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Historic Black Lives Matter: Archaeology as Activism in the 21st Century

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**Historic Black Lives Matter:
Archaeology as Activism in the 21st Century**
A Four-Part Series

**Issue 1
Spring 2015**

Location: Richmond, Virginia

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**Don't Call it a Comeback, We've Been Here for Years:
Reintroducing the African Diaspora Archaeology Newsletter**

Kelley Deetz

"Stumbling is not falling." — Malcolm X

The African Diaspora Archaeology Newsletter is celebrating twenty-one years of scholarly activity. What began as a list-serve in 1994 has since hosted multiple formats and led the field in discourse on African Diaspora archaeology. In 2012 the then ADAN editor Christopher Fennell established the *Journal for African Diaspora Archaeology and Heritage* and handed the ADAN to the current co-editors: Whitney Battle-Baptiste, Christopher Barton, and myself (Kelley Deetz). We successfully published a couple of issues, however, we grappled with two significant issues that hindered our momentum.

First, the transferring of the ADAN from the *University of Illinois* to the *University of Massachusetts, Amherst* took longer than we expected. The staff at UMASS worked tirelessly

for over 300 hours making sure the transition was seamless. Their labor and skills are greatly appreciated by the ADAN editorial team and we are grateful for their help. The second, more challenging issue is related to a larger and more complicated problem. The academic job market is increasingly competitive and scholars *need* peer-reviewed articles. The ADAN has always been somewhat liminal in that sense. The editors provided feedback and occasionally rejected submissions. Nevertheless, ADAN has never been a traditional journal. When we took over the newsletter in early 2012 it was self-sufficient and we solicited and received enough submissions to publish regularly. It was almost effortless.

By late 2012 the vast majority of our solicitations were kindly turned down for a better option. Fennell's peer-reviewed journal essentially replaced ADAN and became an instant success by providing a peer-reviewed option for the same scholars we relied on for almost two decades. Our continuous base was gone. We struggled to remain active, rethought the purpose of the newsletter, and even decided to have a rolling submission deadline with the hopes of receiving more articles. The problem became brutally clear; our base was gone and no matter how we framed the ADAN it wasn't enough for someone's c.v.

New Directions

After much thought and dialog among the editors, I suggested something that my co-editors enthusiastically supported. **We are returning to our roots.** The African Diaspora Archaeology Newsletter will be an active *newsletter*. We will begin publishing quarterly again, highlighting themes of our choosing. Each editor will publish an issue with appointed guest co-editors. The thrust of the ADAN will focus on specific topics related to "Archaeology, Politics, and Race" and will feature sites and/or topics that have brought or *need* significant attention. Each newsletter will have an introduction written by an ADAN editor, who will contextualize the topic, and guest co-editors, who will discuss their particular roles in the theme, and help provide links to reports, media coverage, and historical resources dealing with the given subject. This will be an active newsletter in a formal sense, where we will vet arranged thematic news coupled with archaeology reports and academic insight. The ADAN will weave together grey literature, social media links, theses, conference papers, and other work not typically published in traditional formats. We want to bring attention to areas of

research and activism that may go unseen outside of the local sphere or missed by those unable to attend conferences. Lastly, there will also be a section called The Thread, which will help connect each issue to the next by providing a platform to analyze some of the more contemporary issues that are related to ADAN but not specifically archaeology.

Issue One

With our new charge in place I couldn't think of a better opening theme than the recent uproar in Richmond, Virginia. The former capital of the Confederacy remains a hotbed for mythical histories, community activism, endangered sites, and archaeological importance. This city is home to museums dedicated to both sides of the Civil War and to the descendants of both free and enslaved. Richmond has a spirit steeped in history, and one that represents every imaginable perspective on past and present race relations. The establishment of the *Richmond Slave Trail* helped render the historical significance of the city, while development continues to push against the sites related to what was one of the largest slave auctioning districts in the United States.

Between April 12, 2011 and April 9, 2015 our nation celebrated the countless anniversaries related to the Civil War. This sesquicentennial brought the topic of slavery back into the mainstream with films like *Django Unchained* and the Oscar Award winning *Twelve Years a Slave*. These movies came at a ripe moment for racial discourse. The election of President Obama in 2008 started a chapter in our nation's history that brought the topic of race and the myth of "post-racial America" to the front stage. The "New Civil Rights Movement" launched with #Blacklivesmatter campaigns and has drawn international attention to our long and shameful history of racism and violence in the United States. This sesquicentennial provided a revived platform for the "perfect storm" to discuss issues of race and repair.

The charge of the New Civil Rights Movement addresses a long history of institutionalized abuse towards Black folks. Black bodies have been owned and abused by the right of law since the first slave codes were put into place. In 1705 the Virginia Assembly confirmed a slave code stating:

And if any slave resist his master, or owner, or other person, by his or her order, correcting such slave, and shall happen to be killed in such correction, it shall not be accounted felony; but the master, owner, and every such other person so giving correction, shall be free and acquit of all punishment and accusation for the same, as if such incident had never happened.¹

These codes legalized and normalized brutality, and the ghosts of these slave codes are built into the fabric of this nation. Archaeologists and historians have a responsibility to remind the public that these narratives are not new. Mr. Eric Garner was not the first Black man to be murdered in public and have his killer “free and acquit of all punishment and accusation for the same, as if such incident had never happened.” How do we as scholars join this conversation? What role do archaeologists have in these discussions based mostly in social science and history? How can our work inform, provoke, and inspire change?

