

**The Metaphysical Landscape: Landscape and Dreamscape** – Ed Sebesta  
4/7/2019

Names! Names! Names! The landscape is covered with names. Names for lakes, mountains, rivers, creeks, hills and other natural features. Names for streets, parks, neighborhoods, buildings, airports, bridges, schools, neighborhoods, and other humanly constructed things, the built landscape.

There are monuments, plaques, fountains, and other items, even planted trees, with names, to mark the landscape with names.

All these names on the landscape individually and together in groups tell stories about the land and define and mark that land as being a particular space, a particular territory, a particular type of place. Many of the names define who the people of that land are and which people are not of that land. Many of the names define how the people of that land are to behave and what they should believe and what not to do and what they should not believe.

The names on the landscape are an encoding onto the landscape of what has gone before both good and bad, and in America largely encode white supremacy in obvious direct ways and in not so obvious indirect ways.

We hear the voices of the names of the landscape every day in many ways. As we travel we see names of streets, buildings, bridges, city names, county names, state names, parks, airports, and other names of the landscape. As we read maps, we see the fabric of the landscape woven by the names. In writing and receiving correspondence we see the addresses, return addresses of the correspondence and possibly other addresses referred to in the correspondence. In hearing what happened whether in the news, in a book, in conversation, we use place names to say where it happens.

The 4<sup>th</sup> dimension of time has holidays to honor events and persons and we live in a named space-time continuum.

We experience the names of the landscape intensively on a daily basis. Our ability to travel, to read maps, to correspond, to give directions, to learn what happened depends on the names on the landscape.

The buying and selling of pieces of the landscape itself and the built objects on the land such as houses, buildings, facilities, farmland, sports fields, arenas, businesses, and religious buildings involves reading maps with its names, reading names we navigate through the landscapes to see the property which is at an address with names attached to it of a street, a neighborhood, a city, a county, a state, a nation.

Not all texts are written using characters. Statues, murals, adornments, paintings, sculptures, buildings, friezes, and numerous other types of art are both objects and texts. In many ways art can be the most powerfully influencing text by being often immediately understood by many people and being able to tell a story rather than suggest and imply with a single word as a street name might.

Art can encapsulate the deadliest of poisons in a sweet sugar coating by portraying what is vile and disgusting as beautiful. The 1936 Texas Centennial art deco female statue of the Confederacy at Fair Park in Dallas, Texas is such an example. Leni Riefenstahl with her film, "Triumph of the Will," of the 1936 Olympics in Berlin understood this.

Yet, even though we intensively and frequently see names and because we do intensively and frequently see names and texts, they are so ordinary, so every day, they are so familiar that we often don't consciously think about what the names of the landscape are telling us. We see but we don't perceive. Since we usually are not consciously thinking about the meaning of the names of the landscapes their voices communicate their messages to us unimpeded. The messages slip into our assumptions, presumptions, and thoughts unaware.

For most people they read the landscape daily more than they read the Bible, or the Koran, or the Talmud or whatever their religious text might be if they are religious. Whereas there are non-believers and diverse faiths, all, ALL are instructed by the landscape with its names.

The text and names on a landscape can tell some people that they are aliens and they can experience alienation. For others the landscape can tell them that this land is made for you and me, but not for them, who are the others, and they can feel privileged. The landscape has embedded in it power relations and when the landscape texts and names are proposed to be changed the contest can be bitter.

This essay is to examine what the names and texts of the landscape are telling us and to make us conscious what the names and texts of the landscape do.

Some of the essay will discuss more general topics in a general way. Others will be quite specific so that the particular serves as a concrete illustration of more general topics.

Going forward let us start re-imagining the landscape.

**NOTE:** Do not show off how much you know by telling others about the maps. This presentation depends on examining maps that are not comprehensible.

Also, these maps are considered to be viewed by a person not from that place and by a person who would not be able to read the map or recognize anything. Of course for many this won't be true.



Consider this map. (This map is for those illiterate in the language of the map.)



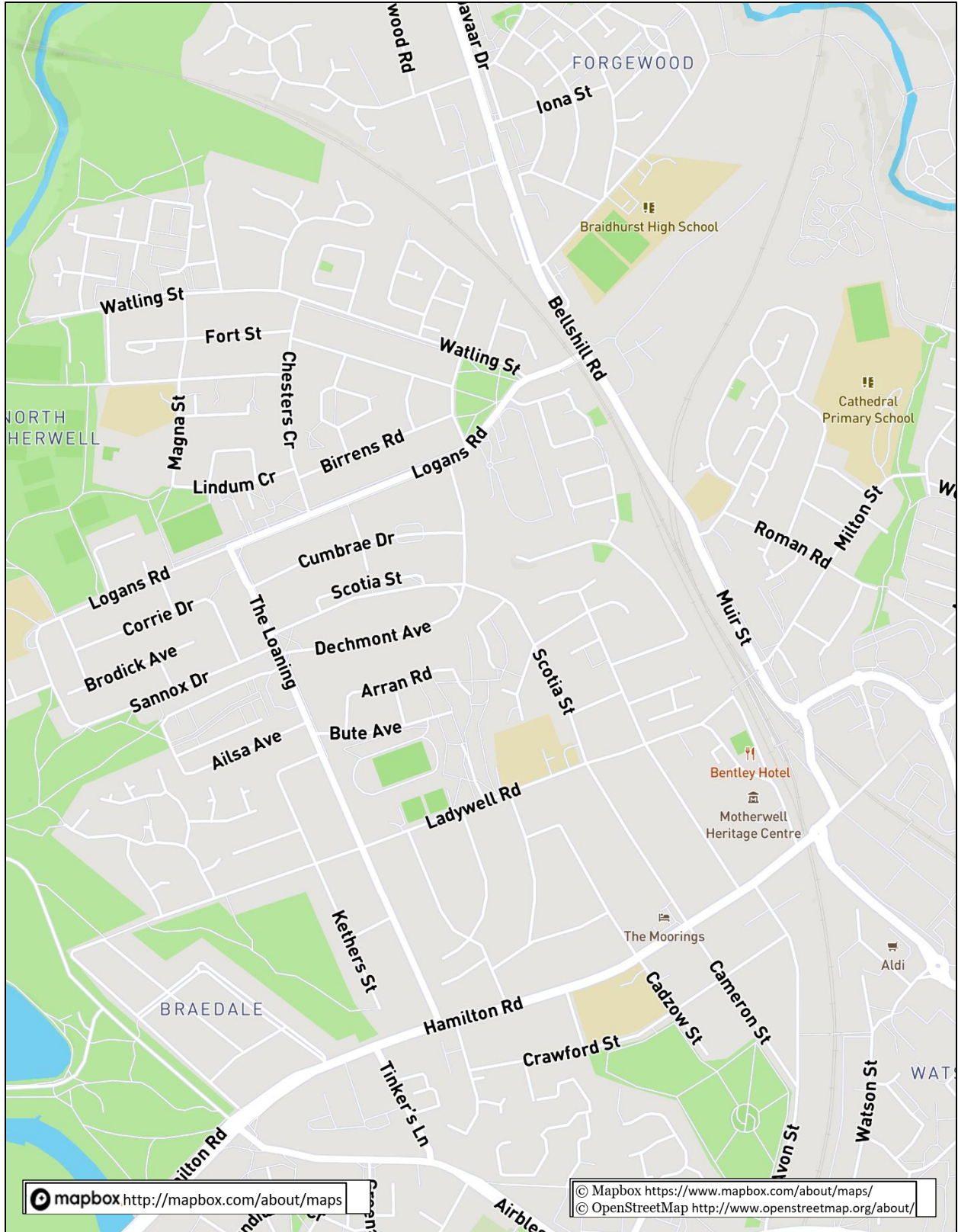
For a person from the United States of America and who is not literate in the language of the map it is not likely that they will be able to recognize from the map where this place is. They are not even likely to know whether the city is Korean, Japanese, Chinese, or Thai unless they are familiar at some level with the writing of those languages. If the map was printed or was an image where a name on the map couldn't be cut and pasted they couldn't even Google it to find out something about the map.

