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Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Historical Geography

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This paper is an edited version of a plenary lecture sponsored by this journal and the Historical Geography Specialty Group of the Association of American Geographers. I want to thank Karen Morin, Garth Myers, and Jamie Winders for organizing that event, and for proffering the invitation to speak. I was honored to have been asked, and am grateful to those friends and colleagues who came to the talk, and asked very good questions of the ideas and examples presented below. The experience speaks well of “historical geography” and of historical geographers.

All of my scholarly work is, I think, deeply historical, and committed to empirically tracing the presence of the past in our claims about the present and the future. Thus I always have considered myself a historical geographer, a self-identification dating back to graduate work at Penn State and Syracuse. I also have long-supported this journal and think it an important complement to the *Journal of Historical Geography*—the two together comprise the strength of the sub-discipline, especially in the Anglophone world.

I was a bit hesitant when asked to offer a “plenary” lecture. I was not sure what such a thing should be. Dictionaries suggest that as an adjective plenary denotes something as “full, entire, complete, absolute, unqualified.”¹ I suggest that what I have to say about historical geography is anything *but* full, entire, or complete—in fact one of my subtexts following is that Historical Geography, and my attendant focus on cultural landscapes, never is complete—nor should that be our aim. And that, of course, raises questions about the idea of absolute or unqualified that I will address below on the topic of methodology. Perhaps the organizers were thinking of a plenary session as an assembly of the whole, but I am not

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even sure what that “whole” would be, especially as I am heartened by what might be an “historical turn” across geography in recent years, and so any “whole” might be large indeed. Perhaps my presentation was more in keeping with a plenary indulgence, the remission of punishment for sin, for surely I have committed many academic sins, perhaps even heresies, here and elsewhere, and this talk-*cum*-paper may be my penance. But the reader can be the judge of that in what follows.

Finally, I fear that this paper may seem chauvinistic even though that is not my intent. It focuses particularly on American historical geographies, and really is about the United States. I am an Americanist primarily because I see my work as intervening in immediately local issues where I live. I do pay attention to my colleagues in other places, and to those who write about other places. But I also have been wondering lately about the state of both historical and cultural geography in the United States; and in fact about the two together as my own work is, I think, cultural historical in a very traceable-to-an-American historiography way. These, too, are signposts to points that will come out in the paper below.

Introduction

This talk-*cum*-paper is organized into four parts. First, I open with two brief meditations on historical geography that prepare the ground for the second part, ruminations about historical geography as a practice. This then serves as a prelude to the third part, some vignettes of particular past and present places and landscapes that speak to the general observations made in parts one and two. In the fourth part I offer some concluding observations and claims.

Two meditations

The first meditation takes up the title of this essay, “Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Historical Geography.” That title means to place my historical geography in tension with its location in the United States and in the discipline. It is a play on two obviously more famous aphoristic phrases. The first is attributed to John Locke: life, liberty, and property. That sentiment also appears in the U.S. Constitution’s Fifth Amendment guaranteeing due process and promising “that no person shall be...deprived of life, liberty, or property.” The second comes from that part of the Declaration of Independence that reads: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.” That passage generally is attributed to Thomas Jefferson.

Thus the title here suggests the close association of historical geography, at least in the United States, with both phrases. First is the

association with property, meaning the fairly unproblematic and foundational importance of real property. Second is a more normative desire for the possibilities of not only historical geography as a personal happiness, but the potential extension or opening up beyond property *per se* as the object of our attention, the subject of our work, even as property may be inescapably foundational.

There is, of course, debate over the apocryphal origins of Jefferson's substitution, and exactly what he meant by it; or at least what was understood by the phrase when it first was enshrined in the Declaration. Carol Hamilton's tracings of that substitution and its meanings contextualized in Enlightenment thought broadly considered are useful for helping us to move toward the ultimate lesson that "happiness" is open for interpretation.² In those two appearances, I want to posit a tension between property and happiness, and while Jefferson's distinction often is attributed to an inherent American exceptionalism, I would like to hold open the possibilities in that tension for intervention that might not only reside in a broad notion of happiness, but which might actually be required of it.

At its simplest, it seems that "happiness" could be simply a substitution for property — and after all, Jefferson himself was a man of much property, both real and human. His estate encompassed five thousand acres in a time when the male-only franchise was linked to property ownership and his slaves numbered in the hundreds. Jefferson's phrasing also is claimed to have biblical origins, especially among those today seeking to reinscribe the idea of inalienable rights, seen as natural and vested in divine providence. The lesson from these possibilities, however, is not to absolutely declare the meaning of happiness, but rather to focus on the fact that people have taken happiness to mean myriad other things; and that this liberality of interpretation is a good thing. Even more important, and more etymologically, there also is scope to link Jefferson's happiness, perhaps through Locke and Epicurus, to a moral philosophy where "the necessity of pursuing happiness is the foundation of liberty," and happiness is not reducible to simply wealth, honor, or pleasure.³ In an Enlightenment context, there can be seen the requirement for a broader interpretation of happiness that engages civic virtues, and most notably that of justice in the social realm. That move toward justice might be founded upon property, but it also is more than that, and might take us beyond the biblical and the economic to a political economy of a deeper kind.



