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Place, Naming and the Interpretation of Cultural Landscapes

Derek H. Alderman

Naming is a powerful vehicle for promoting identification with the past and locating oneself within wider networks of memory. The passing of surnames from one generation to the next is an important symbol of personal heritage in many cultures. Growing interest in genealogical research has spurred many people to trace the origin and meaning of their family names. As Ruane and Cerulo (2000, 70) observe, surnames 'serve as a roadmap to the past; they guide us through an individual's lineage and archive one's traditional group affiliation and cultural ties.' By the same token, giving up a surname, such as many women do on marriage, represents an important power dynamic in deciding whose family history will be recognized and preserved publicly. Little surprise that nineteenth-century feminists such as Lucy Stone and Elizabeth Cady Stanton saw the retaining of maiden or birth names as a central element in the crusade for women's rights (Kaplan and Bernays, 1997). Naming is a noteworthy cultural practice not only because of its ability to create a sense of continuity over time but also through its capacity for changing and challenging lines of identity.

Renaming represents a way of creating new connections between the past and the present. Perhaps no other social group realizes this fact more than African-Americans, who have actively sought to take control of the power to identify themselves. Consider the historical role that whites played in naming African slaves and how, even after emancipation, African-Americans often just assumed the name of their masters. Believing his name to have originated from white slave holders, civil rights leader Malcolm X rejected the moniker of 'Little.' Like many black Muslims at the time, he chose 'X' to mark his unknown and stolen tribal name (Malcolm X, 1965). Beginning in the late 1980s, many blacks advocated being called 'African-American' in a collective attempt to reclaim a common ancestral history, although the entire minority community has not embraced this new appellation (Baugh, 1991). The practice of naming, like all heritages, is inherently dissonant and open to multiple and sometimes competing interpretations.

The power and politics of naming is especially evident on the cultural landscape. Place names (or toponyms) use a single word or series of words to distinguish and identify one place from another. In addition to facilitating physical navigation, toponyms evoke powerful images and connotations, contributing to the development of a sense of place. According to Berg and Kearns (1996), place naming plays a key role in the social construction of space and the contested process of attaching meaning to places. Place names are often used for commemorative purposes and can be studied as 'symbolic monuments that greatly influence public memory' (Grounds, 2001, 289). Place names perhaps lack what Armada (1998) called the 'rhetorical' power of monuments, museums, and other memorials. However, they inscribe ideological messages about the past into the many practices and texts of everyday life, making certain versions of history appear as the natural order of things (Azaryahu, 1996). Toponyms permeate our daily vocabulary, both verbal and visual, appearing on road signs, addresses, advertising billboards, and (of course) maps. Place names not only meld history with geography but also conflate place and group identity because of the shared context of using and referring to toponyms.

Despite the cultural importance of place naming, it has not had a central position within the study of heritage until recently. Much of the new, critical research has focused on the role of place names in nation building and how they are rewritten in times of political and ideological change (Azaryahu, 1992). These studies largely emphasize how government elites in countries such as Israel, Germany, Russia, Romania, and the former Yugoslavia have manipulated place names – particularly commemorative street names – to advance reinvented notions of national identity and history (for example, Azaryahu, 1997; Azaryahu and Golan, 2001; Azaryahu and Kook, 2002; Cohen and Kliot, 1992; Gill, 2005; Katz, 1995; Light, 2004; Robinson, Engelsoft and Pobric, 2001). Scholars have also explored place naming as part of the colonial process of claiming territory and subordinating indigenous histories as well as the post-colonial process of recovering lost language and memory (Breymaier, 2003; Herman, 1999; Nash, 1999; Yeoh, 1992; 1996).

While not negating the importance of studying nationalism, it is worth exploring some of the other social practices and actors that shape place naming. In addition, while heritage scholars have examined place naming in a number of different regions, few have conducted critical studies of the United States landscape. The purpose of this chapter is to broaden, theoretically and empirically, how we conceptualize place naming as a platform for the construction of heritage and identity. Drawing inspiration from the American scene, particularly the African-American experience, I articulate two conceptual frameworks for advancing future research – *naming as symbolic capital* and *naming as symbolic resistance*. These approaches, although grounded in a specific empirical context, have relevance beyond the study of just one country.

