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Archaeologies of Race and Urban Poverty: The Politics of Slumming, Engagement, and the Color Line

ABSTRACT

For more than a century, social reformers and scholars have examined urban impoverishment and inequalities along the color line and linked “slum life” to African America. An engaged archaeology provides a powerful mechanism to assess how urban-renewal and tenement-reform discourses were used to reproduce color and class inequalities. Such an archaeology should illuminate how comparable ideological distortions are wielded in the contemporary world to reproduce longstanding inequalities. A 20th-century neighborhood in Indianapolis, Indiana, is examined to probe how various contemporary constituencies borrow from, negotiate, and refute long-established urban impoverishment and racial discourses and stake claims to diverse present-day forms of community heritage.

Introduction: Reimagining the Slum

Soon after the turn of the 20th century, a massive wooden tower rose in the Indianapolis, Indiana, backyard at 458–460 Agnes Street. The tightly packed near-Westside neighborhood had been quickly built up after about 1870, when waves of European and Southern immigrants settled throughout the area and built homes along the city’s western edge. As in many late-19th- and early-20th-century neighborhoods, residents and landlords soon built extra stories, expanded into yard spaces, and even converted stables and alley outbuildings into makeshift homes. Constructed in the 1870s as a single-story double, the home on Agnes Street had been expanded upward into a four-unit residence just after 1900, and the household expansion demanded additional outhouse space. While surrounding residents dug, cleaned, and redug a patchwork of outhouses throughout their ever-shrinking yards, the residents at 458–460 Agnes Street erected a comparatively colossal two-story outhouse (Figure 1). The brick-lined pivvy, 8 ft. to a side, could be

accessed from the ground level or a second-floor walkway that extended into the yard, where the large outhouse loomed over the neighboring outbuildings and even some of the nearby homes. The outhouse remained in the yard until just after 1955, when it was finally dismantled not long before most of the block itself was razed.

In 1970 an administrator at Indiana University-Purdue University, Indianapolis (IUPUI) described the outhouse as an “architectural and engineering marvel,” but by then the outhouse had been dismantled for 15 years and its brick foundation sat beneath a university parking lot. In the subsequent years the outhouse has fascinated faculty, students, and community members, but most of that fascination has revolved around the mechanics of the tower, fostering a string of jokes about which campus constituency deserved the upper-story seat (Gray 2003:43). The superficial humor in the outhouse discourse reflects understandable wonder about the structure as an engineering feat as well as curiosity about such a seemingly alien sanitary mechanism. Yet the outhouse jokes also betray many of the ways in which historical experiences are evaded or even misrepresented for particular contemporary purposes. For example, the outhouse is sometimes inelegantly offered as a symbol evoking neighborhood poverty and celebrating city and university progress. A 2004 volume comparing historical and contemporary Indianapolis photographs of the same spaces used this approach, borrowing stale slum-clearance terms that when placed beneath a 1941 image of the outhouse refer to the outhouse’s neighborhood as “poverty stricken” and “blighted.” The grainy black-and-white picture of the Agnes Street outhouse contrasted radically with a picturesque contemporary campus image on the facing page that proclaimed: “Out with the outhouses, in with IUPUI, one of the nation’s largest urban campuses. The site of the former outhouse is now the \$32 million IUPUI library” (Price 2004:89).

The outhouse (which was not actually under the library) was excavated in 2003, and the dynamic and often-contested interpretations of the archaeological assemblage, the neighborhood’s history, and the outhouse itself reveal the complex heritage claims made in most cities.



FIGURE 1. In September 1941 realtor Howard W. Fieber took this picture of the two-story outhouse at 458–460 Agnes Street. (Photo courtesy of IUPUI University Library Special Collections and Archives, 1941.)

Slum caricatures that long legitimized urban displacement through references to race, space, and affluence are today relatively untenable, yet the Agnes Street outhouse is still routinely invoked as a symbol that risks distorting the community's heritage, placing poverty at the heart of community heritage, and rationalizing the neighborhood residents' mass displacement. Selective incorporation of slum history has furthered a vast range of contemporary material and social interests in many similar communities, turning many former slum landscapes into gentrified neighborhoods and urban university campuses while linking "slum" identities to community heritage and the color line.

Archaeology offers one mechanism to dissect such discourses, but slum narratives should not be reduced simply to misrepresentations that are contradicted by the historical and material realities revealed through archaeology. Alan Mayne (2007:321) champions a complex notion of slum stereotypes that acknowledges the concrete effects of the bourgeois imagination of space

and social identity. Mayne acknowledges that slum discourses certainly were self-interested rationalizations that were not necessarily especially reliable representations of material context. Nevertheless, urban narratives have always been profoundly shaped by these frameworks for defining, framing, and discussing poverty, space, and race on urban landscapes. Archaeology provides a mechanism to examine reflectively the concrete material conditions of urban marginalization, but especially interesting insights still come from examining the ways in which contemporary stakeholders, ranging from former residents to the university, define and claim the near-Westside's community heritage, often reacting against slum stereotypes even as they borrow from or accept forms of impoverishment in such narratives.

These stakeholders have conflicting visions of community, much like a century of urban reformers, slum ideologues, and residents before them. The contradictions within neighborhood historical discourses and archaeological material

culture reveal how history has been wielded along various lines of inequality, so it makes little sense to attempt to resolve dissentious notions of community and heritage and replace them with a monolithic archaeological narrative or an imposed notion of community. In this discourse on community heritage, the Agnes Street outhouse figures as a multivalent symbol. For instance, defining the outhouse as a material vestige of “slum life” hazards reproducing stale stereotypes and posing an ambiguous notion of urban improvement; that is, the outhouse is used to demonstrate the reader’s contemporary distance from poverty while it ignores the roots of present-day social privilege. Other constituents may be uncomfortable with linking the outhouse to poverty’s social stigmatization at all, but the outhouse demonstrates a profound color-based inequality in the very recent past, and evading the realities of impoverishment sidesteps these inequalities in favor of a transparent American Dream story. Still other university constituencies are simply dismayed that an academic institution with significant scholarly accomplishments and ambition has its heritage repeatedly tied back to an outhouse instead of many other more appealing histories.

