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Street names and the scaling of memory: the politics of commemorating Martin Luther King, Jr within the African American community

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Streets named for Martin Luther King, Jr are common yet controversial features in cities across the United States. This paper analyses the politics of naming these streets as a 'scaling of memory' – a socially contested process of determining the geographic extent to which the civil rights leader should be memorialized. Debates over the scaling of King's memory revolve around the size of the named street, the street's level of prominence within a hierarchy of roads, and the degree to which the street transcends the spatial confines of the black community. A street-naming struggle in Eatonton, Georgia (USA) exposes how the scaling of memory can become a point of division and contest within the black community as activists seek to fulfil different political goals. Analysing these intra-racial contests allows for a fuller appreciation of the historical consciousness and geographic agency of African Americans rather than seeing them as a single, monolithic group.

Key words: *United States, street naming, scale, Martin Luther King, commemoration, African American*

Introduction

Memorial landscapes and spaces play a central role in shaping how the public values, identifies with and debates the past (Johnson 1995; Foote 1997; Till 1999; Crampton 2001). Although largely neglected by scholars until recently, commemorative street naming is an important vehicle for bringing the past into the present. According to Azaryahu,

commemorative street names (like other place names) conflate history and geography and merge the past they commemorate into ordinary settings of human life. Embedded into language, they are active participants in the construction and perception of social reality. (Azaryahu 1997, 481)

Commemorative street names, like all places of memory, are open to multiple, competing inter-

pretations of the past (Charlesworth 1994). Yeoh characterized the street renaming project as 'an uneven, negotiated process of constant mediations', in which 'people questioned, challenged, or came up with alternative readings of both the forms and meanings of street-names' (1996, 305–6).

To advance the literature on commemorative street names further, I explore the politics of naming streets after slain civil rights leader Martin Luther King, Jr. These streets are increasingly common features in cities across the United States. As public symbols, they represent 'significant variations in the American social landscape', revealing 'the character of both the figure commemorated and the community that has honored him' (Stump 1988, 215). By 1996, King's name was attached to 483 streets in the country (Alderman 2000). Given the problematic nature of collecting such data and the popularity of

the commemorative practice, the current number of streets is likely much higher. The growing prevalence of Martin Luther King streets should not divert our attention away from the controversies and struggles that often surround the naming process. Geography figures prominently in debates over how best to commemorate King.

When choosing a street to name or rename for King, people show great sensitivity to the location of racial communities, as well as spatial patterns of commercial development. For instance, many African American activists argue that Martin Luther King was important to all races and hence should be placed on streets accessible and visible to everyone in the city (Osinski 1999). Consequently, they support the renaming of major thoroughfares that cut through prominent business districts and unite white and black communities. Many whites do not personally identify with King and public opposition often leads to the confinement of his name to minor streets or portions of large streets in African American areas of the city (Townes 1993). The renaming of major thoroughfares is frequently disrupted by the protests of the street's business owners and operators, who cite the financial costs of changing their address and the social stigma, as they see it, of being associated with the black community (Alderman 2000). The use of degraded and obscure streets to keep the memory of King alive has, in some instances, changed the streets' symbolic meaning from being a point of African American pride to what one news reporter referred to as a 'Boulevard of Broken Dreams', another reminder of continued inequality and repression (Yardley 1995, E1).

Few studies have sought to unravel the political struggles that surround this new commemorative practice or the locational dynamics underlying these struggles. A growing number of geographers are examining the spatiality of public memory (Johnson 1995; Dwyer 2002; Leib 2002) and the cultural politics of naming places, particularly streets (Cohen and Kliot 1992; Myers 1996; Azaryahu 1996 1997). This paper contributes to these studies by exploring how geographic scale constitutes and structures the politics of commemorating the past. I interpret the naming of streets after Martin Luther King as a 'scaling of memory' – a socially contested process of determining the geographic extent at which the civil rights leader should be memorialized. This scaling of memory determines, in turn, whether King's memory will transcend traditional racial and economic boundaries or simply reinforce their social importance.

