SWEET AUBURN: CONTESTING THE RACIAL IDENTITY OF ATLANTA'S MOST HISTORICALLY SIGNIFICANT AFRICAN AMERICAN NEIGHBORHOOD

by

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(Under the Direction of Steven R. Holloway)

ABSTRACT

This study helps to expand geography's engagement with racialized landscapes by focusing on the construction of significant racialized places by those who live, work and organize along the Auburn Avenue corridor. As racialized populations grow in demographic, political and economic importance, we need to comprehend the multiplicity and contested nature of racialized identities constructed from within racialized communities. This study enhances previous work by: 1) reconsidering the place-making agency of racialized residents and leaders without losing sight of racialized places as the result of the imposition of hegemonic white power; 2) highlighting the significance of conflict within minority communities; 3) recognizing the multiple and potentially incommensurate racialized identities that places often carry; and 4) exploring the power of memorials to (re)inscribe race into these landscapes; through a case study of Auburn Avenue, Atlanta Georgia's most historically significant African American neighborhood. This study links detailed analysis of archival data with open-ended interviews of key community stakeholders. The study is situated broadly within an approach that highlights the importance of discourse and illuminates the

complexity of racial identity formation and place making in the Auburn Avenue community.

INDEX WORDS: Black Counterpublic; Landscape Studies, Memorialization, Racial Heritage Tourism, Urban Geography, Race Critical Studies, Qualitative Methods.

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Dedicated to Richard Karwas and Barbara Inwood who

taught me about life in their own special way.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

"Sweet Auburn" Song

by George M. Coleman
Atlanta Daily World, Date Unknown

I heard the people singing;
Their voices me and you.
Their hearts were tuned to memories
Of Auburn Avenue.
I saw the pride rekindled;
The sweet ghosts of the past;
My childhood days back to me.
I prayed, God, let this last.

Sweet Auburn Avenue, at your heart
a near century crusade.
The black song told the whole wide world
the fine stuff of which we're made.
And we will build the buildings high,
as our sacrifice.
And give the legend branch new life
an earthy paradise, Sweet Auburn.

Writing at the end of the century Kobayashi and Peak (2000) argued that U.S. society remains "deeply racialized" (392) and "virtually no social analysis can take place without a recognition of this reality" (392). Following their call for a more thorough interrogation of race and geography, a growing number of scholars are addressing the complex racialized nature of space in U.S. society (e.g. Nash 2003; Hoelscher 2003; Tyner 2003; 2002; Mahtani 2001; Holloway 2000). An important strand of this research seeks to comprehend the racialization of place as the imbuing of place with racial significance and meaning. Anderson's (1991) analysis of North American Chinatowns and Delaney's (1998) examination of segregation in the Jim Crow South are two prominent examples that highlight the complex social, political and economic forces responsible for producing places that carry racial meaning. These studies haven't probed deeply enough the role of persons of color in the construction of significant

racialized spaces and places. Drawing from a nuanced account of multiple political ideologies operative in African American communities (Dawson 2001), this dissertation enhances existing research on the racialization of place by: 1) emphasizing the place-making agency of racialized residents, workers and community leaders without losing sight of racialized places as the imposed product of white hegemonic power; 2) recognizing the multiple and potentially incommensurate racialized identities that places often carry; 3) highlighting the significance of conflict within minority communities; and 4) exploring the power of memorials to inscribe race into these landscapes through the detailed case study of Auburn Avenue, Atlanta, Georgia's most historically significant African American neighborhood.

Auburn Avenue is located close to Atlanta's downtown core and served as the business, political and cultural headquarters for Atlanta's African American community from the early part of the 20th Century until the mid-1960's (Keating 2001; Pomerantz 1996; Grant 1993). Its position as the spiritual, political and business headquarters of African Americans in the South was rivaled nationally only by Harlem New York. By the early 1970's, however, the corridor faced serious challenges resulting from urban renewal programs, the end of legalized segregation and the loss of middle-and upper-class African American residents moving to suburban areas. The street that *Money Magazine* once declared the "richest Negro street in the world" (as quoted in Grant 1993, 543) had become a landscape of urban decay (Pomerantz 1996, 485). Following Martin Luther King Jr.'s 1968 slaying, Auburn Avenue became the site of several memorials developed by the King family and the U.S. National Park Service (NPS).

Today, major land developers, community organizations, and the City of Atlanta are striving to stimulate redevelopment and renewal in the Auburn Avenue neighborhood through a series of redevelopment projects. These redevelopment efforts invite us to explore more deeply

the complex and contested production of race and place along the Auburn Avenue corridor. Auburn Avenue's significance as a case study derives from its clear historical identification as a racialized place with the ongoing struggles to define its future. Thus, the study of Auburn Avenue deepens our understanding of the complex and multiple ways that minority communities negotiate the racialized identities of place.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This research on Auburn Avenue is driven by a number of research questions that are derived from the need to focus on the agency of persons of color in the construction of urban space. The first question assays the multiple and contested racialized place identities emerging from within Auburn Avenue's African American communities. Specifically: *How do the residents, business-owners, and community organizers along Auburn Avenue racialize space?* I answer this question by arguing that the racialization of place is a complex, contested, project subject to the influence of multiple segments of both the African American and white communities. While recognizing the power of white hegemony, I focus on the place-making activities of the African American community on Auburn Avenue. For example, I argue that contemporary efforts by Big Bethel AME Church to redevelop a block of Auburn Avenue is related to disillusionment with post-Civil Rights U.S. society and Community Nationalism, a variant of Black Nationalism that is focused on the construction of independent African American community institutions. By viewing Auburn Avenue as composed of multiple identity positions I conceptualize Auburn Avenue as a Black Counterpublic (Dawson 2001) space. The Black Counterpublic is a site where African Americans come together to develop strategies to combat racism, work out the meaning of black identities, and engage in political debate (Harris-

Lacewell 2004; Dawson 2001). The roots of the counterpublic flow from work on the bourgeoisie public sphere (Habermas 1989 [originally 1962]).

A second research question forms the basis for the third chapter and probes the power of the Martin Luther King Jr. memorials to inscribe racial meaning on Auburn Avenue. Specifically: *how do the memorials dedicated to Martin Luther King Jr. make visible particular racialized understandings of his life, death and meaning on Auburn Avenue, and how do those meanings inform the corridor, the City of Atlanta and the larger nations understanding of King's life and death?* Several sites that memorialize King's life and death carry potent, yet contradictory meanings. The federal memorials to Dr. King present an overly simplistic and truncated understanding of Dr. King's legacy and meaning for the city, region and nation. In particular, the King National Historic Site embodies a normative conception of Civil Rights that focuses on Dr. King's early work at creating an integrated society. As Dr. King matured intellectually he began to take on more "radical" positions that are left out of the King National Historic Site, or when attention is drawn to them, they are placed in a framework of non-violent direct action. Thus, Auburn Avenue is a site where federal, state and local actors come together to memorialize race and racism. The memorial complex on Auburn Avenue provides a site to interrogate the meanings of race and racism at multiple scales in U.S. society. The memorial landscape dedicated to Dr. King is a vehicle for interpreting the complex relationship between race, place and nation.

The fourth chapter examines contemporary efforts to redevelop and revitalize the Avenue in the context of turning Auburn Avenue into a heritage tourist destination. This research raises a number of questions for those who live, work and organize along the Auburn Avenue corridor. Namely: 1) How should Auburn Avenue be developed? 2) Should the African American

community turn to heritage tourism as a means for preserving and protecting Auburn Avenue? 3) Should the African American community emphasize alternative visions of the history and legacy of the corridor? I address these issues by focusing on the contested nature of identity that is part of the process of creating a racial heritage tourist destination. I ask: *How does the City of Atlanta plan on redeveloping Auburn Avenue and what are the implications for those who live, work and organize along the corridor?* Utilizing redevelopment plans created for the City of Atlanta I examine the tension between the creation of the "Sweet Auburn" heritage tourist experience on the one hand, and the desire on the part of Auburn Avenue stakeholders to build towards the future. A key aspect of the redevelopment plans outlined in this chapter is the need to create an 'authentic' version of the past, one that focuses on particular African American political ideologies. Those that advocate on behalf of turning Auburn Avenue into a heritage tourist destination articulate a vision of Auburn Avenue's past focused on the political ideology known as Black Conservatism (Dawson 2001). This departs in significant ways from the Community Nationalism (Dawson 2001) advocated by stakeholders along the corridor.

RESEARCH APPROACH

To address my overarching research goals I utilize a multi-method qualitative approach that includes open-ended interviews, archival research, and my personal experiences, to understand Auburn Avenue and the surrounding community. Jacobs (1993) notes that qualitative approaches open the city to distinctive approaches and interdisciplinary scrutiny. More explicitly, Jacobs contends that this approach is uniquely positioned to understand the "cultural dimensions of the city" (Jacobs 1993, 827).

Archival research informing this project is an important tool both for reconstructing the past, and understanding the present (Bradshaw 2001; Mason 1996). I use the Auburn Avenue

Research Library and its collections of newspapers and other print media on and about Auburn Avenue. These materials proved invaluable in understanding Auburn Avenue's historic development and its relationship with the broader Atlanta area, the region and the nation. One key contribution of the archival materials was the historical context they provided. By combing through the archives and understanding some of the historic tensions on the Avenue I was able to develop more precise research questions allowing a more nuanced analysis of current social relationships along the Auburn corridor.

In addition to the archival research I conducted 29 open-ended interviews with residents, community activists, businesspersons and City of Atlanta officials. Broadly accepted as a research method, open-ended interviews are "often seen as corrective to the silences and eurocentrisicism of many archival documents" (Miles and Crush 1993, 85). Recovering the voice of the other is important in the context of Auburn Avenue. McKittrick (2006) notes that the geography discipline historically has ignored the contributions and life experiences of persons of color. She explains, "for the most part [geography] incorrectly deemed black populations and their attendant geographies as 'ungeographic' and/or philosophically undeveloped" (McKittrick 2006, xiii). By adopting a qualitative research approach, I seek to illuminate the voices of the corridor's African American stakeholders. While open-ended, I structured the interviews around a broad set of themes that gauged participant's past and current relation to Auburn Avenue and explored participant's views on race and racism and the current state of racial advancement in the city, region and nation. I also probed participant's views on the King memorial sites and asked about participant's awareness and evaluation of current revitalization efforts.

All of the interviews were conducted on Auburn Avenue or in City official's offices. Situating the interview experience in places familiar to participants is an important step in facilitating rapport and was an initial attempt to address power imbalances in the investigator-participant relationship (Ellwood and Martin 2000). Sin (2003) demonstrates that "interview sites can yield important information about the way participants construct their individual and social identities, [and] identities can influence interviewer-interviewee dynamics." Thus it was important to conduct the interviews in Atlanta.

I analyzed the data for my dissertation in two interrelated parts. I organized my data along broad lines, transcribed my interviews and assigned a pseudonym for all research participants. I then coded the archival material and interview transcripts for dominant discursive themes (Lett 1996). I brought to this project a set of etic themes (Lett 1996) that initially directed my inquiry. However, as the interview process progressed, a number of emic themes emerged that contributed to the ultimate questions and analysis of this research project. The distinction between etic and emic themes is a strength of qualitative methodology. It allows the research to incorporate the voices and ideas of the residents (Miles and Crush 1993) of Auburn Avenue, while acknowledging the researcher's positionality and theoretical stance. I pursued a dual-stream coding process in an effort to add rigor, breadth and depth to this research project. I hired two upper-division African-American undergraduate students from the Atlanta area to help code the interviews. These students were familiar with the everyday politics and workings of Atlanta's African American community. The two undergraduates identified a separate set of emic themes. These themes were then compared with the themes and ideas that I had found in the interviews. For the most part we identified a very similar set of ideas and themes, often under different names. In the few instances when we disagreed I sought to build a consensus

through extended discussions of the ideas that we each brought to the project. The undergraduates brought to this project a fresh perspective that strengthened the analysis.

The methodology used in this research project provided several forms of triangulation, defined as the use of multiple methods, empirical materials, and multiple perspectives in a study "as a strategy that adds rigor, depth and breadth to an investigation" (Denzin and Lincoln 1998, 4). Through the use of multiple data sources and multiple modes of analysis I have produced an account that examines the multiple positionalities affecting Auburn Avenue's racialized identity grounded in a complex social reality (Devin and Heath 1999, 49).

CONCLUSION

This dissertation places Auburn Avenue in a context that recognizes the complex and contested nature of racialized spaces. While recognizing that white hegemony is an important part of the Auburn Avenue corridor's identity, to truly understand Auburn Avenue's racialized identity it is necessary to also recognize the contributions of many African Americans who strive to remake the Auburn corridor. By recognizing the place-making agency of African Americans, this research counters notions of racial powerlessness and posits the experiences of African Americans as geographically sophisticated. Additionally, by concentrating on the memorialization of Auburn Avenue as it relates to Dr. King this dissertation furthers our understanding between race, landscape and the construction and understanding of one of the most tumultuous times in U.S. history. Finally, by examining the way the City of Atlanta is attempting to reframe and remake Auburn Avenue this dissertation contributes to a deeper understanding of the way the City of Atlanta conceives and constructs significant racialized spaces and places.

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CHAPTER 2

RECLAIMING THE SPIRIT? THE AFRICAN AMERICAN COUNTERPUBLIC AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF URBAN SPACE: A CASE STUDY OF AUBURN AVENUE[1]

[1] To be submitted: Inwood, J. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers.*

ABSTRACT

In 2004 Big Bethel AME Church, Atlanta's oldest African American church, located on Auburn Avenue, announced the corridor's first substantial development project in over sixteen years. Once home to the wealthiest African American community in the United States, Auburn Avenue went through a period of steep economic decline during the 1970's and 1980's and many in the community see Big Bethel's $45 million mixed-use project as a turning point for the street. This paper uses Big Bethel's redevelopment project to explore the racialization of place in an African American community utilizing a multi-method qualitative approach that includes archival research and open-ended interviews. African Americans on Auburn Avenue actively engage in place making through the articulation of a discourse of community nationalism that flows from broader disillusionment with post-Civil Rights U. S. society. This places Auburn Avenue firmly within the context of the Black Counterpublic, sites where African Americans come together to develop strategies to combat racism, work out the meaning of black identities, and engage in political debate.

Key Words: Dialectical Method, Black Counterpublic, Racialization of Place, African American Communities.

INTRODUCTION

Geographic literatures recognize places as imbued with racial significance--i.e. places can be racialized (e.g. Anderson 1991, 1987; Delaney 1998; McCann 1999; Hoelscher 2003). This work explores the links between the constructions of racialized identity and place (Hoelscher 2003, 659), the role played by white hegemony[2] in the construction of racialized landscapes (Anderson 1991, 1987; Delaney 1998; McCann 1999; Hoelscher 2003), and the ways racialized place reinforces white racisms and privilege (Mitchell 2000, 258). A key principle in this literature centers on the connection between the construction of race and the reinforcement of white, hegemonic power. Understanding the nexus between race, place and power provides a means to confront racism and to develop anti-racist geographies (Kobayashi and Peake 2000). The Anderson, Delaney, McCann, and Hoelscher studies show that white attitudes and actions are central to constructing the racialized landscapes of North America. I build upon this solid foundation by illuminating the roles played by persons of color in making racialized spaces and places through a case study of the Auburn Avenue community in Atlanta, Georgia.

African Americans deploy an understanding of the Auburn Avenue corridor[3] and are engaged in place making vis-à-vis a discourse of community nationalism that flows from broader African American disillusionment with post-Civil Rights United States. This perspective of Auburn Avenue's history, legacy and present-day redevelopment illuminates the corridor as emblematic of a Black Counterpublic (Dawson 2001). The Black Counterpublic is a site where

[2] I deploy the term white hegemony here as it refers to "the dominant representations and practices of elites and power blocs who maintain the dominant story lines that help to consolidate existing relations of power" (Ley 2000, 332). Important elements of hegemony include the role played between coercion and consent (Omi and Winant 1994, 67) which often results in the "incorporation by the ruling group of many of the key interests of subordinated groups" (Omi and Winant 1994, 67). Perhaps the most salient example of hegemony as it relates to race is Anderson's study on Chinatowns (1991, 1987) in which white Canada initially reproduced the subordinate status of the Chinese, used that status to define what it meant to be white Canadian, but then later on incorporated aspects of Chinese identity to market the City of Vancouver as a tourist destination.

[3] Auburn Avenue in this paper refers to the street and the surrounding African American community.

African Americans come together to develop strategies to combat racism, work out the meaning of black identities, and engage in political debate (Harris-Lacewell 2004; Dawson 2001). The roots of the counterpublic flow from Habermas' notion of the bourgeoisie public sphere (Habermas 1989 [originally 1962]; Fraser 1993).

In the following sections I more fully define the "racialization of place" by focusing on the dialectical nature of race and place. In addition, I explore a framework for understanding Auburn Avenue as a Black Counterpublic by discussing its connections with various political ideologies operating in African American communities. Understanding Auburn Avenue as a counterpublic space is important for two reasons. First, it opens up a deeper comprehension of the corridor's historical impact on the city, region and nation. Second, through the case study of Auburn Avenue, the contemporary redevelopment of the corridor takes on a wider significance. Members of the Auburn Avenue African American community seek to reconnect with Auburn Avenue's past as a means to maintain it's presence in the city as a political, economic and social force for African Americans. In addition, by recognizing Auburn Avenue as a counterpublic site, I demonstrate how multiple segments of the African American community seek to engage with and construct urban space. I utilize a multi-method qualitative research approach that employs archival research and open-ended interviews.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

GEOGRAPHY AND THE RACIALIZATION OF PLACE

The process of racialization involves the use of biological criteria (i.e. phenotype etc.) to separate people into distinct groups for the purpose of domination and exploitation (Hiebert 2000, 236). Racialization of place is a process of constructing particular geographic landscapes that help define and reinforce racialized categories, thus facilitating domination and exploitation.

For example, Anderson's work argues that North American Chinatowns are the product of a white Canadian imagination that simultaneously uses the "idea" of what it means to be Chinese, as manifest in the geographic space of the Chinatown, to define what it means to be a white Canadian (1987; 1991). Consequently, we should not see Chinatowns as the product of an inherent Chinese identity; instead, through a series of discourses and laws, Chinatowns reflect and reproduce white ideas about what it means to be Chinese (Anderson 1987; 1991). Implicit in Anderson's articulation of the Chinatown landscape is a recognition that race and place are dialectically related; that the social construction of race and the production of landscape are dialectically linked.

To more fully understand the processes that Anderson identifies, the ways spaces and places are racialized, it will be helpful to examine the dialectical process related to the construction of racialized spaces and places. Castree (1996, 342) argues that the use of dialectical modes of thought have been utilized by geographers since the late 1970's and early 1980's (e.g., Harvey 1973; 1982; 1989; Olsson 1991 and Gibson-Graham 1996). The growth of a dialectical approach to understanding society has led to an increasingly complex engagement with the dialectical method and the ways in which space and place are produced. One salient example of dialectical explanation is Harvey's *Justice, Nature and the Geography of Difference* (1996). In this work Harvey examines the way politics, economics, ecology and other social process are related to and produce difference (Harvey 1996, 6). Harvey's work is indicative of the larger treatment and engagement with dialectics that has characterized geography for the past twenty plus years.

For all of the engagement with dialectics, it is often the case that dialectics is something that is "more often invoked than explained" (Castree 1996, 342), and that the very idea of

dialectics is elusive and hard to define. Part of this confusion lies in the fact that dialectics "has assumed manifold forms and accumulated multiple meanings" (Castree 1996, 344) through time, and point-in-fact, the very "reduction of dialectics to a set of 'principles' might be self defeating" (Harvey 1996, 48) and ultimately fruitless. However, for purposes of our discussion it will be useful to articulate the key features of the dialectical method that inform this project and illuminate the relation between race and place.

One key feature of the dialectical method is the recognition that "[d]ialectics is *both* a statement about what the world is and a method of organizing this world for purposes of study and presentation" (Merrifield 1993, 517; italics in original). In other words, dialectics is a method for understanding the way the world is constituted and is a way to represent the world. Importantly, the dialectical method is an approach to understanding the world that "emphasizes relations and totalities" (Harvey 1996, 7) and focuses on the contradictions inherent in systems (Merrifield 1993; Castree 1996; Gregory 2000; Ollman 2003). Thus the dialectical method seeks to "explain real social processes in a way that rigorously shows the necessary connections between underlying processes and 'surface appearances' " (Castree 1996, 347), which often appear as taken for granted concepts, or seemingly unrelated events or occurrences. Principally the dialectical method operates by concerning itself with four kinds of relationships: "identity/difference, interpenetration of opposites, quantity/quality and contradiction" (Ollman 2003, 15).

A primary principle applies that "dialectical thinking emphasizes the understanding of processes, flows, fluxes and relations over elements, things, structures and organized systems" (Harvey 1996, 49). The concepts of race and place thus cannot be separated from each other, but instead form a mutually constitutive relationship. In this sense we should not see the

construction of place as separate from the social construction of race, but instead the processes that constructs one also constructs the other. This relationship is most clearly illustrated in Anderson's work, as her work is an attempt to:

> demonstrate empirically the workings of the racialization process about which [earlier] theorists had written. It brings micro-and macro- scales of analysis, historical and sociological perspectives, and social and spatial dimensions to the constructivist challenge against essentialist views of race (Anderson 1991, 3)

In other words, the concept of race cannot be set aside from the whole complex social, political and economic relations that constitute lived reality. A critical aspect of the racialization of place was the way white Canadian society was able to create a culture of separation and economic exploitation that extended beyond the boundaries of Chinatowns to permeate all facets of life. Thus to understand the way race was constructed it is important to consider the connections between historic understanding of racial categories and how those racial categories are constantly changing and evolving through space and time.

A second principle of dialectics states: "[t]hings are always assumed to be internally heterogeneous (i.e. contradictory) at every level" (Harvey 1996, 51). A contradiction is understood as "a union of two or more internally related processes that are simultaneously supporting and undermining one another" (Ollman 1990, 49; as quoted in Harvey 1996, 52). An illustrative example emerges from Goldberg's (2002) work on the connections between race and nation in which he argues that modern nations arose to address a contradiction in European society. He writes:

> At precisely the time…[European countries faced an] increasingly heterogeneous society globally, social order more locally was challenged to maintain homogeneity increasingly and assertively. The racial state…is key to understanding the 'resolution' to this modern dilemma (Goldberg 2002, 11).

