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RACE AND AFFLUENCE: AN ARCHAEOLOGY OF AFRICAN AMERICA AND CONSUMER CULTURE (CONTRIBUTIONS TO GLOBAL HISTORICAL ARCHAEOLOGY), by Paul R. Mullins 1999, Kluwer/Plenum Academic Publishers, New York. 217 pages, \$59.95 (cloth).

Reviewed by Maria Franklin

Paul Mullins is the leading scholar on African-American consumerism and the material symbolism of bric-a-brac amongst historical archaeologists. He is also one of a small number of historical archaeologists who grounds their research explicitly in the analysis of race and racism. It should therefore come as no surprise that his first book provides a definitive statement on the relation between race and materialism, and the significant role that consumer culture played within black Annapolitan society from 1850 to 1930. One of Mullins's main theses is that through consumerism, blacks were variously able to contest imposed racial subjectivities. Moreover, despite white racism, blacks viewed consumer culture as a strategic means to potentially stake a claim on American citizenship, with all the rights and privileges that came with such a status. Throughout the book, Mullins effectively demonstrates how black Annapolitans, as a group and as individuals, both negotiated their identities and social positions through material symbolism and challenged societal inequalities through their consumption practices.

In *Race and Affluence: An Archaeology of African America and Consumer Culture*, Mullins presents complex questions and arguments framed within a clearly articulated theoretical position that reaches beyond the simplistic consumer studies that view material culture as a reflection of identity, or which focus on function or price (as an indicator of status) in the analysis. He also refrains from homogenizing African Americans, indicating that people enacted diverse political strategies and cultural and consumer practices for different reasons and to achieve varying ends. While arguing persuasively that material consumption could and often did enable blacks to oppose white racism and redefine themselves

according to their own dictates, Mullins cautions that consumerism did not translate to all-out resistance. After all, through purchasing commodities African Americans were essentially supporting and working within the system, not destroying it from the outside. In eight concisely-written chapters, Mullins carefully constructs a narrative of black life in Annapolis, revealing the desires, actions, and experiences culled from archaeological and historical sources which spoke to their resolve and resiliency in attempting to claim better and more meaningful lives for themselves.

From the start, the reader becomes aware that he or she is about to embark on a thought-provoking read. In Chapter 2 Mullins goes to great lengths to define his use of the concepts of consumption and material symbolism. He states that "consumption should be viewed as a process that attempts to mediate social contradictions and express social and personal desires" (p. 21). Thus, consumption is a "social negotiation focused on desire" (*ibid.*). As an example, Mullins considers campaign-related objects excavated from the Maynard-Burgess house yard. The possession of these artifacts by a black family did not necessarily reflect their support of partisan politics, but a central desire amongst black Annapolitans to attain citizenship. Their consumption of campaign paraphernalia spoke to these aspirations, and allowed them to negotiate the social contradiction of being free from bondage, but still unable to vote because of their race (p. 24). As Mullins puts it: "This politicization of consumption places desire and the negotiation of social contradiction at the heart of consumption, rather than the satisfaction of material need" (p. 24). It is through material symbolism that these desires and negotiations are realized. Mullins further explores black material symbolism in the next chapter.

In Chapter 3, Mullins discusses white consumer space and how it was structured to negate blacks' symbolic and physical access to consumer goods through racist advertisements, arrests of black window shoppers, and other means. He also addresses how blacks responded to white symbolism through consumerism by transforming the meaning and use of consumer goods intended for exclu-

