WALK THE HIGH ROAD: CAMOUFLAGING RACISM AND THE FLORIDA EXPERIENCE ALONG DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING JR. BOUVELARD

By

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In recognition of the street naming pioneers featured in this dissertation:
James and Joanna Tokley and their compatriots in Tampa
Charles Smith for his efforts in Palmetto
Irene Dobson and her neighbors in Zephyrhills
LeRoy Boyd and Movement for Change in Pensacola.
Without their courage and conviction, change would not have been realized.

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To my wife, Judy, who has believed in this project and supported me through the years of completing this dream of mine, and

I recognize Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., whose long shadow is cast upon these pages and who inspired this project. His words below contribute to the title and ideals put forth within this dissertation.

> We can choose either to walk the high road of human brotherhood or to tread the low road of man's inhumanity to man. History has thrust upon our generation an indescribably important destiny – to complete a process of democratization which our nation has too long developed too slowly. The future of America is bound up in the present crisis. If America is to remain a first-class nation, it cannot have a second-class citizenship.
>
> Martin Luther King Jr. 1959
> *Stride Toward Freedom*

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The naming or renaming of streets for Martin Luther King is increasingly common in U.S. cities and towns. It takes place in highly public debate and often creates controversy within a community, exposing racial and political tensions that have previously been buried or ignored by residents. This dissertation looks at the street naming process in four Florida communities over a 20 year time period and analyzes how different types of racial theories interact with the street naming process and if differences in those theories results in different types of protests from street naming opponents. Four racial theories are analyzed -- critical race theory, systemic racism, municipal exclusion and majority and minority representation -- and are explored using case studies in Tampa in 1988, in Palmetto in 1994, in Zephyrhills in 2004 and in Pensacola in 1997 and again in 2008, to determine if naming a street for Martin Luther King is an indication of how far race relations have come in the past 25 years or if there is more process to be made.

CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Less than four months after the 1968 assassination of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., civic and political leaders in Chicago proposed naming a street after the late civil rights leader. The street selected, South Park Way, was a major city roadway, but one located entirely with the predominately black south side of the city (Dwyer, Alderman 2008, 52). With this renaming, and the arguments that accompanied it, the idea had been born to recognize King with commemoration of his life and work through naming a street in his honor. This tradition continues today throughout the United States, with a strong emphasis in the South, where King was born and the region most troubled by racial strife. Today, nationwide, 42 years after the death of Dr. King, more than 890 streets bear his name, including 92 communities in Florida (Alderman 2011)[1].

The manners in which these streets are renamed vary from community to community and place to place, but many also share attributes depending on the geography of the street, if or how it impacts the white community and how divisive the issue becomes. According to geographer and professor Derek Alderman, the movement to name streets after King originates within the black community as a method to continue the efforts of King's activism and to address “the exclusion of their experiences and achievements from the national historical consciousness” (Alderman 2006, 217). It also serves as a tool to recognize the contributions of African Americans within a community and to honor black America’s icons and leaders in a way commensurate with those of white Americans.

Yet the effort to honor the definitive black leader in American history is often wrought with turmoil, protests and opposition from white residents and resentment,

accusations and disappointment from the black community. From the first street renaming in Chicago in 1968 to the ongoing process that has lasted more than 10 years in Pensacola, Florida, the street naming procedure has been a silent partner to the ongoing discussions of race and racial progress within the United States. From the inception of slavery with the nation's founding in the 17th century to civil strife and war in 1860 to the election in 2008 of the first African-American president, race has been a major issue within our social and political structures. In small cities and large, in urban counties or rural, street renaming proposals to honor Dr. King have served as barometers of race and remains a method of determining how far this nation needs to go to resolve its racial divisions.

One Giant Step Forward, Three Baby Steps Backward

Just prior to Barack Obama's inauguration in January 2009, a *Washington Post*/ABC News poll found that twice as many blacks as whites believe racism remains a problem in the United States, while twice as many whites as blacks believe that blacks have achieved racial equality.[2] Further, a CNN poll in 2008 found 72% of whites believe that blacks overestimate the amount of discrimination against them while 82% of blacks believe whites underestimate racial discrimination against blacks.[3] In addition, the *Washington Post* poll found that 44% of blacks believe racism is a "big" problem in the U.S. today, while half that number or 22% of whites consider racism to be a "big" problem.[4]

Obviously, blacks and whites view racism through a different prism. Paradoxically, as Americans – both blacks and whites – traveled to the polls to vote for the nation's first black president, other events were playing out in communities that indicate that Swedish social scientist Gunnar Myrdal's description of the "American

Dilemma" of race, while lessening its grip on the American psyche, continues to haunt its actions. For example, in Tampa, Florida, a "veteran Hillsborough County Republican Party official" was forced to resign her position with the party after forwarding a "racially tinged" e-mail to other party officials. The official, according to the *Tampa Tribune*, is the third prominent Republican in four months to be snared in controversy over e-mails with racial overtones. The "joke" in this particular e-mail questioned how two million African Americans could to travel to Washington D.C. for President Obama's inauguration, while 200,000 blacks were unable to evacuate New Orleans during Hurricane Katrina.[5] A similar sentiment is expressed in a letter to the editor referencing the differences between Hurricane Katrina in 2005 and river flooding in March 2009 in North Dakota: "We don't see looting. We don't see street violence. We don't see people sitting on their rooftops waiting for the government to come and save them… You don't see some leaders of this country blaming the bad behavior of the North Dakota flood victims on society."[6] These are subtle expressions of racism, based on broad stereotypes when the reality of the situations under comparison is totally different.

Still other examples exist. Again in Tampa, a Confederate Memorial Park opened to public fanfare on April 25, 2009. The park opening is a follow-up to the installation of a 150 square foot Confederate flag that was unveiled in the summer of 2008. The flag adorns the park site, which is located at the intersections of Interstates 4 and 75, just east of downtown Tampa. Sponsors of the park state they are interested in projecting a realistic history of the Confederacy. "It's not all about slavery, there were a lot of social and political issues involved. We want to bring about a dialogue on those issues and

remember the history and honor the memory of our ancestors,"[7] according to one member. The flag's installation was prompted in 2008 as a protest when the Board of County Commissioners in Hillsborough County declined to issue a proclamation in recognition of Confederate Memorial Day.

Just prior to the national election, in October 2008, another issue arose, this time in Pensacola, Florida. There a group called "Movement for Change" approached the Pensacola City Council with a request to name a portion of a street after the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. In 1998, Pensacola renamed a portion of Alcaniz Street to MLK Drive. Escambia County followed suit, and renamed all portions of Alcaniz Street outside the city limits to Martin Luther King Jr. Drive. The October 2008 request sought to change another portion of Alcaniz within the City of Pensacola to MLK Drive. After opposition from citizens and a majority of City Council members, Movement for Change withdrew their request. A variety of "bloggers" joined into the debate on the *Pensacola News-Journal's* website. Some raised legitimate issues, including the historic nature of Alcaniz, a name that dates back to the Spanish colonization period in Pensacola, such as "Alcaniz Street has historical significance to Pensacola. I would hate for our community to lose Pensacola history in order to name a street for another historical figure. There are other streets."[8]

Yet other comments, similar to those often made in other communities considering a street name change took on racial overtones. "To begin with," one person commented, "naming streets should be only on new streets. Alcaniz is an established street. MLK need (sic) to be put on a new street. Not only that, but MLK had nothing to

do with Historic Pensacola." Also, another person commented anonymously, "Yeah! less (sic) replace Alcaniz Street with a fornicating communist."[9]

These reactions, in addition to recognizing King's contributions to American society including the end of segregation, provide evidence of "subtle racist tactics" that are used to hold gains realized by African Americans to a bare minimum. Thus, establishing national holidays, embracing African-American icons, and renaming streets for Martin Luther King Jr. serve as legitimate social indicators to illuminate perceptions in the black community that many white Americans continue to struggle with issues of race and equality and react to racial concerns when an event – be it politically or socially oriented – appears to impact their self interests. This dissertation will attempt to determine if these social perceptions provide insight into political and electoral processes and the role race plays in the larger equation. For example, does the manner in which a community handles the seemingly minor issue of naming or renaming a street after a civil rights icon indicate the manner in which it treats its minority residents in general?

Moreover, the reactions of citizens to the naming or renaming of a street also has major implications for future race relations. Previously published literature indicates that white Americans fear economic repercussions when their property (residential or commercial) or business is linked with African-American icons as well as the larger issue of association with African-American neighborhoods in general. As will be demonstrated further, several scholars recognize that some whites believe that residence in close proximity to black neighborhoods threatens their social status. These

issues indicate that race remains a salient issue in American society despite the election of an African-American president.

The Politics of a Street Naming

One of the most contentious issues that a community may address concerns the renaming of a street in their community after slain civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr. In community after community, similar protestations arise when the street renaming is proposed or expanded upon from black neighborhoods into white areas. Alderman notes that the majority of streets named in honor of Dr. King are located within the southeastern United States, yet concerns of white residents mirror one another nationally, whether the street is located in Greenville, Mississippi; Eugene, Oregon; Zephyrhills, Florida; or Quincy, Illinois. Reasons throughout the country are strikingly similar, ranging from economic concerns, to cultural identity, to dislike for the civil rights leader (he was anti-war, a Communist, a womanizer), according to Alderman in an interview in the *Register-Guard* newspaper, Eugene, Ore. (June 11, 2003). Comments from street opponents in Florida communities also were critical of King's anti-war stance (Zephyrhills) and continued allegations that he was a Communist (Palmetto).

Schuman, Steeh, Bobo and Krysan find that "many whites deeply resent efforts to force racial integration on them, not because they oppose racial equality, but because they feel it violates individual freedom" (1997, 297). Street namings bring out similar sentiments as whites claim a forced renaming infringes on their rights and constitutes reverse racism. One common thread in different communities during street naming episodes is that whites are being forced to accept a civic leader for whom they feel little or no affinity. That concept was supported by one resident in a letter to the editor during the 2004 street naming in Zephyrhills. "We all have heroes. Some we share, others we

don't" he said. "Many African Americans are very passionate about King. Many whites (myself included) aren't. It's not that we dislike King. Most agree he did great things. We just don't hold him up as a hero in the same way African Americans do, and we don't want to be forced to."[10]

Support of the concepts of equality are "fine sounding abstractions" that hold little water when the tools to implement those concepts are not supported (Schuman, Steeh, Bobo and Krysan 1997, 308). White Americans appear to "philosophically support the idea of equality" but do not want the granting of equality to infringe upon them or "change or impact their way of life" (1997, 308). In many of the debates surrounding street naming, whites often propose other means to recognize King and suggest naming of a park, library or other civic structure for the slain civil rights leader. It is believed that such commemoration has less impact on the personal or private space of residents.

A second common feature of the street naming debate focuses on the actual street naming process conducted by the local government. Seldom will opponents state that they oppose the street naming after King. Instead, they argue that the local government failed to adequately advise property owners of the proposed change, failed to follow procedures for changing street names or otherwise criticize the regulatory process. That was a major argument in Zephyrhills, where one resident ran for City Council solely on that issue – "Morgan's main reason for seeking office was his feeling that the council hadn't handled the issue properly. Councilwoman (Gina) King said the council did not follow a 1987 ordinance governing requests for street name changes," according to the *Tampa Tribune*.[11] Thus, the naming of a street does fuel speculation that undercurrents of racism exist below the surface. Professor Derrick Bell maintains

that whites only advance racial tolerance or benefits when it either promotes their own self interest or does not threaten or lessen white status (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller and Thomas 1995, 22). A street named for a black man, even a recognized civil rights icon, can threaten – in the eyes of many whites – property values, business opportunities and economic development. To Bell, the interests of blacks are advanced only when it "converges with the interests of whites" or at least does not conflict with societal concerns of middle and upper class whites (1995, 22).

Issues Facing Government Leaders

A variety of issues surface as public managers and elected officials confront public dialogue and debate about how (and where) best to commemorate King with a street name. Among areas of concern is confronting the racial composition and blending of races within their community. Also pertinent are discussions of government's responsibility to private businesses and residences situated on public streets and thoroughfares. Frequently residents and business owners fronting on a particular street believe they have the only legitimate stake in whether the street is renamed while others who simply travel the roadway do not. Public managers also need to understand how to best enact or follow policies and procedures on the naming of public streets and the larger issue of considering and protecting minority rights in a majority rule system.

Geography, race and history all factor into the street naming equation. Vestiges of the past, particularly in the South, have resulted in many cases with communities with residents that still live separate and distinct lives in separate and distinctive neighborhoods defined by race. In many smaller southern towns, African Americans were excluded from the municipal boundaries. The reasons were numerous: to prevent

them from voting in municipal elections, to segregate neighborhoods and to limit the need to provide basic municipal services such as water and sewer, paved roads or streetlights to black neighborhoods. Thus, the political needs of those excluded are not the municipality's concern or responsibility. Being located outside the municipal boundary can take on "enormous social significance," according to Richard Briffault (2004) and result in political insignificance as well. In many cities past racial oppression often restricted blacks to the least favorable areas, such as lower lying areas, across railroad tracks and in the vicinity of landfills and dumps. According to Camilla Stivers in a study on racism and Hurricane Katrina, she found that in New Orleans "as in other American cities, practices of racial segregation concentrated middle and upper-income whites in outlying suburbs (in New Orleans, literally on higher ground) and blacks in the central city, where flooding was the worse." Further "blacks and whites were living in quite literally different worlds before the storm hit" and in conditions that played a major role in people's ability to evacuate (2007, 50).

This racial history creates modern day remnants of segregation that help to blur the lines of the street naming process. In smaller communities, black residents often are found living outside the city limits, thus limiting their standing in the political arena to seek a street name community-wide. In larger metropolitan cities, majority black areas are often confined to lower-income and crime ridden pockets where streets do not have the status or significance for a street naming after King that would connect disparate communities.

Case Studies

Three primary areas of concern regarding the street naming phenomenon occur in most every community when the issue of naming a street after the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. is raised. Those aspects center around the physical location of the street, its political or social impact on the neighborhood or community and the potential economic impact it may have on that physical area. Social implications include those that residents perceive may affect them through integration or other associations with race in their neighborhoods.

First are spatial concerns – the physical location of the street, the neighborhoods it crosses and intersects and the impact the street has on white neighborhoods and business districts. According to Alderman, in small towns and large cities, the debate over the naming of streets in honor of King is framed around the physical geography of confining or limiting the street naming to African-American neighborhoods as opposed to selection of a street of more significance that crosses over into white areas (2000, 672). For many African Americans, if the street signs and name are designated in only the black neighborhood that limitation reinforces the idea that in spite of all the changes and advancements, Americans as a whole still reside in segregated communities, living separate lives. Metaphorically, blacks remain in their place and whites are in theirs.

Secondly are economic factors. These concerns basically center around two arguments. First, many businesses will complain of the cost of changing stationery, business letterheads and envelopes and other operating costs (Alderman 2000, 672). Residential opponents share the same concerns as well as costs of obtaining new driver's licenses, checking and banking materials and other associated expenses. Residents will even complain about the potential costs to the community of erecting new

street signs. “Why go through the financial burden of renaming when we have many other needs (not wants),” wrote one Zephyrhills resident in 2004.[12]

The second and primary concern centers on property values and social perceptions. According to Alderman, the argument against renaming a major thoroughfare is often raised by white property and business owners “who cite the financial costs of changing their address and the social stigma, as they see it, of being associated with the black community” (2003, 164). While these economic factors – particularly those dealing with property values and social fears – are germane to virtually every street naming controversy, there is little or no empirical or quantitative analysis on the impact of street naming on property values or economic development.

Hypotheses – An Overview

- **Hypothesis 1:** Because overt expressions of racism are no longer acceptable in American society, this dissertation will explore how racism will be exhibited in political arenas when majority populations oppose renaming a street after Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.
- **Hypothesis 2:** It is apparent that different patterns of racism developed in all four cities. Do these differences result in similar patterns of opposition to the street naming process?

Numerous social and political aspects will be considered including the racial make-up of the governmental body, who initiated the street naming request, how the debate took place and how the issue was finally resolved. Among them to be considered in the scope of this dissertation are: significance of the street in the community; the street’s placement in a predominately black area or mixed racial demographic; community racial demographics and divisions; social bounding (based on past segregation practices); economic status and condition of a community (business district, residential

neighborhoods, high crime areas, low income neighborhoods); and white acceptance of Dr. King as a national leader.

Social indicators impact economic concerns regarding street naming, including economic status and condition of a community and neighborhood standing. Several scholars have found evidence that whites are hesitant about living in neighborhoods that are adjacent to or near African American or racially mixed neighborhoods. Charles R. Lawrence III suggests that for many whites, living in close proximity to black neighborhoods has the potential to threaten their own social status. "Where one lives is an important index of one's status in our culture, and to live in proximity to those who are looked down upon is to be looked down upon one's self" (Grenshaw, Gotanda, Peller and Thomas, 1995, 250). Richard Thompson Ford reinforces this theory. Residence, he states, is more than simply a personal choice, "it is a primary source of political identity and economic security" (1995, 449).

Alderman notes that analyzing King-named streets is an "important entry point to understanding how blacks struggle to incorporate their achievements into the nation's collective memory" (2003, 165). As noted earlier, depending on the location and "spatial extent of these streets" they can demonstrate an expansion and acceptance of African-American influence or serve as a "reinforcement of boundaries that have traditionally constrained black identity and power" (2003, 165).

A primary question regarding property values is one that centers around the theory that property values will decline or not increase as quickly if located on a street bearing the name of an African American, specifically in this case, Dr. King's name. Another aspect of the economic equation concerns the viability of economic

development along streets named after King in both predominately white or minority neighborhoods. Existing literature indicates that white property owners and business owners express concern that the location of their business on a street named for King will have a negative impact and economic growth will consequently suffer or encourage blacks to move to those newly named neighborhoods. Streets located in lower income neighborhoods can lead to the "perception" that a Martin Luther King Jr. street in a "bad" neighborhood leads to lower property values and negatively impacts or restricts economic growth in those neighborhoods.