Thus we should see race and nation as dialectically connected. Goldberg states:

> [R]ace is integral to the emergence, development, and transformations (conceptually, philosophically, materially) of the modern nation-state. Race marks and orders the modern nation-state, and so state projects, more or less from its point of conceptual and institutional emergence. The apparatuses and technologies employed by modern states have served variously to fashion, modify, and reify the terms of racial expression, as well as racist exclusions and subjugation (Goldberg 2002, 4)

An aspect of racialization of place concerns the way race is connected to national projects. Thus the construction of Chinese identity, outlined in Anderson's work (1991, 1987), is part of a larger national project that comes to define what it means to be a white, Canadian citizen. Chinese identity as constructed and made visible in Chinatowns simultaneously creates a homogenous white population by socially constructing and reiterating the "differences" between Chinese and white Canadians. Recall that the nation state arises at a particular moment to address a fundamental contradiction in European society. As Europeans colonized and conquered large parts of the world they were challenged to maintain a unified national identity. Integral to that project was the articulation of racial difference; thus the invention of racial difference is a necessary part of national projects. However in efforts to homogenize Canadian whiteness it is necessary to construct the Chinese as "other"; which ultimately undermines the concept of homogeneity by constructing the difference between the two populations. Thus it became necessary to rely on an increasingly unstable and complex system of racial exclusion to maintain the idea of Canadian homogeneity. Such efforts affirm the dialectically inherent contradiction: using race to construct a homogenous population necessarily identifies differences in the racial makeup of the nation state.

The tensions between the creation of a homogeneous population by identifying difference in the makeup of the nation state and the contradiction for which race and nation are constructed illustrates a third dialectical principle that "transformative behavior--'creativity'--arises out of

the contradictions" (Harvey 1996, 54). The contradictory nature of the nation/race relationship and the tensions inherent in that relationship give rise to the possibility of change (Gregory 2000, 172). Racialized spaces are not static entities unchanging and unmoving over time, but instead are dynamic. Just as existing racial categories change over time, so too do racialized spaces. Often this dynamism is revealed in more subtle and complex forms of racial exploitation. Nevertheless, the contradictions inherent in the process of racialization also create opportunities for marginalized community members to transform the spaces in which they live. Therefore, racialized spaces on one hand are related to the exploitation of people based on race (e.g. Chinatowns and the construction of racialized identity) but on the other hand may provide space to organize, resist and transform existing racial structures.

Highlighting racialized space as dialectically constituted opens the possibility of recognizing the agency of residents of racialized communities and becomes an important departure point for thinking about the racialization of place. Historically, the voices of African Americans have been placed on the margins of social science research (Harris-Lacewell 2003, 227), which privileges the voices and actions of whites, or treats African Americans as silent carriers and victims of social pathologies rather than expressive agents. Furthermore, studies that ignore the voices and experiences of African Americans also ignore a long, painful history of race in the United States during which African American resistance to white hegemony and racism were central to the enactment of the first slave codes, the legislative acts that instituted Jim Crow segregation, and the U.S. Civil Rights struggle.[4] A dialectical approach to

[4] For example, Singleton (2001) in her study on Cuban slave plantations documents how resistance to slavery by Cuban slaves caused a change in how coffee plantations were set up in Cuba during the late 18th Century. In a U.S. context white fears of African American slave revolts and black resistance to slavery led to the imposition of increasingly draconian measures, known as the "slave codes", which more forcefully regulated the behavior and actions of African American slaves (Kolchin 1993). For other examples of African American resistance to white hegemony and the way this resistance influenced the construction of space and place see: Gilroy 1993; Kelley 1996; Dawson 2001; Hahn 2004.

understanding the racialization of place posits the experiences of African Americans in North America as geographically significant. People of color *are* critical to the construction of racialized places and black matters *are* spatial matters (McKittrick 2006, xii). The internal contradictions identified by dialectical reasoning incorporates the perspectives of those who live, work and organize in these spaces thus allowing a more complex understanding of the construction of race in North America. Through the case study of Auburn Avenue presented here we can begin to see the ways people of color construct significant racialized spaces. We can more fully understand this process by focusing on Auburn Avenue as a Black Counterpublic.

THE BLACK COUNTERPUBLIC

The concept of the "public sphere" was first articulated by Habermas (1989 [original 1962]) and was conceptualized as "discursively constructed categories that came to define boundaries between households, market economies, the state and political participation" (Pratt 2000, 636). For purposes of this paper I concentrate on Habermas' concept of the bourgeoisie public sphere, the sphere which encompasses citizens relationship with the state (Pratt 2000, 636). According to Habermas the public sphere acted as a "mediator between society and the state, holding the state accountable to 'publicity' and to the critical scrutiny of an organized body of public opinion" (Gregory 1994, 152). Broadly defined, the public sphere is "physical or mediated spaces where people can gather and share information, debate opinions, and tease out their political interests and social needs with other participants" (Squires 2002, 448). Importantly geographers have come to view public space as an important manifestation of the public sphere (Mitchell 1996; Staheli 1996), though some have argued that it is incorrect to use the term public sphere and public space interchangeably (Staheli 1996). We can observe a number of activities that take place in public space and can be considered activities that also take

place in the public sphere. Thus, the definition of the public sphere incorporates a number of different spaces and activities in which citizens gather to enact basic citizenship rights. For example, a neighborhood association that meets regularly and organizes to discuss neighborhood or city politics is an example of the public sphere. Groups that target local or national newspapers with letters to the editor advocating particular political positions participate in an activity (letter writing advocating a political position) that takes place in the public sphere (editorial page). The utilization of public spaces for political action is another activity that takes place in the public sphere (Squires 2002, 449-449).

For most of history however, women, people of color, gay men and women, and people with "disabilities", among others, have been shut out of the public sphere (Fraser 1993, 8) and the activities outlined above. This exclusion has led to the creation of alternative spheres of public engagement (i.e. *counterpublics*); sites where marginalized groups form "alternative, oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests and needs" (Gregory 1994, 153). A variety of alternatives to the public sphere emerged in western, liberal democracies (Dawson 2001, 24; Fraser 1993) providing opportunities to organize and confront hegemony. The development of counterpublics illustrates a fundamental tension in modern societies. The bourgeoisie public sphere developed as a way for citizens to hold the state accountable and was an important instrument in defining and regulating citizenship and membership to the broader body politic. However, since much of society has historically been excluded from the bourgeoisie public sphere it gave rise to counterpublics, sites that undermined traditional notions of citizenship and public participation. Thus, the Black Counterpublic developed because, for most of U.S. history, African Americans have been excluded from the American public sphere (Dawson 2001, 24).

Given the subaltern status of the Black Counterpublic, there exists a multiplicity of interpretations as to the nature of Black Counterpublic spaces. Squires notes (2002, 446), the "language of public sphere theory is ambiguous" and Asen and Brouwer (2001, 8) observe "scholars sometimes write about counterpublics with frustrating vagueness." Harris-Lacewell (2004, 2) argues, "the heart of the Black Counterpublic is public space, specifically those spaces where African Americans come together in a relatively safe environment free from white society's gaze." According to Harris-Lacewell (2004, 8) the most important aspect of these public spaces is the belief among African Americans that they are exclusively in the presence of other black people. Historically, the most important "spaces" of the Black Counterpublic included black churches, the African American press, and popular music (Harris-Lacewell 2004; Dawson 2001; Squires 2001; Boyd 1995; Gilroy 1995; Fairclouch 1987; Morris 1984). The ability to debate, strategize responses to white racism, and enact the multiple positions that exist in African American communities in a place relatively free from the influence of whites is paramount. Austin (1997) observes it is within the Black Counterpublic that "black public opinion and a black political agenda are formed." Thus central components of the Black Counterpublic are the multiple political ideologies operating in the Black Counterpublic at any one time.

AFRICAN AMERICAN POLITICAL IDEOLOGY

Gregory (2000, 369) notes that the concept of ideology has so many varied meanings that it is "impossible to provide a single definition." Within the literature on the public sphere, the concept of ideology is treated with suspicion. Habermas worried that ideology undermined the rational deliberation necessary for democracy to work (Dawson 2001, 8). However, scholars working in African American studies have relied on the recognition of multiple African

American political ideologies as a means of understanding and defining the Black Counterpublic (i.e. Dawson 2001; Harris-Lacewell 2004; Squires 2001). Dawson defines political ideology as:

> A world view readily found in the population, including sets of ideas and values that cohere, that are used to publicly justify political stances, and that shape and are shaped by society. Further, political ideology helps to define who are one's friends and enemies, with whom one would form political coalitions, and, furthermore, contains a causal narrative of society and the state (Dawson 2001, 4-5).

Political ideology provides an understanding of how the world is organized, governs social interactions to varying degrees, and provides a framework for the decision making process. Within African American communities a number of political ideologies have been, and still are, important for understanding the experiences of African Americans in U.S. society.

It should be noted that a number of scholars (Gilroy 1994; Gregory 1994; Dawson 2001; 1995; Asante 2003; Harris-Lacewell 2004) have studied African American political ideologies and their relationship to the lives and experiences of black people. In an effort to be consistent between the definition of political ideology and the ideologies operating in African American communities I use the terminology set out in Dawson's work *Black Visions* (2001). Some scholars (notably Harris-Lacewell 2004) prefer an alternative vocabulary to define the political ideologies operating in black communities. In addition, Dawson has been criticized by some scholars of African American political thought (most notably Asante 2003) for using Eurocentric terminology and ideas to describe the political attitudes of black people in the United States.

With these critiques in mind, I utilize Dawson's work and his study of the political attitudes operative in African American communities to identify and examine the political ideologies operative along the Auburn Avenue corridor. Dawson notes (2001, 51) African American political ideologies are forged in the crucible of American Apartheid which has characterized the experience of African Americans for most of U.S. history. Dawson argues we

should view the development of political ideology within African American communities as flowing from a "set of autonomous organizations that the black community ha[s] built since the Civil War" (Dawson 2001,51), but have been informed by ideas operating in the larger normative society. According to Dawson we should view the ideologies operating within African American communities as born out of a set of experiences that are uniquely African American and speak to the experiences of African Americans in U.S. society. While the political ideologies operating in African American communities borrow from the concepts and political thought operative in normative society, the articulation of these ideas by black people marks them as uniquely African American.[5]

Dawson (2001) identifies a number of different ideologies operating in African American communities including: Radical Egalitarianism, Disillusioned Liberalism, Black Marxism, Black Conservatism, Black Feminism and Black Nationalism. I've identified two related ideologies as important to the residents, business owners and community activists along the Auburn Avenue corridor, though others are undoubtedly present along the corridor. *Disillusioned liberalism* is epitomized by Dr. King's writings in the last years of his life and the work of post-1930's Du Bois when both men perceived the structure of U.S. society as inherently racist. Disillusioned liberalism is defined by the idea that "white racism is considered to be fundamentally entrenched among whites" (Dawson 2001, 17) who will never willingly give up their privileged position. In addition, "America is viewed by adherents of this ideological vision as fundamentally racist…the capitalist system is seen as a fundamental part of the problem (Dawson 2001, 17). Moreover,

[5] For example see the critiques by African American feminist scholars like bell hooks who have argued that the contemporary feminist movement ignored the experiences of women of color (1981; 1984; 1989). In this case we should see the kind of feminism advocated by hooks' as uniquely formed by the experiences of African American women in the U.S. context and related to the experiences of slavery, Jim Crow Segregation and other African American experiences.

this ideological vision incorporates the belief that promises made to African Americans during the battle to integrate U.S. society have not been fulfilled, and that whites were never really willing to fully integrate and share the resources of the nation. This ideology contrasts with the liberal integrationist tradition, often associated with Martin Luther King Jr.'s early writings and work, which argued that the foundation of U.S. society was just and decent and the experience of African Americans could be used to redeem the U.S. democratic experiment (Dawson 2001; Harris-Lacewell 2004).

A second ideology operating along the Auburn Avenue corridor, and linked to disillusioned liberalism, is *community nationalism*. Community nationalism derives from Black Nationalism and the belief in African American autonomy from white society. Various degrees of social, economic and political separation from white America are advocated (Dawson 2001, 21). A key component to Black Nationalism is the belief that "race is the fundamental category for analyzing society" (Dawson 2001, 21). The political ideology of community nationalism is often associated with "black empowerment politics" (Jennings 1992) and focuses on the development of independent business and economic institutions in African American communities, but recognizes that a greater engagement with white society is necessary. This is a key distinction with other more "radical" Black Nationalisms that posit a complete break with white society and is a fundamental tension for those advocating a community nationalist approach. By engaging with white society, community nationalism risks absorption into normative economic, political and social spheres, which may ultimately undermine the very institutions community nationalists are trying to construct and maintain. Thus, community nationalism focuses on political empowerment in conjunction with economic empowerment (Dawson 2001, 120) as a way to navigate this tension. The development of one without the

development of the other endangers African American community strength and solidarity. Community nationalism is closely related to disillusioned liberalism and:

> Emphasizes the unique and immutable relevance of race as a political characteristic, perceives whites as actively resisting black equality, and encourages African American self-reliance through fostering the development of autonomous black institutions. Nationalism includes support for cultural, social and economic and political autonomy (Harris-Lacewell 2004, 90).

POLITICAL IDEOLOGIES AND THE MAKING OF THE BLACK COUNTERPUBLIC

Given the multiple political ideologies present in African American communities, a number of different Black Counterpublics have developed so it is now more appropriate to "speak of multiple public spheres (or counterpublics) constituted by groups that share a common racial makeup but perhaps do not share the same class, gender, ethnic, or ideological standpoints" (Squires 2002, 452). The conceptualization of multiple Black Counterpublics has implications for the way we think about African American communities and identity. First, we acknowledge the diversity of African American communities (Squires 2002, 453). Instead of speaking of *an* African American community we can speak of African American communities constituted by a number of different positionalities. In addition, we can understand the ways Black Counterpublics replicate or challenge patriarchy, homophobia or other contested African American identity positions. By speaking of multiple Black Counterpublics we recognize the role that black agency plays in constructing significant racialized space. The ability to organize and challenge white racism has lead various Black Counterpublics to a complex engagement with broader white society. Through the articulation of multiple counterpublic spaces, African Americans have confronted white racism on several scales and with varying degrees of success. This has prompted dominant white society to incorporate various aspects of the Black Counterpublic into the Bourgeoisie public sphere, facilitating broader engagement with African

American culture and politics (Squires 2002; Dawson 1994) and is illustrative of a major tension within African American communities and a contradiction inherent in Black Counterpublic spaces.

Recall from the earlier discussion on the dialectical method that a critical feature of dialectics is an internal heterogeneity in which two processes are both supporting and undermining one another. Black Counterpublic spaces facilitate a larger engagement with the normative public sphere, and through that engagement aspects of the Black Counterpublic are drawn into and become part of the normative public sphere, thus weakening Black Counterpublic spaces (Dawson 1994; 1996). Many African American communities today find themselves in a quandary, as they advocate for greater representation in the U.S. public sphere and a greater recognition of their interests and needs, aspects of African American culture are subsumed in the normative public sphere which ultimately weakens African American communities and political power, and undermines Black Counterpublic spaces.[6] In addition, the greater engagement with white society opens up African American communities to attacks by racist forces operating in white society. Through my examination of Auburn Avenue we can begin to see how community members are trying to reestablish Auburn Avenue as a counterpublic space, navigate normative visions of African American identity, confront racism, while still constructing significant urban space.

RESEARCH APPROACH

Examining the racialization of place from the perspectives of those who live, work and organize on Auburn Avenue requires the use of a multi-method qualitative approach (Miles and Crush 1993). I analyzed archival material housed at the Auburn Avenue research library

[6] For a larger discussion of the Black Counterpublic and debates surrounding the contemporary strength of the Black Counterpublic see (Squires 2002; Dawson 2001 and Harris-Lacewell 2004).

including newspapers, print collections and other sources to familiarize myself with the street's historic development. In addition to their collection of the *Atlanta Daily World,* the research library had several archived collections from local and regional newspapers. I conducted open-ended interviews with those who live, work and organize on Auburn Avenue as well as with city leaders and bureaucrats responsible for urban development in the city. I identified interview participants through a variety of means. I attended community meetings, approached business owners in their places of business, met people through word of mouth, and through the internet. I subscribed to the *Atlanta Daily World* which assisted in identifying officials active in the African American community. The interviews all took place along the Auburn Avenue corridor in offices, private homes or at a local coffee shop, or in city official's offices and lasted from 45 minutes to two hours depending on the amount of time interview participants had available.

I analyzed both archival and firsthand materials in two steps. I organized the materials along broad lines which involved transcribing interviews, assigning interview participants pseudonyms, and categorizing the data. The second step in the process involved the coding of interview data for dominant discursive themes (Sondergarrd 2002; Gibson-Graham 1994). I pursued a dual stream coding process. I hired two upper-division African-American undergraduate students from the Atlanta area to help code the interviews. These students had a different perspective than I on the everyday politics and workings of Atlanta's African American communities. After training in the use of qualitative methods, these students coded the interview transcripts independently. We then discussed the coded data collectively to identify shared themes. In many cases we identified the same kind of topics, though often under different names. In cases when we did not agree on specifics, we built consensus around broad themes that emerged in the coding process. I utilized these steps in an effort to "triangulate" (Denzin

and Lincoln 1998; Marshall and Phillips 1999) my research strategy to add "rigor, breadth and depth" (Denzin and Lincoln 1998, 4) to this research project.

In the following sections I present the analysis of my data. These sections are organized around a broad set of ideas that emerged during the interview and coding process. I began interviews with five themes that I wanted to explore: participant's past and current relation to Auburn Avenue; participant's definition of Auburn Avenue; participant's views on racial ideology; perceptions of Auburn Avenue's post World War II development; and participant's views on contemporary redevelopment efforts. In addition, a number of emic themes emerged during the interview and analysis part of the project which I did not anticipate. These included views on an "Auburn Avenue Spirit", the importance of a community centered-ideal, as well as the disillusionment with post-Civil Rights U.S. society. The interplay between etic and emic themes is an important aspect of this research project as it allows the ideas of interview participants to be incorporated in the project (Miles and Crush 1993) while acknowledging the positionality and theorization of the investigator (England 1994). I have organized the following sections by first discussing the historic context and development of Auburn Avenue. This is followed by a short discussion of corridor stakeholders' understandings of Auburn Avenue and their relation to the "Spirit of Auburn Avenue," followed by a discussion and interpretation of the meaning of a community-centered ideal on Auburn Avenue and the loss of a community spirit as it relates to disillusioned liberalism. I follow this discussion by examining Big Bethel AME's redevelopment project and its relationship to community nationalism.

CASE STUDY OF AUBURN AVENUE

AUBURN AVENUE IN AN HISTORIC CONTEXT

From the 1940's through the early 1960's, Auburn Avenue was the "richest Negro street in the World" (*Fortune Magazine* 1955, as quoted in Grant 1993, 543). Auburn Avenue was home to the three pillars of African American commerce in the South: Citizens Trust Bank, one of the largest African American controlled banks in the United States, Mutual Federal Savings and Loan, and the Atlanta Life Insurance Company (Pomerantz 1996, 123). The Rucker Building provided prized offices for black doctors, lawyers and accountants. Auburn Avenue was one of the most important stops for black entertainers in the segregated south. The Royal Peacock Theater (originally the Tophat Club) and the Casino Club were *the* stops for black entertainers during the time of Jim Crow segregation. It was at this time that Auburn Avenue got its nickname "Sweet Auburn" when John Wesley Dobbs, the unofficial mayor of Auburn Avenue, quipped if "money made the world sweet, then Auburn Avenue was the sweetest street on the planet" (as quoted in Pomerantz 1996, 124).

Figure 2.1. Atlanta Daily World. (all photos by author)

Auburn Avenue was also home to political and civic organizations advancing the goals of social and civil rights in the South. The Prince Hall Masons were instrumental in registering African Americans to vote in Atlanta. Big Bethel AME Church, Wheat Street Church and the Butler Street YMCA were located in the Auburn Avenue community and all played significant roles during the 1950's and 1960's U.S. Civil Rights Struggle. The *Atlanta Daily World*, the nation's only African American owned daily newspaper, was located on Auburn Avenue and provided a voice for the African American middle-class in the South. Auburn Avenue was home to the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) founded by Martin Luther King Jr. to combat racism and promote non-violence. As well as being born on Auburn Avenue, Martin Luther King Jr.'s final resting place on the street is a U.S. National Historic Site. Still today Ebenezer Baptist Church, in which Dr. King served during his difficult struggle to destroy Jim Crow Segregation, anchors a corner of Auburn Avenue.

Figure 2.2. The Oddfellow's'Building.

AUBURN AVENUE IN A CONTEMPORARY CONTEXT

Recognizing Auburn Avenue as a counterpublic space helps to situate Auburn Avenue

and the changes currently taking place along the corridor into a broader framework. The current political ideologies along the Auburn Avenue corridor arose from contemporary disillusionment with unfulfilled promises made to African Americans during the U.S. Civil Rights struggle.[7] Throughout the 1960', 1970's and 1980's Auburn Avenue faced several challenges resulting from the loss of housing stock, the building of Interstate 75/85 through the heart of the community, and the integration of the City of Atlanta. By the late 1970's Auburn Avenue had deteriorated to a point where it consisted of "boarded up cafes, [and] winos wandering at night" (Pomerantz 1996, 485). As the community deteriorated many along the corridor felt abandoned by African Americans as well as whites. These experiences inform a $45 million dollar redevelopment project launched by Big Bethel AME Church in 2004. By situating the Auburn corridor into the broader framework of the Black Counterpublic, the disillusionment with post-Civil Rights America and Big Bethel's Redevelopment project takes on broader significance. Given Auburn's historic role as a Black Counterpublic, the responses to desegregation and the redevelopment of the corridor have a goal of reconnecting to Auburn's past as a political, social, economic and cultural force in the city, the region, and the nation. Thus the case study of Auburn Avenue illuminates how the African American community engages in place making on Auburn Avenue and articulates differing visions of African American identity.

