

CHAPTER 36

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**RACE AND PROSAIC
MATERIALITY: THE
ARCHAEOLOGY OF
CONTEMPORARY URBAN
SPACE AND THE
INVISIBLE COLOUR LINE**

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36.1 INTRODUCTION

RACE has long been rendered invisible in everyday materiality or remade to mask the relationship between material things and the colour line. This chapter focuses on a public sculpture project in Indianapolis, Indiana that aspired to reinterpret a little-recognized 1890s statue of an Emancipated captive. The case reveals how racist privileges and African American heritage are at the heart of American experience even as the racial dimensions of seemingly mundane materiality are unseen or concealed, even in the case of a monumental public statue. The Indianapolis experience reflects the ways many communities struggle to simultaneously remember, displace, and memorialize African American heritage and race in cities where there appear to be no contemporary material traces of the colour line.

**36.2 ‘THE EQUALITY OF MAN’:
MATERIALITY AND THE COLOUR LINE**

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On 15 May 1902 the towering 284-foot tall Soldiers and Sailors Monument was dedicated on Indianapolis, Indiana’s central circle. Like many communities in the wake of the Civil War,

Indianapolis aspired to erect a permanent memorial commemorating its wartime experience and defining the meaning of the national conflict. Proposals were solicited in 1887 for an ‘American Monument’ that would resist classical iconography, and German architect Bruno Schmitz won with a design for a towering shaft with statuary and fountains at its base. The cornerstone for the monument was laid in the centre of the city’s ‘Mile Square’ grid in August 1889. When the monument was finally officially unveiled in 1902 the *Indianapolis News* (1902: 4) waxed that it was testimony that ‘this country stands, as it did not and could not during the slave days, for the equality of man’ (Figure 36.1).

That ideological ‘equality of man’ has often rendered the colour line invisible, aspiring to preserve white privilege even as it inelegantly masks or conceals the profound impression of race and racism on materiality (see also Shepherd, this volume). Few of the thousands of people in the 1902 crowd likely inspected the frieze of ‘Peace’ that occupied the monument’s western side, yet it materialized the colour line in rather typical ways that rendered racial privilege invisible (Figure 36.2). In 1897 German sculptor Rudolfo Schwarz was commissioned to complete ‘War’ and ‘Peace’ statuary groupings that had been modelled by Hermann Matzen for placement on the eastern and western sides of the monument respectively. Nestled rather unobtrusively at the base of the Peace side is the figure of an emancipated African American, reclining and holding up broken chains towards the female figure of Liberty, who resides at the centre of the sculptural group. The motif of the emancipated captive was quite common in post-war statues, which intended to be permanent commemorations of the Civil War—and define black freedom—even as the meaning of the



FIGURE 36.1 The Soldiers and Sailors Monument western face with the Peace grouping at its base (photograph: Paul R. Mullins)



FIGURE 36.2 The Peace grouping with the emancipated captive figure in the lower right (photograph: Paul R. Mullins)

war and Emancipation were being actively constructed (Savage 1997: 74). In the 1860s and 1870s, the placement of an unchained and kneeling captive in relation to Abraham Lincoln was the most common mechanism sculptors used to imagine Reconstruction and black freedom, a manoeuvre that cast Emancipation as an act of white agency (Savage 1997: 65). Yet as Reconstruction collapsed in the 1870s even those public representations of African Americans disappeared. By the time the Soldiers and Sailors Monument was unveiled, the relative optimism of post-Emancipation motifs had been replaced with new signifiers that rarely depicted black bodies.

