up efforts have been in effect since the start of the annual event (Williams 1992). Green Crush volunteers actively encourage partygoers to use receptacles for trash rather than discard items on the beach (beatofmyowndrum 2012; Coleman 2014). These positive efforts often do not receive the same media attention as the negative publicity over trash. In the comment section to Orange Crush coverage Phyllis Nicholls asks, "Should we make the St. Patrick [Sic] Day tourist clean up Savannah after their event ? Just asking!!" (2015). These same strong and very public reactions are not nearly as evident during other events on the island and within the greater Chatham County that also produce similar amounts of trash.

Yet, organizers and students navigate around the opposition and racist encounters as they seek to occupy a space that has traditionally been reserved for whites. An interview with one Orange Crush promoter described efforts to work with Tybee officials to create a more organized event that is beneficial to all stakeholders. These efforts at cooperation, however, typically stall. As a result, different promoters within the region recruit sponsors and release the date of the event through social media and word of mouth two weeks before it is scheduled to take place. This is done in an attempt to give the opposition less time to block the event.[10]

The event is heavily shaped by racism and yet has persisted despite racist acts of opposition. Orange Crush has nearly three decades of staying power, carving out a black sense of place that can be felt through the words of our first author as he reflected on his experience attending Orange Crush in 2016:

> From the time one pulls in the parking lot, the atmosphere can be felt. People are usually parked in their cars, playing music, and creating a fun environment. There are many tents along the beach where various activities take place. One can stop at one tent and jump in on a competitive card game, then go to the next tent and get a hot piece of chicken or a cold drink. Black fraternities and sororities participate in dancing called strolling,[11] and everyone at the beach likes to gather around and watch. Overall, many of the activities that take place on the Orange Crush scene are the epitome of black culture – carefree and fun.

One promoter we interviewed last summer in Savannah and we have anonymized

also mirrored these sentiments describing the long-standing tradition of Orange Crush and its importance to African Americans within the region,

> Because it's been here so long. After tradition is built people just really don't want to redirect. The people who are locals feel as if its theirs. People who are from Savannah who went to Savannah State University who live maybe in Atlanta or Jacksonville now but graduated from that school they feel like that's something that was theirs when they were at Savannah State or that live in Savannah feels its theirs, they feel entitlement to it. So taking it from that location whether it might be heralded to do it or not is doing a disservice to the people who have built the tradition of it over time. It's like ripping something that they feel like is theirs from them. And that's hurtful to people and you don't necessarily want to but sometimes you just don't have a choice. (2016)

Orange Crush has become an important tradition in the geographies of many African Americans in the Southeast, despite the multitude of racist encounters we described earlier in this section. Katherine McKittrick and Clyde Woods argue, "We take for granted the geographic knowledges that black subjects impart, as well as the long-standing spatial politics—from segregation to incarceration to emancipatory strategies—that inform black lives" (pg.6). This attempt of erasure of Tybee's black geographies are not only reflected in the measures to eliminate Orange Crush but also in the notable absence of black stories about the island's segregated history at Tybee Island's Lighthouse and Museum, which purports to recount the island's 400-year history.

CONCLUSION

This case study centered on a spring break event at Tybee Island, Georgia is a reflection of the work still to be done in the discipline of geography on the unresolved state of southern hospitality and the continued attempts to suppress black mobility. Through archival research and interviews, we have sought to situate Orange Crush within a more comprehensive racialized history of Tybee Island and document the struggles that students from Historically Black Colleges and Universities encounter as they attempt to access the island's beaches. In our recounting of Tybee's racialized history, we have provided evidence of the ways the island seeks to limit access to its public beach, while trying to minimize any appearance of racism toward the event.

