

## Chapter 8

# Combating Attempts of Elision: African American Accomplishments at New Philadelphia, Illinois

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This chapter examines the ways in which individuals negotiated the complex terrain of past landscapes that were impacted by the institution of slavery and racial ideologies. Present perspectives on such past dynamics are shaped by related concepts of heritage and history. A particular social group's construction of their cultural heritage often entails a selective emphasis on specific subjects within their history. This selective process of heritage construction includes instances of elision and omission as well as those of remembrance and commemoration. In particular, within their histories, some social groups have undertaken efforts to effect an erasure of the accomplishments and self-determination of others in the context of racial strife and deployment of racial ideologies.

These dynamics are manifest in the accomplishments of Frank McWorter, an individual born into slavery in the United States in 1777, who succeeded in attaining freedom for himself and his family (Walker 1983). In 1836, McWorter also founded New Philadelphia, Illinois, the first U.S. town planned and legally registered by an African American. As this town grew as an interracial community in a region shaped by racial strife, the McWorter family also assisted other African Americans to escape bondage. New Philadelphia faced decline, however, after it was bypassed by a railroad in 1869 as a result of the impacts of structural and systemic racism.

Facets of the histories of the McWorters and New Philadelphia are examined here in relation to varying structures of heritage commemoration, including efforts in the United States to memorialize and celebrate the accomplishments of the "Underground Railroad" of persons escaping bondage in the nineteenth century. The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has also engaged in efforts to address the legacies of slavery and the need for safeguarding the tangible and intangible aspects of cultural heritage. But when examined in relation to one another, these various efforts present as much paradox as promise. The problematic characteristics of the

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concepts of culture and intangible heritage utilized by UNESCO are highlighted when comparing them to facets of African American history in the United States.

## **Aspects of Globalization and Attempted Erasure**

From the fifteenth century onward, European colonial regimes created a trans-Atlantic institution of enslavement that particularly targeted a number of societies in western regions of Africa. The trans-Atlantic slave trade had extensive, brutal impacts upon the many societies caught in its grasp and left a lasting legacy of oppression and pain. UNESCO established the "Slave Route Project" in 1993 to facilitate greater understanding of the contours, causes, and impacts of slavery's destructive legacies (UNESCO 1993). The slave trade is viewed within this perspective as a form of globalization that caused profound economic, social, and cultural disruptions impacting numerous African societies and individuals.

The UNESCO Slave Route Project works to promote greater memory, knowledge, and dialogue concerning the history and continuing impacts of that colonial institution (UNESCO 2006a). This UNESCO project thus works to overcome the "silence that has shrouded" the history of slavery (UNESCO 2006a:3). It further seeks to commemorate the intangible and tangible cultural heritage of the individuals and societies that confronted the adversities of that system of bondage (UNESCO 2006a:7). Focusing on the significance of intangible cultural heritage underscores the importance to today's communities of the histories of their predecessors' strivings to overcome such challenges and prejudices.

UNESCO undertook additional steps in 2003 to conserve and protect the diversity of cultural traditions across the globe by issuing the "Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage" (UNESCO 2003), which took effect in 2006 (UNESCO 2006b:24). Earlier efforts to protect the cultural heritage of diverse peoples worldwide had focused primarily on "tangible" expressions, such as artworks, architecture, monuments, and the built environment (Ahmad 2006; UNESCO 2003:1-2). While 84 state parties have ratified and joined in a commitment to implement this 2003 Convention, the United States has not done so (UNESCO 2007a). However, Richard Kurin (2007:10), director of the Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage and an active participant in UNESCO conferences and heritage deliberations, reported recently that U.S. officials may be considering the possibility of moving forward with ratification.

Participating members of UNESCO considered a number of factors in designing a formalized method for addressing the potential dangers facing the intangible cultural heritage of social groups around the world. A primary concern focused on the realization that nationalist movements and the global



impacts of free-market economies have often eroded and destroyed such heritage within more "traditional" cultural communities (UNESCO 2003:1). Similar clashes occurred with comparable frequency in the history of European colonial expansions in the past.

The concept of "cultural heritage" can involve destructive manifestations—not just of globalization but also of the actions of particular cultures. Nationalist movements and established nation states have often rationalized their existence and exercise of power by deploying ideologies and cultural traditions that legitimize their actions. For example, numerous decisions of the U.S. Supreme Court emphasize that ours is a nation of Judeo-Christian heritage—not Buddhist, Islamic, Cherokee, Yoruba, or otherwise (e.g., U.S. Supreme Court 1892). Similarly, the institution of slavery in the United States was explained by lawmakers in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as a necessary undertaking to fulfill a Judeo-Christian duty of civilizing non-Christian populations of captive Amerindians and Africans (Raboteau 1980). Thus, human bondage was justified as a religious imperative and a sign of social enlightenment. In blunt terms, globalization alone does not kill cultures—dominant cultures kill other cultures.

Another line of development in UNESCO's conventions and declarations has addressed the way that the cultural heritage of a particular group can be deployed for malevolent and intolerant social action. UNESCO has emphasized the importance of fundamental human rights as a baseline that will at times override the heritage claims of individual cultures. For example, Article 4 of the Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity, which was adopted in 2001, states that the "defense of cultural diversity is an ethical imperative, inseparable from respect for human dignity. It implies a commitment to human rights and fundamental freedoms, in particular the rights of persons belonging to minorities and those indigenous peoples. No one may invoke cultural diversity to infringe upon human rights guaranteed by international law, nor to limit their scope."