The focus of this analysis will be on four Florida communities in which residents sought to name thoroughfares after King. Through linear analysis ranging over a 20 year period of the street naming process in all four communities, beginning with a street renaming in 1988 in Tampa to the latest attempt in Pensacola in 2008, the focus will be on similar situations that arise in each community, with arguments and opposition to the street naming process, and with a look at individual situations that are unique to each city.

Historic Vote

On November 4, 2008, Barack Obama, the junior senator from Illinois, was elected president of the United States of America. Mr. Obama received 67 million votes and 52.7% of the popular vote and 365 electoral votes. His opponent, Arizona Senator John McCain, received 58 million votes equaling 45.9% of the popular vote and 173 electoral votes.[13] This historic vote saw Americans elect the first African American to the nation's highest office. It would appear that this milestone erases the racial quandary that has plagued the United States since its inception, from slavery to segregation and Jim Crow laws and what Gunnar Myrdal eloquently summed up as the

“American Dilemma.” Obama’s election serves as the capstone to the Civil Rights era and would herald through social custom what in the last century has been provided by law: equal rights and access for all American citizens.

The purpose of this research is to provide documentation that despite the enactment of laws and general consensus on principles of equality, including the election of the first African-American president, white opposition to social progress for blacks remains an issue, however covertly or symbolically expressed, and may be manifested in a variety of methods, ranging from opposition to racial policy preferences (i.e. affirmative action), hesitancy in general in supporting black candidates for office (or the suspicion of providing false responses to polling questions involving black candidates) , preservation of white power structures and other acts that reinforce perceptions on racial attitudes. Further, societal or community factors, more subtle than political attitudes and actions, also serve as indicators that “inequalities continue to exist” (Orey 2001, 233) and that “whites are threatened by the real possibility of African Americans infringing upon their social, political and economic hegemony” (2001, 235). This research discusses the reactions to renaming streets after the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. as evidence that this racial threat continues. It could be argued that racism is camouflaged behind comments and objections that are designed to derail a street naming proposal yet not reveal racial hostilities of the person or group objecting to the name change.

Because racial attitudes have changed and because blatant expressions of racism are no longer socially acceptable, subtle expressions remain a factor in race relations in the United States. Studies support the idea that racism is not an acceptable

attribute in American society and that overt racist behavior is unacceptable, yet covert realities remain. Today's insidious racial resentments are sometimes difficult to determine and differ from past representations as described by V.O. Key and Myrdal. Yet ultimately, the symbolic approach of overt politics produces similar results when whites use the "essence of contemporary racism" to reach white voters and property owners in order to provide societal and political outcomes that protect the status quo (Knuckley and Orey 2000, 13).

Four communities have been earmarked for this analysis. They are Tampa, which underwent a name change process in 1988, Palmetto, in Manatee County, addressed the street naming issue in 1994, the City of Pensacola, which underwent a two and half year struggle from 1997 to 1999 and then re-opened the process only to drop it in 2008, and Zephyrhills, in Pasco County, which took up the issue in 2004. Through the use of these case studies spanning a linear demarcation in Florida from the beginning of the street naming phenomenon that lasted 20 years, this research will assess changes in the processes of the street naming procedures and reactions from residents and leaders.

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CHAPTER 2
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Conventional wisdom and theory implies that politics helps provide a level playing field within governmental organizations and society in general. Thus politics serves to protect individual autonomy and dignity and promotes equal access to economic and political systems. The federal civil rights laws of the 1960s were based on the premise that African Americans needed legal protections they previously had been denied. Legal action alone, however, including those designed to protect civil rights "did not guarantee equality of outcomes" in social situations (Canon 1999, 261).

Racial attitudes have radically changed in the United States since passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. While "biological racism" or the concept that biological differences between races provide for superior or inferior traits no longer dominates social or political attitudes, a new racism has "evolved as a consequence of white backlash to an increasingly politicized black electorate" (Knuckley and Orey 2000, 4). Centuries of belief that blacks were inferior to whites with convictions that set "black people apart and justified their exploitation" (Stivers 2007, 49) helped whites to rationalize their behavior and discriminatory actions. As a result, race remains a determining factor in the attitudes of both whites and blacks and helps explain how racial attitudinal differences continue to influence societal and political events. While public opinion strongly favors the principle of racial equality (Knuckley and Orey 2000, 4), camouflaged attitudes, belief and feeling continue to exist and impact political actions. In Stiver's study on the reactions of public administrators to Hurricane Katrina's impact on black residents of New Orleans, she recognized the different circumstances facing the minority residents in more flood prone areas and many without personal

transportation and access to escape routes (2007, 50). A variety of factors contributed to this differing landscape. Primarily, as previously addressed, more blacks lived in the lower wards and areas more prone to flooding while whites lived in the suburbs and on higher ground, fewer blacks had access to private vehicles to escape the storm and the black poverty rate in New Orleans was three times that of whites (2007, 50).

The issue of race has long been a contentious issue in American political and social situations. From the advent of slavery in colonial America to the *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling in 1954, race has been a recurring theme throughout the history of the United States. The topic was one that many politicians attempted to sidestep as evidenced in the compromises that resulted in the formulation of the U.S. Constitution and subsequent acts of Congress regarding slavery. According to Carmines and Stimson (1989) the issue often was too contentious for politicians and the party system. It emerged as a partisan issue during the civil rights movement and has since maintained its prominence in the defining of racial cleavages in American politics.

In 1944, Myrdal explored America's treatment of blacks "as a significant moral issue and as a major challenge to the national democratic tradition" in his study on racism and democracy, *American Dilemma: the Negro Problem and Modern Democracy* (Schuman, et al. 1997, 11). This conflict between the founding of a nation based on the principles of "liberty, equality, justice, and fair opportunity for everybody" versus the reality of a legal system of segregation, degradation and discrimination against blacks erodes the core of the fundamental beliefs and traditions of America. Myrdal's study questioned a system that while proclaiming to provide true democracy for its citizens,

simultaneously sought to systematically exclude specific segments from those traditions.

A wide variety of literature is based on what Myrdal referred to as “the American Dilemma.” For this project, research and journal articles authored by Professor Derek Alderman, a noted scholar and cultural geography professor at East Carolina University in Greenville, N.C. who specializes in the areas of spatial memorization and the political conundrums that potentially follow will be featured. Other literature, relating to the geographical issues of race and progress, include works by Richard Thompson Ford (1995) and articles regarding political boundaries, political segregation and municipal annexation and the theory of “underbounding” or political exclusion as proposed by Allan Parnell. These neighborhood locations are often remnants of past segregation policies in many communities. In *Living as Equals*, Phyllis Palmer notes that the flight from the inner cities to the suburbs in the 1950s continues to this day, although in a revised form, in “exclusive enclaves protected, in our era, by gates and guards instead of real estate agents and mortgage brokers” (2008, 242). The “persistence of residential segregation has abated only modestly since its high point in 1970,” Palmer argues, resulting in a variety of segregated situations including “de facto” school segregation (2008, 242)

The literature review will also provide historical perspectives by reviewing Myrdal’s work (1944) and V.O. Key’s classic, *Southern Politics* (1949). In his now historic study Key recognized the importance of race in the South and its impact on everyday life. Key found, “in its grand outlines the politics of the South revolves around the position of the Negro… in the last analysis the major peculiarities of southern politics

go back to the Negro. Whatever phase of the southern political process one seeks to understand, sooner or later the trail of inquiry leads to the Negro" (1949, 5). Key was studying the region prior to the civil rights movement, yet his study fully recognized the impact of racial politics. In that pre-civil rights era, white supremacy was in full strength and racial politics were open and vicious. These earlier works will aid in exploring progress that has been realized over the past sixty years or more in the United States relating to racial issues and will assist in explaining different levels of discrimination and racial intolerance in the United States over the past several decades.

Carmines and Stimson (1989) explore the theory of issue evolution while a number of authors recognize the change from the overt, hostile racism of Key's era to the modified covert areas of symbolic racism, racial resentment, racial threat and "laissez-faire racism" (Orey 2001, Knuckley and Orey 2000, Bobo, Kleugel and Smith 1997, Voss 1996, and Hughes 1997). Finally, Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller and Thomas (1995) look at the critical race theory movement and its effect on race, "unconscious" racism and opposition to affirmative action and other race-based programs.

Resentment

Resentment drives much of the racial debate today. White opposition to racial equality grows in direct proportion to a push by African Americans for more access to political and community opportunity. Robert A. Dentler argues that along with the movement towards "symbolic racism" came "symbolic equality of social treatment" (Clayton 1996, 36). Whites can theoretically absolve themselves of being racists and in fact many believe that to be factual. Yet when instances occur that threaten the status quo, issues and prejudices emerge. Whites' fear of being dominated or pushed to accept racial compromises results in a push of its own back to preserve its perceived

rightful place and protect its self-interests. Symbolic racism surfaces, reflecting resentment and antagonism, but also real group conflict (Tuch, Martin 1997, 49).

These symbolic issues become “predictors” of white attitudes towards other, more substantial racial conflicts. Symbolic racism, coupled with self-interest, affords the opportunity to foresee that whites will oppose actions or policies that they deem to be against their best interests. This defensive behavior leads to the assumption of racism, with white concerns over job availability or promotions, property values and safety. Part of white reluctance to accept incremental black progress (integrated neighborhoods, street namings) may be based on the reality of perception. They fear other whites will consider their properties to be devalued if associated with black history or other racial ties. Hughes maintains that as blacks continue to integrate into the larger white society and achieve professional, personal and economic parity, that progress further threatens white status and opportunities creating a new climate of racial resentment (Tuch, Martin 1997, 73).

When white residents protest a proposed street renaming and claim they are not racist, they may be dealing with two subjective issues: the idea of unconscious conditioning coupled with recognition of society’s newfound contempt for racism in general. Therefore, they generate reasons unassociated with race to oppose the project. There is the inconvenience of changing their address and papers, costs of ordering new stationery, fear of economic reprisals, lower property values or Dr. King’s opposition to the Vietnam War. Race is never the issue raised when white opponents approach the podium to speak out against the street renaming.

Charles R. Lawrence III suggests that for many whites, living in close proximity to black neighborhoods has the potential to threaten their own social status. "Where one lives is an important index of one's status in our culture, and to live in proximity to those who are looked down upon is to be looked down upon one's self" (Grenshaw, et al. 1995, 250).

Alderman concurs regarding the fear whites express of living or working on MLK Avenues: "some business and property owners have gone so far as to express concern about the economic impact of having their street identified with King, and as they perceive it, the black community" (2000, 674). This fear or hesitancy is systematic of deeper core issues. Ford notes that "residential segregation is more than a matter of social distances; it is a matter of political fragmentation and economic stratification along racial lines" and that "racially identified space both creates and perpetuates racial segregation" (1995, 450). Voss appears to agree, concluding in his study on statewide races in Louisiana (featuring former Klansman David Duke) that racial conflicts do not stem from "rational" group conflict, such as direct economic or political competition, but from "a self-maintaining system of cultural apartheid" (1996, 1168).

"The battles of racial politics are fought on a field marked by fuzzier lines," note Hurwitz and Peffley (1998, 2). "Now that racism is unfashionable, racists couch their sentiments in more acceptable guises." While it is a "mistake to assume all opposition to racial programs is motivated by prejudice," the authors note, it is also a "mistake to assume that racial prejudice is not an important under girding of contemporary political attitudes towards race related issues" (1998, 4).

Racial Boundaries

Ford agrees it is now "passé" to speak of racial segregation in the United States, but residential living patterns still result in de facto segregation in many communities. In addition, segregated minority communities are "historically impoverished and politically powerless," Ford states (1995, 449). Yet residential selection is more than a personal choice. According to Ford it also is a "primary source of political identity and economic security" (1995, 449). While a seemingly less important battle in the determination of equality and economic viability, the ability to name geographic spaces within one's community is another legitimate aspect of obtaining a say and earning a role in community life.

"Political geography helps promote a racially separate and unequal distribution of political influence," Ford said (1995, 450). Naming a less desirable street after Dr. King or a street that only intersects with the black community limits the opportunity for cultural sharing and recognition. Ford's writings support that premise: "segregated residential neighborhoods result in uniquely disadvantaged environments that become progressively isolated – geographically, socially and economically – from the rest of society" (1995, 451).

While Ford's focus is on segregated housing, street namings are linked to that same type of segregation. Populations of an area as well as the "demarcation of space" (Ford 1995, 456) are all variables that distinguish and determine that area's political and economic status. Ford argues that racial minorities with their own "significant cultural particularities" have a strong claim for political inclusion in a community or jurisdiction. He finds that for racial minorities (particularly those that do not conform to the Anglo Saxon model) to enjoy equality in an "otherwise racially homogeneous jurisdiction" they

must have the opportunity to change the character of the community and “not merely the right to enter on condition of conformity” (1995, 457).

Similar Reactions

Reactions to street namings in these four selected cities mirror those in other cities across the nation (Alderman 2000, 673; 2003, 163) where black residents, seeking recognition and acceptance of their cultural icons, have proposed naming streets after Martin Luther King Jr. With the designation of a federal holiday named after the slain civil rights leader, Martin Luther King Jr. has become a focal point of black American pride and recognition. Lee Sigelman notes that no one leader ever “inherited King’s mantle as the pre-eminent black American leader” (Tuch, Martin 1997, 177) and his persona and name are central to most commemorative efforts.

For many whites, however, King remains an enigma. According to Caesar McDowell, acceptance of King and his holiday remains elusive because of white reluctance to recognize his contributions. Martin Luther King Jr. “may have spoken the common language of human dignity. But to many white people he remains primarily a black man, and his birthday a black holiday, for black people” (Alderman 2002, 105).

Methodology

The four case studies that comprise the bulk of this dissertation also reflect four different types of racial theory and how racial politics, even those enacted generations ago, impact how Americans live today. While each chapter ties one form of racial theory with one community, each community experiences different forms of racism in a variety of ways. As an example, the chapter featuring Zephyrhills and its street naming experiences focuses on municipal exclusion. However, critical race theory, minority representation and systemic racism also played a role in the Zephyrhills experience.

The same is true for the other communities featured. An aspect of this study will be to determine if different patterns of racism emerge when more than one type of racist situation exists in a community. For example, municipal exclusion and majority-minority representation is a factor in Zephyrhills. Does that provide for different reactions from street naming opponents than if only one racial situation was present?

The Tampa street naming chapter highlights the critical race theory because of the ideals that many whites do not object to street namings or other gains for blacks as long as they do not interfere with their neighborhoods, jobs or social significance. Derrick Bell in *Critical Race Theory: the Key Writings that Formed the Movement* (1995) is a strong proponent of critical race theory and the ideals that the sharing of white power is something white power structures will consider only when it will prove beneficial to their ultimate cause, or at least not detrimental. Roy Brooks, in his analysis of race relations in the age of Barak Obama (*Racial Justice in the Age of Obama*, 2008) also views racism through the lens of critical race theory. His analogy of rearranging the living room is an apt description of how whites control the communities we live and work in.

In "*So Poor and So Black: Hurricane Katrina, Public Administration and the Issue of Race,"* (2007), Camilla Stivers offers insight in how public administration responds to crisis in her look at New Orleans and the impact of Hurricane Katrina in 2005. Yet she also provides a look at how long established housing and residential patterns impact both white and black residents and how segregationist practices of the past continues to have negative consequences for African-American residents.

In the Zephyrhills chapter, the focus is on municipal exclusion and the theory that municipal boundary and annexation practices of the 1950s and 1960s Jim Crow era systematically excluded blacks from living in towns and cities and therefore denied them a voice – and vote – in local government, as well as the delivery of public services such as access to municipal water systems, fire hydrants, sewer and police and fire protection. Parnell in *"The Persistence of Political Segregation: Racial Underbounding in North Carolina"* details how practices of the past impact living patterns today and continue to exclude blacks from life in a community. In New Orleans, blacks lived in the lower parts of the city, more vulnerable to floods and storm damage. In Zephyrhills, for many years blacks were isolated across railroad tracks. Residency within the city became an issue during the Martin Luther King Jr. street naming debates with city residents charging that black residents living across the tracks were not city residents and therefore did not have standing to change a street name that crossed into the city limits.

In Pensacola, despite the persistence of a grass roots organization focused on naming a street after Dr. King, their numbers and influence kept them struggling to have their voices heard. Minority representation is an issue that Carol Swain addresses in her 1995 study entitled, *Black Faces, Black Interests, the Representation of African Americans in Congress*. Swain discusses the dilemma of representation and the ability or inability to have African-American interests addressed at the political level. Although two African Americans sat on the Pensacola City Council, minority residents were unable to penetrate the white controlled majority until they resorted to other tactics to get the attention of the community at large.

Palmetto experiences a similar problem with one African-American member in a white majority controlled Council. Joe Feagin discusses systemic racism in the United States today in *Racist America: Roots, Current Realties and Future Reparations*, (2000) and explores the idea that many whites are not aware of the systemic racism that continues today and that offers all the advantages – political, economic, educational – to whites and leaves blacks disadvantaged. The Palmetto experience is particularly interesting because in that city the mayor and three other white council members held a special meeting without advising the black representative, and voted unanimously to rescind the naming of a street after Dr. King. That process led to accusations of violations of the state's Sunshine Law and the eventual reality that no major street was renamed for King.

Opponents of the street renaming often cite economic or financial issues with the street naming process. Several articles, including an economic study by Dr. Alderman call into repute those claims. That aspect will also be explored in the concluding chapter.

