Spaces of Interpretation: Archival Research and the Cultural Landscape

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In 1987, a Lexington architect declared that the University of Kentucky's Memorial Coliseum "fits like a good suit."[1] The architect, extolling the virtues of its design, wrote:

> Each of the interior spaces at Memorial Coliseum are so clearly expressed by form and detail that you can stand across the street and read what goes on inside like a book ... Simple geometries that alone are very rigid come together in a way that makes my eye race over the "canvas" ... You can just feel [the architect's] intelligence looking at the carefully considered building. The more you look, the more it reveals.[2]

However clearly the Memorial Coliseum (Figure 1) would seem to express itself, there are stories that this landscape is not likely to reveal no matter how much you look at it. One such story is that of an African-American neighborhood known as "Adamstown" which once stood on this site (Figure 2).

This paper presents some of the methodological issues that arose during my research on the historical geography of this landscape.[3] Deryck Holdsworth writes that the historical record "provides a useful additional lens for viewing what does remain and what does survive, illuminating earlier phases of place making and of economic and social restructuring."[4] In drawing upon Sanborn Fire Insurance maps, city maps, archival documents, deed records, city directories, and oral histories, I have found the historical record to be an invaluable means for shedding light upon "earlier phases of place making."

Yet the practice of constructing the historical record is always embedded within a dense social fabric woven with uneven struggles over the imbricated spatialities of race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and class. The absence of subaltern voices from part or all of this record is often the result, thus complicating what is already a thorny issue of historical representation. As such, I contend that a critical interrogation of the historical landscape must draw upon a wide range of sources, and then interpret those sources in relation both to one another and to the sociospatial contexts in which they were produced.

The Empirical Site

Adamstown was established in the early 1870s and was one of several residential districts in Lexington, Kentucky, built to accommodate the urbanward migration of newly emancipated African Americans (Figure 3).[5] These neighborhoods were typically referred to by a place-name, often ending in "-town," but sometimes also "bottom," "alley," or "row," that reiterated their status as sociospatially distinct sections of the city.[6] The academic institution that would become the University of Kentucky was established next to Adamstown in 1881 and, beginning in 1919, the University bought, cleared, and redeveloped a number of small parcels of land in Adamstown. In 1943, the remainder of the neighborhood was cleared to make way for the construction of the coliseum.

Today's tangible, visible scene reveals nothing of the process by which this transformation took place. A perfunctory reading would suggest that there was something here prior to the coliseum, as its architectural style places its construction much later than the houses and campus buildings that surround it. One might conclude that it was either part of the University's original grounds, or, if one happened upon the remnant driveways along the curb of a street adjacent to the coliseum, that it was once a residential area. A lot would depend on how familiar one was with the history of Lexington's growth and transformation. In any case, the particular history of this landscape remains hidden from view. Jonathan Smith writes of the landscape's capacity for "shielding [its past] from view and substituting a seemingly greater reality of spotless innocence for its guilty and gritty processes."[7] To unearth the guilt and grit of the landscape, we must turn our attention to the historical record.

Figure 1. Memorial Coliseum, University of Kentucky, Lexington, Ky., 1997.

Figure 2. Adamstown, Lexington, Ky., 1943. Photo by Lewis Edward Nollau. Source: Nollau F Series, Photographic Collections, University of Kentucky Special Collections and Archives, Lexington, Ky.

The Historical Record

A number of Adamstown photographs were taken in August 1943, after the University had finished purchasing the properties on the site. They were part of an extensive collection of photographs taken by Lewis Edward Nollau, a University of Kentucky professor who chronicled various facets of university life during the first half of the twentieth century. Yet working-class African-American neighborhoods, never regarded as historically, culturally, or architecturally significant, were all but written out of Lexington's archived photographic record, and it was solely by virtue of the University's interest in Adamstown as a site for a new coliseum, and of Nollau's documentary assiduousness, that these exist today.