Institutionalized white supremacy and power are clearly seen throughout history and in our current society. It is our job to make these connections and educate the public through multiple forms of intellectually engaged activism. The ADAN is our stage. This newsletter is a platform for those of us who dedicated our lives and/or careers to addressing historical and contemporary racisms through academic interrogation. The African Diaspora is broad and rich with history, and many of us are *making* such histories now.

This issue is dedicated to the estimated 300,000 enslaved folks who were sold, bought, and tortured in the Richmond Market, to their families who lost them to the Deep South, and to their descendants and advocates who choose to both *remember and remind* us of this history. The following pieces are assembled to bring light to the ongoing efforts of memorialization and preservation in Richmond, Virginia.

"I for one believe that if you give people a thorough understanding of what confronts them and the basic causes that produce it, they'll create their own program, and when the people create a program, you get action." –

Malcolm X

¹ William Waller Hening, ed., *The Statutes at Large; Being a Collection of All the Laws of Virginia from the First Session of the Legislature, in the Year 1619*, (Philadelphia: R. & W. & G. Bartow, 1823), 3:459.

The Significance of Richmond's Shockoe Bottom: Why it's the wrong place for a baseball stadium

Ana Edwards & Phil Wilayto



Image 1. Lumpkin's Jail" Archaeology Site, Shockoe Bottom: Protest and interpretive signage mark the site known by 19th century Blacks as the "devil's half-acre", April 8, 2014. Photo courtesy of Ana Edwards, Defenders' Sacred Ground Project, April 8, 2014

Most people in Richmond know that Virginia was long associated with slavery. Few, however, are aware of the central role the capital city played in that “peculiar institution.”

In the early days of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade, African men, women and children who survived the horrors of the Middle Passage were brought by ship up the James River, unloaded at Manchester Docks and forced to walk to the slave jails of Shockoe Bottom. This is the origin of the Richmond Slave Trail, also referred to as the Trail of Enslaved Africans. Richmond's role in this trade actually was relatively minor compared to other areas, particularly the port city of Charleston, South Carolina. Other cities had their periods as leading entry ports, including Boston and New York.

But Shockoe Bottom later took on a much larger role: instead of receiving human cargo from overseas, it instead functioned increasingly as the place of departure for enslaved Africans being sold from Virginia to plantations in the Deep South.

One big reason for the change was the Haitian Revolution of 1791-1804. This anti-colonial struggle, the largest and most successful slave rebellion in the Western hemisphere, frightened the U.S. political establishment to its core. Political leaders were all for slavery, but fearful of the growing numbers of Black people in the country relative to the white population. The result was that in 1807 Congress banned the importing of Africans, with the ban taking effect the following year. (Virginia itself had banned importation in 1778.)

At the same time, three other things were happening. The world market for machine-made linen was expanding, driving up the value of cotton. In 1793, Eli Whitney invented the cotton gin, which greatly facilitated the harvesting of cotton. And with Napoleon abandoning his dreams of a New World empire after being driven from Haiti, France in 1803 sold the vast territory of Louisiana to the U.S. for a song.

So at the same time that the importation of captured Africans became illegal, the demand for slave labor in the Deep South had greatly increased as new cotton plantations were established. This led many plantation owners in Virginia and Maryland, where years of cotton growing had exhausted the soil, to realize there was more money to be made in selling human beings than in growing cotton. And as the demand rose, supply had to rise to meet it.

Virginia became what was known as a “breeder state” — human beings were literally grown as a cash crop. One successful entrepreneur bragged that his plantations had produced 6,000 children for sale.

And so the great trading center of Richmond came into its own. By the time the Civil War broke out in 1861, the downtown area known as Shockoe Bottom was the largest slave-trading district in the United States north of New Orleans. And more important than its size was that Richmond was now the hub, the fountainhead, of the U.S. slave trade.

In the three decades before the end of the Civil War in 1865, between 300,000 and 350,000 people of African descent were sold out of Virginia, most of them passing through the

auction houses of Shockoe Bottom. In the decade from 1830 to 1840 alone, it is estimated that between 10,000 and 11,000 people were sold each year from Richmond and transported by ship, railroad or by foot, fastened together in “coffles,” to the sweltering fields of their new owners.

In the process, the district bounded by Main, Marshall, 14th and 19th streets became one of the great wealth-producing areas of the South. And it wasn’t only slave traders who plied their trade there. An enterprise this large required many skills.

The heart of the business, of course, was made up of the traders themselves, both formal corporations and freelance individuals. Many of these had their offices and homes north and south of Broad Street between 17th and 18th streets.

But slaves also had to be held somewhere secure. Lumpkin’s Jail, the best known of the slave-holding businesses, was located just west and north of the present Main Street Station. (This area, known as the “Devil’s Half Acre,” later housed the origins of Virginia Union University.) Omohundro’s Jail sat at the southeast corner of what is now 17th and East Broad streets. William Goodwin’s jail, at the corner of 17th and East Grace streets, for a night held Solomon Northup, author of the book “Twelve Years a Slave,” now an Oscar-winning movie. Other jails were scattered around the district, often attached to the traders’ offices.

Shockoe Bottom held some 40-50 auction houses, most of them along 15th Street, known at the time as Wall Street. Other auctions were held in places like the Exchange, St. Charles and City hotels, the Metropolitan and Odd Fellow’s halls and Bell Tavern, located a block or so west of 15th. In addition, commodity brokers, who sold anything, including people, had their offices along East Cary Street from west of 15th to about 19th streets. The town whipping post likely stood in what is now the 17th Street Farmer’s Market.