[7]Dawson 2001 and Harris-Lacewell 2004 note that disillusioned liberalism is the most difficult ideological position to measure in African American communities. However, Dawson contends that national surveys showing between 75-85% of the African American community continue to believe that U.S. society is racially unjust, 83% of African Americans say the legal system is not fair to blacks, and 65% of African Americans believe that racial equality will not be achieved in their lifetimes as evidence for the disillusionment with current U.S. society (Dawson 2001, 280).

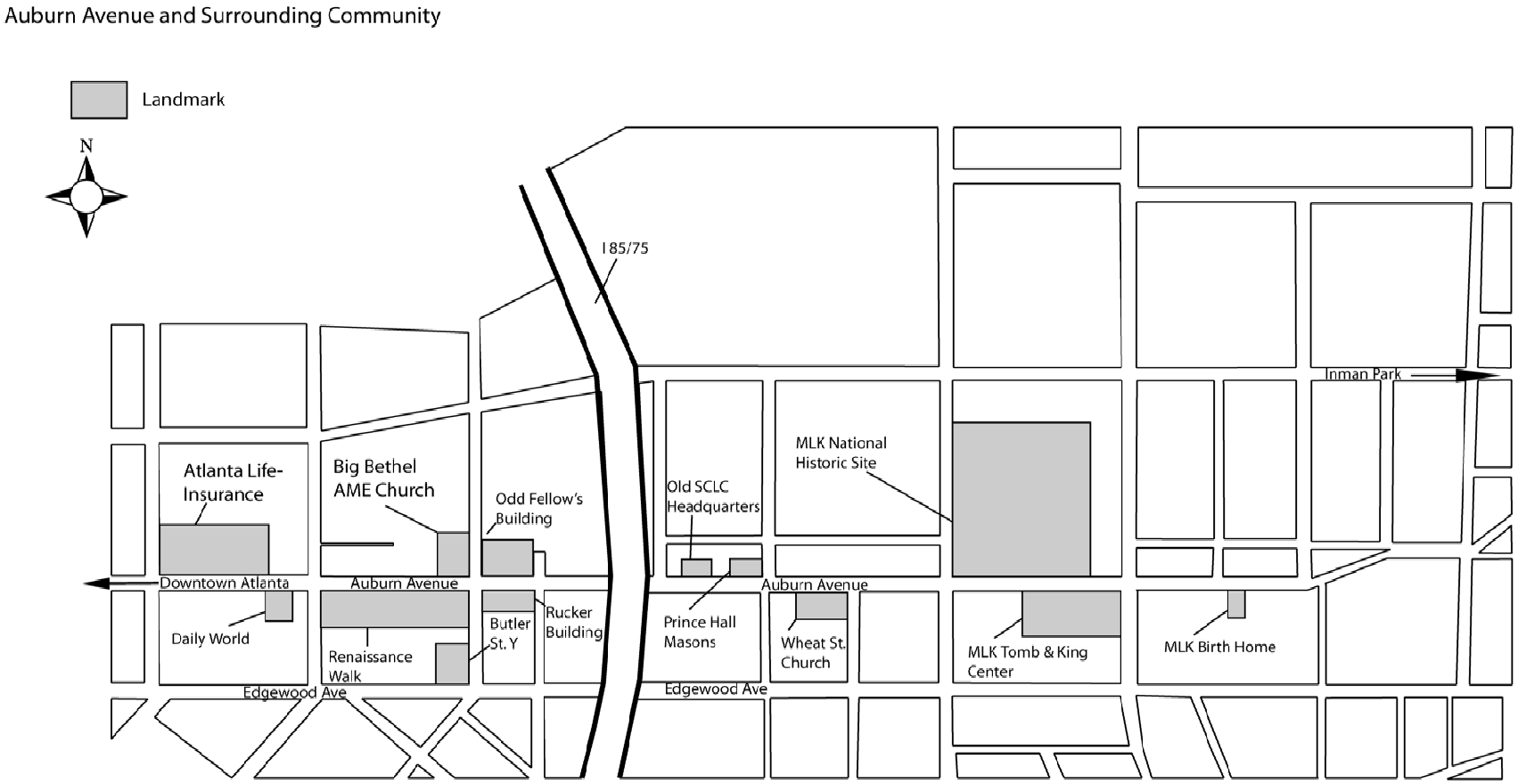

Figure 2.3. Auburn Avenue corridor and landmarks.

THE AUBURN AVENUE SPIRIT: EVOKING THE CORRIDOR'S LEGACY AND SIGNIFICANCE

For many along the Auburn Avenue corridor, the history and legacy of Auburn Avenue is tied to the existence of a successful commercial district developed in the face of racism and segregation. Moreover, for many interview respondents Auburn Avenue's historic identity is evocative of a 'spirit', tied to the Avenue's role as a commercial district. I contend that evocations of 'spirit' both represent Auburn Avenue's historic role as a Black Counterpublic and also illuminate an aspect of the race/place dialectic. Recall from our earlier discussion on the race/place dialectic that a critical piece of the construction of North American Chinatowns was the way Chinese identity extended beyond the boundaries of Chinatowns to permeate all facets of life. In a similar vein Auburn Avenue became synonymous with African American identity in Atlanta, and that identity extended beyond the Auburn Avenue corridor to encompass Black life in Atlanta. For example, *The New York Times* in 1959 declared that Auburn Avenue was emblematic of "New Southerner", what was noted as the emergence on Auburn Avenue of "the middle class Negro" (Dykeman and Stokely August 9, 1959, pg. 11).[8] The Times article tied a larger black identity in Atlanta to Auburn Avenue's commercial success and viability which in turn extended beyond the corridor's borders to encompass all facets of black life in the City of Atlanta. Thus the meaning of Auburn Avenue, what many interview respondents presently refer to as the "Spirit of Auburn Avenue" encompasses a series of social, political and economic relationships along the corridor which in turn are related to broader conceptions of race and place.

[8] This article is indicative of a series of newspaper articles that have run in national publications which tie Atlanta's African American identity to Auburn Avenue (see: Sitton 1962; Range 1974; Harris 1988; Parker 1990 as example).

Mark is a member of Wheat Street Baptist Church and a longtime resident of Auburn Avenue. Mark grew up two blocks from the Auburn corridor in the Grady Homes public housing complex. After serving in the Army in the 1950's Mark returned to Auburn Avenue and worked for General Motors. Mark's long connection with Auburn Avenue allows him to remember a time when the Auburn corridor was central for African Americans living in the City of Atlanta. Mark explains the significance of Auburn Avenue:

> On the Avenue you had two buildings, one was the 'Odd Fellows Building' and across the street you had the 'Rucker Building.' Ninety-nine percept of black professionals had their offices in those buildings. You had 'Yates and Milton Drugstore', it had a fountain, and I could sit anywhere I wanted. It was a place where all kinds of people could come together. Auburn Avenue was a place we could all come together.

In a similar vein the pastor of Big Bethel AME Church explains:

> I don't know if you have ever seen the movie *Ray,* but there is a scene in that movie which is symbolic for the Avenue. In one of the first scenes Ray Charles and his record producer are getting out of a car and walking across Auburn Avenue to record a record. Well, that is symbolic of what Auburn Avenue was. The whole area was for black people and black commerce.

It might be tempting to dismiss these comments as nostalgia, however, these descriptions evoke an understanding of the Auburn Avenue corridor focused on the role Auburn Avenue played in the city, region and nation. Central to this understanding is the presence of African American professional and commercial icons, which are tied to an Auburn Avenue spirit, which is tied to an African American identity position.

Clarence, a businessman from North Philadelphia who moved to Atlanta in the early 1980's, states "What made Auburn Avenue, Auburn Avenue and different from any other place in America? It was a spirit." One member of Big Bethel AME described this as a "spirit of oneness, care, up-lift, pride in being Black when everyone else was telling us to be ashamed of

our skin." A resident of Auburn Avenue links the spirit of Auburn Avenue to Black life in the city. For her the spirit of Auburn Avenue is

> A holistic approach to life. Everything that meant African American in Atlanta happened here. There is a tremendous *spirit of place* that develops in those conditions. The ability to express your humanness as a person happened here, because it couldn't happen anywhere else, it makes this space a very spiritual place for African Americans.

Thus the spirit of Auburn Avenue is related to black identity in the South and the ability to develop a place that showed the world that black people could achieve great success in the face of destructive white racism. Auburn Avenue was a crossroads for African American culture, politics, and commerce during the time of segregation. The corridor served as a staging ground for the desegregation of the city as black leaders met in the community to discuss strategies for combating racism. During the time of segregation Auburn Avenue was a symbol that black people could be successful and govern themselves in a time when broader normative society was saying African Americans were not capable members of society. An aspect central to the historical understandings of Auburn Avenue and the development of the corridor outlined above is the ability of African Americans to express their humanity which in turn is identified with economic success and community viability. Auburn Avenue challenged broader normative society to reconceptualize African American identity in the South and become part of a larger African American identity position. Thus the corridor was more than just an important street for African Americans in the South, its significance lies in the way the corridor became representative of a wider African American identity linked to economic prosperity. Thus, for many of the stakeholders on Auburn Avenue today, a close link has developed between African American economic success and the expression of African American identity in the City of Atlanta, and in turn is linked to broader social and economic forces.

COMMUNITY OWNERSHIP AND CONTEMPORARY UNDERSTANDINGS OF AUBURN AVENUE

The relationship between Auburn Avenue's commercial viability and notions of community is related to the idea of a shared linked fate which is a critical component of the Black Counterpublic and is a focus for many corridor stakeholders (Baker 1995; Dawson 2001; 1994; Harris-Lacewell 2004). Dawson identifies the idea of a shared linked fate as a key difference between the way African American communities and white communities view the world and measure success. Dawson notes that a hallmark of the Black Counterpublic is a belief that individual African American success is measured in terms of community success (Dawson 2001, 31) and is a reflection of the long standing spatial segregation imposed on African Americans. This contrasts with the normative liberal tradition in the United States that has focused on individual autonomy and a belief in individual success, irrespective of community viability (Dawson 2001, 247). Historically, a powerful feeling among many African Americans along the Auburn corridor was the idea that one's personal success was measured in terms of a linked fate between other African Americans in the community.[9] Reverend Jerek, pastor of Big Bethel AME, explains:

> Historically in African American communities we had a communal life. The communal life is what kept us together in the face of all the racism and terribleness that was slavery, and segregation and racism. This is the essence of the African American community, a communal life where we could all take care of each other.

Reverend Jerek's comments reflect broader community understanding of a shared, linked fate that historically was central to the politics and culture of the Auburn Avenue corridor. The idea

[9] This is an example of a theme which emerged during the dual-stream coding process. It was not a theme that I had originally identified, but after talking with the two under-graduate students it emerged as an important theme in this analysis.

of a shared linked fate was in large measure formed within the crucible of segregation and as segregation ended, the links between large segments of the African American community on Auburn Avenue began to erode.

As legalized segregation ended many of the African American professionals left Auburn Avenue for other areas of Atlanta. As they moved, many of the institutions that had supported Auburn Avenue left with them for other parts of the city. Clarence explains: "Auburn Avenue was able to thrive because black people couldn't be anywhere else. Once you were able to move, when segregation ended, many people felt they were moving up by moving out and we lost a spirit of the place." Mark explains this feeling succinctly stating flatly, "integration was a blessing and a curse for us on Auburn Avenue." Many along the Avenue agreed that with the end of segregation the community lost its cohesiveness. Don explains:

> All my friends, they have offices in Buckhead, or on Peachtree Street and you know what I tell them? It's no big deal to have an office on Peachtree anymore. It's not an indication of success. Anyone can have an office down there, but it is a big deal to have an office down here and to deal all the problems that we deal with on the Avenue.

His statement that it is "not a big deal to have an office on Peachtree Street" is telling. Historically, Peachtree was where the wealthiest elements of the white Atlanta power structure had offices. Don's notion of community solidarity effectively ties individual success to the community and spatially situated on Auburn Avenue. Don views his presence on the Avenue as a reflection of his responsibility to the larger black community. These feelings indicate an awareness that the promises of integration have not been fulfilled by broader normative society and reflect disillusioned liberalism. For many along the corridor who remember a time when Auburn Avenue was the place to be, its current state is depressing. Whereas the Auburn Avenue corridor, from their perspective, used to stand as symbol of the strength and power of a united

African American community in Atlanta, that it once embodied a spirit of place, today the corridor is emblematic of the larger challenges facing the African American community as the different elements of the black community in Atlanta try to redefine and redevelop Auburn Avenue.

For many stakeholders on Auburn Avenue, the memory of abandonment of the Avenue by some represents divisions that have emerged in the African American community following the end of legalized segregation. One longtime struggling African American businessman stated in our interview:

> The thing you have to understand is this is Atlanta, which means that there are a lot of black leaders with, I'll be kind, a plantation mentality, which means that when white folks want something done it gets done and if they don't want it to get done, you don't do it. So we had a lot of supposed black leadership sell out places like Auburn Avenue. The black leadership was too busy making a dime, they were too quick to go work for Wal-Mart or whatever, but not so quick to say hey, let's still support our community institutions.

A Butler Street YMCA board member echoed these comments. Located just off of Auburn Avenue, Butler Street YMCA is an institution for those who live in the community. During the controversial decision to desegregate the Atlanta police force, the basement of the Butler Street YMCA provided space for the first black police officers in the City of Atlanta to change into and out of their uniforms. In a telling passage during our interview, a Butler YMCA board member explained his perspective on Atlanta's reputation for being a progressive city for African Americans. Recent demographic trends indicate that Atlanta is home to the fastest growing, wealthiest black community in the nation (Frey 2004). However, for Glen, this demographic trend has come at a price.

> You know I was born in Tennessee in the 1950's when it wasn't safe to be an African American in Tennessee. I've lived all over this nation both in the North and in the South. It never occurred to me though, until I came to Atlanta, that in

> this day and age you can't always go on what a person looks like on the outside, the hue of their skin color, to see who your oppressor is. There are some of us in the black community who are influenced by things other than our cultural roots. Some of us in the black community have forgotten where we came from and the struggles that entailed.

For many along the Auburn corridor the preceding comments point toward problems facing the community. With the end of segregation, the middle and upper income residents left Auburn for other parts of the city. In addition, Auburn Avenue lost much of the housing stock and consequently residents that had supported the business community. For example, during the 1960's Atlanta instituted a program to build a north-south expressway through the city (Keating 2001, 91). Interstate 85/75, was sited to slash through the heart of the Auburn corridor, cutting it into two large sections. Once the highway was completed "the city used the federal urban-renewal program to clear land for redevelopment" (Keating 2001, 93). Huge swaths of land were demolished to make way for Fulton County Stadium needed to bring the Milwaukee Braves to Atlanta. The combination of highway development and "slum" clearance gutted several neighborhoods surrounding Auburn Avenue of their black populations. Though accurate figures are hard to come by, it is estimated that during this period 68,000 people were forced to move and nineteen out of twenty people displaced were African American (Keating 2001, 93). These experiences and views both inform and are informed by the disillusionment with post-Civil Rights U.S. society.

An aspect central to understanding disillusioned liberalism is the belief that whites were never willing to give up their privileged position in U.S. society. Residents, businesspersons, and community activists located along Auburn Avenue only need look at the I75/85 corridor to see the legacy of racism in Atlanta. A second aspect of the disillusionment with post-Civil Rights U.S. society recognizes that members of the African American community were willing

to leverage places like Auburn Avenue to move out of black communities. The recognition that some African Americans were trying to move 'up', by moving 'out' is an example of the connections between place and identity. Many of my interview participants could live and work in almost any neighborhood in the City of Atlanta, yet by locating along the Auburn Avenue corridor they are asserting particular aspects of their identity. In addition, their African American identity is linked to the way they view and understand Auburn Avenue's history and legacy which in turn informs their understanding of the role that race plays in contemporary U.S. society, and in turn is linked to particular identity positions within the African American community.

NAVIGATING IDENTITY POSITION ALONG THE AUBURN CORRIDOR

Given the identification between Auburn Avenue's commercial viability and an historic African American identity, linked to a broader sense of community, and the history of class division along the corridor, an important tension along the Avenue is the positionality of interview respondents. Thus a critical element in the process of racializing place is the way class and other identity tensions within the Black Counterpublic, the internal politics in the African American community, are related to the development and understanding of Auburn Avenue. Perhaps the most salient example of this was the integration of the Atlanta police force and the opening up of the West Side of Atlanta to African American development. Chris, the National Park Historian on the Martin Luther King Jr. National Park, explains: "historically on Auburn Avenue you had a collection of business and community interests that were more interested in negotiation than confrontation. So, when it came time for things like integrating the police force or opening up the West Side to Black development they were willing to make compromises." Prudence, a 90 plus-year old Auburn resident who marched with Dr. King and has lived on

Auburn Avenue her whole life, explains, “what you had here was a neighborhood that had shotgun houses next to some of the wealthiest black people in the city and that caused problems sometimes.” These deep-seated identity tensions began to boil over during the late 1950’s and 1960’s as the black population of Atlanta faced a housing crisis (Bayor 1996, 70); the burgeoning African American population was overwhelming the historic black neighborhoods. Over time the wealthier black citizenry on Auburn Avenue wanted to expand their neighborhood, or alternatively wanted to move to the west side of Atlanta which was shut off from black development. Keating (2001) points out, the African American community on Auburn Avenue was organized politically to resist the building of I85/75, however, the City opened up the west side of Atlanta to African American development in exchange for the highway. Consequently, some of the wealthier elements of Auburn Avenue were willing to make compromises with the City of Atlanta when it came to losing Auburn Avenue housing stock and business when the City of Atlanta began to build highways through the Auburn Avenue community.

In addition, as the City of Atlanta grappled with desegregation, fissures among African Americans along the Auburn Avenue corridor emerged. For example, many of the older African American business and civic leaders in Atlanta wanted Dr. King to stay out of Atlanta and leave local negotiations over desegregation to the older, more established black leadership along the corridor (Branch 1988). C.A. Scott, owner and editor of the *Atlanta Daily World,* published a series of newspaper editorials and articles criticizing Dr. King and his method of confronting whites in his effort to desegregate southern society (i.e. *Atlanta Daily World* July 26, 1962, p.4). The views expressed by Scott were representative of a wider feeling amongst the more established African American leadership along Auburn Avenue that if pushed too hard, the white business leadership of Atlanta would push back, thus upsetting the carefully crafted image of

Atlanta as “the city too busy to hate”. Thus what existed on Auburn Avenue was a complex social world in which class and identity tensions framed the workings of the community both reinforcing Auburn Avenue’s economic stature, but also simultaneously undermining the Auburn Avenue corridor through negotiation and compromise with white Atlanta. Auburn Avenue served as an important counterpoint to racist conceptualizations of African Americans which permeated U.S. society, and also replicated wider normative class and identity fissures and tensions. This tension along the corridor both sustained a community identity, and ultimately, as segregation ended, eroded Auburn Avenue’s commercial viability and significantly crippled Auburn Avenue’s ability to function as a Black Counterpublic space. These experiences inform the redevelopment of Auburn Avenue currently taking place along the corridor.

THE RENAISSANCE WALK: RECAPTURING THE SPIRIT

As the community of Auburn Avenue fell into decline during the 1970’s and 1980’s, several pastors at Big Bethel AME Church bought surrounding property. Beginning in the 1990’s the Auburn Avenue corridor faced development pressure as downtown Atlanta, which borders Auburn Avenue to the west, and Inman Park (a gentrified neighborhood bordering the eastern edge of Auburn) were redeveloped. Jan, project coordinator for Central Atlanta Progress (CAP) the 501 C development arm of the City of Atlanta, noted that Auburn Avenue represents the one piece of the downtown development puzzle that has remained underdeveloped. With this pressure it became clear to many in the community that development was going to come to Auburn Avenue and that the community needed to get involved in order to have a voice in how Auburn would be remade. It was during this time Big Bethel planned a redevelopment across from the main worship hall. The $45 million dollar redevelopment project “Renaissance Walk”

is the fruit of that effort. The project includes a 180 unit-housing component with an additional 42,800 square feet of retail space.

Figure 2.4. Renaissance Walk Redevelopment.

Big Bethel AME's redevelopment of Auburn Avenue is an attempt to ground the spaces of Auburn Avenue in an African American context, and thus also encompasses the broader experience of slavery and even a connection to Africa. Reverend Jerek, Big Bethel's pastor, situates Auburn Avenue historically as a nurturing space that brought together diverse elements of the African American community and is based on a communal life centered around African American control. In this way Reverend Jerek is connecting Auburn Avenue to its historic roots as a Black Counterpublic space. Thus Reverend Jerek describes Big Bethel's project as powerful ministry for the people of Auburn Avenue:

> This is a powerful project because look at what we have here now. We have abandoned buildings, and places where there are drugs up and down the street, no real visibility of people. Well, one of the things, and the real beauty of doing a project like this is, we are going to be able to control the climate down here.

For Reverend Jerek the project is tied to the idea that healthy African American communities had a communal life where people could come together to worship, organize and live together. Thus the Renaissance Walk is connected with larger visions of what it means to be an African American in the United States: "This project and this place [referring to Auburn Avenue] is about people coming together, it's about a spirit of community. The community life is about what we used to have in Africa. That's the kind of spirit of community I'm talking about." According to Reverend Jerek the Renaissance Walk is about trying to capture the meaning and spirit of the African American community on Auburn Avenue through the reconstruction of the street.

For Reverend Jerek an important aspect of the redevelopment project is the ability of the church, and by extension the African American community, to exert control and influence over the street's reconstruction. Thus, the opportunity to "control the climate down here" means more than just the ability to control the population of Auburn Avenue. Roger, a representative of the Integral Group, the development firm hired by Big Bethel to complete the Renaissance Walk, describes: "this project is special because we are an African American company, hired by an African American church, to help rebuild an African American street, which means African American control." Thus an important aspect of the redevelopment project is the ability of the church to own a significant portion of Auburn Avenue and the way the church ties into other African American companies and institutions to complete the project. Yet, one cannot ignore the fact that by asserting themselves into the redevelopment of the Auburn Avenue corridor, Big Bethel is also trying to maintain the prominent role that the African American church has played in black communities. This is related to ideas about community nationalism and the remaking of the Auburn Avenue corridor.