Similarly, the 2003 Convention recognizes as intangible cultural heritage "only those forms of cultural expression consistent with human rights" (Kurin 2007:10). Debates concerning the scope and extent of cultural relativism are also inherent in this tension between claims of human rights and cultural heritage. Anthropologists long ago established that one needs to understand a particular culture holistically, with all elements viewed relative to the other facets of that culture. But should cultural relativism be taken to mean that one cannot judge another culture from the perspective of some baseline of fundamental human rights? UNESCO's answer is a resounding "no."

I focus on such tensions because I wish to consider the intangible heritage of the descendants of individuals who lived their lives in nineteenth-century America as persons whom a dominant culture and legal structure sought to oppress. In doing so, should I invoke the basic terms of the 2003 Convention? UNESCO defines intangible cultural heritage as "the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills . . . that communities, groups and . . . individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage" (UNESCO 2003:art. 2.1). But we

should not read the 2003 Convention as asserting that all instances of "intangible cultural heritage" are unproblematic, benevolent, and to be applauded. For many members of minority groups in American history, their own cultural heritage includes their tireless fight for freedom and basic human rights in opposing the culture of those who sought to subjugate them. This merits celebration; but it also entails commemoration within a context of degraded living conditions, denial of freedom, and even sexual enslavement. Members of some communities may find their intangible cultural heritage is less defined by particular bodies of folklore and ritual than it is by commemoration of their fight for freedom against the tyrannies of another culture.

## **Histories of Adversity and Success**

The history and intangible cultural heritage of New Philadelphia, Illinois, involves such struggles for freedom. Frank McWorter's mother, Juda, was born around 1755 in one of the societies of West Africa targeted by the trans-Atlantic slave trade (Walker 1983:179). Abducted into slavery, Juda survived the horrors of the "middle passage" and was transported to a slave auction in South Carolina. George McWhorter, a plantation owner of Scots-Irish heritage, purchased Juda as an enslaved laborer and took her to his farming operation in the uplands region of South Carolina. Frank was born to Juda in 1777 on that plantation, with George McWhorter as father and owner. When Frank was a young man, George McWhorter moved his plantation operations to new land in Kentucky. In 1799, Frank married Lucy, an enslaved laborer on a neighboring plantation in Kentucky, and they started raising a family together (Walker 1983) (see below concerning Frank's change of spelling in his last name).

Frank McWorter's life history is defined by remarkable industry, sagacity, and skill in overcoming the adversities of enslavement and racism that confronted him. He accumulated funds as an enslaved laborer by renting out his time and skills after satisfying the production demands of his owner. He also later engaged in entrepreneurial projects such as starting a saltpeter mining operation in Kentucky in a period of growing demand for this valuable ingredient for the production of gunpowder. In 1817, he purchased his wife's freedom and then in 1819 his own manumission from slavery (Matteson 1964:1; Walker 1983:28-48). Manumission involved a procedure, either through a purchase contract or provisions in the last will and testament of a slave owner, to grant emancipation to a particular person. In the course of his life, Frank continually worked to accumulate funds and credits with which he purchased the freedom of his family members, obtaining manumission for no less than 16 persons with a cash expenditure that exceeded \$350,000 in today's cash values.



In 1830, he took advantage of a new opportunity in the form of land sales in the western portion of Illinois referred to as the "Military Bounty Lands" located between the Illinois and Mississippi Rivers. He purchased a parcel of 160 acres situated in Hadley Township, Pike County, Illinois, and moved his wife and those of his children who were then free to that location on the expanding Midwestern frontier (Matteson 1964; Walker 1983, 1985). Establishing a farmstead on this parcel in western Illinois in the early 1830s, Frank, Lucy, and their family developed social and working relationships with the other landowners and farmers around them, many of whom were of European American heritage (Chapman 1880:739; Simpson 1981:1; Walker 1983:106–107).

A number of Frank and Lucy's children and grandchildren remained in bondage, because the federal and state laws provided that children born to enslaved individuals would remain in bondage themselves until manumitted. Purchase of the parents' freedom did not retroactively free their children. In turn, manumission provided only limited rights and legal capacities to a free African American (Walker 1983).

The federal and state census lists in the nineteenth century worked to deploy the racial ideologies written in law by categorizing each person in a household as "white," "black," or "mulatto" (King 2006). Federal and state laws accorded different legal rights to those who qualified as white versus those who did not. As a free, manumitted African American, Frank still lacked the legal rights in Illinois to give testimony in court against a white person or to engage in sophisticated property transactions with confidence in their enforceability if challenged in court. However, he overcame these limitations in a dramatic way. He petitioned for and obtained an act of the state legislature to legally register his name as Frank McWorter (purposefully changing the spelling of his surname) and to grant him full legal rights. The public record of this 1837 legislation indicates that Frank received support from his neighbors in this petition and that he planned to found a town named Philadelphia (later called New Philadelphia) on undeveloped land that he had acquired just to the south of his farm (Illinois State Archives 1837). He wished to create this planned town so that he could sell the blocks and lots within it to obtain additional funds with which to purchase more of his family members out of bondage. It was also publicly known that he intended for this town to be a welcoming community for other free African Americans (Walker 1983:107). McWorter's strong character, industriousness, and his hopes for the development of this new town were sufficiently well known in the region to be featured in public ceremony speeches and local historical accounts in the 1870s and 1880s (Ensign 1872:54, 100; Chapman 1880:739; Grimshaw 1876:31). It was a daring and courageous undertaking in a region shaped by racial strife in this period.