Naming as symbolic capital is a theme that recognizes how place names are evoked to bring distinction and status to landscapes and the people associated with them. As part of the commodification of heritage in the United States, naming is used by developers to create place identities that promote idyllic yet often socially

exclusive historical representations. These representations, while evoking feelings of comfort and prestige to some heritage stakeholders, function as a form of symbolic violence or marginalization for other stakeholders who remember the past differently.

Naming as symbolic resistance is a theme that recognizes that place naming is not always controlled by elites and dominant groups. Naming can also be appropriated by marginalized stakeholders who wish to have a greater voice in determining what vision of the past is inscribed into the landscape. In America, racial and ethnic minorities are increasingly turning to place renaming as a strategy for challenging the dominance of white-controlled commemoration and asserting the legitimacy of their historical achievements – although their efforts have been resisted by the dominant white group.

Before engaging these themes, it is necessary to trace the evolution of place-name research as part of broader changes in how scholars have interpreted the cultural landscape. There has been a shift from studying names as mere artifacts to recognizing the role of naming as an active and contestable process of claiming and constructing the landscape around certain ideological visions about the past.

From *Names on the Land* to Naming and Claiming the Landscape

The study of place names has a long history in the United States (Ashley, 1989; Gannett, 1902 [1971]; Wright, 1929). An important advancement in the analysis of place names occurred with the research of George R. Stewart, long-time professor of English at the University of California at Berkeley and one of the founding members of the American Name Society. Of the three books that Stewart wrote on the study of naming, *Names on the Land* (1958, originally published in 1945) was his first and most favorite (Beeler, 1976). Unlike his European counterparts at the time who tended to focus on the etymology or the specific linguistic origins of names, Stewart showed greater concern for uncovering the human motivation behind the naming process and the extent to which place names were 'a reflection of folk-tradition' (Beeler, 1976, 81). Credited with humanizing place-name study, Stewart (1958, 3–4) once wrote: 'Thus the names lay thickly over the land, and the Americans spoke of them, great and little, easily and carelessly … not thinking how they came to be. Yet, the names had grown out the life, and the lifeblood, of all those who had gone before.'

The job of the place-name scholar, according to Stewart (1958, 386), was to reconstruct the historical environment within which naming occurred, and thus 'piece together some record of what we were.' His work, like much of the traditional scholarship on the subject, treated place names as unproblematic indicators of the culture and history of an area, often ignoring the role of conflict in naming and remembering (Kearns and Berg, 2002). Stewart later developed a ten-category system for classifying place names based on their origin (Stewart, 1954; 1970; 1975). He recognized that Americans pulled directly from their past when naming the

landscape and, consequently, included a commemorative name category within his classification system.

Stewart's approach complemented the then prevailing direction of landscape studies articulated by Carl Sauer, whose writings inspired the 'Berkeley School' of cultural geography. The Berkeley School, which dominated from the 1930s to the 1970s, focused intently on tracing the origins and diffusion of cultural traits as well as describing and classifying the morphology (that is, shape and structure) of the landscape (Sauer, 1925 [1996]). Stewart's description of how names 'lay thickly over the land' correlated with Sauer's vision of how layers of material artifacts become superimposed onto landscapes over time. In studying place names as artifacts of earlier eras of settlement and migration, landscape scholars of the Berkeley School focused almost exclusively on the cataloguing, measuring, and mapping of naming patterns, similar to the way in which they plotted house and barn types (for example, Jordan, 1970; Leighly, 1978). Wilbur Zelinsky, one of Sauer's students and a reader of George Stewart, became the most prolific proponent of this approach (Zelinsky, 1967; 1980). In one of his most widely cited contributions to the field, Zelinsky (1988) documented the effects of nationalism and patriotism on the place-name landscape. He found that 25 percent of counties in the United States were named after national leaders from the past. The most frequent references were to Washington, Jackson, Lincoln, Jefferson, and Franklin.

Traditional place-name study has been criticized for its tendency to rely on the collection and description of data over theoretically guided interpretation and explanation. Zelinsky and other members of the Berkeley School advanced a 'superorganic' notion of culture, failing to study landscapes in the context of the daily social practices, relations, and struggles of people who create them (Duncan, 1980; Mitchell, 2000). In focusing on naming patterns, the field neglected to study the people behind these patterns. As Withers (2000, 533) astutely observed: 'Attention to the name alone, either on the ground or on an historical map, runs the risk of concerning itself with ends and not with means; of ignoring, or, at best, underplaying the social processes intrinsic to the authoritative act of naming.' Traditional toponymic studies said little about how social power and ideology influence the naming process. Recognizing this fact, Roberts (1993, 159) implored scholars to discover 'who had the power to leave names to posterity' and 'what values these names represent.' Myers (1996, 238) argued for examining the 'performance aspects' of place names, how naming is employed strategically in constructing and contesting identity boundaries.