COMMUNITY NATIONALISM AND THE REMAKING OF THE AUBURN CORRIDOR

Auburn Avenue and Big Bethel's redevelopment is part of a political and social movement seeking to hold onto Auburn Avenue through the development of African American economic power. This economic power is linked to a broader African American identity and maintains the church's presence on Auburn Avenue as the most important institution for the community, particularly as neighborhoods that border Auburn Avenue to the east have gentrified. Harris-Lacewell notes (2004, 8) that as the sacred and spiritual role of the church has expanded to include "social, political, and economic realms," the influence of the church on the Black Counterpublic is increasing. Consequently, a facet of Big Bethel's redevelopment project moves beyond Auburn Avenue to address issues in African American communities via the Black Counterpublic. As the development pressure increased on Auburn Avenue, many in the community realized that they were in danger of losing Auburn Avenue as a significant African American cultural, political and social neighborhood; by stepping in to fill a vacuum on Auburn Avenue Reverend Jerek is asserting the primacy of the church in the community.

In order for the Big Bethel project to have legitimacy along the corridor, it is important for the Renaissance Walk to maintain a strong black presence on Auburn Avenue. The desire by Big Bethel AME Church and the Integral Group to maintain significant African American presence and control on Auburn Avenue becomes a driving part of the redevelopment visions. Roger explains:

> It is definitely important to keep a black presence on Auburn Avenue. It is definitely important for this to be an African American community and to respect the strong presence of African Americans here. Our goal with this project is obviously not to any community, but we are not advocates for complete gentrification either. In order for our redevelopment project to be successful you have to have a strong African American presence on Auburn. We have to maintain Auburn's cultural significance and frankly that has been our goal from day one with this project.

The need to rebuild and restore Auburn Avenue as well as the desire to maintain a strong black presence on the Avenue is an attempt by some to reconnect Auburn Avenue to its historic roots as a Black Counterpublic. The redevelopment project reestablishes the church's presence as the most important public space for black Americans in the city. During an interview with a member of Wheat Street Baptist Church, she explained the significance of Big Bethel's redevelopment for the wider Auburn corridor: "The thing is, Big Bethel is providing leadership in the community, something we haven't had for a long, long time down here. They had a vision to buy land, hire a black owned development firm, and make their redevelopment happen." A Big Bethel Church Deacon reiterated those sentiments: "Our development on Auburn Avenue is an attempt to reconnect with our past, to maintain a strong black presence in downtown Atlanta, and to provide spaces where African Americans can come together." He goes on to explain that the heart of Auburn Avenue has been the presence of the African American Church:

> The important thing about this project is that the church is leading it. When everyone else left Auburn we were the only institution to stay. Our project is about reasserting the church's influence in this community, about saying we have always been here and we will always be here. You know when King wanted to have a place to meet to discuss Civil Rights, where did he go? The church. Why did he go there? It was the only place whites wouldn't be. It was free from white society.

The African American churches on Auburn Avenue historically played a significant role in the fight for social and civil rights, and through the Renaissance Walk Big Bethel is both reaffirming that presence and rearticulating and reestablishing a particular kind of African American image for the city, region and nation.

BEYOND THE CORRIDOR: ADDRESSING RACE AND RACISM IN U.S. SOCIETY

One goal of Big Bethel's redevelopment is the desire to project a positive image of African Americans beyond the City of Atlanta. For Reverend Jerek the redevelopment of the

street provides an opportunity for people to reevaluate the meaning and significance of black life in America, and for Auburn Avenue to play a critical role in confronting racism. According to Reverend Jerek the Renaissance Walk provides an image of an African American community in control of its future and able to build community infrastructure. Reverend Jerek sums up the project outlined by Big Bethel: "We need to celebrate African American culture and success and we can do that down here."

Reverend Jerek understands the Renaissance Walk as part of a national discourse about the production of race and racism in the United States. The project provides an alternative understanding to mainstream conceptualizations of what it means to be black and live in an urban community in the United States. As we continue in our discussion he mentions, "American culture is screwed up right now." When I ask him about his comment he explains:

> Our community is under assault by forces outside of our control, racist forces, which are destroying and manipulating black people. The community of Auburn Avenue has been under assault for twenty plus years. The Renaissance Walk is about the renewing of Auburn Avenue, the spirit of this place and it is about renewing life down here and stemming the tide of community destruction.

Equally important for many at Big Bethel is the image that Auburn Avenue projects to the world given its significant political and cultural legacy. Auburn Avenue is home to the Martin Luther King Jr. National Historic Site where a museum, Dr. King's birth home, church and final resting place receive over 300,000 visitors annually. The large number of people who visit Auburn Avenue feed into the broader discourse of community nationalism. On a recent trip to Mexico, Reverend Jerek had an epiphany about race relations in the United States: he noticed that many of the Mexican citizens he met during his trip were standoffish and seemed overly nervous around him. He inquired about the situation to his driver who explained to him, "we [in Mexico] see American T.V. and movies. We know what your [African American] culture is like and it

makes people nervous." Reverend Jerek at that moment realized the project on Auburn Avenue was more significant than redeveloping the street:

> When people from around the world come to visit the King memorials they are also visiting the most important street for black people in the world. Look at what they see here now. It is drugs, abandoned buildings, and homelessness. This feeds into stereotypes about what it means to be black in the United States. Just think what they will see when the project is done. They will see a revitalized, respirtiualized community.

Reverend Jerek's comments outline an aspect of community nationalism -- the role that strong community institutions play in countering hegemonic images and stereotypes of black life in the United States. In this sense the project is about reasserting positive images of African Americans to broader normative society. Historically, Black Nationalism has tried to accomplish this by constructing an ideology focused on black autonomy from broader white society. Yet for most of U.S. history attempts to assert more positive images and understandings of African American culture and history have met with resistance from normative society. As manifest in the Renaissance Walk, Community Nationalism attempts to engage with normative society, yet maintain a strong African American identity. The ideology of Community Nationalism seeks to reinforce a strong African American identity through the construction of significant economic institutions owned and run by African Americans. Yet, community nationalism also recognizes that in order for this economic project to be successful, there is a need to engage economically with non-black society. Whereas historically Auburn Avenue was able to thrive and be successful precisely because African Americans could not be anywhere else, Big Bethel is trying to recapture Auburn Avenue's significance through African American ownership and an engagement with white society. Auburn Avenue's role as the most significant street for African Americans in the South and Atlanta's reputation as an important African American city informs the community nationalism displayed by the Big Bethel project.

However, the role that Big Bethel is playing along the corridor may come at a price. The engagement with white society necessarily puts African American communities at risk as significant aspects of the Black Counterpublic are absorbed into normative society (Dawson 1994; 2001). This is a fundamental tension and represents a key contradiction among advocates of Community Nationalism who both seek strong African American communities, but who also want a broader engagement with normative society. On the one hand advocates for Community Nationalism celebrate and promote African American community solidarity, yet they are simultaneously working with and engaging with the racist power structure which still dominates U.S. society.

Big Bethel AME attempts to navigate this tension and to ensure a significant African American presence on Auburn Avenue through ownership of property. Beth, a member of Big Bethel AME, explains:

> This area is more significant than any other African American community in America because we, the African American community, own the property along the corridor. It's what separated this area from other places like Harlem or Beal St. where there was not significant African American ownership of property. So even if these places fill up with white folks, we will still own the property, we will be the ones to benefit from their presence. That is a change from how things usually work around Atlanta.

Thus a way to ensure the success of the Renaissance Walk and the continued strong presence along the Auburn corridor is through the ownership of property and the promotion of a strong, economically centered, identity along the corridor, an economic identity that dominated Auburn Avenue's history when it was known as "Sweet Auburn." In this way, the Renaissance Walk is trying to recapture the spirit of Auburn Avenue through the ownership of Auburn Avenue property.

CONCLUSION

The Auburn Avenue corridor is indicative of the challenges faced by contemporary Black Counterpublic spaces. The end of legalized segregation coupled with the desegregation of the City of Atlanta left Auburn Avenue in a position to be exploited by normative society as the upper-class African American residents of Auburn Avenue left for other parts of the city and the city destroyed much of the surrounding housing stock which Auburn Avenue businesses had depended on for their survival. However, the Auburn Avenue corridor is more than a mere reflection of the challenges faced by African American urban communities at the dawn of the 21st century. Through the redevelopment project started by Big Bethel AME Church we have a window from which to observe the subtle changes taking place along the Auburn Avenue corridor and, in particular, focus on the ways members of the Auburn Avenue community are trying to remake the corridor. The changes taking place along the Auburn Avenue corridor serves as an invitation to explore the racialization of place from the perspective of the African American community, and to consider the ways in which people of color engage with and understand space and place.

Along the Auburn Avenue corridor today there is a collection of business and spiritual leaders who are trying to reclaim Auburn Avenue as a significant urban space. For these individuals the goal is the creation of an up-scale, African American urban community and is a reflection of the larger political ideology known as community nationalism. The form of community nationalism as practiced by Big Bethel AME Church and firm developing the Renaissance Walk focuses on the construction of autonomous economic institutions that support African American communities and flows from the broader ideological position of Black Nationalism. The variant of Black Nationalism occurring along the Auburn Avenue corridor

also flows from broader disillusionment with post-Civil Rights U.S. society. The redevelopment taking place along Auburn Avenue, known as the Renaissance Walk, is an attempt to reclaim Auburn Avenue's past as a social, economic, and political force in the City of Atlanta. Additionally, the Renaissance Walk is an effort to reestablish and reconnect with a traditional African American experience that values community solidarity and is representative of a community-centered ideal. This connects the Renaissance Walk to the larger idea of the Black Counterpublic, a space where African Americans can come together relatively free from the gaze of white society to develop strategies to combat racism. However, in Big Bethel's attempt to reclaim Auburn Avenue, the Renaissance Walk replicates historic divisions within the African American community and also leaves the spaces along the Auburn Avenue corridor open to attack by broader forces in normative society, which may ultimately weakening Auburn Avenue. Thus, the challenge of reinforcing Auburn Avenue's African American community and identity while also engaging with normative society may well undermine the very goals laid out by Big Bethel AME Church. The Renaissance Walk on one hand provides economic and political, leverage for the African American community on Auburn Avenue, while at the same time undermining Auburn Avenue as a significant African American urban space.

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CHAPTER 3

CONTESTED MEMORY IN THE BIRTHPLACE OF A KING: A CASE STUDY OF AUBURN AVENUE AND THE MARTIN LUTHER KING JR. NATIONAL PARK[10]

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ABSTRACT

A critical element of the process of racializing place is the construction of memorial landscapes. Through a detailed case study of Auburn Avenue, Atlanta, Georgia's most historically significant African American neighborhood, this paper explores the multiple meanings of the Martin Luther King Jr. National Historic Site. Following the assassination of Dr. King, Auburn Avenue was home to a memorial complex dedicated to Dr. King's life and work. As this memorial landscape has expanded, so too have tensions regarding Dr. King's legacy to Auburn Avenue, the city of Atlanta, and the nation as a whole. Utilizing archival research, open-ended interviews, and site visits, I focus on several interpretations of Dr. King as deployed by residents, business leaders, community activists, and the National Park Service.

Keywords: landscape studies, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., race critical studies, Memorialization.

INTRODUCTION

Auburn Avenue, located near the heart of Atlanta, Georgia offers a potent example of a memorialized landscape embedded with deep social, cultural and political meaning. Events leading up to the 2004 federal holiday honoring Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. illustrate this point. In January of 2004 President George W. Bush visited the King Center for Non-Violent Social Change (King Center) to lay a wreath commemorating King's life and death. In so doing the President was keeping with a long tradition in which every American President with the exception of Richard Nixon has gone to Atlanta to honor Dr. King. As the President stood with Mrs. King, he laid a red, white and blue wreath on the white marble sarcophagus. While the President paused, several hundred protestors chanted, " 'Bush go home,' beat drums and tried to make their voices heard" (Associated Press January 16, 2004, A1). Given the impending 2004 Presidential election and the ongoing Iraq conflict, it is hardly surprising the President's visit was controversial or that several hundred people from the surrounding community organized to protest his visit. More remarkable was the line of city buses parked end to end that effectively separated the President Bush from community activists. Chad, a community organizer explains:

> You know it was really ironic that the President comes to Atlanta to honor a man who made his early reputation by integrating public transportation in Montgomery and the President is segregated from the people of this community by public transportation. It is one of those weird things you see on Auburn Avenue. I don't know if the President or his handlers realized the irony, but it wasn't lost on all of us in the street.

This narrative serves as a useful illustration of the deeply embedded tensions that surround the King memorials and characterize the Auburn Avenue community.[11] President Bush's visit to the

[11] One possible avenue for exploring the President's visit to the Auburn Avenue corridor is a consideration of the way the public spaces around the King Center were regulated and controlled during the wreath laying ceremony (e.g. Mitchell 1995; 1996; 1997). However, for purposes of this paper I am concentrating on the way the memorial landscape dedicated to Dr. King embodies a particular narrative of racial reconciliation while leaving silent more controversial aspects of King's legacy to the United States.

King Center illustrates the ways multiple social actors come together along the Auburn Avenue corridor to interpret and understand the legacy of Dr. King. The tensions surrounding President Bush's visit invite us to explore the way an official memory of King's life and death interacts with more popular interpretations of Dr. King's legacy to the United States. Specifically, I explore the way an official memory of King is embodied in the Martin Luther King Jr. National Historic site located on Auburn Avenue.

To understand the conflicts, multiple interpretations and understandings of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in the community where he was born, raised and eventually returned to lead the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), I draw from literatures dedicated to understanding the process of memorialization (Dwyer 2004; 2000; Johnson 2004; 1995; Alderman 2003; Atwater and Herndon 2003; Mitchell 2003; Till 1999; Cosgrove 1993). A major theme developed by these authors suggests that memorials play a vital role in framing an understanding of national identity. The very idea of nation, of who belongs, and who is excluded from broader normative society are enacted in memorial landscapes. Public memorials become sites that "teach us about our national heritage and our public responsibilities and assume that the urban landscape itself is the emblematic embodiment of power and memory" (Till 1999, 154).

The memorials dedicated to King's life and death along the Auburn Avenue corridor provide a context for interpreting and understanding one of the most divisive periods in United States history. The Auburn Avenue memorial complex provides a context for understanding the "iconic leader" (Alderman 2003, 165) of the Civil Rights struggle in the United States. In addition, the Auburn corridor is one of the few spaces where the federal government commemorates the struggle to integrate U.S. society. Thus, Auburn Avenue is a site where federal, state and local actors come together to memorialize race and racism. The memorial

complex on Auburn Avenue serves as a site to interrogate the meanings of race and racism at multiple scales in U.S. society. Alderman (2003, 165) notes, "[s]cale is an intrinsically important facet of memorializing the past" as it is related to the extent, scope and ability of public memorials to reach a broader public. The memorials dedicated to Dr. King on Auburn Avenue receive hundreds of thousands of visitors annually and are administered by the National Park Service. Thus the memorials to Dr. King along Auburn Avenue are a vehicle for interpreting the complex relationship between race, place and nation.

To address the broader themes of this paper I focus more specifically on the contested nature of memorial landscapes. In particular, I highlight the tensions between an official memory of King's life and death with an often forgotten, but no less important radicalization of King which characterizes his work and writings in the last years of his life. To address this tension I utilize open-ended interviews with key community stakeholders, City of Atlanta officials, and other Atlanta residents as well as archival materials housed at the Auburn Avenue research library. I also make use of my own personal experiences of the King memorial sites. In particular, I examine an official memory of King which emphasizes non-violent social action and the construction of an integrated society while King's more radical message of wealth redistribution receives little attention. I then place the King memorials in a broader framework that considers the way King is memorialized by the City of Atlanta and the way King's memory is used by the city to frame an understanding of Atlanta. I conclude this article by arguing that the Martin Luther King Jr. National Park is the embodiment of a normative Civil Rights discourse.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

THE PLACE OF MEMORIALIZATION

A tension framing this research on the National Historic Site revolves around the interplay between official memory, the way King's memory is sanitized and made safe, while other, more radical, interpretations of King's life and death and his role within the Auburn Avenue community are left on the margins. Till (1999, 254) notes that an official memory, "museums, memorials, monuments", serve as the "backdrops for the framing of identity." An official memory bounds complex events and people into a single memorial narrative that presents "true" accounting of events and people. The landscape of official memory is where "citizens enact what is normal, appropriate, or possible for a group at a particular setting" (Till 1999, 254). Official memory is "communicated on behalf of the nation state", and seeks to "maintain loyalty…and stresses the virtue of unity" (Atwater and Herndon 2003, 17). The way an official memory becomes visible is in the cultural landscape is critical to its establishment (Hoelscher 2003, 661).

Related to, but sometimes in contrast with, official memory are the complex "popular readings" (Till 1999) of the Auburn Avenue memorial complex. A popular reading of memorial landscapes often results from tensions between social actors in the cultural sphere (Till 1999, 254) and "can be a vehicle through which dominant, official renditions of the past are resisted by mobilizing groups towards social action and also through the maintenance of opposition group identity" (Johnson 2004, 320). The popular reading of memorial landscapes is often situated in a local context and can be given material representation either individually or collectively (Atwater and Herndon 2003, 17). It is through the interplay between official remembrances and popular

readings and understandings of memorial landscapes that we find collective or public memory (Till 1999; Atwater and Herndon 2003; Johnson 2004).

Till defines public memory as a "cultural space" (Till 1999, 255) that is made most visible in the landscape. Public memory is a space where national myths are remade and understood by broader society (Till 1999, 255). According to Atwater and Herndon (2003, 16) public memory is a site of "symbolic action, a place of cultural performance, the meaning of which is defined by its public and persuasive functions." Thus public memory is often a physical space- a museum, memorial, or monument- but it is also a process where diverse groups come together and interact to remake, understand and make use of memorial landscapes. Consequently, memorial landscapes "provide a stage for human action, and like a theater set, their own part in the drama varies from an entirely discreet, unobserved presence to playing a highly visible role in the performance" (Cosgrove 1993, 1).

MEMORIALIZATION AND RACE

Given the federal, state and local presence of the Auburn Avenue corridor, the memorials dedicated to King's life become an important site for examining the connection between memorialization and the way race is embedded in local, regional and national scales. Modern nation states are founded on a system of racial exclusion and race is integral to the exercise of state power (Goldberg 2002). Thus racism is literally embedded in the fabric of the nation. Goldberg (2002, 49) explains, "[the state] has been about increasingly sophisticated forms of racial formation, power and exclusion."

In this context we should see the memorialization of King on Auburn Avenue as part of a larger national effort to come to terms with the end of legalized segregation and the remaking of racial categories in the U.S. Memorials dedicated to the Civil Rights struggle are among the

fastest growing multicultural heritage sites in the U.S. and it is at these sites where "new chapters of struggle associated with the meaning and significance of the past" (Dwyer 2004, 414) are debated and subsequently materialize. It is through the museums and monuments, the memorials dedicated to the Civil Rights struggle, that social actors contextualize the Civil Rights struggle and use it to make a collective understanding of U.S. history and policy (Goldberg 2002, 250). For most of U.S. history African Americans have been excluded from the normative public sphere. With the growth of an increasingly complex memorial landscape dedicated to the experiences of African Americans, it appears that African Americans are being recognized and the achievements of persons of color are being celebrated. However, as local state and national officials celebrate and memorialize the victories of the U.S. Civil Rights struggle, they are simultaneously rolling back civil and social rights legislation and renewing debates about the role of race and racism in U.S. society.[12] Thus instead of becoming sites where meaningful dialog occurs about the nature of race and racism in U.S. society, the memorials dedicated to the Civil Rights struggle are increasingly sites that silence debate about the meaning of race and racism in U.S. society, or more precisely, shift the debate to a discussion of individual rights which is more in line with neo-liberal economic and social policy.

DR. KING'S POLITICAL MATURATION IN CONTEXT

An important element in memorializing the life and times of Dr. King involves an abridged understanding of King's life and work. Writing on the way King's message and his memory are used by broader normative forces in society, Dyson (2004) argues that contemporary efforts at memorializing King, specifically federal efforts, "reveals a truncated understanding of

[12] Recent examples include opposition to the renewal of the Voters Rights Act (AP September 11, 2006), the appointment of conservative lawyers with experience on cases of "reverse discrimination" to the Civil Rights Division at the Justice Department (Savage July 23, 2006) and federal lawsuits claiming reverse discrimination in university admission policies (*Boston Globe* July 23, 2006).

King's meaning and value to American democracy" (264). The larger narrative presented about King focuses on King's early years in the Civil Rights movement. In an analysis of high school history textbooks Alridge (2006) argues the focus on King's early involvement in the Civil Rights movement presents an "heroic, one-dimensional, and neatly packaged master narrative" about Dr. King that "den[ies] a complex, realistic, and rich understanding" of King's life and work (Alridge 2006, 662). King's early years were a time in his intellectual development when he was primarily using the experiences of African Americans in the South to redeem the larger U.S. democratic experiment (Alridge 2006; Dyson 2004; Long 2002; Dawson 2001; Baker 1994). In this context King is represented as a mainstream example of how a leader can use the existing democratic structure in the Untied States to affect greater social change. Most eloquently stated during King's "I Have a Dream" speech King's message emphasized the goal of creating an integrated society. In the minutes preceding King's famous lines he stated:

> We've come to our nation's capital to cash a check. When the architects of our republic wrote the magnificent words of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, they were signing a promissory note to which every American would fall heir…It is obvious today that America has defaulted on this promissory note in so far as her citizens of color are concerned (King 1986a, 217).

Dr. King went on to argue that the "check has come back marked insufficient funds" and that America had defaulted on the promises made in the Constitution and Bill of Rights. In this speech Dr. King focused heavily on the ways the African American experience was an opportunity to redeem the United States, and U.S. society could use the experience of African Americans to show the world the "great vaults of opportunity of this nation" (King 1986a, 217). During the era in which he made that famous speech in Washington D.C., King's words and actions closely reflect a more liberal tradition in American political thought (Dawson 2001, 253). A powerful theme emerging from this tradition is the idea of "American redemption through the

achievement of Black justice" (Dawson 2001, 253) and the only option "for advancing both American democracy and Black social justice is to finally redeem the promise of America" (Dawson 2001, 252).