sively white racial cultural practices. Mullins turns to African-American medicinal practices as an example, using mass-produced patent medicine bottles discovered at the Maynard-Burgess house as evidence. Mullins argues that although black Annapolitans clearly relied on mass-produced antidotes, it did not necessarily follow that they fully participated in white healthcare practices. Nor did this mean that blacks only used patent medicines in African-influenced healing traditions passed down through generations. Mullins states, "African American material symbolism constantly mediates the contradictions between cultural traditions, structural relations, and innovation" (p. 51). Embedding his interpretation of the use of patent medicines within racialized power relations, Mullins reasons that African Americans reconfigured their use within the context of alternative, African-American beliefs regarding wellness and the relationship between body and spirit, and the black medicinal practices sustained by these beliefs. In doing so, they demonstrated self-determination in participating in and transforming black healthcare despite the denigration of black healing practices common amongst whites at that time. Mullins is quick to point out, however, that the use of patent medicines suggests that the white medical system still had a definite impact on black medicinal practices.

With Chapter 5, Mullins tackles the issue of moralizing labor and consumption practices, a process driven by the perceptions of racial difference. In the section that deals specifically with archaeological evidence, Mullins explores how "the racialized moral critique of consumption patterns" by whites critically impacted those patterns amongst black Annapolitans as they sought to establish themselves as "genteel consumers" (p. 118). Historical sources indicate that fishing and fish consumption became stigmatized as whites criticized this largely African-American subsistence and marketing strategy as "the archetypal diversion of lazy and content Black people" (p. 118). By studying the fish remains from the Maynard-Burgess house and comparing these with other Annapolis fish assemblages, he found that fish, once a significant

portion of household diet, declined in consumption amongst black Annapolitans after 1870. Mullins argues that this dietary shift was one way in which African Americans who aspired to gentility struggled to attain the status and privileges of whites presumed to be exclusive to them.

In the end, Mullins argues that by participating in consumer culture blacks weren't attempting to emulate whites, but were instead seeking self-determination and the subjugation of racism. As the tactics to do so varied, so too did the potential to dismantle structural inequalities. Mullins makes it clear that it was never simply a matter of black "resistance" to white dominance. In fact, a number of consumption practices empowered black Annapolitans, while at the same time served to undermine their efforts to combat imposed racial subjectivities and racial oppression. He succeeds in presenting the complexities of lived experiences, underscoring the need for more archaeological scholarship to consider how individuals were able to influence larger societal change through localized political action.

Mullins's book is richly historical, and diligently researched. Some readers may bemoan the fact that the archaeological evidence does not play as central a role as the historical record here. This reader did not, for this book delivers on a number of important points. One is that Mullins successfully manages to soundly critique some of historical archaeology's most flawed theoretical baggage by showing us a far more productive and meaningful way to approach consumerism and material culture. More importantly, Mullins has demonstrated how archaeological and ethnohistorical scholarship can help to demystify the social construction of race and the role of racial ideology in American society.

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HIDDEN LIVES: THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF SLAVE LIFE AT THOMAS JEFFERSON'S POPLAR FOREST, by Barbara J. Heath 1999, University Press of Virginia, Charlottesville. 81 pages, illus., \$12.50 (paper).

Poplar Forest was one of Thomas Jefferson's secondary holdings in central Virginia, located in Bedford County approximately 90 miles southwest of his main seat at Monticello, near Charlottesville. Throughout the heart of his active public life he grew tobacco and, later, corn on the property, making use of the labor of 50 or so African-Americans enslaved by him at the site. In 1806, looking toward his retirement years, he designed and began construction of a fine brick mansion on the property. The house was intended for use as a country retreat or vacation home for himself when, for whatever reason, he needed a respite from Monticello. The property is now a private museum dedicated to presenting Jefferson's years of ownership and occasional residence. The museum's administration has made use of archaeology as a tool of research, preservation, and interpretation since 1989.

The author of *Hidden Lives*, Barbara Heath, has had a long commitment to the archaeology of slave life in Virginia. In her decade or so of service as the Director of Archaeology at Poplar Forest, she has developed a strong program of research and public presentation of her results. Her success is especially admirable given that this is a fairly small and certainly out-of-the-way site, where funding concerns have no doubt always been a large part of the struggle. Heath and other members of her