CHAPTER 3
TAMPA: CRITICAL RACE THEORY

Getting Started

In 1987, a small group of black residents –from local activist groups and black churches – began meeting at the west Tampa home of James and Joanna Tokley. Joanna Tokley was the president of the Tampa Urban League. Others represented included the NAACP, Start Together on Progress or STOP, the Tampa Organization on Black Affairs (TOBA), and several prominent black churches. Their goal: to rename a street in Tampa after the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King. Local civil rights activist Al Davis[1] first suggested the idea that year, and recommended two streets: either Buffalo Avenue, an east-west street that cross the entire city and extended eastward into unincorporated Hillsborough County, or Nebraska Avenue, a north-south route that paralleled what was then Interstate 75. The renaming process would take these 15 to 20 activists two years to accomplish, necessitate agreement with and passage of ordinances by both the City Council of the City of Tampa and the Hillsborough County Board of County Commissioners, fight off attempts to select less visible streets and a strong opposition from residents and businesses on Buffalo Avenue, the street finally selected.

Today Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard in Tampa – at 14 miles in length – is one of the nation's longest streets named after Dr. King. "Tampa's Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard goes through the entire city," James Tokley noted. "It represents physically what Martin Luther King meant." Several city council members however, sought to compromise on the street name and instead suggested Ashley Street in downtown Tampa as the street to be designated and named after Dr. King. Black residents opposed that move and the black newspaper, the *Florida Sentinel Bulletin* called the

move “underhanded,”[2] editorializing “Buffalo Avenue, which runs east and west, through a multiplicity of geographical locations is considered the best choice.”[3] This chapter will explore the Tampa experience during the street renaming of Buffalo Avenue in 1988. This is the first city in the four case studies to undertake the naming of a street after Dr. King and as the first city studied will fit into the overall dissertation by gauging the attitudes and issues associated with the street name change in the late 1980s. This chapter will also assess how critical race theory is pertinent to racial issues in 1988 and today.

Minority Status

In the late 1980s, Tampa’s black population hovered around 27% of the total population and Hillsborough County’s black population was about 14%.[4] These numbers hindered black progress, according to the street activists and the local black press. As Rudolph Harris argued in the *Sentinel Bulletin* on February 9, 1988, “Since black people are outnumbered in cities like Tampa, members of the majority have been quick to inject the use of popular appeal in deciding even those moral questions. Black people in Tampa can seldom expect to win anything if the numbers game is used as the final determinor.”

Harris noted that there has been great improvement over the years in terms of racial relations, many the result of Dr. King’s work. Yet he continued, “white people will always vote against the interests or the desires of blacks.”[5] This coincides with critical race theory promoted by Professor Derrick Bell and others who maintain that whites only advance racial tolerance or benefits for blacks when it either promotes their own self-interest or does not threaten or lessen white status (1995, 22).

The goal of those 15 to 20 residents meeting in the Tokley den in 1987 was to bring to Tampa what had been occurring in other cities, a street named after Dr. King as a lasting tribute to the late civil rights leader. Many smaller cities, including Gainesville, according to Joanna Tokley, were naming streets and Tampa residents believed Tampa was lacking in honoring Dr. King and in unifying themselves as the black community. In Tampa, it was time.

Rearranging the Furniture

Despite the advances made in race relations that Rudolph Harris recognized even in 1988, race remains a contentious and complex issue in America today. Roy L. Brooks agrees with the tenants of critical race theory promoted by Professor Bell and suggests that race in society today brings us to a "place wherein racial truths are sometimes hard to see" (2009, 89). To explain, Brooks describes a narrative about two roommates in a new apartment. One roommate arrives first and arranges the furniture to her liking and standards. When the second roommate arrives, she wishes to make some changes that the first roommate finds objectionable. Some minor accommodations are made, but the overall situation remains the same. The first roommate has "dominion" over the apartment and the second is "subordinated" (2009, 89).

Brooks uses this analogy to describe the principles of critical race theory and the idea that white action is not always directed against blacks, but is instead designed to support their own power and status. "Critical race theorists, in short, argue that disparity resources in black society are sustained by white hegemony. Whites have power, and hence, control over the nation's resources; blacks do not" (2009, 90). Basically, whites use their power to stay in control. Whites then use their control, through government,

institutions, business and “societal” filters that “privilege insiders (straight white males, especially white elites) and subordinate outsiders,” according to Brooks (2009, 90).

In Tampa in 1987, only one African American served on the 7-member City Council and no blacks sat on the County Commission. Blacks feared that their failure to achieve this symbolic gesture – to name a street after Dr. King – could doom their progress and advancement in other areas as well. “Black people will be hard pressed in this city to gain anything of economic substance. This is particularly true if the King street naming issue is any indicator,” wrote Rudolph Harris. [6]

In a community where only one in four residents were African American (and less than one in five in the county), blacks found it difficult to earn a seat at the table let alone help rearrange the furniture to so that they could achieve equal representation and expression. Bell argues through his “interest-convergence” principle or, as it also is referred to as the “white self-interest principle” (1995, 22) that material concerns carry the day in a majority white system and that such a system results in what Brooks labels a “permanently racist society” (2009, 97). In this theory, black gains and movement towards equality are always contingent upon whether promoting those gains serves the interest of white society.

One historical example Brooks provides of this theory is Lincoln’s assessment of the Civil War and issuing the Emancipation Proclamation as a method to save the union, not because of his opposition to slavery. While Brooks notes Lincoln’s personal opposition to slavery, he asserts that the president would have not freed the slaves if it would have preserved the nation (2009, 98). Bell too cites as an example the progress of the South emerging from a rural, agricultural based society to its attraction as the

Sunbelt with opportunity for growth and development only when it shed its state-sponsored segregation policies. Thus, he notes, "segregation was viewed as a barrier to further industrialization in the South" (1995, 23). In order to prosper, white Southerners had to conform and shed the obvious symbols of racism and segregation. Changes were not made to benefit the social position of blacks, but to improve the business climate of whites. In Tampa, the opposition carried similar sentiments. They were not opposed to a street named after Dr. King, they simply did not want it to be their street, in their neighborhood.

Black versus White

The fact that the Tampa street naming process took two years to accomplish is an indication that the white establishment and residents along Buffalo Avenue were not in favor of the change. The movement to honor Dr. King with a street naming developed within the black community, and started as a black movement, according to Joanna Tokley. Once it began, however, whites were drawn into it, she said, including prominent politicians supporting the idea such as Tampa City Councilwoman Linda Saul-Sena and County Commissioners Jan Platt and Pam Iorio. Other white groups also offered support, such as the National Conference of Christians and Jews and the League of Women Voters. The bulk of the opposition came from Buffalo Avenue residents, property owners and businesses. Saul-Sena agrees that the issue developed into a mostly black-white confrontation that, as Tokley said, later attracted white residents to the cause. The Tampa City Council in 1987 and 1988 was not a "progressive group," Saul-Sena said, and the Council's first attempt to name Buffalo Avenue after Dr. King failed on January 14, 1988 by four votes to three.[7] Members

opposing the move expressed concerns about the “costs” of changing street signs and the personal impact on residents on Buffalo Avenue.

Proponents questioned the timing of the vote, originally scheduled for January 28, 1988, and vowed to march on City Hall to seek justice. The *Tampa Tribune* referred to the vote as “A surprise 4-3 vote by the City Council on Thursday gutted an effort to rename Buffalo Avenue after Martin Luther King Jr., prompting council member Perry Harvey Jr. to charge that Chairman Tom Vann ‘sandbagged’ the issue.”[8] Proponents also questioned the city’s following its own ordinances and Council’s choice of a “street selection committee” to review possible streets to be renamed while not holding a public hearing as required.[9] Criticism of the procedural processes undertaken to rename a street are a common occurrence and in some instances are tools used by the opponents of the street naming and other times, as in Tampa, questioned by the proponents. Costs of the process, cost of street sign changes and costs to businesses and residential properties on the street also are frequent issues raised in opposition to the street naming process.

Pirate versus King

Proponents of the Martin Luther King Jr. street naming were growing frustrated at the excuses and roadblocks erected to the proposal to rename Buffalo Avenue by residents and council members alike. One of the most prevalent reasons cited to oppose the street name change was fears of the financial impact to taxpayers and the cost of changing out and erecting new street signs. In Tampa, due to the 14 mile length of Buffalo Avenue, the estimated cost of new street signs was $32,000.

The cost factors arguments angered backers of the street name change. Rudolph Harris, columnist at the *Florida Sentinel Bulletin* suggested Martin Luther King

Jr. supporters should host events to raise the necessary funds to cover the costs. According to the *Sentinel Bulletin* (January 29, 1988), street backers supported that plan of action. They further agreed to use any remaining funds to "defray costs" of business owners for printing and stationery changes. By compromising on defraying costs, leaders of the street renaming effort thought they could make the major issues go away, and satisfy the majority opposition.

The fundraising component did not allay all opposition however and taxpayer concerns continued to be vocalized, again raising the ire of proponents. Worrying about the cost of street signs was hypocritical, they argued. In fact, Tampa has a rich history of honoring a rogue pirate, Jose Gaspar, with an annual Gasparilla "invasion" and festival. The cost of hosting the festival, held since 1904, falls on the city in terms of setting up seating and bleachers, hiring overtime paramedics and police, public works employees and other expenses. As a result, the *Sentinel Bulletin* editorialized, "Honoring a Pirate, Why Not a King?"[10] Hosting these festivals yearly costs the city "hundreds of thousands of dollars annually in preparation and facilitation of the Gasparilla Parade and Invasion," the newspaper noted. The editorial questioned how the city could spend funds on the Gasparilla festival year after year and not afford a onetime fee to change street signs. It further pondered how the city could use Jose Gaspar as a marketing tool and not consider the impact of recognizing Dr. King and all he accomplished and stood for in his crusade for civil rights. King's message, the editorial reasoned, was a better advocacy and highlighted the differences between Jose Gaspar and Dr. King and the subsequent messages of violence versus non-violence. In addition, for 87 years, the invading krewes that swept ashore each year were comprised

of political and business white elites. (In 1990, a year Tampa was poised to host the Super Bowl, black activists sought inclusion in the Gasparilla festivities. As a result, the krewe withdrew from the annual event rather than integrate its membership. By 1992, the krewe relented and accepted four African-American members.[11]) Yet the *Sentinel* persisted. The movement to rename Buffalo Avenue after Dr. King would help move Tampa "toward light rather than darkness," and closed its editorial asking, "honoring a pirate, why not a King as well?"

Racial Attitudes of the Time

The white power structure in Tampa pushed back on the Martin Luther King Jr. street naming issue, and after two years of "intense, racially polarized debate, a divided Tampa City Council"[12] voted to approve the name change in September 1989. The vote was four to three.

Thirty-five years after the historic *Brown v. Board of Education* decision and 25 years after the signing of the Civil Rights Act, American blacks – particularly in the South – found themselves in a different type of battle. Blatant discrimination and Jim Crow segregation was gone. But in its place was a more subtle form of racism, called "symbolic racism" by some such as scholar Michael Hughes or "racial resentment" by others. While these more insidious forms of racism allowed whites to criticize or oppose specific aspects of black progress – civil rights leaders pushed too hard or government programs favored blacks (1997, 49) – they also are indicative of or symbolic of gains that blacks are able to make that may cross over to other areas and lessen white power and privilege in society. The dual fear that blacks push too hard and are moving too fast coupled with the belief that government programs such as busing and affirmative action give blacks preferential treatment create feelings of resentment in white power

structures. Whites begin to question the values of blacks, not their inferiority and resent their perception that they do not have the same work ethics as others. Instead, whites use a symbolic, it's not us but them approach. Blacks should work harder, slavery issues need to be put to rest and government programs geared to the black community are providing African Americans undeserved and unnecessary advantages (Orey 2001, 237). Hughes argues that as the South evolved from "de jure segregation" (1997, 73) and as blacks merge into the mainstream of American society, frictions between the races will continue, although in a different manner. "As blacks continue to be integrated into mainstream institutions, threatening whites' claims to status and privilege, it is not surprising that new racial attitudes would emerge reflecting the nature of this threat" (1997, 73).

This fear is exhibited in the street naming process as well. In Tampa, one justification for voting against the street naming was the passion and opposition of the white residents on Buffalo Avenue. City Councilman Eddie Caballero said he received more calls and letters about renaming Buffalo Avenue "than perhaps on any other issue. There is no way I am going to shove this down the throat of the people on Buffalo Avenue, Caballero declared."[13] According to the *Tribune*, the primary reasons for opposing the street name change were the costs of changing business stationery, and street and building sign costs.[14]

Social distance is another arena that interacts with the idea of racial harmony. The concept of social distance generally refers to "the level of unwillingness among members of a group to accept or approve of interactions with members of an out-group" (Herring and Amissah 1998, 122). In a racial context, it reflects the degree in which

members of one race are disinclined to accept or be associated with members of another race or ethnic group. On a major street intersecting with white neighborhoods, many whites do not wish to be associated with a name that strongly links back to the black community. According to Herring and Amissah, most immigrants and newcomers to the United States adapt to the Anglo-Saxon culture. This adaptation results in a theory referred to as the "race relations cycle" promoted by Robert E. Park which consists of contacts, competition, accommodation and finally, assimilation (1998, 123). This process results in favored and unfavored status, with those failing or unable to adapt to the Anglo culture becoming regulated to the unfavorable position. Herring and Amissah, using information from the 1990 General Social Survey, found that that "despite the supposed decline in racial intolerance and prejudice" there remain "sizeable segments of the U.S. population" that do not want their children to attend schools with blacks, do not want to live in neighborhoods with black people and do not want black political leaders (1998, 142).

Another subtle form of racism is referred to as laissez faire racism. In this theory, the "virtual disappearance" of overt bigotry has not resulted in a prejudice free society, but one marked by laissez faire racist ideology. Laissez faire racism is the persistent negative stereotyping of blacks, of blaming them for their economic situation and resistance to meaningful policy efforts that would eliminate racist social conditions in the United States (Bobo, Kluegel and Smith 1997, 16). Accordingly, the United States remains a "racially dominative society" (1997, 17).

Data reviewed by Bobo, Kluegel and Smith from the 1980 Census describe "the black condition as hyper-segregation" whereby blacks are "extremely racially isolated"

from whites and that there are serious consequences to this segregation. Residential neighborhoods vary in services provided such as schools, utilities, safety and police protection and level of exposure to social conditions (such as crimes and environmental issues) (1997, 19). A street named for a black man, even a recognized civil rights icon, can threaten – in the eyes of many whites – property values, business opportunities and economic development. The interests of blacks again are only advanced when their interests do not conflict with societal concerns of middle and upper class whites, as Bell has expressed (1995, 22). Naming a street after King in their neighborhood does not fit into the interests of many whites.

Despite the gains in knocking down Jim Crow laws and state sanctioned segregation, whites continue to enjoy a substantially greater share of economic, political and prestige resources than African Americans. Thus, laissez faire racism emerged to defend white privilege and social status.

Arguments on Buffalo Avenue: Voices of Opposition

Hillsborough County and the City of Tampa held a joint public hearing on August 31, 1989 to hear public comment on the request to rename Buffalo Avenue after the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. The hearing was held a year and eight months after the City Council first voted to deny the request along portions of the roadway within the city limits. In Tampa and the surrounding county areas affected by the potential change, residents and property owners along Buffalo Avenue overwhelming opposed the street name change. Proponents for the change were mostly black residents and members of black orients organizations. Opponents offered alternatives to naming Buffalo Avenue after Martin Luther King Boulevard. Gordon Commee, a business owner on Buffalo Avenue, had no “objections to naming something where other people were not hurt.” As

Chamber president in the rural Seffner-Mango-Dover-Valrico areas east of Tampa, "they had voted and did not want Buffalo Avenue changed whatsoever, Commee stated."[15]

Tampa resident Charles Springer argued about the potential costs to the citizens of Tampa and Hillsborough County. Springer lamented fiscal problems already plaguing the County and "knew to change the street signs alone was going to cost hundreds of thousands of dollars" and suggested a new road be named after Dr. King. He also supplied a petition of 540 names of residents he said were opposed to the Buffalo Avenue name change. Additionally, he said that changing the street name would "disrupt not only their addresses, but the whole neighborhood in general." [16]

Another argument raised at the public hearing was the onslaught of "outsiders" attempting to change the name of Buffalo Avenue. "The people owning property on Buffalo Avenue did not want the change, for whatever reasons, and many were not objecting to a new street," John Sherman testified. Residents may hire an attorney, he said, adding, "it was not right for outsiders that did not have property on Buffalo Avenue to try and take away the name."[17]

Another resident, living in the rural county areas of Buffalo Avenue (also referred to as Highway 574) stated "he had not heard one property owner, taxpayer, or so forth, who lived on Buffalo that wanted the name changed."[18] Realtor Richard Bennett said the issue, as he saw it, "was whether or not the majority was going to rule." He argued he could afford the costs associated with the name change but the county and city could not. "Every property owner on Buffalo Avenue received certified mail at the cost of $2 each, so thousands had been spent in trying to deal with this issue," Bennett said. He

urged the consideration of “something new” to be thought of to honor Dr. King. He further suggested “putting a ballot” to the property owners on Buffalo and doing what the majority wanted. [19]

Randy Pacheco said in two years of fighting the name change on Buffalo Avenue he had documentation of 1,600 signatures on petitions opposing the name change. He was “strongly opposed to changing the name of Buffalo Avenue,” and he asked that “neighborhoods which had built Tampa not be destroyed.” [20] Sylvia Espinola expressed concern over confusion and economic impact for the businesses located on Buffalo Avenue. Attorney Dale Swope argued that the opposition to the street naming tainted the efforts and the “issue had become too painful and too decisive and winner take all.” Tampa should look for an alternative that would “unify the community.” Christina Bennett “strongly objected to the ability of the City and County governments to initiate any proposals to change the name of any street at the expense of taxpayers, businesses and property owners on the street.” She also questioned if the City and County were following the rules and regulations regarding street naming and asked how the governments could instigate a name change without support of the property owners.[21]

Mike Roberts, a Buffalo Avenue property owner, opposed the name change, he stated, “for economic reasons” such as the “change of letterhead, computers, etc.” Others questioned how costs to residents may be mitigated while Bill Boenau said he and his wife drove 60 miles from Sarasota to suggest the City rename the Hillsborough River in Dr. King’s memory. One resident, in the spirit of cooperation, even offered to help businesses with potential printing costs. Alphonso Brown, owner of a printing

business in Tampa, stated he would "extend his services free to those businesses on Buffalo Avenue if anyone was economically deprived." Brown said he would "bear the responsibility and cost of printing business cards, stationery and envelopes to those" who needed his services.[22]

Social Distance

As comments from citizens at the joint City-County public hearing indicate, many residents were willing to name other streets, buildings or even a river after the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. instead of a street that traveled in front of their property, home or business. Social distance from racial identity with African-American culture seems to drive the debate between property owners against the street renaming and those who proposed the change. As Dr. Bell theorizes, when actions undertaken may enhance or improve social or economic standing for whites, they will conform to change – such as occurred in the South during the end of segregation to the immersion of the Sunbelt. Actions that will impact white interests, however, will not be tolerated especially when they do not converge with white goals, interests or objectives. Opposition to a street named after Dr. King is a strong indicator of the principles behind critical race theory.