Since 2000, archaeological excavations have been conducted in Indianapolis’s near-Westside to illuminate the displacement of neighborhood residents and examine how archaeological insight might temper the stereotypes that rationalized urban renewal and continue to reduce community heritage to class and racial caricatures. After World War II the Indiana University Medical Center expanded into the neighborhood containing the outhouse, armed with the slum stereotypes used to rationalize wholesale displacement in much of postwar urban America (Mullins 2003). After IUPUI was officially established in 1969, the new campus quickly took aim at the surrounding neighborhoods to accommodate suburban-commuter parking and the growth of the university, which soon enveloped several hundred acres of former neighborhoods. Archaeological fieldwork and oral historical research has been conducted in partnership with neighborhood elders, university constituencies, and other city residents who stake various claims to the community’s heritage, and much of the discussion, of the outhouse in particular and near-Westside heritage in general, revolves around slum stereotypes and poverty. During excavations of

the Agnes Street site in 2003, elders who lived in the near-Westside were interviewed about life in these neighborhoods that local historical discourses simply reduce to slums. Former residents acknowledge the material realities of impoverishment, but they paint poverty in ways that reveal it to be an important but not deterministic backdrop to their lives, much as racism is often portrayed. Elders sometimes use poverty as a rhetorical foil to underscore the magnitude of their ambitions and accomplishments and stress that the black community’s distinctive contemporary character reflects shared African American negotiations of material scarcity and color-line segregation. This position is less a refutation of poverty than it is a rejection of ideologically loaded slum caricatures that present urban poverty as a reflection of essential African American attributes or a structural framework that determined the lives of African Americans. The contentious history of the neighborhood’s landscape, the discourses over urban space, and the apparently prosaic materiality of the outhouse promise an interesting, if complex, picture of the intersection of race and heritage.

“Slumming” and the Aesthetics of Urban Poverty

Privileged thinkers have routinely “slummed” it in urban neighborhoods, using forays into marginalized communities to champion particular moralistic visions of community (Mayne 1993; Dowling 2001; Ross 2001; Feerst 2005). When a typical *New York Times* (1859:2) scribe ventured into the city’s “abodes of the poor” in 1859, the anonymous author was quick to suggest that “[t]here is no pleasure in visiting the haunts of wretched men and women,” but the writer nevertheless concluded that “it is wholesome to know how humanity suffers in our midst, how it even contents itself amidst its sufferings.” Such “slumming” sometimes devolved into a condescending spectacle in which privileged outsiders reveled in the aesthetics of marginality and their link to the color line. For example, English traveler William Archer (1899) concluded that New York’s

slums have a Southern air about them, a variety of contour and colour—in some aspects one might almost say a gaiety. ... For one thing, the ubiquitous balconies and fire escapes serve of themselves to break the monotony of line, and lend, as it were, a peculiar

texture to the scene; to say nothing of the opportunities they afford for the display of multifarious shreds and patches of colour. Then the houses themselves are often brightly, not to say loudly, painted; so that in the clear, sparkling atmosphere characteristic of New York, the most squalid slum puts on a many-coloured Southern aspect.

Ray Stannard Baker (1904:61) noted that in Southern cities: "The temperament of the Negro is irrepressibly cheerful, he overflows from his small home ... and his squalour is not unpicturesque." In 1896, slum tourist H. C. Bunner (1896:90) even noted that "I have missed art galleries and palaces and theatres and cathedrals (cathedrals particularly) in various and sundry cities, but I don't think I ever missed a slum." A 1911 history of Indianapolis's "old-time slums" inventoried a host of the city's earliest ethnic neighborhoods, and one neighborhood's typical resident was described as "a compound of brilliant colors with red, blue and yellow stripes on his trousers, a red undershirt crossed with bright hued suspenders, and a gaudy neckerchief, with cowhide boots upon his feet and a broad-brimmed brown hat surrounding all" (Cottman 1911:170). In these examples, poverty was an aesthetic attraction that could be toured, imagined in slum tourists' accounts, or viewed through photographs like the 1941 image of the Agnes Street outhouse (Figure 2).

Reformers routinely bemoaned slum and tenement dwellers' inability or unwillingness to conform to universal material and moral standards, and they often took explicit aim at outhouses and sanitation conditions. A 1900 study of Chicago tenement dwellers lamented the "almost universal unsanitary condition of privies and water closets" and decried the "utter apathy of the tenants," concluding that the residents were "ignorant as to even normal sanitary conditions" (Embree 1900:358). The study noted that "the lowest grade of tenement dwellers know nothing of decent living, and there are instances where sanitary contrivances have been removed because the use was totally misunderstood" (Embree 1900:362). Some observers believed that slum dwellers simply could not reproduce such standards and broader genteel moralities because of racially determined attributes. Louis Albert Banks (1892:172), for example, concluded in 1892 that

[g]reat numbers of the incompetent, vicious, idle, deformed, or starved-brain class have been poured into

this country by immigration during the last fifty years, and have filled our slums and tenement houses, our hospitals, asylums, alms-houses, and jails to overflowing. They cannot escape the results of their physical organization, which, in its turn, is an inherited result of ancestral degeneration.