The second meditation begins with a story broadcast on National Public Radio (NPR) recently.⁴ Reporter Alex Kellogg was in Montgomery, Alabama to cover the 150th anniversary of Jefferson Davis's swearing in

as president of the Confederacy. The event was billed as a “day-long celebration of the South at the dawn of the Civil War,” and it included a reenactment of Davis’s 1861 inauguration speech. But, as Kellogg noted, there was no mention of slavery in the celebration. He went on to observe that the parade started next to Montgomery’s old slave market; there was no mention of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., even though the parade passed his old church; there was no mention of the Montgomery bus boycott, even though the crowd gathered at the site of Rosa Parks’ famous refusal to give up her seat; and the speech itself was delivered near the site where in 1963 Governor George Wallace gave a speech declaring that segregation would last forever.

The NPR report included a sound bite from a Penn State professor who referred to the difficulty even today of inserting slavery into discussions of the Civil War. A couple of tourists were also interviewed: one a kindergarten teacher from the Delta who came for the nice people and the fun time, and the others a retired couple from North Carolina who consciously avoided the celebration on their tour of Civil War sites because they felt the commemoration would be offensive to some and probably not appropriate. The celebration’s organizer was also interviewed – Chuck McMichael, a high school history teacher and past president of the Sons of Confederate Veterans. Kellogg noted that the mock-inauguration was an all-white affair, despite the fact of Montgomery’s mostly black population. In response to a question about slavery, Mr. McMichael responded that the inauguration speech that day was “historically accurate” and was the “exact same speech that Jefferson Davis gave then and he didn’t mention it” (“it” being slavery). McMichael emphasized that he was not there as a “put down” or to “rub anyone’s face in history.” Rather he intended to “commemorate the history of our ancestry and of the nation...history is history.”

History is history indeed. But that is not the whole story. Kellogg’s reporting generated letters to NPR and the Weekend Edition Program the following week included a corroboration of McMichael’s observations about history, with an editorial comment that bears on the practice of historical geography. An excerpt of one of the letters, from Julie Leonard of Quincy, Massachusetts, was read on the air.⁵ She wrote:

I would ask the reporter why a mention of Rosa Parks or Martin Luther King would ever be made at an event that has nothing to do with them or the era in which they lived. I don’t believe that translates into disrespect of them or an attempt to ignore their important impact.

The idea that the Civil War and slavery had nothing to do with Rosa Parks or Martin Luther King can only make sense if we could time

travel to 1863. But the actions of those two activists are embroiled in a deeper historical geography of the South and of race (among other things) that cannot be so simply separated on the grounds of sterile, verbatim, historical accuracy. One of the things historical geography always has prized and human geography more recently has realized is the always-contingent and contextual quality of socio-spatial activity and meaning. Holding apart a contemporary Civil War reenactment and the contiguous importance of the very space to an American Civil Rights movement belies a rather individualistic and insulated sense of history, and an antiquarian historical geography. Claiming that Jefferson Davis has nothing to do with George Wallace in Montgomery lacks a discursive and inter-textual understanding of land and life that links these together, and which is premised on the simple question of asking why the re-enactors felt the need to reenact the past in the present if not for claims about the future. This meditation, too, raises questions about what historical geographical stories we tell, how we tell them, and for whom we tell them. It brings attention to the power of those stories not just to valorize the past, but also to bring the past to life in the present. This is akin to the old question we used to ask about whether historical geography is about the past in place, or past places, or the place of the past in today's (socio-spatial) concerns.

How do we practice historical geography?

These are not new questions for us. There are plenty of methodological statements about historical geography, in the United States and elsewhere. Debates about how we practice historical geography and to what ends are not new and I expect as long as there are at least two historical geographers in the same room, there will be points of contention. This is not the place to rehash those debates, even as it periodically is instructive to remind ourselves what they have been and why those debates and contentions might continue to inform our ongoing reassessments of what exactly constitutes historical geographical practice.⁶ For a good part of the twentieth century U.S. historical geographers were a small, if active, sub-set of the discipline, and they were mostly focused upon tracing European settler society conquests: focused on frontiers and settlement models, Euro-American expansion, agricultural development, and urban systems in the United States. Twenty years ago Michael Conzen wrote an essay summarizing that work, and in it he created a periodization and typology extending from Semple and Turner through Sauer to Whittlesey and Brown, moving on to Clark and Wisconsin and Kniffen at Louisiana.⁷ Graeme Wynn added a Canadian perspective that overlapped with Conzen's, but of course added particular scholars who perhaps did not so neatly fit into Conzen's U.S.-derived inductive exercise, most notably Cole

Harris.⁸ These are coded, academic references that might recall genealogies for some readers or the incoherent scribbling of an historiographical fetishist for others. And in either case there is an inherent danger in calling out names, whether in the theoretical sense of reproducing a hagiographic approach to sub-disciplinary history (and a patriarchal one at that), or in the more personal sin of simply leaving important people off the list.