Place-name study underwent a redefinition in the 1990s with the emergence of a new, critical approach to cultural landscape studies. Through its dialogue with social theory, this school re-theorized culture and landscape in significant ways. Rather than ignore the inner workings of society, scholars began focusing on the collision of social interests behind the construction of culture and cultural identities (Anderson and Gale, 1992). Landscapes were increasingly recognized as 'documents of power,' shaped by the fact that 'some social groups exert greater or lesser effects on places around them' (Matthews, 1995, 456). The landscape, rather than merely reflecting culture, participated in making certain cultural relations and

identities appear to be normal. In the words of Don Mitchell (2000, 100), landscape is a 'form of ideology,' and 'one of the chief functions of landscapes is precisely to control meaning and to channel it in particular directions.'

From the perspective of critical landscape study, place names are more than passive artifacts. They are symbolic texts embedded in larger systems of meaning and ideology that are read, interpreted, and acted upon socially by people (Duncan, 1990; Pinchevski and Torgovnik, 2002). Emphasis is placed less on the name itself and more on the cultural practice of naming, that is, how people seek to control and contest the naming process as they engage in wider economic, social, and political struggles. Kearns and Berg (2002, 285) have argued that 'names are a constitutive component of the landscape,' rather than simply 'being entities in [and on] the landscape.' As they also assert, the construction of place identities is carried out through the pronunciation of geographical names as well as their inscription into signs, documents, and maps.

Whether written or spoken, it is now understood that place naming represents a means of claiming the landscape, materially and symbolically, and using its power to privilege one world view over another. As part of the landscape, toponyms are not simply evidence of history, as suggested by traditional place-name research, but part of the ideologically driven process of visibly grounding the past into the present and framing these historical meanings as legitimate. As mentioned in the chapter's introduction, current research emphasizes the extent to which place naming is employed in constructing and institutionalizing nationalistic histories. The remainder of this chapter examines two other contexts, symbolic capital and symbolic resistance, in which people use place naming to lay claim to the landscape as a device for communicating heritage and identity.

Naming as Symbolic Capital

The term 'symbolic capital' is drawn from the work of Pierre Bourdieu (1984; 1991). Bourdieu defined culture as a 'field' in which social actors compete not only to accumulate economic capital but also symbolic capital, those practices and goods that are defined as socially distinctive, desirable, and superior (Gartman, 2002, 257). Symbolic capital contributes to the reproduction of power and privilege within the social world because it confers status, prestige, and honour upon its holder. Symbolic capital originated from Bourdieu's concern for understanding how aesthetic issues and notions of taste are used to reinforce the importance of social class beyond the sheer measures of monetary wealth. Place naming can be conceptualized as a form of symbolic capital used to associate places with consumable and exclusive visions of the past. Identification with these naming patterns serves as a source of social distinction for some people while bringing social marginalization to others.

Symbolic capital can take many forms, but the built environment is a powerful device for creating social distinction. James and Nancy Duncan (2001) have explored how place-based identity can be analyzed as a form of symbolic capital. As they found in Bedford, New York – a suburb of New York City – people go to great pains

to represent their community as distinctive and elite, often by making comparisons with other places as well as through exclusive zoning laws. According to the Duncans, heritage plays a central role in the construction of distinction in Bedford. Historical societies and preservation committees manipulate the landscape to maintain a romantic image of Bedford as a traditional rural village reflective of an era before urban capitalism, ensuring that 'landscapes are preserved so that history and community can be consumed as good taste, as symbolic capital' (Duncan and Duncan, 2001, 44).