As Dr. King matured intellectually his message shifted to address broader social justice issues, most notably the war in Vietnam and poverty. Dr. King's later message went through several distinct categories of thought and action. Long (2002, 88) divides King's intellectual development into three periods. The first phase from 1954-1963 was a time when King focused on the redemption of U.S. democracy. From 1964-1965 King proposed the creation of a Swedish style (social) democracy in the U.S. (Long 2002, 130). The third phase from 1966-1968 was King's most radical period when he was convinced that U.S. society needed a "revolution of values" (Long 2002, 170) attainable through the redistribution of wealth and privilege.

The later period of his intellectual development was expressed thoroughly in King's book *Where do we Go From Here: Chaos or Community*. In perhaps his most radical work King wrote:

> For the good of America, it is necessary to refute the idea that the dominant ideology of our country, even today, is freedom and equality while racism is just an occasional departure from the norm on the part of a few extremists…[the dominant ideology] is racism (King 1967, 69).

Dr. King went on in *Chaos or Community* to predict much of the white backlash towards the Civil Rights struggle during the 1970's and 1980's. After 1967 Dr. King broadened his message to incorporate larger issues of poverty and the war in Vietnam. As he began to take his message to Northern sections of the United States, King realized that racism was deeply entrenched in U.S. society and whites were only interested in his message to the extent that it did not interfere with their interests. King recognized that a foundation of U.S. society was the inequality of African Americans. For example, in King's last and most radical address before the Southern

Christian Leadership Conference he noted: "When the Constitution was written, a strange formula to determine taxes and representation declared that the Negro was sixty percent of a person" (King 1986b, 245). This statement represents a discursive shift from his earlier speech at the Lincoln Memorial. Recall during King's "I Have a Dream" speech his focus was on the promises made to persons of color by the Bill of Rights and the U.S. Constitution. By King's 1967 SCLC address he clearly argued that there remained deep structural and legal barriers to African Americans realizing true racial equality in the United States. King went on:

> [The] whole structure [of the United States] must be changed. A nation that will keep people in slavery for 244 years, will 'thingify' them--make them things. Therefore they will exploit them, and poor people generally, economically. And a nation that will exploit them economically will have to have foreign investments and everything else, and will have to use its military might to protect them. All of these problems are tied together. What I am saying today is that we must go from this convention and say 'America, you must be born again!' (King 1986b, 251).

As King's ideas evolved, he became more pessimistic about the chances of actually attaining true racial equality in his lifetime. Scholars of African American political thought have identified this shift in King's outlook and termed it "disillusioned liberalism" (Dawson 2001). Disillusioned liberalism represents a break from King's earlier work encouraging the integration of U.S. society. In a forceful articulation of his disappointment with the pace of racial progress, King delivered his "Christmas Sermon" on December 24, 1967 and the speech was carried live by the Canadian Broadcast Company (CBC). King told the congregants of Ebenezer Baptist Church: "In 1963, on a sweltering August afternoon, we stood in Washington D.C. and talked to the nation about many things…I tried to talk to the nation about a dream I had, and I must confess to you today that not long after talking about the dream I started seeing it turn into a nightmare" (King 1986c, 257). King went on in his Christmas Sermon to explain how his earlier optimism was tempered with the realization that white society was prepared to violently resist

the assertion of African American civil and social rights. For King, his dream became a nightmare as the death toll of Civil Rights workers increased and as the War in Vietnam increasingly occupied President Johnson's attention and diverted federal efforts from the Civil Rights struggle. The pessimism outlined by King in his sermon stands in marked contrast from the hopeful tone that colors the Martin Luther King Jr. National Historic Site and represents a radical break form his earlier work and views on racial reconciliation. King's Christmas Sermon was not a repudiation of the vision laid out in the march on Washington, but it does reflect a more nuanced understanding of how deeply entrenched racism was in white society, and how much work remained to be done to increase social and civic opportunity. It also reflects a deeper appreciation for the sacrifices needed to achieve racial reconciliation and justice in the United States.

The public memorials on Auburn Avenue are a landscape subject to multiple readings and interpretations in which a variety of social actors come together to impart their own meaning and understanding of King's life and death. The memorials dedicated to King's life become a stage on which ideas about who belongs and who is excluded from the broader public sphere are played out. By examining the messages described in the official memorials dedicated to Dr. King, we can examine how race and racism persist at multiple scales and ways the federal government understands and imparts particular racialized understandings of Dr. King. Thus the Auburn Avenue corridor is a site where issues of public memory are enacted, made visible, and subsequently disputed.

THE AUBURN AVENUE CORRIDOR

Once home to the wealthiest, most prominent African American community in the nation, by the early 1970's the Auburn Avenue corridor faced significant challenges stemming from the

end of segregation, loss of housing stock and aging Auburn infrastructure (Pomerantz 1996). Also at this time the Auburn Avenue corridor began to be remade as a nationally significant memorial site. Auburn Avenue's economic prominence declined as African American capital moved to other parts of the city, but its cultural significance increased as Martin Luther King's legacy began to receive mainstream attention.

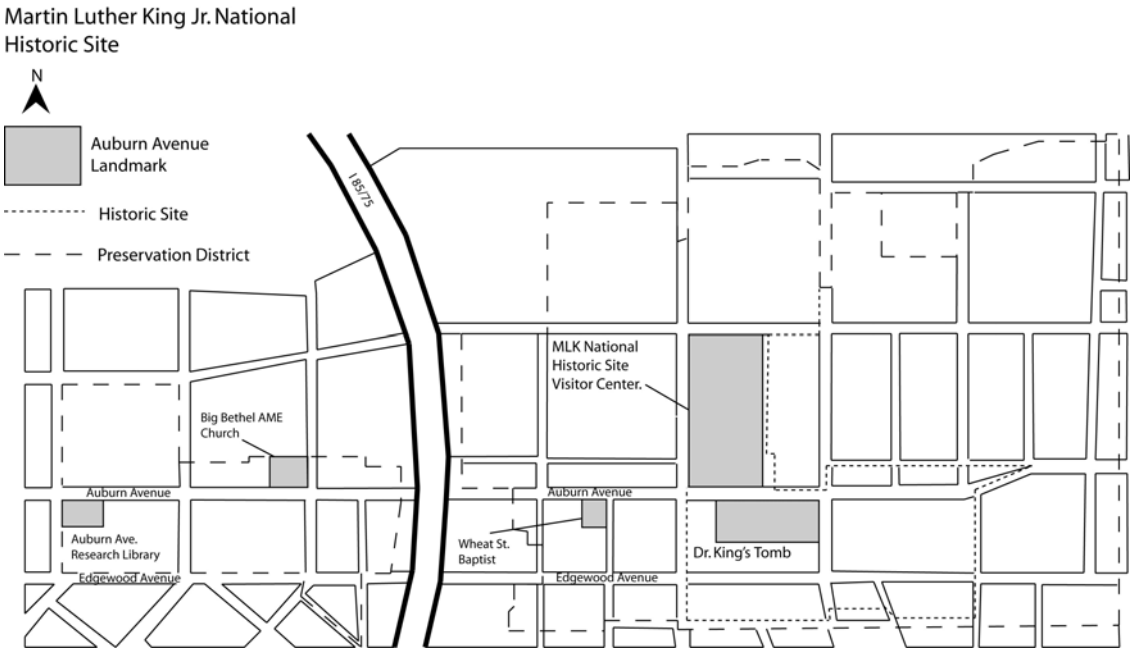

Figure 3.1. Martin Luther King, Jr. National Historic site and preservation district.

Almost immediately following King's assassination, his widow, Correta Scott King, founded the "King Center for Non-Violent Social Change." Originally conceived as a teaching center based on the principles of non-violence, over time the King Center became more concerned with preserving the historic legacy of Dr. King. In the early 1970's the King family constructed a crypt and interred Dr. King's body on the center's grounds (Rutheiser 1996, 129).

Figure 3.2. Martin Luther King Jr. Tomb in front of the King Center.

In 1980 the United States Congress declared: “The places where Martin Luther King Jr. was born, where he lived, worked and worshiped, and where he is buried should receive special attention to protect and *interpret* these areas for the benefit, inspiration, and education for present and future generations” (National Park Service 1985, 9). With that declaration the National Park Service (NPS) took over much of the surrounding community and incorporated it into its national park system. As the NPS’s role in the community has expanded so has their responsibility to commemorate and memorialize King’s life. For example, in preparation for the 1996 Olympic Games in Atlanta, the NPS took over a community center from the City of Atlanta and turned it into a visitor center that further memorialized King’s life. The U.S. Congress allocated $11.8 million for the project to expand upon federal efforts to memorialize Dr. King’s legacy.

Figure 3.3: Martin Luther King Jr. National Historic Site.

The NPS plans touched off a very public falling out between the King family, the city, and the National Park Services as these different interests literally fought over the ownership of King's legacy (Dwyer 2000; Rutheiser 1996). It took the personal intervention of Congressman John Lewis to broker a rapprochement between park officials and the King family. During the public feud, the City of Atlanta made great use of Dr. King and his image to sell Atlanta's role in the Civil Rights Struggle to the International Olympic Committee and (Dwyer 2000). Atlanta used the fact that it was home to two of the United States' great humanitarians, Jimmy Carter and Martin Luther King Jr. to 'brand' and sell the city (Rutheiser 1996).

From this abbreviated history of the King site it is clear that the memorial landscape on Auburn Avenue contains multiple private and state actors who operate at different scales and often have very different, competing goals. The King memorials are a focal point for a series of tensions and conflicts. A multi-faceted relationship exists between the King family, the City of Atlanta, the federal government and the people who occupy, and visit Auburn Avenue and

highlights the intersection of race, place and politics in the construction of Dr. King's memorialized legacy.

RESEARCH METHOD

To investigate the memorialization of Dr. King I employ a multi-method approach to understanding the memorial spaces on Auburn Avenue. Specifically, I conducted open-ended interviews and archival research in addition to analyzing my own experiences to explore the social meaning behind the memorials dedicated to Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

I began this research project by conducting a detailed archival search at the Auburn Avenue Research library. Archival material is an important tool for reconstructing the past, as well as for making sense of the present (Bradshaw 2001; Mason 1996). The Auburn Avenue Research Library has a large print collection of the *Daily World* a newspaper that served the African American community in Atlanta as well as housing several archives dedicated to Auburn Avenue development. These materials provided historical context for understanding the legacy of Auburn Avenue's African American population. .

In addition to the archival research I conducted open-ended interviews with National Park Service employees, community activists, residents and businesspersons, as well as with city officials. Open-ended interviews are broadly accepted as a research method (Sin 2003; Elwood and Martin 2000; Kobayashi 1994) and are "often seen as corrective to the silences and eurocentrism of many archival documents" (Miles and Crush 1993, 85). While open-ended, I did approach each interview with a set of broad themes. These themes consisted of participant's past and current relation to Auburn Avenue, participant's views on effective strategies for racial reconciliation, participant's views and perceptions of the King memorial site, and their awareness of current debates surrounding the legacy of Dr. King. All of the interviews were

conducted on Auburn Avenue or in official's offices. Situating the interview experiences in places familiar to participants facilitates rapport and addresses power imbalances in the investigator-participant relationship (Sin 2003; Elwood and Martin 2000). All of the interview participant's names have been changed.

I analyzed my data utilizing a dual-stream coding process which focused on themes appearing in multiple interviews. As part of the dual-stream coding process two African American undergraduates familiar with the Auburn Avenue community were hired to help code the interviews. After training in the use of qualitative methods and exposure to the project goals and objectives, the undergraduate students coded the textual data. We each independently identified themes and compared them as a group. In many cases we came up with the same codes, often under different names. In cases where we came up with different codes, or had different interpretations, we worked towards building consensus over a broad set of themes and ideas. I employed the dual-stream coding process in an effort to triangulate this research project (Denzin and Lincoln 1996).

CASE STUDY: THE MARTIN LUTHER KING JR. NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE

OFFICALLY KING

The National Park Service MLK memorials bind King's life in a particular time period and geographic location. The MLK National Historic Site consists of different attractions and incorporates several city blocks. Composed of old residential homes, King's birth home, and a visitor center, according to the MLK Park Superintendent the Historic Site attracts 300,000 visitors annually. One of the more prominent features of the National Historic Site is the MLK Visitor Center where most visitors begin their tour. Roughly divided into two halves, one part of the visitor center consists of a visitor desk staffed by a NPS Park Ranger, a theater that shows

short films about Dr. King, and a souvenir store; the other half of the center encompasses eight semi-circular displays (called "pods") that document particular aspects of King's life. The exhibit begins with a short presentation on life in the segregated Jim Crow South. This provides a context for visitors as they learn about Dr. King's life. Following the discussion on segregation we are introduced to King's family and his early years growing up on Auburn Avenue. The third pod is entitled "Call to Lead" and explains King's early years in Montgomery, Alabama, leading the fight to integrate public transportation. This pod transitions to "Visiting the Mountain Top," dealing with the March on Washington and other King projects in the early 1960's. It is followed by "Expanding the Dream" which details King's work in Chicago and his opposition to the War in Vietnam. The final pod entitled "Overcoming Loss" describes King's assassination and provides a documentary style edited video of his funeral along with commentary. According to the Park Service the exhibits were designed by a committee of NPS staff consisting of people from a variety of backgrounds. Initially the King family assisted with the presentation of King's life but with the public controversy in the 1990's they have become less involved with the Park Service displays.

In explaining the layout and focus of the National Park, Bill, the Park Superintendent states:

> One thing a lot of our visitors don't understand is that we have a mandate from Congress to preserve and protect those places and those events where Dr. King worked and is buried. Our job here is not to tell the broader story of the Civil Rights Struggle and we don't do that. Our job is to tell the story of Dr. King and his life. We concentrate heavily on the time period when he became famous from 1955-1968. The story we present doesn't get involved in other things not directly related to his life and death.

According to Bill, the presentation of the story of Dr. King does not move beyond King's life to engage with the broader American Civil Rights struggle because that would be outside the focus

of the MLK National Park. From Bill's perspective an important part of telling the King story includes an image that moves beyond a narrow racialized understanding of Martin Luther King Jr. to incorporate the wider legacy of King for the United States. The focus on King and the decision to concentrate on the events central to his life reinforces normative histories of the U.S. Civil Rights struggle. King is presented as *the leader* of the U.S. Civil Rights Struggle. The presentation of King as the preeminent figure of the U.S. Civil Rights Struggle glosses over deeply entrenched divisions that emerged during the U.S. Civil Rights Struggle (Dwyer 2000). During the 1950's and 1960's debate raged among African Americans about the best way to secure social and civil rights (see Branch 1998) and there continue to be multiple leaders and visions for civil rights in African American communities (see Dawson 2001). This presentation of King deligitimizes other leaders (Malcolm X for example) who presented alternatives to the goals laid out by King and his organizations.

The Park Service Memorials also omit mention of the role gender played in the Civil Rights Struggle. A particularly glaring absence is the relative lack of information about Correta King and the sacrifices she made as her husband traveled the country working for social justice. This effectively marginalizes the role of women and replicates gendered stereotypes that leave women out of traditional histories of the Civil Rights struggle. The official history of Civil Rights serves to silence the voices and contributions made by countless numbers of women during the Civil Rights struggle (Dwyer 2000). The absence of a discussion about the diversity of leaders and opinions during the Civil Rights era, as well as the reinforcement of gendered roles may be related to the NPS's goal of creating a site that has broad appeal. One official explained over the courses of our interviews that one goal of the MLK National Park is to present a story that has mass appeal.

> It is important to show people that this place is more than just a park for blacks, or that King story is a black story. If all you remember is the bus boycott and Rosa Parks, well ok, but you need to know that he [referring to Dr. King] was much more than that. We try to put King in context and to make the story broad enough to appeal to a wide range of people.

Bill, the Park Superintendent, elaborated on the idea that the MLK Historic Site is more than just a "Black Park." At the beginning of our interview Bill noted, "You know I can't tell you how many times I run into white people and I tell them what I do. They almost always say, 'The King Park, isn't that just for black people?' Of course I almost always say, 'No, King is important to all of us.' Given that I am a white guy, people are genuinely surprised by that." Bill continues:

> At one time the Park Service used to have what they called 'Black Parks' and 'White Parks'. This was a Black Park, Tuskegee was another, and the only people who could get jobs there were African Americans. In the early 1990's the Park Service began a program of diversifying the Service and this job came open [Superintendent of the MLK Historic Site]. I applied for it and I got it.

Bill's commentary on how he came to the MLK Historic Site and how he fits into the broader message provided by the Park Service in its interpretation of Martin Luther King's life is instructive. Dwyer (2004, 205) reminds us that a monument's discursive force comes not from the monument itself, the steel and the stone if you will, but from the connections interwoven into the monument; the ways the monument is coupled with other socio-spatial contexts. Thus Bill's presence as the "white guy" in a formerly discursively constructed "Black Park" fits into the larger message of integration and racial reconciliation that lies at the heart of King's "official memory" and his more moderate political thought and writing.

Through his biography and as director of the King site, Bill becomes an embodiment of the earlier representation of King. Just as the NPS used to have "Black Parks" and "White Parks" so too was the United States segregated. However, the broader normative discourse on

King argues U.S. society was redeemed through King's work and death. In this way Bill becomes the living example of that message. Bill elaborates:

> Every ten years or so we have a big meeting where all the Super[intendent]s get together. Well, they had some big shot there and he gave the keynote address on diversity. He said we will 'have diversity when there is a white man at the MLK Park and a black man at Yellowstone.' Well, someone pointed out to him that we already had that. I don't want to suggest that diversity or racism isn't a problem, it is, but these parks are a nice representation of the goals King laid out to the nation.

Through both his employment and positionality Bill is the fulfillment of the moderate understanding of King that adds legitimacy to the park and overlays the tone of the memorialized message delivered by the National Park Service. Bill's biography identifies the park site with King's early work which focused on the integration of Southern society. Through his position, Bill becomes the living embodiment of the hopes and dreams which many mainstream commentators identify as central to the legacy of King. This moderate understanding of King and his message is written into the King Historic site in different locations.

One of the most prominent examples of King as a moderate voice of racial reconciliation is the presentation of the 1963 March on Washington. The National Park Service exhibit on the March uses a powerful combination of stirring images of King at the March. Etched in glass are King's words about being issued a promissory note returned with insufficient funds in front of a large picture of King giving his speech in front of the Lincoln Memorial. Recall from the earlier discussion of King and his political and intellectual development that these were the key lines in King's Washington march speech, where he connected the experience of African American with the larger U.S. democratic experiment, and the ability of African American suffering to redeem American democracy. Cornell West (1999) identifies this strain in King's writings, words and thoughts as a kind of "American civil religion", the "complex web of religious ideals of

deliverance and salvation and political ideals of freedom, democracy and equality that constitute the evolving collective self-definition of America" (West 1999, 432). In his early work King drew from this religious/political tradition in the United States, and sought to return the United States to "its founding ideals of democracy, freedom and equality" (West 1999, 433).

By drawing attention to this aspect of King's work, the National Historic Site that is dedicated to his memory becomes a site which places King within a larger U.S. political tradition and framework with King in the center of efforts to remake U.S. Democracy. Not surprisingly, the Federal government's efforts at controlling and intimidating King and his family are left out of this broad narrative. Throughout the 1950's and 1960's the federal government and the FBI in particular used their power to wiretap King's phones and hotel rooms, tried to regulate who he could associate with and blackmailed King in an effort to destroy the Civil Rights movement and SCLC[13] (Branch 1988, 1998). Importantly, identifying King with the tenants and traditions of U.S. democracy has the material effect of de-radicalizing his message. This is accomplished by highlighting King's "mainstream" views on U.S. Democracy, ignoring the complex relationship King had with the federal government, and relegates his later work focused on the redistribution of wealth and power in the United States to the margins.

RADICALLY KING

Chris, the MLK Jr. Park Service historian, explains, "For the most part people stop talking about Dr. King after the 'Voters Rights Act' was passed in 1965 and he shows up again a week or two before his assassination in April of 1968." This is a significant omission--it is from 1965 to 1968 that Dr. King reevaluated his message and incorporated his opposition to the War

[13] These efforts went so far as to audio tape King engaged in extramarital affairs and then to send those tapes to King in an effort to get him to commit suicide. These tapes were ultimately intercepted by Correta King before King was to accept the Nobel Peace Prize (Branch 1998, 528-529).

in Vietnam, U.S. efforts at confronting communism and the redistribution of wealth and power in the United States. Scholars in African American political thought, most notably Dawson (2001), have dubbed this period of King's intellectual development when he became disillusioned with the pace of social justice in the United States and the structure and form of U.S. democracy and U.S. foreign policy as disillusioned liberalism. For example, speaking on the role that racism occupies in U.S. society, King stated in 1968: "Let me say that we have failed to say something to America enough. However difficult it is to hear, we've got to face the fact that racism still occupies the throne of our nation" (King 1986d, 676).

This later work of King is not entirely ignored in the National Park Service memorial. The NPS draws attention to King's work in Chicago and his opposition to the war in Vietnam. For example, in the display pod entitled "Expanding the Dream" a large video monitor plays images of King leading a march in the Chicago suburb of Cicero which met with widespread violence by white suburban Chicagoans. Dubbed over un-named whites waving the Confederate Battle Flag chanting "We want King, we want King", and as a bomb detonates in the background, King's voice announces "I have never in my life seen so much hate, not in Mississippi, not in Alabama. This is a terrible thing." The video's spectacle of violence and hatred directed at King transitions to former Atlanta Mayor and King lieutenant Andy Young describing a meeting King had with Chicago "Street Toughs" and a seminar Dr. King led on "Non-Violent Social Action". Thus, the larger more radical message encouraging the redistribution of wealth and addressing the structural conditions of poverty, which were at the heart of King's efforts in Chicago remain obfuscated. This pod fits within the broader narrative arch presented by the National Park memorials which emphasize King's moderate voice of racial reconciliation and accentuates non-violent social action rhetoric. In this way King is still

contextualized as a leader committed to using the existing democratic power structures in the United States to achieve his goals. This emphasis leaves hidden the more profound realizations that King ultimately reached about the U.S. government and broader U.S. society.