Scholars have traditionally thought of scale as a static category for organizing space. Not until recently have they considered how geographic scale is constructed and reconstructed through social practice and political struggle (Herod 1997; Marston 2000; Mitchell 2002). Building upon the work of Smith (Smith 1984; Smith and Dennis 1987), who theorized about the role of capital in constructing and manipulating scale, Herod (2001) has shown how ordinary people can significantly reconstruct the spatial extent or reach of their activities and activism. As he first suggested in this journal several years ago, geographic scale is made (and remade) through everyday social practices of cooperation and competition (Herod 1991). As Smith (1993) found in his study of New York City's homeless, marginalized populations can use scale as a political strategy for bringing legitimacy and public visibility to their cause. In this paper, I am interested in understanding how African Americans, as an historically discriminated social group, struggle to create and control the geographic scale of recognizing King and, in turn, the achievements of all blacks.

The struggle to define the geographic scale of King's commemoration through street naming is often viewed as inter-racial in nature. No doubt, black and white Americans hold strong and often competing opinions about the historical importance of the civil rights leader and thus collide over selecting the most appropriate street to identify with him (Alderman 2002). The politics of place naming, however, are rarely so dualistic. Instead, place naming involves a complex, intertwined set of social and political relations (Berg and Kearns 1996). Moreover, the politics of remembering the past are not just shaped by ideological struggles between social groups but also struggles within those very groups (Graham and Shirlow 2002; Olsen and Timothy 2002). This paper seeks to analyse the intra-racial politics of commemorative street naming, specifically how the memorialization of Martin Luther King can become a point of division and contest within the African American community. Of particular interest is how black activists, embracing different political goals, construct the geographic scale of King's commemoration in conflicting ways. Analysing these differences allows for a fuller appreciation of the historical consciousness and geographic agency of African Americans, who are often misrepresented as a single, monolithic group.

This paper has two major objectives. My first objective is to provide background on how the

politics of naming streets for King are played out in, and shaped by, struggles to construct the geographic scale of public commemoration. In doing so, I argue for a more critical understanding of differences and divisions within African American memory and activism. My second objective is to present a brief empirical illustration of how African American activists competed with each other in determining the most appropriate scale at which to memorialize the civil rights leader. The case study focuses on a street-naming struggle in Eatonton, Georgia (USA). In 1990, the city witnessed a public struggle between two African American leaders. While both leaders defined the King legacy in a very positive light, they offered dramatically different street-naming proposals and, in doing so, exposed a tension between exterior and interior uses of the past within the black community. My work in Eatonton, which dates back to 1993, is based upon research in newspaper and government archives and intensive personal interviews with African American leaders in the community. It is one case study in a much broader effort to examine the role of African Americans in naming streets for King, the controversies they face and the ultimate locations which these streets occupy (Alderman 1998).

Importance of scale to commemoration

The naming of streets for Martin Luther King is part of a larger movement in the United States to affirm the historical importance of minority groups and challenge traditional, white-dominated conceptions of the past that frequently ignore these contributions (Rhea 1997). With the establishment of federal and state holidays in his honour, King has become an official icon of the civil rights movement and black heritage in general – sometimes at the historical neglect of lesser-known activists, particularly women (Dwyer 2000). The movement to memorialize King and the civil rights movement is affecting not only the names attached to streets, but also the geography of statues, museums, preserved sites, heritage trails and festivals (Gallagher 1995; Armada 1998). O’Meally and Fabre noted a significant need for research that identifies and analyses African American ‘sites of memory’ (1994, 3–4) or places where blacks invest the past with great symbolic and political significance. Analysing King streets is an important entry point to understanding how blacks struggle to incorporate their achievements into the nation’s collective memory.

Scale is an intrinsically important facet of memorializing the past and bringing significant public attention to the historical contributions of African Americans (Alderman 1996). The geographic scale at which memory is produced (or commemoration is carried out) determines, in large measure, the populations who will be touched by the memorial meanings being communicated. By expanding the scale of memory or increasing the geographic extent of commemoration, social actors and groups hope to make images of the past retrievable or available to a larger array of publics. As suggested by Schudson, retrievability is an essential factor in shaping the ultimate power or influence of a cultural object or practice: ‘If culture is to influence a person, it must reach the person’ (1989, 160). Street naming is a potentially powerful form of commemoration because of its capacity to make certain visions of the past accessible to a wide range of social groups. In contrast, a restriction in the scale of commemoration can decrease the retrievability and accessibility of the past, thus limiting the extent to which traditional historical interpretations and valuations can be challenged and changed. As Smith argued, scale has a ‘double-edged nature’ and can be constructed to both constrain identities as well as enlarge them (1993, 114). King streets have a similar double-edged nature. Depending on the location and spatial extent of these streets, they can represent an expansion of African American influence and cultural expression or a reinforcement of the boundaries that have traditionally constrained black identity and power.