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1 Landenberg, Lee and Michael Field, "Tampa Will Honor King With Street," *Tampa Tribune*, September 8, 1989, 1B

2 "Petitions Press Fight For Martin Luther King Memorial Street," *Florida Sentinel Bulletin*, January 5, 1988

3 Harris, Rudolph, "My Opinion: Tampa City Council Decides King Street Naming Thursday," *Florida Sentinel Bulletin*, January 5, 1988, 4B

4 United States Census, 1990, Tampa and Hillsborough County, FL

5 Harris, Rudolph, "My Opinion: Selecting Buffalo Avenue a Moral Issue," *Florida Sentinel Bulletin*, February 9, 1988, 4B

6 Harris, Rudolph, "My Opinion: Buffalo Avenue is an Opportunity for this City," *Florida Sentinel Bulletin*, February 5, 1988, 4B

[7] "Council Votes 4-3 Against Naming Buffalo Avenue After King," *Florida Sentinel Bulletin*, January 15, 1988

[8] "Renaming Street for King Rejected," Metro Briefs, *Tampa Tribune*, January 15, 1988, 1B

[9] Harris, Rudolph, "My Opinion: Tampa City Council Procedures Are Well Off Course," *Florida Sentinel Bulletin,* February 2, 1988, 4B

[10] "Honoring A Pirate, Why Not A King," editorial *Florida Sentinel Bulletin*, February 9, 1988, 4B

[11] Peterson, Lindsay, "Desegregating Krewe Was Only the First Step," *Tampa Tribune*, February 27, 2005, accessed online TBO.com, July 19, 2010

[12] Landenberg, Lee and Michael Field, "Tampa Will Honor King With Street," *Tampa Tribune*, September 8, 1989, 1B

[13] "Council Votes 4-3 Against Naming Buffalo Avenue After King," *Tampa Tribune*, January 15, 1988, accessed online TBOP.com, May 29, 2010

[14] Ibid

[15] Fitzpatrick, Edna, deputy clerk, Minutes of the Hillsborough County/City of Tampa Public Hearing, August 31, 1989, page 424

[16] Ibid

[17] Ibid

[18] Ibid, Maurice Reynolds, page 425

[19] Fitzpatrick, Edna, deputy clerk, Minutes of the Hillsborough County/City of Tampa Public Hearing, August 31, 1989,page 425

[20] Ibid, page 426

[21] Ibid, page 426

[22] Ibid, page 423

CHAPTER 4
PALMETTO: SYSTEMIC RACISM

Recognizing King

In 1990, Charles B. Smith became the first African American elected to the Palmetto City Council. The Manatee County community located just north of Bradenton had a population of about 13% blacks and as in much of the South a legacy of segregation and isolation for African Americans. Smith represented Ward 1, a largely African-American constituency that was ready for representation and inclusion in city affairs and having a voice in their government. Included on Councilman Smith's agenda were two issues of importance to the black community: establishing a city holiday for Martin Luther King Jr. and designating a street named after the late civil rights leader.

By 1994, Smith had accomplished one goal, the City of Palmetto recognized Martin Luther King Jr. holiday on the third Monday of January, as does much of the nation. The street naming was more elusive but seemingly in sight and almost accomplished. After a year of debates before the City Council and two votes on the issue, Smith believed 17th Street West was about to be renamed Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard.

What Councilman Smith did not expect was after a 4 -1 vote to further discuss the street naming on January 17, 1994 when he left town, that the other four members of the City Commission would schedule a special “work session” for the morning of January 19 where his colleagues would vote to rescind the street renaming, face charges of violating Florida's Sunshine Law and effectively scuttle the renaming of 17th Street West.

Minutes and Debates

The process to rename 17th Street West from 8th Avenue to 14th Avenue began in early 1993. On January 18, 1993 Smith and his fellow council members voted unanimously for the street name change. Then confusion set in. Residents opposed to the name change appealed to Council, about 60 attending a meeting on February 1, 1993 and protesting the name change. Council still upheld the decision, this time by a 3-2 vote.[1] Further complicating the issue was the discovery that a portion of 17th Street West was located outside the city limits, in the jurisdiction of Manatee County. Despite that snafu, African-American residents continued to press for the street name while white residents opposed it, many on the grounds that it would "confuse Palmetto's grid system of numbered streets."[2] One resident, Robert McMillen, claimed it would "cause confusion." He suggested a park or civic building be named for King. The Rev. Willie Ivey, a chief proponent of the street naming called white residents' opposition "racially motivated."[3]

By the December 20, 1993 meeting, Councilman Smith was becoming increasingly frustrated in his efforts to rename the street after Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Opponents, including fellow council members, were raising issue after issue to block the name change. They used "every excuse" to oppose it, he said.[4] Cries of opposition included: "Dr. King was a communist," residents "won't be able to find their address," and according to Smith, "the (numerical) grid became an issue." Not only did opponents argue that the numerical grid was important to finding one's way around town, they also argued that the City of Palmetto did not have named streets. In countering that claim, Smith said, "we found 50 names." Other excuses were that property values would decrease and Smith noted, real estate agents testified to that claim. A postal employee

also complained that the mail would be harder to deliver. Basically, Smith said, “all hell broke out.”

Another issue raised in Palmetto that frequently is an issue in street namings in other communities was that the city did not follow its own ordinances. Palmetto had a “street designation ordinance” enacted in 1989 that stipulated:

> Streets shall be assigned numbers in accordance with the approved city grid system. Streets may be assigned names where the street is designed in such a curvilinear fashion that it would be difficult to number due to its various directional changes upon the approval of the city clerk. Dual designations shall be prohibited. No names shall be assigned or approved which duplicate existing street names either actually or phonetically.[5]

At the December 20 meeting, the city attorney stated that the Council’s motion to designed 17th Street as Martin Luther King Jr. Drive was taken prior to and without the attorney’s review of the action. He recommended the Council “consider rewriting the street designation ordinance.”[6] But council members were getting nervous about the vote and the increasingly negative arguments about renaming 17th Street West. Rev. Ivey urged the Council to move on with the street naming, erect new street signs and argued that due process and adequate notice had been provided to residents.[7] Councilman Smith also argued that enough time had passed and that adequate notice was provided to residents along 17th Street and “they had surely heard or read of the designation by now.”[8]

Residents also spoke to the issue. Guy Grimes suggested that part of the street be named for President John F. Kennedy and the other part for Dr. King. Jean Moreland told Council she was “discouraged and disgusted” by their lack of action and said the naming of the street “was important to the black community.” Council’s action

or lack of action was a “sad comment on leadership,” she said adding, “I beg you to erect the signs.”[9]

Mayor Gordon Dole countered that it was his opinion that Council “did not act in accordance with our own ordinance and violated our own law, until such time as the ordinance is followed I will vote aye” to follow the city code and he suggested that residents on 17th Street West be advised that a motion has been made to change the street name.[10] Street signs were never erected during 1993 because the City Council and County Commission began “waffling” over street naming procedures.[11] Further, council members began digging in over the grid system and potential safety issues of changing the numbered street name. “I’m not going to vote to change our number system, that could cause tremendous safety problems,” Councilman Brian William declared.[12] Councilman Jim Biggins also supported preservation of the grid at a different meeting, stating “We can’t do it (change the name) unless we change the ordinance. I’m not for that, I’m for sticking with the grid system.”[13]

Sunshine Violation Allegations

With the issue still unresolved, council members met on January 17, 1994 to again discuss the naming of 17th Street West after the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. At that meeting, “Councilman Charles Smith, the only black member, urged his colleagues to honor the decision a previous council made last year to rename 17th Street West between Eight and 14th Avenues after the slain civil rights leader. His motion died because the remaining four – all white – refused to support it.”[14] Following a long and fruitless debate, Council voted four to one to hold a work session on the issue of street names in general. Following discussion on other items and after

Councilman Smith left the meeting early, remaining members agreed to schedule the work session on Wednesday, January 19 at 8:30 a.m.

According to the *Bradenton Herald*, "at the January 19 meeting, which few people knew about, including Smith, the other four council members voted unanimously to overturn the 1993 decision to rename a section of 17th Street West after King."[15] The meeting, which was not recorded, was alleged by Smith and Rev. Ivey to be a violation of Florida's Government-in-the-Sunshine Laws. Smith filed a complaint with the Palmetto Police Department and charged that the mayor and three other white council members sought to "disenfranchise black constituents by trickery and deviousness."[16] Further, he said proper notice was not provided that the meeting would be held and that official action can only be taken a meetings or special meetings and not at a work session. The complaint was forward to the State's Attorney Office. While the Sunshine Law requires that "reasonable notice" be given of a public meeting, it does not establish what type of notice is reasonable. However, according to Barry Richard, an attorney for the Florida Press Association, that "certainly a strong argument can be made that there wasn't sufficient notice" given for the Palmetto Council's work session.[17] In addition, city officials argued that the meeting called was a special meeting and not a work session, allowing council members to vote on issues.

The State's Attorney announced in February 1994 that the City Council broke the law when they meet at the morning meeting and unanimously overturned the naming of a portion of 17th Street West after Dr. King. Unable to verify that the white council members and mayor "knowingly" broke the law, assistant State Attorney Deno Economou said civil violations would be charged against Mayor Dole and Council

members Jim Biggins, Shirley Grover Bryant, Brian Williams and Pat Whitesel. The infractions are punishable by fine of up to $500 against each individual.[18] Smith, who is routinely referenced in the *Bradenton Herald* as "the city's first and only black councilman," said he was pleased with the result of the State Attorney's actions. It may signal change in City Hall, he said, adding, "these behind the door decisions will not be tolerated."[19]

State Attorney: Law Was Broken

City Council meeting minutes from the January 17 meeting when the special meeting was scheduled show that the "remaining council members decided to hold a 'special meeting' at 8:30 a.m. January 19."[20] Another issue that arose, however, is that Palmetto Council meetings are not recorded, and no audible tape exists from either meeting to verify action taken just written minutes are available. At that time, according to the Florida Press Association, Palmetto "might be the only city in the state that does not tape its meetings."[21]

An attorney for the mayor and council denied any infraction of the Sunshine Law had taken place by his clients. "They are not personally responsible for giving the notice, it's not their duty," Don Hadsock said.[22] In fact, in most municipalities and counties, staff prepares the meeting agendas and provides notice to the press and public. A judge agreed and in June 1994, dismissed the non-criminal charges against the five Palmetto officials accused of violating the state's Sunshine Law. The judge's reasons included that the law does not define "reasonable notice," that information about the second meeting was announced at the January 17 meeting, and other reporter's attending that meeting left early, thereby minimizing their ability to be advised

of the next meeting. Since one reporter did attend the January 19 meeting, the judge ruled, some notice had been provided.

While Smith believed the gap in the law "gave the council a way to wiggle out," he believes the process was worthwhile and would prevent such actions by the Council in the future. "I don't think it will ever happen in the City of Palmetto again."[23] Dick Shelton, secretary of the First Amendment Foundation in Tallahassee and executive director of the Florida Press Association, expressed disappointment with the court's decision. "The whole thrust of public notice is to give the public an opportunity to attend a meeting of interest to them. I think (Palmetto officials) failed significantly in follow the public notice requirement."[24] Smith concurred with that philosophy. The issue of renaming 17th Street was of great interest, especially to his constituents, Smith said.

New Street Name?

Following all the votes, confusion and protest, including charging the city's Mayor and four council members with violation of the Sunshine Law, 17th Street West never was renamed to Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard. The year long process and following court case that ended in June 1994 deflated the effort to implement a new street name or even a dual name as suggested by Manatee County commissioners. According to Charles Smith, the street naming, protests and special meeting allegations attracted national media coverage as well as efforts to find some other memorial to name after Dr. King, including city buildings and a city park. None were successful.

Then owners of a new subdivision under construction in Palmetto stepped in and offered to name the development's main thoroughfare Dr. Martin Luther King Place. That street's meandering contours meets the city's street naming ordinance allowing for a name and not a number because it is "curvilinear" and located within a subdivision or

mobile home park. The developers spoke with Smith prior to making the offer and he did not object to the street naming. "The developer wanted to give something to the community. I think it's a wonderful idea," Smith said. Smith said black residents he has spoken with were pleased with the offer but they were still interested in seeing 17th Street West named for the slain civil rights leader as well. Other council members and the mayor also praised the offer. "I think it's one great step toward a healing process that desperately needs to take place within this community," said Mayor Dole.[25]

No Easy Road

As in many communities, the process to name a street after Dr. King often exposes other racial dynamics. In Palmetto, Councilman Smith notes that there has been a white power structure that for blacks is difficult to penetrate. Often times, the street naming is not an effort only to recognize Dr. King and his contributions to America, but to "establish the public legitimacy of all blacks" (Schein 2006, 220). As even the press reports of the Palmetto street naming process imply, in six out of 10 articles mentioning Charles Smith, he is referred to as "the only black (council) member," or "Palmetto's first and only black council member" and "the city's first and only black councilman."[26] That a black man has been elected to City Council appears to be an accomplishment and perhaps, something of a surprise. It can reflect what Karen Till notes that street naming struggles "often reflect larger social (power) disputes about who has authority to create, define, interpret and represent collective pasts through place" (2006, 220). Further, commemorating King is a broader struggle in that King and the street naming process is so often linked to race and racism, which blacks see as an attempt to exert some control over their space and community and share in the historical control whites have exhibited in the past. That is why when all white

councils or majority councils, such as in Palmetto, deny street namings, often based on flimsy reasoning, that race is a suspected reason. As Rev. Ivey said after one Palmetto meeting, "it's time to stop this hatred, prejudice and racism."[27]

Another aspect of the street naming debate is the selection of a street of some prominence and that meets a cross section of the population. For many blacks, streets selected to honor Dr. King having a "geographic connectivity" to multiple neighbors has a symbolic appeal. The intent is to allow streets to unite diverse neighborhoods (2006, 226). The problem with this approach, however, is that many blacks live separately from whites. Plus, blacks are more likely to cross over into white areas of town than whites into black areas (Feagin 2000, 153). Despite the change in social behavior and lessening of residential barriers, about two thirds of the black population in the South remains segregated from white neighborhoods (2000, 154). This systemic approach to segregation in American society is indicative of how unconscious much of white America's racism can be. Many blacks, therefore use King and the street naming process to draw in the white community and at the same time extend themselves into white areas, which often are the prime locations for residential and commercial development. Selection of a prominent street to be named for King will indicate how that community – white and black – views the slain civil rights leader (2006, 230). It can also indicate how that community deals with racial issues and reconciliation.

Systemic Racism

A primary principle of systemic racism, especially as espoused by Joe Feagin, "involves recurring and unequal relationships between groups and individuals" (2000, 19). An important tenant of this theory is the fact that, according to Feagin, those who create and dominate the economic system also control and crafted the political system.

In the United States, the primary, dominant force in both economics and politics is the Eurocentric, white race. Systemic racism not only focuses on racial images, attitudes and identities, according to Feagin, but also on "the creation, development and maintenance of white privilege, economic wealth and sociopolitical power" (2000, 21). Racism and control over economic wealth and sociopolitical power can impact where one resides, what type of job or education is provided, whether a family has health care or other similar issues. These social inequities result in what Feagin calls a "racial hierarchy" that is duplicated across all spans of societal development (2000, 26).

An interesting facet of this theory is that most white Americans "greatly underestimate the degree to which the nation is still a total racist society" (2000, 26). Whites not only do not recognize the degree of their privileges but they do not realize that these privileges have been passed down from generation to generation. And Feagin notes, "every sector of U.S. society – the economy, politics and the law, education and the mass media – was still run by and for whites, with the elites making most important decisions" (2000, 36).

No Representation

The numbers of elected black officials in the four cities selected for this dissertation is telling. In Zephyrhills there were no black officials, in Tampa just one, in Pensacola two out of 10 and in Palmetto just one. That is not a unique problem. In many areas, black voters are unable to elect black representatives and when they are, they often are in the minority and unable to affect change or impact black neighborhoods or black interests (Feagin 2000, 144).

Despite the advancement of blacks and improvements in racial relations in the United States, systemic racism is evident in the organizational power structure of many

local governments. In Palmetto, Charles Smith is the only African American elected to the Palmetto City Council. His personal achievement and ability to speak out on the issues of importance to black constituents in his community is a step forward in recognizing the needs of the minority population and espousing their points of view. However, as only one vote out of five, the other four white members remain in control of the issues that come before the City Council and of the sociopolitical agenda of the community.

