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Archaeology as a Tool to Illuminate and Support Community Struggles in the Black Metropolis of the Twentieth and Twenty-first Centuries

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The South Side of Chicago — the ‘Black Metropolis’ — has been the site of many struggles over the years: for human dignity and civil rights; against restrictive real estate covenants; and to control present-day gentrification, to name a few. This legacy is inscribed on the landscape above and below ground. Black Chicagoans are keen to preserve the material manifestations of prior struggles and use preservation to benefit the current inhabitants of ‘Bronzeville’. These activists have welcomed the author into collaborative projects that use archaeology and historic preservation to further their goals. Excavation at the Phyllis Wheatley Home for Girls and the Bronzeville Cultural Garden has contributed to our efforts to identify and present stories of the Great Migration and its consequences. At stake are our understandings of how racial and other identities shaped life in this community in the past as well as the neighbourhood’s role in the city’s future.

KEYWORDS African diaspora, twentieth century, US, gentrification, class, gender

While Chicago may indeed have been a ‘Promised Land’ for African Americans in the first half of the twentieth century, life in the city was not without its struggles (Lemann, 1992). Citizens of what pioneering anthropologists St Clair Drake and Horace R. Cayton (1993 [1945]) called ‘the Black Metropolis’ faced continual challenges to their basic humanity and their right to partake in full citizenship in Chicago. In recent years, these challenges have been joined by the threat of gentrification — a process that affects many neighbourhoods in the city at the start of the twenty-first century. This paper begins with an outline of the central points of contestation and discusses how past struggles have shaped the modern landscape, even as contemporary struggles are manifested in that same space. Next, I describe the work of

community activists in contesting the city's attitude toward preservation and place top-down approaches to black history in the context of the motives, methods, and benefits of preservation for this South Side community. Finally, the discussion turns to the Phyllis Wheatley Home for Girls Rebirthing Project, a collaborative effort between several community activists and myself to identify, preserve, and promote knowledge of 1) the efforts by elite black clubwomen in Chicago to serve the Race¹ and 2) the lives of the Home's residents, both groups being important contributors to the development of black Chicago. I then explain how this project integrates research and community goals. This paper also considers contested landscapes along several dimensions: how past contests for equality were inscribed on the landscape; present-day struggles to preserve and recognize that landscape; and contestation over the contemporary landscape. In each case, archaeological research contributes to these efforts by making them visible and by providing information and resources with which to continue the endeavour.

Excavation began at the site of the Phyllis Wheatley Home for Girls in the summer of 2006, as a component of an archaeological field school that I directed while on the faculty at DePaul University (Agbe-Davies, 2008). Subsequent field seasons in 2007 and 2009 provided the opportunity to make spatial comparisons across the site, connect the recovered artefacts with the development of black consumer culture in America, and record the standing building and trace its transformation over time (Agbe-Davies, 2009) (see Figure 1). However, the project began several years before



FIGURE 1 Excavation during the 2007 and 2009 field seasons uncovered a significant number of sealed contexts dating to the 'Home period' occupation of the site (c. 1925–1975).

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the first trowel touched the ground. It is my contention that the documentary research, the excavation, and the analysis of the finds are only a small part of archaeology at ‘the Home’.

Archaeologists are increasingly comfortable with the idea of archaeology as a ‘tool for civic engagement’ (e.g., Little & Shackel, 2007). The idea that archaeology can be good for something besides discovering information about the past is self-evident to many archaeologists. It may be thought of as one of the ideologies — those taken-for-granted ideas about how the world works — that underlies our practice. However, it is not necessarily natural for people to want to work with archaeologists (Dawdy, 2009: 137), which is precisely why it is important to discuss this idea explicitly. If archaeologists wish to position our work as challenging — rather than exploiting — class-based, ethnic, or national inequalities, then we cannot justify research simply because it pleases us or our colleagues; this argument is not new. If we attribute value to what the practice of archaeology can accomplish for people besides other archaeologists, then perhaps we should discover and analyze the circumstances that motivate people to work with us. The present article is a case study illustrating how that process unfolded in one particular context.

Archaeology is valuable to the people I work with not only, or even primarily, because it tells us something new about the past. Rather, archaeology points official attention to silenced stories, it provides necessary analyses of the contemporary environment, it makes connections between the past and the present visible and concrete. Here, I attempt to demonstrate what I have learned about making archaeology a tool not for my own use, but for others’. My partners do not really need me to tell them about black life in Chicago in the twentieth century — many of them lived it. However, the story of what they do want and need, how we managed to bring that conversation to the surface, and our attempts to use archaeology to address those needs, is a story worth telling to a general, international audience.

Past struggles: the contested terrain

Departure

Troy, Alabama, 17 October 1916. ‘Dear Sirs: I am enclosing a clipping of a lynching again which speaks for itself. I do wish there could be sufficient pressure brought about to have federal investigation of such work. I wrote you a few days ago if you could furnish me with the addresses of some firms or co-operations that needed common labor. So many of our people here are almost starving. The government is feeding quite a number here would go any where to better their conditions. If you can do anything for us write me as early as possible’. (Scott, 1919: 440)

The ‘Great Migration’ in which millions of black Americans left the south for northern industrial cities in the first decades of the twentieth century was itself a collective act of resistance. Men and women who recognized the limitations of their southern homes rejected the ideology that condemned them and their children to inferior facilities, denied them fair access to government and legal systems, and excluded them from many rewarding professions (Chicago Commission on Race Relations, 1922). They chose to leave familiar territory, their communities, and in

some cases their families, in order to assert their right to a productive and dignified life. Their initiative caused the human landscape of Chicago to shift dramatically over the course of the twentieth century. During the peak Great Migration years, the Negro population of Chicago increased more than fivefold.²