Where such images do appear within the historical record, they are most often incorporated into planning documents or newspaper articles that attribute to the neighborhoods they depict no more locational specificity than their proximity to notable urban landmarks. For example, a 1924 housing survey captioned its photographs of the city's poorer housing districts with descriptions like "neighbors to the University of Kentucky" and "neighbors to Transylvania College."[8] The production of a historical record is rarely an exercise in systematic documentation intended to serve the needs of future researchers. The survey's photographs might be more appropriately regarded as

a surveillant technology in the service of maintaining urban moral and social order. Such imagery frequently appears within urban planning and reform discourses as exemplars of what a city should *not* look like, and it is in light of these discourses and of the material transformations such discourses effect, that they typically illustrate what is no longer present in the contemporary urban landscape.

Even without the chance existence of these photographs, we could still gain a fairly clear sense of the morphology of this landscape through the use of maps such as those produced for insurance purposes (Figure 4). Numerous urban historians have utilized the information provided by fire insurance maps to gain valuable insights into the structural and functional transformations of urban landscapes.[9] Yet these efforts can be hampered by limitations in the coverage that insurance maps provide. The first of Lexington's Sanborn maps was produced in 1886, but since most postbellum African-American neigh-
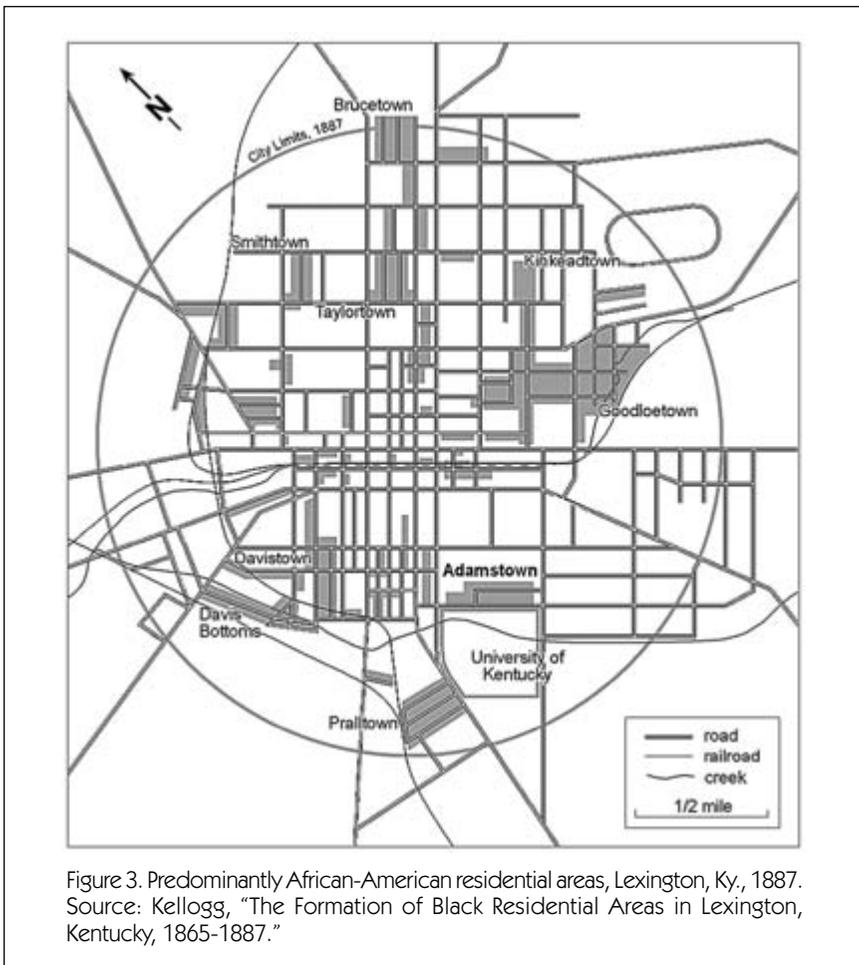