They will know that it is some place where they would be considered foreigners or aliens and where they would not be able to read or speak the language of the place. Though surely there would be a McDonald Hamburger place somewhere, for many Americans they would know that in general the foods would largely be different. They would know this even though they can't read a single word of the map and because they can't read a word of the map. Without saying anything to the person who can't read the map's language the map says a lot. Though to a person who can read the language of the map it will likely tell of a specific place, maybe where they live, or where they are from, or where they have relatives, or many other things. The map could say to the persons that can read the map that they belong there or could belong there. The area in the map isn't inherently alien or non-alien, these are differing perceptions depending on the reader of the map.

This is a section of a city which is very notable for its civility in a country that is considered quite progressive which the author is hoping to visit someday.

Consider this map.





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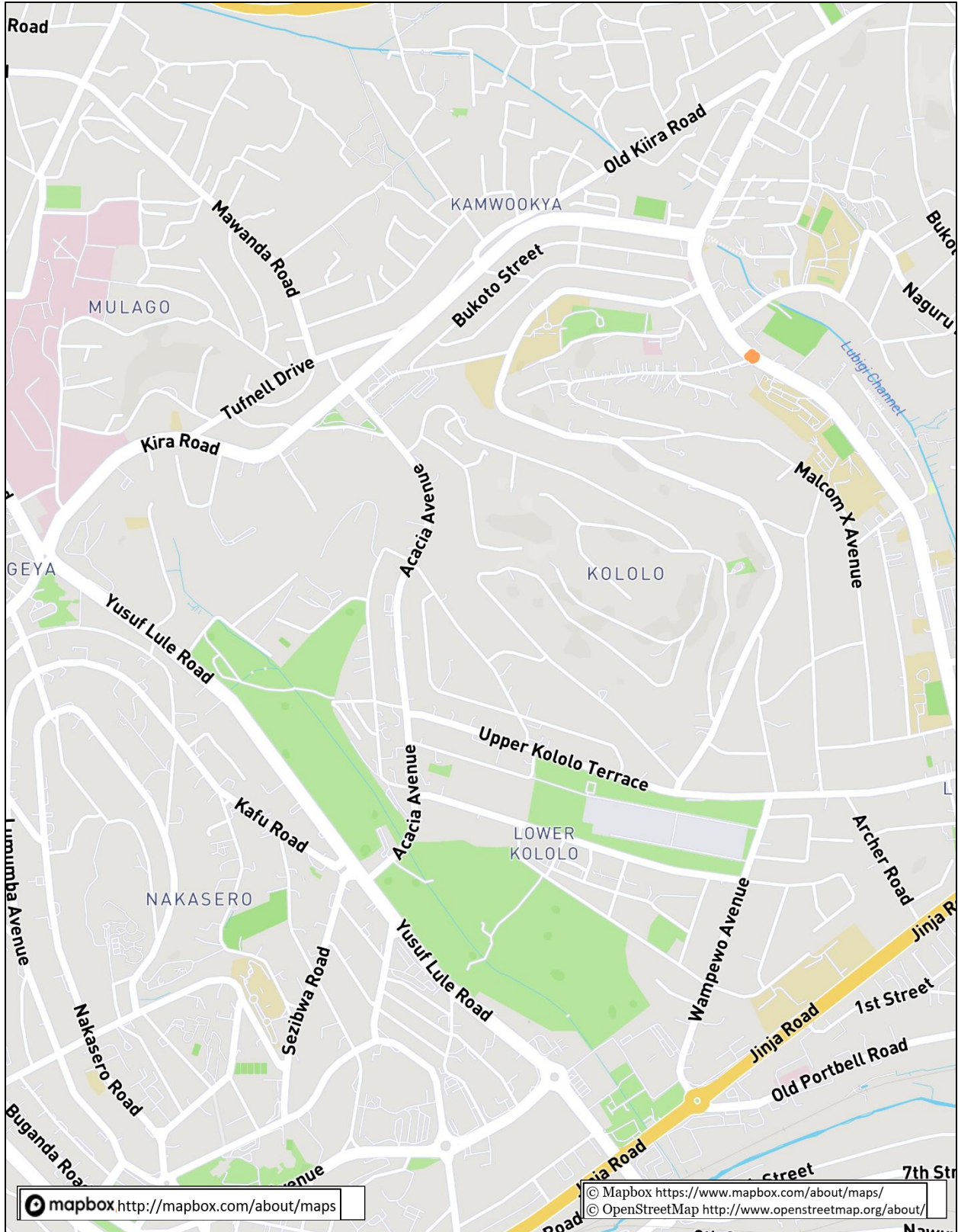
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At first glance it could be some type of suburban development anywhere in the English speaking world. The careful observer however, will note that the words “meadow,” “shady,” “wood,” “brook,” “trail,” are absent and so it is not likely a tract development and the landscape isn’t whispering bucolic fantasies.