Focusing solely on the parasitic dimension of slumming ignores the concrete sociopolitical interests that drove urban discourse and had a genuine impact on material life for over a century. As in many other communities, initial slum-analysis projects in Indianapolis were focused on providing adequate housing for inner-city residents, a commitment to reforming tenement life that followed the lead of progressive advocates like Jacob Riis (1890). Unlike New York and many other big cities, though, very few of Indianapolis's marginalized neighborhoods were like high-density tenements in New York and Chicago. A 1917 study concluded that "Indianapolis is fortunate, in that it has not developed a serious tenement or lodging house problem. Its citizens live in one or two-family houses. Few houses ... are occupied by several families, but the houses are not crowded and means of ventilation are provided" (Bureau of Municipal Research 1917:341). A 1935 study indicated that 95% of the housing in the city's "blighted" areas was single-family dwellings, as compared to 36% in Chicago (where 32% was still multifamily dwellings) (Achinstein 1935:45). Certainly many of the dilemmas of metropolises were commonplace in Indianapolis, but the problem for many observers was not really poverty, which often was painted as an inevitable structural reality. In 1937, for instance, housing reformer Edith Elmer Wood (1937:15) argued that families "live in the slums because they are poor. ... Better health may increase earning power, and better environment stimulate ambition, but no one should expect the disappearance of slums to abolish poverty." Such housing reformers simply hoped to improve living conditions and restrict the spread of poverty into other areas, and they devoted little attention to structural class and color inequalities.

In 1924 social-work student Nelda Weathers ventured into Indianapolis's near-Westside and conducted a typical study that focused on the material details of life in the neighborhood, assessing housing quality and cost, street condition, utilities, and sanitation (Figure 3). This methodology densely painted the details of

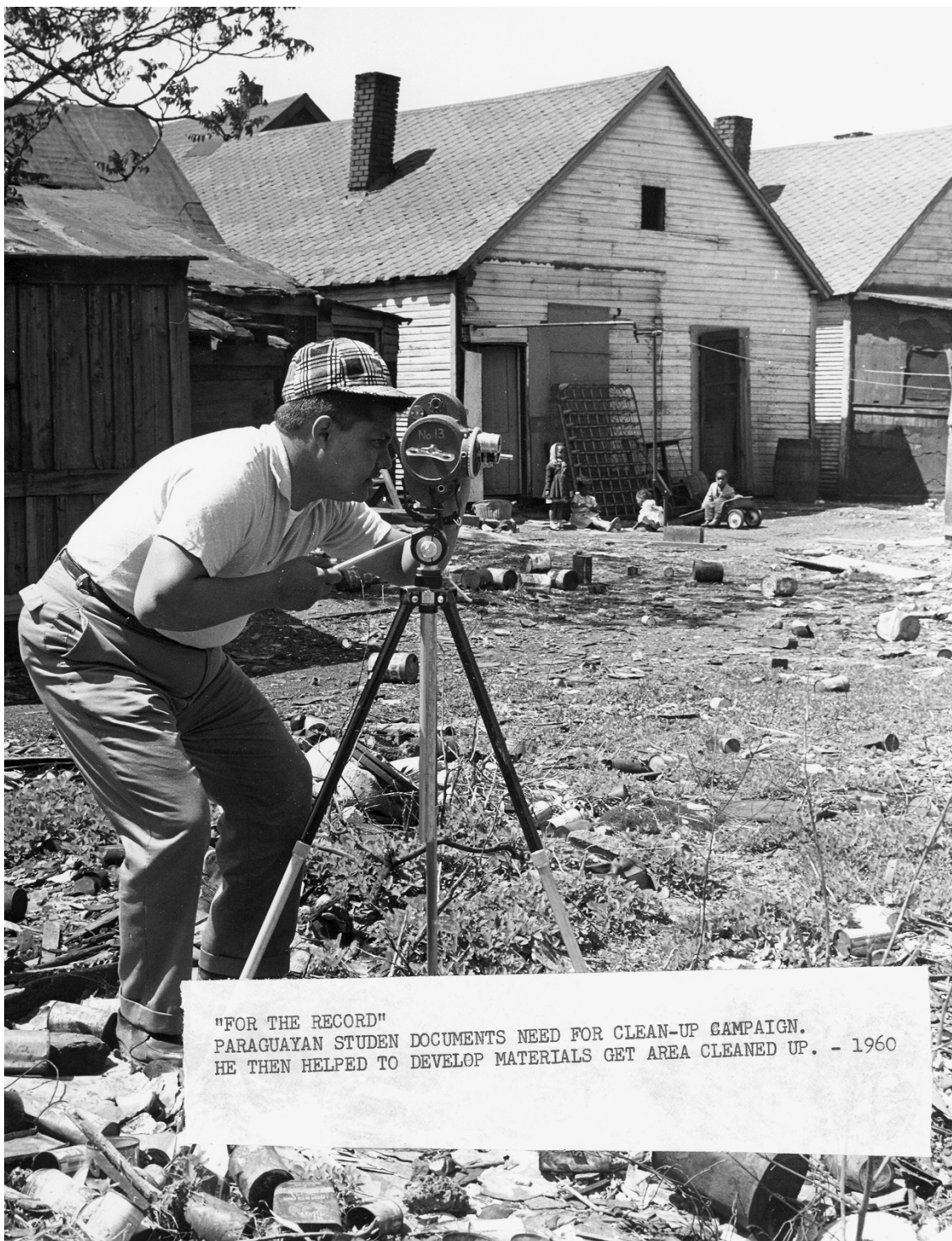


FIGURE 2. In 1960, this unidentified Paraguayan student joined a long tradition of visual representation of slums, trading still images for film. (Photo courtesy of IUPUI University Library Special Collections and Archives, 1960.)