Conzen's last period, like so many chronological historiographies across the discipline since the post-positivist turn, was simply titled "Challenge and Pluralism." It was thus perhaps a code for the broader engagement of many historical geographers with concepts and theories drawn from abroad, in both senses of that term — moving from engagements with themes and debates in disciplines beyond history and geography, and with concepts and theories originating across the ocean, most notably in the British literature but coming from even as far as continental social theory. Conzen's and Wynn's essays appeared in a bursting-at-the-seams bibliography of writing on the "American and Canadian Past" that in the early 1990s seemed to vindicate the increased popularity and the broader and deeper engagement of the historical with the rest of human geography since the hallmark founding of the *Journal of Historical Geography* in 1975. Those engagements were exciting. Some historical geographers had joined the Maryland Hall of Records gang and were helping to rethink American social history from the ground up. Others tackled more explicitly capitalist transformations in the context of European colonialism and imperialism. Still others engaged labor theory and Marxian interpretations to account for regional urbanization patterns. And of course, there were lively debates about what we ought to do and how we ought to do it. Many of us reveled in the vibrancy of a discipline that could support the kinds of riposting exhibited between, for instance, Carville Earle and Donald Meinig on the pages of the *American Historical Review*.⁹

On the other hand, historical geography seemed still to be mostly about men, and white ones at that. The section in the Conzen, Rumney, and Wynn *Scholar's Guide* that provided bibliographic information for ninety-eight "Benchmark Scholars" of Canadian and U.S. historical geography in the past century included only seven women.¹⁰ The bottom of that section's last page was graced with a (normative?) drawing as "filler": a bespectacled, mustachioed, suit-and-tie attired, white man clenching a pipe in his mouth and gazing authoritatively upon an unfurled map of the continent held firmly in his grasp and clearly under his control. Jeanne Kay noted the problematic personified in that small drawing when she wrote, around the same time, that:

The problems arise when we assume that northern European ancestry is the only kind that matters; or that a study of male

activities equates to a study of an entire society. Our work becomes one-sided and biased when we mention black Americans only in the context of slavery, Indians only in the context of pre-European settlement stages, or women only in the context of reproduction. To cast minorities and women only as stagehands or bit players in a Euro-American male drama does not provide historical reality. It simply indicates that scholars interpret the past in terms of mythical type scenes that validate their own ideologies....Is there a gender-balanced and ethnically balanced historical geography, beyond the Exodus mythology?...Our literature is so firmly fixated on European male-directed economic and settlement patterns that it may be difficult to see what we would write if we followed a new direction.¹¹

That elision noted by Kay was epistemological as well as substantive. Calling it as such required us to move from the elusive-but-important fiction of simply building a more complete picture of *an* American historical geography (adding women, Native Americans, people of color) to opening the door for many other historical *geographies*. One of the ways to do that was through explicit methodological connections to other exciting, post-positivist developments in human geography more broadly considered. Mona Domosh described historical geography's (then) position as "outside these discussions, moribund...in an antiquarian world aloof from the problematics of recent social and cultural theory," and further argued that "the epistemological and methodological assumptions of historical geography have not been seriously challenged." Domosh issued a call for "a shift in how we conceive those spaces to begin with, and with this, a reformulation of methodology...sensitive to the gendered construction of all landscapes."¹²

The fundamental methodological angst of historical geography at that time was its traditional reliance upon the archive as primary source. As Domosh and Karen Morin have noted: "ethnographic research is not possible on long-deceased historical subjects."¹³ I recall going to my first academic conference as a new M.A. student twenty-five years ago. It was the Eastern Historical Geographers Association, and there I witnessed a rather brutal on-the-floor argument about the proper form for the (rather empiricist) historical geography being discussed. This was the last gasp of the infamous "field" versus "archive" debates that pitted Sauerians against students of Clark and devotees of Brown.¹⁴ To us students it seemed silly. But I realize now how important that move to the archive was — it signaled a legitimacy of historical scholarship that extended beyond geography to other disciplines, history in particular. For that reason, many of us turned our attention to the archive and the archival basis of historical geography. Practically speaking, it seemed to make sense: if one is undertaking historical geography, then the source material will be historical, and

therefore the kinds of ethnographic methods that have come to characterize the rest of qualitative methodology are impossible. Or are they?

It has been ten years since *Historical Geography* devoted a special issue to new theorizations and so joined the journal in wider conversations, including those occurring in the Historical Geography Research Group of the IBG, and on the pages of *Archival Science* through the critical interventions of Joan Schwartz and Terry Cook, among others.¹⁵ In that issue, I suggested that there was an epistemological sea change of sorts even as there was a continuity of tradition. And our attention to the archive, too, moved from a strategic empiricism – adding the missing voices in the story of the whole – toward the challenge of asking different questions, of figuring out how to reframe our access to and creation of historical geographical knowledge: “in the end, we need to acknowledge basic epistemological differences in knowledge and knowledge production that may or may not come from the archive.”¹⁶ That challenge of rethinking the archive also opened historical geography to the sorts of qualitative methods we previously thought off limits. We may not be able to speak directly to dead people, or hold a focus group with women on the overland trail; but our discussions of that included a rethinking of what the archive was to how we might approach it differently. Anthropologist Ann Laura Stoler provides us with a nice shorthand for this rethinking of the archive in her distinction between *extractive* and *ethnographic* archival activity. In the former, we mine the archive for data. In the latter, we approach the archive as a process implicated in the colonial project, as colonial archives are “both transparencies on which power relations were inscribed and intricate technologies of rule in themselves.”¹⁷ And we can do both. Stoler accepts our initial desire to read archives “across the grain” in order to locate human agency and resistance and silence. But she also wants us to interrogate the archive itself, ethnographically, for its placement and form as a site of knowledge production.