The English as a first language white person looking at this map would reasonably expect that they could speak to the inhabitants, and even if it was in another country they would have likely watched the same television shows and depending on age have listened to similar music, and have read a lot of the same literature when they were in school and know some of the history of that nation from either school or through movies. There could be the expectation that there would be similarities with the food and where the food was different they would be already somewhat familiar with this different food. Even if it was another country there wouldn’t be the feeling of being alien, but only the charm of something a little different.

Unless a person was this place or someplace near, they would not have any ideas where this place was. In just viewing the names, without knowing what these names might mean, the white English speaking person still has an impression of what this place might be like. An English speaking person who wasn’t white might have other concerns and have further questions about this space.

Consider this map.





English is used for street names. There are “roads,” “terraces,” “avenues.” Some names are in English such as Summit View and Old Portbell Road. An American, even if having never visited this place or the country it is in, or studied this nation, would know that it isn’t in Australia, New Zealand, Ireland, Britain, Canada, or the United States. An American would think that it was very likely a place in Africa south of the Sahara.

One thing that would be immediately apparent is that where ever this place might be African are in control. You can tell because the naming of the landscape shows that it is under the control of Africans.

However, even though the map uses English, an American wouldn’t be sure if the people of this place watched the same television shows or studied the same literature in school or would be listening to the same popular musicians as in America and not be sure that the foods are similar at all. Though since English is used, names could be typed in and Googled and a person could learn about this place. Though for most Americans they would likely guess that they don’t know much about this place and its history. It is from the street names for which we don’t comprehend the meaning of the names of the streets that we know given the spellings where this place likely is.

For an African American there could be a whole other layer of meaning inferred to this map.

For all the author knows some of these names could translate as “Shadywood Road.,” “Whispering Meadow Lane,” and “Babbling Brook Trail,” but to know the translation would be to lose the exoticism of these names to the English reader. This is another layer of meaning overlaid over another. Names have meanings encrusted upon each other even without them being comprehended.

We can also conclude from seeing a Prince Charles Dr. that it is perhaps a former British Colony. We also note a Malcolm X Avenue and conclude that there is some sentiment of solidarity with the American civil rights movement.

It needs to be understood that even without knowing specifically what most of the names of this particular map are about we draw a lot of meaning.

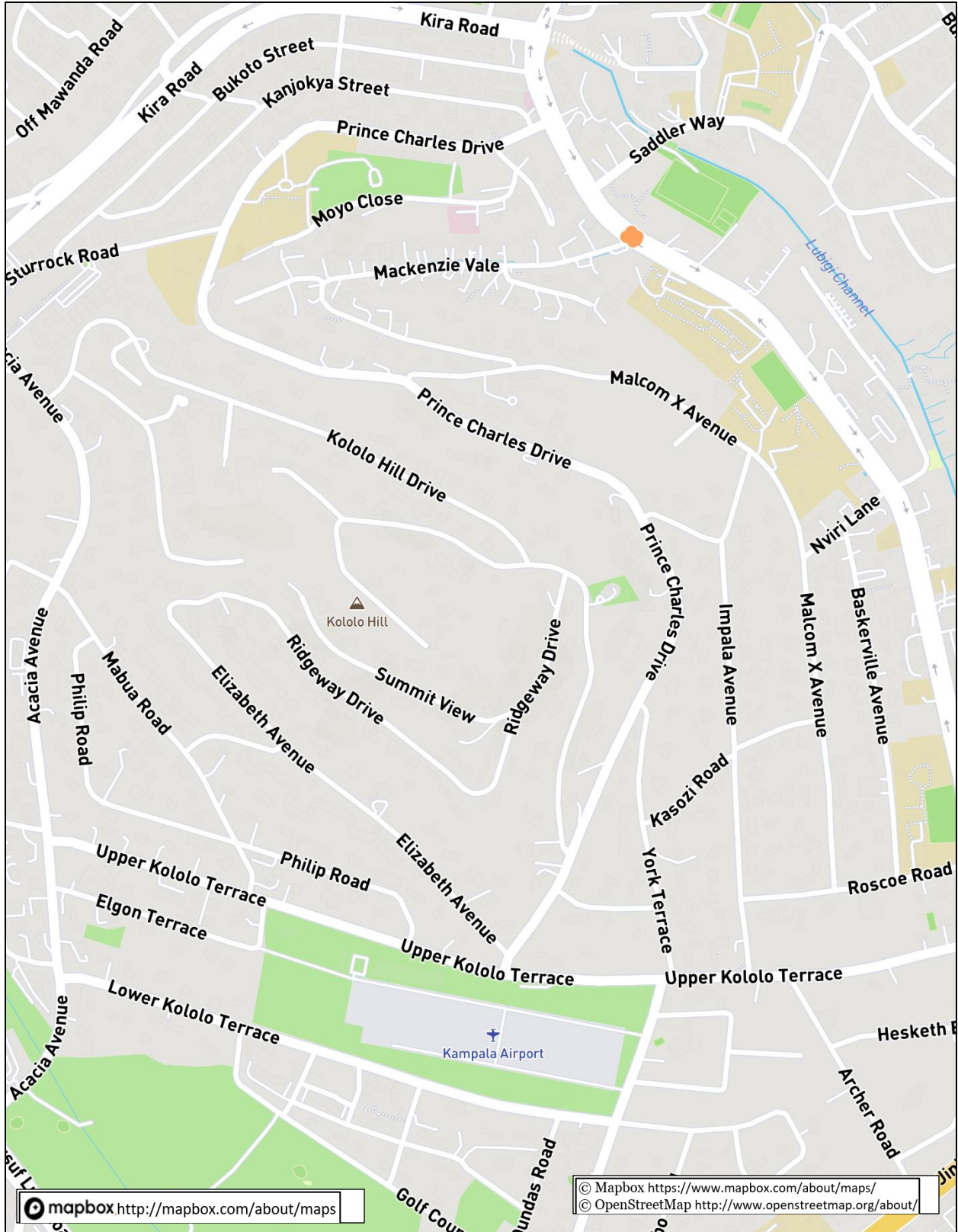
When looking at maps we get impressions about the place even without knowing about the places in the map or where the map’s area is, we get impressions even if we can’t read the map at all. For these maps we form mental images about who lives there and what the place might look like and what they eat and how they speak and how we might fit on that landscape. The last statement needs to be carefully considered. The names on maps communicate to people, depending on who they are, how they might fit into that landscape.