FIGURE 3. Many Indianapolis residents continued to use outhouses like this row found in a series of near-Westside backyards sometime after 1940. (Photo courtesy of IUPUI University Library Special Collections and Archives.)

slum life and linked residents' material conditions to their morality in hopes of appealing to the observers' sense of justice, but like many commentators Weathers equated slum life with black housing (Meyer 1973). Outhouses often were seized upon as symbols of slum life and employed to explain the social and moral shortcomings of residents, and Weathers followed suit. In her survey of 137 houses Weathers found only 6 had "inside toilets" and 16 others used outhouses linked to the city sewers; the remainder used enclosed privy-vault outhouses. Thirty of the houses Weathers examined had "joint" outhouses used by between two and six households (which would describe the multiseat outhouse on Agnes Street), and she questioned "the injurious influence upon morals of the joint toilet." In 1908 Albion Fellows Bacon

(1908:377–378) drew similar links between "privacy and decency" when she noted that in South Bend, Indiana, "[o]ne yard closet is often used by from fifteen to twenty people." W. E. B. Du Bois's (1899:292–293) ambitious Philadelphia study surveyed the living conditions of 2,441 households and reached similar conclusions about the social and moral impact of shared outhouses, finding that 507 households had an "outhouse in common with the other denizens of the tenement or alley." A 1912 study in the south side of Chicago surveyed 682 African American homes and assumed that "[s]ince most of the houses are one- and two-family houses, it might be expected that a large proportion would have private toilet facilities" (Comstock 1912:248). Instead, about one-third of the houses surveyed in the study did not have indoor "closets" (toilet facilities) "and

use yard, basement, and hall closets” that are not “conducive to the good health or morals of the tenants” (Comstock 1912:248).

A wave of codes governing sanitation swept through many American cities in the second half of the 19th century (Stottman 1996, 2000). New York City led the way in developing sanitary legislation, especially after a thorough 1865 study of city tenements cataloged a host of horrific conditions (Citizens Association of New York 1865; Stone 1979:288). One 1914 commentator argued that subsequent sanitation laws were “forced by the lamentable unsanitary conditions of the earlier types of tenement houses” (De Forest 1914:8), but uneven enforcement left much of New York and many other communities relatively unchanged well into the 20th century. Chicago, for instance, enacted a tenement housing code that required all buildings constructed after 1902 to include a water closet in each apartment with more than two rooms, but earlier structures were not required to meet the same standards (Comstock 1912:248). In 1912 the city’s chief sanitary inspector estimated that Chicago still had 8,250 privy vaults in use (Ball 1912:23). A year later a reformer in one five-block swath of the city’s Italian neighborhoods reported that 237 “yard closets” were found that were “dark, dirty, and most frequently out of repair” (Norton 1913:525). These Chicago outhouses were attached to buildings that predated 1902, so they were not “illegal but are as dangerous to the health and to the morals of the tenants, especially of the children, as if they were forbidden by law” (Norton 1913:525).

The Agnes Street outhouse was constructed in about 1910, and by contemporary sanitary standards the 8 × 8 ft. brick-lined privy vault with no city sewer connection lagged well behind the model sanitation systems championed in or legally required by most cities. Indianapolis built a modest sewer system in 1870, but the city had little interest in compelling residents to connect privies to the system (Holloway 1870:130–131; Bicknell 1893:46; Scarpino 1994:202). Jay Stottman (1996:42) paints a similar picture in Louisville, Kentucky, where a 1917 law requiring toilets to be connected to the sewers did not eliminate many outhouses until the eve of World War II. Despite high rates of communicable disease and clearly outlined sanitation practices in contemporary cities, Indianapolis was slow to expand the sewer system and enforce

an 1873 privy-vault code, instead licensing contractors to remove “night soil” privy waste. A 1908 study of 207 African American homes in Indianapolis “showed a sickening lack of sanitation: dark sleeping rooms without windows, alley houses without yards or sewer connection, sinks overflowing, yard closets crowded against the houses so that doors and windows have to be kept closed to shut out the stench” (Bacon 1908:378–379). In 1914 a report by the Indiana State Board of Health (1914:244) indicated that “[i]n all the cities on the White River [including Indianapolis] the hauling of night soil is done by private concerns and paid for by the householder.” The report indicated that the “most unsanitary practice in the disposition of night soil was found in Indianapolis,” where privy deposits were dumped into the river south of the city. An Indianapolis Water Company official estimated that the city had more than 10,000 privy vaults in use in 1914 (Indiana State Board of Health 1914:233). The authors of an extensive 1917 study of Indianapolis were surprised to find that “[t]he health department has not the power to compel householders to make sewer connections even if sewers exist, or to prescribe a sanitary privy” (Bureau of Municipal Research 1917:326). The study found that Indianapolis had the nation’s highest typhoid rate among the 29 cities with more than 200,000 residents, and it argued that “[t]he main causes of this condition are undoubtedly the pollution of the streams by sewage and the large number of yard privies” (Bureau of Municipal Research 1917:326). Its authors concluded that

Indianapolis has been exceedingly shortsighted not to realize that it cannot be a healthy city without pure water and sanitary sewers. ... It would also be a wise provision for the city itself to make the privy connections and assess the cost thereof upon reasonable annual installments. It is cheaper for the city itself to make rigid regulations as to sewer connections than to run the perennial risk of a high typhoid fever case and death rate (Bureau of Municipal Research 1917:342).

