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John P. McCarthy

Greenhorne and O'Mara, Inc.

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Foodways: The African-American Archaeology Workshop at the 1998 Society for Historical Archaeology Meeting, Atlanta

John P. McCarthy, Greenhorne and O'Mara, Inc., Greenbelt, MD

Organized and chaired by Ywone Edwards-Ingram of Colonial Williamsburg, this workshop featured summaries of current research by several speakers followed by a lively and stimulating discussion.

Jo Anne Bowen noted the persistent and conservative nature of foodways. As much as 40 percent of African-American assemblages are wild, with lots of fish represented. Yet variability can be seen reflecting specific choices such as small fish over large fish.

Elizabeth Reitz discussed evidence for a "cultural filter" on the natural environment. Humans are not random scavengers even though we are omnivores. Many ethnic/cultural differences are manifest in the context of food consumption/preparation behavior.

Michael Blakey discussed aspects of physical anthropology that can reflect nutritional stress. Diet can also effect bone and dental chemistry.

Steve Morozowski pled for more emphasis on environmental reconstruction, including pollen and floral studies. Small differences in these indicators can reflect major variability in the nature and quality of past environments.

Barbara Heath also mentioned the importance of the local environment, but she focussed more on the consumer aspects of foodways: slaves made use of many wild and grown foodstuffs as a source of cash for use in the market economy. This money was only rarely used for meat; it was more often used for whiskey, sugar, spices, and coffee.

Amy Young briefly summarized ongoing research at Saragossa Plantation. One of her students, Michael Tuma, has been involved in a study of cooperative hunting in a contemporary community at the site. This male activity was contrasted to female gardens.

The discussion made clear that foodways are an important area of research about which much remains to be learned.