Drake and Cayton used the term ‘Black Metropolis’ to designate a city within a city and their landmark study continues to provide a wealth of information, and inspire scholars and activists (Drake & Cayton, 1993 [1945]). According to their findings, migrants and ‘Old Settlers’³ alike founded and patronized establishments owned and operated by fellow black Chicagoans. Some districts, for example, 47th Street, became commercial destinations for the growing number of black consumers in the city. Retail outlets, manufactories, banks, and insurance companies, like the Supreme Life Insurance Company of America (also the Supreme Liberty Life Insurance Company), made an impressive and durable mark on the landscape. Churches purchased edifices from other congregations, built new, magnificent houses of worship, or set up in storefronts close to where their members lived and worked. Major housing developments, such as the Michigan Boulevard Garden Apartments (also known as ‘the Rosenwald’), were designed to accommodate the massive influx of people into the increasingly crowded South Side.

Reception

Dear Mr Wagner: We enclose to you herewith copy of the Anti-colored Restriction Agreement, on the second page of which your property is described [...] we would request that you sign and execute this agreement and then return to us. This is the agreement originally drafted by the Attorneys for the Chicago Real Estate Board and has for its purpose the restriction against the sale to, use and occupancy of colored people, which is based upon the decision of the Supreme Court of the United States, and is legal, lawful and binding [...] (Fulton, 1929: n.p.)

The principal factor contributing to overcrowding in the Black Metropolis was the use of covenants that became a new tool for keeping the races residentially separate once segregating ordinances were declared unconstitutional (Drake & Cayton, 1993 [1945]: 184–90). The covenants were agreements signed by property owners in many neighbourhoods who thereby agreed not to rent or sell to ‘colored people’, extending what some saw as a ‘a marvelous delicately woven chain of armor’ that encircled white communities from ‘the northern gates of Hyde Park at 35th and Drexel Boulevard to Woodlawn, Park Manor, South Shore, Windsor Park, and all the far-flung white communities of the South Side’ (Hirsch, 2005: n.p.). These restrictions limited the neighbourhoods where black Chicagoans could live, thus permitting their landlords to charge exorbitant rents for substandard and cramped housing (see Figure 2). Such were the conditions that inspired the established well-to-do and middle-class black women who comprised the membership of the Phyllis Wheatley Club to devote their organization to providing lodging for women and girls new to the city (see below).

The covenants, though ruled unenforceable in 1948, have had a lasting impact on Chicago’s human landscape. The limited areas where African Americans could rent and own property continue to have a black majority population today. Indeed, the