THE KING IS DEAD: LONG MEMORIALIZE THE KING

In perhaps the most jarring example of the way King's message is understood at the King National Historic Site, and how his image is grounded in a particular space/time period, the National Park Service exhibit ends with the death and funeral of Dr. King. In one of the most emotional video presentations, audio of a famous sermon given two months before his death, in which King recounts how he wants to be remembered by the world, plays at his funeral. In the background, King's family and friends mourn his death. At the end of the sermon King declares that he wants to be remembered as a drum major for peace and love. The video then cuts away to the memorial procession which took King down Auburn Avenue in a cart drawn by two mules symbolizing the historical itinerant black Southern preacher. With that the King memorial experience comes to an end. Given the mandate from Congress regarding the King Site, this is not a surprising ending to the visitor center experience. However, the way the memorial ends makes it appear that the social and civil struggles Dr. King stood for, fought for, and eventually gave his life for also ended with his death. More importantly, it also appears that the struggle for social justice was successfully accomplished and the goals Dr. King laid out to the nation were achieved. This too fits into the broader normative vision of Civil Rights which argues that the Civil Rights Struggle was an historic moment in U.S. history, and that the goals of the Civil Rights Struggle have been accomplished, when in fact many of King's confidants and friends continue to strive and work for social justice. The SCLC, the organization Dr. King founded, continues his message of social justice and non-violent direct action. Furthermore, by ending the

presentation of Dr. King with his death, the memorials dedicated to King become easier to use in the broader framing of the City of Atlanta.

KING IN ATLANTA

As we shift scales from the federal memorials about King to the way King is understood in the town where he was born, raised and eventually returned to lead the Civil Rights struggle, King's embodiment of a normative Civil Rights vision becomes central to his role in Atlanta. During the bid to host the 1996 Olympic Games the City of Atlanta, local developers and business persons capitalized on several of Atlanta's historicized meanings to sell the City of Atlanta to the rest of the world (Rutheiser 1996). One of the most successful redevelopment projects was done in conjunction with the Daimler-Benz Corporation to develop the "Margaret Mitchell House", the home where Margaret Mitchell wrote *Gone With the Wind.* Jeff, a local developer, explains how his work on that project got him thinking about how the city could leverage other icons of Atlanta to market itself to the rest of the world:

> You know it really occurred to me that if a bunch of German businessmen were willing to put up $5 million for the Mitchell house then there might be something else here in Atlanta we could capitalize on. You know, I think if you are going to be successful you need to figure out what the rest of the world is saying about you. So what do they talk about when they talk about Atlanta? 'Gone With the Wind' and the Civil Rights Struggle and Martin Luther King.

For Jeff, Atlanta is synonymous with the Civil War, reflected in the novel and movie *Gone With the Wind*, and through its identification with King and the Civil Rights struggle. Each of these time periods represents an opportunity to market and sell the City of Atlanta. Jeff explains again "The icon of Atlanta is King, no question. Atlanta has a tremendous opportunity to brand itself as the center for non-violence in the world with King. There is a tremendous opportunity to show the world that Atlanta is a progressive city and to market King and use his legacy to leverage Atlanta's place as a world city." The link between *Gone With the Wind* --a work of

fiction, and the identification of King-- a living human being, with the City of Atlanta, is indicative of the way memory is used to create a particular historical narrative. Mitchell used real events, the Civil War, and the burning of Atlanta, to create a fictional account of the past imbued with politicized meaning. The memorialization of the past similarly takes real events and real people and filters them through a lens that places particular historical meaning on them. Hoelscher (2003, 660) observes that the filtering and the inherent instability of memory is a key aspect of the memorialization process because it places the emphasis on articulating the past. In this sense memorialization is a process constantly producing, shaping, and giving meaning to history. A city official who works on redevelopment issues for the city explains the importance of King:

> Well obviously the Civil Rights struggle was more than just King, but if you are going to make a development project work down here [on Auburn Avenue] you have to simplify things. You have to come up with a story. So what is the story? King is the personification of the Civil Rights struggle and his main message was the races coming together. So to make the development work down here you have to make that the dominant theme. You have to take some tangible things and connect them to King.

For this particular city official, King is a vehicle to recount a specific historical narrative of the past, one focused on King as the personification of the Civil Rights Struggle. Importantly, the message is focused on people coming together which reiterates a normative understanding of King and the Civil Rights Struggle.

Ever since Auburn Avenue began to decline economically there have been plans to redevelop the corridor. Given the historic nature of the Auburn corridor and the connection to Dr. King a goal has been to preserve the street as a memorial to Dr. King. A city official from the historic preservation office explained over the course of our interview a major goal of trying to preserve the Auburn Avenue corridor is to "make it so if Dr. King magically reappeared he

would still recognize the buildings in the neighborhood where he lived. That has been an overriding goal of the Martin Luther King Jr. historic preservation district." This understanding of the Auburn Avenue corridor binds the Avenue in a particular time period and is major goal for many of the historic preservation efforts in the community.

The designation of Auburn Avenue as a National Historic Site links the corridor with King and connects Dr. King tangibly to the City of Atlanta. The director of the historic preservation in Atlanta explained Auburn Avenue's unique position: "Auburn Avenue is probably the most unusual situation in the nation. You literally have every level of protection down here. You know the feds, the national historic site, and the city. It has everything."

While the organizations dedicated to preserving Auburn Avenue as a shrine to Dr. King work at multiple scales and sometimes have competing goals, what unites these efforts is the ability to create an "official script" in which all the development interests, landowners and individuals who come to the MLK National Historic Site have a part to play. The official script bounds the corridor and helps to dictate the kind of space Auburn Avenue can be. In so doing, the memorials dedicated to King all understand King and his legacy in a particular way. An official with Central Atlanta Progress, a 501C organization charged with developing downtown Atlanta, explained to me that the historic attitude of many in the city about Dr. King and Auburn Avenue could be summed up by stating: "Auburn Avenue is here, a great man came from it, and we've got some great attractions and history for you here."

The City of Atlanta's realization that King is a useful icon to sell the city is a key part of the memorialization effort. The question of course becomes what aspect of King's career should be highlighted? For Jeff, and many other city and national officials, the most important aspect of King's career is his work at integrating U.S. society. Jeff explains:

> In the eye's of the world the MLK phenomena, the power of that movement, I just don't think Atlanta takes advantage of that association. I mean forget about race because Dr. King was about creating a colorblind society, about opportunity. So we have a story to sell that focuses on equality and opportunity.

This understanding of King is useful for thinking through how King's earlier message of racial reconciliation and equality are paramount to understanding King's official memory. Not surprisingly, this understanding of King and the City of Atlanta is only partially correct and ignores Dr. King's later more radical message. By selectively deploying an understanding of King and the Civil Rights Struggle the focus on King is one of racial reconciliation. This understanding of King becomes an important part of the memorialization process and reveals the tensions in presenting King's official memory and legacy to the city and the nation.

CONCLUSION

The public memorials to King administered by the federal government are a landscape where key officials make claims on the past and make visible particular understandings of Dr. King and his legacy to the United States. President Bush's visit to Atlanta to honor Dr. King serves as useful illustration of the way the King memorial is used to construct a normative vision of U.S. society, and the tensions which exist as an "official memory" of King comes into conflict with the complex and multifaceted realities of King's legacy, life and death. While leaders and officials appropriate King's image and "celebrate" the diversity of the U.S., the integration of society, and King's work to create a color-blind society, a more complex understanding of King exists just off to the side and made visible at particular moments. In this way, the King memorials collapse space and time "into a set of key symbolic dates and events" (Johnson 2004, 323) which become important sites for public officials to make claims on the past and to appropriate images of the U.S. Civil Rights movement for their own purposes thus advancing particular visions of U.S. society. This normative vision draws attention to Dr. King's earlier

work in the Civil Rights movement and grounds King in a liberal democratic tradition which focused on using the experiences of African Americans to redeem the U.S. democratic experiment. King is thus connected to American "civil religion" and to a liberal democratic structure which celebrates individual success and personal freedom.

However, this understanding of King reveals a truncated view of his role in U.S. society, his work, and the role Auburn Avenue played in the development of the City of Atlanta. King's life and work reveal a complex man who was deeply troubled by the racist foundation of U.S. society, the social construction of race that treated African Americans as objects, and U.S. imperial designs on Southeast Asia. Just as the protestors were kept off to the side out of sight from the President's visit, these visions of King are also placed on the margins of King's legacy, yet remain integral to the understanding of King and his goals for U.S. society.

Given the tensions that exist between official understandings of King and a more multifaceted treatment of King's life and death, Auburn Avenue is an important site to examine efforts at memorializing Martin Luther King Jr. The MLK National Historic Site embodies a normative Civil Rights discourse which frames King, Auburn Avenue, and the City of Atlanta in the context of King's work at integrating U.S. society. The King memorial site is a landscape which reveals the way a subtle racialized discourse on and about King permeates our understanding of his life and work. The MLK National Park acts as a visible embodiment of the integration of U.S. society. This understanding of the MLK National Historic Site articulates a vision of King which obfuscates alternative views of the Civil Rights Movement and the contributions made by thousands of everyday women and men who worked for social and civil rights.

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CHAPTER 4

SWEET AUBURN: CONSTRUCTING AUBURN AVENUE AS A HERITAGE TOURIST DESTINATION.[14]

[14] To be submitted: Inwood, J. *Urban Geography.*

ABSTRACT

Utilizing redevelopment plans created by the Central Atlanta Progress and the City of Atlanta this paper explores the process of constructing a heritage tourist landscape on Auburn Avenue. Once home to the wealthiest African American community in the United States during the 1970's and 1980's Auburn Avenue went through a period of steep economic decline. Beginning in the early 1990's the City of Atlanta began plans to redevelop Auburn Avenue. While initial plans went nowhere in 2000 developers again set their sites on the Auburn Avenue corridor. It was at this time that Central Atlanta Progress began to update plans to turn Auburn Avenue into the nation's premier African American tourist destination. Utilizing those plans I argue that Central Atlanta Progress's redevelopment vision ties into particular aspects of African American identity closely linked with the political ideology known as Black Conservatism. I juxtapose this redevelopment plan with the reaction of community members along the Auburn Avenue corridor. I focus on the desire by some to honor Auburn Avenue's past by redeveloping the corridor into an important African American commercial center. This vision connects Auburn Avenue with the political ideology known as Community Nationalism.

Key Words: Racial Heritage Tourism, Urban Redevelopment, African American Politics.

INTRODUCTION

"If you think Auburn Avenue can be anything other than a tourist attraction then you've missed the boat."
City of Atlanta Official

"I'm saying yes, we should embrace and appreciate our past, but this place [Auburn Avenue] was never about looking back to the past, really this place has always been about looking to our future."
Auburn Avenue Business Owner.

These comments, taken from open-ended interviews conducted on Auburn Avenue in Atlanta, Georgia are indicative of a tension along the corridor. On one hand Auburn Avenue seems primed for the development of a heritage tourist landscape dedicated to the experiences of African Americans in the City of Atlanta. During the 1950's and 1960's the Auburn Avenue corridor gave rise to some of the most important African American cultural, economic and political institutions in the nation (Inwood 2007a). In addition, Auburn Avenue is home to the Martin Luther King Jr. National Historic Site which brings 300,000 visitors annually to corridor. These connections to African American history and culture mark the Auburn Avenue corridor as a natural site for the marketing of a heritage tourist landscape. Along these lines Central Atlanta Progress (CAP)[15], in conjunction with the City of Atlanta, has created plans to turn the corridor into a heritage tourist destination focused on the experiences and lives of African Americans in the city. More specifically their redevelopment plans connect Auburn Avenue with a period of time when the corridor was dominated by a relatively conservative set of leaders.

On the other hand the positioning of Auburn Avenue as a significant space focused on the past achievements is troubling for many of the contemporary stakeholders along the corridor. For a significant portion of Auburn Avenue residents, business owners, and community activists, Auburn Avenue's significance lies in the way it looks to the future, not to the past. They want it

[15] CAP is a 501c non-profit organization charged with the economic development of downtown Atlanta.

redeveloped in a way that honors the past through the development of independent African American cultural and political institutions on the Avenue, but that allows Auburn Avenue to prepare for the future of African Americans living in the City of Atlanta. This redevelopment vision connects Auburn Avenue to a political ideology known as Community Nationalism (Dawson 2001) and encapsulates certain aspects of Auburn Avenue's history and legacy, while at the same time providing political, social and economic support for African American engagement with normative society. Thus a key question for Auburn Avenue stakeholders is how should Auburn Avenue be developed? Should the African American community turn to heritage tourism as a means of preserving and protecting Auburn Avenue, or should the community emphasize alternative visions of the history and legacy of the corridor?

Using redevelopment plans created by CAP, open-ended interviews, and archival research, I explore the process of creating a heritage tourist landscape on Auburn Avenue. Specifically I argue that CAP's redevelopment vision ties into very particular aspects of African American identity closely linked with the political ideology known as Black Conservatism (Dawson 2001). I juxtapose this vision with the reaction of some of the community stakeholders along the Auburn Avenue corridor. In particular I focus on the desire by some community members to honor Auburn Avenue's past by redeveloping the corridor into an important African American commercial center. This vision of Auburn Avenue's future exemplifies the political ideology known as Community Nationalism and represents an African American identity position connected to larger discourses of Black Nationalism.

> Auburn Avenue is a useful case study for exploring the links between heritage tourism, the production of racialized identity and the connection with particular political ideologies. Hurley (2006) notes that public history projects have become an important tool in cities across the United States as a means to promote "greater social stability and economic vitality" (19) in urban areas long seen as degraded, dangerous and economically depressed. Coakley (2007) explains heritage tourism

> is "now a well established growth industry" (13), one which local, regional and national governments are keen to support and develop. Increasingly heritage tourism is seen by governments and non-profit institutions as a way to promote and sustain economic development in urban areas that have historically been underserved.

Local, regional and national governments have begun to use heritage tourism as way to develop ethnic neighborhoods (Hackworth and Rekers 2005). However, an ethnic heritage tourist site's importance lies beyond its use as an economic development tool; heritage tourist sites focused on the memorialization of race and ethnicity are powerful instruments in creating and constructing racialized identity. For example, Anderson (1991, 212) notes the development of Vancouver's Chinatown in the 1970's as an ethnic tourist destination was important in reconceptualizing and understanding modern Chinese-Canadian identity. The development of Vancouver's Chinatown into a heritage tourist landscape transformed Chinese identity "into a more muted and outwardly sympathetic image and discourse involving 'ethnic' difference" (Anderson 1991, 211). Thus heritage tourist landscapes embody particular aspects of racial identity and difference and serve as a lens from which to examine the social construction of race and a connection to place.

I develop the major themes of this paper by considering the larger literature of heritage tourism. In particular, I focus on the ways heritage tourism produces particular racialized identities and meaning. I follow by discussing the political ideologies operating in African American communities. I turn to the *Butler-Auburn Redevelopment Plan Update* (Butler-Auburn Plan Update) to outline the City of Atlanta's vision for the future of Auburn Avenue as a major tourist destination. I position those plans against the perceptions and views of those who live, work and organize along the Auburn Avenue corridor.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

HERITAGE TOURISM

Heritage tourist sites are developed in order to re-create and preserve past identity, often in conjunction with efforts to market, brand and redevelop urban areas. Crump's (1999) study of Moline, Illinois and the production of a John Deere-themed entertainment venue and Mitchell's (1992) analysis of Johnstown, Pennsylvania are examples of the way formerly industrialized areas have used heritage tourism to hold onto particular aspects of a regional identity. Increasingly urban governments use heritage tourist sites as an important economic development tool to promote urban redevelopment and preservation (Chang et al. 1996; Xie 2006). As cities have deindustrialized and manufacturing has shifted overseas, urban governments in many western nations have focused on heritage tourism as a way to promote economic growth in older industrialized areas and to provide jobs for those formerly employed in manufacturing (Mitchell 1992; Chang et al. 1996; Crump 1999; Apostolakis 2003; Hurley 2006; Xie 2006).

A critical aspect of the heritage tourist landscape is the way it deploys a commodified, and thus selective, historical place identity in service to contemporary economic development plans. For example, Mitchell notes that community officials in Johnstown Pennsylvania made a conscious effort to subsume class and race interests in an effort to present a "consensus history" where the "common interests of the 'community' " (Mitchell 2000, 97) were paramount to developing Johnstown's heritage center. By downplaying the "contentious labor history that had long marked the place" Johnstown community leaders were hoping to make Johnstown "attractive to potential investors" (Mitchell 2000, 97). In so doing divisive issues and the labor conflicts that characterized much of Johnstown's history were removed from the landscape in an effort to create a cultural heritage park focused on "*industrial* rather than the *labor* history of the

city" (Mitchell 2000, 97). Thus we should see the heritage tourist landscape of Johnstown, and heritage tourist sites in general, as sites where multiple social actors come together to debate the past, find meaning in history, and enact particular aspects of a common cultural heritage (Till 1999). Consequently, part of the process in constructing heritage tourist destinations is determining whose past should be made visible. Thus a critical distinction in the heritage tourist landscape is between history, "the remembered record of the past" and heritage "which is a contemporary commodity purposefully created to satisfy contemporary consumption" needs (Boyd 2000, 108). This tension between the actual history of a place and the creation of an authentic heritage tourist site is a critical aspect in the development of heritage tourist sites.

Waitt (2000) notes that an important element in the success of heritage tourist sites is the perception by the broader public that they are experiencing an 'authentic' version of the past. Often the creation of an authentic experience relies on tangible connections to the past, artifacts that one can see, touch, and experience. In an urban landscape, the connection to a tangible past often results in the preservation of historic structures and buildings (Waitt 2000). Thus a common result of the creation of heritage tourist landscapes is historic preservation of old structures.

HERITAGE TOURISM AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF RACIAL IDENTITY

An important development in heritage tourism has been the creation of sites focused on particular ethnic or racial minorities (Anderson 1991; Boyd 2000; Dwyer 2000). Efforts at memorializing ethnicity have typically focused on remembering immigrant experiences. More recently however, urban governments have begun to turn to the heritage of African Americans. Dwyer (2000) notes that memorials dedicated to the experiences of African Americans are among the fastest growing heritage tourist destination sites in the nation. Boyd (2000) describes

the growth of heritage tourist sites dedicated to the experiences of African Americans as a kind of "racial heritage tourism." These sites often celebrate the history and culture of African Americans through the historic preservation or the rehabilitation of historic structures in African American neighborhoods (Boyd 2000, 107). One prominent example occurred in 1992 when the City of New York undertook a project in Harlem to develop and promote a kind of "Harlemworld" (Jackson 2001, 155) where middle-class tourists could experience a less threatening, more commodified version of Harlem's history and culture (Jackson 2001, 155).

Within a broader context the growth of racial heritage sites is related to the larger production of racial identity. Historically race was embedded into the fabric of a nation and was a key principle in defining who was a full member of society and who was excluded from the normative public sphere (Goldberg 2002). For example, in her study on the construction of Vancouver's Chinatown Anderson (1991) argues that North American Chinatowns are a product of a white Canadian imagination that used the idea of what it meant to be Chinese to ultimately define what it meant to be a white Canadian citizen (Anderson 1987; 1991). Two key ideas emerge from Anderson's work and are related to the contemporary production of heritage tourist sites. The first is the concept that race cannot be separated from the construction of place. Thus we should see the production of racial heritage tourist sites as linked to and part of the process of producing racialized identity through the construction of significant cultural spaces. In addition, racial heritage tourist sites dedicated to the experiences of African Americans are part of a broader effort to come to terms with the end of legalized segregation and the integration of U.S. society. Dwyer notes that sites dedicated to racial heritage tourism are "where new chapters of struggle associated with the meaning and significance of the past" (2000, 414) are debated, subsequently materialized and worked out. Racial heritage tourist destinations provide a space

where diverse social, economic and political forces come together and create particular racialized narratives about the past.

Anderson's work also suggests that as the political, social and economic situation changes it became necessary to rely on an increasingly complex and multifaceted understanding of racial identity. Goldberg (2002) notes that a primary vehicle for transmitting and making visible particular racialized identities is the creation of culture, specifically as it relates to the shaping of a historical memory through "schools, museums, and monuments, public art and ceremonies, rituals and symbols" (250); the very essence of racial heritage tourist landscapes. Thus the landscape of racial heritage tourism embodies notions of who belongs to, and who is excluded from, the broader public sphere, and also serves as a powerful tool for creating and disseminating racialized identities and meaning. Thus we should see racial heritage tourist sites as landscapes which reveal the tensions involved in the production of racialized identity.

IMPORTANCE OF POLITICAL IDEOLOGY IN CONSTRUCTING RACIAL HERITAGE SITES

Scholars examining African American communities have long recognized that African American communities are composed of a number of different political ideologies (Dawson 2001; Squires 2001; Harris-Lacewell 2004). Political ideologies are an important aspect in the creation of racial identity because they "help to define who are one's friends and enemies, with whom one would form political coalitions, and furthermore, contain a causal narrative of society and the state" (Dawson 2001, 4). In other words, political ideology helps to define one's place in the world and how one relates to others. Ideology contributes to creating racialized identity because it frames an understanding of the world, defines problems, and also offers solutions to

those problems. Within African American communities there several different political ideologies that contribute to our perceptions of race and place in black communities.[16]

In his work *Black Visions* (2001) Dawson identifies six ideologies which have been central to the creation and understanding of African American communities including: Radical Egalitarianism, Disillusioned Liberalism, Black Marxism, Black Conservatism, Black Feminism, and a form of Black Nationalism. Two ideologies in particular influence our understanding of conflicts surrounding Auburn Avenue's redevelopment as a heritage tourist destination. The first is *Black Conservatism* and is epitomized by Booker T. Washington's writings and the work of modern black political commentators like Glenn Loury (Dawson 2001). Key ideas related to Black Conservatism include a belief in the "anti-discriminatory aspects of markets" and a reliance on "self-help" and "individual autonomy" (Dawson 2001, 19-20). Perhaps most importantly Black Conservatives reject "claims that blacks have suffered special oppression and deserve special consideration" in the U.S. racial classification system (Dawson 2001, 20). A central goal of those advocating a black conservative ideology is to "sever the link between racial uplift and white racism commonly found in other black ideological [positions]" (Dawson 2001, 287). Of all of the racial ideologies identified by Dawson, the position of black conservatism comes across as the least militant, and most palatable to normative society.