Figure 3. Predominantly African-American residential areas, Lexington, Ky., 1887. Source: Kellogg, "The Formation of Black Residential Areas in Lexington, Kentucky, 1865-1887."
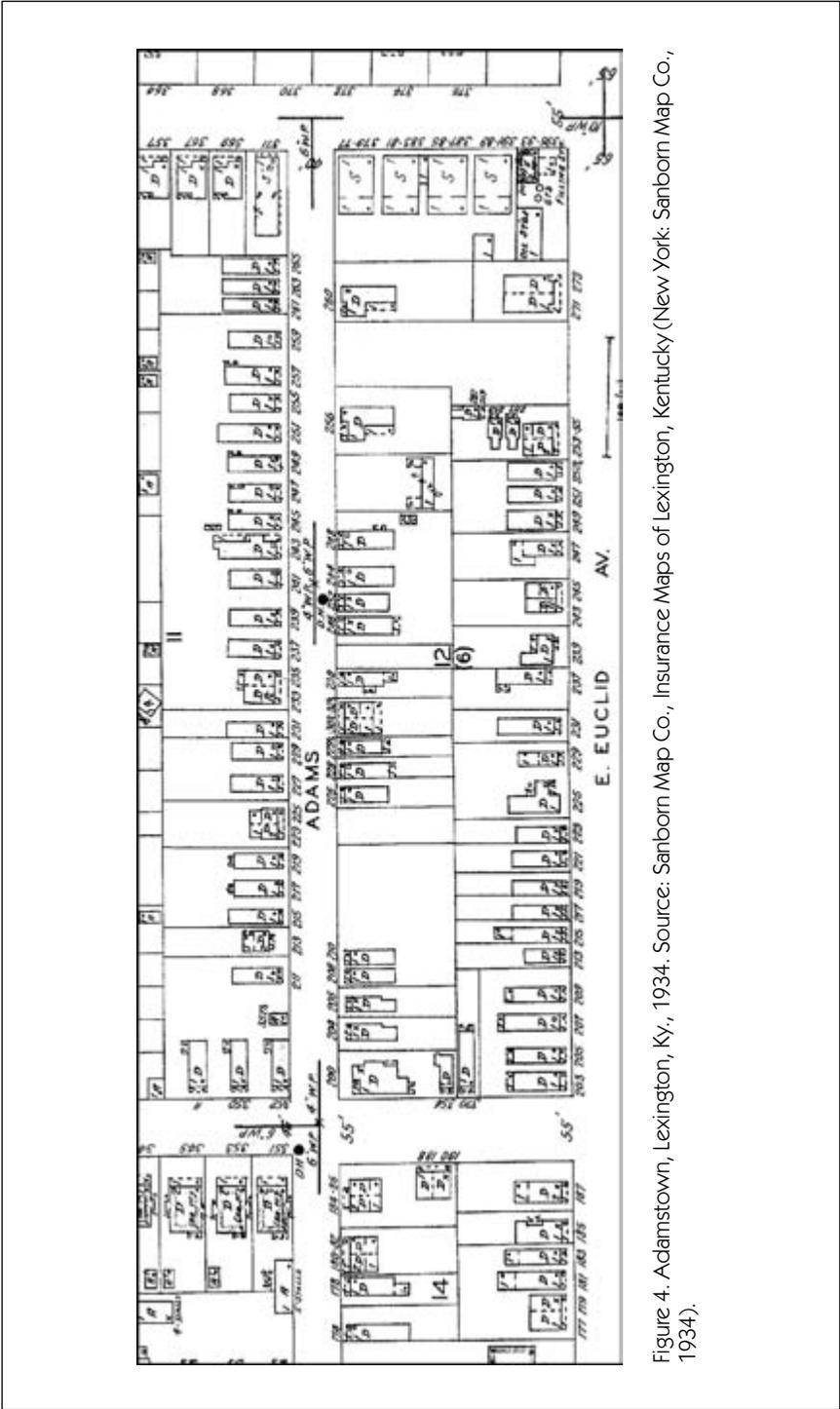
Figure 4. Adamstown, Lexington, Ky., 1934. Source: Sanborn Map Co., Insurance Maps of Lexington, Kentucky (New York: Sanborn Map Co., 1934).

borhoods stood on the city's edge, they were not recorded on earlier editions. Adamstown appears only on the fifth and sixth series of maps, which were produced in 1907 and 1934 respectively. The next edition was published in 1958, some 15 years after Adamstown's removal, leaving us with only two maps by which to discern the changes that Adamstown underwent during its existence.