This “opening up” of the archive from an empiricist data source to a site of subject formation joins historical geography to the exciting possibilities inherent in qualitative methodologies more broadly considered.¹⁸ We are a generation into a “qualitative turn” in the discipline that offers up exciting possibilities for challenging the separation of theory and empirics by engaging ethnographic methodologies with forthrightness, reflexivity, and modesty.¹⁹ Thinking and researching “qualitatively” offers myriad possibilities for historical geographers and forces us to address questions of reflexivity, positionality, identity, accountability, and academic structure.²⁰ It allows us to acknowledge the collaborative benefits of participatory research.²¹ It gives us scope to link to social movements, to challenge neutrality and address the ethical and moral responsibilities of research as a practice, and to explore the politics of fieldwork.²² We now have license to

ask new questions about the kinds of work we do and who we do it for, to acknowledge that there are different ways to explore the importance of past places and the importance of the past in place. We are to an extent freed from the dangers of presentism and charges of teleological story telling when we acknowledge historical geographical legacies as part of the contemporary landscape palimpsest rather than involving the past as inevitable precursor to present concerns about land and life. We can look for sites of memory, and acknowledge the ghosts and haunting of the places we study.²³ We can look for alternative stories of belonging to the land and landscape, in a critical humanist vein that valorizes the stories and experiences of everyday folks, and we can examine the frayed edges of cultural meanings through contestations and alternatives and resistances and re-situations.²⁴ These are heady and optimistic methodological and practical considerations, and suggest the need to go to ground, in some real cases in real places. And so I offer a few vignettes.

Some cases/some places

First indulge me in an autobiographical moment, both professional and personal, that helps set a context for what is to come. I grew up with stories of discrimination and racism, told to me by my father, who grew up in East St. Louis, Illinois, in the 1930s. Because they were family stories, they were simple, even as they were potentially chaotic and contradictory, as generally are the stories of people not concerned with appearing logical and rational for an academic audience. They often started with my dad being not-Jewish, as there was closeted understanding that my great-grandfather was a Jew escaping conscription in the German army, stowing away on a New Orleans bound boat, and working his way up the Mississippi to southern Illinois where he was an itinerant peddler before he opened a country store south of St. Louis. He became part of a mixed-up family that had him converting to Lutheranism the morning he was married to my great-grandmother, and somehow, by the time my dad was a kid, the family was nominally Catholic. Perhaps for that mixed-up ethnicity, perhaps for his friends, perhaps for the Great Migration that was transforming East St. Louis in those days, he always remembered things like the signs on the local swimming pool that somehow granted him access but not his Jewish friend; and it is not clear that he even knew a person of color. I note that because years later my younger brother was a roadie for Miles Davis and through that we discovered that Miles and my dad were born eighteen months apart, grew up in the same town, played the same instrument, had bands, but of course never crossed paths. And somewhere in there I serendipitously discovered that my great uncle was one of three East St. Louis police commissioners during the 1917 riots,

which I discovered one summer while working at the Missouri Historical Society as a scholar in residence, generating a hypothesis for the founding of Kinloch as an all-black town in an all-white suburb.

These realizations occurred shortly after I moved to Lexington, Kentucky and began to learn the town, especially as a cauldron of American racial formation. I knew about Lexington and urban slavery already, primarily from Richard Wade's classic *Urban Frontier*.²⁵ It was required graduate school reading for an historical geographer. I went to Lexington's Courthouse Square—the old public market site, enshrined in the original town plat filed with the 1781 Virginia Legislature—expecting to find in the usual memorial offerings some reference to Lexington's role in the slave trade and the site's centrality for collecting, selling, and distributing that most peculiar commodity of the American South. But there was none. Here were the stories of my childhood, writ absent in the cultural landscape that I had made my scholarly focus and imbricated in the historical geographical development of American frontiers, as an inevitable part of American expansion, urban development, everyday land and life. This was perhaps an epiphany moment—a time and place where contemporary realizations of elision and silence and absence and injustice in the cultural landscape met historical geographical understandings of the routes/roots of individual travels and that very injustice.

And so in many ways, but not always, historical geography became (sometimes) for me about justice and equity and the structural qualities of race/racial formation and racism. This can be seen in urban landscapes, in urban morphologies, in the material practices and representations of land and life. And that historical geography often is about the "frayed edges" where cultural and social meaning and intention are contested, where discord erupts, where things are swept under the rug, where things matter, where there are battles, where we are on shaky ground, where historical geographies are implicated in contemporary debates, as the foundations for structural considerations of racial formation. Following are a few stories that illustrate the point.

That courthouse square is called Cheapside. I most recently heard it referred to while in the audience of the Lyric Theatre in Lexington. The Lyric once was the anchor of Lexington's black business district, a remnant of the New Negro Movement that was a venue on the Chitlin' Circuit and marked the corner where one moved from the respectable side of the East End with its barber shops and funeral homes and grocery stores to the honky-tonk side on DeWeese (known as Do-as-you-please) Street. Closed as one of those ironies of integration in the early 1960s after an ignominious stint as a screen for "blue movies," the Lyric has just been refurbished and reopened as a celebratory site of African American pride, memory, and nostalgia. I was there with my daughter for a performance of two plays.

