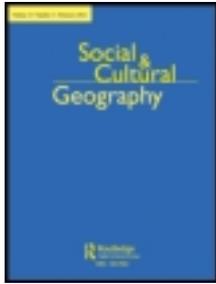


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Street naming and the politics of belonging: spatial injustices in the toponymic commemoration of Martin Luther King Jr

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Although the critical turn in place name study recognizes the central and contested place that toponyms hold in people's lives and identity struggles, little work has explicitly analyzed place naming rights in terms of social justice, citizenship, and belonging. We introduce readers to the naming of streets for slain civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr and use two brief case studies from the southeastern USA (Statesboro, Georgia and Greenville, North Carolina) to discuss the barriers that hinder the creation of a landscape that truly reflects the teachings of King. Naming opponents, sometimes with the (un)witting cooperation of black activists, impose spatial, scalar limits on the rights of African Americans to participate in the street naming process and to appropriate the identity of streets outside of their neighborhoods, even though challenging historically entrenched patterns of racial segregation and marginalization is exactly the purpose of many street naming campaigns. The case of King streets prompts us to think about place naming as a mechanism of spatial (in)justice, demonstrating the fundamental role that geography plays in constituting and structuring the processes of discrimination or equality.

Key words: spatial justice, place name, toponymy, Martin Luther King, African American, belonging.

Introduction

Place names or toponyms play an important but uneasy role in the study of geography. After all, who among us has not expressed anger over the persistent stereotypical image that geography is a simplistic field concerned largely with physiographic description and the

rote memorization of capitals and other place names (Floyd 1971; Murphy 2007)? However, scholars long ago established the broader analytical value of place names and their capacity 'to provide clues as to the historical and cultural heritage of places and regions' (Kearns and Berg 2002: 284). With an emphasis on classifying and mapping the

spatial distribution of landscape artifacts, traditional cultural geography used place name patterns to reconstruct the direction and timing of human migrations, the location of past settlements, the original vegetation of areas, the boundaries of vernacular or perceptual regions, and the contours of national and regional identity and commemoration (e.g. Leighly 1978; Raitz 1973; Waibel 1943; Zelinsky 1980, 1988). Yet, a focus simply on naming patterns does not fully capture the naming process and 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.

Over the past several years, geographers have examined the social processes to which Withers refers and situated ‘the study of toponymy within the context of broader debates in critical human geography’ (Rose-Redwood et al. 2010: 455). Newer toponymic approaches stress the cultural politics of naming, paying close attention to who controls the naming process (and conversely who does not) as well as the cultural and political world views that are given voice (and made silent) through the place name landscape. Place names are more than innocent spatial references or passive artifacts; they are embedded in social power relations and struggles over the identities of places and people (Berg and Vuolteenaho 2009; Kearns and Berg 2002). Much of the scholarship has focused on place names in the context of nationalism and (post)colonialism and how political elites and public authorities within countries use the toponymic process—particu-

larly commemorative street naming—to erase signs of earlier political and ideological regimes and to advance new notions of national identity and memory (Azaryahu 1997; Azaryahu and Kook 2002; Guyot and Seethal 2007; Light 2004; Nash 1999). However, as geographers have also noted, the rewriting of the name landscape is an ‘uneven, negotiated process of constant mediations’ as social actors and groups of varying power question, reinterpret, and even challenge the form and meaning of place names (Yeoh 1996: 304). In outlining a new agenda for place name research, Rose-Redwood (2011) stressed the importance of analyzing place naming rights and the ongoing privatization of these rights as part of the neoliberalization and commercialization of the landscape. He noted how the right to name a place—including parks, schools, and streets—is increasingly controlled and exclusionary in today’s society, thus limiting the ability of the broader community to claim and use those public spaces and their names as sites of social life and expression (Rose-Redwood et al. 2010).

In summary, critical place name scholars recognize the central and contested place that toponyms hold in people’s lives and their struggles over identity and rights, understood here as not only the legal authority to name a place but also the broader rights of people to participate in the production of place and to have their cultural identities and histories recognized publicly. Toponyms, like all place representations, are expressive and constitutive of the politics of citizenship, conferring a greater degree of belonging to certain groups over others, while also serving as sites for battles to widen the ‘distribution of citizenship’ and the use of space (Dunn 2003). Although it is true that ‘critical place-name scholars have typically focused on the most

dramatic political conflicts over place naming' (Rose-Redwood and Alderman 2011: 3), few have analyzed toponyms and place naming rights explicitly in terms of the struggle for citizenship and social justice. This is surprising given the important role that words and names play in the circulation of moral attributes and the 'distribution of rights' (Peteet 2005: 154). With calls to place social justice at the center of landscape analysis (e.g. Mitchell 2003), it is especially important to understand how place naming rights and toponymic practices work ideologically to disenfranchise or empower historically marginalized groups as they make claims for public space, political legitimacy and what landscape scholars refer to as the 'politics of belonging' (e.g. Alderman and Modlin forthcoming; Schein 2009). Our objective in this study is to identify a kind of oppositional politics that animates struggles over belonging in an effort to elucidate broader political struggles around place identity and visibility, toponyms, and African American identity. As Schein (2009) has argued, such an oppositional politics of belonging focuses not only on moments of exclusion but also points of intervention, where marginalized groups might claim citizenship and, in this case, struggle to create a more inclusive and just place name system.

A case study of streets named for slain civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr offers an opportunity to explore place naming as a cultural arena for racial and ethnic minority struggles to reshape the identity of landscapes, the contours of social memory, and the larger sense of political membership and social inclusion communicated within the public realm. King's namesakes are more than just monuments to the USA Civil Rights Movement. They are the materialization of ongoing African American claims for civil rights, racial equality, and civic fairness in historical

representation. Many street naming proponents see the toponymic process as an antiracist spatial practice, a way of inscribing a new vision of race relations into the American landscape. At the same time, the King street naming process is actively shaped by racism, white privilege, and a locational discrimination that threatens to reinforce, rather than challenge, the spatial and social boundaries that have traditionally constrained black power and identity within cities—a bitterly ironic memorial to a man famous for battling segregation (Messner and Vail 2009). A growing body of work, particularly in this journal, has investigated whiteness and the construction of white privilege as part of the racialization of place (e.g. Hankins et al. 2012; Housel 2009; Van Riemsdijk 2010). As Wilton (2002: 307) found in not in my back yard (NIMBY) conflicts, and as evident in controversies over attaching King's name to certain city streets, community opposition over the siting or locating of activities can facilitate the reproduction of white privilege and reinforce a notion of community as a place 'where particular groups belong and others do not.'