For those who didn’t survive the Passage, or who died from their labors in the city, there was the municipal cemetery just north of what is now East Broad Street between 15th and 16th streets. In the center of that dismal place was the town gallows, where the great slave rebellion leader Gabriel was executed on Oct. 10, 1800. Abandoned around 1816, the site was variously used for the city jail and the dog pound. In the early 1970s it became a

commercial parking lot, used by students and faculty at VCU Health Centers. After a decade-long community struggle, what is now known as the African Burial Ground was reclaimed from its latest owner, Virginia Commonwealth University, a state institution.

Then there were the offices of the many businesses that serviced the slave trade: law firms, insurance companies and the shipping and railroad lines. One of those railroads developed into the present-day CSX Corporation. To help attract the trade of the slave dealers, it offered free transportation for children.

There were blacksmith shops and dry goods stores, including the original Thalhimer's one-room establishment. There were the clothing houses that made sure human beings waiting to be sold were properly dressed for viewing.

And there were the newspapers. The media wasn't located in Shockoe Bottom itself, but the direct predecessors of today's Richmond Times-Dispatch contributed by announcing the auctions, complete with the number, ages and genders of the "products" to be sold. They also assisted the slave owners by publishing notices of runaway slaves.

In this period, selling people was the most profitable trade in Virginia, and in one way or another most of the city's merchants and professionals found ways to take part. For example, famed attorney Patrick Henry did legal work for Thomas Prosser, who owned Gabriel.

The trade in slaves and the profits from slave labor built the fortunes that allowed a privileged few to rise to the highest political offices in the country and later assume the political leadership of what was to become the capital of the Confederacy — the political expression of the rule of the slaveholders and their merchant allies.

But in addition to the suffering and humiliation that Shockoe Bottom represents, there is also a story of incredible courage. From Gabriel's Rebellion of 1800 to the successful mutiny on the slave ship *Creole* in 1841 to the thousands of instances of individual defiance, this tradition of continuous resistance to injustice and brutality is a tribute to the deep resilience of the human spirit.

And there is another reason why present-day Shockoe Bottom is so ill-suited for a stadium. In many ways it was the crucible where the present-day African-American community was forged.

As stated above, in the 30 years before 1865 around a third of a million people were sold from Virginia, most of them out of Shockoe Bottom. By 1865 there were fewer than 4.5 million Black people in the entire country. That means that, all across the United States, as well as in Canada and Mexico, most African-Americans have some ancestors who passed through the auction houses and slave jails of Shockoe Bottom.

The slave prison on Goree Island off the coast of Senegal in West Africa is recognized as a sacred place for African-Americans. It is the bit of land where many of their ancestors were held before their final journey from the Motherland. In a similar way, Shockoe Bottom is that bit of land where many of the ancestors were held before their forced journey South to lives of desperate servitude.

This is why Shockoe Bottom has significance far beyond Virginia. There may be no place in the United States that hold more meaning for Black Americans. Just as those of European descent can travel to the Statue of Liberty to see where their ancestors first stepped ashore in the New World and find new opportunities, so Americans of African descent should be able to travel to Richmond to see where their ancestors were forced to travel throughout the country to labor for others.

Because of all this, this small piece of land does not belong to Richmonders alone. It belongs to the whole country and especially to all those people whose ancestors once stood there, bound and chained, forced to watch while their mothers and fathers, sisters and brothers and even their own children were sold away to lives of torment.

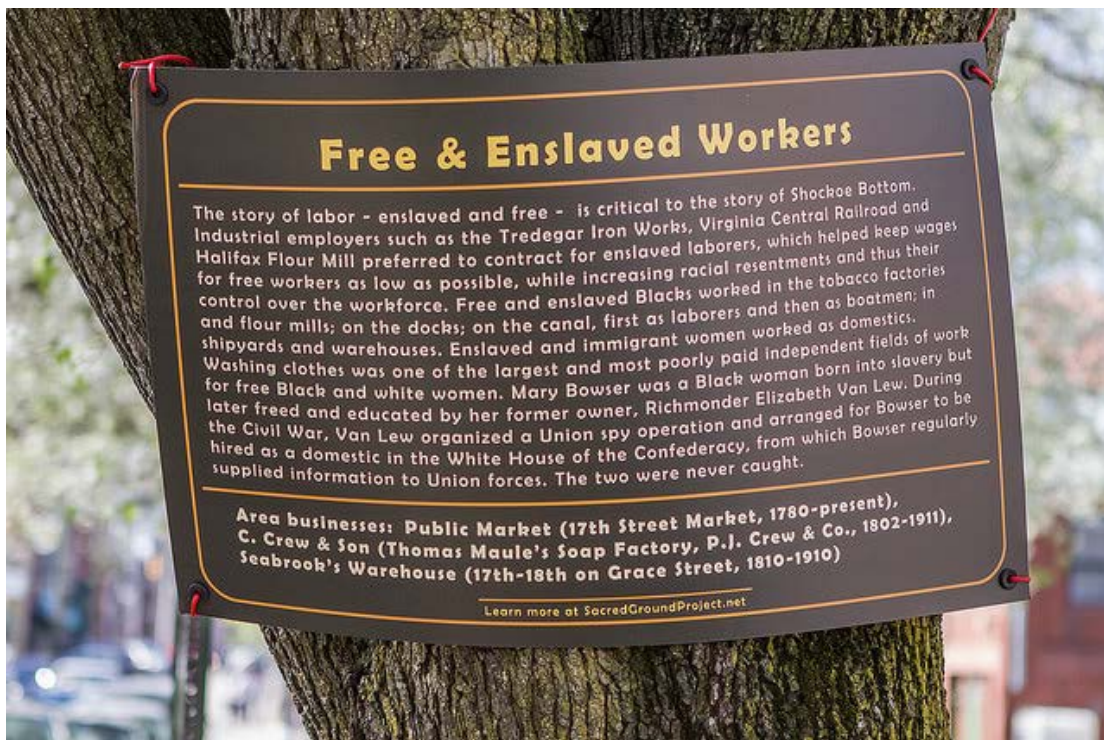


Image 2 & 3: Two of ten temporary historic markers placed for a walking tour of Shockoe Bottom called "Footprints of the Slave Trade", held on April 3, 2015, the 150th anniversary of Liberation Day and designed to convey the scale and normalcy of the trade and the city as a slave society.