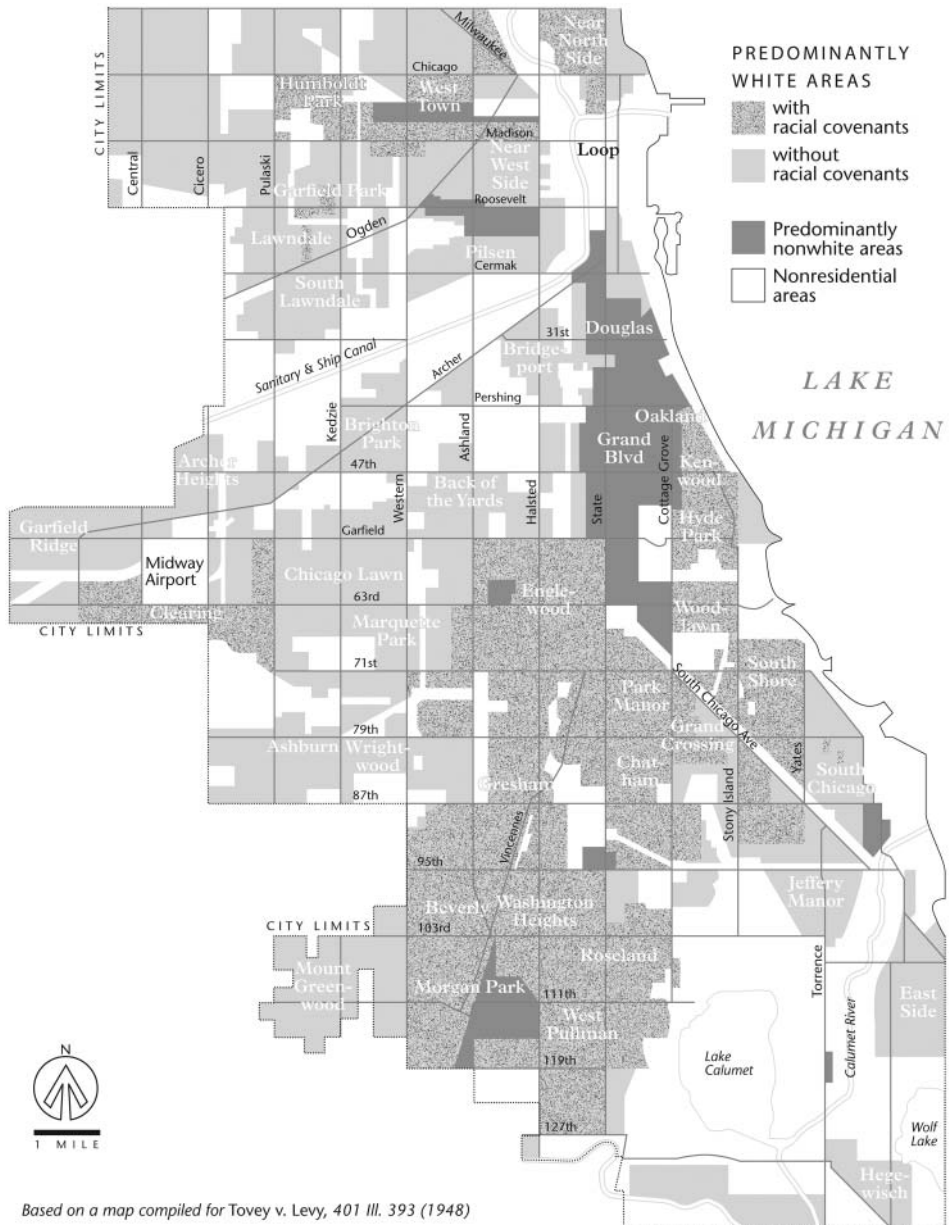


FIGURE 2 This map of ‘Racial Restrictive Covenants on Chicago’s South Side in 1947’ has been used by twenty-first century activists to define historic ‘black Chicago’ for a contemporary audience.

Reproduced by kind permission of the Newberry Library. Taken from the Encyclopedia of Chicago, ed. by James R. Grossman, Ann Durkin Keating, and Janice L. Reiff (University of Chicago Press, 2004).

elimination of covenants did not open the entire city up to black homeowners and renters. In 1966, Dr Martin Luther King, Jr moved briefly to Chicago to support the integration of Marquette Park on the Southwest Side. After being struck with a brick during a march, he remarked ‘I’ve been in many demonstrations all across the South [...] But I can say that I have never seen — even in Mississippi and Alabama — mobs as hostile and hate-filled as I’ve seen in Chicago. I think the people from Mississippi ought to come to Chicago to learn how to hate’ (quoted in Kass, 2008: 2). His former residence is now vacant, but continues to loom large in the city’s perception of itself as a patchwork of segregated spaces (Ahmed & Little, 2008: 1).

Persistence

‘Don’t price us out, tax us out, tear down our historic landmarks. I’m not going anywhere’ Valencia Hardy, organizer with Housing Bronzeville. (quoted in Cottrell, 2008: n.p.).

In the twenty-first century, the neighbourhoods that many Chicagoans once saw as ‘containing’ their black counterparts, and had derided as ‘slums’ and ‘ghettos’, seem increasingly desirable for upwardly mobile and middle-class households. African American neighbourhoods on the South Side have been remade several times before. For example, the run-down neighbourhoods of Federal Way were demolished in the 1950s to construct Stateway Gardens, which was until recently a Chicago Housing Authority (CHA) project. Now Stateway is nearly gone and in its place stands the first stages of Park Boulevard, a mixed income development. The CHA has demolished many of its former properties, and these ravaged landscapes are sites of ongoing contestation as residents work to retain the communities that sustain them and avoid banishment to unfamiliar terrain in the southern suburbs (Hyra, 2008). Recently, it appears that even market-rate residential communities, like Lake Meadows, are also threatened with erasure. Many blame the clearance on newcomers and see the struggle as a fight against gentrification.⁴

Although the name is not universally accepted as either flattering or accurate (Boyd, 2008: 84), the South Side is increasingly known as ‘Bronzeville’. The term dates at least to 1930, when an editor at the African-American run *Chicago Bee* initiated a contest among Race men to be named ‘Mayor of Bronzeville’. In later years, the contest was sponsored by the *Defender* and became an annual event (Drake & Cayton, 1993 [1945]: 383). Recently, use of the term ‘Bronzeville’ has re-emerged on official signs, public art, and real estate advertisements.

The new migrants to the Black Metropolis are often themselves African American, an unusual circumstance in gentrifying neighbourhoods (Boyd, 2005). Conflicts that are often described as ‘racial’ in other contexts have a more obvious class dimension in Chicago (Pattillo, 2007). Community members and leaders are frequently concerned that the newcomers do not sufficiently appreciate the neighbourhood’s rich history. They point to the impact that increasing property values have on tax rates for established homeowners with lower incomes and on rental rates for other residents (Harold Lucas, pers. comm., 2007). New construction and rehabilitation of existing dwellings have altered the physical character of what has been until recently a fairly pristine late nineteenth-/early twentieth-century built environment (see Figure 3).



FIGURE 3 Between the 2006 and 2007 field season (when this photograph was taken) a new multi-unit dwelling appeared on the alley behind the Home, and a neighbouring building was completely refitted with modern exterior treatments.

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Contemporary challenges: key contestants

A number of individuals and organizations are dedicated to preserving the material legacy of the Black Metropolis. My initial contacts with preservation activists in the community came through my participation in the Black Metropolis National Heritage Area (BMNHA) Steering Committee. This diverse group includes developers, museum specialists, housing advocates, university researchers and administrators, and hospitality experts working to establish a National Heritage Area (NHA) on the

South Side. This NHA will ‘preserve and promote the cultural assets and historic achievements of Chicago’s Black Belt and Bronzeville neighborhoods from the 1880s to the present through programming that will educate and inspire’ (BMNHA Mission Statement).⁵ Spearheading the Black Metropolis National Heritage Area effort are Paula Robinson (Managing Partner, The Bronzeville Community Development Partnership) and Harold Lucas (President and CEO of the Black Metropolis Convention and Tourism Council). Robinson and Lucas are also the force behind the preservation of the Supreme Life Building and its conversion into the offices of the Black Metropolis Visitor and Information Center. The Bronzeville Community Development Partnership has four interrelated goals: historic preservation; cultural heritage tourism development; workforce development and training; and information technology and civic engagement.⁶ Preservation of the built environment is key to maintaining the authenticity that underlies tourism and derives from the continued presence of Bronzeville’s current population. These preserved places can be sites of employment and education that foster attachment to the community (physical and social), and support its viability, thus engendering the civic engagement that demands respect for the community’s history.