All this is done not through some conscious process or formal process, but through the imagination and mental processes of which we might not be aware.

The examples given here are chosen to make very obvious that maps communicate messages even when the language is incomprehensible, when the place is unknown, and when the names on the maps are just words and the meaning of the name is unknown.

Though we have used these maps here, narrowed in their scope to just focus on these streets, you would begin to know more about where you are, from other sources besides the names, but the names would still be read, and still without knowing them you would still get messages from them.

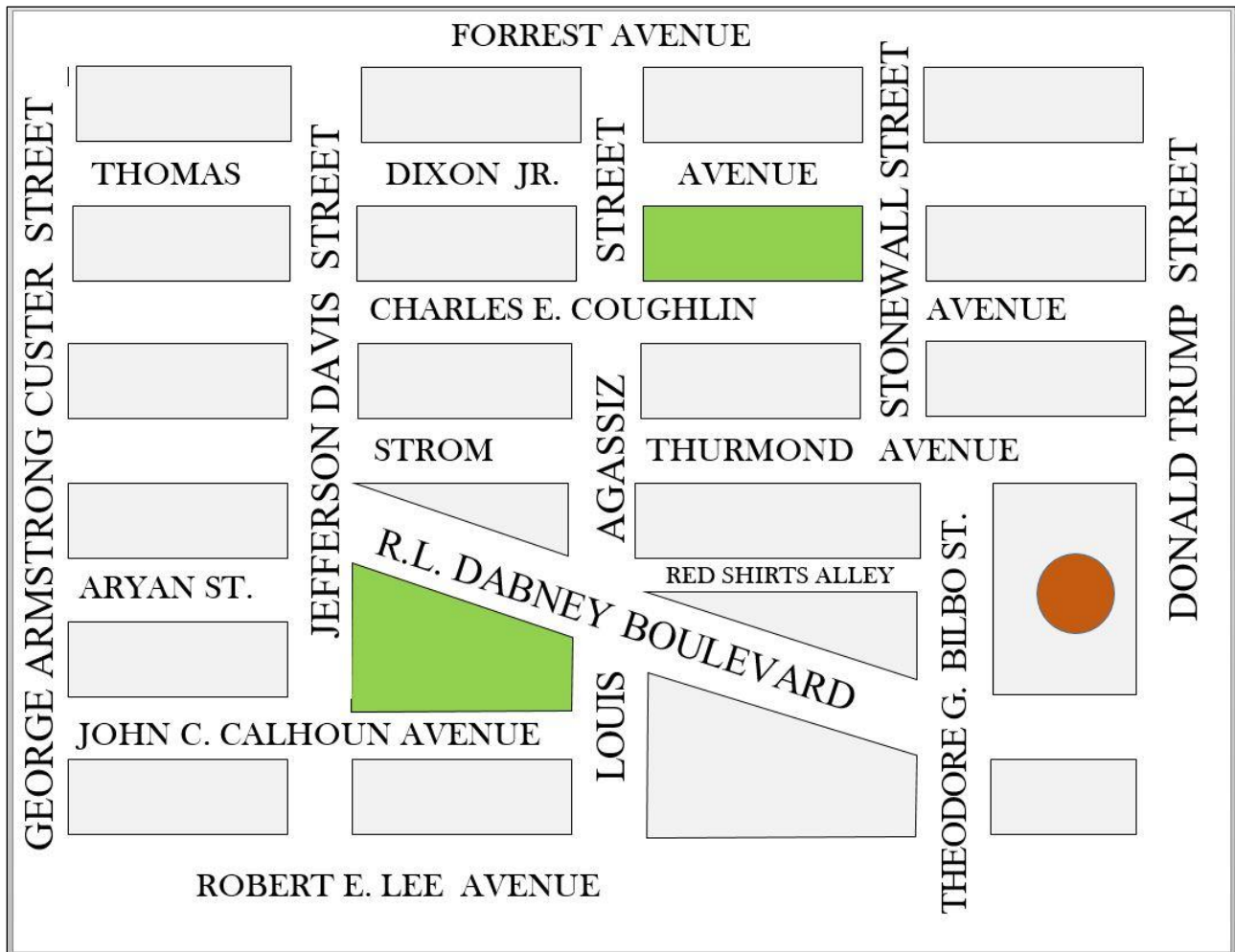
We should understand though that with the everyday landscapes we deal with these same mental processes are at work even though we can read the names and often might know about the names and know where we are. Since the landscape is familiar and often we know the meanings behind the names there are additional messages we receive and process.



Now let's consider a landscape where we comprehend the meanings of the names.