Nestled within a dense statuary group, the emancipated captive was simultaneously monumental and invisible, and for more than a century he passed mostly unnoticed by the scores of people who walked by it. However, in 2007 artist Fred Wilson noted the black figure paradoxically hidden in Indianapolis's most public space, and he conceived a statue that would draw attention to that image and colour line heritage. Wilson had been commissioned to produce an artwork for the Indianapolis Cultural Trail, a downtown bike and pedestrian path linking five urban historic districts punctuated with public artworks. Wilson spied the kneeling captive on the Soldiers and Sailors Monument and contemplated how recontextualizing that concealed black motif could produce dialogue about the colour line that apparently had never been triggered from its placement in the monument itself. He proposed to recast the freed captive in a more upright position and situate him grasping a flag of Wilson's design that represents the African Diaspora. The proposed work was intended to be placed

along the Trail at the City-County Building, which is home to Indianapolis's city government and just a few blocks from Monument Circle. Wilson dubbed the work *E Pluribus Unum* (Out of Many, One), and Trail planners optimistically celebrated that such a work 'speaks to diverse audiences and... is long overdue' (fredwilsonindy.org 2011).

Wilson's implication that race remains largely unrecognized in Indianapolis's cityscape holds true for virtually all of urban America, and we might conclude that it is typical of nearly all contemporary materiality. Race is paradoxically an essential dimension of all public materiality even as it has been simultaneously rendered largely invisible in concrete material terms; that is, race is invisible in the sense that colour line privilege is rarely acknowledged in everyday materiality, and race is only 'seen' in its most stereotypical ideological aesthetics. As the Emancipated Monument captive passed largely unseen for more than a century, its hollow dominant narrative of white altruism likewise passed unexamined, even though it was among the most prominent material representations of African America in the city. Yet its nineteenth-century racial aesthetics conflict with most contemporary perceptions of black subjectivity, and some audiences have resisted immortalizing those conventions for fear they will reproduce the racist privileges the monument had effectively condoned for a century.

Wilson's proposed statue and its reception raise the question of how the colour line can be made materially visible in the contemporary world and how archaeology can illuminate racial privilege. On the surface the discourse over Wilson's proposal is simply an assessment of an aesthetic work that aspires to redefine stale ideological motifs, and stakeholders intent to craft certain pictures of African America disagree over whether such symbols can frame productive conversation about African American heritage. The reception also reflects the lines of power that materially represent African America, especially how culture brokers in Indianapolis's arts community have partnered with (and potentially misunderstood) African American constituencies.

Yet perhaps the most critical dimension of this discussion is how materially illuminating race reveals a vast network of unquestioned privileges and deep-seated sentiments about racial subjectivity. Like the long-ignored freedman who has ignited a discussion of Indianapolis's colour line, the city's broader landscape is a material testament to racial privilege: broad swaths of state offices, a university campus, and prosaic apartment complexes inhabit what were predominately African American neighbourhoods for more than a century. Nevertheless, these mundane or unexamined spaces pass without critical reflection and little or no acknowledgement that they are products of racial ideology. In an early twenty-first century society that often transparently bills itself as 'post-racial', African American heritage is often more thoroughly masked than it was just a half-century ago. Black materiality was overwhelmingly effaced from American cityscapes in the wake of the Second World War, when urban renewal projects took aim on predominantly black neighbourhoods and razed massive tracts of historically African American communities in the heart of cities like Indianapolis. The remaining public spaces including places like Monument Circle are inelegantly cast as being 'race-less' or simply assumed to have been outside African American experience. Urban renewal projects aspired to remove nearly all material traces of African American heritage that revealed the impression of white racial privilege, which extended the Soldiers and Sailors Monument's sanitized history that completely ignores African American agency. Black materiality has been nearly completely erased from public spaces, sequestered in newly marginalized areas, and submerged in ideologically distorted histories.

Consequently, much of historically African American cities are today either literally erased or ideologically effaced.