Defining the notion of scale – as it relates to streets and roads – can be difficult. Howitt identified three facets of geographic scale – size, level and relation. He noted that while geographers generally recognize scale in terms of ‘size’ and ‘level within a hierarchy’, they have not fully explored the idea of ‘scale as a relation between geographic totalities’ (1998, 50–2). In terms of size, the scaling of commemoration can refer to the length or width of the named street. In many instances, the size of a street determines the sheer number of residences and businesses identified, by address, with a commemorated person or event. Addresses are essential to daily activities and represent an important way of inscribing commemorative meanings into a multitude of urban practices and narratives (Azaryahu 1996). The scaling of memory through street names can also be defined in terms of level, specifically the street’s level of prominence within a city’s hierarchy of roads. As Azaryahu pointed out, there is often a

positive correlation between 'the strategic importance of a thoroughfare and the prestige of the associated commemoration' (1996, 325). A prominent, frequently travelled street would represent a larger and more significant scale of memorialization than a small side road because of differences in the amount of public exposure and visibility that each road brings to a memorial cause.

African American activists hold strong views about constructing the geographic scale of King's commemoration relative to the size of the named street and the street's perceived level of prominence. In Sylvester, Georgia (USA), two black city council members voted against a street-naming proposal when they learned that King's name would be placed in a poor, deteriorating neighbourhood (Townes 1993). In Athens, Georgia (USA), African Americans living along Reese Street opposed identifying King with their street, which they described as 'unknown' and 'drug infested' (Alderman 1996). In March of 2002, African American activist Torrey Dixon petitioned the city council of Danville, Virginia (USA), asking that Central Boulevard, a major commercial thoroughfare, be renamed in honour of King. He considered the thoroughfare an 'appropriate street' to rename because its central location and high volume of traffic would ensure that King's name would be seen by many people. The proposal failed and officials suggested renaming a smaller street that had served as a focal point for members of the local civil rights movement when King had visited Danville in 1963. The leader of the street-naming campaign rebuked this counter-proposal and was quoted as saying: 'I think Dr. King should have a major road . . . I think having a road in a low-class neighborhood named after King is offensive' (quoted in Davis 2002, 3A). In this case, the commemoration of King at an inappropriate scale of prominence represented a degradation of his memory, even when the street in question had a strong historical association with the civil rights leader.

The geographic scale of commemorative street naming can also be defined in relational terms or the extent to which a named street creates associations or linkages between different people and places in the city. Street names have a connectivity that allows them to touch the consciousness of social actors and groups who may or may not identify with the person or event being remembered. However, because cities often develop (intentionally and unintentionally) in segregated patterns, not all streets cut across and connect diverse populations, thus

reducing the scale of public identification and interaction with a commemorative naming. When commemorating King, African Americans are often concerned about the location of the named street in relation to the white community and the extent to which the street serves as a geographic bridge between races. Accompanying the importance of naming a long and prominent thoroughfare is the equally important desire to name a street that reaches beyond the confines of the black community. This was certainly the case in Keysville, Georgia (USA). African American leaders found little opposition when they renamed a street for King within the city limits of Keysville. However, they encountered intense resistance when they sought to have the road renamed across the entire county from one boundary to another. Ultimately, county commissioners voted against the extension of Martin Luther King Road. This decision limited the geographic scale of King's commemoration, specifically the scale of race relations that would be embodied along the renamed road. The city of Keysville is largely African American (more than 75%) and the larger county is almost 50 per cent white. Keysville's mayor, Emma Greshman, reacted to the county commission vote by saying: 'The whites who protested the new name need a little more knowledge about what Dr. King meant not only to his race but to America' (quoted in *Atlanta Constitution* 1989, A18). As indicated by Greshman, the scaling of memory through street naming is inherently political because people hold multiple and sometimes conflicting ideas about the public relevance of King's achievements.