I first met Bobbie Johnson, R.N., as a result of a series of letters and ‘cold calls’ I made to key community history and preservation organizations and to local elected officials. She had got my name from Sherry Williams, the executive director of the Bronzeville/Black Chicagoan Historical Society (www.bronzevillehistoricalsociety.com) and recipient of one of my letters. The Society aims, in part ‘to preserve, protect, collect, and perpetuate the records of African Americans who live or lived in Chicago’, and ‘to recognize the contribution of African Americans who participated in the establishment of Chicago and the surrounding communities’ (Bronzeville/Black Chicagoan Historical Society Mission Statement). Johnson is the founder of Race to Knowledge, a family literacy programme, and sees historic preservation as a component of her work. Over the course of several meetings and phone calls, Johnson outlined for me her goals and concerns with respect to the historic landscape of Chicago’s South Side.

For Johnson, archaeology represents a mechanism for reconnecting with the past and bridging generational gaps, as well as a source of new information to contribute to the authenticity of other cultural preservation efforts (Bobbie Johnson, pers. comm., 2005). She has spent years working to preserve the built heritage of the Black Metropolis. She is deeply involved in the fight to preserve the Michigan Boulevard Apartments, spearheading the Save the Rosenwald Coalition. Her efforts stem not only from a commitment to preserving important landmarks of black history, given the building’s associations with prominent South Siders, but also a vision for truly affordable housing, as a counterbalance to the demolition of subsidized units all over the city, but particularly in Bronzeville. After some time spent talking about a variety of possible fieldwork locations, Johnson informed me that her neighbour lived in a house of historical significance — was I familiar with the Phyllis Wheatley Home for Girls? I was not, but Ms Johnson filled me in on some of the details and offered to introduce me to her neighbour, Joann Tate. This was the beginning of our partnership to highlight the struggles and triumphs of the founders and residents of the Home from the mid-1920s through to the 1970s.

Tate purchased the former Home in the mid-1990s with no knowledge of its past. However she speaks of the decision to do so as serendipitous and she soon uncovered the association with the Phyllis Wheatley Association through finds in the house as well as materials in a nearby university archive. She is in the midst of rehabilitating the house, and has discussed the possibility of developing space on the ground floor for community use. Two important interests of hers are food security and horticulture. Ms Tate established and runs an organization called Training and Educational Resources for Children (TERC). The group's main project is the maintenance of the Bronzeville Cultural Garden on what was formerly a vacant lot two doors down from the Home. The intent is to provide a 'safe haven' for youth, as well as training in horticulture and entrepreneurship (Joann Tate, pers. comm., 2006).

Both Joann Tate and Bobbie Johnson are tireless advocates for their community. Each works to strengthen the community through education, broadly construed. In this way, they continue the legacy of black women dedicating their careers and personal lives to providing opportunities for other black Chicagoans, particularly children and youth, to achieve their goals and contribute to the communities in which they live (see Figure 4). Because of their long years of experience in activism and community advocacy, we make a good team for the overall project. I bring skills from



FIGURE 4 Owner Joann Tate appreciated the media attention that the archaeology generated, as it provided an opportunity for her to connect modern-day social programmes with the earlier efforts of the Phyllis Wheatley Association.

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the academic world, such as training in historical and material culture research, and experience working in a history museum.⁷ They know how to turn archaeological and historical materials into information that is compelling and useful in addressing community concerns. They are also brilliant analysts of the social and political context within which our work takes place. And I have learned a great deal from Tate in particular about integrating community service and pedagogy.

‘The past is never dead. It’s not even past’⁸

The historic legacy of Bronzeville is made material when enacted through tours with themes such as local musical innovations (particularly gospel, jazz, and blues), or a recent Veteran’s Day launch of *The Tour of Duty: Bronzeville Military Monuments & Moments in History* (Harold Lucas, pers. comm., 2008). The landscape can be experienced virtually through such mechanisms as the GIS (geographical information system) database that includes community assets like national and city landmarks, national register sites as well as important development data such as Empowerment Zones, Enterprise Zones, and Tax Increment Financing Districts (TIFs).⁹

The landscape created by the racial covenants that hemmed in earlier generations of black Chicagoans is now being used as a tool to protect and promote the history of that community (Harold Lucas, pers. comm., 2008). After a great deal of discussion about the historic and modern limits of ‘black Chicago’, the map that designates the territory bounded by covenanted areas has become the base map for the effort to establish the Black Metropolis National Heritage Area. Thus, the project acknowledges the neighbourhood’s history with segregation and refashions those boundaries for new purposes. Specifically, the National Heritage Area is intended to be a tourist destination that simultaneously stimulates the local economy and burnishes its reputation (see Boyd, 2008 for a critical analysis of such efforts).