These conditions were common throughout most of Indianapolis, but they lingered in the near-Westside until the 1940s, reflecting the city’s disinterest in sanitation in predominately African American neighborhoods. Basketball player Oscar Robertson (2003), for instance, lamented that in the 1940s his family’s Colton

Street home two blocks north of the Agnes Street outhouse still had “no indoor plumbing, and the city came around just once a year to empty out all the waste, so the air was perpetually full of bad smells and festering diseases.” In 1947 a *Saturday Evening Post* article on Indianapolis painted an even more unpleasant picture, concluding that [a]lthough some of the Negroes live in moderately pleasant circumstances ... the majority live in squalid surroundings. In certain sections ... families live in tumble-down shacks, with outdoor privies and, sometimes, with one outside tap the only source of water for fifteen or so families. Pigs, chickens and goats wander in garbage-littered yards” (Ellen and Murphy 1947:116). In 1952 an observer agreed that Indianapolis was composed of “streets and streets of hovels. ... Many of these hovels have no toilets and no running water” (Stark 1952:9).

One of the most interesting material commentaries on sanitation came from an apparently prosaic knickknack excavated on the Agnes Street site in a house neighboring the two-story privy. The excavations of the Agnes Street two-story outhouse were conducted during an excavation of 10 neighboring homes that included several wells, outhouses, and cisterns with a relatively typical range of 20th-century household discards that included several pieces of bric-a-brac. Bric-a-brac’s numerous motifs from the 19th century onward most commonly included subjects from nature and historical and pseudohistorical motifs, but they also included many idiosyncratic subjects like a tiny chamber-pot curio found at 444 Agnes Street. The Agnes Street chamber pot is emblazoned “The Smallest,” and at less than an inch in diameter it is indeed quite tiny (Figure 4). When indoor toilets began to replace privies in many 19th-century communities, the manufactured chamber-pot curios began, making light of the most universal of needs while also establishing some symbolic distance from outhouses and staking a household’s claim to modernity (Mullins 2004:85–86). The example from 444 Agnes Street was made in interwar Japan. The two modest houses that sat alongside each other at 444 and 442 Agnes Street shared a single lot, and by the time the curio was discarded, after World War II, they appear to have had indoor toilets with a city sewer connection. Nevertheless, the house apparently still had a privy in the 1930s. The two-story privy lorded over the

neighbors’ yard at 458–460 Agnes into the 1950s, and a foray into some of the surrounding neighborhood would have found many vault privies in use when the chamber pot was manufactured.

The diminutive curio made light of consequential sanitation issues by rendering the once-universal chamber pot an aesthetic object disassociated from the most unpleasant dimensions of sanitation. Most elders with memories of privies likewise tend to use humor to remember outhouses and the trappings of earlier sanitation methods. For instance, in 1937 Richard Crenshaw’s family moved into the newly built Lockefield Gardens, an exclusively black public-housing project two blocks north of the Agnes Street outhouse. Crenshaw (2005:4) remembered that “[f]or their time Lockefield was a magnificent place to live. A wonderful place to live. They had hot and cold running water in the house and toilets in the house.” In Crenshaw’s celebration of the “magnificence” of indoor plumbing he laughed, “I can remember outhouses when I was a kid, you didn’t want to walk by them.” Kenneth Adams (2005:5) also lived in Lockefield and shared Crenshaw’s sentiments about the quality of the Lockefield homes. Adams noted that in many other Indianapolis neighborhoods residents “had to go out and use an outhouse, but we had running water, hot and cold running water. We had indoor toilets. ... We were living good.”

The tiny chamber pot in an Agnes Street living room brought the topic of sanitation into discussion through levity, but it still underscored the household’s distance from the unpleasant realities of outhouses that were fresh in the experiences of household members and visitors alike. Elders often seize on such significant material shifts as key transformations in their lives. Crenshaw (2005), for example, pointed to the Lockefield homes’ steam-heating system as a vast improvement over the wood- and coal-heated homes covering most of the near-Westside: “It’s hard to imagine somebody getting excited about steamed heat today, but in the day it was a wonderful invention. ... It was very sufficient in heating the apartments, but another thing is you didn’t have to go out and chop wood or bring coal in and carry ashes out and clean out a fireplace or furnace.”

Elders rarely characterize these changes as movements from poverty to affluence or from slum life to a settled “middle-class” life, but they clearly recognize that they and many of



FIGURE 4. This modest chamber-pot curio used humor to illuminate significant sanitation concerns. (Photo by Kathryn Christine Glidden, 2008.)

their neighbors faced unpleasant and challenging conditions that were significantly diminished by everyday material conveniences like toilets and running water. In this sense, these former residents are not championing an archaeology that simply romanticizes the past and ignores

the concrete realities of poverty. In her study of archaeological constructions of poverty, Sarah Chicone (2006:51) argues that some archaeological studies of slum life focus on the ideological distortions of popular portrayals of slum life to illuminate the consequential agency of slum

dwellers. Chicone suggests that such a focus on how impoverished peoples' lives contrasted to the ideological pronouncements of social reformers risks evading the real social and material effects of impoverishment. Near-Westside elders, though, do not argue that poverty was utterly "imagined" by middle-class reformers, and, in fact, former residents typically concede its existence, understand its effect on their communities, and recognize its prominence in their heritage.