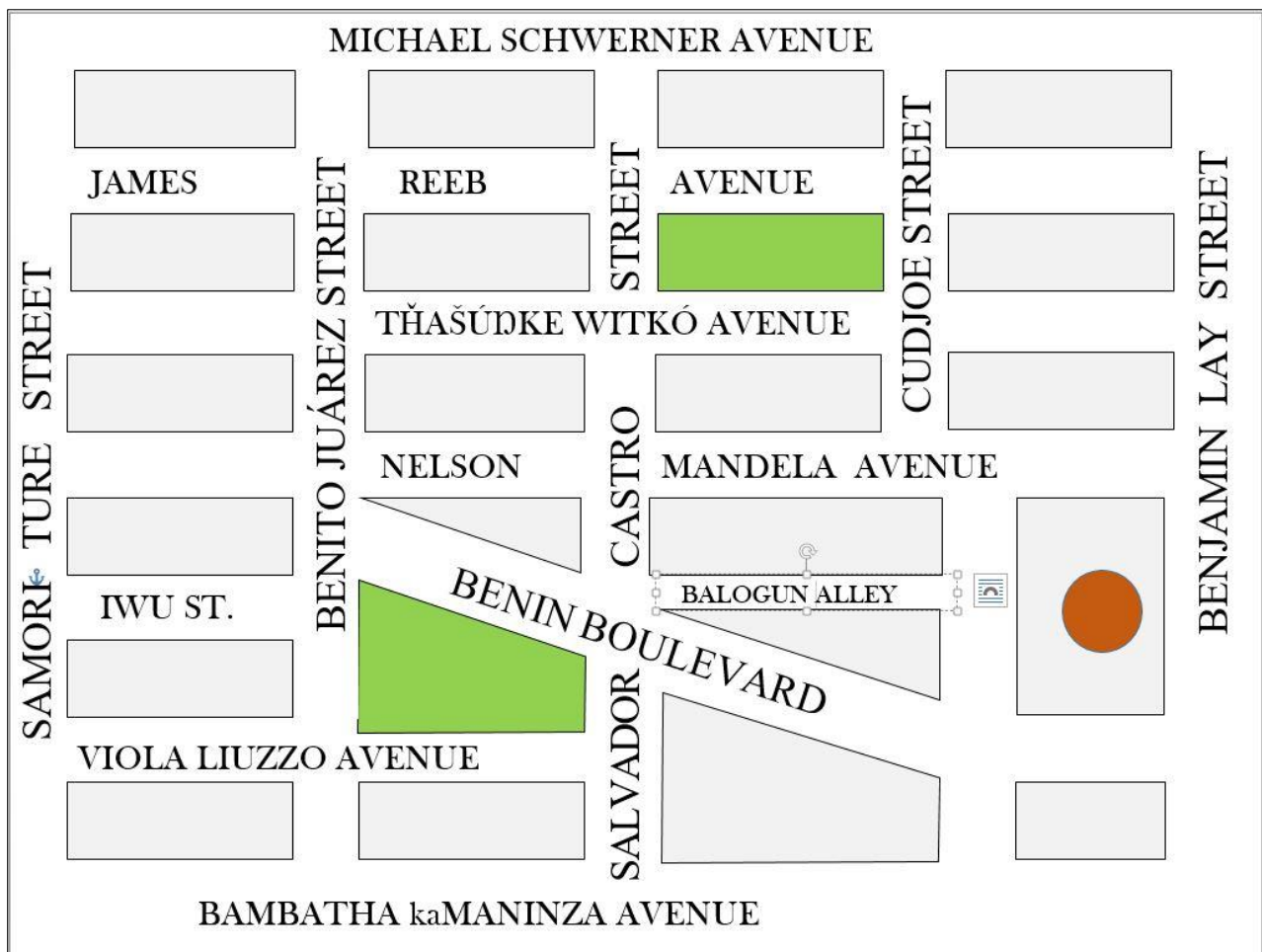
Consider these two maps of a hypothetical central district around city hall indicated with a red circle for its dome. Monuments, park names, and building names aren't added in since these maps are constructed in Microsoft Word. However, how the names of the streets represent the same type of messaging as these other names on the landscape.

If you don't recognize the names look them up. They are all important historical figures. However, even without knowing all the names, even with only knowing some of the names you would likely form a strong opinion, feel strong emotions, and have a mental image about the two different cities. Depending who you are you might fear going to one or the other city. (A short list of who these people are will be provided under the maps.)





1. Nathan Bedford Forrest was a Confederate general and the first leader of the Ku Klux Klan.
2. Thomas Dixon Jr. wrote pro-Klan novels which were made into the movie, "Birth of a Nation."
3. Charles E. Coughlin was an anti-Semitic broadcaster in the 1930s.
4. Strom Thurmond was a segregationist who ran for president in 1948 in opposition to civil rights.
5. The Red Shirts were a violent white supremacist group in South Carolina in 1876.
6. R.L. Dabney was a Confederate, virulent racist, and pro-slavery theologian.
7. Aryan is an identity claimed by some white supremacists.
8. John C. Calhoun was a defender of slavery.
9. Robert E. Lee was a Confederate general.
10. George Armstrong Custer. Fought Native Americans after the Civil War as part of suppressing them.
11. Jefferson Davis was president of the Confederacy.
12. Louis Agassiz promoted white supremacist theories of race at Harvard Univ.
13. Thomas Jonathan "Stonewall" Jackson was a Confederate general.
14. Theodore G. Bilbo was perhaps Mississippi's most notorious segregationist.
15. Donald Trump is the 45<sup>th</sup> president of the United States of America.