Events in Bedford are indicative of larger societal trends. As noted by Claire Mitchell and her colleagues (2001, 285), many heritage landscapes are created around the goal of serving 'the demands of post-modern consumers to purchase symbolic capital in the form of unique products and experiences that reflect a bygone era.' As found in Bedford, many of these products and experiences commodify images of a preserved rural heritage, even though the creation of a saleable past often leads to the destruction of old landscapes. Bourdieu (1984) recognized that symbolic capital can be exchanged for and converted into economic capital (and vice versa). Yet, he also suggested that the creation of social distinction was important in gaining political power and not necessarily limited to economic gain. According to Forest and Johnson (2002, 524), political elites manipulate monuments and other places of memory as symbolic capital in their 'attempt to gain prestige, legitimacy, and influence.'

Although scholars recognize how heritage functions as symbolic capital, few studies (if any) have examined place naming in this context. Naming represents a means of appropriating or taking ownership of places. The word 'ownership' captures how the power to name can be exchanged like any commodity. For instance, it is a tradition on many American college campuses to name buildings after generous donors. 'Stadiums are especially susceptible to commodification – FedEx Field, MCI Center, Fleet Center, and Coors Field are perfect examples' (De Blij, Murphy and Fouberg, 2007, 174). In 2005, the town of Clark, Texas (population: 125) renamed itself 'DISH' in exchange for ten years of free satellite-television service for every household. Clark, Texas is just one of a growing number of small towns in America that have offered up their place identities to corporations (*Spokane Spokesman-Review*, 2005). These agreements may appear to be simply advertising stunts, but it is important to note the potential impact on collective memory. In abandoning the name Clark, residents have lost a historical connection with the family that founded the town. As asserted by Tuan (1991, 688), renaming 'has the power to wipe out the past and call forth the new.'

Officials in Clark saw their name change as a way of re-branding the town, a means of drawing attention to the community with the hope of attracting new residents and businesses. The branding of place refers to more than just selling one's name to corporations. Branding is a larger process of promotion in which places are represented as having distinctive and desirable characteristics and identities. Although the marketing of places has a long history in the United States, it has taken on greater dimensions in the post-industrial era as cities attempt to gain an aesthetic advantage over their competitors (Gold and Ward, 1994; Zukin, 1995). Creating such distinctions is often focused on promoting places around

selective and marketable historical visions or narratives (Kearns and Philo, 1993). The practice of branding is especially popular within the marketing of tourism destinations (Morgan and Pritchard, 1998).

Naming places is an important branding strategy. This is particularly the case within heritage development, which involves not only a direct commodification of the past but also, more subtly, the promotion of a 'heritage ambience' that can 'provide a strong regional or community image and hence encourage investment from both internal and external sources' (Aplin, 2002, 17). Naming participates in the manipulation and management of public images and impressions essential to the social construction of place identity. Place names are often used to draw distinctions around neighborhoods, leading to an association of certain spaces with social groups or classes (Alderman, 2002a; Berg and Kearns, 1996; Myers, 1996).

Developers in the United States are increasingly cognizant of the 'image-generating potential' of place names as they seek to attract residents, business investment, and tourists (Zelinsky, 1989, 44). This fact is perhaps no more apparent than in Las Vegas, where Raento and Douglass (2001, 14) found that a casino's name 'sets the initial tone of a property's primary identity.' Casinos associate themselves with a variety of images, but historical themes are some of the most popular. Many casino names reference real or mythical people and places from the nineteenth-century American West, a reflection of the casino's regional context and the cultural popularity of 'Western' films, television shows, and novels. Like many of these 'old West' media images, casino names valorize the exploits of white settlers (for example, Gold Rush, 49er, Westward Ho) and misrepresent, if they acknowledge at all, the experiences of Native Americans. Western names also carry connotations of uninhibited adventure and opportunity, complementing the city's latest promotional mantra of 'What Happens in Vegas Stays in Vegas.'

Attaching a well-chosen name to subdivisions, shopping centers, and apartment complexes is seen as essential to giving customers a point of social distinction, a means for them to acquire symbolic capital and a sense of sophistication and superiority. In creating such an atmosphere, developers often employ names that make connections with European (particularly British) history, even fictional literary figures. In Winterville, North Carolina, there is a subdivision named 'Canterbury' with street names drawn directly from Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*: Miller Circle, Shire Drive, Tabard Road, Friar Drive, and Merchant Circle (Figure 11.1). My discussions with homeowners in Canterbury show that while they do not connect directly with *Canterbury Tales* as a historical literary text, they identify with the name as a place signifier of exclusivity, an ironic fact given that Chaucer wrote of a pilgrimage that brings together people from different classes and walks of life.