The neighbourhoods transformed by urban renewal have rarely been viewed as products of systematic racism directly linked to the original freedman statue or his contemporary recasting. Most public space has simply been assumed to have no connection to the colour line, and material forms like the Monument and the cityscape cleared by urban renewal have rarely been approached in ways that examine how such materiality is experienced along and across the colour line. Racial privilege persists because it is embedded in material culture yet its impact on material symbolism remains largely unspoken or unacknowledged. From the most quotidian commodities to the most monumental spatial materiality, racial privilege is silently reproduced, masked, and accented by materiality that appears to have no tangible connection to the colour line. The freed captive on the Soldiers and Sailors Monument and the largely erased landscape of African American Indianapolis reflect how race has often been ideologically rendered invisible, and the reception to the freedman's recasting underscores the complicated ways such representations are contested in the contemporary world.

36.3 MATERIALIZING BLACK HERITAGE: URBAN RENEWAL AND AFRICAN AMERICAN LANDSCAPES

Since almost the moment Europeans settled the city in the 1820s, Indianapolis's near-Westside had African American residents. While they were often settled in pockets, they had white and European immigrant neighbours alike throughout the nineteenth century; white and black children went to the same secondary schools until 1927; African Americans were much less densely settled and more often in single-family homes than in other northern cities; and African Americans who left the South found much less suffocating racist codes and violence than they escaped in the South. Much of this changed at the dawn of the twentieth century, though, when the city became starkly segregated as both European and African American immigration alarmed city administrators (Crocker 1992: 44). A typical 1910 study of neighbourhoods just south of the African American near-Westside found that 'Twenty-five percent of them are foreigners, either Irish, German, Italian or Hungarian...Of the remainder of the people of the district 14% are negroes....Consider this mass of people—foreigners of different nationalities, negroes, Americans from a dozen different states, and a handful of native citizens of Indianapolis. Could they be expected to mix well in any sort of social organization, or to have many common interests or aims?' (Adams 1913: 122). The nadir perhaps came after the First World War, when the Ku Klux Klan mobilized widespread nativism to fashion itself into Indianapolis's single largest social organization between 1921 and 1928 (Moore 1991: 59). The Klan gathered sufficient backing by 1924 to win the election of a Klan-endorsed slate of state officials including the Governor and a Klan-supported majority in the state legislature (Moore 1991: 152). The Klan has often been caricatured as a racist vigilante organization, but in Indiana the hooded order was a truly mainstream political and social force with historically deep-seated racist sentiments that did not disappear after their 1920s zenith in power.

One of the most significant material effects of such racism was colour line spatial segregation and neighbourhood material decline, a commonplace pattern in twentieth-century American cities (cf. Lands 2009). African Americans became increasingly spatially segregated in twentieth-century Indianapolis by *de facto* segregation by white realtors and neighbourhood associations, and this fuelled a significant black housing shortage as many African Americans were forced to secure housing in the near-Westside (Pierce 2005: 59–60). That housing shortage was intensified by the growth of the African American community by 175 per cent between 1900 and 1930 (Pierce 2005: 60). As the population swelled, landlords seized upon desperate tenants and much of the near-Westside housing declined. Alarmed city administrators launched one of the city's first 'slum reform' projects in 1933 with the planning for a New Deal public housing settlement that came to be known as Lockefield Gardens (Barrows 2007). When it opened in 1937 Lockefield Gardens' 748 units provided stylish and spacious housing for working black families, but it could not remotely address African American housing problems in Indianapolis.