Just as previous generations of Chicagoans could see their struggles written on the landscape, much of that material legacy is itself the subject of contemporary contests. The official City of Chicago ‘Black Metropolis-Bronzeville Historic District’¹⁰ is one place where past efforts and triumphs are commemorated. Many of the buildings that compose the district have been saved through creative re-use. The *Bee* building is now a branch of the Chicago Public Library. The Supreme Life Building houses the Black Metropolis Visitor and Information Center among a number of businesses and non-profits. But other spaces precious to black Chicagoans are not included in this small district and are vulnerable to the whims of city officials and developers. For example, the Michigan Boulevard Apartments are currently vacant and have attracted the attention of developers who may or may not keep the existing buildings. In 2003 it was listed as one of America’s Eleven Most Endangered Historic Places by the National Trust for Historic Preservation.¹¹ Pilgrim Baptist Church, the home church of Thomas A. Dorsey, the gospel music innovator, is a Chicago landmark, but remains ‘at risk’ according to Preservation Chicago¹² after a severe fire during a renovation in 2006. So even sites nationally recognized for their significance are threatened in the city. The situation is even more dire for places whose significance is primarily local or community-defined. For example, Gerry’s Palm Tavern (a music venue) emerges frequently as an example of a community institution that was not

valued by official preservation and development interests, and was therefore removed from the social landscape, even as redevelopment efforts centred on the history of Chicago's music scene (see additional discussion in Hyra, 2008: 122–24). Clearly, the contemporary landscape is a site for the struggle to preserve the landmarks that matter to South Side Chicagoans today.

Archaeology and the Phyllis Wheatley Home Rebirthing Project: revealing the material legacy of past challenges

In keeping with the concept of archaeology as a 'tool for civic engagement' (Little & Shackel, 2007), the excavations at the Phyllis Wheatley Home for Girls and Bronzeville Cultural Garden are intended to illuminate past struggles — through research — and support present struggles — through practice (Agbe-Davies, 2007). Information revealed and knowledge created by archaeological research has begun to expand our understanding of how past contests were manifested at specific sites in the Black Metropolis. The examples below demonstrate how the very act of performing archaeological research contributes to ongoing efforts by community members and leaders to enhance the quality of life for themselves and their neighbours (Bobbie Johnson, pers. comm., 2009).

First, archaeology is the means by which the important contests described in general terms at the outset of this piece are made material in the specific context of the Phyllis Wheatley Home for Girls (hereafter PWHG or 'the Home'). The women who founded the Home were engaged in the unending struggle to 'uplift the race' (Hendricks, 1998; Knupfer, 1996; 2006). The women who lodged there and took advantage of its programmes had taken the first step to transform their lives by moving to a new city, but still had to find affordable, decent housing in a chronically crowded and strained market. Both groups of women had to negotiate the difficult terrain of 'respectability' and the unique burdens that ideology placed on black women. They also had to confront each other's expectations about how, whether, and to what extent to conform to such standards. Archaeology gives us an opportunity to explore the material manifestations of these challenges and how material culture was used to negotiate this challenging terrain. It also gives us an opportunity to see these issues from another perspective. Increasingly, historians are bringing to light the stories of the African American elite, who left memoirs, collections of papers, minutes of meetings, reports, and periodical writings on the subject of the Great Migration and its impact on black life in the urban north. However, the written record is less rich when it comes to the first-person accounts by African American working-class men and women who made up the majority of the migrants (Boyd, 2008).

The selection of a stately greystone on the 5100 block of South Michigan Avenue by the members of the Phyllis Wheatley Home Association reflects the success of their main project. The Association was formed in 1906 in response to what members of the Phyllis Wheatley Club (established in 1896) saw as

a problem that was assuming alarming proportions that of colored women coming into the city, many of them from the best families in other States, and finding it impossible to secure a congenial environment in which to live or desirable employment by which to

support themselves. Many of these girls were going astray by being led unawares into disreputable homes, entertainment, and employment because of lack of the protection that strange girls of other Races enjoy. (Davis, 1922: 16)

The clubwomen mobilized around this mission and managed to purchase a house where a woman could obtain room and board. The first house was purchased in 1908, and a second house in 1914, but the magnitude of the ‘problem’ was such that a larger house was needed, and so the Home on Michigan Avenue was opened in 1926 (*Chicago Defender*, 1926: 4). The PWHG was one of several non-traditional residences on that same block in 1928, as a city directory also notes the presence of the Frances Juvenile Home, several hotels and a lodging house (Polk, 1928–1929).

The Home, like many of the surrounding structures, was built in the 1890s as a single-family residence. Yet this greystone has spent much of its life occupied by unrelated individuals, rather than ‘households’ as traditionally understood by either anthropologists or archaeologists (Battle-Baptiste, 2007; Franklin, 1997; Mrozowski et al., 2008; Wilkie, 2000). During the most recent season of investigation, archaeologists and students affiliated with DePaul University’s archaeological field school examined the interior of the Home for traces related to its conversion from family home, to Phyllis Wheatley Home, and back again. The fabric of the structure itself has allowed us to chart the changes that have left their mark over the years and reflect the Association members’ aims, the Matron’s supervision, and the ‘Girls’ occupation.

Field seasons in 2006, 2007, and 2009 have uncovered archaeological deposits associated with the period of the Home’s operation, as well as preceding and subsequent occupations. Trenches opened in the rear, side, and front yards of the still-standing Home have yielded artefacts that are only beginning to reveal the details of the lives led by these recent migrants to Chicago. Measured drawings of the Home itself record both its original configuration, as well as the alterations made to render it suitable for a large number of residents — twenty-eight at the time of the 1930 census (United States Bureau of the Census, 1930). The Home is particularly accessible for detailed ‘stratigraphic’ analyses of the structure and its alterations (as in Harvey, 1997) because of the ongoing rehabilitation that allows us to look inside the walls (see Figure 5). Preliminary analysis suggests that the girls lived in semiprivate rooms, rather than dormitory-style accommodations, and that a number of washrooms were added, rather than expanding existing bathrooms to accommodate a large number of residents (J. Eric Deetz, pers. comm., 2009).