New Philadelphia was planned as a community of 42 acres in size, with 20 blocks, 144 lots, and a grid pattern of streets and alleyways. The town grew from its founding in 1836 until its decline in the 1880s, with a peak population recorded in the 1865 census of 160 residents in 29 households (King 2006; Shackel et al. 2006). Over the decades of its existence, its residents were recorded

in federal and state census lists, with approximately one-third classified as black or mulatto and two-thirds classified as white. During its existence, New Philadelphia had several business operations, including a grocery, blacksmith, carpenter, wheelwright, wainwright, shoemaker, cabinetmaker, and a physician, and the town served as an agricultural service center to the surrounding farmsteads. A well-trafficked road ran along its northern edge, in an east to west path leading to the Illinois and Mississippi Rivers in either direction (Shackel et al. 2006:2–12; Walker 1983:167; Walker 1985:55–56).

The McWorters' farming operations and the town they founded were located within a region buffeted by racial tensions (Davis 1998:18; Shackel et al. 2006:2–4; Walker 1983:110–111). In the antebellum period, Hannibal, Missouri, located along the Mississippi River just 25 miles to the west of New Philadelphia, was part of a slave state and hosted an auction market for the sale of enslaved laborers. The Illinois River was just 15 miles to the east of New Philadelphia. While these two water arteries aided the value of lands in the region, providing transport modes for moving agricultural products to market, they also provided transport for bounty hunters who were known to kidnap free African American into slavery during the antebellum period (Davis 1998:289; Putnam 1909:414; Savage 1943). Illinois law recognized the rights of slave owners in other jurisdictions to seek to recapture those who escaped from bondage, and the harsh "Black Codes" of Illinois belied the state's status as a truly "free" state (Davis 1998:413; Savage 1943:312; Simeone 2000:157).

In addition to the dangers of nearby Missouri, free African Americans in this region saw abolitionist Elijah Lovejoy shot dead and his office and printing press burned in 1837 by a proslavery mob in Alton, Illinois, not far to the south (Simon 1994). The following year abolitionist and pro-slavery factions clashed in Griggsville, Illinois, just 13 miles to the east (Chapman 1880:516). African Americans and European Americans in nearby Quincy and Jacksonville worked to help abolitionist causes and to aid those escaping slavery as they traversed Illinois on their way to Canada (Savage 1943; Turner 2001). Members of the McWorter family, who owned parcels surrounding and within New Philadelphia, were also reported in oral histories to have aided African Americans escaping from bondage (Turner 2001:vii; Walker 1983:149).

Local newspapers in communities surrounding New Philadelphia published reports of the daily economic and social events that occurred within that community, but neither they nor historical studies of New Philadelphia and its residents reveal any overt racial violence within the town in these antebellum and postwar decades of the nineteenth century. Likewise, archaeological investigations to date show no evidence of physical destruction in the town that might be attributed to racial action.

Archaeological studies seek to determine whether the town was developed as planned in the 1836 plat filed by Frank McWorter in the local courthouse (Shackel et al. 2006). The town may have developed in a way that did not fully utilize all of the 42 acres of planned blocks and lots, and those areas that were developed may have been constructed in ways that departed from the



original drawn plan. Newspaper reports from the period of the town's existence indicate that residents likely did not follow that design in detail but built residential parcels and businesses in a way that crossed the planned lot lines recorded in the original plat (*Barry Adage* 1876:3). Surveys and excavations have thus far shown that the house and business sites associated with European Americans and African Americans were interspersed with one another, rather than being spatially segregated into different areas within the town, a notable indication of peaceful coexistence (Hargrave 2006; Shackel et al. 2006). The archaeological remains of objects used in daily life within households, such as the ceramic housewares obtained and used by each family, are also similar across households of both African Americans and European Americans within the town (Shackel et al. 2006).

The impact of racial categories and social difference can be seen in other aspects of the town's history, however. The community was served by two separate cemeteries, each close to the town, with one used primarily by African American families, including the McWorters, and the other mostly by European American families. Until at least 1874, the children of town residents were educated in segregated schools located within the community. They were educated in a new, integrated schoolhouse after 1874 when a new building was erected close to the town and then continued in operation through the early 1900s. Preliminary archaeological studies also indicate that there may have been different dietary and culinary traditions across the households of town residents. These patterns may have been correlated with differences in the regional and ethnic backgrounds from which town residents had emigrated when coming to New Philadelphia (Shackel et al. 2006).

While no overt acts of racial violence were reported within New Philadelphia during the town's existence, that community was impacted in a profound way by structural and systemic influences of racial ideologies. Such structural forms of racism have been characterized by analysts as forms of "aversive" racism, in which members of a dominant social group channel economic opportunities and social resources away from individuals targeted by their racial prejudices (Gaertner and Dovidio 1986; Kleinpenning and Hagendoorn 1993; Kovel 1970). Such aversive racism can be seen in events that started in the late 1850s and culminated in the 1869 construction of a railroad that bypassed New Philadelphia.