In the wake of the Second World War, federally funded slum clearance programmes were boosted by urban blight rhetoric. In 1947, for instance, a *Saturday Evening Post* article on Indianapolis snidely suggested that 'the people of Indianapolis are considerably more attractive than much of the town they live in', concluding that 'some of the most hideous slums in the United States are in the "Mile Square"' (Ellen and Murphy 1947: 113–14). That same year, John Gunther (1947: 387) indicated that 'Indianapolis is an unkempt city, unswept, raw' and added a dig at the Soldiers and Sailors Monument when he suggested that 'in it you may see the second ugliest monument in the world.' In 1953, an *Indianapolis Star* study reported that 'Twenty per cent of the city today is under the scrutiny of the Indianapolis Redevelopment Commission and needing possible slum clearance', concluding that '900 buildings should be razed immediately...and another 1000 ramshackle buildings run the 900 a close second in disrepair and other substandard conditions' (Connor 1953a: 1). The newspaper reported that 959 homes had no indoor toilets, another 20,649 households had neither bathtubs nor showers, and 140 miles of the city's 923 miles of streets had no water mains at all (Connor 1953b: 1, 3). Many of these conditions may have intensified before and after the Second World War, but they had been present for much of the twentieth century and not at all restricted to African American neighbourhoods. For instance, Nelda Weathers's (1924) survey of 137 houses in the predominantly African American near-Westside identified only six with 'inside toilets' and 16 others using outhouses connected to the city sewers, but the remainder was using enclosed privy vault outhouses that in many cases remained until the homes were razed in the 1960s (cf. Bureau of Municipal Research 1917: 326). These conditions were tolerated by the city and hastened by racist housing practices until urban renewal funds gave the city the concrete financial capacity to remove such overwhelmingly black neighbourhoods, which took aim on material decline but also targeted areas that wielded significant political power.

Indiana University was one of the most prominent players in the post-war transformation of the near-Westside. Universities became especially active in urban renewal when the Federal Housing Act was amended in 1959 to expressly direct federal aid for 'urban renewal areas involving colleges and universities' (Hechinger 1961: E7). In 1958, the Indianapolis Redevelopment Commission's master design for the near-Westside proposed an undergraduate campus of Indiana University that would adjoin the Indiana University Medical Center, where students had been trained since the early twentieth century. The planners

indicated that around 'the present medical center is a large area of blighted dwellings and scattered commercial and industrial buildings. The Department proposes that this area be redeveloped for housing to primarily serve the university campus' (Metropolitan Planning Department 1958: 14). Yet in the early 1960s, Indianapolis's city government shocked the University by rejecting federal urban renewal funds in favour of locally financed projects. The University was compelled to expand into the densely settled neighbourhoods around the Medical Center by purchasing single lots, spending most of the 1960s purchasing between 10 and 20 properties each month and continuing that growth through the 1970s and into the 1980s. A rush of landlords eager to sell descended on the University when its expansion designs became public, and by 1974 the University lamented that a 'substantial backlog of property owners wanting to sell endangers the University's commitment to the immediate campus neighborhood' (IUPUI 1974: 65).

Today that African American neighbourhood has been completely materially displaced, uprooted for parking lots and a scatter of brutal modernist buildings that make up the campus of Indiana University-Purdue University, Indianapolis (IUPUI). The black material heritage that escaped the wrecking ball in post-Second World War Indianapolis generally conformed to ideological visions of community history. A few historic churches survived, for instance, structures that institutionally situate African Americans in deeply held Midwestern faith traditions that are ideologically cast as unifying people across the colour line. However, churches are actually among the most segregated of community spaces, and these African American congregations had very distinctive anti-racist politics. In the city's near-Westside, for example, the Bethel AME Church built in 1867 replaced a structure that was burnt in 1862, almost certainly by slavery supporters who opposed the congregation's public abolitionist leanings. Likewise, the 1929 landmark Madame C. J. Walker Theatre commemorates one of the city's most prominent entrepreneurs, celebrating an African American woman whose hard work, ingenuity, and good fortune built one of the twentieth century's most affluent cosmetics firms. Yet that transparent public accounting of Madam Walker routinely ignores her anti-racist activism. It also conveniently sidesteps her own flight from Indianapolis to live in Harlem and escape Indianapolis's persistent racist codes imposed on even its wealthiest black citizen. The central thoroughfare in the neighbourhood, Indiana Avenue, was almost entirely depopulated in the 1960s and 1970s as businesses and music clubs lost their customers; the city's African American high school, Crispus Attucks, was legally desegregated in 1949 (though *de facto* segregation continued through the 1970s) (Gonis 1965); and all but seven of the original 24 buildings in Lockefield Gardens were razed in 1983.