The first was Carolyn Gage's *Harriet Tubman Visits a Therapist*, and the second was a piece written expressly for that night, based on a combination of Nikki Finney's poetry and the performing Agape Theatre Troupe's reading of slave narratives in *Voices of Freedom*. It was a powerful, at times hilarious, at times tragic invocation of the past. It started with an actor pointing out two men in the audience at random, suggesting that one was a fine specimen of a man, sure to fetch a good price, while the second seemed shady and listless, and more than likely to be sold on the auction block at Cheapside, which determined the fate of the lesser quality, cheaper slaves. That is the lore of Cheapside—the cheap side of the courthouse. And indeed it was the site of slave auctions, and is intimately tied to the historical geography of the westward migrating cotton belt in the deep South, the availability of surplus labor in central Kentucky by the 1830s and 1840s, and the trade down the river that facilitated economic exchange between the two regions.²⁶ One of the students in my qualitative methods class found this semester in our university archives correspondence between a father and son based in Memphis and Lexington about this time; and their conversation was entirely about the prices of slaves, the health of the commodity, and the vagaries of the practice. Of course, Cheapside also is the name of a London Market, and Cheapside in Lexington was a market for all sorts of things in the southern tradition. But the ostensible origins of the name are not something to be expertly and absolutely proclaimed through diligent archival searching. Rather, the local stories that have circulated for generations, the practice of avoiding the square by Lexingtonians of color over a certain age, and the “big picture” understanding of the site in a westward moving Euro-American frontier all come together in a richer historical geography of Cheapside than a simple tracing of the name. These stories and practices bring together cultural meaning and process, perhaps against the grain, even as we also rely upon the archive for a logical framework of racialization.

Country roads around my house in central Kentucky are often marked by the presence of beautiful dry-laid stone *fences*, as we call them. My colleague Karl Raitz and Carolyn Murray-Wooley have co-written a book about them.²⁷ They were prompted to do so, in part, by the regional stories that these were “slave fences.” Their diligent archival research revealed a slightly different story. They found buried in a thirty- or forty-year period of manuscript census records the presence of an Irish migration to central Kentucky, possibly pushed inland after the Erie Canal was completed in New York, who seem to have brought a culturally specific masonry practice to solve the demands of new livestock fencing laws in the burgeoning agricultural economy of the bluegrass from the 1830s. Deeper digging revealed that they hired slaves, and that after the Irish “disappeared” from the manuscript census—as they no longer were

foreign born or lived in labor gangs identifiable by census groupings—the craft became associated with African Americans, and especially certain families after the Civil War. Clearly the product of slave and, eventually, free labor, these fences still are often referred to as slave fences, or at least as African American fences, as a point of pride and as part of a story of agency and bootstrapping. Their presence in the landscape valorizes a presence in the community. The stories told about them have helped to situate those fences in a deeper historical geography of regional settlement and development, and individual agency and pride. My personal favorite is the one just down the road from my house, signed by the masons, whose descendants also are my neighbors.

I have reported elsewhere in some detail about the Hampton Court Gate.²⁸ It is a pedestrian gate, now welded shut, at one end of a middle class enclave built into the middle of a large block in the center of Lexington early in the twentieth century. It was controversially locked and then welded about twenty years ago, when the spot became a flashpoint of racial and class tension. The welding was an attempt to protect Hampton Court from the surrounding neighborhood. Hampton Court and its neighbor, liberal arts college Transylvania University, appear on contemporary maps as a wedge of whiteness poking into a blacker part of town. Some—though not all—Hampton Court residents complained of transgressions; and Transylvania's administration mapped that part of town in terms of safe/dangerous places for the students, or more accurately, for the parents of the students in that enclave of academic privilege. This is not a place for that story. What is important for grasping the contemporary significance of that controversy, however, is a deeper historical geography of the city's evolving urban morphology and its relations to changing social and racial formation over the past 200 years. At the center of the aphorism "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" stands the ideological person of the autonomous individual, who is related by birth to rational economic man. He or she is not, to use a term you never hear in academia anymore, *prejudiced* against any of his neighbors individually; and in fact in this ostensibly post-Civil rights era, is fully aware that discrimination on a one-to-one personal basis is reprehensible and indefensible. But that position elides the remnant structural inequities of the urban landscape that translate to discrimination of a different sort, grounded in the concept of free-hold property tenure and defended on the grounds of democratic egalitarianism. Of course, that democracy needed some tweaking—most notably in the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, Fifteenth, and Nineteenth Amendments of the Constitution, or the Civil Rights acts—but now that those problems are fixed the city is a neutral ground for individualized social relations. Yet an historical geography of Lexington's changing urban socio-spatial form can shed light on the structural foundation of white

privilege, in places like Hampton Court. In this case, it entails tracing the city's developing urban form from a grid including five-acre residential lots that accommodated slave quarters as well as slaves and free people of color living out in a micro-apartheid of racial segregation. Alley life behind the main street, African American enclaves as post-Civil war refuge for manumitted slaves beginning the Great Migration, and urban renewal and gentrification are all intimately linked to the "Hampton Court Gate" and I argue that understanding that flashpoint is impossible without a grasp of the historical geographies that led to the present day appearance and function of the site.