The street name politics of remembering Dr King serves as an effective way to think, more broadly, about *place naming as a mechanism of spatial (in)justice*, a theoretical connection that to date has not been discussed in the toponymic literature or the general social and cultural geography literature. Spatial justice stresses the spatiality of belonging, recognizing that social (in)justice does not simply have geographical outcomes; rather, space plays a more fundamental role in constituting and structuring the broader processes of discrimination or equality (Iveson 2011). Indeed, the contested politics of naming streets for King is not simply a matter of determining whether the civil rights leader's name will be inscribed

into the landscape but also debating where that name is best situated within public space. As African American activists have long and stubbornly asserted, it is not enough to name just any street for King. In fact, some of them have refused to rename a road for the civil rights leader when they believe the street does not occupy a sufficiently prominent or visible place in cities or does not transgress long-standing racial and economic divides. The ultimate location of a named street affects the social meaning and political efficacy of King's commemoration while also symbolizing the degree of cultural power and rights held by black citizens. Confining where King can be remembered publicly, especially in relation to the aforementioned social divides, places limits on recognizing and recovering the civil rights leader's historical identity as a challenger to the liberal-democratic-capitalist order, thus contributing to a larger national amnesia about his radical legacies (Dyson 2000).

In this study, we focus on street naming in terms of the 'right to participate' and the 'right to appropriate,' and identify some of the barriers that hinder the full realization of these rights for African Americans and the creation of a street name landscape that truly reflects the teachings of King. In doing so, we broaden the application of the idea of belonging within landscape analysis and advance an empirical understanding of the oppositional politics of street naming. Two brief case studies from the southeastern USA (Statesboro, Georgia and Greenville, North Carolina) illustrate how opponents, sometimes with the (un)witting cooperation of black activists, impose spatial, scalar limits on the rights of African Americans to participate in the street naming process and appropriate the spatial identity of streets outside of their neighborhoods, thus creating procedural and distributive injustices in the toponymic commemoration of King.

Socially critical approach to place naming

From the perspective of critical place name studies, 'assigning a name to a given location does much more than merely denote an already-existing "place".' Rather, 'the act of naming is itself a performative practice that calls forth the "place" to which it refers' and thus participates in the social construction of the landscape and its meaning to people (Rose-Redwood et al. 2010: 454). In the words of Price (2004: 31), naming represents 'a sort of conjuring, a bringing into being of place and with it, a specific and scripted understanding of collective identity tied to that place.' Moreover, place names do not simply *reflect* people's religious beliefs, ethnic origins, perceptions of nature, and political values. They also *project* and work to legitimize these beliefs and values, affecting the sense of place of future generations and what they perceive as the natural or assumed order of things (Azaryahu 1996).

Because of the cultural power of naming, social actors and groups place great value on controlling the messages communicated on and through the place name landscape. Humans name places to create a sense of order and they frequently choose names that give voice to their perspective. In doing so, people invariably silence other point of views and cultural identities. Naming also represents a means of taking ownership of places, both materially and symbolically. 'In this way naming can be an act of intervention, a way of organizing and giving meaning to place and thus staking a claim and imposing ways of conceptualizing and navigating in it' (Peteet 2005: 158). It is little surprise then that in many world regions, a renaming of geographic features accompanied European colonial exploration. Explorers and mapmakers not

only projected their Western values onto the landscape but also excluded and devalued the naming systems of original inhabitants, in effect writing off native knowledge (Bassett 1994). Even though place names can appear banal and without controversy, they are nevertheless ‘caught up in the dialectic of remembering and forgetting that characterizes so many white settler societies built on the dispossession of Aboriginal lands’ (Berg 2011: 20).

Although place naming can be conceptualized as a form of control or dispossession, this domination is rarely complete and can be challenged. Indeed, an important part of the politics of place naming approach is recognition that naming is not always controlled by elites and traditionally dominant groups. Naming can also be appropriated by less powerful stakeholders who wish to construct a more prominent public identity and have a greater democratic role in the fashioning of the landscape (Alderman 2008). In this respect, place naming has the capacity to serve as a form of resistance, whether that resistance involves a formal political appropriation of the naming process or a more informal verbal or visual contestation of the everyday authority of an official toponym (Jones and Merriman 2009; Kearns and Berg 2002; Rose-Redwood 2008b). Kadmon (2004) has used the term ‘toponymic warfare’ to describe instances in which marginalized nationalities and linguistic cultural groups within countries rewrite place names on maps as part of their campaigns of resistance.

Of course, it is important to note that place name resistance from marginalized groups can elicit its own resistance from opponents to changing the *status quo* (Kearns and Berg 2002). In addition, Rose-Redwood (2008a) has rightly argued that the landscape cannot always be reduced to a monolithic discussion

of the dominance of elites and the resistance of the marginalized. Tensions and struggles over naming occur within elite and marginalized groups as well as between them. Place names are public symbols to which people attach meaning and from which they draw identity. Names evoke powerful connotations and associations and, as symbolic texts, they are embedded in larger systems of meaning and ideology that are read, interpreted, and acted upon differently by people, sometimes in counter instinctual ways. Indeed, the political fractures that often surround remembering King on roadways do not always fall along racial lines. The street naming process, while heavily charged racially, can be characterized by competing goals, if not sometimes opposition, from African Americans as well as white cooperation and co-option.

The metaphor of ‘cultural arena’ offers one possible way of understanding the socially constructed and contestable nature of place naming. An arena approach recognizes place naming as part of the broader production of public space and the capacity of naming—as a place-making process—to serve as sites of contest, debate, and negotiation. Social groups and actors within those groups, with varying goals and levels of power and resources, compete for the right to name the landscape and cast legitimacy on their political vision, cultural history, and identity (Alderman 2002). The arena metaphor recognizes the highly public and performative nature of debates over toponymic practice as people seek to influence collective decisions or policies and justify their claims. The assigning and authorizing of toponyms can be arenas for international, geopolitical struggles, such as the tension between South Korea and Japan over the name of the ‘Sea of Japan,’ which the Koreans see as a legacy of colonialism and prefer to call the ‘East Sea’ (Arai 2003). Place

name debates can also be more local in nature, such as public controversy in Canadian cities over the selling of naming rights for buildings to corporations to raise public revenue (Hopper 2012).