Photo and markers by John Moser Productions.

Richmond's Shockoe Bottom has the potential to become an educational center of international significance. Properly preserved, this small area that once held such cold, commercial brutality could become a life-affirming place of study, reflection and meditation.

Like the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C., it could become a place where people of all backgrounds gather and resolve to never again allow such inhuman cruelty. It could become a place of understanding, of healing, of reconciliation born of a country finally facing the reality of its origins, finally resolving to make right what has been so wrong for so long.

And yet this is the area that Richmond Mayor Dwight Jones, developers like the multi-millionaire H. Louis Salomonsky (who famously went to prison in 2003 for bribing a member of City Council) and the owners of the Richmond Flying Squirrels AA baseball team along with their supporters among Richmond's present-day merchant class have now targeted for a baseball stadium.

Shockoe Bottom is exactly the wrong place for this commercial project. We do not have the right to allow that kind of desecration to compound all the wrongs already committed there.

What was once a place of horror and sorrow must be restored materially and spiritually, so that it can play its rightful role as a reminder of what once was, and what can never be allowed to be again.

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Richmond's Archaeology of the African Diaspora: Unseen Knowledge, Untapped Potential

Ellen Chapman

While most of the visible city of Richmond dates back to the mid-nineteenth century at the earliest, its landscape been shaped by a much longer history. The written records of Richmond reveals that it has been a critical location during many different periods due to its placement on the landscape, natural resources, significance for riverine and overland travel and transport, political dominance, and economic and industrial strength – a strength that was substantially expanded through the city's profit from the 19th century domestic slave trade. Taking a longer view, the landscape of the Falls of the James River, around which the historic towns of Richmond and Manchester were founded, had been an important habitation, subsistence, and political boundary region for Virginia native people since at least the Middle Archaic period. By the Woodland Period, the Falls were a contested region claimed by both the Siouan-speaking Monacans of the Virginia interior and the Algonquian-speaking Powhatan chiefdom of the Chesapeake (Hantman 1990). Like several other river cities located along the Fall Line of the Chesapeake Bay watershed (including Petersburg and Fredericksburg), trade and subsistence along the river have defined life here for several millennia.

The corporate roots of the state of Virginia, through the founding of Jamestown by the Virginia Company in 1607, have been well documented (Kelso 2006). So too has been the arrival of the first Africans to Hampton in 1619, and the complex origins of enslaved and unfree labor in the colony, which included white bondservants, enslaved Africans, and native people with enslaved or servant status (Sluiter 1997, Campbell 2011, 60–85). However, much of the historical trajectory of the African Diaspora in Richmond has been hidden or misunderstood until recent efforts, and the contribution of the city to the domestic slave trade has only been investigated in the past few decades.

Although the site of early colonial exploration by central figures such as John Smith and Christopher Newport, Richmond did not become a focal point until after the Revolutionary War, when the town of just 600 became the new Virginia capitol in 1780. By between

roughly 1830 and 1860, the city had developed into one of the largest hubs of the domestic slave trade in the United States (Takagi 2000). It was also one of the earliest centers of Southern industrial power, was well connected along a number of transport routes, and was home to Tredegar Ironworks, one of the most significant iron foundries in America. These factors, along with the city's close proximity to the front lines of the Eastern Theater of the war, resulted in the capitol of the Confederate States of America being moved to Richmond early in the war.

The war substantially reshaped the city, and caused it to swell in population and activity. The city's warehouses were repurposed as hospitals and Confederate storage, and the population roughly doubled between 1861 and 1863, causing overcrowding and famine among its inhabitants (McPherson 1988, 617). With Belle Isle, Castle Thunder, and Libby Prison, the city also held substantial prisons for the Union enlisted men and officers. In contrast to the Revolutionary War, when Richmond was not substantially damaged by the hostilities, the Civil War had a fiery conclusion in Richmond. On April 3rd 1865, retreating Confederate forces set fire to downtown warehouses and the bridges spanning the James River between Richmond and Manchester, and occupying Union forces (led by troops that included six regiments of United States Colored Troops) entered the city. This dramatic day was celebrated as Liberation Day by the city's black population for many years, and has recently enjoyed a resurgence.

In the aftermath of the Civil War, Reconstruction and the city's critical transport and industrial infrastructure resulted in considerable financial investment and expansion in the city. The prominent black neighborhood of Jackson-Ward became a hub of black capitalism and political leadership, home to figures like Maggie Walker, John Mitchell Jr., and Rosa Bowser. African-American garden cemeteries were constructed in Richmond's East End to meet demand for elite cemeteries equivalent to Hollywood Cemetery for white Richmonders (Davis 2000).