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1 Starnes, Stan, "Hot Debate Blocks Path of King Street Proposal, "*Bradenton Herald*, March 3, 1993, B1

2 Ibid

3 Ibid

4 Telephone interview with Charles B. Smith, November 20, 2010

5 Palmetto City Codes, Chapter 25, Streets, Sidewalks and Other Public Places, Article II, Section 25-35, Municode.com

6 Stearns, Linda, city clerk, City Council minutes, December 20, 1993, City of Palmetto, page 3

7 Ibid

8 Ibid

9 Stearns, Linda, city clerk, City Council minutes, December 20, 1993, City of Palmetto, page 4

10 Ibid

11 Atamian, Kim, "Palmetto Council Refuses to Name Street After King," *Bradenton Herald*, January 18, 1994, B1

12 Ibid

13 Starnes, Stan, "King Street Decision Rests with Palmetto," *Bradenton Herald*, January 28, 1994, B1

14 Ibid

15 Starnes, Stan, "Palmetto Records Rule Mulled," *Bradenton Herald*, February 21, 1994, B1

16 Starnes, Sam, "Smith Files Criminal Complaint Over King Street Meeting," *Bradenton Herald*, January 22, 1994, B1

17 Ibid

[18] Starnes, Sam, "State: Palmetto Council Broke Law in Street Case," *Bradenton Herald*, February 26, 1994, A1

[19] Ibid

[20] Ibid

[21] Starnes, Stan, "Palmetto Records Rule Mulled," *Bradenton Herald*, February 21, 1994, B1

[22] Gillespie, Annette, "Cloud Over Sunshine Moves to Courtroom," *Bradenton Herald*, April 22, 1994, B1

[23] Gillespie, Annette, "'Sunshine' Complaint Dismissed," *Bradenton Herald*, June 23, 1994, F1

[24] Ibid

[25] Gillespie, Annette, "King Street OK'd," *Bradenton Herald*, March 31, 1994, A1

[26] Atamian, Kim and Stan Starnes, "Palmetto Council Refuses to Name Street After King" and "Smith Files Criminal Complaint Over King Street Meeting," *Bradenton Herald Tribune*, 1994

[27] Atamian, Kim, "Palmetto Council Refuses to Name Street After King," *Bradenton Herald*, January 18, 1994, B1

CHAPTER 5
ZEPHYRHILLS: MUNICIPAL EXCLUSION

Silent No More

On April 29, 2004 at the intersection of 7th Street and Martin Luther King Jr. Avenue in downtown Zephyrhills, dozens of protesters marched back and forth across the City Hall parking lot, carrying signs and waving flags. "Silent No More, Our Voices Will Be Heard," read one sign, "Zephyrhills Best Kept Secret, the Black Community" another sign said while a third called Zephyrhills "a city of shame." The protests began after the Zephyrhills City Council voted April 26 to reverse an earlier vote that changed the name of Sixth Avenue to Martin Luther King Jr. Avenue in this small west central Florida town. The protests would continue for days, bringing in national press and coverage.

The demonstrators ranged from 13-year Nicholas Graham, a white Zephyrhills middle school student to Irene Dobson, a longtime African-American resident who first suggested the name change the previous October and would turn 80 during the protests. The diversity and ardor of the protestors however would not stop City Council from changing the name back to Sixth Avenue at their next meeting. For Zephyrhills, an attempt to unite white and black residents instead unearthed divisions within the community that city leaders and residents did not realize existed. Zephyrhills would soon learn that while many of the Martin Luther King Jr. streets are different, in many instances, their stories are similar.

The Idea of a Street Change

In Zephyrhills, Sixth Avenue is a thin ribbon of asphalt two lanes wide and a few miles long. It traverses across the width of the Zephyrhills, a small city best known for

its pure water and as a haven for northern retirees. In the east, the avenue stretches past pasture lands and runways of the municipal airport, through a small Africa-American community snuggled alongside the railroad tracks and westward into predominately white city neighborhoods lined with block houses and fruit trees in the yard.

In 2003, Sixth Avenue was a mostly quiet street in a relatively quiet town of 12,000 residents. Yet tensions arose and tempers flared in October 2003 when a request was brought forward to City Council to rename Sixth Avenue after Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Inspired by the celebration of the 40th anniversary of Dr. King's "I Have a Dream" speech, then-79-year-old Irene Dobson passed a letter around her neighborhood seeking support from the mostly African-American residents for the street renaming change. At the next city council meeting, the name change proposal was endorsed with little discussion and no animosity.[1] Staff was directed to investigate the mechanics of the renaming process. This effort, however, had just begun.

In Zephyrhills, existing demographics would appear to doom the street naming from the start. In the 2000 census, 2.8 % of the city's population was African American, compared to 92.6 % white population. The city's mayor and all five council members were white, and in fact, no black had ever been elected to office in Zephyrhills. Local dailies such as the *Tampa Tribune* and *St. Petersburg Times* and the weekly *Zephyrhills News* covered the event. Later, coverage would attract the national news media, including the *New York Times*, CBS and ABC and television coverage from the Tampa market. No predominately African-American press covered the Zephyrhills story.

How Sixth Avenue Was Selected

Today Sixth Avenue is a paved road that connects to the east with a county bypass road. As recently as the late 1990s, however, Sixth Avenue east of the railroad tracks was a dead end dirt road that extended past a half dozen smaller dirt lanes in the primarily black neighborhood. When Irene Dobson and her family moved to the "Otis Moody" subdivision in 1962 it was virtually the only Zephyrhills residential neighborhood available to blacks. The new subdivision was a half mile northeast of existing black housing, often referred to in Zephyrhills as "Krusen's Quarters" and named after the citrus and ranch family that owned much of the land in the area. The black families living in Krusen's Quarters historically worked in the Krusen citrus groves and family owned lumberyard and shopped at the company-owned commissary that accepted "chits" issued at work for food and supplies. Irene Dobson's family moved over to the Krusen's Quarter's area from Hercules Powder Company land in north Zephyrhills, where her husband Robert was employed as a laborer for the powder company since the early 1950s. The Dobsons moved to the Hercules Powder Company land from southeast Georgia, Mr. Dobson first arrived in 1950 or so in search of work, and then later, Irene joined him. Hercules Powder Company operated in Zephyrhills for nearly 20 years, from 1946 to 1962. Laborers harvested pine stumps that were sent to Brunswick, Ga. and processed for resin and pine oil. Camp 39, as the Zephyrhills plant was known, was located on 80 acres on the north side of Zephyrhills (Wise 2010, 86). Outside the city limits, Camp 39 included cabins on the property where the workers and their families resided. When the powder company closed its doors in 1962, the families living there were moved off the land, over to Sixth Avenue.

This time period encapsulated the height of segregation during the 1950s and early 1960s. Hercules Powder Company had work camps across the South and imported black laborers from poorer areas who were seeking work. When the camps closed, workers had to find housing as well as new employment. As the camps were closing, the steel grip of segregation began to ease, at least in the public arena. Housing conditions did not change in Zephyrhills, both the Otis Moody subdivision and Krusen's Quarters were located just outside the city limits of Zephyrhills. When Mrs. Dobson's youngest daughter entered fourth grade in 1962 she was enrolled for the first time in a predominately white school in Zephyrhills, leaving behind the all black elementary school she attended previously in Dade City.

By 2003, Irene Dobson had resided in the Sixth Avenue area for 40 years. While her husband worked as a laborer at the Hercules Powder Company, and later at other businesses, she served as a domestic in the homes of some of Zephyrhills most prominent families, including one of the first doctors to come to Zephyrhills and wealthy farmers and ranchers. When she began the campaign for the street naming, she selected Sixth Avenue for two reasons: first its historical significance as the gateway to the black community and secondly, because it ran through town, from one end to the other, from the heart of the black community into the predominately white neighborhoods. The entire street, she envisioned, would bear the name of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., recognizing his universal accomplishments.[2]

Thus, in Zephyrhills, as in many communities, it was important to black residents that all of Sixth Avenue be named after the fallen civil rights leader. The idea of renaming only that portion of a street that just "wiggled through the black community" as

was suggested during the MLK street name change in Tallahassee (*Tallahassee Democrat*, p 1A, January 17, 1999 as quoted in Alderman, 2000, 675) would be viewed as a hollow and empty gesture. In a community such as Zephyrhills that has been largely defined by the "railroad tracks" that separated white residents from most black residents, the duality of a street name could only serve to reinforce the segregated living conditions long sanctioned by Zephyrhills and other communities in the American South. Crossing cultural boundaries is symbolic of change and how Americans have come together since the civil rights movement.

"Rev. King was about togetherness… if his name was going to be on a street, it had to be on one that connected one neighborhood to another," said Allen Stuchs, a King supporter during the Tallahassee renaming process (Alderman 2000, 675). As Alderman notes, "when commemorating King, African Americans are often concerned about the location of the named street in relation to the white community and the extent to which the street serves as a geographic bridge between races" (2003, 166).

It was against this backdrop that black residents in Zephyrhills were heartened by the warm reception of City Council and tentative approval of the proposed street name change. But once property owners along Sixth Avenue were notified of the proposed name change, the next Council meeting was standing room only and contentious, filled with white residents opposed to the idea and openly hostile to Council. Despite the anger of the white residents, the street name change was approved. Council members originally voted four to one to change the name; the final vote tally was 3-2, still with a slim majority.

But what was the cost? White residents felt betrayed, torpedoed by what they called a callous Council, who they claimed rushed the issue and ignored the wishes of the majority white residents. Black residents, meanwhile, vindicated by Council's support, were distressed by the reactions of white residents.

The Zephyrhills Experience

What appeared to be the final vote on the Zephyrhills street naming was held November 10, 2003. Despite the protests from white residents and threats of recall elections, the issue died down. The City attempted to mollify some residents of Sixth Avenue who complained of the costs associated with the street name change and reimbursed a total of $145.13 for the costs of changing the address on their Florida driver's licenses and checking accounts.[3]

Then in February 2004, during qualifying for the next city election, two candidates stepped forward to challenge incumbent council members who had voted for the Martin Luther King Jr. name change. They vowed to overturn the street naming and return the name back to Sixth Avenue. The candidates, Arjay Morgan and Gina King, challenged incumbents Elizabeth Geiger and Lance Smith. Following the April election, Geiger held onto her seat by *one* vote and Smith was defeated by King, 510 votes to 425[4]. With the elective majority shift at the next Council meeting, Gina King moved that the street name be rescinded and Martin Luther King Jr. Avenue be renamed Sixth Avenue, or as she explained it in an email to Council she would recommend "that we restore the name of the street and right of way currently known as Martin Luther King Jr. Avenue to its original name of Sixth Avenue thus preserving the historic numeric grid system already established within the City."[5] Her motion passed three to two. But several Council members had met with black community leaders, Irene Dobson among them,

and negotiated a compromise: honorary signage recognizing Dr. King would remain on the street posts, and both names would adorn street signs. A motion by Geiger to that effect passed, four to one, with Gina King opposed.

In the interim leading up to the Council vote, about 100 mostly African-American residents began a protest at City Hall. Discouraged by the April 26, 2004 Council motion to revert the street name to Sixth Avenue and running up to the May 10 meeting mostly black protesters picketed City Hall. Irene Dobson celebrated her 80th birthday in the City Hall parking lot with prayer and cake and her fellow protesters honoring the milestone. In just days, the city received over 50 emails and letters, with a majority from whites protesting the street name, and several from white supremacist groups urging Council to remain strong and not to back down in the face of the protests. Many comments were from out-of-state and other parts of Florida as well as local Zephyrhills residents and others in Pasco County.

The letters and emails contained comments and messages ranging from the mildly supportive for the name change back to Sixth Avenue, such as “Hold your ground. Don’t give in. We support you” and “hang in there, don’t change your vote. Somewhere, someplace it is time to take a stand” to “don’t letter the ‘racism’ talk get to you,” to a letter urging, “I have been reading about your decision to review your decision to rename an established street after MLK and commend you and encourage you. Perhaps if our ancestors were to do it over again, they would pick their own cotton” and “I do not want the name changed to MLK!!!! If this happens I will stop shopping in the Hills.”[6] Other letters expressed dismay at the prospect of reverting to the original name and embarrassment for Zephyrhills and those living in the town. Those emails

urged caution and expressed support for the street naming process. African-American supporters wrote a joint letter thanking Council for "their recent vote. It was a courageous stand. It took much more intestinal fortitude than many would have thought possible." Others called the vote "an appropriate gesture in keeping with what many other communities have done throughout our fair nation." Still another resident wrote, "Don't become a Selma or Eagle Lake. Make us proud. Make our constituents proud. There are times in our life when we are given the challenge to do the right thing. This is one of yours."[7]

Finding Solutions

President Clinton attempted to bridge the racial divide by forming initiatives to open dialogue between the races. On a national scale, that can be challenging and outcomes difficult to ascertain. In Zephyrhills, city officials formed a community initiative to open dialogues and explore the schisms that appeared in the wake of the naming of Martin Luther King Jr. Avenue. In the late winter of 2004 students in the Master of Public Administration program at the University of South Florida conducted a satisfaction survey for the city. One question asked, "The City recently renamed 6th Avenue to Martin Luther King Avenue. Do you support street renaming? Of 255 respondents, 188 or 74% said they did not support the street naming while 66 or 26% said yes, they did support it.[8] This created a discord difficult to breach in an initiative setting.

The issue, however, facing those on the initiative is simple: how do you begin to build a bridge to close those gaps and heal those wounds? And perceptions aside, are Americans – particularly white Americans – really ready to accept racial equality?

As the street renaming in Zephyrhills and other communities has shown, many whites, at least in the abstract, are free of discrimination or prejudicial beliefs as long as those beliefs don't impact their daily existence. The community as a whole did not oppose renaming Sixth Avenue from the railroad tracks east as that area is predominately black. No one complained in the past when city officials worked with predominately black county residents to get streets paved in their neighborhood, streetlights installed and water and sewer lines extended to county residents outside the city limits.[9] But when a black woman who lived outside the city limits requested the street name and demanded that it carry the length of the street, residents objected. Residents voiced fears that the association with a black civic leader will diminish their neighborhoods and devalue their properties. In Keysville, Ga., city leaders experienced the same reaction as in Zephyrhills, according to Alderman. "African-American leaders found little opposition when they renamed a street for King within the city limits of Keysville. However, they encountered intense resistance when they sought to have the road renamed across the entire county from one boundary to another." The city of Keysville is 75% black, the county is 50% white (2003, 166).

Another common approach against the street renaming was to criticize the way the renaming is handled. In Zephyrhills, an ordinance defining street renaming procedures was passed in 1987 and was forgotten by city leaders during the street naming process. Despite complaints about the ordinance, the city attorney found that City Council followed proper procedures during the street naming process. That also is a similar complaint in other communities and one used in Eugene, Ore. when residents

decried the “flawed process” of the street naming process (*The Register-Guard*, June 11, 2003).

At one of the Council hearings in Zephyrhills, the Rev. Eddie Nunn Sr., pastor of the Macedonia Missionary Baptist Church, a black church located just north of the Otis Moody community, held up his eyeglasses while speaking in support of the Martin Luther King Jr. street naming and directing his attention and comments in the racially divided audience to the “white side” asked them to look at the world through his eyes and through the eyes of black residents. Zephyrhills needs to change, Nunn admonished them, and while people often resist change, “we need to remember the contributions that Martin Luther King Jr. made for all Americans, white and black.” The cost of a street name change is minimal compared to the life the Rev. King gave to the cause, Nunn said.[10] Rev. Nunn, it turns out, was the only minister or civic leader to speak in support of the street name change in Zephyrhills during the debate.

Municipal Exclusion and Underbounding

Irene Dobson’s experiences in Zephyrhills demonstrate the power of municipal exclusion and segregation and how those vestiges of the old South continue to impact life in today’s societies. In 1962, African Americans were extremely limited in their ability to live within the city limits of Zephyrhills. In the black communities, black residents did not have access to city water or sewer, fire hydrants, paved roads or street lights. They supported local businesses by shopping in town, but did not have a right to vote within the municipality. Forty years later many of those issues are resolved. Between Pasco County and the City of Zephyrhills most – but not all – of the roads are paved. Blacks living east of the railroad tracks and off of Sixth Avenue within the city limits live on paved roads with city utilities, street lights and voting rights. Blacks in the

unincorporated area have access to city water, some paved roads and some street lights, but without annexation into the city, no vote in city government.

In 2004, after 40 years living in the Sixth Avenue area and more than 50 years in Zephyrhills, Irene Dobson, who resides about a half mile from the city limits, discovered she remained an outsider. The development of the black residential area in Zephyrhills is not a unique phenomenon in the South. According to Allan Parnell, "the settlement patterns of rural black immigrants during the 1960s and 1970s resulted in high concentrations of blacks located outside the borders of towns as well as segregated within towns."[11] Further, Parnell defines "political exclusion" or underbounding as a process that "occurs when African-American neighborhoods are kept just outside of a town's boundaries, resulting in lower levels of services, reduced access to infrastructure and limited or no political vote." The real political power remains "with the local white elite" and African-American communities are routinely excluded from local government actions by administrative decisions made by elected and appointed officials based on the "gerrymandered" exclusion of black residents.[12]

A primary complaint of city residents opposed to the street renaming was that Irene Dobson lived outside the city limits. So too did many of her African-American neighbors. In fact, one argument Councilwoman Gina King used in opposing the Martin Luther King Jr. street name change was "everyone she's heard speak in favor of King Avenue lives outside the city limits."[13] Councilman Lance Smith suggested that his support of the renaming of Sixth Avenue was based on the merits of the request and his belief that the black residents had a strong stake in what occurred in Zephyrhills. "It was my feeling that they were community members," Smith stated.[14]

It is possible to explain away the historical aspects of political and municipal exclusion and the impact on minority communities, but the continued existence of these "jagged and irregular municipal boundaries" suggest "something more sinister."[15] The process of annexation of unincorporated properties is another aspect of the underbounding process. "Annexation – or the lack of annexation – can be a tool used by municipal leaders to exclude disadvantaged or low-income populations, including minorities, from voting in local elections and from receiving public utilities and other community services (Lichter, Parisi, Grice and Taquino 2007, 47). The authors define "underbounding" as "racially-selective annexation and racial exclusion from municipalities" (2007, 48). This phenomenon, while practiced nationally, is most prevalent in the South "where blacks often reside at the outskirts of local municipalities."