Reconstructing Privy and Slum Heritage

Many 20th-century observers seemed to believe that there was a concrete distinction that granted some neighborhoods the status of slum, but the specific material, aesthetic, and social dimensions defining slum life were ambiguous and directly linked to state interests and prevailing prejudices. Alan Mayne (2007:322) concurs that the "slum" was a subject fashioned to serve various public policies while it reproduced broader popular sentiments about social and individual identity. In the 1930s, for instance, Indianapolis's slum discourses tended to focus on economic analyses of poverty, a maneuver that quantifiably grounded slum life in black materiality to legitimize wholesale neighborhood removals. When Asher Achinstein (1935:46) wrestled with the definition of a slum area in 1935, he canvassed nine major cities and concluded that more than half of Indianapolis's African Americans lived in what he classified as "blighted" neighborhoods (the next highest percentage was in Baltimore, where 38% of African Americans lived in such neighborhoods). Achinstein (1935:39) decided that the most reliable measure of blight was median rentals, arguing that "where the lowest rents are paid, there the poorest housing exists." In contrast, in 1911 George Cottman (1911:170) suggested that Indianapolis's slums had already been eradicated, concluding that the slum landscape had been erased by "the moral sanitation which may fairly be said to have taken place in our community. It is said that Indianapolis is to-day, for a city of its size, exceptionally free from slum conditions. Whatever vice flourishes here makes at least a show of hiding its head and not flourishing in the more respectable quarters." This was a more indefensible position by the 1930s, when the Indianapolis Real Estate Board objected to the federal government's plans to construct the exclusively African American

Lockefield Gardens, the first public housing in Indianapolis (*Indianapolis Recorder* 1933a, 1933b). The *Indianapolis Recorder* (1933c:1) reported that the real estate board and "certain owners of properties located in the area chosen for the slum clearance ... sought to convince officials at Washington that no Negroes of Indianapolis were living in slum areas and that 'they would not appreciate better surroundings if they could get them.'" The real estate board did not evade the presence of genuine poverty, conceding that "certain sections of the city should be rebuilt, but it should be left in the hands of a private business" (*Indianapolis Recorder* 1933d:1). The realtors argued that the new homes' rental prices would be "prohibitive to those now living in this district and would force these residents to blight other areas" (Barrows 2007:146).

For elders, the question is less about whether the neighborhood constituted a "slum" than it is about residents' ambition and dignity. Very few elders accord poverty an especially prominent position in their memories of the near-Westside, but almost all acknowledge its presence, even if they are quick to refute slum stereotypes. For instance, Thomas Ridley (2002:5) grew up in the neighborhood in the 1920s, and he acknowledged that his family's modest rented home "had an outdoor toilet." Such conditions associated with slum life were often linked to renting, which was associated with community "instability" and often viewed as an insubstantial claim to citizenship. Ridley (2002:5) stressed that

very few people owned homes, they rented. ... But that didn't mean you didn't take care of your house. You did, because you had pride. ... I don't know any side of town that didn't have a pocket, some pockets of slum area of poverty stricken homes. ... They were not modern homes most of them, but they were nice homes and kept nice by the people that lived in them.

The homes Ridley remembered were almost all vernacular houses built from the late 19th century onward, and many of the stylish 20th-century streetscapes in the African American near-Westside were by most measures model genteel communities. Booker T. Washington (1909:173) painted such African American domesticity as accommodationists' refuge from public racism, arguing that "[w]e sometimes complain about the Jim Crow cars, but, although we may not have the most agreeable part of the car in which to

ride, all of us, as I have said, can have a beautiful home in which to live, in which to rear our children.” Washington’s confidence that genteel homes would provide an essential foothold to African American citizenship was misplaced in many communities, though, because black architectural respectability often inspired apprehension among white observers (Mooney 2002:64).

A 1946 study of a near-Westside neighborhood targeted for slum clearance linked community identity to genteel housing, arguing that “[a]lmost all of the families were living in houses which needed major repairs and few of them had adequate plumbing facilities” (Blackburn 1946:95). The study’s author, Cleo W. Blackburn (1946:52), argued that his “analysis of community life shows little understanding or concern on the part of the people with regard to such factors as community health or sanitation.” Blackburn (1946:96) concluded that the challenge was “how to co-ordinate housing building and community development in such a way as to assure a new type of life in the community as well as a better appearance in housing.”

Following models he had learned at the Tuskegee Institute in the 1930s, Blackburn was a proponent of slum clearance and advocated “sweat equity” redevelopment of slum tracts, with a community of model African American homeowners building new homes in place of former slums (Pierce 2005:67–69). Blackburn believed that African Americans in the near-Westside would learn new social discipline as they transformed the community’s material living conditions. The project eventually built over 330 homes between 1950 and 1964, but Blackburn’s rebuilding project was intentionally peopled by solidly middle-income homebuilders, favoring families with stable work histories, spotless records, and good credit (Pierce 2005:70). Most displaced African Americans who once lived in the area were compelled to migrate to equally marginal housing elsewhere.

The material conditions along Agnes Street in the 1950s had declined significantly from Thomas Ridley’s childhood, and as he acknowledged, they had been difficult for some near-Westside households for most of the 20th century. By the 1950s, Agnes Street had declined as a result of wartime migration into the city, a half century of landlord disinterest in maintaining the homes, and the city’s persistent failure to extend basic utilities to