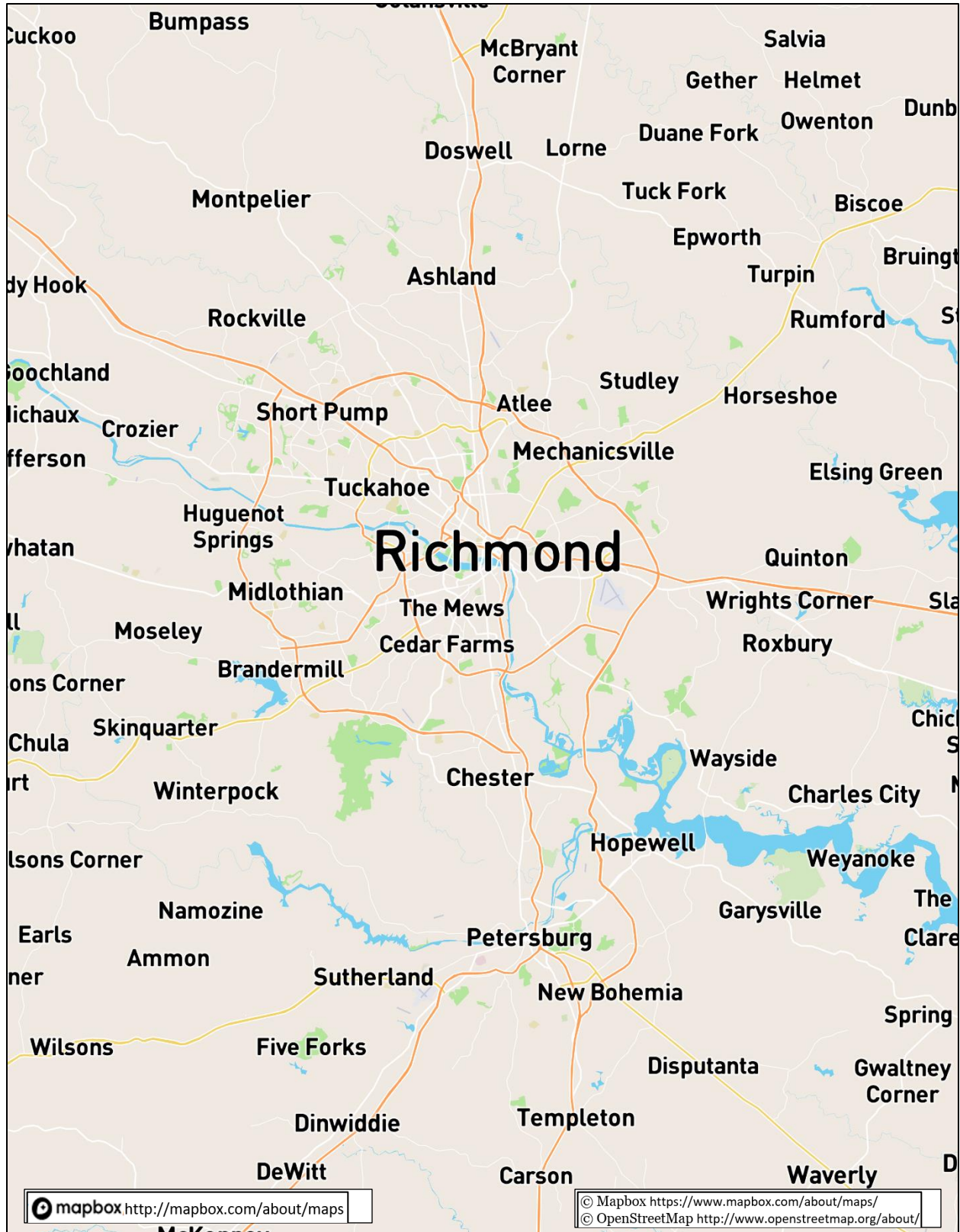
1. Michael Schwerner was one of three civil rights workers killed in Mississippi in 1964 by the KKK.
2. James Reeb was a civil rights worker assassinated in 1965. William Buckley made fun of efforts to raise money for his widow.
3. Tashunka Witko lead the resistance against white invasion of the Black Hills and defeated George A. Custer.
4. Nelson Mandela was a fighter against apartheid in South Africa.
5. Balogun is a local Dallas Civil rights leader.
6. Benin is a country in West Africa on the coast.
7. Iwu is an African name.
8. Viola Liuzzo was a civil rights activist murdered by the KKK in 1965.
9. Bambatha kaMANINZA led an armed rebellion against the British poll tax in Natal, South Africa.
10. Samori Ture led the resistance against the French colonization of West Africa.
11. Benito Juarez lead the war against the French invaders of Mexico and drove them out.
12. Salvador Castro led the East Los Angeles high school walkouts protesting unequal conditions.
13. Cudjoe Maroon leader in Jamaica of runaway slaves who fought the British.
14. Benjamin Lay was born in the 17<sup>th</sup> century in the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century was a ferocious abolitionist.

For the second map consider how often you have seen names like this in the cities you have lived in or visited.

All these maps, real and hypothetical, are discussed to get the reader to start thinking about the landscape and its messages, to break through every day habits of seeing the landscape but not perceiving it.

The following are some maps with observations. In reviewing the maps not every possible observation will be made. Maps and the landscapes messages sometimes reveal themselves to conscious comprehension slowly.

Look at the following maps. They landscape was built largely with African labor. Yet there are no cities with African names. That is because these are cities built with African slave labor, with Africans that were not immigrants, but kidnapped and stripped of their pasts. As slaves they would not be founding a New Benin, a New Timbuktu. Stripped of their pasts, enslaved, and later oppressed there would be no opportunity to found a town and there would be no Mhlongoville, Mbongwetown, and Xhosaburg.



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Likewise there will not be found streets with African names either

Dallas in particular owes its success to the exploitation of slave labor. John Henry Cochran history of Dallas is the author of “Dallas County: A Record of Its Pioneers and Progress,” one of the primary histories of Texas. The white establishment has considered him a great historian.

The key part is in boldface. As slave owners fled to Texas with their slaves Dallas had an abundance of African slaves and flourished with the exploitation of cheap African slave labor. The prosperity of Dallas resulting from this exploitation launched Dallas into prominence. All the flourishing glittering prosperity of Dallas that you see starts with Dallas being flooded with African slave labor, and yet their descendants are left in poverty. From Chapter V, “The Civil War Period,” pages 87 to 89:

WHILE other counties of Texas suffered a decrease in population as well as in improvements during the Civil War from 1861 to April 9th, 1865, Dallas County, alone with one or two exceptions, perhaps, only Bexar and Harris Counties, held its own. All counties were drained of the flower of their population to create the Confederate Army. But Dallas County, from 1859 to 1861, had made such rapid and successful progress in the production of wheat, corn, forage, meat and other necessary supplies of food, she was recognized as the center of the food-producing counties of Texas, so much so that the Confederate Government established and maintained a general quartermasters and commissary headquarters at Dallas for the collection of food and supplies for the army of the Trans-Mississippi Department. Also, established a transportation and recruiting department there and a manufacturing department at Lancaster, where arms were repaired and pistols manufactured. Dallas was general headquarters for all these departments, so the officers and their families and all necessary details made Dallas their temporary home during the war, thus supplying the places of the enlisted soldiers. This was temporary of course, but it served to advertise the county and city, which was a great benefit when the war closed. San Antonio was the center of Commerce with Mexico, and Houston was a military strategic point, similar to that of Shreveport, Louis[i]ana. **Besides, large numbers of negroes were brought into Dallas County for food and for protection during the war, and were gladly hired to the citizens for their food and clothes. Nearly every family, which had no negroes of their own, hired one or more of these negroes and were thus enabled to cultivate all of their land in wheat, corn and oats, so Dallas County continued to be the great food producing center of Texas. Its reputation in this respect became so great that many desirable citizens were attracted by its prosperity and permanently settled in the county and contributed much to its future development.** The decade, ending in 1870, had two of these periods, the one above described, lasting from 1861 to April 9th, 1865 and from that time to the census of 1870, which is heretofore described,



and shows Dallas County increased her population amazingly during that time, notwithstanding the loss by reason of the war. It increased from 8,665 in 1860 to 13,314 in 1870, a gain of 4,649. This increase was practically all made in the last five years of the decade ending with 1870, and was largely made from ex-confederates and ex-confederate soldiers, heretofore mentioned.