The fact that Irene Dobson, or her neighbors, were restricted in where they could live, even in an historical context, was never part of the street naming decision. For white residents, it was simply enough that most of the supporters of the street name change were not residents of the city and therefore had no voice or vote.

In the Lichter article, the authors conclude that incidents of racial exclusion are less widespread than in the past, but still exist, and their results are "suggestive of continuing racial exclusion in some parts of the rural South" (2007, 67). The continuing after effects of the practice linger throughout the South, yet there are remedies to past injustices. In Zephyrhills, city officials extended city water to the Otis Moody subdivision in the late 1980s and in 1998 assisted residents in seeking a federal grant through Pasco County to pave dirt roads. A newspaper headline heralding that cooperation was entitled, "Zephyrhills Government Takes on Unusual Role: That of A

Good Neighbor."[16] After the 2004 street naming issue, city planning officials met with residents east of the railroad tracks and within the Otis Moody subdivision to discuss the idea of annexation. Residents declined the offer.

Remnants Remain

Forty years after the fall of segregation, its remnants remain. Denying parity and residential equality in the 1950s and 1960s carried through to the next century. Racial residential segregation "institutionalizes subordinate positions for African Americans by diminishing or denying their political status in local affairs," according to Parnell (2004). During the fight for the name change in 2004, Irene Dobson found she was fighting for more than the recognition for a national hero on a street sign. She was still fighting for recognition of her co-existence as a resident of Zephyrhills for the past 50 years. The Zephyrhills experience provides insight into the ability of actions taken decades in the past – during the days of the Jim Crow South – to continue to haunt communities and more importantly, people as remnants of municipal exclusion and segregation remain a factor in the black community today.

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CHAPTER 6
PENSACOLA: MINORITY REPRESENTATION

Movement for Change

A sign hangs above the door to the office of Movement for Change in Pensacola, a block off Martin Luther King Jr. Drive. It quotes Margaret Mead, “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.” [1] Movement for Change grew in 1997 from the effort to rename a street in Pensacola after the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. to an organization today that promotes voter registration, legal defense fund, educational opportunities, racial equity and environmental justice for the black community in Pensacola and Escambia County.

Movement for Change began as the grassroots organization Progressive Alliance Community Equity Resources and Strategies. The idea, in addition to naming a street after Dr. King, was to obtain equal footing for Pensacola's black community, a minority population long accustomed to having little or no political representation in community, educational or political decisions.

In the 2000 census, Pensacola's population was 55,347 residents, with 30 % black and 65 % white. In the first Congressional district of Florida, of which Pensacola is a part, the district stretches from the Alabama state line in the west to just outside of Tallahassee nearly 200 miles to the east, and comprises almost 500,000 residents with whites outnumbering blacks 78 % to 14.5 %. The first Congressional district has never had a black representative, Escambia County elected its first black commissioner since Reconstruction in 1983[2] and the 10 member (with one mayor) Pensacola City Council had two black members and eight white members during the street naming debates.

African-American members were Marie Young, first elected in 1997 and now an Escambia County commissioner and Rita E. Jones, first elected in 1995.[3] Politically, it was difficult to find representation that constituted a relationship between black citizens and their elected officials. In such a racially lopsided district and community, the question of interests arises when elected officials are unable to relate to the needs and desires of their constituents (Swain 1995, 5 - 6).

As has been established, the issue that complicates a street naming in a community is when the street name will cross into white neighborhoods is a lack of understanding of white politicians and residents with the importance of the issue to black residents (Alderman 2003, 116). Swain suggests the importance of the need of African Americans to feel their contributions as a group are valued by society in general. In majority-minority communities, the issue becomes "majority consideration versus minority lifestyle" (1995, 6). Further, interests between elected officials and their constituents are defined as an "essentially contested concept" (1995, 6). Swain elaborates that whenever an individual or group defines an issue or concern as an interest, "then that interest becomes to an extent legitimatized as a worthwhile pursuit and should be taken seriously by those purporting to represent that group" (1995, 6). In 1997 Pensacola, the interest that became legitimized in the minority population could not get a fair hearing before the white majority establishment.

Movement for Change became that small group of people, trying to impact their community and their first objective was to rename either Palafox or Alcaniz Streets to Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Drive. When their leaders contacted City Hall, the fight for change began. In a white dominated society, the battle would be an uphill fight.

Kathleen Blee, in *Spaces of Hate* notes that in such white dominated societies and communities “whiteness is invisible” and that invisibility translates to culture and the embrace of cultural icons. Whiteness is viewed as the normative behavior and black icons or black history are foreign to the dominant race. (Blee 2004, 50 - 51)

A secondary consideration is the political aspect. According to Blee, political agendas that favor whites – especially middle class whites – “are seldom acknowledged as racial in their intent or consequences” (2004, 51). As Blee finds, white agendas are considered as “defending goods that are ostensibly nonracial, such as quality schools, property values, equal access to employment, or neighborhood safety” (2004, 51). Due to the majority population of the white society in most communities, “majority populations are rarely aware of the racial politics that benefit them” (2004, 51). Nor are they aware of other cultural aspects that represent minority populations. And street naming proposals are seen, often through the eyes of the white population, as something that may impact property values or even neighborhood safety in a negative manner.

In a community with a small minority population, such as Pensacola, blacks are faced with two primary issues in having a say when attempting to influence the renaming of a street in a black or white neighborhood after a prominent African American. First they often have difficulty getting a hearing – sometimes referred to as a seat at the table – and second they must gain the respect of the white community of African-American historical figures and icons and perhaps more importantly of the minority point of view.

The Pensacola Experience

The man behind Movement for Change was LeRoy Boyd, a native of Pensacola and a retired employee of the aviation depot. Ultimately, the street naming process would include the consideration of naming four streets, including Palafox, Alcaniz, Main Street and "A" Street for Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. the battle would last two and a half years, endure countless City Council votes and consume enough newsprint to fill a binder an inch thick. Boyd would face accusations of rigidness, uncooperativeness and an unwillingness to compromise. On the other hand, he along with his supporters, who number around 300, charged city officials with racism and an inability to see or appreciate the black perspective. Further, Boyd would challenge the racial structure of the city and the lack of appreciation of black historical figures. "Why won't the city change the name of the street to be reflective of the entire community? Why is it we only utilize whites to name streets after," Boyd said after one City Council vote denying the name change from Palafox to Martin Luther King Jr.[4]

Joe Davis, a supporter and active member of Movement for Change, is a Pensacola native and Vietnam veteran who was involved with the first attempts at a name change. Movement for Change first proposed Palafox Street to be named for Dr. King. Council members, voting along color lines, denied the request, with white council members arguing that residents and business owners objected. The *Pensacola News Journal* reported that "Many business owners on Palafox Street said a new address would be inconvenient and costly even though they may have to reprint stationery and business cards soon because of a proposed change in the telephone area code."[5]

When Palafox was proposed, city officials countered with the suggestion to rename Main Street after Dr. King. Movement for Change members objected to that

name due to its isolation in the black community and the fact that a sewer plant was located on the street. White opposition was "entrenched" according to Davis, who added that address changes and cost of street signs were excuses at a time when "any excuse will do."[6] Opposition was community wide, Davis said. The white opponents sought to keep the name change on a street that only impacted the black community.[7]

When Movement for Change leaders approached the City of Pensacola in January 1997, seeking to rename Palafox Street to Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Drive, the City Council instead voted 9 – 1 to never rename Palafox Street. According to the *Pensacola News Journal*[8] many objected to the name change because it would, according to Councilman John Nobles "force many businesses currently located along Palafox to reprint stationery, business cards and incur other costs." Other council members had different concerns, including Councilman Doug Halford who said there wasn't community consensus on the project, just "a small group" interested in the street naming.[9] Council members also emphasized that their decision "had nothing to do with race." Instead, Councilman Owen Eubanks said, "It has to do with a street."[10] Boyd complained that council's insistence that they would listen to the community did not reflect the entire community. "That reflects the majority community," he said.[11]

Multiple Votes

In all, Pensacola city council members voted on the Martin Luther King Jr. street naming issue 17 times, including five votes in one meeting and one vote that pledged to never rename Palafox and another vote that simply agreed that a street would be renamed after Dr. King. Virtually every street naming vote fell along racial lines, with the eight white council members voting against a street naming and the two black members voting for a street name change. One vote was unanimous, in March 1999, when the

council went on record to rename a street, and directed city staff and the city manager to work with Movement for Change and the public to recommend a process to resolve the issue. Two votes were held to just to schedule a public hearing, one which passed unanimously in 1999 to hold a public hearing on the debate and a second in 1998 was approved 8 – 2 to hold a public hearing to consider changing A Street or a portion of Alcaniz. That vote was along racial lines, with the black members opposed to those streets for consideration. During a 3-hour meeting on January 15, 1998 – on what would have been Dr. King's 69th birthday – City Council members held five votes, unable to agree on a street name change and defeating motions to name a street all five times. According to the *News Journal*, "the Pensacola City Council made a statement Thursday night: it cannot and will not agree on renaming a street for Dr. Martin Luther King Jr."[12]

Change in Tactics

LeRoy Boyd believed the white Council members were "imposing their will" and the lack of cooperation was "a slap in the face of the black community."[13] Despite their minority status Movement for Change members decided it was time to show how valuable and integral African Americans were to the Pensacola and Escambia County community at large. In February, 1998, a group of black activists announced it was planning an economic boycott that would target 250 stores in the Pensacola area. As the *News Journal* reported, "the boycott underscores the increasingly bitter feelings and racial division reverberating from the council's insistence that the Alcaniz Street name is here to stay because it's part of the city's Spanish heritage. The eight white men on the council have consistently outvoted the two black women."[14]

LeRoy Boyd led the boycott. “The message we are going to send is that our dollars count too. Our dollars have feelings. We have feelings,” he said.[15] Further, he announced, if the boycott was not successful, a drive to mobilize the vote would be undertaken to register blacks. “It is time for politicians to stop taking the black vote for granted,” added to Bettye Joe Franklin, a Movement for Change member and Pensacola social worker.[16]

Many businesses targeted by the boycott were taken by surprise. Others, including a local bank, were on the list due to their affiliation with a city council member. Council member Jack Nobles, for example was also the president of Horizon Bank.[17] As proof of white council members’ indifference, Boyd complained that the majority white council was more accommodating to white residents fighting a cell tower locating in their neighborhood than they have been to the street renaming process. “No longer can we continue with the Confederate regime we have in place,” Boyd said. Further he argued the boycott exposed white business owners’ antipathy to minority interests, ranging from a lack of support for a King street renaming to hiring and promoting blacks within their businesses.[18]

By March, the boycott had seen some positive results. Chamber of Commerce members took up the cause of the street naming, and on March 11, 1999, the City Council voted unanimously of their intention to name a street after King. The city manager also recommended that a committee be formed to assist in the process. To emphasize the disparity in treatment, Movement for Change members also requested the city provide records indicating the number of street name changes that were made in the past 20 years and how they were handled and resolved. They argued that

consensus issues were not part of those street name changes. City records revealed that five streets had been renamed in the past 15 years with little or no discourse.[19]

Other support materialized as well. In a March 23, 1998 editorial, the *News Journal* supported the Chamber's intention to add its voice to the debate. Perhaps the Chamber can resolve the King fight, the editorial suggests, since "the council seems unable to understand how important the matter has become to so many in the black community."[20] Representatives of the Northwest Florida Coalition of Human Rights and Dignity, which represents civil rights groups and the NAACP, also weighed in on the street naming controversy. "We know there are two sides to politics, there's an economic side and there's a political side. While people on the Council will say no, the business community can make them say yes," said Jerry McIntosh, Coalition president.[21] The economic boycott served to broaden the network of voices speaking on behalf of the street name change.

Voices of Opposition Remain

Despite the fact that activists for the street naming continued to press for a portion of Alcaniz to be renamed after Martin Luther King Jr. and supporters went door to door to collect more than 3,000 signatures of residents supporting the change, opposition remained.[22] One complaint from City Council members concerned the apparent lack of unity within the black community for which street to name in honor of Dr. King. While black leaders agreed there was some confusion over which street to select, the majority said collecting 3,000 signatures signaled a united front. There also was concern that changing a street sign would not be a significant act to enhance life in black neighborhoods. According to John Allbritton, a Pensacola lawyer, the issue "was a sore one in the black community." He added, "We've got economic problems. We've

got social problems with our children. For the community to be focusing on a street, I wonder if we have our priorities right. It'll make me feel warm. It will make me feel better. But let me take that to the bank. Let me tell those kids in my athletic program that we don't have the money to buy equipment, but you can walk up and down Martin Luther King Boulevard all you want."[23]

Yet Boyd countered those types of arguments with his own logic. A street should be named after King because he is a hero and Americans should follow his principles of peace and non violence, Boyd argued. Boyd and the members of Movement for Change share a larger goal of turning the street-naming issue into "economic renaissance" for Pensacola's black neighborhoods. "Blacks need to recognize their true potential and become totally involved in the growth of this community," Boyd told the *News Journal* in 1998. The city has not embraced minorities or their culture, Boyd believed and added, "I want to live in a city that is concerned about all of its people. Like it is now, this town is just another chapter in the history of America where blacks are excluded."[24]

Dragging out the process to rename a street only delays the issues of equality, according to Movement member Sherlee Aronson. Quoting Dr. King, she said, "Justice delayed is justice denied."[25] But for many whites, the action was taking place too quickly and encroaching on their rights. As the debate narrowed it focus onto changing a portion of Alcaniz Street after Dr. King, the opposition also narrowed to residents on those portions and to opponents on City Council. Butch Haynes, owner of Haynes Van and Storage on Alcaniz Street expressed concerns for "economic" reasons. "Changing all of my paperwork and notifying our thousands of customers around the world is an

expense I'm not willing to absorb," Haynes stated. Haynes added, "changing approximately one hundred street signs is not the way I would like to see my tax dollars be spent."[26] Another resident, Teresa Hargrove, objected to the label that anyone opposed to the King street naming was tagged a racist.[27] Melanie Nichols stated her objections to changing Alcaniz Street in deference to Spanish history and heritage during a year that Pensacola was noting its 300th anniversary of its original settlement. Still others believed that a two block plaza on Palafox in downtown Pensacola named after the slain civil rights leader is a significant recognition that should belie the charges of racism over the street naming.[28] But others, like Boyd who were involved in the development of the Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Plaza, know the plaza was a start and a compromise on recognizing King's accomplishments and sought a street naming as a more fitting tribute to his life work.[29] Alcaniz Street has a strong record of black history as well as Spanish history, Boyd claimed, including serving as the location of the school run by the mother of the first African-American four star general, Chappie James.[30]

Compromise and Change

The city council election in the spring of 1999 helped alter the street naming deadlock. Two new black council members replaced two white members, bringing the racial balance from eight whites and two blacks to six whites and four blacks. While not altering the total racial composition that could lead to a change in voting on the street naming issue, the *News Journal* reported that this election made "the council the most racially diverse in the city's history."[31]

As the council was voting for their mayor and mayor pro-tem positions, long time African-American member Marie Young broke with the other black members and voted

for Mayor John Fogg to be reappointed and Council member Jack Nobles to be mayor pro-tem. In turn, Mayor Fogg appointed two black council members to chair committees.[32] The newly formed Council and a new city manager attempted to find compromise and relief for the street naming debacle. City Manager Tom Bonfield sought a mediation route through the Florida Conflict Resolution Consortium. Movement for Change members shot that down. Then Councilman John Panyko suggested a dual street naming for Alcaniz Street. That idea also failed. Then on June 24, 1999, in what the *News Journal* reported as "a stunning compromise," Council members Panyko and Owen Eubanks, both white members, voted with the four black members to renaming Alcaniz Street from Cervantes Street to Texar Street for the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.[33]

"It's not only a black thing, it's for all of Pensacola," said Movement for Change member Doris Hayes.[34] Panyko said the issue had divided Pensacola for too long and was creating racial tensions that brought into question whether council members cared for the future of the city. The issue that consistently had been denied by an eight to two vote for two and a half years passed six to three, with one member absent. Councilman Panyko said he did not want his tenure on council defined by race. "I have found it somewhat offensive that there seemed to be an overwhelming sentiment that this council was going to vote on issues 6-4 based on race. It was time to send a message, if you're going to come and do business in the city of Pensacola, you can leave your racial rhetoric at the door."[35] The city set the date to begin erecting the new signs as of August 1, 1999.

Alcaniz and King Revisited

In October, 2008, eleven years after the first push to name a street in Pensacola after Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Movement for Change again resurrected the issue. LeRoy Boyd petitioned the Pensacola City Council to extend the name of Martin Luther King Jr. Drive north to the I-10, Exit 4 interchange and further south to Bayfront Parkway. Immediately, a number of the same arguments from the late 1990s arose: Movement for Change members did not want to compromise, "like we did last time," according to Boyd, and opponents continued their argument that Alcaniz is a historic name tied to Pensacola's Spanish founding 300 years ago.[36] Following the city's action 11 years previous, Escambia County Commissioners renamed all portions of Alcaniz Street located outside the city limits to Martin Luther King Jr. Drive.

Despite the protests, the City Council agreed to forward the request to a city committee hearing in November 2008. The city conducted a survey of most of 93 private properties along the street, most of whom opposed the street name change, according to City Manager Al Coby.[37] Then abruptly, Boyd called off the request in January 2009.