Differences in African American memory and activism

Debates over where to commemorate Martin Luther King are not just between whites and African Americans. As the case study in the next section will illustrate, black leaders may disagree with each other about what constitutes an appropriate scale of memorialization. To conduct an analysis of these struggles requires a critical understanding of African American memory and activism. Kelley (1994) and Goings and Mohl (1996) emphasized the importance of seeing blacks as active cultural and political agents who mobilize to reclaim streets and other public spaces as a means of redefining social and political identity. These scholars also pointed to the important role that divisions and contestation play within the black community.

As Tuck (2001) recently noted in retracing the history of the civil rights movement in Georgia (USA), the struggle for racial equality does not follow one normative pattern. Black activism, according to him, can be defined and carried out in different and conflicting ways. In some instances, integration takes a back seat to blacks developing their community institutions and a sense of psychological empowerment. Even Martin Luther King holds a complex and sometimes contradictory place in African American history and culture. During the civil rights demonstrations of the 1960s, black leaders in Savannah, Georgia (USA) tried to bar King from preaching in the city. They feared that the civil rights leader's presence might antagonize local authorities and disrupt an already successful protest movement. The marginalization of King has even been inscribed into Savannah's civil rights museum. Although located on Martin Luther King Boulevard, the museum says little about King's accomplishments and stresses, instead, local activists and struggles during the Movement.

An African American commemorative culture existed long before the emergence of King as a national icon. Clark (2000) has examined, for example, Emancipation Day celebrations in the years immediately following the Civil War. These ceremonies represented more than a shared affirmation of the importance of black freedom. They also 'provided crucial forums for African Americans to reflect, debate, and enact their own versions of history and plans for the future' (Clark 2000, 125–6). In speaking about the memory of slavery and the evolution of black progress, a range of African American voices could be heard at these gatherings from conservative, accommodationist views to more radical calls for change. Following the lead of Clark (2000), the commemoration of King can be interpreted as a forum or arena for African Americans to present and debate their interpretations of his legacy as they articulate future political visions for the black community.

King's legacy – like all historical reputations (Fine 1996; Schwartz 1997) – is open to competing interpretations and constructions, even amongst his most devoted supporters. This competition became evident immediately after the civil rights leader's assassination in 1968. While the SCLC (Southern Christian Leadership Conference) sought to honour their fallen leader through increased social activism and protest, Corretta Scott King placed more emphasis on establishing the King Center in Atlanta, Georgia

(USA) and establishing a holiday in her husband's memory. The two parties even differed on when to commemorate the civil rights leader. SCLC focused on April 4, the date of King's death. The King family preferred the birth date on January 15 (Daynes 1997). Jacqueline Smith is a more recent example of intra-racial division over how best to memorialize King. She has spent over a decade protesting the conversion of the Lorraine Motel – the site of King's assassination – into the National Civil Rights Museum. Smith was the last resident of the Lorraine before its closure. She argues that the museum does not embody or truly commemorate the ideals and beliefs of King, who would have never allowed low-income people to be displaced for the purpose of building a memorial and tourist attraction (Jones 2000). While the museum focuses largely on King's contribution to racial integration, Smith emphasizes the civil rights leader's concern, later in his life, for issues of poverty and economic inequality. According to her, the Lorraine should have been converted into a centre to offer housing, job training, education, health services and other aid to the poor.

In assessing the commemoration of African American memory, Ruffins (1992) made a distinction between interior and exterior views of the past. Interior interpretations of the past are those produced by African Americans about their own experiences. Exterior interpretations originate from outside the black community. While this duality between interior and exterior helps us understand how blacks and whites remember and represent the past differently, it can also shed light on commemorative complexities within the African American community. As Ruffins (1992) pointed out, African Americans are bicultural, living in two American cultures – one white and one black. Consequently, the remembrance of Martin Luther King operates on at least two different levels within the black community.