New Developments for Old Archaeology

Notably, though the city has been defined through its complex history and considerable historical nostalgia (particularly significant for the Lost Cause mythology), the city's archaeological resources have received comparatively little research focus and preservation. Local archaeologists have described local resistance to archaeological investigations from a variety of sources; during the 1980s, L. Daniel Mouer described that "local companies, Richmond's government, property owners, even preservation groups like Historic Richmond Foundation don't have or want to pay the required costs [for archaeology]" and that the city had refused Mouer permission to perform self-funded excavations in city parks (Lazarus 1984). This resistance, along with substantial projects that were never completed, has left an indelible impact on the accessibility of sites in the city for archaeological and material culture research. To some extent this resistance to archaeological reviews continues today. In 2013, a city project to develop 17 acres of state land for a training camp for the Washington D.C. National Football League team was preceded by mere days of archaeological trenching and excavation, despite being mandated by the Virginia Environmental Impacts Report Act, and was cut short with little notice when the construction company wanted to proceed (Pilot 2013; Dovi 2014).

However, recent events have drawn increasing recognition for the richness of Richmond's archaeological record and its vulnerability. A new community archaeology organization, co-founded by myself, Dr. Kim Allen, and Dr. Terry Brock, is working to advocate for better understanding, interpretation, and preservation of archaeology in the city. The catalyzing event for this group, called RVA Archaeology, was the proposed Revitalize RVA development. This city-financed project planned construction of a baseball stadium, hotel, grocery store, slavery heritage museum, and other projects downtown on an eight-acre parcel of Shockoe Bottom. After Brock wrote a blogpost pointing out the extremely high archaeological potential of the site, the city contracted with engineering firm Greeley and Hansen to conduct a four-month archaeological investigation on the site. However, staff in the Mayor's Office also relocated the stadium in order to evade a Section 106 review, and have been consistently evasive regarding the extent of independent oversight of archaeological work (Oliver 2014).

The richness of the Richmond's archaeological record means that considerable research potential exists in the city, including topics associated with the African Diaspora, despite several missed opportunities over the last several decades. This edition will discuss some of these resources, which include African-descended bateauxmen on the James River, the infrastructure of urban slavery, medical experimentation on African bodies, the complex dynamics of racially-mixed colonial settlements, and the human impact of the convict leasing system. This, however, is the tip of the iceberg. Many other collections from the city could benefit from reanalysis through the lens of Diaspora, and several sites in the city could be excellent locations for research into the topic.

A Brief History of Richmond's Archaeology of the African Diaspora

The first African-descended people in Virginia arrived at Hampton in 1619, and were most likely enslaved individuals captured in a raid on a Spanish slave ship (Sluiter 1997). History and archaeology are relatively vague regarding the lives of free and enslaved Africans during the early colonial period in the Richmond area; while there were early colonial settlements (or settlement attempts) at the sites of Fort Charles, the town of Warwick, the Falling Creek Iron Works and Westham foundry, and explorations along the James River, few records of any sort survive of these seventeenth-century sites. However, somewhat more historical context is available for the early 18th century community of Rocketts Landing, which was characterized by a high degree of racial integration relative to later periods. During the eighteenth century, the plantation economy in and around Richmond expanded, and so too did the city's reliance on enslavement as an economic engine.

In Richmond, changes in the regional or global slavery system had direct impacts on the way people lived and worked. Until 1775, some enslaved people transported via ship to the dock at Manchester had traveled directly from Africa, or via the Caribbean. Slavery was intimately connected with life across most of Richmond, but Ancarrow's landing (the Manchester dock where ships of slaves were unloaded) and the many slave jails, auction houses, and slave trader sites of Shockoe Bottom and Shockoe Slip are where this legacy is most likely to be

materially visible. As has been only discovered recently through research by Elizabeth Cann Kambourian and cultural resource management company Dutton+Associates, at least seventy sites associated with slave trading are located in a mere twenty square blocks in the historic city center (Dutton, Friedberg, and Taylor 2014).

By the Revolutionary War, enslaved Africans made up approximately half of Richmond's 600 person population. During the hostilities, British troops in Richmond, as elsewhere, encouraged slave escape and rebellion with promises of freedom that were largely broken (Tyler-McGraw 1994, 60–62). By 1808, the domestic slave trade underwent rapid expansion after Great Britain abolished the transatlantic slave trade. Given Richmond's prominent industrial position and its site as the east coast's most inland port, the city became the largest exporter of domestic slaves outside of New Orleans (although Natchez also lays claim to this dubious distinction). Richmond's infrastructure also rested on urban slavery, and enslaved people worked in industries like Tredegar ironworks, doing domestic work for city residents, and on public works projects like the Confederate earthworks and all the major public buildings (Richardson and Duke 2008, 23–32).

In terms of the African Diaspora archaeology of antebellum Richmond, the collections from Lumpkin's slave jail, excavations at Tredegar Ironworks, a slave market site at the former of Cedar and Broad Streets, and the dissected human remains recovered from the Marshall Street well and are the most substantial collections produced thus far (Browning in prep, Laird 2010a; Raber et al. 1992). However, because the Lumpkin's excavation was hampered by the high water table, and the sites at Tredegar, and Cedar and Broad do not yet have widely available reports, even these sites' potential are not currently fully realized.

Furthermore, the newly available material from the East Marshall Street Well Project has come about primarily as a result of a 2011 documentary and associated community pressure (Utsey 2011). Archaeological and curatorial best practices have sometimes not been followed, particularly at the Medical College of Virginia well (discussed in greater detail below). Finally, investigating urban slavery archaeologically is challenging given the sheer volume of materials produced and the difficulties inherent in associating particular artifacts and contexts with specific ethnic groups. However, these materials have nonetheless produced important information regarding characteristics of Richmond slavery. Landscape

analysis of the topography and layout of Lumpkin's Jail has demonstrated how structures of urban slavery recreated spatial inequality despite the density of urban living (Laird 2010b). Additionally, the bones recovered from the Medical College of Virginia well are important evidence for the dehumanizing practices carried out by the medical profession on the bodies of the enslaved, and have the potential to be informative regarding topics including the mobility, malnutrition, disease and diet histories of Richmond's enslaved population.