The effect of the bypass was dramatic. Businesses and residents moved out of the town in the following years, with the town's population dropping steadily (Simpson 1981:1; Walker 1983:165–167; Walker 1985:56). By 1885, an order was entered in the courthouse records that vacated a large portion of New Philadelphia's land from holding the status of a town, with public rights of way, streets, and lots lines, and converted that land into large parcels for agricultural use. Local history publications in 1872 and 1880 reported on the town's demise, with observations that the "railroad did not run through the town, which has greatly ruined its trade" (Ensign 1872:10) and the fact that "the railroad passing it a mile distant, and other towns springing up, has killed it" (Chapman 1880:740–741).

In the many varied histories of railroads constructed across segments of the United States, there have been a multitude of reasons why one town became a depot and expanded, while others were bypassed and often withered away (Conger 1932:285; Davis 1998:368–370; Jenks 1944:14). As one historian of railroad histories observed: “Every enterprising hamlet had visions of becoming an important commercial city if at least one railroad could be built through the community” (Carlson 1951:103). A disturbing pattern also emerges from these histories: towns and settlements that were known to be the communities of African American families and businesses were typically bypassed by new railways of the Midwest in the nineteenth century (Cha-Jua 2000:42).

Any of a number of rational business reasons often led to a railroad being built along a route that bypassed or avoided the location of a particular town. If a town was located next to significant topographic features, such as deep ravines, broad river crossings, or high ridges, it would often be more cost-effective to route the railroad so as to avoid those areas (Cootner 1963:484; Vose 1857:32). A town might be bypassed because other nearby towns successfully lobbied the railroad company to move the route in their direction so that they could enjoy the economic benefits of becoming depot towns. In turn, the residents of some towns might prefer to avoid the social and aesthetic impacts of a railroad being built through their community, no matter what future economic losses might be predicted as a result of such avoidance.

I have not found any *direct, documentary* evidence of an overtly expressed decision to bypass New Philadelphia due to racial bias. However, after a thorough study of the corporate records of the railroad companies involved in building the railway that bypassed the town, and critical examination of numerous reports in regional newspapers concerning the railroad planning and construction, it is clear that New Philadelphia was bypassed because of the impacts of aversive racism. A large body of contextual evidence points to no rational business reason for the railroad company to have bypassed the town. In fact, the arc of the railroad route running to the north, around New Philadelphia, followed a path that was distinctly *not* optimal for rational business reasons. Of the extensive body of evidence, analysis, and pursuit of alternative hypotheses undertaken in evaluating the reasons for this event, a summary of the principal evidence and findings is provided here. In view of such contextual evidence, and the absence of proof for a rational business reason for bypassing the town, the most persuasive explanation of this incident focuses on the structural and systemic impacts of racial ideologies and biases.

Planning for the construction of a railroad to link Hannibal, Missouri, with Naples, Illinois, began by the 1850s and gained momentum with the formation of the Pike County Railroad Company (PCRC) in 1857 (Grant 2004:22; PCRC Records 1857–1863; *Pittsfield Union*, 18 May 1853:3). This new railway across Pike County would link up two existing railroad routes that had been constructed earlier with federal and state subsidies (Fishlow 1971:190–191). One subsidized rail project had connected Hannibal with the city of St. Joseph on the Missouri River to the west, thus linking Hannibal by rail to an expanding



western frontier of settlement and agricultural production (*Alton Telegraph & Democratic Review* 1849:3; Cochran 1950:55–57). Another subsidized project had linked the towns of Springfield, Jacksonville, and Meredosia in Illinois, and that rail was then extended to a terminus at Naples, along the Illinois River just opposite the border of Pike County (Grant 2004:7–12; Corliss 1934:19). Government subsidization of such railroad construction had lost popularity after those first projects were completed with extensive cost overruns (Carlson 1951:100; Davis 1998:230). Later construction of railroads in various segments and regions would have to be undertaken through private holding companies that received very basic state charters and obtained funding subscriptions through stockholders and investors (Dobbin 1994:23–24; Fishlow 1971:190–191; Riegel 1923:154–156). The PCRC was formed for just that purpose.

Although called the Pike County Railroad Company, this commercial entity was dominated by the business interests of enterprises centered in Hannibal (Chapman 1880:904–905; PCRC Records, 14 February 1857, 4 June 1860, 4 June 1862). In 1857, that city was situated within a slave state and hosted a local marketplace in which African Americans were sold as laborers in lifelong bondage. Construction of the Pike County Railroad would make Hannibal an interregional hub linking the Missouri River valley to the west with central Illinois and other transport connections to Chicago, Buffalo, Toledo, and market centers in the east (Grant 2004:22; *Hannibal Daily Courier*, 15 January 1878:1). The city of Hannibal owned the largest share of stock in the PCRC and the company's board of directors was dominated by entrepreneurs based in that city. After initial efforts toward planning, designing, and surveying the railroad route over a few years, the PCRC was reorganized in 1863 as the Hannibal and Naples Railroad Company (HNRC), which was again dominated by business interests in Hannibal (Chapman 1880:904–905; HNRC Records, 12 February 1863, 4 August 1863).