On the one hand, African Americans participate in an exterior or external mode of commemoration in which King's image is fashioned for consumption by non-blacks as well as blacks. The goal is to educate a larger, white-dominated American culture about the historical importance of King and his social philosophies. The exterior or external mode is characterized by an emphasis on using King's memory to challenge prevailing, race-bounded views of history and society. On the other hand, African Americans also participate in an interior or internal mode of commemoration in which King's image is used to inspire fellow blacks and give them a sense

of racial pride and identity. From this perspective, remembering the civil rights leader is more about constructing a role model for the African American community rather than presenting a multicultural lesson for non-blacks. Indeed, Rhea (1997) asserted that the growing movement to commemorate minority historical contributions is not only about achieving cultural recognition within the larger society but also about (re)educating minorities in their own heritage and cultural worth.

A potential tension underlies commemoration as African Americans negotiate between interior and exterior uses of memory. Implicit in each perspective are ideas about what constitutes an 'appropriate' scale at which to memorialize the past. Essential to enacting an 'exterior' view of King's contributions is constructing his commemoration at a geographically expansive scale. By the same token, while an 'interior' view does not necessarily relegate the civil rights leader's memory to obscure places, it does emphasize the importance and value of spatially focusing commemorative activities within the confines of the black community. The following case study illustrates how the tension between these two memory/scale perspectives can drive the politics of naming streets for Martin Luther King.

Street naming in Eatonton, Georgia (USA)

Eatonton is a town of 6764 people (2000) in Putnam County, which is located in the central part of the state of Georgia (USA). Although seemingly small and obscure, Eatonton is actually representative of many other towns that have engaged in the street-naming process. Well over three-quarters of all Martin Luther King streets are located in the American South, and Georgia – King's home state – led the nation with the largest number of such streets (72) in 1996. King street naming occurs in small towns as well as large cities in the South (Alderman 2000). Indeed, 41 per cent of these streets are in places with populations ranging from 2500 to 9999. In Georgia, the median population size of a place with a King street is only 5595. Street naming in the southeastern United States occurs most often in places where African Americans constitute at least 30 per cent of the total population (Alderman 2000). Blacks comprise 59 per cent of Eatonton's population and 30 per cent of the population of Putnam County.

Eatonton is noted for being the birthplace of authors Joel Chandler Harris and Alice Walker, both

of whom made significant contributions to the representation of black culture and history in the United States. Joel Chandler Harris (1848–1908), a white author, is best known for writing the *Uncle Remus Tales*. Harris retold the 'trickster' folktales and fables of plantation slaves, which were acted out by animal characters such as 'Brer Rabbit' and 'Brer Fox'. Uncle Remus, the elderly narrator of these tales, embodies the docility and humorous innocence of the Sambo stereotype. Harris' writing took on even greater popularity and stereotypical proportions when Walt Disney adapted it into an animated film titled *Song of the South* (Kesterson 1989). African American author Alice Walker (born 1944) constructed a different and perhaps more complex image of rural black life in her book, *The Color Purple*. While the Remus Tales were told by a gentle black man and dealt with racial struggle in sublime, metaphorical terms, Walker's protagonist (Celie) and central characters were women and her work dealt directly with issues of violence, abuse and sexuality (Gaffney 1989). *The Color Purple*, also made into a widely popular film, challenged Americans to think more critically about divisions and struggles within the black community.

The city of Eatonton named a road for Alice Walker in 1985, five years before dedicating a street to Martin Luther King. The naming of a street for Walker further establishes the symbolic importance that African Americans attach to place naming as a means of making their accomplishments visible on the landscape. Public recognition of Walker represented an attempt to rewrite Eatonton's symbolic landscape. From monuments and museums to festivals and business names, the landscape is permeated with references to the legacy of Joel Chandler Harris and Uncle Remus. The establishment of Alice Walker Drive is also significant because it exposed a commemorative tension within the African American community. This tension resurfaced and became more clearly defined when selecting a street to name for King. The black activists involved in honouring Walker – many of whom participated in King's commemoration – disagreed over whether the author's name should adorn a street restricted to the black community or one that reminds the entire city of her accomplishments. As would become the case with King, Alice Walker was identified with a residential road populated largely by African Americans. Interesting enough, Alice Walker Drive closely parallels Martin Luther King, Jr. Drive, although there is no direct evidence to suggest that

the honouring of Alice Walker influenced the location of King's street (Figure 1).