Tybee's racialized past as a quarantine station for enslaved African persons and a segregated beach off limits to Savannah's majority African American population cannot be divorced from understanding present-day efforts to limit beach access, ultimately restricting black mobility to Tybee Island. While Jim Crow policies allowed Tybee Island to openly discriminate against persons of color, today, Tybee officials and residents carefully employ coded language focused on crime, public safety, and trash to achieve similar results. Jerome Miller, former executive director of the National Center for Institutions and Alternatives said this, "There are certain code words that allow you never to have to say 'race,' but everybody knows what

you mean and 'crime' is one of those…" (Alexander 2012, p 105). The latest efforts voted on by Tybee officials in 2017 are even less subtle in their racist intent as they pushed forward an alcohol ban under the guise of public safety.

This case study aligns in many ways with prior research on travel patterns for African Americans (Phillip 1994; Carter 2008). Orange Crush is a large event (though informally organized) that attracts students from the region. Its three decades of staying power make it part of a long-standing tradition for many students who attend, some of whose parents partied at Orange Crush in its early years. Nonetheless, Orange Crush diverges from the larger trends observed in tourism literature in one powerful way. In the face of very blatant and open discrimination, Orange Crush has persisted. Alderman and Inwood remind us that "people of color not only challenge racial control by seeking to move on their own terms but are engaged in a complex relationship with oppression" (2016, p. 602).

Case studies focused on the terrain of large spring break events like Orange Crush are evidence of the potential for geographers analyzing the racial politics of travel and tourism in the South to also answer the call issued by black geographies for a greater understanding of black senses of place and everyday forms of resistance (McKittrick 2011; Bledsoe, Eaves, and Williams 2017). Events like Orange Crush and its precursor Freaknic are often overlooked as resistance movements that seek to subvert racism and efforts to limit black mobilities and ultimately the right to occupy space by persons of color. This type of antiracism mobility work can often be overshadowed by much larger protest movements taking place in the United States, which seek to also stand up against racism and white supremacy (Alderman and Inwood 2016). Orange Crush, despite being a "fun" spring break event attended by college students, is still part of the destructive narrative that positions "people who inhabit black *bodies*" as "floating signifiers for threat that require policing" (Burton 2015, p 41). These efforts to criminalize black youth are largely absent when discussing other larger gatherings of white college students (i.e. Daytona Beach spring break and New Orleans Mardi Gras) (Thompson 2007).

For now, however, the future of Orange Crush hangs in the balance after Tybee imposed an alcohol ban that directly impacts the annual event, all the while protecting other large gatherings that produce similar amounts of trash and arrests. In many ways, Tybee has come full circle in its efforts to limit black mobility. Six decades ago, black college students led the early resistance to desegregate Tybee, and today black college students are caught in a struggle against policies designed to limit their access to the very same public beach.

NOTES

1. There are three dominant theories that describe African-American leisure travel behavior (Phillipp 1994; Carter 2008). The first theory argues that travel behavior is a result of marginal socio-economic status. A second positions that travel behavior is a result of ethnicity (Philipp 1994). The third theory is outlined in greater detail in this paper.

2. Tybee changed its name to Savannah Beach in 1929 to give the island a seeming greater connection to the city of Savannah. In 1978, the city of Savannah Beach changed its name back to Tybee Island.

3. Gullah are predominantly found in the Carolinas while Geechee are located in Georgia. Their heritage corridor stretches from North Carolina to northern Florida.

4. W. W. Law, Savannah's president of the local NAACP chapter, posted their bail.

5. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 outlawed discrimination in public spaces: including service stations, restaurants, hotels, and recreation sites.

6. Tybee was initially scouted to host the volleyball competition and did serve as a support site for sailing.

7. Students had been informally gathering prior to 1988. The name "Orange" derives from Savannah State University's school colors.

8. These events include Pirate Fest, the Beach Bum Parade, and the Fourth of July Celebration.

9. Her editorial is written shortly after the 1992 arrest and beating of Rodney King in Los Angeles.

10. This type of informal organization has resulted in some years the event being scheduled on two different weekends.

11. Strolling refers to synchronized dancing that black Greek letter organizations do in public.

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