The route of the railroad was largely planned and surveyed in 1857 and that route was described in a final surveyor's report submitted to the PCRC at the end of that year (PCRC Records, 21 August 1857, 29 December 1857). Progress on the project was interrupted by economic difficulties in 1857 and then by the onset of the Civil War (Cootner 1963:499; Grant 2004:22; PCRC Records 1857–1863). Construction efforts were taken up after conclusion of the Civil War, in 1868 and 1869, using the original survey plans (HNRC Records 1868–69). Route planning for railroads generally followed fairly predictable guidelines for keeping costs to a minimum. The greatest expense items in railroad construction involved the linear feet of roadbed to be graded and built up and the linear feet of iron rails to traverse the designated route (Grant 2004:21; HNRC Records, 21 August 1868). It is important to note that wherever possible, railroad engineers sought to take a straight route from one terminus point to the next, while avoiding topographic features that would require climbing to higher elevations or descending into ravines (Cleeman 1880:12–13; Jervis 1861:48; Webb 1917:3–5). The expense, for

example, of crossing small streams with culverts was very minor compared to the primary expense of the linear distance of iron rails and roadbed (Cleeman 1880:29–31, 44–60).

The route planned for the railroad across Pike County generally followed these guidelines, until it reached the vicinity of New Philadelphia. An 1897 map of Pike County shows the railroad route that runs east to west from Naples, on the Illinois River, to Hannibal, on the Mississippi River (Fig. 8.1). The name of New Philadelphia did not appear on this map, because it no longer existed as a town at the time of this 1897 publication. New Philadelphia was located where the letters “de” in the name “Arden” appear on this map, approximately mid-way on an east-to-west line between the towns of New Salem and Barry. The depot communities and stations of Baylis, Cool Bank, and Arden that are shown on the map did not exist until after the railroad was constructed in 1869. What was first constructed as the “Hannibal and Naples Railroad” bears the name of the “Wabash” line on this map, for the company that operated trains along the line at that time. Although Pittsfield was a commercial center and the county seat in the 1850s and 1860s, that town had been unable to lobby the PCRC and HNRC to direct the main route from Naples to Hannibal



Fig. 8.1 This excerpt from “Rand, McNally & Company’s New Business Atlas Map of Illinois,” published in 1897 (Chicago, Illinois), shows the route of the Hannibal and Naples Railroad, labeled as the Wabash line on this map, across Pike County Illinois. The town of New Philadelphia was located between the towns of New Salem and Barry, in the area marked by a black rectangle on this map



through their community. Instead, a small connecting rail was built to link Pittsfield to the main railway line crossing Pike County (Ensign 1872:7; Grant 2004: 22; HNRC Records, 2 June 1870).

The PCRC and HNRC plans for the rail route took a sensible, low-cost approach by running along the level ground of the Illinois River valley from Naples down south to a point of relatively low topography, where it crossed the river and proceeded due west toward the existing town of Griggsville (PCRC Records, 29 December 1857). The overall surveyor's plan was to then proceed east to west along flat topography from Griggsville, to New Salem, to Barry, and then on to a point opposite Hannibal on the Mississippi River (PCRC Records, 29 December 1857). Yet, the map shows that between New Salem and Barry the route circled to the north and bypassed the existing town of New Philadelphia, which would have otherwise fallen directly along that east-to-west line.

Was there a significant topographic feature at or near New Philadelphia that prompted this bypass? The answer is "no." The topography runs fairly level in a gradual line from New Salem (at 784 feet elevation above average sea level) to New Philadelphia (732 feet elevation) to Barry (712 feet elevation) (U.S.G.S. 2007). A shallow stream bed existed just to the west of New Philadelphia, called Kiser Creek. Yet, this creek would have been crossed easily and without significant expense by building small-scale culverts. The company records of PCRC and HNRC, as well as newspaper reports about the construction and later operation of the railroad, do not indicate that Kiser Creek was prone to flooding or otherwise presented a topographic challenge (PCRC Records 1857–63; HNRC Records 1863–70).

The expense of building a culvert over a streambed near New Philadelphia would have been minimal compared to the significant increase in costs incurred by the railroad company in extending the route in a several mile arc to the north, only to turn back to the south for several miles to continue on to Barry and the east-to-west line to Hannibal. Those extra linear feet of iron rail and roadbed were increased even more by a significant rise and fall in elevation along that detour of the route (Cootner 1963:484; Vose 1857:32). At the location where a depot town named Baylis appears at the northernmost point on that arc, the elevation increases to 863 feet, a rise of over 150 feet from the elevation of Barry (Fig. 8.1) (*Barry Adage* 1876:2; U.S.G.S. 2007). In addition to significantly inflating the construction costs in linear feet of iron and roadbed, this elevation later required the companies operating the freight trains on this route to maintain a helper locomotive near Hannibal that would assist in pulling trains over the high point of Baylis (*Barry Adage* 1876:3; *Barry Adage* 1877:1). Such helper locomotives were very expensive to operate, as they were detached after getting the freight train over the summit of Baylis, then returned to wait near Hannibal for the next freight train (*Barry Adage* 1876:3; *Barry Adage* 1877:1; Cootner 1963:484; Wellington 1901:601–604). This happened frequently, as the traffic flow was principally from west to east, moving agricultural and livestock products to market centers farther to the east.

Did the railroad line detour to the north because other towns along that route lobbied the railroad to become depot stations and perhaps plied the company with funds to compensate for the construction expense? The answer is "no." There were no towns in existence along that route when the railroad was built. Baylis and other towns along that stretch were created as depots *after* the rail was constructed.

Was there a large-scale landowner who held land along that northern arc and lobbied the railroad to divert the route for his own profit? The answer, again, is "no." That arc of railroad route traversed the land holdings of over a dozen smaller scale landowners, none of whom appear in the histories of this region to have operated as a local real-estate baron (*Barry Adage* 1876: 3; Chapman 1880:641–642; Ensign 1872:10; Pike County Deed Records 1865: 247–248). Nor is there any evidence that the railroad company received any payments from those landowners for conveyance of the railroad's right-of-way across their parcels. The strips of land for the railroad to cross those parcels were conveyed through simple, contingent deeds that would become null and void if the railroad was never constructed (Pike County Deed Records 1865:247–248).