36.4 ART, MEMORY, AND THE MONUMENTAL AESTHETICS OF RACE

The Soldiers and Sailors Monument was typical of later nineteenth-century statuary that aspired to celebrate the everyday soldier, the mostly anonymous men who were cast as typical citizens preserving the Union. When President Benjamin Harrison spoke at the laying of the monument's cornerstone in 1889, he saw the future statue as a memorial to those

unknown soldiers, indicating that he had long hoped that ‘there might be built a noble shaft, not to any man, not to bear on any of its majestic faces the name of a man, but a monument about which the sons of veterans, the mothers of our dead, the widows that are yet with us, might gather, and, pointing to the stately shaft, say: “there is his monument”’ (*The Ohio Democrat* 1889: 3). At the monument’s dedication in 1902, the *Indianapolis News* underscored that this selfless if anonymous service to the state was the central lesson of the monument, which demonstrated that ‘Private and general are entitled to the same measure of our love and gratitude if they do what they are bidden to do without thought of self. There is now no man so humble but he can greatly serve the country.’ The 1902 speeches and newspaper articles on the Monument apparently said nothing about the relationship between the war and black freedom, but in his 1889 speech Harrison called the end of bondage one of the war’s greatest victories, arguing that ‘I do seriously believe that if we can measure among the States the benefits resulting from the preservation of the Union, the rebellious States have the larger share. It destroyed an institution that was their destruction’ (Hedges 1916: 215). Yet presaging the ideological turn towards celebrating the common soldier and ignoring African America, Harrison also underscored that ‘This is a monument by Indiana to Indiana soldiers.’

The kneeling, freed captive on the Soldiers and Sailors Monument memorialized the black experience of the war as the gift of freedom won by countless white citizen-soldiers. Hidden in the recesses of the monument, the freed captive was whites’ self-congratulatory mechanism that applauded their ability to secure freedom, forgave themselves for the patriarchal racism that followed Emancipation, and materially and ideologically submerged race and the colour line within a broad ideological narrative. In 1916, Freeman Henry Morris Murray (1916: 124) noted how the statue’s design buried its single captive amongst a cacophony of wartime symbols, observing that the monument aspired ‘to represent so much of the tumult and carnage as well as the glory of war, on a large scale; and brings into action so many arms of the service in so many stages of the fray; and, moreover, introduces such an over-load of the symbolical and the figurative—and finally, in the lower part, a glimpse of the aftermath of the struggle—that one is at first bewildered, and after a time wearied in the effort to disentangle, to correlate, and to interpret.’ Murray (1916: 125) criticized the placement of the freed captive in the monument’s ‘Peace’ grouping rather than the ‘War’ side of the monument, where ‘we see no black man, though here, if anywhere—here, where there is powder smoke—he would seem most fittingly to have a place, both for his honor’s sake and the truth’s sake.’

Fred Wilson recognized the effacement of black material heritage and the paradoxical invisibility of the emancipated captive in Indianapolis’s most public space. His work commonly ‘re-purposes’ symbols and goods to compel audiences to rethink or simply acknowledge their meanings, so the unshackled monument captive provided a potentially productive motif to trigger a discussion about freedom, privilege, and the colour line. The Cultural Trail has many artworks installed along it or planned, but Wilson’s is separated by its conscious ambition to trigger discourses about culture, heritage, and materiality. In 2009 and 2010 the Cultural Trail planners in the Central Indiana Community Foundation shared their vision of this and other works in a series of public meetings. Blogger Tyler Green (2010b) argues that the planners ‘held a series of meetings to try to introduce Wilson and *E Pluribus Unum* to the community. Art students showed up and maybe a few other folks did too. The groups that Wilson and the ICT most wanted to engage—the quarter of Indianapolis