Justice

Two events occurred during the Pensacola street naming process that helped to sway city council members and result in a compromised street named after Dr. King. Both issues relate to the struggles minority populations are faced with when dealing with majority rule. First was the idea to begin an economic boycott of businesses in the Pensacola area. Despite the fact that many of these businesses did not have a role in the street naming process, their inclusion in the struggle and the recognition of the buying power of the minority residents enabled Movement for Change leaders to attract

notice and then assistance from economic leaders, such as the Chamber of Commerce, to bring others into the discussion helped to broaden support and legitimacy to the street naming battle. The boycott, while different in scope from other successful boycotts – the Montgomery, Alabama, bus boycott is probably the best known – provided a similar outcome for minority residents. Secondly, by 1999, two more blacks were elected to city council, bringing a more diverse representation to the council and strengthening the minority viewpoint. Two initial responses to the 1999 street renaming followed the Council's vote and indicate the mood of the Pensacola community. First, was the attitude as quoted by Councilman Pankyo, who was the first white councilmember willing to compromise: he said he received many "positive" calls from citizens, "not that they're ecstatic that it's renamed, but that we've made a decision and moved on." Another came from a business owner on the street, who stated that the idea of a street name change is a problem for business, but he noted, "it's not my first choice, but we can live with it."[38]

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CHAPTER 7
CONCLUSION AND FINDINGS

Overt Racism

All the streets are different, but in many instances, the stories are similar. Four distinct communities in Florida, three in the Tampa Bay area and the fourth in the western Florida Panhandle, all with minority black populations. All four had African-American residents seek at one time or another to rename of major thoroughfare in their community after the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. While racial patterns in each city differed, many of the goals were the same: name a street for King, expand black culture into the greater community and begin to participate more fully in the day to day life of their hometowns. This chapter will explain those efforts and provide the results of the hypotheses established in the Introduction

The first hypothesis seeks to discover: because overt expressions of racism are no longer acceptable in American society, how is racism exhibited or hidden in politics? Numerous scholars agree that overt racism in American society is a thing of the past. Still others recognize that racism has been a long standing cleavage in both cultural discourse and political life that has cast a long shadow on American democracy and principles (Carmines and Stimson 1989, Key 1949, Knuckey and Orey 2000, Sigelman 1997). The days of blatant bigotry and outright discrimination and segregation, particularly in the South, are historic relics that live on only in history books and the memories of older Americans, both black and white. The disappearance of these overt types of racism is not indicative that racism does not exist.

In their study of the 2008 presidential election in Florida, Martinez and Craig (2010) find that while many Floridians expressed pride that a black man was a

candidate for president, in instances where they may be personally impacted, survey respondents harboring racial resentment for blacks “pushing themselves where they are not wanted” resulted in the authors concluding that “racism in Florida is hardly a thing of the past” (2010, 10-11). In fact, Martinez and Craig note that measuring racial attitudes is difficult because many survey respondents “might be tempted to conceal anti-black attitudes behind what they know to be more socially accepted answers to direct questions about race” (2010, 4).

In an earlier study, Kuklinski and Cobb posed similar questions to survey respondents by asking questions regarding affirmative action or how one would feel about a black family moving next door. These types of questions are added to other, more benign questions in what is called a “list experiment” to better gauge how race fits into an equation. Kuklinski and Cobb found that the list experiment is useful in dealing with a respondent who “holds anti-black attitudes and also recognizes contemporary norms” (1997, 327).

Covert Reasoning

These findings are useful in looking at attitudes on Martin Luther King Jr. street namings as well. In all four communities presented in this dissertation, those against the street name change when it impacted white neighborhoods and business districts used similar types of arguments and language when opposing the change. In city after city, at podium after podium, and from opposing city council members as well, the arguments seldom varied. Very few opponents overtly spoke ill of Dr. King. Most expressed concern about costs of the street naming, be it for personal stationery and checking account changes, or cost of replacing street signs, to confusion for drivers within a community, especially if those cities had numbered streets with a “grid” pattern

as found in Palmetto and Zephyrhills. Some worried about mail delivery, yet others worried about property values and economic viability of their neighborhood. In Pensacola, the historic nature of the street considered for renaming was a concern. As has been noted in several communities King was attacked for his reputation as a womanizer, someone with Communist leanings and for his anti-war stance. Thus, whites can argue that King's legacy is tainted and fear that it will place a negative economic impact on their business or property if aligned or associated with him (Alderman 2000, 673).

Sometimes fear of King's blackness is expressed in the opposition, according to Jonathan Tilove in his study of Martin Luther King Jr. streets across the country, "businesses don't like the bother and expense of changing their addresses. There are always some folks devoted to the history and significance of the old name. But in the scores of skirmishes one also catches a glimpse – or an eyeful – of deeper white resistance and, in the intensity of the reaction, a bracing reminder of the real King, the man with edge and meaning, and not simply the dreamy King of grammar school coloring contests (2002, 16). Another commonality in virtually every community is that residents suggest naming something else after King. In Tampa, one resident even suggested renaming the Hillsborough River after King. In Zephyrhills and Pensacola, libraries, bridges and community or civic centers were suggested. In Palmetto, the city is currently in the process of designing and developing a park in King's name.

All of these suggestions are appropriate and legitimate ways to recognize a noted civil rights leader. But hidden behind many of them are attempts to camouflage racism or fear of black culture. It allows recognition without it impacting the personal

space of the residents or business owners living or working on a street named after King. Perhaps more telling and worth repeating is a comment from a Zephyrhills resident on the status of King in the white community as compared to King in the black community: “We all have heroes. Some we share, others we don’t. Many African Americans are very passionate about King. Many whites (myself included) aren’t. It’s not that we dislike King. Most agree he did great things. We just don’t hold him up as a hero in the same way African Americans do, and we don’t want to be forced to.”

Are those complaints and comments legitimate responses to naming a street after King or a symptom of deeper resentments? Why is it that whites do not respect and recognize King’s accomplishments, particularly his role in ending segregation in the United States? It becomes difficult to ascertain if they are deliberate acts of racism or something more innocuous. Listening to those comments make it easy to suspect, but nearly impossible to prove, that race is the underlying issue.[1]

White Resistance

In much of the literature reviews for this dissertation, several themes reoccur. First, as Kuklinski notes, one finding that resonates with white survey respondents is the idea of “black leaders” pushing for something (Kuklinski, Sniderman, et al. 1997, 415) that leads to white resentment. In his article, it is affirmative action. In other instances it may be busing. Street naming is a perfect example of this push for equality and recognition. As the resident above states, “we don’t want to be forced to” recognize King, citing resentment on those who are trying to honor the civil rights leader. In Palmetto, Pensacola and Zephyrhills the leaders of the drives to rename a street after King, Charles Smith, LeRoy Boyd and Irene Dobson, respectfully, were all criticized in their communities for their efforts and tenacity in the street naming process. In

Zephyrhills, city council members were vilified as well for pushing through the name change and within two years, two of the street naming supporters on council were voted out of office for their supportive stances on the King street name change. (Both were subsequently re-elected several years later.)

Minority rights and representation also is an important part of the street naming equation. The four cities studied all had similar majority white populations and white representation on city councils and county commissions that severely outweighed the black population. Street name opponents sought to use their majority rights to steer governmental votes their way, and away from a street named after King. However, elected officials are responsible to defending the rights of minority populations as well. Kuklinski, et al. argues that public opinion should not "dictate the direction of public policy," adding, "elected officials inherit a responsibility to lead as well as follow" (1997, 416.) Whites particularly object when the government intervenes on behalf of blacks, and expect government to comply with their majority concerns.

The four case studied cities all featured majority white councils that resisted black pleas for the street naming, and importantly, only two cities – Tampa and Pensacola – were successful in having streets named for King. In Zephyrhills, the street name was awarded and then rescinded and an honorary compromise settled upon, and in Palmetto a secondary street was named by a private developer, not the major community street sought by Councilman Smith. Frequently in the nation's past government was pushed into taking the lead, such as integrating schools and providing for equal voting rights that resulted in the implementation of policies designed to bring about radical change in society. To use Zephyrhills as an example, majority white

residents – who comprise about 96% of the population – criticized City Council for initially not voting with the majority and pushed for a referendum on the street name change and attempted to stage a recall election of several council members in support of the name change.

Racism Uncovered

In his book, *Racist America*, Joe Feagin discusses the fact that systemic racism permeates much of society and much of white America is not cognizant of it. Kuklinski believes that same ideal: “Perhaps whites believe that prejudice and discrimination do not exist when in fact they do” (1997, 415). While opposition to affirmative action is not proof of racism, neither can opposition to a street naming in a white neighborhood be proof of racism. Alderman cautions against categorizing the naming of streets for King in only racist terms, but acknowledges that it is not unusual for whites to claim African American efforts to rename streets after King are racist acts being forced on white residents who do not share the history or adoration of the King legacy. In one Georgia county, whites labeled the street naming as racist, comparing it to other “preferential color-conscious” practices such as affirmative action (2002, 117). At the same time, it is difficult to ignore the race issue when discussing these types of issues.

Whites, meanwhile, are not as focused on race or race issues. In fact, white apathy is a major roadblock to achieving racial equality. Many whites believe the issue of race is over and that any problems in the black community are the results of failures of black culture, not racial barriers (Schuman, Steeh, Bobo, Krysan, 1997, 295). Conversely, whites maintain their argument that their opposition to policy programs and race based issues are not due to racism, but on a larger commitment to the American ideals of individuality, hard work and independence (1997, 296).

Level Playing Field

Affirmative action issues and a street naming are examples of racial playing fields that are not level and have never been level in this nation's history. For example, to discuss affirmative action as a tool to level the playing field for blacks in admissions to college or employment is sometimes considered or referred to as reverse discrimination for whites. Yet often whites do not recognize that there have been built in forms of affirmative action in the majority society for generations. Consider for example the scions of society who are admitted to Yale University or Harvard University, often based upon who they know, what relatives attended the university or the stature of family members. President John F. Kennedy, who first introduced the idea of affirmative action in 1962, was a recipient of family prestige and status as a stepping stone into Harvard. So too was his brother, Senator Ted Kennedy. President George W. Bush also was a recipient of family connections to get into Yale University. Blacks, and poor whites for that matter, did not have the family ties to get into state universities let alone the most prestigious universities and colleges in the nation. In fact, in much of the South, state universities were closed to blacks into the 1960s, including the University of Florida, Florida State University and the University of Alabama. It took protests, legal opinions, calling in the National Guard and other remedies to even allow blacks to attend a state university in the South. Many whites did not recognize the benefits they had taken for granted or that were provided to them based on the color of their skin. Consider this exchange taken from the celebrated CBS sitcom, "All in the Family":

> *Archie Bunker*: If your spics and your spades want their rightful share of the American dream, let 'em get out there and hustle for it like I done.

Mike Stivic: So now you're going to tell me the black man has just as much chance as the white man to get a job?

Archie Bunker: More, he has more... I didn't have no million people marchin' and protestin' to get me my job.

Edith Bunker: No, his uncle got it for him.

In this exchange, Archie Bunker stands in for the white/American work ethic as discussed by Orey and Schuman, et al. and the theory that race is not about color but character. Edith Bunker is cognizant of the idea of white entitlement and affirmative action of who you are and who you know and family status.

Why Not Us?

In the four cities considered in this study, segregated histories from the past contributed in the majority of blacks living in areas that excluded them from the primary white neighborhoods, commercial centers and shopping districts. In order to rename a street that had significance in their community, they had to cross into white neighborhoods. As a result, the street naming process exposes racial divisions that many communities are not aware existed.

The street renaming and reactions in the black community in Greenville, Mississippi is typical of what occurs in a community when efforts are undertaken to name a street for King. "What they're (blacks) saying is, 'Every street in this town has been named by white people. Couldn't we name just one?'" notes Vic McTeer, a black Greenville attorney and civil rights leader.[2] Blacks who have believed their communities were progressive and forward thinking are disappointed and point to race as the underlying reason for the opposition.

"We thought we were a progressive community. It turned out we talk a good game, but there's really no substance to it," the Rev. Anjohnette Whitcomb, a minister

and activist in Greenville regarding opposition to the street renaming told *The Commercial Appeal*. In community after community, when blacks are excluded from the political landscape and often kept out of the city limits themselves, they had no opportunity to participate in naming of streets, locating parks or otherwise exerting their influence on their neighborhoods.

Naming streets after Martin Luther King Jr. helps to keep his message alive and remind African Americans of the struggles undertaken to achieve racial equality. While MLK streets "collectively map this nation within a nation," according to Jonathan Tilove,[3] they also provide a "window" on society's progress in fulfilling the civil rights leader's dream of racial equality and social integration. The process legitimatized King's contributions to society in the minds of African Americans and has the potential to bridge cultural geographies and connect "disparate communities" while incorporating historical context into the spatial reality of everyday life (Alderman 2000, 681).

These symbolic issues become "predictors" of white attitudes towards other, more substantial racial conflicts. Camouflaged racism, coupled with self-interest, affords the opportunity to foresee that whites will oppose actions or policies that they deem to be against their best interests. This defensive behavior leads to the assumption of racism, with white concerns over job availability or promotions, property values and safety. Part of white reluctance to accept incremental black progress (integrated neighborhoods, street namings) may be based on the reality of perception. Because most Martin Luther King Jr. avenues are in predominately black neighborhoods, many also are in predominately poorer neighborhoods. According to Tilove, this leads people to ask, "aren't there any nice ones?... The black side is Martin Luther King and the

white side is still whatever it used to be."[4] They fear other whites will consider their properties to be devalued if associated with black history or other racial ties. Other issues also emerge with the changing face of racial advancements. Hughes maintains that as blacks continue to integrate into the larger white society and achieve professional, personal and economic parity, that progress further threatens white status and opportunities creating a new climate of racial attitudes (Tuch, Martin 1997, 73).

The African American Point of View

In a study of black American's views on racial inequity, authors Lee Sigelman and Susan Welch (1991, 47) contend that it is important to examine black attitudes towards racism and discrimination in the United States and determine how blacks fare today in "overcoming the bitter legacy of white supremacy." Blacks need to be brought into the discussion regarding a variety of issues, including whether "out and out racism" is a thing of the past or is still a part of the American equation.

According to Sigelman and Welch, many blacks agree that the bonds of racism have been lessened, that many blacks have a raised standard of living and a more equal place in American society. Despite improvements and advancements over the past 50 years, however, especially with changes encompassing new legal rights, changes in attitudes and in economic and social improvements, blacks continue to lag behind whites. The authors argue that "enduring residues of racism and legacies of segregation, coupled with structural changes in the American economy, have conspired to leave many blacks in poverty, to deter blacks as a group from achieving equal status with whites and imperil the gains blacks have fought so hard to achieve" (1991, 16-17).

In their study, the authors make an important distinction between prejudice and discrimination. Prejudice is an attitudinal opinion, where blacks are judged unfavorably

due to their race. Discrimination is the withholding of rights solely due to race. Sigelman and Welch present the case that in the United States racial prejudice and discrimination are mainly products of "what goes on in the minds of white Americans" (1991, 6). Today's issues confronting African Americans deal more with prejudicial racism and have moved past the wholesale discrimination of the past.

Schuman, Steeh, Bobo and Krysan find that "many whites deeply resent efforts to force racial integration on them, not because they oppose racial equality, but because they feel it violates their individual freedom" (1997, 297). Street namings bring out similar sentiments as white protestors claim infringement on their rights and reverse racism. White protesters in Zephyrhills complained about government intrusion into the street naming and ignoring the wishes of the majority white residents. They also argued that as residents residing on the street, they had the primary say over the street's name despite the fact that Sixth Avenue is a public street, maintained by the city.

Whites particularly object when the government intervenes, such as with affirmative action policies or busing. But history indicates that significant racial advancement and progress in the United States is made only when government has stepped in to protect the rights of the minority from the rights of the majority. Numerous court cases (such as *Brown v. Board of Education*), legislative acts (Civil Rights Act and Voting Rights Act) and intense lobbying and demonstrations led by Thurgood Marshall, Martin Luther King Jr., the Southern Christian Leadership Council and NAACP are all examples of government taking the lead in pushing through reforms. Often government was pushed into taking the lead, but it still resulted in the implementation of policies designed to bring about radical change in society.

Trends from the past still result in segregated neighborhoods in many communities. Blacks still are prone to move to older, inner-ring suburbs with lower quality schools, mediocre services and higher taxes with the "tendency of whites to shun integrated neighborhoods and most blacks' disposition to avoid tested white areas" results in the continuation of racially segregated neighborhoods (Wiese 2004, 258). In more rural areas, blacks have been excluded from municipal boundaries and further kept out of white areas and white power structures. And too often, as we have seen, whites are not interested in black symbols or icons in their neighborhoods.

The Push for Equal Footing

Herbert Blumer defines prejudice as a "group position" that is socially created with subjective ideas that establish an appropriate relationship between two or more groups. Bobo, Kluegel and Smith agree that in the United States, the dominant white race has had a "proprietary claim on entitlement" to greater resources, economic opportunity and status (Tuch, Martin, 1997, 22). This view is shared by Lawrence and Ford as well. Many whites, therefore, perceive black demands (for equality, recognition of their cultural attributes, policy implementation) as "threatening incursions" on their interests. Basically, white attitudes seek to "defend white privilege" (1997, 22).

The dilemma today is one of "competing values," according to Sniderman, Tetlock, Carmines and Peterman (1993, 213). More is at stake in the dilemma between races than in housing or job promotions. Blacks seek access to values that include tolerance, compassion and freedom to achieve and to be judged on one's merits (1993, 2). Values can also mean acceptance and recognition of one's contributions and of the contributions of one's race.

Thus, despite the “tremendous progressive trend” that has characterized whites’ racial attitudes over the past 50 years and a transformation in that relationship that has, to a degree, helped resolve the “American dilemma,” crucial issues remain unresolved (Tuch, Martin 1997, 24). The defeat of total social oppression and segregation has not resulted in elevating blacks as a whole to a genuine position of sharing economic, political and social equality (1997, 31). Nor have the far reaching gains of the civil rights movement resulted in breaking down existing patterns of “racial domination and inequality” whether in the workplace, neighborhood or community (1997, 38).