For the purposes of this study, we are interested in place names in the context of racial and ethnic identity and how the toponymic process serves as an arena for asserting and debating the cultural, political, and legal right of minority groups to reshape the identity of urban places and the broader collective memory of cities and, in turn, the nation. Governments are under growing pressure to be sensitive to the place name interests of minorities. Australian officials, for example, are moving toward the restoration and use of Aboriginal place names and the involvement of these indigenous communities in the naming process (Hodges 2007). A similar movement has taken place in New Zealand with the reinstatement of Maori toponyms as a way of redressing that group's historical marginalization, although that process, as in Australia, has evoked resistance and accusations of reverse racism from conservative whites (Berg and Kearns 1996). As Hay et al. (2004) found, the racial politics of public commemoration and renaming places can also be characterized by locational debates and discrimination even as authorities seek to bring greater public attention to the representation of indigenous histories. In Adelaide, Australia, for example, city and state sponsored efforts to recognize Aborigines through place renaming 'overwhelmingly link indigeneity with the city's periphery, not its cultural core' and 'the landscape of indigenous (historical) presence is confined to large parkland areas' that are perceived by many people as dangerous and forbidding (Hay et al. 2004: 210). As this previous study suggests and as we argue in this paper, the spatiality of

ongoing efforts to recognize historically silenced racial and ethnic groups through place names is critical to their transformative potential—where we remember matters along with what (and who) we remember. A similar marginalization of memory and identity can be found operating within the contested geography of Martin Luther King Jr streets.

A street fit for a King?

The debates that surround toponyms are especially evident when they involve historical commemoration, that is when the struggle to name a place is linked to deciding who has the right to determine what is remembered (and forgotten) publicly and officially (Azaryahu 1996). Public commemoration is a political act and can serve as a tool for minority groups to contest the authority of the hegemonic group (McDowell 2012). Racial and ethnic minorities in the USA increasingly turn to place naming, and commemorative street naming in particular, as a political strategy for addressing exclusion and misrepresentation within traditional, white-dominated constructions of local and national heritage. This strategy has led to the removal of racially and ethnically derogatory place names as well as the renaming of places in ways that recognize the historical importance of America's major minority groups (Monmonier 2006). As Swart (2008) has found with street naming in post-World War II Germany and post-apartheid South Africa, commemorative toponyms can function as a 'form of symbolic reparation,' allowing victims of oppression and discrimination to reclaim dignity and identity, while also allowing the history of the country to be rehabilitated.

African Americans have been especially vocal in calling for changes to the place

name landscape of the USA. In arguing for a greater public recognition of their experiences and struggles, African American activists have carried out a campaign of renaming places to celebrate black historical figures, particularly from the Civil Rights Movement (Tretter 2011). These name changes reflect an effort to create a place identity and image that can assist in reconstructing and enhancing the group identity of African Americans and giving a material tangibility and permanence to that refashioned identity on the landscape. 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 and, in turn, the future (Alderman 2006). Street names have proven to be a popular battleground for these struggles for legitimacy because of the way they permeate our daily vocabulary—both verbal and visual.

(Re)naming roads for Martin Luther King Jr is especially important in African American efforts to rewrite the commemorative street name landscape of the USA. Although the Civil Rights Movement was carried out by many leaders and workers, King is perhaps the most widely identified national icon associated with the struggle for racial justice, often to the exclusion of the many women, young people, and local activists who also drove the Movement (Dwyer and Alderman 2008). By 2010, at least 893 cities and towns in the USA had named a street for King. Although these named streets are found in forty states and the District of Columbia, over 70 per cent of them are clustered in the southeastern region among both large cities and small towns. It is in the southeast where the earliest Civil Rights Movement battles were fought and the current home of a majority of the country's African American population.

On the surface, the widespread presence of King streets belies their contested nature, seeming to signal a victory for African Americans and progressive whites when, in reality, the naming process and the ultimate location of these streets tell a different story. Street name commemoration of King evokes highly public protests and debates because of its potential to touch and connect disparate groups—some of which may not identify with King (Alderman 2000). Yet, as Caliendo (2011) has argued, the controversy over honoring King with a street name is not only about the civil rights leader's social and historical contributions but also about people contesting the racial (re)signification of space and the (re)negotiation of individual and collective identity. One of the largest obstacles facing African Americans is the prevailing assumption among the conservative white establishment and other opponents that King's name should be confined spatially to the African American community rather than cut across traditional racial boundaries in cities. For many activists, naming a major thoroughfare that stretches beyond minority neighborhoods is essential to educating the broader white public about the importance of King and all African Americans. These debates about where (and where not) to locate King's name and memory take place between blacks and whites, but they also occur within the African American community and thus prompt us not to essentialize black identities and political goals. Some naming activists articulate different spatial strategies, which include naming streets only in black neighborhoods (Alderman 2003). Some naming proponents are more interested in inspiring and mobilizing their fellow African Americans (rather than challenging the historical consciousness of whites), while others fear losing ownership of the civil rights leader's

image in light of the vagaries of white-controlled place naming decisions.

Some opposing whites believe that naming a street for King will stigmatize the identity of their neighborhood. 'As a direct result of racial (mis)representations in public memory, King streets... signify Blackness, poor Black people, and even a dangerous neighborhood whereby commemoration recalls not social achievements by African Americans but a socioeconomic decay of Black neighborhoods' (Caliendo 2011: 1157). There are King streets that defy that image (see Mitchelson et al. 2007), but public opposition frequently leads to the naming of side streets or portions of roads located within struggling, African American areas of cities and towns. According to a recent national analysis, residents in neighborhoods with a street named for King tend to be significantly poorer than residents in neighborhoods without a named street, even when those neighborhoods have a similar racial and economic makeup (University of North Texas 2011). As some activists argue, to marginalize the commemoration of King on blighted streets within the black community, particularly in the face of African American requests not to do so, is to perpetuate the same force of segregation that the civil rights leader battled against (Alderman 1996). Tilove (2003: 122) perhaps put it best when he wrote: 'To name any street for King is to invite an accounting of how the street makes good on King's promise or mocks it.'