residents who are African-American—were mostly disinterested.’ Green certainly misinterprets those absences as ‘disinterest’, but he was probably correct in his depiction of conventional ‘community meetings’ that gathered together people who saw themselves as part of an ‘art community’. Such a conception of community misunderstands black grassroots organization—which occurs in very different institutional channels than public art meetings—and risks underestimating the profoundly deep African American commitment to heritage and its public representation. Deep-seated mistrust of the state and a sober realism about the limits of black community voices likely kept all but the most committed stakeholders from initial public meetings, particularly in an arts community that has not often included voices of colour. The Trail’s artistic curator and public art coordinator acknowledged their difficulty reaching African American stakeholders in October, 2010, saying that ‘Honestly, it had been a little bit difficult to get a lot of people from the community involved’ (Green 2010b).

This effort to ‘locate’ the African American community risks misunderstanding Indianapolis’s distinctive heritage of colour line civility, which continues to shape the ways race is discussed in the city today. As Richard Pierce (2005) has thoughtfully argued, African Americans were an integral part of the city long before twentieth-century wartime migrations that swelled the populations of many other Midwestern cities. Those cities, however, did not share Indianapolis’s heritage of generations of black and white residents living alongside each other or the long-term relationships between the city’s white and black elite. Even in the face of rising separatism from the 1920s onward, African Americans in Indianapolis tended to contest civil inequalities through patient negotiation across the colour line within existing power structures and through community representatives. This yielded a distinctive twentieth-century colour line politics that avoided radical public protest and overt racist hostility.

Nevertheless, a range of people became part of the discussion about the Wilson project in autumn 2010. One of the first volleys came in a September, 2010 letter to the *Indianapolis Recorder* from an African American high school teacher who complained that when he ‘saw the picture of the sculpture that was created (or recreated) by artist Fred Wilson, I was appalled, embarrassed, disappointed, and outright mad. My initial thought was that the features around the shoulders, neck, head and face looked “ape-ish” to say the least’ (Robinson 2010). That uneasiness focused on the material aesthetics of black representation, arguing that ‘this is not the 19th century and the African-American community in Indianapolis does not need another “image” in downtown Indianapolis to remind us of how downtrodden, beat down, hapless, and submissive we once may have been. We don’t need any more images of lawn jockeys, caricatures...no more buffoonery, no more shuckin’ and jiven’, and no more ape-ish looking monuments.’

That discord was a somewhat narrow critique of racist aesthetics and the apprehension that their visibility would fortify or resurrect racist stereotypes. It did not address the thorny community politics of representing racialized symbols in a public, permanent, and monumental piece of material culture. A public monument is a distinctive material object in its ambition to represent something with timeless permanence, so much of the debate over the project revolved around how the motif was selected and how the statue’s meaning and interpretation could be subsequently managed. Wilson himself recognized the folly of aspiring to control such meanings, arguing that ‘Public art is...in public and people can interpret it in the way they will and often without any mediation, which is really great’ (Green 2011). Yet the critics of the project soon orchestrated a group calling itself the Citizens Against

Slave Image that rejected the suggestion that the nineteenth-century aesthetics of captivity could frame a productive discourse on race. The dispute was fundamentally over control of public, permanent material representations of African America, not simply one statue. The letter to the *Indianapolis Recorder*, for instance, concluded with a criticism that exposed the politics of materiality and representation across the colour line, asking ‘whose culture is this image along the Indianapolis Cultural Trail attempting to represent, the oppressor or the oppressed?’ Wilson appeared on a local African American radio show soon after, and a caller against the statue again intoned ‘Who decides what is appropriate and what is not appropriate?’ (Green 2010a).