The Home was intended primarily as a short-term residence, but it was also a place where migrants could receive training and employment leads (Knupfer, 1997). The majority of the employment options for black women in interwar Chicago consisted of ‘servant work’.¹³ Fifty-six percent of black women were engaged in some kind of servant work in 1930. According to Drake and Cayton, this rate was at least four times their proportionate share. Another 34 per cent of women worked in semi-skilled or unskilled manual labour (Drake & Cayton, 1993 [1945]: 226). Assistance at the Home responded to this distribution of employment opportunities. In some ways, the instruction resembled the courses in, for example, sewing and meal preparation that the Club had offered in earlier years (Davis, 1922: 16). However, the later courses were designed to help women enter the workforce and to professionalize service



FIGURE 5 The ongoing renovation of the unoccupied upper floors of the Home allows archaeologists to study the changes made when the building was converted from a private home into a boarding house.

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work, not to instruct women on the administration of their own homes. According to Victoria Wolcott, migrants in Detroit, Michigan, during the same time period enrolled in domestic training to the extent that they saw it ameliorating the conditions faced by domestic workers, but they were far more eager for courses that prepared them for clerical and business-oriented employment (Wolcott, 2001).

The analysis conducted to date on the artefact assemblage does not suggest intensive use of the site for training residents or other clients in the principles of domestic science (Spencer-Wood, 1987). Isolated artefacts that may evoke such associations include items such as an iron, or canning jar lids. But more notable and numerous are the items that speak to the private lives of the girls: costume jewellery; soda bottles; and a camera (see Figure 6). As research continues, it may be that further comparison with contemporaneous private dwellings will reveal the subtle differences that mark the Home as a site of domestic instruction and training for service.

The impulse to educate and reform extended beyond those whom clubwomen were able to house or enrol. The founder of the Phyllis Wheatley Association noted that when migrants arrived in the city, fellow members of the Federation of Colored Women's Clubs 'visited the new families and left printed cards making an appeal for cleanliness, respect for public property, orderly conduct in the street and the best possible upkeep of the household' (Davis, 1922: 38). Many Race women saw such instruction as an extension of their role as the moral caretakers of their own house-



FIGURE 6 Items such as this canning jar lid (top) and camera (bottom) speak to the daily activities of 'the Girls' who resided in the Home.

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holds, following on the principles of domesticity and respectability which appear to have retained their salience for African American women some time after their fading from significance in the construction of white femininity (see Wolcott, 2001; Cash, 2001). Race leaders (men and women) also saw the maintenance of respectable comportment as key to improving the image and reputation of all black Chicagoans. Drake and Clayton stated at the time that, ‘When upper-class and middle-class people speak of “advancing The Race”, what they really mean is creating conditions under which lower-class traits will eventually disappear [...] Middle-class people want to remake the Black Ghetto in their own image’ (Drake & Cayton, 1993 [1945]: 710). Comparison of the front and rear yards of the Home show a clear conformity with middle-class norms forbidding messy or private activities in areas visible from the street. Far fewer features appear in the front yard of the Home than in the back. Artefact tallies also point to higher rates of deposition in the back yard than the front (see Figure 7). While such a pattern is not unique to twentieth-century black Chicago, its replication here speaks to issues of propriety, claims to legitimacy in the face of racism, and class conflict (Agbe-Davies, in press b).

Social service organizations (such as the Phyllis Wheatley Association) often depicted female migrants as innocent to the ways of the city and vulnerable to exploitation by unscrupulous landlords, criminals, or predatory men. Indeed, many newcomers came from small communities with fewer opportunities to be led astray, and many were quite young to be striking out on their own, but a significant number had been residents of southern *cities* before making the move north. And many made the decision to leave because of the exploitation they or their female relatives *already* faced at ‘home’ (Cash, 2001; Powdermaker, 1993 [1939]). While the kind of supervision offered by the Home and its Matrons may have helped mitigate the influence of the purveyors of vice who were permitted by lax law enforcement to concentrate in black residential areas, it may not have been as effective at protecting women from harassment and exploitation by employers, a significant hazard of domestic work in private homes whether in the south or north (Wolcott, 2001). Available records suggest that the Home programmes mainly provided domestic service training, which could be interpreted as an attempt to reinforce class boundaries (Knupfer, 1996). However, it may be that clubwomen promoted such courses with the idea that the professionalization of domestic work would change employer’s perceptions to the point that they would refrain from taking, or attempting to take, liberties.

The racial ideology at work in twentieth-century Chicago, as in the rest of the United States, denied the respectability of black women, making them susceptible to insult without recourse. This, in part, explains the tendency to cling to notions of Victorian womanhood and domesticity some time after these ideas were superseded in the wider society (Hendricks, 1998; Wolcott, 2001). So while Drake and Cayton accurately diagnosed pressures to conform to acceptable standards of behaviour as originating in class distinctions (see above), the stakes were particularly high for middle-class and elite African American women, such as the members of the Phyllis Wheatley Association, who felt that their own position in society was at risk when other members of the Race transgressed. We know the stated desires and standards of the clubwomen — what was the response of their migrant sisters? Did they buy into the argument that uplift of the race as a whole depended on their respectability?



FIGURE 7 Deposits in the front yard of the Home differed sharply from those in the rear and side yards.