On April 3rd, 1865, the Confederate Army withdrew from Richmond after setting fires that spread through a considerable portion of the downtown warehouse and dock district. Liberation came to Richmond's black population that day, among the ashes and confusion of a city that quickly fell under martial law. Archaeology related to the African Diaspora post-Emancipation is limited, but shows some of the mixed legacy of Reconstruction and post-Reconstruction changes for members of the Diaspora. The impact of the black codes and the convict leasing system that rented out predominantly black prisoners to the western Virginia railroad projects can be seen at the Virginia State Penitentiary excavation, which uncovered human remains that were interpreted as the repatriated remains of prisoners who died working the rails (Nelson 2006). Similar to many projects related to Richmond's antebellum archaeology, there is current no site report for the Virginia State Penitentiary project, although work will be ongoing this summer to improve understanding of its associated archive and collections. Artifacts dating from 1867-1870 at Lumpkin's Jail likely relate to the use of the site as a school, the Colver Institute, for formerly-enslaved black students (Laird 2010b). Some limited archaeological investigations were performed at the Maggie L. Walker House, now a National Parks Service property (Saunders and Williams 1995).

Many archaeological projects relevant to Richmond's African Diaspora history are currently accessible through grey literature sources, but are not well-known outside of Central Virginia. The remainder of this edition will provide more details regarding these sites, including links to research reports and further resources when available.

Rocketts' Landing's Diverse Community of Immigrants (1740s-Post-Civil War)

Pre-dating Richmond by several decades, the port community of Rocketts' Landing grew up around the ferry port established by Robert Rocketts sometime before 1740 (Mouer 1992, 73). While this was certainly the driving force behind mid-eighteenth century settlement, the origins of colonial settlement in the area remain obscure, and the village is one possible



Figure 1. Bateauxmen on the James River are commemorated outside the James Center (Photo by Ellen Chapman)

location for the John Smith garrison established in roughly 1610, shortly after Smith purchased the Indian village of Powhatan on nearby Tree Hill. L. Daniel Mouer has described the Rocketts' Landing community as “a highly mixed community of merchants, free black and hired-out slave artisans and laborers, domestic slaves, stevedores, transients, mariners, innkeepers, and captains” (Mouer 1992, 39). A substantial research report (Mouer 1992) is available at the VDHR, and additional analyses are in preparation.

The Great Turning Basin of the James River and Kanawha Canal and Tobacco Transport (1745-1840)

In the mid-1980s, archaeologist Lyle Browning and canals scholar Bill Trout became aware of construction of the James Center in the location of the Great Turning Basin of the James River and Kanawha Canal. They enlisted the assistance of several volunteers, including professional and avocational archaeologists, to salvage the site. During short periods of excavation performed over several years more than sixty boats were exposed (often via backhoe) and recorded. This excavation was the basis of a Master's thesis by Bruce Terrell in 1992 on the bateaux used to transport tobacco along the James River, and this site is where a considerable amount of information regarding this boat type was collected (Terrell 1991). James River bateauxmen, many of them enslaved Africans, navigated the rapids at Richmond (now assessed to be Class II to IV) in shallow-draught boats full of tobacco hogsheads, passengers, and other cargo. The archaeological site and its discoveries resulted in the establishment in the James River Bateaux Festival and exhibits that have commemorated the bateauxmen. Additionally, the grand entranceways to the James Center financial buildings now boast several large pieces of statuary portraying men pulling the bateaux upriver against the current (Figure 1). However, the condition of the archaeological remains themselves remains tenuous (Kollatz 2014). Several fragments of these boats remain in storage facilities in the Richmond area, and continue to be in need of conservation, research and analysis. In 2014, the boat curated by the ASV at Kittiewan Plantation was named to the Virginia Top Ten Endangered Artifacts list, the first time an archaeological artifact has been named to the finalists list. There are also some submerged collections of artifacts that have not yet been conserved, and may have lost provenience information in the intervening decades.

The most substantial published description of the Great Turning Basin archaeology is [East Carolina University Research Report No. 7](#), which examined tobacco transport along the James using information regarding boat construction, details regarding artifacts found associated with the boats, and related historical records. The report also documents the financial and timing challenges faced by the excavators, as boats were re-covered by cave-ins, and boat recording was truncated by contractors destroying them. In the Chapter VI, Terrell

discusses the historical information regarding the boats' crews, romantic images about them, their rations and travel habits, and how regulations discriminated between the enslaved, free, and white bateauxmen.

The Marshall St. Well and Medical Exploitation of Black Bodies

In 1994, a well containing human remains, personal effects, and medical tools was discovered during the excavation of the Kontos Medical Sciences Building on Marshall Street. The well was predominantly excavated using construction equipment due to time-pressures and safety concerns, and the archaeologists called to salvage the bones were given just a weekend for bone retrieval and recording. Since the well extended below the water table, it is likely that additional dissected remains were entombed beneath the building foundation. The bones have evidence of dissection and autopsy cuts, and have been identified by Smithsonian forensic anthropologists as predominantly African-American (Owsley and Bruwelheide 2012). They are associated with the illicit use of bodies, primarily black, in the nineteenth century for anatomical instruction at the Medical College of Virginia (Koste 2012). Understandably, this site has been the focus of considerable community anger, particularly in light of a documentary (Until the Well Runs Dry: Medicine and the Exploitation of Black Bodies) produced by VCU Psychology Professor Shawn Utsey about the site in 2011. As a result of community activism, The VCU President's Office is currently in the process of a community-engaged commemoration process, called [The East Marshall Street Well Project](#), that will determine the future reburial process, directions for future research, and appropriate ways for VCU to mitigate their actions in relation to this site. The grey literature available for this site include an osteological analysis of the bones, an artifact analysis, a historical investigation of nineteenth-century medical instruction in Richmond, and an introduction describing the broad trajectory of the field recovery. Peer-reviewed publication of the osteological analysis of these remains are forthcoming in a volume from Springer entitled *The Bioarchaeology of Dissection and Autopsy in the United States*, edited by Ken Nystrom.