One might ask whether members of the McWorter family or other prominent African American families living in or near New Philadelphia attempted to lobby the railroad company to make that town a depot along the planned rail route. Frank McWorter died in 1854, but his wife, adult sons, and other prominent African American residents could have undertaken such lobbying efforts (Chapman 1880:752; Ensign 1872: 23, 54, 58). For example, Frank's son, Solomon, was a prominent entrepreneur, profiled in a local history published in 1872 as owning over 500 acres of farm lands and working successfully in raising crops and livestock for sale (Ensign 1872: 54). Yet no evidence has been uncovered to date to show that such lobbying efforts were undertaken. The same concept of aversive racism that explains how a Hannibal-dominated railroad company could be motivated to bypass New Philadelphia also provides a sense of why African American residents of that locality would not have much reason to try to lobby and negotiate with that company.

Several central lessons can be learned from these histories of the McWorters and New Philadelphia. One lesson focuses on the histories of oppression, racism, and attempted erasures undertaken by European Americans in the past and the continuing impacts of those legacies in the present (Leone et al. 2005; Shackel 2003). In renewed efforts to look unflinchingly at such instances of malevolent conduct by European Americans, one can demand that these acts of racism and attempted destruction of communities and lives not be forgotten but enter into the preserved heritage of that place and those communities (now dispersed). Efforts today to combat the continuing influences and distortions of racial ideologies and structures of oppression are enhanced by focusing on and condemning the reprehensible acts of earlier generations. Yet, within this perspective, one primarily focuses on the acts and determinations of European Americans. The lives and communities of African Americans are seen largely as victims at the hands of others.



Another perspective focuses on the struggles for freedom and successes of African Americans in combating racism, expropriation, and oppression (Leone et al. 2005; Shackel 2003). Frank McWorter's life story is exemplary of such successes in overcoming adversities through incredible acts of industry, skill, and determination. As another example, after the railroad bypassed New Philadelphia and the town's population began to wane, Solomon McWorter adapted to the new economic conditions by driving 100 head of his cattle several miles to the depot at Barry to ship them out by rail (*Barry Adage* 1873: 4). The other African American families who departed from New Philadelphia similarly pursued new opportunities through their own acts of self-determination (Walker 1983: 169).

While the impact of the railroad detour brought New Philadelphia to an end as a town, the legacies of that community and the McWorter family were not forgotten. Numerous descendants of those families, as well as historians working at the local, regional, and national scales, have contributed to recording, maintaining, and celebrating the heritage of those past lives and community. These efforts have included publications such as those of Ensign (1872), Grimshaw (1876), Chapman (1880), Matteson (1964), Simpson (1981), and Walker (1983, 1985). In 1988, Juliet Walker, an historian and McWorter descendant, succeeded in placing Frank McWorter's grave site, located within the African American cemetery close to New Philadelphia, on the National Register of Historic Places (Shackel et al. 2006: 2–24). In doing so, Walker achieved a remarkable success. Only two other grave sites in Illinois have been recognized by the National Register of Historic Places: those of Abraham Lincoln and Stephen Douglas. Moreover, in 2005, the New Philadelphia collaborative archaeology project that I codirect with Paul Shackel and Terry Martin succeeded in placing the entire town site of New Philadelphia on the National Register of Historic Places (Shackel et al. 2006: 2–25). Thus, the past acts of overt and aversive racism that sought to erase the accomplishments of Frank McWorter and the residents of New Philadelphia did not succeed in attaining such an elision of those vital facets of American history.

## Concepts of Heritage and the Paradox of Culture

When comparing frameworks for recognizing histories and heritage in the United States with the approaches taken by UNESCO projects, one finds points of divergence and a number of paradoxical operational mechanisms. For example, UNESCO's 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage privileges oral histories and related oratory performances over the tangible resources of documentary records and material culture that embody the same subjects and expressions. In contrast, the National Park Service (NPS) of the federal government in the United States views oral histories as only a tentative, first step toward the compilation of evidence that would support

historical recognition of a particular location's role in aiding individuals escaping slavery in the antebellum years (NPS 2007: pt. F). In doing so, the NPS follows the federal legislation that sponsored that agency's investment in such heritage sources (Public Law 105-203). The NPS and this enabling legislation emphasize the importance of tangible, documentary evidence of such activities as a proper basis for historical recognition of a particular location and its built environment.

The heritage of the McWorters includes long-established oral testimony that Frank and his family aided individuals who were escaping slavery in the antebellum years. Western Illinois was traversed by many persons escaping bondage, as they traveled from more southern locations up through Illinois to points along the Great Lakes and transit into Canada where they could be free of the fear of bounty hunters. Juliet Walker's excellent study of the history of the McWorter family provides persuasive details of the oral history reports that the McWorters aided escapees in their home, which served as a "safe house" (Turner 2001:vii; Walker 1983:149). Yet, the house in which Frank McWorter lived no longer survives above ground, and no documentary evidence from his day has yet been revealed to corroborate these oral histories. Using the guidelines of evidentiary emphasis provided by the NPS, should one disregard this history of aid to escaping slaves and of resistance against an immoral institution of bondage?