Although the politics of naming streets for Martin Luther King are struggles to define King's historical reputation and his cross-racial resonance (Alderman 2002), the toponymic process also speaks to the obstacles that face African Americans as they struggle to challenge and reverse the spatial and social control historically exercised by whites over racial and ethnic minorities in the USA. These

struggles prompt us to consider how the Civil Rights Movement, both in terms of how it has changed society and how it is remembered, is an evolving and unfinished project. Rather than a simply symbolic gesture, street naming for many African American activists is about gauging society's relative progress in fulfilling the goals of the Civil Rights Movement, to ground truth contemporary race relations and to gauge, materially, public attitudes about equality and justice.

Street naming and spatial justice

In viewing place naming as an arena for debating identity, memory, and justice, it is important to think about naming as a cultural right. One should also reflect on how the geography of place names—where they are located and, even more importantly, where they are not—can advance or obstruct the realization of the political goals of historically marginalized social groups. As mentioned earlier, political struggles over naming streets for King often revolve around the issue of location, with proponents and opponents putting forth competing ideas about where best to emplace King's name and memory within the cultural landscape and who in effect has a right to certain public spaces in the city. At the same time, citizenship can be spatially managed through the structure of decision-making (Dunn 2003). As we illustrate in this study, one's physical and socio-economic location within a city, particularly in relation to the potentially renamed street, is frequently used by government authorities and naming opponents to define and limit the place naming rights of African Americans.

Spatial (in)justice is a useful concept for understanding how King street naming proponents view and mobilize their cause in

spatial terms and how the opposition responds by actively using geography to contest these claims to the city. The concept of spatial justice is of growing popularity not only in geography but across the humanities, social sciences, and planning circles (Bromberg et al. 2007; Dikeç 2001; Soja 2010). Spatial justice recognizes that social, economic, and political injustices are frequently based on and perpetuated through the ways in which we organize, use, and control places and spatial processes. Social life is inherently territorialized and any meaningful effort to create social justice must address the geographic order that constitutes and shapes social inequalities and unfair decision-making processes (Bromberg et al. 2007: 2).

Recent geographic work on belonging has been especially important for understanding spatial justice and connections to landscape. Although a sense of belonging is certainly a personal emotional attachment to place, it is also a socially mediated matter. Belonging, according to Antonsich (2010), is related to the discourses and practices of socio-spatial inclusion and exclusion, a means of defining membership to a group and ownership of a place. Schein (2009: 811) pointed to the importance of examining struggles over belonging, stressing how certain social groups, particularly African Americans, have been ‘written out’ of landscape representations of history and hence notions of regional and national identity. Specifically, it is the tension between belonging and exclusion that animates these political struggles and by connecting racialized and territorial politics these struggles lie at the intersection of rights and identity. For example, Alderman and Modlin (forthcoming) state: ‘[d]ominant social groups consciously define the terms of belonging as they seek to impose cultural coherence and fix the boundaries of identity of “us” and “them”’

and that ‘this politics of belonging is often carried out geographically, in the way we construct places materially and symbolically.’ As a consequence it is incumbent on scholars to focus on the intersectionality of identity, place, and toponyms to explore the competing and sometimes contradictory political struggles the fight over naming entails.

Using geographic understandings of ‘belonging’ as a framework, we analyze the politics of naming American roads after Martin Luther King Jr in terms of the ‘right to appropriate’ and the ‘right to participate.’ Although these rights have been examined previously in the context of Lefebvre’s right to the city (Purcell 2003), they have saliency and meaning beyond the specific way that the French thinker critiqued capitalism and the state and conceived the claiming of space by inhabitants. Noting the potentially problematic and marginalized position that African American spatial claims and struggles holds in the traditional right to the city literature, Inwood (2012) has recently argued for a broader and more inclusive notion of rights that addresses the legacies of racial segregation and exclusion and the history of uneven access to urban spaces by people of color. Our analysis of street naming examines the right to participate and appropriate within the broader context of African American opposition to the legacies of racism and white privilege, allowing us to identify some of the distributive and procedural injustices that characterize the naming process and the central role that space, especially scale, play.

Right to appropriate and distributive injustices of street naming

When African Americans use street naming to exercise their right to appropriate urban space

literally in the name of King, they employ a strategic mapping of the city, figuratively and sometimes literally, to find a street that best fits their political and commemorative agenda. According to Purcell (2002: 103) the right to appropriate means ‘not only the right of [marginalized social groups] to occupy already-produced urban space’ but also ‘the right to produce urban space so that it meets the needs of inhabitants.’ In other words, to rework the spatial and social relations that have historically reproduced racially segregated urban space, street naming proponents pay close attention to and try to achieve a distributive justice in which King and the African American community are recognized publicly. Distributive justice has long been a foundation concept in social justice studies (Rawls 1971) and it continues to be important within geography (Boone et al. 2009; Merrett 2004). Distributive justice is traditionally concerned with ensuring a fair allocation of goods and opportunities among social groups, but the concept, when defined in spatial or ‘territorial’ terms, can be broadened and enriched significantly (Harvey 1973). Distributive justice also focuses on public access to certain place-based resources or services as well as the geographic distribution of social groups relative to certain opportunities and hazards (Bullard and Johnson 1997; Omer and Or 2005; Walker and Day 2012).

Applying a spatial justice framework to place naming prompts us to go beyond simply determining the sheer presence or absence of a name on a landscape. It is also important to consider the intra-urban location of the toponym and how the appropriation and production of urban space through naming are situated in relation to wider geographic distributions of people, wealth, and transportation within cities and towns. The distributive reach of place names affects who will have

direct contact with the name (and conversely, who will not) as well as the general landscape prominence of the name—all of which impact a minority group’s power to reshape the city so that they are seen and heard. The ability of street names to (re)distribute certain meanings and identities across the city does not simply raise the visibility of King and the black community, but signals an important widening of the ‘distribution of citizenship’ (Dunn 2003) and broader messages about who matters and belongs.

Larger questions of geographic distributions and access to urban space are especially important in shaping the meaning and efficacy of naming streets after Martin Luther King Jr. Assessing whether the streets achieve distributive justice requires asking questions such as: Where are King’s namesakes located in relation to the spatial distribution of race and class distinctions within cities? To what extent do streets named for King occupy central civic spaces and are geographically accessible to the larger community, especially whites? To what extent do King streets, because of their location, operate as a bridge or boundary between different social and economic areas of cities? Martin Luther King streets—depending on their place in relation to wider distributions of people and resources—could work to marginalize or raise the visibility and public importance of African Americans. As Raento and Watson (2000: 728) contended: ‘Naming and re-naming are strategies of power, and location matters, because this power is only truly exercised when it is “seen” in the appropriate place.’