The idea of naming a street in memory of Martin Luther King made its formal appearance during an Eatonton city council meeting on 4 September 1990. Black city councilman Ulysses Rice, then vice-chairman of the local chapter of the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) and a former college classmate of King, discussed the possibility of renaming Concord Avenue for the civil rights leader (Eatonton City Council Minutes, 4 September 1990). Concord was a main residential artery in the African American community as well as located near an elementary school, a funeral home owned by Rice, an American Legion post and the Ebenezer Baptist Church. In January of the previous year, the road had taken on great symbolic importance as part of the route for a 'Freedom March' held on the Martin Luther King holiday. Participants assembled at the Ebenezer Baptist Church, marched to the county courthouse and then returned to the church for a three hour memorial service in which a pastor re-enacted King's 'I Have a Dream' speech (*Eatonton Messenger* 1989). To mobilize support behind the renaming of Concord after King, Rice and other members of the NAACP distributed a questionnaire to residents along the street asking if they were in favour of the name change. Results of this questionnaire, which indicated almost unanimous support for the name change, were submitted to the city council in support of the request made by Rice (Eatonton City Council Minutes, 7 October 1990). On 7 November 1990, the city council officially changed the name of Concord Avenue to Martin Luther King, Jr. Drive (Eatonton City Council Minutes, 7 November 1990).

In the case of Eatonton, geographic scale figured directly in how activists conceptualized and carried out the campaign to commemorate King through street naming. For example, in explaining his support for renaming Concord Avenue, councilman Rice emphasized the size of the street. He stated, 'Concord ran all the way through the county to Pea Ridge Road near Highway 441'. Indeed, Martin Luther King Drive stretches over four miles, connecting black residential areas of varying value with rural dairy farms. To emphasize the relative prominence of King Drive, Rice added, 'most of the houses (along King Drive) are fairly decent by black standards' (Rice 1998). This emphasis on the street being evaluated by 'black standards' is important to our discussion because Rice advocated that

the geographic scale of Martin Luther King Drive be limited largely to the spatial confines of the black community.

From Rice's point of view, the scale of the named street was appropriate for what he envisioned as its political and social purpose. Promoting an interior interpretation and use of the past, Rice showed great concern for how King's commemoration would focus and inspire the black community: 'If naming the street after King hasn't done anything else, it has pulled people together who want to live in a decent neighborhood. Black people have a place to be proud of' (Rice 1997). He represented the renaming of Concord Avenue as a way of focusing the black public, particularly children, on King's importance and the larger achievements of African Americans. On this point, he said:

Helping to keep King alive in Eatonton was a way of showing a person the great opportunities that await black people. Black kids would have an opportunity to drive down the street [King Drive] and remember the things that black people can achieve. Even little children, who could care less. Everyday they ride down that street, it gets drilled in them. When programs are held at the school, if they don't know anything else about Dr. King, they know his name is on a street nearby. (Rice 1998)

Although the naming of Concord for King progressed rather quickly, it did not go unchallenged. The primary opponents were not local white citizens or other city council members, but were from within the African American community. On 15 October 1990, a group of African Americans led by Fannie Pearle Farley – former vice-president of the American Legion Auxiliary – requested that King's name be attached to a road more prominent than Concord Avenue (Eatonton City Council Minutes, 15 October 1990). She asserted that King was an important symbol and that placing his name on a major road would project a more positive image to those living in the town and to the larger outside world. Like Rice, Farley is a prominent leader in the Putnam County African American community. In 1981, the NAACP voted her one of the ten most influential women in Middle Georgia. Farley had a history of being heavily involved in commemorative issues. For example, in 1986, her American Legion Auxiliary erected a monument on the courthouse lawn to honour veterans (*Eatonton Messenger* 1986). In 1990, not long before the emergence of the King street-naming issue, Farley presented the