In crafting a positive, consumable identity for a place, developers frequently choose names that 'conjure up an image of a misty, rural past' (Zelinsky, 1989, 45). Americans, like Europeans, idealize rurality and buy into images of the countryside inscribed into heritage products and places (Short, 2006). In evoking rural heritage, names are chosen that glorify traditional styles of community such as hamlet, commons, colony, cluster, square, and village (Zelinsky, 1989). These monikers carry connotations of harmonious rural ways of life in the past, even

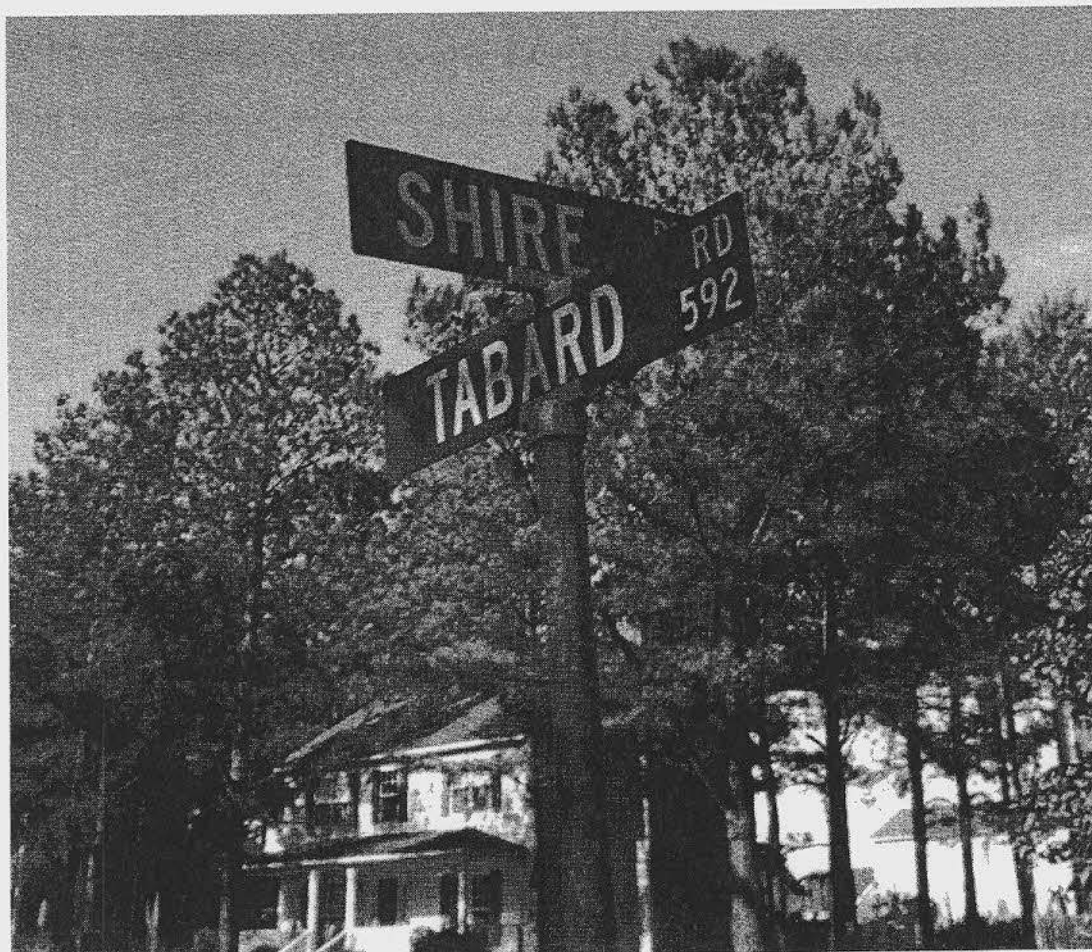

Figure 11.1 The intersection of Shire Drive and Tabard Road in the Canterbury housing subdivision in Winterville, North Carolina (USA)

though the rural idyll is actually 'an exclusionary place' (Bell, 2006, 151). This fact is quickly apparent when one realizes that many of these named places cater to, and are largely inhabited by, middle- to upper-class white Americans.