We should also remember, following J.B. Harley, that insurance maps, as a cartographic practice and representation, are a form of knowledge production.[10] Maps are always embedded within the geographies they are intended to represent, and as such they may be read as texts that articulate some social relations while effacing others. For example, we may read the racialized marking of space on insurance maps, such as on churches, schools, or separate hospital wards, as indicative of the ways in which the modalities and the impacts of racial segregation were (and still are) struggled over (Figure 5). Additionally, but less evidently, such cartographic practices representationally efface whiteness, leaving it an unmarked norm against which a racially inflected social order is measured and maintained.

The Politics of Naming Place

Geographers such as J.B. Harley, Denis Wood, and Mark Monmonier have cogently dispelled the illusory innocence of maps by showing them to be selective and refractive territorialities in their own right, rather than transparent representations of an *a priori* territory.[11] As such, even elements as seemingly straightforward as place names must be approached with the politics of cartographic representation in mind. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, John Kellogg conducted studies of the formation of Lexington's African-American urban clusters.[12] Among the materials used by Kellogg was a map of Lexington drafted by J.T. Slade in 1912. It was from this map that Kellogg identified the names of Lexington's African-American neighborhoods (Figure 6).

Place names such as Adamstown, Pralltown, and Kinkeadtown refer to the names of the landowners who subdivided parcels and sold lots to blacks moving to Lexington in the years following manumission. Adamstown, for example, was platted on land owned by George Adams and sold to individual residents beginning in 1872. These place names were codified within the historical record in a number of mutually supporting ways. The name Adamstown appears in county deed records in 1874; the 1875 Lexington City Directory identifies Adamstown as a place of residence; a formal plat of Adamstown was filed in 1881.[13] These documentary sources reveal the fact that the names of these places were part and parcel of their establishment in Lexington's urban landscape.