residents. Eventually this decline was seized upon as the key reason to uproot thousands of households throughout the near-Westside. After World War II the Indiana University Medical Center expanded into the surrounding neighborhood, armed with slum stereotypes used to rationalize wholesale displacement in much of postwar urban America. In some communities slum clearance was a rapid and utter razing of whole swaths of city, but in Indianapolis it was a protracted process of mostly modest land acquisitions. In 1956 one large tract of 19 ac. was acquired by the city’s redevelopment commission, an area in which the building commissioner said the “houses are structural, fire and health hazards and many have no plumbing” (*Indianapolis Star* 1956:1). The city rationalized the displacement by stressing that of the 116 families living in the area, 29 had no running water, 33 had no indoor plumbing, 63 lacked baths or showers, and 36 were using outhouses. While the city professed that “the clearance was ordered solely on the basis of blight there and not for the convenience of the school,” Indiana University repaid the city’s costs on the project and took possession of the land. After IUPUI was officially established in 1969, the small campus quickly took aim at surrounding neighborhoods to accommodate suburban-commuter parking and the growth of the university, which soon enveloped several hundred acres of former neighborhoods. The home at 458–460 Agnes Street and its monumental outhouse eventually fell to the wrecking ball during this 1960s transformation of the campus landscape. The privy’s *terminus post quem* comes from a bottle, manufactured in 1954, found in the lowest excavated level, reflecting that even in the neighborhood’s last moments sewer connections still had not been extended to every Agnes Street home. A 1958 map shows the outhouse removed, so it was razed and filled sometime between 1954 and 1958, with the house and its neighbors following soon afterward (Rosenberg 2008). Eventually Agnes Street was renamed University Boulevard, further distancing the campus community from the heritage of the former residents.

Consuming Poverty

The concrete consumption tactics reflected in the Agnes Street assemblage provide a more illuminating picture of the residents’ lives than

simply framing the analysis in terms of how the artifacts either support or refute the residents' poverty and position on a slum landscape. For instance, the privy included 1,042 bones, and more than 75% of those are pork. The predominance of pork indicates a strong preference for it over other meats, and it does not surprise African American elders who concur with the vast volume of archaeological scholarship that reveals a similar African American devotion to pork. Somewhat surprisingly, many former residents assume that such households were consuming inferior cuts like feet elements, linking pork, however circuitously, to poverty. The Agnes Street assemblage, though, is dominated by the most costly pork loin and rib chops, while it also includes less-desirable vertebral scraps, rib tips, and feet. While elders tend to deemphasize poverty in their memories of their youth, some still assume that economic scarcity will be reflected in archaeological material culture.

Community descendants stake a complicated position on the assemblage that rejects some dimensions of economic determinism even as it accepts the powerful influence of material marginalization. On the one hand, elders almost always acknowledge material want in many of these neighborhoods. On the other hand, though, they resist framing the analysis in terms of a deterministic notion of poverty that ignores households' tactical consumption patterns and clever resource management. On Agnes Street, for example, the predominance of pork likely reflects such circumspect consumption tactics by residents Max Folley and Oscar Roddy. By the mid-1950s the Agnes Street apartments were home to Oscar Roddy, who worked at Kingan's meat-packing plant, and Max Folley, who lived at 458½ Agnes Street from 1948 until the 1960s and also worked at Kingan's. From 1862 to 1966, Kingan's was one of the largest pork plants on the face of the planet, in which, by the company's own count, more than 10,000 hogs met their ends each day. Neighborhood residents and employees often took discarded meat from Kingan's, which is suggested by many of the smaller cut bones, although distinguishing slaughterhouse discards from market purchases is infeasible. Nevertheless, pork loins certainly were not routinely discarded into Kingan's glue vats. Folley and Roddy were probably bringing at least some of this food home from Kingan's

and apparently mixed some desirable cuts in alongside the feet and bone scraps normally pilfered from the glue vats.

Such tactics produce a picture of material consumption that resists being reduced simply to deterministic frameworks or agency disconnected from impoverishment and the color line, and similar tactics are reflected in other dimensions of the assemblage. For example, during World War II, many ideologues renewed the call for home food preservation, and the Agnes Street glass assemblage provides an opportunity to see how such entreaties played out in at least one set of households. Since the 19th century champions of home food preservation had often celebrated the thrift and material discipline provided by home food preservation, but such consumption dictates were often dropped in the face of inexpensive and convenient mass-produced canned goods. Many African American domestics, for instance, did home food preservation for white employers and were not eager to do the same unpleasant labor in their own homes when canned foods were widely available and quite cheap (Mullins 1999:178–180). In 1887 Maria Parloa's (1887:87) popular household manual was already willing to decree that "taken for all and all, canned foods, especially fruits and vegetables, are a great blessing." In 1918 over 7.5 million cases of corn alone were canned in the United States, and by 1940 16.6 billion pounds of vegetables were sold in cans (Judd and Marshall 1918:64; Halper 2003:1,371). During World War II, though, canned food was rationed to preserve tin resources, reviving lagging interest in home food preservation (Halper 2003:1,371–1,372). In Indianapolis, Cleo Blackburn's Flanner House social service agency built a massive cannery in 1944 to serve its predominately African American constituency in the near-Westside (Figure 5). Preserving a vast range of vegetables in glass mason-style jars, Flanner House reported that "20,000 cans of food were processed" in 1944, almost all of which were canned vegetables grown in one of Flanner House's 250 family garden plots (Allen 1945). A 1955 pamphlet proudly noted that "[i]n its community gardens, open to Negroes and whites alike, hundreds of families grow their own vegetables, and can them in the Flanner House cannery" (High 1955).