Katharyne Mitchell (1997, 169) has asserted that symbolic capital is 'predicated on both exclusivity and the ongoing process of creating outsiders.' The accumulation of symbolic capital hides 'the processes by which power relations and material inequalities are reproduced' (Manza and Sauder, 2006, 559). Indeed, Bourdieu (1991) coined the term 'symbolic violence' to capture the way in which cultural meanings and categories (including names) are imposed upon and accepted by subordinate groups as natural.

The popularity of toponymic references to 'plantation' in the United States illustrates the symbolic violence that can accompany naming when it is used to represent popular yet racially insensitive visions of the past. References to 'plantation' are common within American place naming, particularly in the American South with its strong historical connection to the plantation economy and society that

dominated the region before and after the Civil War (Aiken, 1998) (Figure 11.2). The plantation also occupies a prominent place in the region's collective memory and identity, made nostalgic in the still popular novel and film, *Gone with the Wind*. For many white southerners, references to the plantation signify prestige and there are profits to be made in evoking this history (Smith, 1982). A search of a national business directory (Reference USA, 2006) reveals that 2,253 businesses in the United States use the word 'plantation' in their name. Eighty-five percent of these businesses are located in the South. There are a host of establishment types that use the word 'plantation,' but the most frequent are: restaurants; townhouses and apartment complexes; real estate firms; hotels; motels; and bed/breakfast inns – all of which are highly dependent on communicating memorable promotional images.

References to plantation may be a positive point of identity for many whites, but the word carries different historical connotations for African-Americans, whose ancestors' forced labor ran these agricultural estates. The commemoration of the plantation lifestyle has long been used in reinforcing white supremacy, segregated race relations, and the marginalization of African-Americans (Hoelscher, 2003). Most plantation-tourism-heritage sites in the South do not acknowledge the contributions of slave labor or even mention slavery in their advertising (Butler,

Figure 11.2 The entrance of Colleton River Plantation, an exclusive gated community in Hilton Head, South Carolina (USA)

2001; Eichstedt and Small, 2002). A symbolic violence is perpetuated upon African-Americans as the historical celebration of the plantation is upheld as a legitimate identity for places.

The symbolic violence of plantation naming often goes unquestioned, such as when black southerners live in subdivisions, condominiums, and apartments named in this manner, but this is not always the case (Towns, 1996). In 1994, when a developer in Fulton County, Georgia sought to rename a public street using the word 'plantation,' a black elected official successfully derailed the proposal. The official was quoted as saying: 'A large segment of our community does not have happy memories of idyllic plantation days … I would no more vote to name a county road Auschwitz Avenue or Swastika Boulevard' (Towns, 1996, 4H). Another participant in the debate complained: 'My great-grandparents died trying to get off the plantation' (Towns, 1996, 4H). For some African-Americans, it may feel like they never left the plantation. Journalist Peter Applebome (1994, A18) recognized this irony when he wrote:

> *Once, blacks picked the long-stranded cotton and worked the fields here among the South Carolina Sea Islands. Now, they clean linens, scrape deviled crabs off dirty plates and trim azaleas on private, gated resorts with names like Shipyard Plantation, Port Royal Plantation, Wexford Plantation, Colleton River Plantation, and Hilton Head Plantation.*

The fact that many African-Americans can afford only to work, rather than live, in plantation places illustrates how toponyms, through their ability to sell a distinctive place identity, are involved in the reproduction of class and racial inequality.

Naming as Symbolic Resistance

Much of the critical place-name research recognizes that naming can be used as a tool of control, a means of inscribing and reifying certain cultural and political ideologies. In the case of heritage, there is recognition that place names can be manipulated by dominant social actors and groups in ways that allow certain historical narratives to be seen and heard while silencing other representations. Ironically, while newer approaches to cultural-landscape study emphasize the social contests often involved in the creation of place identity, toponymic study has not fully explored the negotiated and struggled-over nature of remembering the past through naming. I suggest that place naming can be studied as a site of symbolic resistance within the politics of public commemoration. In previous work, I have suggested that place naming, specifically the naming of schools and streets, functions to create 'arenas,' public spaces where social groups of varying power debate the contemporary meaning of the past, the extent to which they identify with certain notions of heritage, and how best (and where best) to carry out commemoration through the landscape (Alderman, 2002a; 2002b).