In the 1920s, many of these neighborhoods came under the scrutiny of urban planners and municipal slum clearance agencies. Newspaper accounts tended to refer to these areas simply as slums, unsightly shacks, or "cheaply constructed, unattractive frame dwellings occupied by Negro families,"[14] but
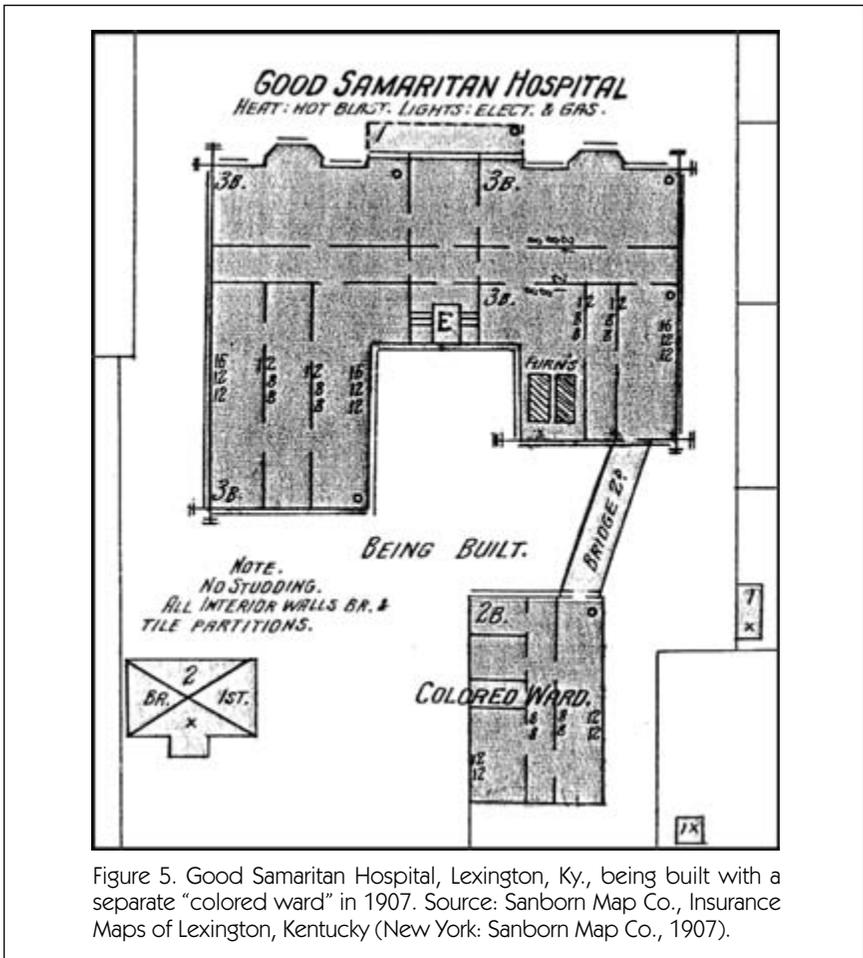
Figure 5. Good Samaritan Hospital, Lexington, Ky., being built with a separate "colored ward" in 1907. Source: Sanborn Map Co., Insurance Maps of Lexington, Kentucky (New York: Sanborn Map Co., 1907).

administrative documents and correspondences consistently referred to them by their place names. For example, the 1924 housing survey listed a number of working-class neighborhoods while emphasizing their relationship with local institutional apparatuses:

> Chicago Bottom [sic], Brucetown, Davis Bottom [sic], Goodloetown, Yellmantown, have many famous streets and alleys bearing the names of distinguished citizens. These streets are well known to school physicians and nurses, to family welfare and baby milk supply workers, to public health visitors, to the hospitals and sanitorium [sic] and clinics.[15]

Administrative scrutiny continued into the New Deal era and intensified after the passage of the 1949 Federal Housing Act. In 1935, a Kentucky Emergency Relief Administration survey identified Pralltown, Goodloetown, Chi-
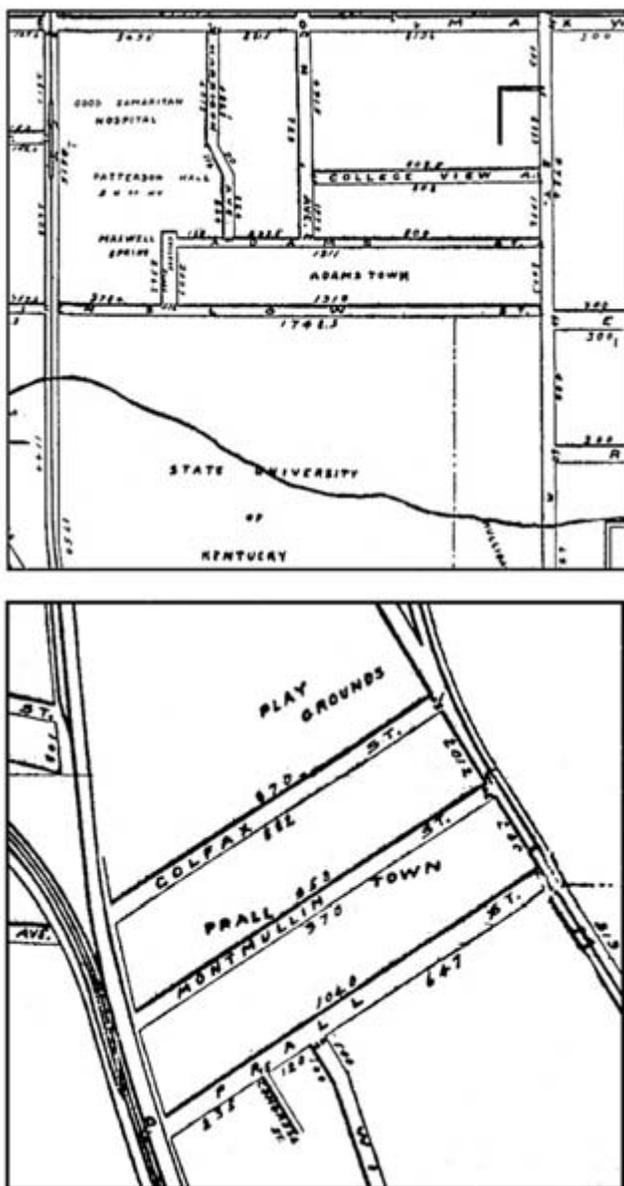
Figure 6. Adamstown and Pralltown as depicted on J. T. Slade's map of Lexington, Ky. Source: J. T. Slade, "Map of Lexington, Ky., and vicinity," (Lexington, Ky.: J. T. Slade, 1912).