In 1996 a statue of tennis star and AIDS activist Arthur Ashe was dedicated on Richmond, Virginia’s Monument Avenue, and that project was also dogged by a complicated community review process that inelegantly manoeuvred around deep-seated sentiments over race and heritage. Between 1890 and 1929, Monument Avenue was lined with five bronze and marble monumental statues that memorialized five iconic figures of the rebelling Confederacy’s ‘Lost Cause’ (i.e. Confederate Generals Robert E. Lee, Thomas ‘Stonewall’ Jackson, and J. E. B. Stuart; Confederate President Jefferson Davis; and Confederate Navy Commander Matthew Fontaine Maury) (Edwards and Howard 1997). When the 60-foot tall Robert E. Lee monument was dedicated on what was then Richmond’s unpopulated western edges in 1890, an estimated 100,000 people gathered for its unveiling (Leib 2002: 286). Influenced by the City Beautiful movement, late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century planners soon placed a central grass median along Monument Avenue’s grand straight boulevard, which was rapidly lined with stately Colonial Revival homes. Kathy Edwards and Esme Howard (1997: 93) argue that the community’s exceptional architectural homogeneity was a 30-year-long process that informally but strategically reflected the post-Reconstruction politics of Richmond’s white elite. Public statuary and the materiality of Monument Avenue invoked pre-war heritage even as it was funded by—and rationalized the new influence of—newly wealthy post-war elite professionals who replaced the Old South planter class (Edwards and Howard 1997: 95; Savage 1997: 148). Veterans’ reunions and Southern cultural events became commonplace along Monument Avenue and won the exclusively white neighbourhood the transparent status of ‘sacred ground’. When it was proposed that an Ashe statue join this landscape, the Richmond discussion most explicitly focused on physical placement of the statue within a landscape that ideologically heralded Southern chivalry, the defence of home and honour, and new, post-Civil War Southern affluence. A majority of whites and African Americans alike opposed the placement of the Ashe statue alongside the fathers of the Confederacy; some of the former questioned the statue’s aesthetic worthiness and whether Ashe deserved the status accorded the likes of Lee and Jackson, while the latter often cast those same figures as traitors whose monuments commemorate the defence of enslavement (Leib 2002: 299–301). Ultimately the statue was erected in 1996, effectively accepting the heroic status of the Confederate icons while elevating Ashe to a position that conceded the multicultural dimensions of Southern heritage and questioned the unchallenged heroism of those icons and the cause they defended (Leib 2002: 307).

The very absence of African American images on Monument Avenue and in Indianapolis alike somewhat counterintuitively underscores the profound power of the colour line (cf. Savage 1997: 154). Fred Wilson’s Indianapolis sculpture raises the issue of exactly how we see race in materiality, and historically Americans have chosen not to see it at all. Wilson’s design intentionally appropriated an ideologically charged racialized symbol, but, as Wilson

recognized, the precise discussion it hoped to foster when installed—beyond simply illuminating race and racism—is not mediated by the state, socially powerful collectives in the city, an arts community, or any other social group. A reflective public discussion of race and privilege has historically failed Americans for half a millennium, but discussions about racial representation occur constantly in African America in secluded discursive spaces that rarely find their way across the colour line into white public space. Tyler Green's prescient analysis of the Wilson sculpture and its public reception concludes that reception to the proposal 'is the kind of artist-public discourse wherein art can play an important role as a community protagonist'. However, these discussions about racist representations and African American heritage have always been at the heart of African American culture and discourse, so the 'arts community' has awkwardly found its way into that discussion and risks appearing self-congratulatory about initiating it.

In a city that has often sought contrived racial consensus, some people saw the disputed Indianapolis statue as an unacceptably inflammatory if not racist illumination of the colour line. Tyler Green lamented that simply eliminating the statue from the Cultural Trail would yield 'a false unanimity' that ignores all the complications of racism. Despite such fears, in July 2011 the Central Indiana Community Foundation (CICF) announced that it no longer supported placing the statue in front of the City-County Building. Their inelegant retreat focused on the sculpture's siting at the City-County Building, which is home to the city jail as well as the Mayor's Office, a space Wilson chose in part because it was within sight of the Soldiers and Sailors Monument. In December 2011 the CICF finally reached the conclusion that the project could not be salvaged anywhere in Indianapolis, and they withdrew their support, so it somewhat curiously has been a powerful material thing without actually having any genuine material presence.