Central Kentucky was very much a part of the nineteenth century South, claiming an agricultural and mercantile economy based on staple production, and including some counties that counted almost half their antebellum residents as slaves. Today that economic and social practice is little acknowledged, at least in several of the major tourist sites and markers of regional identity such as the Ashland estate of Henry Clay. Ashland is a privately owned and operated house museum, set on eighteen remnant acres of Clay's estate, and it hosts about 20,000 visitors a year, a significant number of whom are school children being tutored in the canon of Kentucky history. Ashland's symbolic importance in placing Kentucky on the map of national(ist) historiography has meant that the museum also has enjoyed public subsidy. The most recent round of significant renovations (over one million dollars' worth in the late 1980s) was funded through a Lexington city bond initiative when Ashland was designated a Landmark at Risk. Henry Clay never actually lived in the particular house on display, which was built by his son on the footprint of the original Clay manse, but the museum is an explicit celebration of his life. Clay was a local lawyer and slave-owning gentleman farmer who served nationally as U.S. Senator, Speaker of the House, Secretary of State, two-time presidential candidate, an author of the Missouri Compromise, and a founder and president of the American Colonization Society, advocating the gradual abolition of slavery and African re-patriation. Tourists can visit the big house, as well as an icehouse, a foreman's house, a carriage house, and a kitchen. There is little material evidence, however, of that side of the plantation supported by slavery: the landscape assemblage that euphemistically referred to "house servants," the agricultural fields with their slave hands, the slave quarters, the overseer's cabin, or the fences and barns built with slave labor.

When I first visited the Ashland museum many years ago (and three or four others like it, locally) I immediately assumed the worst of the museum curators, reading in the landscape a racist act of omission; and if I am being honest, I have chosen the worst local example in Ashland. There are other big house museums that do represent slavery, although their

representation is not without problem. There is a lesson to be gained from the Ashland example, particularly as Henry Clay is one of the most celebrated national figures from the American nineteenth century. More academically, the oversight at Ashland is consequential, for both the telling of historical geographies and for the state of contemporary racialized social relations in this part of the country, at least. More banally, the questions we are left with, at their simplest, are why is slavery not acknowledged in the landscape, what if it was, as part of a regional collective memory, and why does that matter?

It might matter for the fact that as a part of the region's historical geography, the often-suppressed telling of slavery's existence and operation might be important to the descendants of those involved. It might matter as Ashland and Clay are fully implicated in an American historical geography of property, settlement, slavery, and emancipation at a national level. It might matter because Clay was implicated in the Missouri Compromise, which, among other things, admitted Missouri to the union as a slave state. Missouri is where Dred Scott began his eventual Supreme Court case to sue for his freedom; because he was a black man and a slave he had no rights as a United States citizen. Such events are foundational to cultural attitudes toward people of color, as evidenced in protest signs that read "I AM A MAN" held during the sanitation strike in Memphis in the day before M.L. King was assassinated. I expect a letter writer from Massachusetts would tell me that celebrating Clay's life has nothing to do with the rights of an African American sanitation worker in the mid-twentieth century. But I would disagree.

It might matter more locally, because it is not too difficult to connect slavery with Lexington's striking patterns of residential apartheid. Although slavery ended in most of the South with the end of the Civil War, Kentucky never was an official member of the Confederacy and was the last place in the U.S. to manumit slaves, doing so only through the federally imposed Thirteenth Amendment in 1865. Rural violence and sharecropping, and subsequent migration of African Americans to the city of Lexington marked the post-Civil War period in Kentucky's inner Bluegrass. Reconstruction led to Jim Crow laws enforcing segregation by the turn of the century, and within another twenty years the threat, or promise, of racial zoning was replaced by racial deed covenants and was ultimately supported by redlining and real estate steering, creating and maintaining a Euclidean color line in the city that persists today. The absence of slavery in the contemporary museum landscape is symptomatic of the same racist discourse that created and maintained the institution in the first place. As Michel-Rolph Trouillot has written: "That U.S. slavery has both officially ended yet continues in many complex forms — most notably institutionalized racism and the cultural denigration of blackness — makes

its representation particularly burdensome in the United States. Slavery here is a ghost, both the past and a living presence; and the problem of historical representation is how to represent that ghost, something that is and yet is not."²⁹ How to represent that ghost—there yet not, transparent to some and fully embodied to others.