cago Bottoms, and Adamstown as slums, and in 1952, Lexington's Slum Clearance and Redevelopment Agency targeted Pralltown, Davis Bottoms, and Chicago Bottoms for removal.

It was of course important for local agencies to be able to identify and distinguish among proposed urban redevelopment projects, and these place names facilitated this administrative exigency. Yet place names are more than simply labels. Lawrence Berg and Robin Kearns argue that place names constitute "a symbolic and a material order that provides normality and legitimacy to those who dominate the politics of (place) representation."[16] One piece of Lexington's historical record offers compelling evidence for an argument that the place names attached to Lexington's African-American neighborhoods played a central role in normalizing and legitimizing a dominant vision of urban order.

In 1989, the University of Kentucky conducted an oral history project that documented the life experiences of African Americans in Lexington. A number of residents and former residents of Kinkeadtown were interviewed as part of a larger project studying the history of that neighborhood on the eve of its removal to make way for a street extension. Interviewees were asked if they referred to or knew of their neighborhood as Kinkeadtown, the place name etched so indelibly into the historical record, and the answer was invariably that it was not:

> Interviewer: Was the neighborhood called Kinkeadtown at that time?
> Respondent: Not, no I never heard of it as such, we just called it Illinois Street and Kinkead Street, it was only in later years that I found out it was Kinkeadtown.

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> Interviewer: Okay, was your neighborhood recognized as a distinct community separate from other communities around it?
> Respondent: I wouldn't think so, I wouldn't think so, in other words I would think that you would have to have neighborhood organizations, a president organize something, and I don't think that happened.[17]

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> Interviewer: Were you born in Kinkeadtown?
> Respondent: Born on Illinois—we moved off of Illinois in January of 1935 but we moved back January of 1936.
> Interviewer: What was the name of the area?
> Respondent: Just Illinois, Illinois Street, Kinkead, and Moseby, I didn't hear the Kinkeadtown until later.
> Interviewer: Was your neighborhood recognized as a distinct community separate from other residential areas around you?

Respondent:	Not really, we were just like a family but we had friends that lived on other streets and other ends of town but we were like family.
Interviewer:	Where were the boundaries of this little area? Can you describe that to me?
Respondent:	It was Kinkead, Illinois, and then Moseby hooked the two; it was like a horseshoe, between 4th and 5th and Ohio and Maple.
Interviewer:	Now did the boundaries change, grow larger or smaller as time went on?
Respondent:	Not really, just, you know, the same families, and—I don't understand, grow larger?
Interviewer:	Did it get larger or smaller?
Respondent:	Well as the people had children, yes.
Interviewer:	So did it change—now when you're telling me it got larger, explain that to me, did they put up more houses on the same street?
Respondent:	Oh no, it was—no, no, the houses that were there, they just crowded, you know, and moved in like—if, I guess when a child got married he moved out, you know.
Interviewer:	So the boundaries sort of stayed the same?
Respondent:	Same, right, right, right.[18]