The NPS is sensitive to many issues concerning the history of African American resistance to slavery. For example, NPS guidelines for those exploring local histories of the Underground Railroad recognize that "the majority of assistance to runaways came from slaves and free blacks, and the greatest responsibility for providing shelter, financial support and direction to successful runaways came from the organized efforts of northern free blacks" (NPS 2007: pt. E). Those guidelines further observe that, by definition, the escape routes and the activities of the Underground Railroad were "clandestine so information about sites and routes was kept secret or not widely distributed" (NPS 1998:1). Nonetheless, when addressing proposals to commemorate particular instances of these past endeavors, the NPS focuses on anchoring such events to particular "sites" and "properties" supported by tangible, documentary evidence (NPS 2007: pt. F), and not upon the oral histories that may speak more to networks of people and their moral commitments.

With such a focus on extensive documentary evidence and surviving buildings related to past safe house operations of the Underground Railroad, the NPS programs tend to place greater emphasis on the heritage of abolitionist operations conducted by European Americans. Many historical houses and properties recognized today within the United States are related to the history of such abolitionist societies and prominent European Americans, rather than being the stories of free African Americans and fellows in bondage who assisted individuals in their escape to freedom. In the region of New Philadelphia, one sees analogous elision and biased emphasis in the histories of Hannibal, Missouri. Historical exhibits in Hannibal today speak hardly at all of the city's past role in slavery, its deployment of racial ideologies, and past resistance by African



Americans. Instead, one is confronted at every turn with the story of Samuel Clemens, who, in his literary efforts as the author Mark Twain, spoke out against slavery (Dempsey 2003).

Ideally, one might look at the provisions of the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage as a better vehicle for commemorating facets of the heritage and oral histories of the McWorter family and New Philadelphia. But there is an impediment to the fact that the United States, like the United Kingdom, has rarely ratified such UNESCO conventions in the past 12 years (Alleyne 2003:25; Jones and Coleman 2005:36). Such conventions, declarations, and resolutions of UNESCO only have effect to the extent that they are ratified, explicitly adopted, and implemented by member states (Jones and Coleman 2005:76). Yet, over the past two decades, nations such as the United States have advocated significant restraint in the scope of UNESCO undertakings, while other countries have pushed for progressive programs like the 2003 Convention on intangible heritage. The result has been that the United States and the United Kingdom have chosen not to ratify conventions put forward by UNESCO and have thereby made those conventions inapplicable within their own territories. As Phillip Jones and David Coleman (2005:73) observe, this has become a "permanent reality of UNESCO at work, an organisation unable to afford its view of itself."

The 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage provides that member states ratifying and implementing its provisions should compile an inventory of instances of intangible cultural heritage to be recognized, commemorated, and safeguarded within their territories (UNESCO 2007b). As a start for this process, the 2003 Convention incorporated by reference the intangible cultural heritage entities listed as qualifying under the "Proclamation of Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity" that was initiated in 1998 (Bouchenaki 2007:107; UNESCO 2007b). Member states of UNESCO were free to submit candidates to this list of masterpieces and an international jury was created to review and approve such proposals (UNESCO 2007c). Within the framework of this inventory of masterpieces, "nineteen forms of cultural spaces or expression were proclaimed 'Masterpieces of Oral and Intangible Heritage' by the Director-General of UNESCO in May 2001, another set of twenty-eight 'Masterpieces' gained international recognition in November 2003, and forty-three in 2005" (Bouchenaki 2007:107). Given the 2003 Convention's incorporation of this inventory of masterpieces, one would assume that those proclaimed examples "provide a useful indication of the types of intangible heritage that different Member States wish to safeguard" under the Convention (Bouchenaki 2007:107). If nothing else, the representatives of the United States have been consistent: they chose not to participate in this "Proclamation of Masterpieces," and that inventory includes no instances of "Oral or Intangible Heritage of Humanity" within the United States (UNESCO 2007c).

The consistent refusal by the United States and the United Kingdom since the 1980s to participate in the activities of UNESCO may have some limited,

rhetorical benefits for that international organization. UNESCO was created in 1945 with the mission of disseminating information and educational efforts to communicate the goals, perspectives, and principles of the United Nations (UN) worldwide to combat intolerance, prejudice, and racial ideologies (Alleyne 2003). UNESCO's operations were constrained, however, by the power given to member states of the UN, many of which could choose not to ratify proposed undertakings of UNESCO. The influence of member states of the UN over the operations of UNESCO led to a series of criticisms of the latter organization, with some analysts condemning it as a mechanism for "recolonization" and global exercises of white supremacy in the late twentieth century (Jones and Coleman 2005:15; Mills 1997:36-37, 73-75). Such criticisms lose persuasiveness, however, when one sees numerous UNESCO conventions ratified and implemented by many countries in South America, Europe, Asia, and Africa, while the United States and the United Kingdom abstain from participation.

Such abstention by influential and wealthy industrialized nations contradicts accusations that a global conspiracy exists that employs UNESCO as a tool of white, capitalist supremacy in the manner proposed by critics such as Charles Mills (1997). However, by withholding participation and the contribution of resources, these wealthy member states severely constrain the success of UNESCO's programs. "The typical interplay between western governments calling for program restraint and governments from the south advocating program expansion assumed ritualised status long ago, the low points of the organisation's effectiveness and credibility being reached when commitments were wide and resources severely constrained" (Jones and Coleman 2005:73). Thus, one paradox facing UNESCO is the contrast of program aspirations with resource deficits. Another dilemma arises from the concepts of agency and culture frequently incorporated in UNESCO's conventions and proclamations.