Ashland can be seen as one of Pierre Nora's nationalist sites of memory: *Les Lieux de Memoire*.³⁰ Nora writes that we speak so much of memory because there is so little of it left today; and we particularly do so now because we have passed a threshold of historiographical consciousness. To make that point, he distinguishes between *lieux* (sites) of memory and *milieux* (real environments) of memory. The transition from the latter to the former is a symptom of the diminishing of memory in everyday life. Societies dominated by *milieux de memoire* made no distinction between past and present, for memory was lived. Today, *lieux de memoire* serve to separate memory from everyday life. They relegate memory to signification for cultural display, thus compartmentalizing memory as history, and as an individually received experience. While the seemingly organic qualities of Nora's pre-modern *milieux de memoire* could be construed as problematic, that is not the attractiveness of his schema. Rather it is the end point of his transformation that appeals as an apt description of the contemporary period. Nora writes: "The transformation of memory implies a decisive shift from the historical to the psychological, from the social to the individual, from the objective message to its subjective reception, from repetition to remembrance."³¹

To represent slavery in the landscape, then, would be to establish a *lieu de memoire*; to compartmentalize slavery as history, and in so doing relegate slavery to the past, in effect ghettoizing its representation as a part of a socio-economic system that ended 145 years ago. The *lieu de memoire* in modern society, in this case the landscape of slavery, mediates the experience by presenting a cultural display for the individual reader and puts the memory at a distance.

Ashland has begun to struggle with its tourist brochure claim that the museum is dedicated to the house and all those associated with it, however. Gradually over the last dozen or so years the presence of slavery and slaves has been slowly if sparingly incorporated into the guided tour, if not the actual landscape. It depends on the docent of any given tour, of course, and slaves still are generally referred to with the polite euphemism of genteel Southern Society: servants. But some real digging also has been taking place, in fits and spurts, by some of my archaeologist colleagues. Jay Stottman is one of them and he publically has noted that "even though the things we find seem small, insignificant and mundane, they are significant," and according to one newspaper report, "they are relying upon old drawings, maps and local oral history to determine what they're looking at

and what they'll find."³² Historical geographers can help tell those ghost stories too, making the historical geography of slavery at Ashland reverberate at scales ranging from the national to the intimate and linking the past to the present so as to avoid that funereal moment of museum display where to call something out is to relegate it to the past. African American storytellers presumably know this conundrum intimately. One of Toni Morrison's characters struggled with the concept of literacy—realizing at once the liberatory possibilities in learning to read and write, even as he worried about the rich storehouse of memory and genealogy that might get lost in the process.



My final vignette is really the outline for a project only proposed, and still very much in the conceptual stages, but one that nevertheless is exciting for its potential combination of both contemporary qualitative inquiry as well as credentialed *bona fide* historical geography. I serve on my county planning commission. I was appointed by my mayor to represent the interests of the little town I live in as part of the larger county government. We recently had come before us a rezoning request for a property on the southeast corner of Versailles, the county seat. The city recently acquired the land, and is interested in making a park out of the property. It seemed a fairly innocuous and easy request to accommodate, and one that would benefit everyone. The potential park is well situated to provide a nice balance to the primary county park at the other end of town, and is adjacent to some of the town's newest suburbs so also will serve those folks even as it helps to maintain the sharp line between city and country that is central to land use planning in the county. It turns out that the property is a remnant settlement of quasi-rural proportions. The houses and out-buildings all are gone, the site is some distance removed from the original town limits, and bounded by an abandoned railroad embankment on one side, hemmed in by a limited access highway on the other, poorly drained in parts, and only recently encroached upon by the town proper. The place was once known as Huntertown and it represents one of a series of settlement practices in central Kentucky, and perhaps across the South after the Civil War.

Manumission in rural central Kentucky changed not only the labor relations of slavery by replacing them with wage or sharecropping practice, it also added some new settlement geographies. Slaves once housed in cabins on the plantation became free laborers housed in what became known as hamlets, located adjacent to the old plantation, on land often set aside for or purchased by the newly freed labor force.³³ These were once isolated rural areas in which life probably did not change that much for the

day-to-day existence of those working the land in the post-Civil War transition—although people did begin to own their own property and that certainly was something. In fact, as an aside, many of those hamlets now are bedroom communities within easy commuting distance of the University of Kentucky or the Toyota Motor Manufacturing plant, and post-WWII changes in the regional economy as well as the demographic character of central Kentucky mean that some of these places have survived, and even thrived. Cadentown, for instance, is one of those places blocking Lexington's suburban expansion, between the downtown and the newest big box shopping center. Thirty years ago it would have disappeared under the developer's bulldozer without much fanfare. But local folks in Cadentown recently were able to call upon the historic preservation discourse and save their Rosenwald School, valorize the neighborhood, and hold onto their little piece of property as suburban Lexington rolled on around them. Similarly Bracktown, which only a decade ago had no sewers, has been brought into the city's urban service boundary and residents participated in a neighborhood design charette to decide exactly how they wanted to become a part of advancing suburbia.³⁴ Others are just hanging on, although the parking lots of the little Baptist churches that still anchor many of these communities often are filled with expensive cars on Sundays, as children and nieces and nephews and grandchildren return home to see their families. It is a pleasant irony of annexation and expansion that gives these once isolated rural folks quite literally million-dollar views in the middle of the horse country that most of us can only enjoy as drive through visitors.