It is clear from these exchanges that the African-American community defined itself not by sharply delineated districts but by extended social networks, such as those forged through schools, churches, and family relations. I have been unsuccessful in my attempts to identify any former residents of Adamstown, but the single reference to the Memorial Coliseum within the oral history collection refers to residents who lived on Adams *Street*, not *Adamstown*. Whereas street names and mailing addresses are common parlance within the urban social imaginary, African-American neighborhoods in Lexington did not have signs on them indicating their existence as an identifiable "town." There were no signs saying, "you are now entering Adamstown," "you are now leaving Pralltown," or "Kinkeadtown, population 112."

These place names were more than merely shorthand means of referring to African-American neighborhoods within a deeply segregated Southern city. They were administrative labels that mediated the social relations between the African-American community and dominant white political structures along institutional lines while eliding the complex interconnectivity of these neighborhoods. Their deployment took on added material import within the planning discourses through which these "towns" became the objects of slum clearance projects. These place names, inscribed in city directories and maps, and rearticulated in city planning documents as well as in scholarly research, did not correspond to the imagined communities of those who lived in these places. Rather, they reflected the regard in which administrative apparatuses held these neighborhoods.

Yet cultural landscapes are always sites of sociospatial struggle, and the politics of place representation, while uneven, always leave open spaces for resistance. Older, working-class neighborhoods, especially those inhabited by African Americans, have long been threatened with removal from the landscape. I have already mentioned two, Adamstown and Kinkeadtown, that no longer stand today. Others, such as Pralltown, have been fairly successful in their struggles against urban renewal efforts, and in the process, the place names that once articulated a dominant vision of urban order have been reappropriated as material and symbolic loci of community identity and cohesiveness. In 1972, a community group formed the Pralltown Neighborhood Meeting in response to the city's plans to redevelop the area.[19] The group has become Pralltown's neighborhood association, and other associations have formed in African-American neighborhoods such as Brucetown, Cadentown, and Smithtown.

Conclusion

Both the cultural landscape and historical record are constituted by spatial practices and representations that reflect, refract, and reproduce social relations in specific ways. Archival collection is itself a practice ineluctably intertwined with uneven power relations, and social struggle is often precisely what is elided in the process of constructing and engaging with the historical record. As such, the historical record does not merely represent a given social reality that existed in the past, but instead gives voice to the specific discourses that reveal the intentions behind its construction. In the process, the voices of those who have been excluded from the process of historical documentation are often truncated or even silenced altogether. It follows that the scholarly practice of historical representation and interpretation is always a situated contemporary reconstruction that must be attuned to the unevenness of the historical record and to the muted voices of the subaltern embedded within its constructions. The inseparability of landscapes and archives from the sociospatial contexts of their production must inform every turn of our engagement with them.

