

## Examining Structural Racism in Jim Crow–Era Illinois

**T**his chapter examines the contours of racial ideologies and their impacts on social dynamics in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in Illinois by undertaking historical, archaeological, and comparative studies of three African American communities. In addition to overt acts of racism and racial violence, African American communities in the nineteenth century combated various forms of structural and aversive racism that diverted economic opportunities away from them and presented challenges for households to overcome (Gaertner and Dovidio 1986; Kleinpenning and Hagendoorn 1993; Kovel 1970). I examine such dynamics using examples from archaeological and historical analysis of three communities in Illinois: New Philadelphia, Brooklyn, and the Equal Rights settlement outside of Galena. The study employs research questions that confront multiple social dynamics that impacted dispositions in the past and continue to influence the present. This project analyzes past multiethnic and racial dynamics using interdisciplinary methods and active engagement with the perspectives expressed by multiple stakeholders, including members of descendant and local communities.

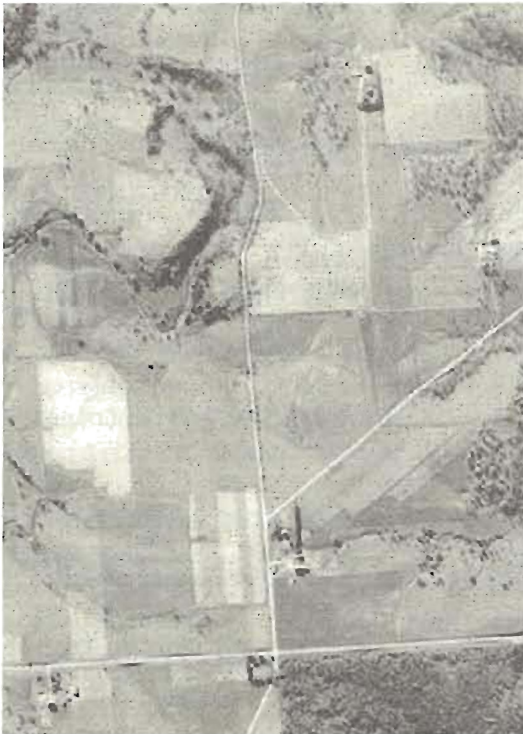
New Philadelphia was the first town in the United States that was planned in advance and legally registered by an African American (Walker 1995 [1983]). It grew as a demographically integrated community from 1836 through the late 1800s. Brooklyn was the first African American town to be incorporated under a state legal system in the United States (Cha-Jua 2000). It was a community started by families escaping Missouri plantations in the late 1820s and grew through the late 1800s. Equal Rights was a rural settlement of several African American households near Galena, started in the 1870s, with residents who utilized church congregation networks and entrepreneurship to overcome racial and economic challenges of the late nineteenth century. Research concerning such communities can expand our understanding of how social networks, racism, and developing markets influenced the ways in which individuals and households made choices in shaping the natural, social, and built environments and in developing social relationships, cultural traditions, and economic strategies.

in fear. The media, local and state officials have forecast our self destruction and demise. They are like vultures circling the wounded, patiently waiting for all signs of life to cease before moving in to consume flesh. They underestimate our resilience and tenacity” (HSB 2008).

This diversity of economic and community interests presents particular challenges for such a collaborative project to enhance and commemorate Brooklyn’s heritage. For example, many of the individuals who work in adult entertainment establishments are themselves struggling to navigate the harsh class and economic structures of the day. A project to enhance the pride of Brooklyn’s past and present will need to find a way to proceed with tolerance, empathy, and pride in seeking ways to better the lives all of who engage with the community.

### Equal Rights Settlement and Galena

Galena, Illinois, is well known for its history as a lead-mining center started in the early 1800s and as the home of Ulysses Grant (for example, Krausse 1970; Owens 1963). While Galena has been largely ignored in popular history accounts, historian



Aerial photograph (1946) of the agricultural landscape in Jo Daviess County, Illinois, on which the Equal Rights settlement site was located. Courtesy of U.S. Geological Survey archive collections, Denver, Colorado.

H. Scott Wolfe (2008) of the Galena Public Library District has worked for years to record and commemorate the rich history of African American residents, entrepreneurs, and church communities in Galena and a nearby settlement called Equal Rights. African American residents of Galena worked as miners, ministers, blacksmiths, educators, cooks, and laborers in the river transport industries (Wild 2008). Those residents also experienced the oppressions of bondage, servitude, and racism within Galena (Wolfe 2004).

In the 1860s, as Galena began to experience an economic downturn, a number of African American families moved out to farmsteads in neighboring Rush Township, where they engaged in entrepreneurial activities such as burning lime in stone kilns to create fertilizer for sale to other farmers in the area and the work of raising crops and livestock. Equal Rights included a church and schoolhouse serving that cluster of African American farms and the surrounding area (Wild 2008; Wolfe 2008). As in the histories of Brooklyn and New Philadelphia, social relationships influenced by church networks played important roles in the founding, location, and development of Equal Rights. Residents were members of the Colored Union Baptist Church in Galena, the Northwestern Association of the Regular Predestinarian Baptists, and later established a new church in Equal Rights as a location halfway between affiliated Baptist congregations spread across the county. By the 1880s Equal Rights included 30 residents on 70 acres of neighboring farmsteads served by the local church and school. Galena experienced a corresponding loss of African American residents in the same period, with census rolls listing 64 in 1870 and 13 in 1880 (Wild 2008; Wolfe 2008).

Racial conflicts within Galena later focused upon Equal Rights. In 1867 members of the Freedman's Aid Society worked to open an African American schoolhouse in Galena. As the school began operations, local European Americans assailed the students, teachers, and school directors with verbal and physical harassment. When a new schoolhouse was constructed in Equal Rights during the 1870s to serve the area's African American families, racial strife again became manifest. Oral histories report that European American residents protested such a school violently and began to refer to the community by the racial epithet of "N—rville." In a remarkable example of the impacts of intergroup conflict, it was apparently this event that motivated the African American residents to adopt the name of "Equal Rights" for their previously unnamed community (Wild 2008; Wolfe 2008).

I am working to launch and participate in an interdisciplinary, collaborative research project on the Equal Rights settlement history that will include the University of Illinois Department of Anthropology working in coordination with H. Scott Wolfe of the Galena Public Library District. This project of historical, oral history, and archaeological research will work to expand our knowledge of African American heritage in Galena and Equal Rights and the impacts of racialization in that region in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

## Conclusion

Interdisciplinary studies concerning communities such as New Philadelphia, Brooklyn, and Equal Rights help to deepen our understanding of how racial ideologies, social networks, and developing economic structures influenced the ways in which individuals made choices in shaping their social and built environments and in developing economic strategies and cultural practices. Civic engagement in such research projects also significantly aids the members of current-day communities to enhance the recognition and visibility of their African American heritage and accomplishments and to combat facets of structural racism they are experiencing today.

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Edited by Jodi A. Barnes



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