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Did they accept that uplift as an important value? Did they see conformity as a mechanism for securing their own status? Some of these questions will be addressed via ongoing examinations of the material culture recovered from the private spaces of the Home — the rear yard and the lodgers' rooms. How did the 'Girls' behave when their benefactors were not on site, or in the privacy of their own rooms? How did they use and treat the goods provided to them for their sustenance and education? Did they conserve or reject the apparatus of their enculturation to the ways of the city (cf. Wilkie, 2000)? What, if any, rules did they break when they had the opportunity (Beaudry et al., 1991)? These contests between women who gave and women who received remain to be teased out of the material record.

Research questions such as those outlined above reveal the challenges faced by black women in twentieth-century Chicago, and the tools — material and social — that these women used to meet them. As such, the ongoing research component of the Phyllis Wheatley Rebirthing Project brings to public attention these neglected stories. It is also possible that these stories may inspire archaeology's publics to challenge the conditions we face today (Leone, 2005; Little, 2007).

Archaeology's contribution to contemporary struggles

In addition to illuminating past contests, archaeology by its very practice can contribute to twenty-first-century struggles in the Black Metropolis. Such an archaeology could be considered an applied anthropology (Shackel & Chambers, 2004). Most conservatively, archaeology is one of a suite of activities that can enhance educational and employment opportunities in Bronzeville. The information provided by archaeological research may yet confront the problem of displacement, if on a limited scale. The PWHG Rebirthing Project has the potential to connect ongoing service organizations with their historic counterparts. In addition, archaeological excavation can assist in struggles to procure daily necessities — such as employment and nutritious foods — in this underserved community.

It would be difficult to justify training in archaeology in purely monetary terms (Agbe-Davies, 2002; Zeder, 1997). And in a city where there is little archaeological excavation, even for cultural resource management, the field does not seem like much of a career path. Nevertheless, Bobbie Johnson sees the potential for archaeology to form a component part of her campaign for family literacy. As noted above, Race to Knowledge aims to connect people with the history of their community in a way that evokes pride and encourages the development of core academic and life skills, particularly related to technology and media. While it may not be practical or desirable to encourage students to aspire to work as archaeologists in their city, archaeology can be a means to engage young people in the creation of new knowledge and to support their formal schooling in traditional subjects such as geometry, biology, social studies, and computer applications (Bobbie Johnson, pers. comm., 2005). With this in mind, a group of DePaul students in my course 'Community Based Applied Practice' developed a curriculum — inspired by the finds at the Home — to teach archaeology to eighth graders (c. age 13–14) and link it with other elements of a more traditional middle-school education.

Archaeology is also a contributor to more familiar forms of preservation, which community activists see as key to developing local attractions (thus creating other

kinds of careers besides that of ‘archaeologist’) and preventing displacement. Residents of Bronzeville, and some outsiders, are increasingly capitalizing on the history of that community to develop the South Side as a destination for international and domestic tourism. Early efforts focused on African American tourists as an audience (KPMG Peat Marwick, 1993), but it has become clear that the appeal extends even further. International visitors, in particular, are keen to see the church where Thomas Dorsey developed modern gospel music, or the site of the Chess recording studio, or the former home of Lorraine Hansberry, or the A. Philip Randolph Pullman Porter Museum. The infrastructure needed to support the kind of visitation envisioned would provide much-needed jobs.¹⁴ More importantly, however, hospitality and tourism experts in the community note that these sites and services support ‘careers, not just jobs’ and generate employment at management and executive as well as entry levels (Cassandra Houston, pers. comm., 2008). The by-word for this tourism-driven employment growth is the acronym FAITTHE — Foodservice, Airlines, Information Technology, Travel, Hospitality, and Entertainment.¹⁵ Major infrastructural additions like hotels are still on the horizon, but many of the other pieces are already in place. For example, residents have already developed tour companies that bring visitors through the neighbourhoods focusing on such themes as music and the arts, sports legends, civil rights, and black entrepreneurship. Future archaeological research can pinpoint additional sites to commemorate, while demonstrating the integrity and significance of sites where the relevant structures may no longer be standing.

Chicago is no longer a potential host for the 2016 Olympics, but the activity surrounding the city’s bid stimulated important discussions about development, displacement, and shifting landscapes of power. Much of the infrastructure to host the Games would have been built on the South Side. Plans included the addition of a stadium to Washington Park (only a few blocks away from the Home), and the construction of the Olympic Village near the lakefront, on the site of a defunct hospital (Hutson, 2008). Residents of Bronzeville saw great potential in the construction of permanent recreational and hospitality facilities, and they entertained hopes for improved public transportation. However, the planning process revealed how many people were suspicious of land grabs, and that they were particularly concerned that studies might stigmatize existing communities as ‘blighted’ in order to clear the way for inexpensive acquisition and subsequent redevelopment.

Excavation at the Phyllis Wheatley Home has generated materials that can be used to draw attention to the material heritage legacy that remains just below the surface in so much of the city, yet is seldom considered ‘significant’ enough to merit salvage or protection during construction. The materials introduced here speak to the efforts of the clubwomen and Home residents as described above. Homeowner Joann Tate has expressed an interest in renovating the Home and developing the first floor as an exhibit space dedicated to the work done by black women activists in service to their communities (pers. comm., 2006).