The theme of distributive justice appears in the comments of many African Americans who push to have a street named, even if they do not express it exactly in those terms. Important to their vision of appropriating and producing a legitimate place for King is

making sure that, relationally, the named road transcends traditional racial boundaries and occupies a location that is situated within a social geography that embodies integration and inclusiveness rather than marginalization and segregation. Facing public opposition to such proposals, municipal authorities tend to pursue a distributional tactic that does the exact opposite. They agree to rename only part of a major street that aligns with the geographic boundaries of the African American community, not allowing the name change to encroach on white, wealthier parts of the same street. Although officials believe this spatial confinement strategy effective in minimizing (white) controversy and supposedly appeasing the black community, vocal street naming proponents have frequently interpreted it as racist and have called to have King's name extended spatially down the entire length of road.

As Alderman (2003) would argue, the social construction of scale lies at the heart of controlling the distributive justice of street naming and the right of African Americans to appropriate the production of space beyond their neighborhoods. Scale plays an important, but often under-theorized role, in the politics of place naming (Hagen 2011). Toponymic disputes do not simply happen at different fixed scales. Rather, proponents and opponents compete to determine the geographic scale at which King and African Americans will be recognized and, in turn, the scale at which associations or linkages would (or would not) be created between the wider white community and its black citizens. Maintaining racial segregation requires a policing of scale in which certain activities by African Americans are allowed in certain places as long as they are not scaled beyond the black community and disrupt segregated space. In fighting to maintain or redefine this

scale of racial power relations, proponents and opponents deploy different scalar configurations of identity and citizenship when competing to name a place. In the words of Rose-Redwood (2011: 38), proponents of achieving a distributive justice through King street naming advocate for a 'toponymic rescaling,' hoping to reframe the spatial identities of places in new ways that literally and figuratively make more room for African American belonging. In contrast, opponents to this rescaling rely on and publicly perform a traditional urban scalar narrative that uses racial fear, residential segregation, and the rhetoric of neighborhood invasion to justify keeping the black community and King in their place.

A street naming dispute in Greenville, North Carolina, exposes how opponents impose scalar limits on the right of African Americans to appropriate the identity of urban space and how African Americans react to this distributive injustice in different, conflicting ways. Greenville is located in eastern North Carolina approximately 85 miles from the state capitol of Raleigh. Greenville's West Fifth Street became Martin Luther King Jr Drive in 1998. Originally, the African American leaders who brought forward the request wanted all of Fifth Street renamed—not just part of it—but residents and business owners on the eastern end strongly opposed the proposal. King's namesake marks a downtown area that is predominantly African American, whereas East Fifth is mostly white (Batchelor 2006a). Moreover, a clear difference in wealth and development exists between the east and west segments of the street. This racial and economic boundary has long been in place and some older Greenville African Americans have spoken about how East Fifth Street was 'forbidden territory' for them historically (Namaz 2006: A12).

Proposals to extend King's name down the rest of Fifth Street were made by local African Americans in subsequent years. However, these efforts failed to win approval of the Greenville City Council, leading to deep frustration within the city's African American community. One prominent African American leader, Michael Garrett, was quoted as saying: 'Having a street that runs straight through town with a different name in the black section is a throwback to the old Jim Crow Days' (Batchelor 2006b: B1). Of course, Jim Crow was not simply about separating the races. It was also about normalizing unequal power between the races. One proponent for extending King down all of Fifth Street, Rufus Huggins (2006: D2), sought to challenge the taken for granted nature of white privilege at work through the street name controversy: 'Greenville citizens do not realize [that] most streets in the predominantly black community are named after someone white...our white brothers and sisters have a problem with just having one street [in the white community]... being named after someone black.'

In January of 2006, the local chapter of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) led a boycott of the Martin Luther King Prayer Breakfast in protest of the city's failure to rename all of Fifth Street. This action sparked several months of public debate, with many residents along East Fifth continuing their adamant opposition to the renaming. King supporters held marches down Fifth Street including the eastern section. One of these marches drew resistance from a group of young white men who taunted the marchers, yelled 'Fifth Street Rules,' and displayed the Confederate Battle Flag, long a symbol of white racist resistance in the southeastern USA (White 2006). Although proponents for renaming the entire length of Fifth sought to rescale the identity of the street and to assert

their right to appropriate a previously forbidden portion of urban space, opponents clearly placed boundaries around King's meaning and the legitimacy local black citizenship. Many East Fifth residents claimed that their street name had historical value and was part of their heritage (Spell 2006), angering some African Americans who thought King was more historically important than a numeral. Others suggested that King's name would bring down property values and invite crime, gangs, and illegal drugs into their neighborhoods, and that limiting the scale of the street naming was essential to the social preservation of the East Fifth neighborhood (Gabbard 2006). In making this argument, critics pointed to the depressed condition of the existing King Drive. African Americans were, in effect, blamed for being the victims of broader processes of inequality, discrimination, and segregation, and opponents called into question their identity as responsible citizens and whether they had the right to appropriate other urban spaces when they supposedly could not take care of their own.

Seeking to settle what they saw as a contentious issue and unwilling to force East Fifth Street to undergo an address change, municipal leaders voted along racial lines in late 2006 to place King's name on the then-undeveloped US 264 Bypass that partially encircled Greenville. The bypass had been identified as an alternative by an *ad hoc* committee organized by East Carolina University, who claimed 'neutrality' even though it owned a significant amount of property on East Fifth. Believing that there was an NC Department of Transportation rule against roads having duplicate names, the council also voted to have the existing Martin Luther King Jr Drive revert back to West Fifth Street (Batchelor 2006c). Even after discovering that such a rule did not exist, white municipal

leaders approved the removal of King's name, prompting some in the African American community to argue that the name change was part of a larger plan of redevelopment and black dispossession planned for the area (Batchelor 2007).