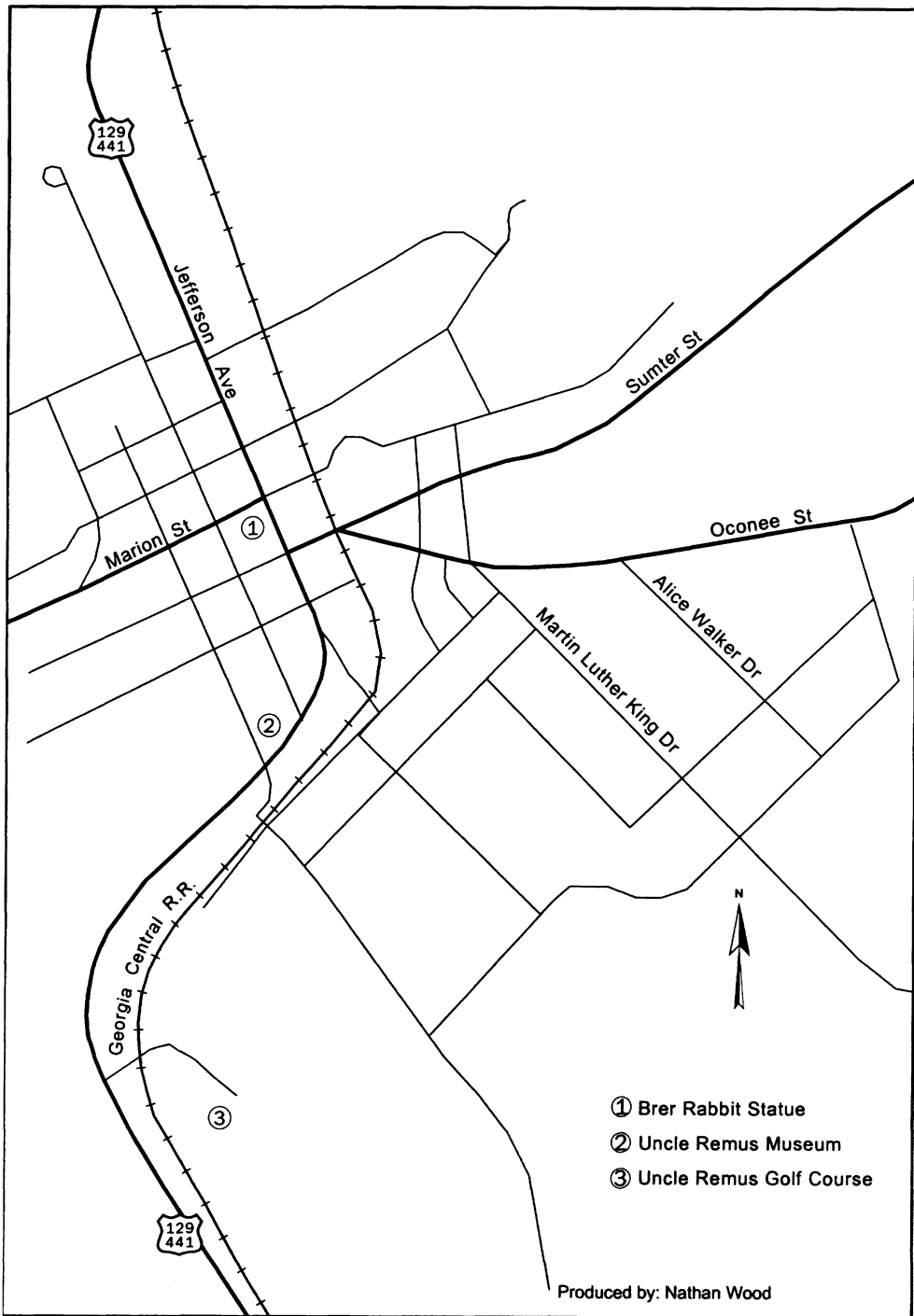


Figure 1 Selected streets and landmarks in Eatonton, Georgia, USA
Source: Mosher-Adams, Inc. (1993)

city with a flag that had been flown over the United States Capitol (Eatonton City Council Minutes, 5 March 1990). Because of Farley's previous leadership in commemorative issues, she felt compelled and justified to approach the city council to express an alternative vision of how best to commemorate King.