Other scholars have pointed to the need for looking at place naming in these terms. Myers (1996) complained that the limited amount of research that connected place naming to issues of power focused almost exclusively on the imposition of state or elite ideologies. As he argued, place naming – and the boundary-making that accompanies it – 'are strategies exercised both by those having a great deal of social power and by those [who] comparatively lack it' (Myers, 1996, 244). Myers advocated the analysis of place naming as a form of resistance rather than simply a mechanism of control. The use of place naming as resistance is often done subtly, such as when a marginalized group employs a competing, informal system of geographical nomenclature rather than the authorized system of naming (Yeoh, 1992). In addition to creating and using alternative names, resistance can also involve the 'use of alternative pronunciations for established names' (Kearns and Berg, 2002, 286).

Yet, subordinate groups can and do contest the power of dominant groups through formal, political means as well. In examining street naming in post-independence Singapore, Yeoh (1996) found evidence of different racial groups questioning, challenging, and even resisting the form and meaning of place names in official policy settings. As she also noted: 'The inscription of hegemonic [dominant] meanings in landscape text is hence more akin to an uneven, negotiated process of constant mediations rather than a static consensual once-and-for-all translation of a monolithic ideology into material form' (Yeoh, 1996, 304). Indeed, while theories of hegemony recognize that dominant groups or classes control the production of culture space, they also assert that this dominance is never complete and is challenged by counter-hegemonic ideologies of subordinate groups. Resistance is sometimes confrontational, but often symbolic. Symbolic resistance involves the 'appropriation of certain artefacts and significations from the dominant culture and their transformation into symbolic forms that take on new meaning and significance' for the subordinate group (Cosgrove and Jackson, 1987, 99). Place naming can be interpreted as a conduit for challenging dominant ideologies about the past as well as a means of introducing new historical meanings and narrations of identity into the landscape. Although place naming is certainly controlled and planned by the state, it can also be appropriated by marginalized groups wishing to have their political and commemorative interests seen and heard publicly. This process of being seen and heard is critical in establishing who has a right to the city and its landscapes (Mitchell, 2003).

American racial and ethnic minorities are increasingly turning to place renaming as a strategy for demanding new rights and recognition. These renaming campaigns are part of a direct political movement to challenge and change the commemoration of the past within cultural landscapes (Alderman, 2000). African-Americans have been particularly active in addressing the exclusion and misrepresentation of their achievements within traditional, white-dominated constructions of heritage. In arguing for greater public recognition of their experiences in the past, black activists have carried out a campaign of: 1) removing place names that commemorate white supremacists or purveyors of racial inequality, and 2) renaming places to celebrate black historical figures, particularly from the American Civil Rights Movement.

These name changes reflect an effort to create a heritage place identity that can assist in reconstructing the group identity of African-Americans. By naming landscapes in ways that talk about the historical importance of minorities, African-Americans seek to change the way they are valued in the present.

Removing racially insensitive place-name references has proved especially controversial. Florida's Palm Beach School Board decided to remove the name of Jefferson Davis from a middle school after several years of resistance from parents and white Civil War heritage groups (Cerabino, 2004a; 2004b). School officials and black community activists interpreted Davis, the only president of the pro-slavery, southern secessionist government called the Confederacy, as an inappropriate identity for the school and its student population. This controversy joined numerous debates in the South over the public display of Confederate symbols (Leib, Webster and Webster, 2001). Renaming the middle school became an arena for debating whether references to Davis were legitimate expressions of (white) southern heritage or symbols of the perpetration of racism upon blacks (Leib, Webster and Webster, 2001). The fact that the school was named after Davis in 1961, amid (and perhaps in reaction to) the Civil Rights Movement, did little to convince African-Americans that the school's original naming was not an attempt at the time to maintain the dominance of white rule.

As illustrated in Florida, schools are key sites in the production of culture, not only in transmitting a dominant culture to students but as places where 'cultural meanings can be resisted and contested' (Dwyer, 1993, 143). Events in New Orleans, Louisiana illustrate the importance that some African-Americans see in rewriting the historical identity of schools through renaming. In 1992, the Orleans Parish School Board passed a policy that prohibited school names honoring slave owners and others who did not respect equality. The names of many white historical figures (including the slave-holding first president of the United States, George Washington) were removed from schools and replaced with names commemorating prominent African-Americans, including Martin Luther King Jr. (Dart, 1997). In the wake of rebuilding New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina, it will be interesting to see if these challenges to white memory will endure, given the displacement of blacks from the city and the changing racial/ethnic composition of the area.