Archaeological excavation has also provided the opportunity and financial support to undertake a study that supports the current owner of the Home in her own efforts to serve the surrounding community. Permission to excavate at the Phyllis Wheatley Home and Bronzeville Community Garden was contingent on an agreement to include tests for hazardous materials, such as lead, in addition to the normal round

of chemicals that are tested for archaeological analysis (Joann Tate, pers. comm., 2006). The presence of lead is an environmental justice issue that plagues many communities in Chicago. Illinois leads the nation in the number of children identified as suffering from lead poisoning.¹⁶ The question of lead is particularly important in the case of the Bronzeville Cultural Garden because Tate, a horticulturalist by training, would like to transform this ornamental garden into a vegetable garden that would grow produce for neighbourhood sale and consumption. This garden would be an element of her TERC programmes, giving children further training in plant cultivation as well as market research and entrepreneurship, as they sought to learn what crops might be most desirable and profitable for them to grow. Such a garden would also help alleviate another social justice problem faced by many residents of the South Side: the lack of stores selling fresh produce and other healthful foods.

The problem of 'food deserts' in Bronzeville has developed over time, as retailers, particularly grocers, have abandoned once-thriving South Side commercial districts.¹⁷ Adrian Praetzellis and Mary Praetzellis have investigated this progression archaeologically at sites in Oakland, California (Praetzellis, 2004), generating questions and theories that will be further tested with more detailed analysis of food procurement artefacts from the Garden and Home. The written record and oral history support multiple interpretations of African American consumption in the pre-Civil Rights era. Whether black Chicagoans were excluded from 'white' retail spaces elsewhere in the city or shopped in the Black Metropolis by choice, the perception is that people were able to provision their households locally during the years of the Home's operation. People today also lament that it is no longer possible to do so. Datable deposits will enable us to compare the impact of de facto segregation of retail establishments in earlier periods with the sharp reduction in retail options in the later twentieth century.

Conclusion

The residents of Bronzeville want to preserve the material legacy left by their predecessors. This inheritance includes the buildings, institutions, and businesses they built as well as the dwellings in which they lived. Residents want to be able to stay in their communities, and will accept newcomers so long as they acknowledge the historical and cultural significance of their new home and do not attempt to force out existing residents or radically alter the landscape. Inhabitants of the erstwhile Black Metropolis want a say in the presentation of their community's history, in preservation policy, and in actions that protect the landscapes they consider significant. They want to be able to benefit from renewed attention to the South Side's contribution to city history and African American history on a national level.

Archaeology is one method among many for recovering evidence of past struggles, and supporting present-day efforts to keep the history of Bronzeville alive and responsive to the needs of today's black Chicagoans. One reason that I entertain the hope that this undertaking will truly benefit the 'publics' on whose behalf, and with whom, I work, is that we are not merely investigating the past. The Phyllis Wheatley Home Rebirthing Project is situated firmly in the present, and conducted with a critical understanding of the long term processes, structures, and traditions of which it is a part.

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Notes

- ¹ In period writings, black scholars and commentators frequently referred to 'the Race' when speaking collectively of African Americans, using words like 'colored' and 'Negro' mainly in the adjectival form.
- ² From 1910 to 1920 there was a 148% increase, from 1920 to 1930 113% (Drake & Cayton, 1993 [1945]: 8).
- ³ The term 'Old Settlers' was used to refer to Chicagoans who had lived in the city prior to World War I (Drake & Cayton 1993 [1945]: 66).
- ⁴ Derek Hyra (2008) documents the feedback relationship between CHA demolition and increasing property values in Chicago.
- ⁵ The feasibility study legislation has been introduced by Representative Bobby Rush, and has been referred to the House Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public lands. A National Heritage Area is 'a place designated by the United States Congress where natural, cultural, historic and recreational resources combine to form a cohesive, nationally distinctive landscape arising from patterns of human activity shaped by geography' and is intended to benefit the community through preservation of significant landscapes, provision of educational and interpretive opportunities, and availability of planning and funding support (<<http://www.nps.gov/history/heritageareas/FAQ/INDEX.HTM>> Accessed 10 November 2008).
- ⁶ Author's notes, Black Metropolis National Heritage Area Steering Committee Meeting, 16 September 2008.
- ⁷ For a comparison of community archaeology in Chicago to its practice in a variety of other contexts, see Agbe-Davies (in press a).
- ⁸ William Faulkner, *Requiem for a Nun*.
- ⁹ 'TIFs allow municipalities to direct local taxes toward public and private developments, usually by providing funding for land clearance' Businesses in Empowerment Zones get tax breaks such as credits for hiring community residents, or property depreciation write-offs (Hyra, 2008: 50, 59). The description of the contents of the GIS database is drawn from the 'Bronzeville Community Development Partnership Draft Work Plan' and notes from the 14 February 2006 BCDP Steering Committee Meeting, both MS in possession of the author.
- ¹⁰ See <<http://www.cityofchicago.org/Landmarks/B/BlackMet.html>> Accessed 10 November 2008.
- ¹¹ See <<http://www.preservationnation.org/travel-and-sites/sites/midwest-region/michigan-boulevard-garden-apartments.html>> Accessed 10 November 2008.
- ¹² See <<http://www.preservationchicago.org/risk/pilgrim.html>> Accessed 10 November 2008.
- ¹³ Categories include laundry work, elevator service, general domestic and personal service, charwomen and cleaners, janitors, and waitresses (Drake & Cayton 1993 [1945]: 221).
- ¹⁴ Employment statistics for the South Side of Chicago are available in Hyra (2008).

- ¹⁵ Author's notes, Black Metropolis National Heritage Area Project Summit 'Bronzeville International II: Owning the Change Agenda', 12 December 2008.
- ¹⁶ See <<http://www.leadSAFEillinois.org>> Accessed 10 November 2008.
- ¹⁷ See <http://asap.sustainability.uiuc.edu/members/sagra/LaSalleBank_FoodDesert_ExecSummary.pdf>, especially figs 7 and 8. Accessed 10 November 2008. The Home is in the Washington Park Community Area.

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