Figure 2. Shockoe Bottom from Church Hill, facing northwest (Photo by Ellen Chapman).

Shockoe Bottom: Archaeological Potential and Public Debate

Shockoe Bottom (see Figure 2) has become indelibly marked as an archaeological space, perhaps more than any other Richmond place in recent memory. The 2006 and 2008 excavations of the Robert Lumpkins complex by the James River Institute for Archaeology are the most publicly-oriented archaeology to have taken place in the city, and the recurrence of the baseball stadium debate in 2013 acquired an archaeological element when archaeologist Terry Brock began to discuss the area's archaeological potential in a [blog post](#) that drew substantial local attention. The Revitalize RVA development is a city-financed project proposing to construct a baseball stadium, hotel, grocery store, slavery heritage museum, and other projects on an 8 acre parcel of Shockoe Bottom. Following publication and media coverage of the blog, and a [Historical and Archaeological Symposium on Shockoe Bottom](#) in March 2014, the city contracted with an engineering company to produce an archaeological and historical review. This review, discussed before City Council by David Dutton in this [video](#), emphasized the likely sensitivity of the area, and particularly referenced the archaeological potential for recovering at least nine buildings associated with slave

traders; two major tenements occupied by free and enslaved African-Americans; two blocks of the original 1737 Mayo town grid; a major industrial and commercial corridor of the nineteenth century; and structures related to early Richmond churches (Dutton, Friedberg, and Taylor 2014). One of the most significant of these sites is a lot owned by Silas Omohondro on 17th Street, which may have included a slave jail as well as a boarding house and residence. Omohondro may have lived there with his enslaved wife Corinna, providing some parallels between him and Robert Lumpkin whose wife Mary was also of African descent. Partnerships between enslaved women and white city businessmen (particularly those most directly associated with the slave trade) have been repeatedly documented but little is understood regarding their influence or the rhythms of their daily lives, and this site could be an important material study. Another material remnant of the African Diaspora in Shockoe bottom is the cabin purchased for Emily Winfree by her former owner. Winfree was enslaved south of the river in Manchester, and her children's father was likely her owner. A community organization, the Alliance to Conserve Old Richmond's Neighborhoods, lobbied to have this structure preserved when the land around it was slated for a public housing development project.

Lumpkin's Jail Complex

During the 1990s, the Richmond Slave Trail Commission was founded to investigate and acknowledge the city's involvement in the slave trade, particularly the domestic slave trade that sold enslaved men, woman, and children born on Virginia plantations to the cotton plantations of the Deep South. The Slave Trail Commission

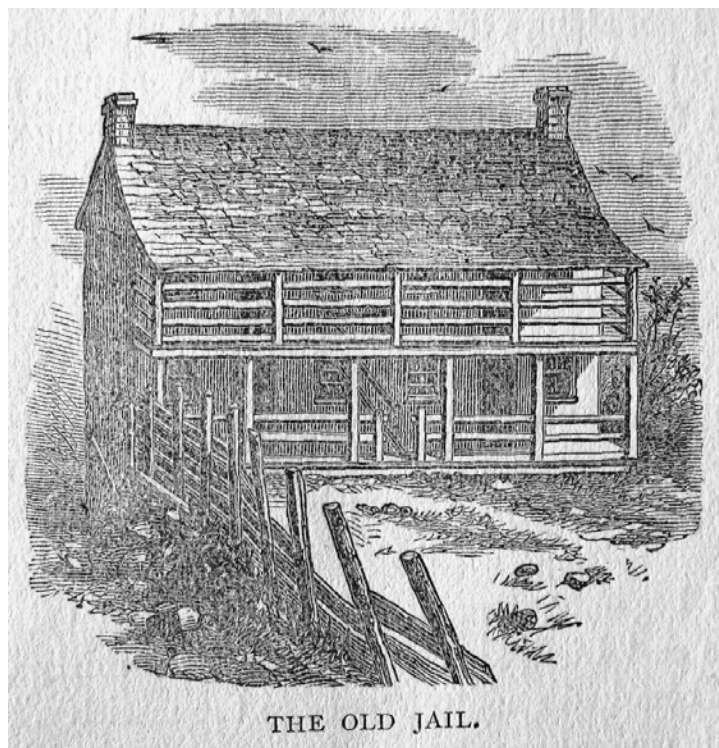


Figure 3. Engraving of Lumpkin's Jail in Charles H. Corey's, *Historical Sketch of the Richmond Institute*, 1876, p. 5. (from Laird 2010a)

created interpretive signage and statuary to mark sites on the north and south of the river associated with the transport, sale, punishment, residence, and resistance of enslaved Africans in the city. During the mid-2000s, the city partnered with the Commission, the Virginia Department of Historic Resources, and ACORN to fund an archaeological investigation at Lumpkin's Jail, a complex that included one of the most notorious slave jails in Shockoe Bottom.