Every city, county or country is what its people make it. For this reason, I so shaped and wrote the first part of this, my Supplemental History of the County and City of Dallas, with a view and desire to instill into the hearts and minds of its readers, and especially of the descendants, successors and beneficiaries of the brave, grand and self-sacrificing pioneers of Dallas County, an admiration and love of their noble ancestors and predecessors that would stimulate and infuse into them a desire and determination to emulate their brave deeds, acts and successful accomplishments, not only in rescuing and developing their County and City from a wilderness infested with wild, roving, barbarous and hostile Indians, far removed from any civilized settlements from which they could get necessary supplies, into the most highly developed County, with the largest, richest and most progressive City in the largest and most prosperous State in the United States ... <sup>1</sup>

Dallas is launched into prominence on the backs of African slave labor. Today there is living in Dallas County a large population of African Americans as there has since the Civil War, and there were African slaves in Dallas before the Civil War.

Let's look at some maps of Dallas and the Dallas Fort-Worth Area starting with one on the following page.

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<sup>11</sup> Cochran, John Henry, "Dallas County: A Record of Its Pioneers and Progress." The Aldredge Book Store, reprint, Dallas, 1966. The bound volume is a reprint of two Dallas history books by different authors. The other book reprinted is "History of Dallas County, Texas From 1837 to 1887," by John Henry Brown. The book has a forward by Sam Acheson, a columnist for the *Dallas Morning News*, and a leading member of the Dallas white establishment. The book doesn't include the original publishing information. This interest in Dallas' origins occurs during the middle of the Civil Rights revolution in the United States. NOTE: The spelling of "negroes" without the capitalization is in the original.



There are no towns with names of African origin.

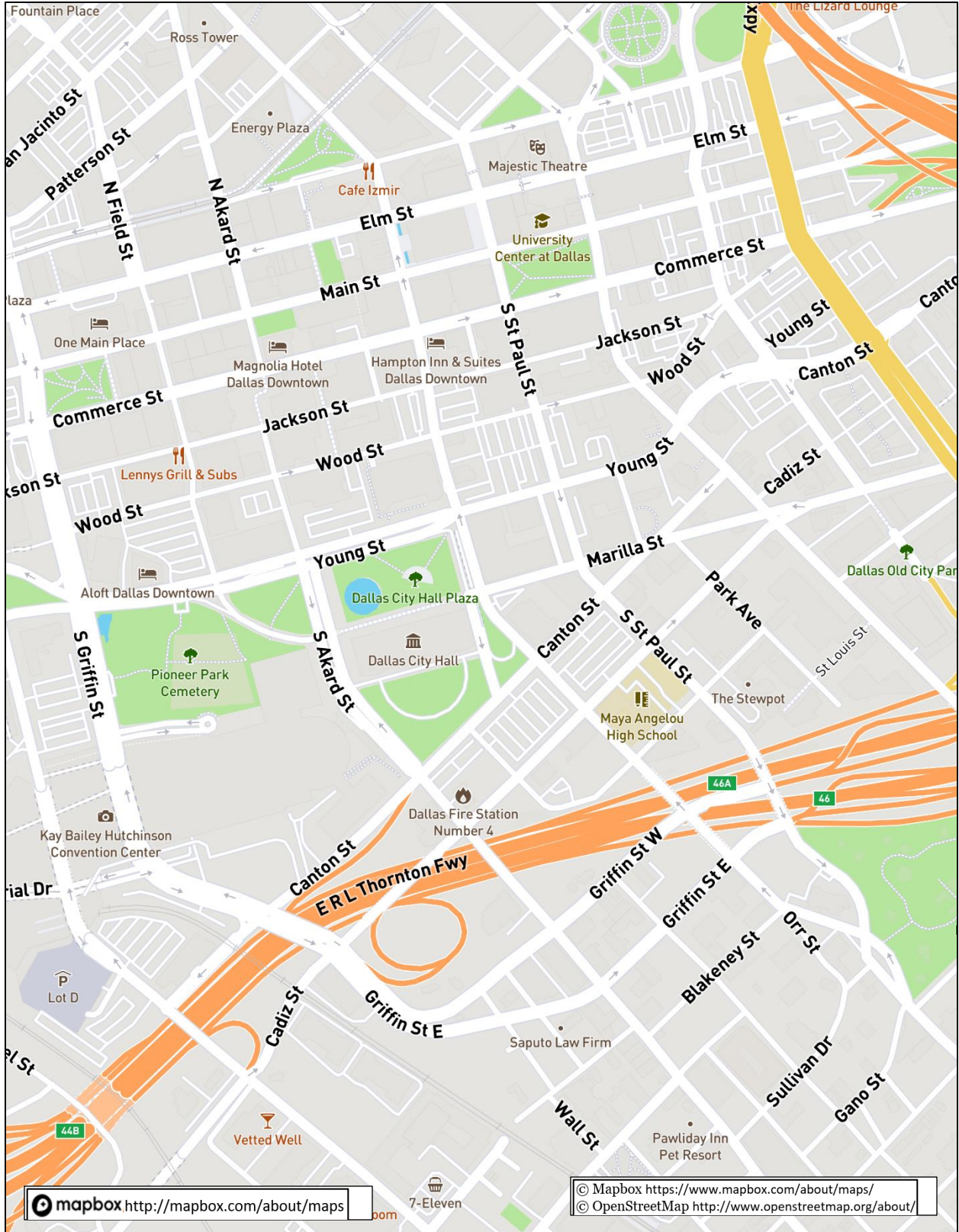
No towns with Indigenous names

A few Spanish language towns.

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In the previous two maps you see that though African slaves got the city of Dallas launched there aren't any African surnames for cities or street names. The history of slavery where Africans were stripped of their names is embedded into the naming of the landscape. Slavery in which Africans were not paid for their labor and not free to pursue their own ends and not having any capital when their freedom arrived and systems of racial oppression meant that Africans would not have the wealth to build subdivisions and name streets or hand land to donate to make parks. The system of racial oppression of African Americans is embedded into the naming of the landscape.

The near absence of Spanish names is due to another system of racial hierarchy. Names like San Jacinto are place names elsewhere where the Texas Republic fought the Mexican army. Defeat of Hispanics is embedded into the landscape. Similar to the fights against renaming streets in Dallas for African American civil rights leaders, César Chávez Blvd was shoved into an unimportant segment though it was not in a Latino neighborhood.



