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Book Review of "The Archaeology of Institutional Confinement" by Eleanor Conlin Casella

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THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF INSTITUTIONAL CONFINEMENT, by Eleanor Conlin Casella, 2007, *The American Experience in Archaeological Perspective Series*, University Press of Florida, Gainesville, 174 pages, 32 figures, 3 tables, \$24.95 (paper).

Reviewed by Sherene Baugher

Eleanor Conlin Casella provides an excellent archaeological perspective on institutional confinement in one of the first three books released in the new series, *The American Experience in Archaeological Perspective*, from the University of Florida Press. Michael Nassaney, the editor of the series, notes in the foreword “archaeologies of the recent past have a contribution to make to an anthropological understanding of the American experience” (p. xvi). The goal of the series is to highlight research on a particular topic and to “make it available to a wider audience” (p. xvi). Casella masterfully achieves that goal by providing the reader with ample theoretical, historical, and archaeological perspectives on incarceration including numerous case studies on almshouses, workhouses, jails, prisons, internment camps, and Indian boarding schools within the United States. She addresses the question, “why incarcerate?” and she demonstrates how that answer has changed over time. This is a must-read book for anyone considering excavating an institutional site. It is also a timely book for Americans to read as we address the issues of institutional confinement in state and federal prisons and in military prisons such as Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo Bay.

Casella has done extensive fieldwork on prison sites in both Australia and the United Kingdom and she brings her global perspectives to this book, which is focused on case studies from United States. Because of her own research on prisons, her book puts more weight on institutional confinement in prisons, including colonial jails and debtors prisons, Civil War prisoner of war camps, World War II Japanese relocation centers, and federal and state prisons. Her book is divided into five chapters:

- 1) An introduction;
- 2) A chapter on the historical evolution of American institutions of confinement;
- 3) A chapter on interdisciplinary theories on institutional confinement including recent feminist and poststructuralist critiques;
- 4) A lengthy chapter of diverse case studies of institutional sites;
- 5) A brief conclusion on the materiality of institutional confinement.

Her bibliography provides a very useful reference list of key articles and books on the history, theory, and archaeology of institutional confinement.

The first chapter, “The Carceral Society,” provides a brief introduction to the book and clarifies the goals of the chapters. Chapter Two, “The Gentle Apparatus: A Historical Overview of Institutional Confinement,” begins with the roots of these American institutions in late 16th century Europe. Casella discusses early English, Dutch, and French pre-industrial almshouses, prisons, workhouses, and hospitals as models for colonial institutions. Because of ethnic diversity in the American colonies, there were diverse approaches to the care of the poor and the homeless from government-sponsored support to private philanthropy. Casella notes how the archaeological evidence reflects the differences in American and European approaches to institutional confinement.

In the early decades of the new Republic, the building of prisons and jails increased. However, Casella notes, “unlike penitentiaries of the 19th century, these early American institutions utilized confinement itself as a compassionate form of punishment – as a humane and rational alternative to the gallows” (p.22). But ideological changes regarding institutional confinement were taking place in Europe and these changes had a profound impact on American practices (Spencer-Wood and Baugher 2001). There was a movement to reform deviants by removing them from society and controlling their daily lives within institutions thereby providing the inmates with an opportunity for social and personal transformation – Erving Goffman calls this the “total institution” (Goffman 1970). American civic leaders and welfare activists embraced these new theories. Casella calls this period from 1830-1860 the “golden age of the

American institution" (p.24) when there was a rapid proliferation of asylums, reformatories, and prisons.

The Civil War ushered in a new approach to institutional confinement – that of warehousing "ambiguously defined non-citizens" in the Prisoner of War camps (p.33). After the Civil War, the "warehousing" of people continued with the institutional confinement of Native American children in the forced assimilation of Indian boarding schools and Casella adds that a disproportionately high number of African Americans were "warehoused" in southern prisons (p. 35). This "warehousing" continued with the removal of Japanese Americans to relocation centers and internment camps during World War II. The chapter ends with a discussion of contemporary issues regarding the indefinite detention of American citizens at Guantanamo Bay without any formal charges, rights to a trial, or due legal process. Casella writes, "profound debates over citizenship and human rights continue to haunt the American experience of institutional confinement" (p.54).

In chapter three, "Why Incarcerate?" Casella provides interdisciplinary perspectives from criminology, sociology, psychology, anthropology, and archaeology to answer that question. She discusses power and the relationship between dominance and resistance and then turns to feminist and poststructuralist critiques of the binary dualism of the dominance-resistance framework. Scholars have analyzed the strategies by which inmates coped within a repressive institutional environment. Casella notes that by analyzing the ritualistic, transformational, and experiential aspects of institutional life, archaeologists have examined the wider dynamics of race, ethnicity, class, age, and gender within institutions.

In chapter four, "An Archaeology of Institutional Confinement" she builds on the information presented in her historical and theoretical chapters (chapters two and three) by providing case studies that demonstrate "how social power tangibly operates in the modern institution and how such material experiences themselves generate a distinctive worldview for those who inhabit places of confinement" (p. 84). Casella divides her case studies into three categories: punishment,

asylum, and exile. These categories reflect three distinct populations: "those who are criminal, those who are dependent, and those who are politically and/or racially disenfranchised" (p.84). In her category "confinement as punishment," Casella discusses the Walnut Street Prison in Philadelphia; the Old Rhode Island Penitentiary; the Old Baton Rouge Penitentiary in Louisiana; and Alcatraz in San Francisco Bay. In the category "Confinement as Asylum" there are case studies of the Albany Almshouse in New York State; the Uxbridge Almshouse in Worcester County, Massachusetts; the New York City Almshouse; the Old Poor House in Falmouth, Massachusetts; the Smithfield Town Farm and Asylum in Massachusetts; the Cook County Poor Farm in Illinois; and the Magdalen Asylum in Philadelphia. In her final category, "Confinement as Exile," the case studies include: the Civil War Prisoner of War Camps at Andersonville in west central Georgia, Camp Ford in eastern Texas, and Johnson's Island Military Prison in northern Ohio; the Japanese American Relocation Centers at Manzanar in California, Minidoka in Idaho, Heart Mountain in Wyoming, Topaz in Utah, and Tule Lake in California; and an American Indian boarding school, the Phoenix Indian School, in Arizona. These case studies provide a range of material culture analyses including architecture, ceramics, glass, faunal, clothing, personal items, gravestones, gardens, and landscape design. The archaeological evidence demonstrates how inmates survived within the institution, expressed their social identities, and forged links with the outside world.

Casella's final chapter, "Privations: The Materiality of Institutional Confinement," is a brief summary of her book. She demonstrates that through the study of material culture, archaeology has provided insights into our understanding of institutional life. The diverse range of her case studies provides numerous stories of conflict, struggle, cooperation, accommodation, dominance, and resistance. Casella notes that archaeological evidence offers "a testimony to their [the inmates] enduring spirit of survival" (p. 143). She asks the reader to think about the question, "what have we learned from diverse experiments in institutional confinement?" (p. x) In summary, this book should appeal to archaeologists,

historians, psychologists, and criminologists and it should be used as a primer for any archaeologist interested in the archaeology of institutions.

References

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Sherene Baugher's research on class, inequality, ethnicity, and landscape archaeology often has focused on the archaeology of institutions.

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