A second ideology, which helps us understand the creation of a heritage tourist park along the Auburn Avenue corridor, is *Community Nationalism.* Community Nationalism is related to Black Nationalism and focuses on the development of a set of independent institutions from white America (Dawson 2001, 21). Key to understanding Community Nationalism is that race, and more importantly racism, are seen as fundamental to understanding the lives and

[16] For a more detailed discussion of the political ideologies operating in African American communities see Inwood 2007a.

experiences of African Americans in the United States. What sets Community Nationalism apart from other more "radical" Black Nationalisms is a recognition that African Americans must engage with broader normative society. Community Nationalism focuses on:

> The unique and immutable relevance of race as a political characteristic, perceives whites as actively resisting black equality, and encourages African American self-reliance through the fostering the development of autonomous black institutions. Nationalism includes support for cultural, social and political autonomy (Harris-Lacewell 2004, 90).

Thus we should see the debate currently taking place along the Auburn Avenue corridor about the nature and scope of its heritage tourist potential as part of a complex, multi-faceted process. CAP is making visible a very specific and limited racialized understanding of the corridor's history, and legacy to the city, region and nation, one connected with a Black Conservative ideology, as they plan and implement a redevelopment plan centered on the creation of a heritage tourist landscape. The ways those ideas are debated along the Auburn Avenue corridor is connected to other political ideologies operating in African American communities and is a critical part of the creation of the racial heritage tourist landscape. Thus the production of a racial heritage landscape is related to the way those positions are debated. In this way, the Auburn Avenue corridor becomes a site where issues of racial identity, history and significance are debated, and made visible in the urban landscape.

RESEARCH APPROACH

To investigate the way race is produced along the Auburn Avenue corridor in service to the creation of a heritage tourist landscape I utilize a multi-method qualitative approach. I conducted open-ended interviews with Auburn Avenue residents, business owners, community activists, as well as with City of Atlanta officials. In addition, I conducted archival research at the Auburn Avenue research Library. I focused primarily on their collection of newspaper

articles about Auburn Avenue and their collection of the *Atlanta Daily World,* the nation's only daily African American owned newspaper which was headquartered on Auburn Avenue.

While open-ended, I approached the interviews with a broad set of themes including: participants' current relationship to Auburn Avenue, their views on the development of the corridor, and their understanding of Auburn Avenue in the context of metro-Atlanta. Once the interviews were completed I analyzed my data in two steps: I organized the interviews and archival material along broad lines, changing the names of the interview participants, and began to examine the interviews looking for broad themes. In addition, I hired two African-American undergraduates familiar with the Atlanta area to help code the interview data in an attempt to add, rigor, depth and breadth to this research project.[17]

AUBURN AVENUE CASE STUDY

THE HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT OF AUBURN AVENUE

Like many neighborhoods around downtown Atlanta, Auburn Avenue was initially an all white neighborhood. By the early 1900's 40% of the street was African American and it was not until 1910 that blacks would outnumber whites along the corridor (Grant 1993, 249). What emerged during the 1940's and 1950's was claimed as the richest African American street in the world (*Fortune Magazine* 1955, as quoted in Grant 1993, 543). Visiting the Auburn Avenue corridor at different times during the twentieth century, you could observe the changing nature of the African American urban experience in the South:

> To walk the Avenue on any given summer evening was to experience the vitality of black life in the city: the sounds of ragtime from the Top Hat, the smell of fried chicken from Ma Sutton's Restaurant, and the constant hum of animated street chatter. It became a place for black dreamers. You knew you had arrived on the Avenue once you had your own pulpit or your own cornerstone (Pomerantz 1996, 123).

[17] For a detailed discussion of the methodology utilized in this paper see: Inwood 2007a; Inwood 2007b.

Auburn Avenue was home to some of the most influential African American leaders as well as to some of the most important African American financial institutions in the United States. The center of African American commerce in the South--Citizens Trust Bank, Mutual Federal Savings and Loan, and the Atlanta Life Insurance Company--were all located along the street. In addition, Auburn Avenue was the most important stop along the "Chitlin Circuit." The Chitlin Circuit was a series of black-owned clubs in the segregated South where African Americans could play music, sing and dance. Finally, Auburn Avenue was home to arguably the most influential Civil Rights figure of the twentieth century, Martin Luther King Jr. Dr. King was born on Auburn Avenue and eventually returned to become assistant pastor at Ebenezer Baptist Church.

Auburn Avenue began to decline economically during the 1970's and 1980's. after the end of legalized segregation, and the opening up of west Atlanta to African American development among other factors (see Inwood 2007a). At that time, the City of Atlanta began to develop plans for revitalizing the corridor. One of the first redevelopment plans from the 1970's called for digging up Auburn Avenue and installing a Venetian Style Canal where gondolas would have plied the street, presumably taking commuters from the residential part of the street past Martin Luther King Jr.'s tomb, to the central business district and back down again (Atlanta Journal Constitution 1985, B14). Not surprisingly, residents and business owners rejected the plan. In the 1980's plan, that would have redeveloped the corridor more in line with its historic role, was quashed when the lead developer was exposed as having organized nudist colonies in rural Georgia which upset Auburn Avenue's religious community (Hopkins April 7, 1983).

During the early 1990's hopes again were high for the Auburn corridor as billions of dollars poured into the city after Atlanta was granted the 1996 Olympic Games. In conjunction

with the 1996 Games, the City of Atlanta created the first comprehensive development plan for the Auburn Avenue corridor. However, for a variety of reasons, including insufficient funding from the City, much of the original development plan was not implemented. Beginning in 2000 there was renewed interest in redeveloping the corridor and the original Butler-Auburn Redevelopment Plan, created for the Olympic Games, was updated. With the redevelopment plan update Central Atlanta Progress (CAP) has focused on turning Auburn Avenue into a heritage tourist destination relating to the lives and experiences of African Americans. With this renewed interest there arose a debate among stakeholders regarding the direction and future of the Auburn Avenue corridor. In the following sections I outline more specifically the Butler-Auburn Redevelopment Plan Update, and detail CAP's vision for Auburn Avenue. I then discuss the reaction to the Butler Auburn Plan Update by community stakeholders, residents, and activists.

THE BUTLER-AUBURN REDEVELOPMENT PLAN UPDATE

A contextual discussion of the Butler-Auburn Plan Update will help us to understand CAP's perspective on Auburn Avenue. Rich, an urban planner who helped draft the Butler-Auburn Plan Update, explains that the project was "prepared for Central Atlanta Progress and is actually a redevelopment plan update. The original plan was completed in preparation for the 1996 Olympic Games." The Butler-Auburn Plan Update was prepared in the context of the *Imagine Downtown Project* funded by Central Atlanta Progress, a 501c non-profit organization. CAP is a private-public partnership charged with developing and maintaining downtown Atlanta in partnership with the City of Atlanta. Jan, project coordinator for the Imagine Downtown Project explains that CAP is funded by a special tax levied against downtown property owners. Stone (1989, 16) explains that CAP provides a structure and focus for urban development in the

downtown area. Thus the City of Atlanta is able to launch long-range development activities and development is able to progress in a more structured, organized way. This mission and history informs the Imagine Downtown Project.

Jan explains, "The Imagine Downtown Project was a visioning exercise which helped to identify, very specifically, what our investment options were downtown, and what we wanted downtown to look like when we were done." Over several months, CAP conducted a series of community meetings where stakeholders were able to talk about and brainstorm development ideas. Jan elaborates "We had four workshops, which geographically focused on a different part of downtown. Each workshop lasted three days and about a hundred people came to each. We used crayons, marker, pens, whatever, and paper and made maps and drawings of what we thought downtown should look like." CAP used these meetings to create a vision of what downtown Atlanta should look like and which subsequently could be used to justify redevelopment projects in the downtown area. As a result of this process CAP realized that the city needed to fit Auburn Avenue more fully into the overall downtown redevelopment structure. As Jan explains it, CAP realized, "Auburn Avenue was the hole in the doughnut. Development was happening all around Auburn and they were facing a lot of development pressure there." As a result CAP began a comprehensive update of redevelopment plans for the Auburn corridor. The Butler-Auburn Redevelopment Plan Update is the fruit of that effort.

The overarching goal of the Butler-Auburn Redevelopment Plan update is to:

> [P]lace Sweet Auburn within its physical and social context by: describing the surrounding physical and social context in the area; outlining the participatory process that was undertaken for the update; laying out the overall themes that helped drive the planning effort and finally by spelling out the specific vision, goals and objectives which every other aspect of this plan is designed to support (Butler-Auburn Redevelopment Plan Update 2005, 6).

From this seemingly banal statement several themes emerge to illuminate the ways that CAP seeks to frame Auburn Avenue to support development. The authors of the Butler-Auburn Plan Update focus on a very particular time period, the time when Auburn Avenue was known as 'Sweet Auburn' to frame discussion and understanding of the Auburn Avenue corridor. Subsequently all the decisions made about Auburn Avenue's redevelopment fit into the 'Sweet Auburn' discourse and becomes a way to make decisions about Auburn Avenue and its redevelopment. This aspect of the Butler-Auburn Plan Update connects the redevelopment plans with particular aspects of the historic African American community along the Auburn Avenue corridor and more specifically with particular African American political ideology.

COMMODIFYING THE PAST TO CAPITALIZE ON THE PRESENT: THE MAKING OF SWEET AUBURN

A major theme emerging from the Butler-Auburn Redevelopment Plan Update is the idea that Auburn Avenue tie into its past as an important street for Black commerce as a means to redevelop the corridor. As the Butler-Auburn Redevelopment Plan Update acknowledges, there is a surprising lack of understanding about Auburn Avenue and its wider legacy. According to the Plan Update this is surprising because at one time Auburn Avenue was "more celebrated than even New York's Harlem" (Butler-Auburn Redevelopment Plan Update 2005, 9). Yet according to Jim, an architect from the firm that prepared the report, this provides an opportunity to "rebrand" Auburn Avenue, to reconstruct its identity around a set of cultural ideas and themes related to the experiences of African Americans in Atlanta.

The lack of knowledge about the Auburn Avenue corridor by the broader public is a critical facet of CAP's redevelopment plan because it provides a relatively blank slate on which to build. Thus the remaking of Auburn Avenue in the Butler-Auburn Redevelopment Plan

update presents an opportunity to reconstruct meaning for Auburn Avenue around ideologies and understandings identified by CAP. The Butler-Auburn Plan Update explains:

> The waxing of cultural and heritage tourism in the United States coincides with an aging, more affluent, baby boom population and a sense of introspection since the tragedies of September 11, 2001. More people are seeking to reinforce feelings of a common past and affirm a cultural solidarity through visits to America's celebrated historic and natural parks and sites. The National Park Service has at least 38 heritage tourism itineraries online; The National Trust for Historic Preservation lists over 70 'Distinctive Destinations' in their marketing. Sweet Auburn is a natural for each (Butler-Auburn Redevelopment Plan Update 2005, 9).

By continuously referring to Auburn Avenue as "Sweet Auburn" the Butler-Auburn redevelopment plan sought to create a larger narrative about the Auburn Avenue corridor and connects Auburn Avenue with a particular period of history in an effort to market and brand Auburn Avenue as a heritage tourist destination.

John Wesley Dobbs, an important community activist during the 1940s and 1950s on Auburn Avenue, originally coined the term "Sweet Auburn" in the 1950s. He declared, "if money made the world sweet, then Auburn Avenue is the sweetest street in the world" (John Dobbs as quoted in Pomerantz 1996, 124). According to Chris, a National Park Service Ranger and Historian at the Martin Luther King Jr. National Historic Site, the period in which Dobbs spoke was a time of conservative black leadership in Atlanta and on Auburn Avenue in particular. Chris explains, "the overriding impulse on Auburn Avenue at that time was don't put too much pressure on white people [here in Atlanta], we can get things done if we want to through negotiation."

Furthermore, the era of "Sweet Auburn" was a time when Auburn Avenue was most closely associated with economic commerce. For example, in 1955 *Fortune Magazine* declared Auburn Avenue to be the "richest Negro street in the world" (As quoted in Grant 1993, 123).

The New York Times highlighted Auburn Avenue in a special newspaper section which discussed Atlanta's response to the burgeoning Civil Rights movement, declaring "Atlanta boasts Auburn Avenue the richest Negro street in the world. Here is the largest Negro stock company in the United States, the Atlanta Life Insurance Company, the Nation's only daily Negro newspaper, and other institutions" (Dykeman and Stokley August 9, 1959, pg. SM11). A few years later the Times returned to report on Atlanta's moderate response to desegregation efforts in the city. They quoted John Wesley Dobbs stating:

> It takes sugar to sweeten things, and you know it takes money to buy sugar. The acquisition of this kind of wealth along Auburn Avenue has caused us to call it 'Sweet Auburn.' Auburn Avenue is not a slum street; it's not over behind the railroad tracks. It runs straight into Peachtree Street. When you go up Sweet Auburn, you're going to town, Negro policemen for Negro neighborhoods (Sitton May 6, 1962, 246).

These quotes indicate Auburn Avenue's financial success, and the way Auburn Avenue was used to promote a very particular image of African American identity. By referencing Auburn Avenue during its economic height, the Butler-Auburn Plan Update is emphasizing a successful time period in Auburn Avenue's history. It was an era dominated by a conservative, business-oriented black leadership, and by referencing this period the Butler-Auburn Redevelopment Plan places Auburn Avenue in a context where business activity defined the street. This orients the street towards a time when accommodation and negotiation were the rule, during which an older, more conservative set of leaders dominated the community. In addition, it links Auburn Avenue to a time when business activities were the central focus of the corridor. In this way, Auburn Avenue is closely aligned with a series of consumptative practices that will further help to market the street for heritage tourism.

CREATING AN AUTHENTIC SWEET AUBURN

One longtime Auburn Avenue businesswoman noted in our interview that the City of Atlanta and CAP do not have a good track record when it comes to promoting or developing the Auburn Avenue corridor. Over the course of our interview Alberta spoke about the "Sweet Auburn Curb Market." The curb market was begun in the late 1980's to preserve and redevelop one of the oldest vegetable markets in the City of Atlanta. It was done in conjunction with the 1988 Democratic National Convention which was held in the City of Atlanta and was seen by city officials as a way to redevelop the Auburn Avenue corridor with a tourist attraction. She describes:

> The City of Atlanta came up with this 'great plan' to help Auburn Avenue. They re-did the curb market. However, the market has no real legacy for the people of this community. During segregation black people couldn't even go there. It was the white folks' market, but you don't see that there. The whole reason its called the curb market is because we couldn't go inside, we had to stand on the curb to buy vegetables. Yet this is the city's vehicle for redevelopment? It makes you wonder what their goals and motivations are down here.

Alberta's comments highlight an aspect of the Butler-Auburn Redevelopment Plan Update which saturates the plan's context and lies at the heart of the corridor's redevelopment: how do you create an authentic African American experience when so much of that experience revolves around the exclusion from public buildings and public spaces, the artifacts of the landscape that traditional heritage tourist sites rely on to provide an authentic experience?

Recall from the earlier discussion on heritage tourism that questions of authenticity are key to the perceived success of heritage tourist landscapes. The authors of the Butler-Auburn Redevelopment Plan are conscious of the need to create an authentic tourist destination. In a passage from the plan the authors compare the tourist-heritage potential of Auburn Avenue with

Beal Street, a historically significant African American street in Memphis, Tennessee. The Butler-Auburn Plan Update declares:

> Many argue that the pressure for profit undermined the authenticity of Beale Street; certainly the grit of the old district is lost in the over-produced venues and the contrived themeing. Nevertheless, most of Beal was restored and the district is a major tourist destination…and [Beale Street] even attracted an authentic industry--Gibson Guitars--to invest in a new plant and visitor center (Butler-Auburn Redevelopment Plan Update 2005, 23).

While one can debate the meaning and merits of an 'authentic industry', presumably in order for Auburn Avenue to become a successful heritage tourist destination, the corridor will have to rely on, or more likely create, an authenticity of its own; just as Beal did with the Gibson Guitar factory. As the above quote about Beal Street shows, it is not necessarily important to find an industry, or practice which is historically connected to the landscape, but instead what is important is finding a *perceived* connection to the corridor's landscape. When it comes to constructing a *racial* heritage landscape a critical element is its connection with a version of a perceived racial identity. Just as buildings represent artifacts in the landscape and confers an historic identity onto the landscape, racial identity imbues urban space with a similar kind of legitimacy. For the success of the Butler-Auburn Plan Update it is necessary to connect Auburn Avenue with certain African American identity positions in the landscape as a means of creating an authentic African American experience.

By constantly referring to and connecting Auburn Avenue to the time period known as "Sweet Auburn", the authors of the Butler-Auburn Plan Update are trying to connect Auburn Avenue with an authentic version of the past. They chose to emphasize a period when a Black Conservative agenda dominated the Auburn Avenue corridor. Dawson (2001, 281) notes that black conservatism is the most visible black ideology in mainstream, white, America. While black conservative ideology has little support amongst the broader African American

community, it enjoys a long and important history in the United States. Black conservative political ideology was made most famous by Booker T. Washington (Dawson 2001, 283) who "emphasized pragmatic economic development" and focused on compromise and accommodation when dealing with segregated Southern society

The construction of "Sweet Auburn" Avenue put forward by the Butler-Auburn Redevelopment Plan Update attempts to frame an understanding of the Auburn Avenue corridor within the larger ideological position of black conservatism in an effort to create both an "authentic" racial heritage tourist site and a site which appeals to a wide range of individuals. For the authors of the Butler-Auburn Plan Update this was a tricky problem, one they struggled with at different points during the project. Jeff, the urban planner who helped to draft the report stated, "Some people view Auburn Avenue as an historic relic of segregation and Jim Crowism and that sort of thing. The challenge for us it to think of a way that memorializes that era without fostering a lingering bitterness and to still make it palatable to business redevelopment." For Jeff and the other authors of the report, it is important to maintain a vision of Auburn Avenue focused on the accomplishments of African Americans --accomplishments that occurred despite racism-- while only implicitly acknowledging that white racism and prejudice. The way such a narrative ignores the larger structural imperative of segregation makes the vision controversial. One Atlanta official summed it up by stating "The redevelopment of Auburn Avenue is going to have positive and negatives for people. So on the positive side we are trying to bring people into Auburn Avenue who have a stake in the street. You either have to move on or stay stuck. The idea is to revitalize and that is what we are doing." An architect with the Atlanta Urban Design Commission, which approves development plans for designated historic districts within the City of Atlanta, Jessica stated during our interview "Auburn Avenue is

significant because it was a location where people could be entrepreneurs. It spoke in a very concrete way to the realm of possibility for black in Atlanta. That is the story we need to tell with Auburn Avenue and I think it is an important story to tell. Jessica's comments are instructive. It is not that the story CAP and the City of Atlanta want to tell is wrong, or does not have an historical basis, or even that it should not be part of the Auburn Avenue corridor story. Rather the story they are trying to tell by focusing on 'Sweet Auburn' is truncated. It ignores significant portions of the past and presents an image of Auburn Avenue that may well be 'authentic' heritage site, but is incomplete. Historically, Auburn Avenue was rife with class, gender and other identity tensions. Not only was the conservative approach advocated by many of the established leadership challenged on Auburn Avenue, the conservative leadership on Auburn Avenue lead to its economic and social decline in the 1970's and 1980's (Inwood 2007a). This aspect of Auburn Avenue's history is left out of larger discussion about the corridor's historical narrative presented in the Butler-Auburn Redevelopment Plan Update. Not surprisingly this lack of completeness in Auburn Avenue's redevelopment outlined by CAP has elicited the most controversy among those who live, work and organize along the Auburn Avenue corridor.

COMMUNITY REACTION: COMMUNITY NATIONALISM AND AFRICAN AMERICAN IDENTITY

The director of the Butler Street YMCA, and a major property holder along Auburn Avenue, explains his reaction when he first saw CAP's plans for redeveloping Auburn Avenue as an important heritage tourist destination:

> I don't think that Dr. King or Alonzo Herndon, or B.L. Calhoun or T.M. Alexander or any of those individuals [central figures in the development of Auburn Avenue] ever in their wildest dreams thought for a minute that Auburn Avenue would stand still, that our destiny would be based on what we used to

> have, rather on the potential of what can be. I do think we've got to save some of Auburn Avenue, but I don't need some white person to come here and tell me to keep the A.T. Walden building--we own it, we bought it for a reason, we're trying to redevelop it and it is insulting for you to tell me that.

Given Butler-Street YMCA's long connection to Atlanta and the historic role it played on the Auburn Avenue corridor, the director's comments are instructive. First, the director is connecting with Auburn Avenue's past as the preeminent black business, social and political district in the United States. The corridor was about African Americans' abilities to make money, support viable community institutions and triumph in the face of pernicious white racism. However, whereas CAP and the authors of the Butler-Auburn Redevelopment Plan Update connect to that history to construct a broadly appealing heritage tourist destination, the director of the Butler Street YMCA sees that history in a different light. For him, Auburn Avenue's long history is a reason to build for the future, to emulate the earlier business successes by redeveloping a strong financial and commercial district. For CAP to move in and to tell property owners what to do with their buildings is, in the director's mind, a denial of Black agency and the inability to develop a profitable section of the city. The historic meaning of Auburn Avenue for the director was the ability of African Americans to build for the future, not necessarily construct a destination dedicated to the past. Thus for the director, the Auburn Avenue corridor represents an African American identity defined by an ability to be successful in the face of continued racist assaults by normative society. Others within the Auburn Avenue community echo the director's sentiments.

A representative of the Integral Group, an African American development firm, noted, "I was talking with a woman down at city hall about some of our projects and she said to me, 'the overriding goal of the city is to make sure Auburn Avenue looks like it did when Martin King Jr. lived here.' Well, you know I said to her, 'Auburn Avenue was never about the past for black

people, it was about the future of black people!" Another Auburn Avenue businessperson who has been located on Auburn Avenue for several years explains her connection with the Auburn Avenue corridor and her development vision:

> I've always tried to reach back and respect the past, but I also feel, in redeveloping Auburn Avenue, that I'm reflecting the current meaning of the street too. Auburn Avenue first and foremost signals African American independence when it comes to business and commerce. It reflects an independent, strong, community centered African American identity. That is what made Auburn Avenue, and that is what will make Auburn Avenue in the future.