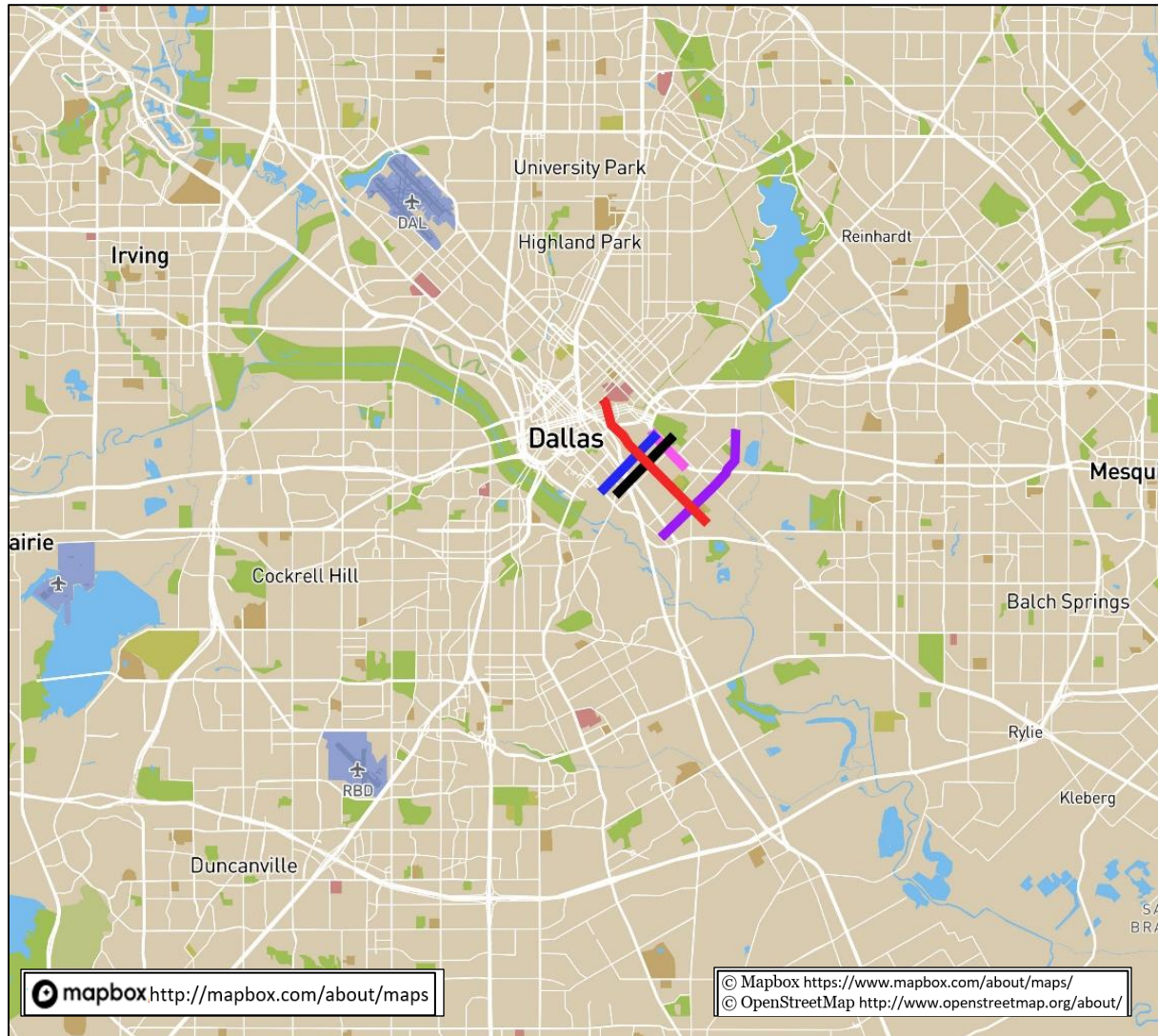
To the left the **Red** is the original proposed renaming of Industrial to César Chávez.

The **Black** is the proposal to rename Ross Ave. to César Chávez.

The **Blue** is the stretch of a highway service road which was renamed César Chávez.



The genocidal campaign against Native Americans is embedded in the landscape by the absence of Native American names. The two streets that did have Native American names were due to a white developer's wife's claim that Pocahontas was an ancestor.



Al Lipscomb is in **Blue**, Elsie Faye Heggins in **Purple**, JB Jackson in **Magenta**, Martin Luther King is in **Black** and though not visible since it is one block long is Maurine Bailey in **Light Blue**.

These are the streets named after Dallas and national African American civil rights leaders. Except for a little of the northern most stretch of Malcolm X Ave. all of these streets are contained in a soon to be former African American neighborhood that was impoverished. None of them are in the more prosperous African American

neighborhoods to the south.<sup>2</sup> There were attempts to have Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Jr. roads extend across Oak Cliff but they were blocked.

A short stretch of the northern most end of Malcolm X Avenue extended out of South Dallas and into a then up and coming arts district called Deep Ellum and it was bitterly resisted by the merchants and real estate developers there.

Other possible roads for renaming that pass through South Dallas, but go further into downtown Dallas like Ervay St. and others are avoided also. Like a biohazard, streets named after African American civil rights leaders are tightly contained.

Martin Luther King Jr. liberated the entire nation from segregation and was a powerful force for the passage of the civil rights legislation of the 1960s changing American society for everyone. Civil Rights legislation protects all races from discrimination. Yet you can see from this map that African American civil rights leaders are contained in an African American neighborhood suggesting that Dallas in general sees Martin Luther King Jr. and others as the heroes of African Americans and not that of Americans in general.

The review of these maps show that they have, without considering the specific origins of the names of these streets, embedded meanings and histories. In this case racial hierarchy, genocidal theft of land, and enrichment from slavery is hidden underneath a named landscape that suggest that modern Dallas has as its origin the accomplishment of white people meritoriously struggling against challenges and adversity with perhaps a pioneer covered wagon involved in which non-white people are of little or no consequence.

### **So this leads to the first major understanding of what maps say.**

What the American landscape with its lack of identifiable African or African American names means that there aren't names for African Americans to identify as belonging to the landscape, or having made the landscape, and leaves African Americans as aliens in a land identified with others and as being made by others. .

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<sup>2</sup> Oak Cliff was annexed to Dallas and is south of what is called South Dallas which is the area north of the Trinity River where the streets named after civil rights heroes are indicated. Prior to the annexation of Oak Cliff, South Dallas was the most southern portion of Dallas and the name has been retained.