Not all whites opposed renaming all of Fifth Street and several outspoken white citizens protested the decision to move King's name to the bypass. African Americans also held different views about how (and where) best to honor King. Indeed, three prominent black leaders who had initially called for the renaming of East Fifth Street later reversed themselves and supported the bypass option, much to shock and anger of other African American leaders, including two city council members. White city council members took advantage of the situation, asserting that the dissenting African American leaders represented the 'real' views of the black community and that the presence of ideological differences among African Americans somehow made the campaign to name all of Fifth Street less legitimate. These assertions drew upon a long-standing racist supposition that African Americans form a monolithic community with a single voice. The leaders who now advocated for the naming of bypass were motivated by personal rivalries with other black leaders and the belief that renaming East Fifth was increasingly out of reach and naming a new road was better than King's name remaining segregated. Also important to them were arguments from white citizens that the street name debate was unnecessarily dividing the local community along racial lines, and thus a peaceful compromise was needed (Johnson 2006). But what kind of peace was produced? To use King's own words, by moving the civil rights leader's name to the bypass, white city council members constructed a 'negative peace' or an absence of

tension (for whites) rather than constructing a 'positive peace,' which King characterized as a presence of justice for African Americans (King 1986[1963]: 295).

The dialectical interplay between positive and negative peace is central to understanding fundamental tensions inherent in the discourse of belonging. In its negative form, peace implies the stopping of some existing, or pending act of discrimination or injustice. As a consequence, negative peace-building practices often focus on remedying perceived wrongs. Positive peace-building practices, on the other hand, are 'practices that encourage the growth of social, political and legal institutions that address the underlying causes' of inequality and often focus on supporting institutions and processes that try to break cycles of discrimination (Inwood and Tyner 2011: 448). By engaging in the process to rename only portions of Fifth Street, the political leadership in Greenville was promoting a process that 'recognized' King, but failed to address the underlying histories of discrimination, segregation, and uneven access to resources that have characterized the separate and unequal geographies of Jim Crow segregation. As a consequence the fundamental question of who belongs to what and on whose terms is obscured from the debate (Schein 2009). Thus, the decision by the white political leadership to rename only part of Fifth Street was a none-to-subtle reinforcement of historic geographies of exclusion and discrimination, which while conforming to negative peace-building practices, ultimately obfuscated the larger question of resources that is at the heart over struggles around belonging. Toponymy matters then, not just about what it tells us about the past, but also about how it is often the first step in broader struggles over social, political, and economic

capital that may fundamentally alter historic patterns of exclusion and discrimination.

Accordingly, even though some opponents to renaming East Fifth, and even some black leaders, saw the naming of the bypass as a legitimate appropriation of urban space in the name of King and African Americans, it was ultimately an appropriation and production of space that never really achieved the distributive justice and the rescaling of urban spatial identity and race relations that was originally intended. In fact, Greenville's naming dispute might speak, more powerfully, to the power of the white community to access and reshape urban space through place naming and indicates potential limitations of belonging struggles that do not outline and connect to broader struggles over economic and political resources. African Americans living along King, now West Fifth Street, had to bear the expense and inconvenience of changing their address, to ensure, in effect, that white property owners on East Fifth Street would not have to do so. Tragically, one might argue that African Americans lost the right to appropriate and produce space in their own neighborhood, especially in light of the many Martin Luther King birthday celebrations and marches historically held on the once named road and the impossibility of holding those same activities on a busy four-lane bypass. Moreover, the controversial decision to move King out of downtown ensured that the geography of the civil right leader's commemoration would not violate the territorial limits and sense of divided racial order of the white community on East Fifth Street that may have destabilized historic geographies of Jim Crow segregation. Because street naming proponents sought to use the scaling of place naming as a way of testing as well as creating racial integration, the city's decision represented, in both literal and figurative terms, a bypassing

of King's proverbial dream and illustrated the limits of the politics of belonging.

Right to participate and procedural injustices of street naming

Interestingly, the politics of belonging also stresses the importance of the 'right to participate,' which gives 'inhabitants the right to take a central role in decision-making surrounding the production of urban space' (Purcell 2003: 578). Exercising the right of participation (along with appropriation), citizens can assert their use rights and directly challenge the hegemony of property rights and the valuing of urban space as a commodity to exchange (Purcell 2002). Rose-Redwood et al. (2010) have called for a greater consideration and protection of the use value of place names in the face of growing efforts to commercialize toponyms and place naming rights and decision-making. Although the actual selling and buying of naming rights is an important infringement on the right of ordinary people to participate in the production of space, the socially exclusionary nature of toponymic decision-making is felt across cities beyond merely financial transactions, especially when public authorities view place naming rights as a natural extension of property rights. This is particularly evident when examining the procedural injustices that hinder African American participation in the renaming of streets outside of their neighborhoods.

Procedural justice, like distributive justice, has an established history in social science and geography (Boone et al. 2009; Merrett 2004; Young 1990). Scholars recognize that a lack of fairness in how public disputes and decisions are made and legally resolved can impact one's right to participate as well as produce and sustain unequal distributive outcomes and

access. Naming and renaming places involve decision-making procedures and policies in addition to general ideological or cultural considerations (Azaryahu 1997). A procedural or participatory justice perspective would address the factors that limit the full participation of African Americans in local government decisions about whether to name a street for King and which specific street to rename. Even when a street is renamed for the civil rights leader, it can still work to exclude African Americans if they have no actual voice in the naming process. This can happen when municipal leaders reject initial requests to rename major thoroughfares and elect instead to attach King's name to smaller streets, sometimes overriding the protests of the activists who brought the original proposal to city leaders.

There is frequently a spatial context to the procedural injustices of naming streets for King. Many local governments enforce a rather narrow geographic as well as social scaling of cultural citizenship when renaming a street. One's citizenship or 'right to the street' is defined by where one is located in relation to the street and the economic conditions underlying that locational relationship. In many street name debates, those who own property along potentially renamed streets often play a deciding role in name changes, even though the street (and by extension, its name) is theoretically a public space rather than a private good. Indeed, some cities and towns have responded to controversy over selecting a street to rename for King by establishing ordinances that require a majority (and sometimes even a supermajority) share of property owners located on a particular street to approve a proposed name change. The interests and opinions of a road's property owners are given precedence over those who rent or simply work or travel on the

road in question. Placing such clear territorial and class limits on cultural citizenship and whose voice matters in the place naming process has seriously limited the ability of African Americans to honor King on a street upon which they are not the majority of property owners.