Acknowledgments

Notes

1. Sharon H. Tate, "Memorial Coliseum Fits Like a Good Suit," *Lexington (Ky.) Herald-Leader*, 25 January 1987.
2. *Ibid.*
3. The issues I raise here are drawn from my master's thesis on Adamstown, "An Invisible Landscape: Urban Reform and Racial Formation in Lexington, Kentucky" (Master's thesis, University of Kentucky, 1999).
4. Deryck W. Holdsworth, "Landscape and Archive as Texts," in Paul Groth and Todd W. Bressi, eds., *Understanding Ordinary Landscapes* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1997): 44-55, 55.
5. John Kellogg, "The Formation of Black Residential Areas in Lexington, Kentucky, 1865-1887," *Journal of Southern History* 48 (1982): 21-52; John Kellogg, "Negro Urban Clusters in the Postbellum South," *The Geographical Review* 67:3 (1977): 310-321.
6. Various strategies of racial differentiation were actively pursued by whites as a means for maintaining their dominant position in the social order, particularly in the postbellum era. See, for example, Kellogg, "Negro Urban Clusters in the Postbellum South;" John P. Radford, "Race, Residence and Ideology: Charleston, South Carolina in the Mid-Nineteenth Century," *Journal of Historical Geography* 2:3 (1976): 329-346; Richard C. Wade, *Slavery in the Cities: The South, 1820-1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964); Charles S. Johnson, *Patterns of Negro Segregation* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1943).
7. Jonathan Smith, "The Lie That Blinds: Destabilizing the Text of Landscape," in James S. Duncan and David Ley, eds., *Place/culture/representation* (New York: Routledge, 1993): 78-92, 80.
8. Madge Headley, *Report of Housing Survey of the City of Lexington, Kentucky* (Lexington, Ky.: 1924), 7, 15.
9. See, for example, Richard Harris, "Reading Sanborns for the Spoor of the Owner-Builder, 1890s-1950s," in Annmarie Adams and Sally McMurry, eds., *Exploring Everyday Landscapes: Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture VII* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1997): 251-267; Richard H. Schein, "The Place of Landscape: A Conceptual Framework for Interpreting the American Scene," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 87:4 (1997): 660-680; Cathy Moulder, "Fire Insurance Plans as a Data Source in Urban Research: An Annotated Bibliography of Examples," *Art Reference Services Quarterly* 1 (1993): 49-62; Vlad Shkurkin, *Fire Insurance Maps as Primary Historic Records* (San Pablo, Calif.: Vlad Shkurkin, 1984).
10. J.B. Harley, "Maps, Knowledge and Power," in Denis Cosgrove and Stephen Daniels, eds., *The Iconography of Landscape* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988): 277-312.
11. See *ibid.*; J.B. Harley, "Deconstructing the Map," *Cartographica* 26:2 (1989): 1-20; Denis Wood, *The Power of Maps* (New York: Guilford Press, 1992); Mark Monmonier, *How to Lie With Maps* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991).
12. Kellogg, "The Formation of Black Residential Areas in Lexington, Kentucky, 1865-1887"; Kellogg, "Negro Urban Clusters in the Postbellum South."
13. *General Index to Deeds, Mortgages, Etc., Fayette County, Kentucky, 1794 to 1903*, County Clerk's Office, Lexington-Fayette Urban County Government, Lexington, Ky.; Jas. H. Prather, *Prather's Lexington City Directory* (Lexington, Ky.: Jas. H. Prather, 1875).
14. Laurence Shropshire, "Worthy Slum Clearance Project to be Accomplished if Chosen Site is Provided for Field House at U.K.," *Lexington (Ky.) Herald-Leader*, 23 June 1939.
15. Headley, *Report of Housing Survey*, 6.
16. Lawrence D. Berg and Robin A. Kearns, "Naming as Norming: 'Race,' Gender, and the Identity Politics of Naming Places in Aotearoa/New Zealand," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 14:1 (1996): 99-122, 99. For more on the politics of place naming, see R.D.K. Herman, "The Aloha State: Place Names and the Anti-conquest of Hawai'i," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 89:1 (1999): 76-102; Saul Cohen and Nurit Kliot, "Place-names in Israel's Ideological Struggle over the Administered Territories," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 82:4 (1992): 653-680; Wilbur Zelinsky, "Nationalism in the American Place Name Cover," *Names* 31:1 (1983): 1-28.
17. *Blacks in Lexington Oral History Project* Part III (1987-89), University of Kentucky Special Collections and Archives, 89OH255 KH473, Lexington, Ky.
18. *Blacks in Lexington Oral History Project* Part III (1987-89), University of Kentucky Special Collections and Archives, 89OH253 KH471, Lexington, Ky.
19. Jennifer Kopf, "Neighborhood Hygiene and 'Renewal' in the U.S. South: The Purification of Pralltown During the Civil War Reconstruction and 1960s Urban Renewal Eras," *Historical Geography* 25 (1997): 148-164.