In another telling interview a Citizens Trust Bank official noted:

> You know none of the political accomplishments of the 1950s and 1960s would have been possible without the financial backing of places like Auburn Avenue. We [the business community] made those things possible. If we are going to move forward as a community we need to create places which still serve that purpose.

These comments point to a vision of African American identity along the Auburn Avenue corridor that resonates with ideologies of Community Nationalism outlined earlier. Recall that this form of Black Nationalism believes that there needs to be a connection with white society, but for African American's to be successful and live in a successful community it is necessary to construct strong African American owned business and community institutions. This vision departs from the kind of Black Conservative identity embodied in the Butler-Auburn Redevelopment Plan Update. A key component of Black Conservatism is to sever the link with white racism and black uplift. Black Conservatism argues that many groups in United States society suffered discrimination, that racism is not unique to the experiences of black people. Community Nationalism on the other hand argues that racist actions by normative society are the *critical* piece of the African American experience. Thus the response by Community Nationalists is to build significant institutions owned and operated by African Americans which

will provide African American communities with leverage and a degree of autonomy from white society.

Ultimately the debates taking place between CAP and their vision for "Sweet Auburn" and those who live, work and organize along the corridor revolve around questions about the ability of CAP and the City of Atlanta to accurately reflect and represent the experiences of African Americans. Within the Auburn Avenue community today there is a group trying to reconstruct Auburn Avenue more aligned with a vision of Auburn Avenue that both reflects past achievements of the corridor and necessarily looks to the future. For this group Auburn Avenue is a landscape which can support and promote strong African American communities. This is connected with a form of Black Nationalism which seeks to construct strong African American communities.

CONCLUSION

Today Auburn Avenue is at a crossroads as urban developers and city leaders target the corridor for urban redevelopment. As longtime residents, business owners and community activists work to maintain a version of African American identity tied to Community Nationalism, Central Atlanta Progress and the City of Atlanta seek to create an urban landscape providing heritage tourism opportunities. Given Auburn Avenue's legacy as an important street for African American commerce, the redevelopment plans outlined by the city highlight particular historic and racialized understandings of the corridor's history, significance and legacy to the state, the region and the nation. In particular, the City of Atlanta focuses on a time period in Auburn Avenue's history when the street was dominated by a conservative set of African American business leaders who tightly controlled the corridor. Consequently, the city contextualizes Auburn Avenue in a specific framework centered on accommodation, business

development, and the close relationship between African American civic and business leadership with the white Atlanta power structure. This understanding of the Auburn Avenue corridor is the framework for promoting Auburn Avenue's heritage tourist potential.

The truncated understanding of Auburn Avenue exhibited by the Butler-Auburn Redevelopment Plan Update provides and example with which to explore the process of creating a racial heritage tourist destination and the connection with racial identity positions. The role that African American identity positions related to political ideology is marketed in racial heritage tourist sites shows the way race and racism are comodified and used for economic benefit. It also shows the ways particular African American identity positions are written into the landscape, while other more controversial positions are removed from the landscape.

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CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

"Auburn Avenue; The Avenue"

by: Kathleen Redding Adams
Atlanta Daily World, Date Unknown

Auburn, Auburn, a viatic trail
An ever-growing golden vale;
Nurtured into a glowing avenue;
Street of dreams--Negritude desires,
Street for adventure, daring and new,
Street of homes, and business, too-
Freedom's vision made manifest.

Auburn, Auburn, 'The Avenue!'
Always the pride of 'Old Fourth.'
Extended to idealists of the world
Mecca-National and international too,
Negritude's exposition of latent desires
Educative, activative- sound
Auburn, Auburn, may its grace abound.

INTRODUCTION

This dissertation explores the racialization of place in Auburn Avenue, an historically significant African American neighborhood located in Atlanta, Georgia. I draw from a set of literatures that explore the racialization of place, the ways memorials inscribe meaning and context on the landscape, African American political ideology, and the construction of heritage tourist landscapes. This research examines the ways in which the African American community of Auburn Avenue is engaged with and constructs significant urban space. In addition, my research on Auburn Avenue's memorial landscape uncovers the ways the Martin Luther King Jr. National Historic Site embodies a normative understanding of his life and death and ignores other aspects of his work and writings. Additionally I interrogate the City of Atlanta's plans for constructing Auburn Avenue as a heritage tourist destination focused on more conservative aspects of Auburn's history, legacy and impact on the City of Atlanta. This research on Auburn

Avenue contributes both theoretically and empirically to existing knowledge about the racialization of place by countering normative conceptualizations of African Americans as ungeographic and philosophically undeveloped (McKittrick 2006). Moreover, this research highlights the changing nature of Black Counterpublic spaces and the complexity of the connections between race and place in 21st Century United States Society.

Chapter two explores a redevelopment project started by Big Bethel AME Church in 2004. For many stakeholders along the Auburn Avenue corridor, Big Bethel's $45 million redevelopment project was seen as a turning point for the street and represents a new chapter in the corridor's long history. I argue that Big Bethel's project reveals the complex and contested processes behind the racialization of place, provides an case study with which to explore ways that the African American community along Auburn Avenue is engaged with place making. I suggest segments of the African American community along Auburn Avenue are engaged in place making vis-à-vis a community nationalism discourse that flows from broader disillusionment with post-Civil Rights U.S. society. Furthermore, this chapter also demonstrates the utility and appropriateness of framing Auburn Avenue as a Black Counterpublic. Historically Black Counterpublics served as powerful counterpoints to normative conceptualizations of race and racism in U.S. society, and provided a space where African Americans could come together to organize to confront racism in the United States. However, with the end of legalized segregation and the advancements made by the U.S. Civil Rights struggle, many historic counterpublic spaces have weakened.

Big Bethel's project is both hopeful, in that it represents the strengthening of significant African American communities, and cautionary because as they are strengthened they may be absorbed by normative society. Historically African American Counterpublic spaces served as

powerful windows through which to observe underlying racism in U.S. society, and counterpublic spaces served as powerful critiques to normative conceptions of U.S. history and democracy.

Chapter three draws from literatures that focus on the construction of memorial landscapes. This chapter explores the ways the Martin Luther King Jr. National Historic Site embodies a sanitized and, therefore, safe understanding of Dr. King's life and meaning to the nation; focused almost exclusively on King's early work and his strategy of non-violent social action. Through this understanding, King is presented as the "safe" leader during a time when the U.S. Civil Rights Movement roiled U.S. society. This perspective of King reveals a truncated understating of his history and legacy to the nation, and reveals the tension between official memory and more popular interpretations of King's life and work. Another important element to contextualizing King's legacy and memory is the way the City of Atlanta uses King's memory to promote an understanding of the City to the wider world. Thus Dr. King serves as a powerful symbol for federal and local efforts to understanding one of the most divisive periods in U.S. history.

Chapter four examines plans created by Central Atlanta Progress and the City of Atlanta to turn Auburn Avenue into a heritage tourist destination. Drawing from literatures that examine the construction of heritage tourist landscapes this chapter focuses on a growing trend in heritage tourism, the construction of 'ethnic tourist destinations'. The City of Atlanta plans to take advantage of Auburn Avenue's historic identification with business and a conservative black leadership in order to construct Auburn Avenue as a heritage tourist destination focused on "Sweet Auburn". The ways the city has constructed their plans highlights only selective aspects of the history of Auburn Avenue. This is contrasted with the views of those who live, work and

organize along the Auburn Avenue corridor who want to construct a neighborhood that looks to the future of African American communities.

BROADER SIGNIFICANCE

Broadly speaking, this dissertation argues that there is a need to critically re-engage with the study of African American communities. Patillo (2006, 2) argues scholars need to lay to rest "the notion of a unitary black political agenda" and that there is a need to get beyond static notions of African American identity. Within the field of Black Studies scholars are coming to terms with the changing nature of urban black communities by recognizing the intesectionality of identity positions. Thus, we should not see the concept of race as the only identity position which has meaning for those racialized as African American, though it may be the most important one. Instead, African American identity is constructed around a broad set of identity positions that include gender, sexuality and class. By conceptualizing Auburn Avenue as a Black Counterpublic I am providing a framework for examining and understanding the multiple and contested identity positions within the Auburn Avenue community. In this way my research provides a spatialized understanding to interrogate the ways African American identity is dialectically constructed around notions of space and place. African American identity along the Auburn Avenue corridor which connect to broader political ideologies which are written into and form a basis for redeveloping and reinterpreting African American engagement with the racialization of place. Thus, my research speaks to geography and those who have examined the racializtion of place, but also scholars in other disciplines who examine African American urban communities.

This research also offers a way of discussing minority communities that recognizes the agency of residents, businesspersons, and community activists within a framework that also

acknowledges the power of white hegemony. McKittrick (2006) argues that geography has not treated African American understandings of space and place with the same philosophic reverence reserved for other oppressed populations. My research shows that segments of the African American population on Auburn Avenue are engaged in place making and have a nuanced understanding of the processes involved in constructing urban space and its connection to the construction of race. For example, while those who come to Auburn Avenue to visit the King memorial currently see an underserved urban community. Big Bethel AME hopes that its Renaissance Walk redevelopment will produce an urban community including successful middle-and upper income African Americans. In this way Big Bethel is trying create a counter-stereotypical image of African American identity connected to the urban space of Auburn Avenue.

My research addresses African American agency in the construction of significant racialized space in two ways. First, it shows that the African American community along Auburn Avenue has a sophisticated understanding of the significance of place to the construction of racialized identity. Both Big Bethel AME's project and the reaction by segments of the African American community to CAP's plans to redevelop Auburn Avenue link African American identity to the construction of Auburn Avenue space and place. Second, it links the understanding of place and space with specific African American political positions. Thus, it counters geography's traditional disciplinary blindness to the philosophical engagement of space and place by minority communities. This research argues the African American community on Auburn Avenue brings to Auburn Avenue a complex philosophical engagement with space and place. In many respects this isn't surprising. The history of African Americans is replete with examples of how space has impacted the lives of African Americans. The slave codes, Jim Crow

Segregation, the integration of Southern Society, and ghettos in Northern cities, are all examples of how the construction of space directly affected the lives of people of color in North America. Thus, it should come as no surprise that the African American community is engaged with, and cares deeply, about the connections between space and race. This dissertation, through the concept of the Black Counterpublic, provides a base from which to build upon and engage with African American engagement with space and place.

This research project bridges diverse literatures including work on African American political ideologies and the study of African American communities with more traditional geographic literatures. Importantly, my work provides philosophical consilience between work in African American studies and geography. Since the spatial turn in the late 1980's Sociology, Anthropology, Cultural Studies, and Identity Studies have engaged with an increasingly complex understanding of space and place. This in turn has led to a greater engagement with geography as researchers in other disciplines have focused on the construction of space. This dissertation speaks to scholars of African American studies and geography and provides a theoretical basis on which to engage. Geographers have engaged with the study of the processes that have historically racialized spaces. Scholarship in African American studies has engaged with the African American Counterpublic that shows how African Americans brought to bear a significant amount of agency and resistance to the imposition of white hegemony. Yet there has been much less engagement between these two diverse literatures. My research provides the theoretical and analytic bridge which shows how the imposition of white racism is important, but not to the negation of the actions of African Americans. In so doing, this dissertation research provides a nuanced account of the way race is embedded in place and space.

THOUGHTS ON METHODOLOGY

Within the realm of qualitative studies, the question of who constitutes an insider and who constitutes an outsider still frames much of the contemporary debate (Crang 2003). Unfortunately, as Rose (1997, 313) points out, much of the conversation between the "researcher and researched can only be mapped out in two ways: either as a relationship of difference, articulated through an objectifying distance; or as a relationship of sameness, understood as the researcher and researched being in the same position." This rather formulaic presentation of positionality that places insiders as good, outsiders as bad (Crang 2003, 496) and fails to capture the nuance and sophistication of human relationships that sees us occupying multiple, contested, and often shifting positions depending on a variety of factors.

Furthermore, there exists a danger in the conception of positionality as a strict dichotomy -- the very categories of race, class, gender, and sexuality etc. are in fact reified through a process that much of qualitative research seeks to problematize. Research on race indicates that the "binary categories of white and non-white or black and white [do not] adequately or unproblematically capture the dimensions of identity" (Holloway 2000, 20). Similarly, the dichotomy of researcher as outsider, research participants as insiders fails to capture the multiple dimensions we occupy. Treating persons of color as having a positonality based on one or several characteristics reifies previously held natural positions that we occupy at any given time.

Through my experience of conducting qualitative research I have found that it is far too easy to simply state my own positonality without seriously engaging with what it means for the research process. It is one thing to identify myself as an outsider with a different set of life experiences, and quite another to actually engage with and discuss that positonality in relation to the research process. The first scenario involves a superficial acknowledgment of difference that

does not bring the researcher to any real understanding of why those differences matter in the research process. The second scenario involves a serious engagement with research participants that seek to find some form of common ground, while being cognizant of the ways different life experiences and positions in society affect interpretations of events and perceptions of reality.

In particular, I have found through my research that an important element in the creation of a nuanced understanding of positonality concerns a consideration of the construction of place and its influence on the research process. This often boils down to an understanding of the social and locational context of where qualitative research occurs. Elwood and Martin (2000, 656) point out "[i]nterpreting and understanding the significance of different interview sites is important throughout the research process as apart of creating a feasible and effective research plan." Key in this statement is the idea that the interview site becomes an integral part of the research process. From a logistical standpoint you want to make it as easy for your research participants to meet you as possible. Conducting interviews in the places, homes, and business' where people live, work and organize also may put people at ease. Perhaps more importantly, the spaces and places where people live and work are also sites saturated with power relations. By conducting interviews in the community I felt more capable of exploring the workings and relationships that constitute the Auburn Avenue corridor.

Through my own experience on Auburn Avenue, I have come to realize that it is the unexpected that often reveals insights into the community. For example, over the course of an interview I conducted with an elderly woman in her home, a next-door neighbor stopped by to borrow something from the kitchen. As she walked in she saw me sitting on the couch and apologized for interrupting a visit by 'company.' The woman who I was interviewing stated, "don't worry" then, looking over at me, she smiled and said, "He's not company, he's not even a

visitor, we're just doing an interview." Her statement startled me for two reasons. The interview had been going so well that it was almost as if we were having a discussion amongst friends. Her statement brought me back to reality and reinforced my outsider status at the moment. It startled me again at the end of the interview when she apologized for having her neighbor stop over to check on us. She then went on to explain that you can never tell what a white person wants and that her neighbor had stopped by to "borrow something from the kitchen" to check on her. In this sense, her home, the place of the interview, became a site where we were both under interrogation. I was interviewing her in an attempt to understand Auburn Avenue. I was being interviewed as an 'outsider' to see what my intentions were. The particular woman I was interviewing was a pillar of the community; she had marched with Dr. King and was a voice for the low-income residents in Wheat Street Gardens. Unbeknownst to me at the time, her reaction to me and her reception of me would either open doors in the community, or close them. Her home space became a site where our multiple positonalities and life experiences merged to mark that space with particular power relationships. Her home and the interview that took place there offered clues about the community and the power relationships in the community where she lived.

The importance of my positionality goes beyond simply trying to gain access to the community and trying to find people to talk with. My positionality also lies at the heart of this project as it allows me access to certain spaces along the corridor and denies me access to other places. An experience I had at a barbershop along the corridor illustrates this point. Actually, this is not just any barbershop but the oldest African American barbershop in Atlanta. I entered and began introducing myself and after a few minutes I asked the barber if he would be interested in talking with me further about his experiences and perceptions of Auburn Avenue

and the changes taking place along the corridor. He proceeded to tell me that all of the answers I was looking for were across the street at the APEX museum of African American history. I then stated that I had been there and that I thought *he* could tell me more than I could ever learn in a museum. He responded, as the six customers who were in the shop fell silent, that perhaps I didn't understand him, and I should make every effort to go over there and check things out. Sensing defeat I gave him a card and retreated to a local coffee shop.

As the proverbial outsider trying to conduct research in an urban, African American community, this incident isn't very surprising. After all, the community members on Auburn Avenue have only to look at the Interstate that bisects their neighborhood to see part of the legacy of white racism in Atlanta, and that racism is still fresh in the minds of many who live and work along the Avenue. Furthermore, this particular barbershop is an Atlanta institution in the African American community, a place where African American men come together to discuss politics, the state of the neighborhood, and to share perceptions of what is going on with themselves and each other. In other words, precisely the spot that would have proved invaluable for my research. Yet, I was certainly aware that my mere presence would disrupt the normal flows of daily life on Auburn Avenue and so this incident really shouldn't have been too surprising. In my post interview analysis of the incident I chalked my experiences up as a total and complete loss. I had been denied access to a significant community institution and had been shut down in a very public way. However, this narrative is illustrative of the complex and multifaceted nature of identity and is indicative of the complex relationship that exists between researchers and researched.

The literature on positionality has switched in recent years from a discussion of strict dichotomy, insiders as good, outsiders as bad (Rose 1997), to one of intersectionality and a

realization that academics need to address the multiplicity of positions we occupy (McCall 2005). The concept of intersectionality emerged in feminist studies as a way of addressing earlier critiques that feminism, or more precisely white feminist scholars, could not or should not presume to speak for women of color just because of a common gendered identity position (McCall 2005, 1775). Instead academics need to think through the multiplicity of positions we occupy (e.g. gender, sexuality, race, class etc.). As the incident in the barbershop illustrates however, certain identity positions carry more community cache than others. As a male, I was entering an extremely gendered space, the barbershop, which researchers (Harris-Lacewell 2004) have documented as having a patriarchal structure. Yet that position did not carry as much weight or provide an entrée point into the community. Instead, I was entering into a space where the identity of the barber, the shop and the customers lay at the intersection of race and gender. Thus the incident provides clues as to the nature of identity position along the Auburn Avenue corridor.

Initially I treated the experience at the barbershop as a complete failure on my part. I had approached the barbershop in a clumsy way and had misinterpreted the significance of my visit. However, upon later reflection and a discussion with my dissertation committee, I had realized how illuminating the experience had been. The intersection of identity positions at the barbershop is indicative of the ways in which counterpublic spaces operate. Recall from the earlier discussion about the nature of counterpublic spaces that multiple counterpublic spaces exist within African American communities. Some, like Big Bethel AME's redevelopment project, are visible and are engaged with normative society. Others, like the barbershop are private spaces which operate under the radar screen of normative society and it is in these spaces where African American men can come together to debate and strategize responses to white

racism and hegemonic, normative society. In this way the incident at the barbershop served as an important entry point for thinking through the complexity of counterpublic spaces along the Auburn Avenue corridor and also served as a means for interrogating the ways in which my positonality as an outsider does deny me access to the community, illuminates my role in the community, and importantly allows me to gain a perspective of counterpublic spaces which was not readily apparent.

The above outlined narratives are also indicative of the ways my positonality infuses this project and informs my research results. In hindsight it is not surprising that Community Nationalism was the most visible political ideology I observed along the Auburn Avenue corridor. Recall from the earlier discussion on Community Nationalism that is predicated on a belief that white society remains inherently racist, but that African Americans need to be pragmatic, that the black community must engage with white society in some meaningful way. For those who ascribe to this ideology, while my presence in the community may have been troubling along the corridor, interview participants may well have felt it necessary to engage with me in some way. Thus the incident in the barbershop may well be an indication that other political ideologies or identity positions are operating along the corridor that remain just below the surface well, just out of site. Had I to do this project over again I would have brought in the two African American undergraduates in at a much earlier phase in the research process. It would have been interesting to bring them in at a time in the project when I was conducting interviews. Carolyn and Dominique could have also conducted interviews and we then could have compared the kind of information that we were getting. This would have served two purposes. First, it would have allowed me to see how the information changed based on the identity of the interview participants. Second, it may have provided an entrée into the more

subtle, or more invisible political ideologies operating along the corridor. Thus the *private* counterpublic spaces operating along the corridor would have become more visible and meaningful to this project.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

When my parents built their house they stated that they wished they had built two homes; one to figure out all the things they had wished they had done, and the other to do all the things they wished. In some respects I feel the same way about my dissertation. During the process of writing these pages several important ideas emerged which were important, but either for a lack of space, relevance to the particular arguments I was making, or my ability to think through those ideas at the time, I had to leave them out. Thus I foresee building on the ideas laid out in this dissertation. An element of counterpublic spaces that I have begun to explore is the way counterpublic spaces employ exclusionary practices while simultaneously providing a place for marginalized groups to organize. One avenue for continued research is examining how the redevelopment project started by Big Bethel AME Church may represent patriarchal notions of African American identity and community organization. The Black Church historically has been dominated by men, a fact reiterated in popular accounts of Civil Rights leaders where often women are left out of the story, and has been accused of replicating patriarchy. Also historically the Black churches are fairly conservative when it comes to certain social issues, particularly homosexuality. Consequently I would also like to determine how African American religious groups reinforce normative notions of the family and sexuality.

Related to these ideas is the way modern Black Counterpublic spaces reflect the neo-liberal state. Wheat Street Baptist Church recently announced that they are redeveloping Wheat Street Gardens. "The Garden" is a low-income housing development located just off Auburn

Avenue. The plans call for refurbishing The Garden as a 'mixed-use' housing development that reflects the goals laid out by the Hope VI initiative of the mid-1990's and would be targeted for a mixed-income community. While geographers have reported on Hope VI projects and the redevelopment of urban spaces, little work exists on the ways that African American communities and Black Counterpublic spaces reflect these trends. This direction of research is important both for what it reveals about both the redevelopment of urban areas and identity tensions within African American communities.

An area of research that has just begun examines the development of African American political thought and the connection to geography. As recent work suggests (McKittrick 2006; Tyner 2006) African Americans have a long history of engagement with geography. Martin Luther King Jr. is one prominent African American leader who has been under-theorized in the field of geography. Of particular interest to geographers is Dr. King's writings of the "Beloved Community", his articulation of a just society, and his engagement with African American urban communities and the ghetto. King's ideas have only tangentially been explored in geography and deserve further consideration.

Atlanta has emerged as an important destination for African Americans, yet aspects of African American gentrification have largely been ignored. Atlanta offers an interesting case study to explore the gentrification process via an African American community that is one of the wealthiest and most dynamic in the country. Another potential research project might discover how African American communities may be engaging with and participating in the gentrification process. Focus groups, interviews, and an exploration of demographic trends may reveal how the African American community is engaged in the gentrification process in metro Atlanta, Georgia.

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