These restrictive street naming ordinances work to frame African Americans as 'outside agitators' within their own cities, continuing a oppositional tactic begun during the Movement to discredit the African American struggle for equality as non-local and thus ignoring what King (1986[1963]) referred to as the mutuality and interrelatedness of all communities. Even when these procedural hurdles are not used in direct opposition to King street naming, they nevertheless affect the process. Recognizing the difficulty in getting approval from the many white property owners on a major road, some African Americans will propose renaming a smaller or a less racially diverse segment road that they know is winnable even if it is not their first choice. In this respect, even when black activists are leading the toponymic process, these ordinances rescale the structure of political membership and democratic participation in regressive ways that reproduce a segregated geography of street naming, prompting us to consider yet another way that scale is strategically manipulated to control and limit place naming rights.

The impact that procedural injustices can play in shaping the location and racially distributive scale of the street eventually named for King was especially apparent in Statesboro, Georgia (USA). Statesboro, which is the county seat of Bulloch County, lies between the two population centers of Macon, in central Georgia, and Savannah, on the coast. In February of 1997, African American leaders from the National Association for the

Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the Bulloch County Ministerial Alliance proposed to have Northside Drive renamed for Martin Luther King Jr (Hackle 1997). Northside Drive, one of the longest and busiest commercial arteries in Statesboro, is part of US Highway 80 and passes by the city's mall and nearly 200 businesses. Donnie Simmons, one the local NAACP leaders behind the proposal, expressed it best when he said:

Dr. King lived a highly visible life and should have a highly visible place named... I can never agree to renaming a street restricted to the black community. This would bury Dr. King in the black community and say that Dr. King was only for blacks... King was against injustice for every man [sic]. (Simmons 1997)

Not unlike King street naming struggles across the country, the proposal to rename Northside drew significant resistance from the street's white property and business owners, many of whom signed a petition against the name change. Like their counterparts in other communities, opponents complained about the financial burden of changing their address. In doing so, they downplayed the use value of the road's name to African Americans as a public symbol and stressed the exchange value of maintaining the name for customers, suppliers, and their bottom line (Rogers 1997). Although this argument was represented to the public simply as a matter of cost and convenience, it actually masked a deeper anxiety about white discomfort and protection of racial boundaries for the sake of commercialism. For instance, the owner of a business on Northside argued:

When someone calls me up asking for directions to the store and I say 'We're located on MLK road,'

those people might think I'm located on the black side of town. Now, I'm not a racist but that fact may keep people from coming to my store. (Henry 1997)

The arguments made by property interests on Northside Drive proved influential, prompting the Statesboro City Council in May of 1997 to unanimously pass an ordinance that required 75 per cent of property owners on a street to approve a proposed name change before it could be formally voted on by the city council. The ordinance also required the petitioners of a street name change to pay half the cost for new street signage, a policy that spoke to: (1) how much the city sought to discourage toponymic changes, especially for major roads and (2) the extent to which place naming rights were clearly defined in exchange value terms and revenue (Gross 1997). Even though the King street renaming debate began before the passage of the ordinance, supporters of renaming Northside were required to follow the newly created decision-making rules, which led some black leaders to claim that the ordinance targeted their request. NAACP leader Donnie Simmons argued that the ordinance thwarted the efforts of African Americans. He contended: 'They [the city council] know good and well we're not going to get 75 percent of the whites to name a street for King' (quoted in Gross 1997: 1A). Moreover, because of the size of Northside Drive, it was estimated that the cost of the renaming would be US \$8,000–10,000, a sizable sum for the local NAACP or any minority organization.

The situation was further complicated by the approval of the new ordinance by African American city councilman David Shumake, who argued that the ordinance provided African Americans a mechanism for demonstrating public support for renaming to

the city council. In fact, he argued that the ordinance would actually protect black interests by preventing city leaders from later removing King's name from Northside once it was changed. In contrast to Simmons, Shumake suggested that 'Blacks can get Northside renamed if they organize, shake bushes, and mobilize,' although this was difficult to envision given the level of vitriolic opposition expressed by the street's businesses and property owners. Moreover, he expressed hesitancy about 'forcing a street address change down the throat of the [white] community' (Shumake 1997). As this situation illustrates, even when it appears that African Americans have a place in the decision-making process, such as having a seat on the city council, this does not guarantee that a procedural or participatory justice is achieved. The ordinance, by putting the power to initiate a name change in the hands of those on Northside rather than the city council, worked not only to limit the place naming rights and participatory power of the broader Statesboro African American community but also Shumake himself.

Ultimately, Statesboro's street renaming ordinance facilitated the renaming of a street for King, but it was not Northside Drive. In December 2002, the city council voted to rename two connecting roads (Blitch and Institute Streets) after receiving a proposal from African American city councilman Gary Lewis. Following ordinance guidelines, Lewis spent 6 months going door-to-door to collect signatures from property owners along the two streets (Martin 2002). Blitch and Institute Streets were smaller, poorer, and more African American than Northside. Some opponents, including members from the NAACP, questioned the extent to which the chosen streets were prominent enough to bear King's name (Martin 2002). Statesboro's ordinance not

only made the renaming of a major road difficult, but also forced black leaders to limit their commemorative naming agenda to streets that could be renamed in light of the property owner requirement and signage cost requirement, specifically roads largely limited to the confines of the black community. Although the ordinance gave proponents such as Lewis a means of ensuring that King's name and memory would have a place on the landscape, it nevertheless territorialized the toponymic process and the right to participate, legally sanctioned the privatization of public space, and contributed to the growing power of property owners and commercial interests to define the limits of one's citizenship and belonging.

Concluding remarks

The rise of the critical school of place name studies holds great promise for rehabilitating the image of toponyms within the discipline of geography as well as giving us a platform for analyzing the spatial struggles of marginalized social groups. We have sought to fill a void in the geographic literature, which to date has not widely examined place naming rights in terms of the struggle for equality and civil rights and certainly not in the context of social justice and struggles over belonging. As a rapidly growing movement that touches people in intimate and potentially controversial ways, the naming of streets for King provides a glimpse into where the country is in terms of race relations, casting doubt on conservative declarations that we have moved into a post-racial or post-civil rights era. Because street names, as part of public space, connect the 'visual-factual with the sensual-emotional' (Caliendo 2011: 1148), recognizing King within the official city text is not simply a

dry retelling of important histories. Rather, for the African American activist, place naming can be an emotion-laden and politically charged spatial tool for redefining the scale at which they belong in the American city and the right to stake a claim to urban space.