Despite such rhetoric, most households before and after the war opted for inexpensive



FIGURE 5. Sometime after World War II, this woman posed at the Flanner House cannery for an unidentified touring group. While such visits might not strictly be considered “slumming,” this demonstration of Flanner House’s thrift and uplift programs certainly was in a tradition of slum tourism across class and color lines. (Photo courtesy of IUPUI University Library Special Collections and Archives.)

mass-produced canned foods, and the Agnes Street assemblage had a significant volume of corroded metal that likely came from such vessels. Nevertheless, the glass assemblage indicates that the households at 458–460 Agnes Street also were consuming home-preserved food. Of 240 bottles in the Agnes Street outhouse, 31 (12.9%) were preserving jars, which were the second most common vessel type. The mean production date of the 31 preserving jars was 1943.09, which is slightly earlier than the assemblage’s mean production date of 1944.21; consequently, there may have been modest reuse of some preserving jars, but extensive reuse would be reflected in an earlier production date. The Agnes Street residents may have seen such food production and consumption as “thriftiness,” they may have adopted canning

as an economically prudent tactic, or their home food production could have been some combination of those sentiments. Thriftiness was routinely bandied about in moralizing consumption literature from the 19th century onward, but along the color line it often implied that black consumers would largely remove themselves from white consumer space as full participants. In 1913 the white sociologist Robert Park (1913:152) suggested that many African American tenant farmers mired in poverty might improve their circumstances with more disciplined planning and consumption: “The average tenant farmer will spend as much money during the cropping season as the grocer or the banker who is advancing him will permit. ... A thrifty farmer, however, can reduce the amount of his purchases at the store to

almost nothing.” Booker T. Washington was the best-known African American champion of thrift as part of a “racial uplift” discourse promoted most extensively in the wake of Emancipation but continually revived in the 20th century as well (Gaines 1996; Daugherty 2004). Thrift and racial uplift were rather ambiguous notions, but they were often linked closely to the material details of everyday life. Washington (1900:174), for example, noted that “[w]hile the great bulk of the race is still without money and property, yet the signs of thrift are evident on every hand. Especially is this notable in the large number of neat little homes which are owned by these people on the outer edges of the towns and cities in the South.” Tuskegee’s outreach programs to rural women included training in a wide range of household skills, including home food preservation as well as dressmaking, poultry raising, and “moral” amusements (Washington 1904:123).

Indianapolis’s own Flanner House was a persistent advocate of “self-help” programs fashioned after similar uplift models at Tuskegee Institute, where Executive Director Cleo Blackburn had served as a research assistant. Flanner House touted its cannery as a mechanism to foster material discipline, encouraging prospective canners to “enjoy the glorious feeling of thrift and efficiency by having a grocery of your own canned goods in your own home. ... [Y]ou will save money, time, and energy, and you will enjoy a deep pride in your saving when you can at the Flanner House cannery” (Flanner House [1950]). The Agnes Street residents may have agreed that home food preservation materialized self-sufficiency, but this does not mean that such household production was not also a reflection of impoverishment. Elders often stress the relationship between material penury and individual aspiration; this maneuver constructs a heritage that recognizes community impoverishment but stresses how personal and family initiative and discipline allowed some households to advance materially and socially. Some neighborhood ideologues saw such material ambition and discipline as an essential element in the reconstruction of former slum communities. In 1952, for instance, a Flanner House advocate argued that construction of “sweat equity” homes built by neighborhood residents was “not the end of their aspirations, but only a step towards the

formation of a community where each family will be in a position to live best and serve most” (Kimbrough [1952]:5). This position applauded ambition and disciplined labor and stressed relationships with neighbors, vesting community in the shared willingness to work toward common aspirations.

Conclusion

The spot on which the Agnes Street outhouse once sat is today home to a new Campus Center, a gleaming monument of steel and glass that lords it over the parking lots and buildings that now populate the IUPUI campus. The outhouse provides a stark contrast to the new Campus Center that makes the latter structure and the university itself appear to be a justifiable improvement on the neighborhood that it displaced. Most sober observers will agree that eliminating many of the most unpleasant dimensions of impoverished neighborhoods had a positive impact on subsequent generations, and most elders have no nostalgia for impoverishment. Yet for elders, the community that once populated these neighborhoods was not defined simply by material conditions or the narrowly defined and ideologically distorted slum discourses that sought to displace the community. The dilemma is that certain material forms defined as slum life are recurrently resurrected to legitimize the social and political displacements related to urban renewal and to avoid the sticky questions of how such displacement has a powerful contemporary legacy. In the face of a radically reshaped campus landscape that bears no material traces of historic architecture and is no longer populated by a descendant community, stereotypes and historical ignorance have tended to replace reflective and critical pictures of the many residents that populated the neighborhood for more than 150 years. Contemporary perceptions of the near-Westside hazard lapsing into the same class, cultural, and racist distortions that have characterized slumming for well over a century.

Archaeology may lend some concrete material presence to these former neighborhoods and productively establish the heritage of the landscape before it became a campus and ocean of parking lots. This materiality would unite a fine-grained archaeological picture of the things and spaces that made up the near-Westside landscape while

recognizing how they were concretely shaped by, understood through, and inseparable from social discourses such as those on slum life, race, and poverty. Establishing that historical presence is only the first move in creating an engaged picture of the community, one that still needs to examine how a vast range of residents' lives were significantly influenced but not determined by racism, economic marginality, and material circumstance. The challenge is to temper the archaeological narrative in ways that recognize marginalization and acknowledge the power of racism without letting those structural influences drive the analysis or eliminate the collectively meaningful agency of the near-Westside's residents. The ultimate goal of such scholarship is not necessarily to forge a clearly defined community based on archaeological analysis, because monolithic notions of community usually have been wielded by urban-renewal advocates, racists, and even universities in order to make particular social subjects conform to particular dominant interests. Instead, seemingly prosaic archaeological materials like those from the Agnes Street outhouse should reveal communities actively negotiating numerous forms of difference. The outhouse can mean many different things, and in fact it is perhaps most valuable as an element of neighborhood heritage when it reveals dissentious views of history and the contemporary world. Piercing the distorted and simplistic pictures of the outhouse as a symbol of poverty projected onto racism is a critical first step, but it should ultimately make this and similar contexts mechanisms that interrogate contemporary social interests.

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