Slain civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr. holds a common yet contentious place in African-American attempts to resist the white hegemonic order and redefine the commemorative place-name landscape. By 2003, at least 730 cities and towns in the United States had named a street after King. Yet, the work of naming streets after Martin Luther King Jr. often takes place through highly public debate, exposing basic racial and political tensions within communities (Alderman, 2006). A 'reputational politics' often surrounds the street-naming process as African-Americans engage in discursive struggles to convince the larger white public of the legitimacy and resonance of King's legacy (Alderman, 2002b). One of the largest obstacles facing African-Americans is the prevailing assumption, particularly among whites, that King's historical relevance is limited to the black community, and hence renamed streets should not cut across traditional racial boundaries and penetrate the lives and place-based identities of white America. While these

Figure 11.3 Members of Coalition against Racism march along Martin Luther King Jr Drive in Greenville, North Carolina (USA)

debates about where, and where not, to locate King's memory take place between blacks and whites, they also occur within the African-American community, as activists seek to inspire and mobilize black neighborhoods rather than challenge the historical consciousness of whites (Alderman, 2003).

Place identity plays a key role in these struggles to commemorate King (Figure 11.3). Some African-Americans have refused to rename a road after the civil rights leader when they believe the street does not have a sufficiently prominent image and status. By the same token, some opposing whites believe that naming a street after King will stigmatize their street and bring a decline in property values, although there is no evidence to substantiate this (Mitchelson, Alderman and Popke, 2007). As a result, King's name is frequently (but not always) found on side streets or portions of roads located within poor, black areas of cities. The renaming of these degraded and obscure streets has, in some instances, changed the streets' symbolic meaning from being a point of African-American pride to yet another reminder of continued racial inequality.

The segregation of King's memory on the landscape would appear, at first glance, to substantiate claims that place naming remains a tool of cultural and

political control. Yet, by studying place naming as a form of symbolic resistance, even when that resistance is not successful, we begin to fully understand how public remembrance of the past is 'a field of social conflict and tension' (Graham, Ashworth and Tunbridge, 2000, 5). In addition, the debates over remembering King in America illustrate how the use of place naming as resistance is not limited to marginalized groups seeking greater public recognition. As Kearns and Berg (2002) suggested, resistance should also be thought of in terms of how hegemonic or dominant groups resist or contest counter-hegemonic attempts to claim and rewrite the landscape around alternative historical meanings. Although named streets commemorate the Civil Rights Movement as a completed part of the country's past, they speak, perhaps more importantly, to the great social struggles that African-Americans still face as they attempt to reverse the control historically exercised by whites over racial and ethnic minorities.

Concluding Remarks

Naming is used to fix the identity of places, often as part of larger renegotiations over the lines of national, regional, and racial identity. In doing so, place names can be scripted to evoke general (and even superficial) associations with the past or to honor specific historical figures. Toponyms serve, quite literally, as signposts for directing people to what is historically important. Because of the normative power of naming, place names create a material and symbolic order that allows dominant groups to impose certain meanings into the landscape and hence control the attachment of symbolic identity to people and places (Berg and Kearns, 1996). This is often done by government elites in the name of nationalism, state formation, and the creation of what Anderson (1983) famously called 'imagined communities.' Yet, the place-name landscape is inhabited by a wide array of other heritage stakeholders who use naming in different ways and for different purposes. Developers and place promoters manipulate heritage-related toponyms as 'symbolic capital.' The images of social distinction and elitism created through naming not only work to commodify the past but also assist in reinforcing unequal power relations. As illustrated by the competing meanings that surround the word 'plantation' in the American South, what is symbolic capital for many white southerners can exist, simultaneously, as symbolic violence and exclusion for African-Americans. The theme of control is important in studying the interconnections of heritage, identity, and place naming, but it is also necessary to explore the dimensions of resistance and how place naming is open to social negotiation and debate as marginalized groups, such as racial and ethnic minorities, struggle to redefine what is considered worthy of public remembrance. As illustrated through the naming of streets after Martin Luther King Jr., the politics of commemoration is not simply about convincing people to remember the past in different ways. Rather, it also requires finding suitable locations in which to do this remembering and merging heritage with place identity in progressive and positive ways.

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