Since its creation in 1945, UNESCO has worked to combat concepts of race and racial ideologies (Alleyne 2003). In related efforts, UNESCO has advocated proper regard for individual cultures worldwide and has promoted multicultural tolerance by emphasizing that diverse "cultures" and "ethnicities" should be treated with respect (Lentin 2004:76). Yet, in doing so, UNESCO conventions and resolutions have often incorporated a concept of culture in which individuals are passive actors shaped by their cultural traditions. As Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (2004:58) has observed, the concepts of cultural traditions incorporated in the 2003 Convention on intangible heritage view individual practitioners as "carriers, transmitters, and bearers of traditions, terms which connote a passive medium, conduit, or vessel, without volition, intention, or subjectivity." This is a fairly outdated view of the basic character of cultural belief systems and traditions, in which such traditions are viewed as static and unchanging, all-encompassing, and as shaping and directing the conduct of individuals to such a degree that actors lack personal agency or capacities for innovation and self-determination. Such a static concept of culture is particularly



ill-suited to addressing the heritage of individuals who undertook, through their own initiative and ingenuity, to combat the oppressive conduct of a dominant culture that sought to subjugate them.

Rather than viewing individual agency as part of the internal engine of cultural traditions, UNESCO conventions and declarations largely cast individual rights as a counterpoint to the sanctity and respect to be afforded to particular cultures. In this vein, the 2001 Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity includes a specific provision emphasizing the importance of "a commitment to human rights and fundamental freedoms, in particular the rights of persons belonging to minorities," with the caveat that particular cultural traditions and heritage should be overridden in specific cases where those traditions violate the basic human rights of individuals (UNESCO 2001:art. 4). When one views the 2001 Declaration and the 2003 Convention together, condemnation of a culture's past practice of enslavement and commemoration of individual acts of resistance against bondage would be addressed in an abstract manner at best. The 2003 Convention does not provide a vehicle for commemorating the self-initiative of individuals resisting a dominant culture's attempts to violate basic human rights. At best, the 2001 Declaration would operate to disallow any attempt by an interest group in the United States that sought a UNESCO imprimatur for their desire to commemorate, rather than condemn, the institution of slavery in America's past.

The potential for cultural heritage claims within the United States remains hypothetical, because the United States has not yet ratified and participated in such UNESCO conventions and declarations. However, the same tensions will be present for minority social groups within other nations that have ratified the 2003 Convention and are now seeking to implement its provisions. As Richard Kurin (2007:13) observes, it will be unfortunate if nations participating in the 2003 Convention on intangible heritage simply appoint a government agency within their territory to inventory and safeguard those cultural traditions that the *state* deems worthy of attention. UNESCO and participating nations can best fulfill the goal of respecting such traditions of intangible cultural heritage by providing *citizens* an active voice in the process of implementing the 2003 Convention. This is particularly important because "[i]n many countries around the world, minority cultural communities do not see government as representing their interests—particularly when it comes to their living cultural traditions and their vitality as living, dynamic communities" (Kurin 2007:13).

## Conclusion

Recognition of the significance of intangible cultural heritage raises the importance to today's communities of understanding the histories of how their predecessors strove to overcome past challenges and prejudices and the

ways in which past actors confronted obstacles, failures, opportunities, and successes. The 2003 Convention emphasizes the importance of safeguarding particular facets of heritage to ensure that they do not disappear from the consciousness of current and future generations. For some aspects of the history and heritage of African Americans, their legacies of self-determination and resistance against racism will be subverted if the subjects of past and present racism in America are elided from national discourse. Yet, attempts to effect such an erasure are currently underway in national political debates in the United States. Those commentators who advocate a "color-blind" society in which race is no longer a consideration often seek a cessation of debates about the continuing impacts of past institutions of bondage and racism in America. Countervailing currents of commemoration and elision clash once again, with implications for both yesterday's heritage and the vitality of living communities.

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## Preface

This volume examines international cases where heritage is complicated by issues of ephemerality, reiterative performance, and local, regional, and national interests. The essays herein were first presented in spring 2007 at a conference organized by the Collaborative for Cultural Heritage and Museum Practices (CHAMP) at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Funding was generously provided by the Office of the Dean of the College of Fine and Applied Arts, the Department of Landscape Architecture, the Department of Anthropology, and the Center for Global Studies. We would like to express our gratitude to these sponsors and to our editor at Springer, Teresa Krauss. Teresa has enabled this second volume in our series on cultural heritage which began with *Cultural Heritage and Human Rights* (2007).

The introductory essay (Ruggles and Silverman) in this volume provides a history of the expansion of heritage discourse from an object-centered practice to one that includes the intangible dimension of lived human experience. Its bibliography is followed by an appendix that contains a list of the conventions and documents pertinent to the evolution of the UNESCO Intangible Heritage Convention of 2003. The subsequent essays address the themes of voice and performance (Sather-Wagstaff, Wong, and Gandhi and Gandhi), landscape and space (Conan, Fennell, Keller, and Ruggles and Sinha), and memory (Fennell, Keller, Sather-Wagstaff, Gandhi and Gandhi, and Salomon and Peters). The volume concludes with explorations of new technologies and media (Graham and Sather-Wagstaff).

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