Blumer contends that attitudes between groups are historically rooted. Bobo argues that reasons for symbolic racism are tied to whites’ beliefs that aggressive black leaders push too hard for rights or respect and are too demanding in seeking equality. Hughes suggests that opposition to busing is not an abstract resentment by whites but a clear example of how political demands of blacks can produce real changes and impacts on their lives (Tuch, Martin 1997, 50). City council actions regarding street name changes also can impact white residents where they live or work and white residents believe they are being forced to accept changes outside their realm of consciousness.

Thus, when white residents protest a proposed street renaming and claim they are not racist, they may be dealing with two subjective issues; the idea of unconscious conditioning coupled with recognition of society’s newfound contempt for racism in general. Therefore, they generate reasons unassociated with race to oppose the project: inconvenience of changing their address and papers, cost of ordering new stationery, fear of economic reprisals, lower property values and Dr. King’s opposition to

the Vietnam War. Race can never be the issue raised when white opponents approach the podium to speak out against the street renaming.

Modern Day Examples

Numerous scholars studying race and racial cleavages in the United States today have concluded that race remains an issue, although racial hostilities and animosities have changed and dissipated. Yet several of the most infamous racial incidents in the United States from the days of segregation and the civil rights era can be mimicked and recreated with similar examples from current times. For example, a frequent argument against the street naming process is complaints by citizens on the process of the street naming and how it was handled by local government officials. Often some of those complaints are legitimate. Sometimes they are excuses. A number of political battles are being fought over gay rights, including the right for gay couples to marry in California and the right for gay and lesbians to serve openly in the United States military. The California case is before a judge, the military's Don't Ask, Don't Tell policy was just debated and resolved in Congress after 18 years of controversy. Members there, according to the *St. Petersburg Times*, were not opposed to the issue or the policy, "only to the procedure."[5] That argument sounds familiar to those tendered by street naming opponents.

In the height of Southern segregation denying black residents the right to vote was commonplace and only rectified by the Voting Rights Act of 1965. It was not unusual for blacks to be asked to pay a poll tax or take a test in order to vote. In Alabama in the early 20th century, blacks were "actively disfranchised" from voting and often were required to read and write and own at least $300 in property. The intent was to totally stall and prohibit blacks from voting (Riser 2010, 143-144). It is something

most Americans probably have thought was a relic of the past. But in the most recent national election in 2010, Tom Tancredo, a former Colorado congressman and candidate for governor, while speaking to a tea party convention told attendees that President Obama won election in 2008 because voters could not spell the word "vote" or speak English. He then added that a "civics literacy test" should be required of all voters.[6]

Another iconic moment from the segregation period is that of Alabama Governor George Wallace in his inaugural address in 1962 pledging "in the name of the greatest people that have ever trod this earth," to draw a line in the dust and say, "segregation today, segregation tomorrow, segregation forever." Governor Wallace also beseeched the "Negro citizens" of Alabama to "work with us from his separate racial station" (Lesher 1994, 174). The "Ground Zero Mosque" controversy and debate in New York City this past year aroused similar language and reactions. Thousands of residents marched against the mosque with one protester, speaking to a crowd in New York, definitely declared, "No Mosque, Not Here, Not Now."[7] This deals with a different issue and different minority group, but similar approach and language.

A final example is the celebration of the confederacy and confederate flag. The *New York Times* reports that confederate groups are preparing to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the Civil War. A "secession ball" and parades are planned throughout Southern states. A mock inaugural of Jefferson Davis being sworn in a president is planned, as are battlefield reenactments and other celebratory activities. Representatives of the Sons of the Confederacy are defending the activities as historical replications of Southern history. Some blacks are less sure. "We don't know

what to commemorate because we've never faced up to the implications of what the thing was really about," said Andrew Young, a civil rights activist with Dr. King and former mayor of Atlanta. "The easy answer for blacks is that it set us free, but it really didn't, we had another 100 years of segregation. We've never had our complete reconciliation of the forces that divide us."

Another issue that arose this year was Virginia Governor Bob McDonnell's attempt to design April as Confederate History Month and issued a proclamation recognizing the confederacy that did not make any reference to slavery. The national outcry led to an apology and revised proclamation. Like street naming commemorations, "these battles of memory are not only academic," said Mark Potok, of the Southern Poverty Law Center, "they are really about present-day attitudes."[8] Denial of gay rights, anti-immigration, religious fears along with continued racism are modern day examples of discrimination and prejudicial actions. Yet they continue to be acceptable. Symbolic actions and camouflaged language covertly lessen the impact of the reality of racism.

Economic Fear

One of the more prominent issues to be raised by opponents to the Martin Luther King Jr. street naming process is one of economic fear, both of personal costs to a property owner and the threat of lower property values. According to Alderman, "King's memory does not necessarily cause poverty and degradation along streets" (Schein 2006, 231). Instead, the typical street naming process results in King being recognized in poorer – and African-American – neighborhoods due to the majority white opposition of more prominent streets being selected. A number of cities are experiencing wide redevelopment efforts with King streets as a part of that focus. They include Miami,

Florida; Savannah, Georgia; Indianapolis, Indiana; and Seattle, Washington. Still other streets featuring King's name have prominent business districts located on the streets, including Tampa's street, Los Angeles and Washington, D.C. (2006, 231).

In 2007, Alderman, et al. conducted what they referred to as "the first such analysis conducted at the national level" to verify if a street named for King altered its economic viability or decreased property values. Their study found that while residents and business owners would complain that the street naming "is not the economically right thing to do," (2007, 121) as one Indiana property owner put it, "establishments located on MLK Streets do not systematically exhibit economic marginality" (2007, 120). Instead perception and fear dominate the process. Alderman states that the "brand" of the street name "carries a negative imaginary, one enmeshed in the complex politics of race." In Zephyrhills, a business owner complained that "property values would fall, saying streets name after Dr. King were a guarantee of economic blight" (2007, 128). In addition, the street name brand labels Martin Luther King Jr. streets "as African-American space" and "landscapes of economic marginalization" (2007, 142). As a result of the study conducted the authors found that the "negative branding of MLK streets is largely mythical" and that in most instances, "there is no real difference" from what is found on an MLK street and other urban areas (2007, 142).

Other studies also look at how property values or neighborhoods may be affected. One study conducted on the impact of transit corridors on residential property values analyzed the positive and negative effects of residential property located in a one-mile wide corridor centered on Interstate 90 in suburban Seattle, Washington (Kilpatrick, et al. 2007, 303). According to the authors, a variety of factors can impact

property values such as accessibility to mass transit, proximity to transportation routes (both positive attributes such as access and negative attributes such as noise and congestion), desirable market location (i.e., waterfront, golf course frontage), proximity to power lines, rental residential development impact on single family occupied properties, and socio-economic considerations such as noise, pollution or crime rates. In other words, many factors need to be taken into consideration when discussing property values in neighborhoods and cities.

Further, governmental policy changes or actions and market strength or downturns will determine property values. In addition, scholars have looked at other race based impacts on property values, such as Bruce Mann's article on "*The Influence of School Busing on House Values*" (1982). Mann provides evidence that the discussion of "broader public policy issues in urban areas need to consider the housing market capitalization consequence of decisions" (1982, 85). Mann explores the impact that public policy has on property values and finds that the market does respond to changes "or perceptions of change" in service levels and that "the implementation of public policy in a local area will generate relative price changes which have both efficiency and equity implications" (1982, 109). These studies, however, do not indicate any impact of something as innocuous as a street name on property values.

But is it Racism?

The history of racial conflict in the United States is couched in camouflaged language. Today's reenactments of Civil War battles, the hosting of succession balls and Confederate flag displays are all acts done that can be argued as in defense of Southern heritage and states' rights, not slavery and not racism. During the Pensacola street naming debates, one woman objected to the "tag" of racist that was applied to

King Street opponents.[9] That is a legitimate complaint. However, much of the literature examined and case studies of the different cities document that opposition is based on race – perhaps not out and out racism, but fear of race, fear of losing social standing and fear of too much integration.

Hughes recognizes that as society evolves in this country blacks become more integrated in both social and professional networks which creates a new threat to white hegemony (1997, 73). What occurs when blacks seek a street name change is a group conflict issue that whites do not know how to deal with. Blacks protesting and picketing in City Hall parking lots, organizing and collecting neighborhood petitions and flooding city council chambers challenges white residents and threatens their political power base and assumption of white supremacy. It changes the existing but often unspoken equation of blacks situated in "politically powerless" positions (Ford 1995, 449) and subject to "unequal distribution of political influence" (1995, 450). White reaction is often angry and hostile to the idea of a street name change. Council members are put in a quandary: do they support a minority concern or back the majority angry for the status quo. Minority populations lose out with council votes and the public opposition. In several communities, including Zephyrhills and Tampa, residents sought a referendum on the street name change or a vote among residents of the street. These calls for action were made knowing that blacks in the minority position would not win.

The next solution for the white majority was to call for something else in the community to be named after King. A river, a bridge, a new street, a civic center or anything that would provide "social distance" and not impact the street in front of their homes and businesses. Often this call for naming a substitute monument was part of

the “subconscious” objections of black incursions to their interests and neighborhoods. The arguments against the street naming sometimes bordered on the sublime. In communities like Zephyrhills and Palmetto, council members and residents alike complained about disturbing the numbered street grids and argued that residents and visitors could get lost, be confused and less safe if a named street was added to the numbered system. Even in Palmetto, where the discussion included a dual naming of 17th Street West, council members expressed concern about altering the grid and safety impacts for police and fire responders if the numbered street pattern was altered.

In a majority rule democracy, there is an inherent disadvantage forminority populations to successfully mount a campaign for change in their neighborhoods when they are not in control of the votes or have access to the major players. The lack of representation in all four cities hindered their ability to participate in the naming of streets in their communities and to exert control over their space and city public space. This is the result of several factors, including past segregation practices that continue to impact where and how people of different races lives in a community, the gerrymandering of boundaries both outside city limits to exclude blacks and other minorities and residue of segregated neighborhoods inside cities that isolate minorities within cities.

As Feagin aptly recognizes, in the racial demography of established communities that impacts everyday life, the majority of blacks spend much more of their time interacting with whites than the majority of whites spend interacting with blacks. And, he states, more blacks work, shop and travel with large numbers of whites where few whites do the same with larger numbers of blacks. Whites basically live separate lives

from blacks and from other Americans of color (2000, 132). It is that lack of integration that inhibits the abilities of blacks to share their culture or their national heroes with whites. As Carol Swain notes earlier, the lack of connection between council members and their constituents in majority rule communities inhibits residents from effectively interacting and sharing their interests with elected officials.

Coded and Isolated

Tilove's observation that past "circumstances of segregation" and the martyrdom of Dr. King has resulted in a combination of events that created "a black Main Street from coast to coast." "Map them," he states, "and you map a nation within a nation" (2003, 3). As critical race theory projects, white residents are not aware of their privileges in society, they assume them and believe they have earned them. Whites believe that blacks and other minorities are disadvantaged, not due to racism, but because they do not take advantage of the opportunities available in the United States and their lifestyles hinder them from realizing the American dream. As Feagin and Vera note, whites believe that justice will come quicker "if black Americans worked harder to make themselves worthy" (Durr 2002, 171). They further quote Dr. King's argument, made shortly before his assassination, that many whites are not committed to "real equality" but "settled easily into well-padded pockets of complacency" (2002, 171).

Earlier I posed the question, "is it racism?" The easy answer is yes. A more realistic answer is yes and no. Politicians have either tried to avoid the race issue altogether or as Richard Nixon did during his presidential campaign in 1968 speak coded language that historians have labeled his "southern strategy" telling Southern voters "he would not run an administration which would 'ram anything down your throats'" in reference to integrated schools and forced busing (Carmines and Stimson

1989, 53). Ronald Reagan campaigning for the presidency in 1980 used similar tactics when he told a Mississippi crowd that he believed in states' rights. The site of his speech was symbolic as well, New Philadelphia, Miss., where civil rights activists were murdered in the 1960s.

In the 1995 gubernatorial election in Louisiana, coded language including a call to repeal affirmative action and support of plaintiffs challenging a majority African-American congressional district were used by the white candidate, Mike Foster, to appeal to white voters. Orey notes that none of the overt racism described by Key in his research (1949) was evident but subtle tactics were utilized to get Foster's views across. One tactic: he used crime to compare predominately white Jefferson Parish with the "jungle in New Orleans" and noted Jefferson Parish's low crime rate (2001: 238).

Camouflaged and Invisible

In the first hypothesis it is noted that whites who oppose the renaming of a street in their neighborhood after Dr. King – be it residential or commercial – will color their objections with non-racial rationalizations. A variety of alternative objections will be cited such as defending costs to both themselves and the municipality, they will object for historical street name reasons (the most legitimate usually), they will question the ability to rename numbered streets and they will try to find another site to name after the slain civil rights leader. They will even claim that blacks are receiving special treatment as evidenced in Zephyrhills. A resident who called the protests at City Hall "curious" also questioned what African Americans were seeking with the street name. "My belief is that 'equal' means equal, not special. I think these folks out here are demanding special treatment."[10]

The second hypothesis notes that in all four cities different patterns of racism sometimes developed or could be examined through different lens. The question is, will these differences result in similar objections – or "push backs" against the efforts to name a street for King. The case studies reveal a white society that has emerged that while opposed to overt racism, is still uncomfortable with racial issues, and therefore camouflages its fear of race and fear of loss of its social standing in American society. Whites generally believe racism is over, that governmental programs to level the playing field for African Americans are reverse discrimination, and that, as the case studies indicate, blacks are not entitled to street names or other memorial recognition of African-American icons that impact white neighborhoods. Further, many whites are comfortable with their versions of separate neighborhoods. Another Zephyrhills resident expressed her feelings on living near a street named for Dr. King, "If I wanted to move into an integrated neighborhood I would have" adding, "I just want to be in a white neighborhood... I don't think I'm being unreasonable wanting to live among whites."[11]

It is apparent that the effort to unite black and white communities through a street naming process often fails. As has been noted, streets named for Martin Luther King Jr. represent some of the most controversial and widespread methods used by African Americans to recognize the historical contributions of minorities. What also has been demonstrated is that while there are purposeful and legitimate reasons for white residents to object to naming a street after Martin Luther King Jr., there are substantial indications that racial uncertainty, fear and prejudice lies behind the reasons and excuses. The United States has a long history of naming streets after historical figures and notables. Those so honored, however, are traditionally white leaders and figures.

The MLK street naming movement seeks to provide diversity to this geographical phenomenon and to recognize the contributions of minority figures and leaders in the nation and in communities. Naming a street becomes a symbol in the quest for equality and a measure of who has social power to categorize public spaces.

Difficult to Define

A feature of the Jim Crow, segregation era was the ability for many white Americans to disavow the race issue by not seeing it. Blacks were out of sight in many instances, even when working in a home or office. White Americans did not see black America. They surely did not see the differences in lifestyles, educational opportunities or employment. As a protagonist in Isabel Wilkerson's *The Warmth of Other Suns* notes about 1950s Louisiana, “it still made no sense... that one set of people could be in a cage, and the people outside couldn't see the bars” (2010, 174).

The primary person responsible for breaking down those barriers was Martin Luther King Jr. It was his persistence in the non-violent campaigns of the 1950s until his death in 1968 that changed how America looked at race. Sanctioned laws and policies that prevented blacks from sitting on public transportation, attending white schools, utilizing white hospitals and other discriminatory practices were eliminated through court orders, federal law and low and state enactments. But King recognized, as did others, that laws would not and could not change attitudes. In fact, he found during his life that dealing with some issues, including those in the North, were trickier. It was a truism discovered earlier by Gunnar Myrdal in his study on race in the United States.

While Myrdal referred to the race problem in the United States as the “American Dilemma,” he labeled issues above the Mason-Dixon Line as the “Northern Paradox.”

Myrdal found, as King did in the late 1960s, that invisible barriers erected in northern states did not deal with sanctioned voting or housing issues, but more subtle methods of exclusion. In the North, Myrdal wrote, “almost everybody is against discrimination in general, but at the same time, almost everybody practices discrimination in his own personal affairs” (Myrdal, 1944 Vol. 2, page 1010, taken from Wilkerson 2010, 387). In other words, whites did not approve of discrimination but did not wish to have their personal space complicated by blacks, either in their neighborhood, social activities or job locations. Myrdal then concludes, “It is the culmination of all these personal discriminations which creates the color bar in the North... About this social process the ordinary white northerner keeps sublimely ignorant and unconcerned.”

Sixty-seven years after Myrdal, race relations in the United States have made unbelievable strides. Thus, when asking if naming a street after Martin Luther King Jr. is connected to race (instead of racism) one must respond in the positive. White Americans in general, due to the many changes made in the legal system and societal disfavor with overt expressions of racism, prefer to not exhibit overt protestations on racial issues that affect them, even if they impact their personal space or neighborhoods. As to whether residents who oppose a street naming are necessarily racist, this dissertation demonstrates that some are, as comments throughout the case studies indicate. And so is society in general. In all four Florida cities efforts to remain a street began in parts of town that are primarily black, primarily poor and basically segregated. Efforts to expand the street name into other parts of town – primarily white areas either residential or commercial – led to the disruption and opposition. Yet as Myrdal found in 1944, and has been experienced over the past 20 years in Florida from

Tampa to Palmetto and Zephyrhills to Pensacola, many white Americans, while generally opposed to discrimination, remain unconsciously oblivious to black concerns in their communities or that race remains an issue in the United States today. The continued invisibility of black Americans is the issue today. Their heroes, their causes and their needs are camouflaged within the greater white American society. Perhaps Lerone Bennett Jr. (Clayton 1996, 36) summarized it best when he assessed the plight of African Americans and their place in American society in general: “everything has changed but nothing has changed.”

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

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