36.5 'OUR OWN PECULIAR VIEWPOINT': FINDING THE RACIALIZED LANDSCAPE

Fred Wilson's intentions were in many ways much the same as Freeman Henry Morris Murray's had been in his 1916 study of the representation of African Americans in public statuary. Murray (1916: xix) underscored that 'when we look at a work of art, especially when "we" look at one in which Black Folk appear—or do not appear when they should,—we should ask: What does it mean? What does it suggest? What impression is it likely to make on those who view it? What will be the effect on present-day problems, of its obvious and also of its insidious teachings? In short, we should endeavor to "interpret" it; and should try to interpret it from our own peculiar viewpoint.' Facing the Soldiers and Sailors Monument, Murray (1916: 125–6) saw the well-concealed captive as a fundamental misrepresentation of the war and African American agency, finding that in 'the Peace group—wherein a black man appears, seemingly as an afterthought or a sort of supernumerary—there is, artistically viewed, as much confusion and incoherence as in the other [i.e. War group], and there is more over-loading; and in it the symbolical and the figurative are heedlessly and hopelessly mixed with the realistic and commonplace....I feel an impulse to seize this "super" by his

dangling foot and slide him gently off into oblivion—or else say to him, as sternly as I can: “Awake, awake, put on thy strength...shake thyself from the dust; arise. You deserve a place at Liberty’s side, not at her feet. Assist her soberly to uphold the Flag, while others rejoice; for, but for your strong right arm the Flag would even now perhaps be trailing in the dust!”

Wilson aspired to do much as Murray hoped by illuminating an otherwise invisible racial symbol, a symbol that like most racialized modern materiality was hidden in plain view. Potentially the recast freedman might cast doubt on the hollow white beneficence posed by the Soldiers and Sailors Monument a century ago. Wilson’s intentions were to recontextualize the freedman’s agency simply by drawing attention to him and posing the question of why legions of visitors to the Circle had mostly ignored that captive over more than a hundred years. Wilson’s reimagining of that symbol will not become a concrete material reality on Indianapolis’s Cultural Trail, but the captive, the Wilson statue, and the public contestation of representation reveal the ways in which race is invested in material landscapes in a vast range of forms. Contemporary archaeology provides exceptionally powerful tools to interrogate these historically deep-seated discourses on race as they intrude into the present-day world, marshalling ethnographic rigour and material insights into the ways race is impressed into contemporary life in profoundly clear and unseen ways alike. Myriad landscapes bear the symbolism of race and racism, and nearly all public space in a city like Indianapolis is invested with unacknowledged colour lines experiences.

Disassociating the landscapes of urban renewal from the narrow racialized materiality of the Monument freedman risks underestimating the genuine power of racial ideology. Yet the contestation of the freedman’s representation of race and African Diasporan heritage demonstrates the genuine power of—and challenges confronting—materialities of the colour line. The arts community that commissioned this project certainly understood the power of public materiality and the productive discourses a thoughtful piece could trigger, but they ultimately failed to grapple ethnographically with African American receptions of blackness or the ways some African American constituencies contested precisely who had the power to publicly represent African Diaspora. Much of the mission of contemporary archaeology is to reveal how race is invested in mundane and monumental materiality alike, and it does that by assessing the material forms themselves as well as the breadth of constituencies who encounter and give meaning to things. Admitting racialized symbolism and acknowledging white privilege challenges communities along and across colour lines, and material culture—even the mere spectre of material representations of African America like Fred Wilson’s sculpture—can foster productive conversations about the sway of race and racism.

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