In challenging the attachment of King's name to Concord Avenue, Farley offered two alternatives. The first was Jefferson Avenue, one of the town's major thoroughfares and a national highway (Figure 1). The second was the then-uncompleted Highway 441 bypass, which now runs around the western edge of the town. The renaming of Jefferson Avenue was quickly dismissed by the city council because of the unlikelihood of gaining the support of the street's white population. In fact, one white city councilman responded by stating: 'I don't want to shove this (renaming a street) down anybody's throat if they don't want it' (quoted in *Eatonton Messenger* 1990, 1). This view reflects an assumption found in many communities that residents and businesses located along the street in question should have a disproportionately strong influence on the approval or revocation of a name change. Left out of this perspective are the voices of people who identify with and use the street by simply working, shopping and driving along it. As Berg and Kearns pointed out, the politics of naming places are 'both a politics of space (deciding who names and controls space) and a spatialized politics (whereby the spatial defines who has legitimacy to speak)' (1996, 111). The spatialized politics embodied in place naming can have a dramatic effect on the geographic scale at which King is ultimately commemorated, since it is unlikely that all (if not most) of the stakeholders on a large, racially diverse street would agree to a renaming. Responding to resistance toward the Jefferson proposal, Farley suggested that naming the new bypass would avoid some of the political controversy that results from renaming a street. Yet, the bypass proposal also failed because of plans to name the highway after a still living and very popular city official, James Marshall. Debating the merits of naming the bypass for King was further complicated by the fact that Marshall was well liked by the black community in Eatonton. Ultimately, Farley was unsuccessful in convincing the city council to place King's name on a different and, as she saw it, a more appropriate street for King.

While Ulysses Rice argued that a largely African American street was an appropriate geographic scale for commemorating King and representing the

achievements of blacks, Fannie Pearle Farley countered by suggesting that the geographic scale of street naming should extend beyond the black community. In building her conception of an appropriate scale at which to commemorate King, Farley advocated an exterior use of memorialization, emphasizing the importance of naming a street that would be visible to and touch white residents and visitors. She stated:

Signs are important. The problem with Concord Avenue [King Drive] is people going through Eatonton can't see it. Where it is now, people don't know it's there. The magnitude of King demands that a prominent street be named after him, not one stuck in the black area of town. After all, King did not fight just for blacks but for everyone. (Farley 1997)

From Farley's perspective, street naming was a way of bringing the importance of King to the attention of whites, who, in her opinion, benefited from the civil rights leader's achievements along with blacks. Unlike Rice, her notion of geographic scale is concerned less with the size or length of street *per se* and more with its ability to transcend racial boundaries and hence create relations between different groups of people within the city. While Rice is advocating a scale of commemoration that honours the traditional lines of residential segregation, Farley is advocating that the scale of King's commemoration should be constructed in such a way as to break down what Rhea (1997) called the 'segregation of memory'. When asked whether she thought the street-naming campaign had been a success, Farley stated

No it wasn't because having Martin Luther King Drive where it is does not give the community [the black community] full credit for its achievements. The street should have gone through a major thoroughfare. (Farley 1997)

In this respect, street naming in Eatonton was characterized by a tension among African Americans between using the geographical scaling of King's memory as a device for challenging and changing the historical consciousness of whites versus using it as a means of consolidating and focusing the black community ideologically.

Concluding remarks

Street names are important memorial landscapes that play a key but under-analysed role in the contested

process of attaching meaning to the past. Streets named for Martin Luther King, Jr represent one of the most widespread and controversial products of the ongoing US movement to recognize the historical contributions of minorities, particularly African Americans. I have suggested that geographic scale is an important factor in shaping political struggles over public commemoration in general and King's commemoration in particular. Recognizing that differences and divisions exist in African American memory and activism, I also suggested that black leaders hold multiple and sometimes competing views about the civil rights leader's legacy and hence the most appropriate scale at which to honour him through street naming. As illustrated in the case of Eatonton, African Americans may advocate interior or exterior scalar constructions of King's commemoration depending upon their immediate political goals. This is not to minimize the importance of examining commemorative struggles between black and white Americans and those occurring within the white community. However, this study sought to challenge some basic assumptions about how heritage and history are divided along racial lines. As with any historical figure, King's legacy is open to redefinition not only by opponents to his political/social philosophy but also people who unquestionably embraced and benefited from this philosophy.

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