More than that, however, the struggle over streets named for King and its connection to broader scholarly work on the politics of belonging illuminates the contradictory and sometimes incommensurate goals of activists who seek to claim urban space. On the one hand, the struggle over streets named for King illustrates the way portions of the African American community are attempting to assert themselves into the public discourses of USA cities. However, as African Americans pursue street naming as part of claiming a right to belong, they encounter obstacles—both outside of and within their own communities—that limit the ability to redistribute the resources of the city that will achieve the goals of positive peace. This reality illustrates the limits of struggles over belonging to fundamentally challenge entrenched economic and political interests in the city. Public debates about which street to rename for King and how that name designation will be situated in relation to larger racial and economic geographies provide us the opportunity to think about how place naming rights can be scaled in ways that do not achieve King's vision of positive peace-building practices that address racism, militarism, and materialism.

As the case of Greenville illustrates, the street naming process can be affected by distributive injustices rooted in broader social ideas about where (and where not) African Americans supposedly belong and how far their power to shape urban space should extend geographically. These injustices significantly limit the efforts of place name activists to gain access to certain urban spaces and to appropriate the

identity of streets outside of their neighborhoods, even though challenging historically entrenched patterns of racial segregation and marginalization is exactly the purpose of many street naming campaigns. Analyzing the political struggle to honor Dr King also sheds light on the struggle for participatory and procedural justice within place naming rights, particularly in an urban environment built upon protecting the exchange value of landscapes, privileging property rights over other cultural rights, and enforcing a vision of public space that is increasingly privatized and unthreatened by political activity. As illustrated in Statesboro, local governments can enact narrow social and spatial definitions of citizenship that restructure the scale and conditions under which one's voice matters in place naming, thus disenfranchising African Americans from the very decision-making process that they often help initiate.

Finally, some opponents to naming streets for King question the very legitimacy of place naming as a social issue worthy of public resources and debate, suggesting that African Americans do not truly know what is best for the community (Messner and Vail 2009: 28). Even some African Americans argue that fellow black activists should concern themselves with civil rights issues 'more important' than street naming. There are a large number of worthy social and economic issues in need of addressing, but it is worth thinking about how the naming of roads is not necessarily separate from the broader social justice picture. Naming streets for King can signal something very important about the willingness (or unwillingness) of the white community to invest in African Americans, thus providing (or failing to provide) a platform on which to bring about supposedly more 'substantive' change and improvement. When a community refuses to do something as doable as naming street

beyond the African American community, what does that say about the degree to which the community is really ready or willing to take on the 'tough' issues? The place naming rights issue is about the struggle to be seen and heard within public space, an important civil right in and of itself and one arguably necessary for other rights to be realized. Plus, we can also think about how street naming might be coupled with other social justice campaigns, such as community redevelopment. Using places named for King as platforms for addressing social and economic inequalities is already being undertaken by organizations such as Beloved Streets of America in St Louis, Missouri, the National Alliance of Faith and Justice in Washington, DC, and the Georgia's Client Council through their 'Claiming a Street Named King' program.

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Abstract translations

La dénomination des rues et la politique d'appartenance: injustices spatiales dans la commémoration toponymique de Martin Luther King, Jr

Bien que le tournant critique dans l'étude de toponymie reconnaît le rôle central et contesté que les toponymes jouent dans les vies et luttes d'identité des gens, il y a peu de recherches qui examinent de manière explicite le droit de dénommer les lieux en termes de la justice sociale, la citoyenneté, et l'appartenance. Nous présentons aux lecteurs la dénomination des rues américaines

en honneur du leader tué du mouvement des droits civiques Martin Luther King, Jr, en utilisant deux études de cas brèves du sud-est des Etats-Unis (Statesboro, Géorgie, et Greenville, Caroline du Nord) pour discuter les barrières qui entravent la création d'un paysage qui reflète vraiment les enseignements de King. L'opposition à la dénomination pour King, qui profite parfois de la coopération (non) intentionnelle des militants noirs, impose des limites spatiales et scalaires sur les droits des afro-américains de participer dans le processus de dénommer les rues ainsi que celui de approprier l'identité des rues en dehors de leurs quartiers. Pourtant plusieurs campagnes de dénommer les rues visent explicitement à contester les modes de ségrégation et de marginalisation raciale bien établis. Le cas des rues « King » nous incite à réfléchir à la toponymie comme mécanisme de (in)justice spatiale, qui démontre le rôle fondamental qui joue la géographie dans la constitution et la structuration des processus de discrimination ou d'égalité.

Mots-clefs: justice spatiale, nom de lieu, toponymie, Martin Luther King, afro-américain, appartenance.

Ponerle nombre a las calles y las políticas de la pertenencia: injusticias espaciales en la conmemoración toponímica de Martin Luther King, Jr

A partir del giro crítico en los estudios sobre denominación de lugares, se reconoce el lugar central y, a la vez resistido, que los topónimos tienen en la vida de la gente y en las luchas por la identidad. Sin embargo, los trabajos dedicados a analizar el derecho a nombrar lugares en términos de justicia social, ciudadanía y pertenencia son escasos. En este trabajo nos proponemos acercarnos a los lectores a la práctica de llamar a las calles con el nombre del líder asesinado Martin Luther King, Jr. Para ello, recurrimos a dos breves estudios de caso en el sudeste de los Estados Unidos (Statesboro, Georgia y Greenville, Carolina del Norte) a los fines de discutir los obstáculos que dificultan la creación de un paisaje que verdaderamente refleje las enseñanzas de King. Nombrar oponentes, a veces con la (in)consciente cooperación de activistas de color, impone límites espaciales y escalares a los derechos de los afroamericanos para participar en el proceso de denominación de las calles, así como a la

apropiación de la identidad de las calles fuera de sus vecindarios. Esto sucede a pesar de que muchas de las campañas de nombramiento de calles tienen por finalidad desafiar patrones históricos de segregación racial y de marginalización. El caso de las calles llamadas con el nombre de King, nos incita a pensar al acto de nombrar calles como un mecanismo de (in)justicia espacial, y nos muestra el rol funda-

mental que tiene la geografía en la conformación y estructuración de los procesos de discriminación o igualdad.

Palabras claves: justicia espacial, nombramiento de lugares, toponimia, Martin Luther King, afroamericanos, pertenencia.