But Huntertown was not so lucky. Substandard dilapidated housing and poor water and sanitary systems led the residents left in Huntertown to approach the local government for some relief. No one could find a solution that fit any of the available state or federal grants short of buying everyone out and tearing the place down. And that is what happened. The jury is out on whether this was a good thing or a bad thing; wanted by residents or presented as a *fait accompli*, but that is one of the exciting things we will find out in this project. It turns out there are a few other people interested in the property, too, from former residents to fellow commissioners to our very good county planning staff to a curious neighbor (who just happens to work as a GIS analyst for the state) to some energetic women in the local historical society to family members (who sort of remember who used to live there) to my favorite local historian, a retired state worker who has made it her life's work to document the African American presence in our county (one of the few this far north to actually have an African American majority on the eve of the Civil War). Huntertown is on the verge of becoming a community project; a collaborative effort where each of us has a different reason for wanting to research

it, to document it, to remember it, to memorialize it, to honor it through a park design that recalls the former residents. We have no money yet, just volunteer time. We are slowly building an archive. We have started a list of potential interviewees. We have yet to negotiate what questions we will ask. I certainly want to know about how the property was acquired in the first place; former property – slaves – getting to own real property is an optimistic moment in my historical geographical imagination and will let me see Hunteertown as a regional phenomenon, connected to the in-town neighborhoods that emerged in Lexington at the same time, and perhaps ideologically even to the all-black suburbs that showed up after WWII. Owning property and feeling a connection to the landscape are powerful markers of belonging in a country founded on the principles of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, and are especially prescient when afforded to those often written out of that aphorism.

Conclusion

Human landscapes are normative and vested with (dominant) power relations, tend to exclude (by definition), and are somewhat insidious in their abilities to naturalize (uneven) social relations. But one of the main points of the post-structuralist turn in landscape study was to call out that (inevitable) unevenness/exclusion as a step toward marking the *processual* and *always becoming* nature of landscape – that is, someone always has to work to make landscapes exclusionary. But if *someone* has to work, that means that (potentially, and within the limits of uneven power relations) *anyone might be able* to work to challenge that inequality/social injustice. Calls for belonging and social justice *were* a *utopian* ideal, in which we might call upon the inherent place of human action through the landscape to fight for social justice. That justice is not to be found in an abstract and universal quality of landscape (in a theoretical sense; as one person's justice might be another's injustice) or in looking for an ultimate/utopian landscape of justice (as in: once we find it we are done...), but in *specific and contingent* landscape contestations. In other words, the idea was not to locate a "landscape of social justice" but to see potential in and to fight for *social justice through landscape*. That is the pursuit of happiness; seeking through land and landscape a moral philosophy, where "the necessity of pursuing happiness is the foundation of liberty" and happiness is not reducible to simply wealth, honor, or pleasure.

There is in that tension, of course, the problematic of *the power* to intervene as a sticking point; not to mention the issue of adjudicating between interventions should we get to that point. Big ideas like racial formation generally are over determined, and we could look at U.S. racial formation without recourse to studying particular landscapes. Yet racial

formation is predicated, in part, on particular landscapes, and those particular (racialized) landscapes become moments of intervention into the American discourse on race—places where we can see and challenge racial formation (and racist practice), in many ways—from the mundane and particular to the sublime and ideological; even as the particular landscape in question is not reducible to racial formations.³⁵

In the end, the past is always with us, sedimented and accreted in the stuff of everyday landscapes. The stories we tell about (ostensibly) past landscapes, because they are inescapably partial, are as much about bringing (some aspect of) the past to bear on present socio-spatial relations. In the telling, the past is employed in contemporary understandings of place, and the stories are marshaled in the service of giving life to a place now. I always have liked Stuart Hall's call for broader truths about the past in order to bring the margins to representation. But the impetus of social (or individual) justice motivating those stories is not so much about redressing past wrongs (for the people who lived them) as it is about highlighting the (often) structural imperatives of the past in socio-spatial relations today; or at the very least acknowledging that life does not happen in a vacuum and that "historical geography" and admitting time and the long *durée* into our critical analyses can help provide the foundational context for many things. I have tried to show by example as much as by methodological proclamation the possibilities for a deeply empirical, critical, contingent historical geography, not limited in topic, linked to other disciplines, other geographers, other theories, and informed by a breadth of methodological inquiry, as a means toward the pursuit of happiness.

Notes

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3. *Ibid.*
4. National Public Radio, Weekend Edition Program, February 20, 2011 (<http://www.npr.org/2011/02/20/133913207/Confederate-President-Jefferson-Davis-Sworn-In-For-A-Day>; accessed February 27, 2011). Transcript quotations copyright National Public Radio, February 27, 2011.
5. National Public Radio, Weekend Edition Program, February 27, 2011 (<http://www.npr.org/2011/02/27/134103440/Your-Letters-Jefferson-Davis>Returns-Sir-Derek-Jacobi>; February 27, 2011). Transcript quotations copyright National Public Radio, February 27, 2011.
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 10. "Benchmark Scholars," in Conzen, Rumney, and Wynn, *Scholar's Guide*, 157-182.
 11. Jeanne Kay, "Rough draft of presentation for panel, 'Sharing the Continent: Women and Men in Western North America,' AAG meetings 1990," subsequently published as "Landscapes of Women and Men: Rethinking the Regional Historical Geography of the United States and Canada," *Journal of Historical Geography* 17:4 (1991): 435-452.
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 17. Ann Laura Stoler, "Colonial Archives and the Arts of Governance," *Archival Science* 2 (2002): 87-109, quotation on 87.
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 31. Nora, "Between Memory and History," 18.
 32. Amber Mobley, "Can You Dig It?" *Lexington Herald Leader* (June 14, 2001), B3.
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