Figure 4. Lumpkin's Jail Excavation with buildings identified (image courtesy of the James River Institute for Archaeology and the Richmond Slave Trail Commission).

The degrading practices at Lumpkin's Jail in Shockoe (it moved around several times, as most slave traders and auctioneers did) were revealed in a biographical account from the perspective of former prisoner Anthony Burns (Laird 2010a, 24–26). The site of Lumpkin's Jail was excavated in two stages by James River Institute for Archaeology, a [Phase II testing investigation](#) and a Phase III data recovery (report in [two parts](#)). Due to the extensive overburden (the jail was eventually located 14 feet below modern grade), the excavators only just uncovered the jail site when the excavation was concluded. However, the work recovered a considerable quantity of artifacts, much of it dating to the latter half of the

nineteenth century. Additionally, the archaeological work characterized the layout, topography, and orientation of the Lumpkin's compound as a carefully-assembled landscape of power that reinforced the power relations of urban slavery in a similar way as did the design of rural plantations (Laird 2010b).

Virginia State Penitentiary

The Virginia State Penitentiary site was excavated in 1991 by Katherine Beidleman prior to the demolition of the old state penitentiary. The excavations were primarily focused on searching for any remaining foundations of the original state penitentiary, which was designed in 1796 by Benjamin Latrobe, later architect of the White House and U.S. Capitol. While fieldwork indicated that most of the Latrobe foundations were destroyed in subsequent construction in 1928, some fragments of the original foundations were located and preserved in place. However, what no one expected was the presence in the courtyard of multiple human skeletons, consisting of individual burials but also disarticulated charnel pits. Although some scholars who have studied the materials believe them to relate to an unknown municipal cemetery, historian Scott Nelson and others have argued that they represent the remains of prisoners leased to the railroad in convict leasing. Nelson's book *Steel Drivin' Man* investigated the leasing system and has hypothesized that the genesis of the John Henry legend may have been John William Henry, a man who was incarcerated at the penitentiary and leased to the C&O railroad in 1874. The C&O at the time was digging the Lewis Tunnel in western Virginia, where they used a steel drill to help cut through the mountain. Unfortunately, Katherine Beidleman died in 2013 and no report was ever completed for the Penitentiary or its burials. The human remains from this excavation are curated at the Smithsonian, where they have been examined by Douglas Owsley and Kari Bruwelheide. Work is currently ongoing to assess the feasibility of recreating a site report for this site, which also includes an assemblage (including ceramics, architectural remains, and limited faunal material) that does not appear to have been processed since the excavation.

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Links to Related Media

The Latest Announcement (April 2015)

<http://www.savingplaces.org/treasures/shockoe-bottom#.VVYGcktp-2w>

Tourism and Public History

To Be Sold Exhibit at the Library of Virginia:

http://www.richmond.com/entertainment/article_604ed200-48d6-50d9-ac21-56d2730d3515.html

Visit Richmond

<http://www.visitrichmondva.com/things-to-do/local-tours/slavetrail/>

Creator of Shockoe slavery map blasts city over use

http://www.richmond.com/sports/special-report/baseball-in-richmond/article_2adc39e0-ccc2-568d-8270-1c3dfda02059.html

Could a Slavery Museum be Built in Shockoe Bottom?

http://www.richmond.com/news/local/city-of-richmond/article_519c1463-6e0e-5790-8ca3-d70420d58d98.html

Symposium on the domestic slave trade

To Be Sold: The American Slave Trade from Virginia to New Orleans (symposium)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5oqFStLHR_I

Shockoe Bottom Archaeology and Historic Preservation Efforts

Terry Brock's [blog post](#)

David Dutton's [presentation to City Council](#) regarding the Archaeological and Historical

Review of Shockoe Bottom

[Before It's Too Late: The History and Archaeology of Shockoe Bottom](#) Symposium

NTHP <http://www.savingplaces.org/treasures/shockoe-bottom#.VVYGcktp-2w>

The Underground Legacy of Shockoe Bottom in Richmond, Virginia

<http://blog.preservationnation.org/2014/07/14/underground-legacy-shockoe-bottom-richmond-virginia/#.VVYHc0tp-2w>

Article on Black America Web

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National Public Radio: [Richmond, Va., Wrangling Over Future Of Historic Slave Trade Site](#)

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James River & Kanawha Canal Bateaux

[East Caroline University Research Report No. 7](#)

Lumpkin's Jail

Preliminary investigations [report](#)

Final report [vol 1](#)

Final report [vol 2](#)

Matt Laird's [presentation](#) on Lumpkin's Jail at the Shockoe Bottom Symposium

Medical College of Virginia well (East Marshall Street Well Project)

[The East Marshall Street Well Project website](#)

[Introduction](#)

[Anatomical and Surgical Training in 19th Century Richmond](#)

[Artifacts Report](#)

[Osteological Report](#)

RVA Archaeology

[website](#)

[Facebook](#)

Shockoe Bottom Archaeology in the Media

Smithsonian Magazine- <http://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/digging-up-the-past-at-a-richmond-jail-50642859/?no-ist>

City Lab - [America's Failure to Preserve Historic Slave Markets](#)

The Root - [Lupita Nyong'o is Against Turning 12 Years a Slave Site into a Baseball Stadium](#)

NY Times - [Lupita Nyong'o Seeks Va. Slave-Trade Preservation](#)

Washington Post - [Shockoe Bottom Ballpark proposal could bury Richmond's slave history](#)

To Read

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The Thread: Reflections on #Blacklivesmatter and 21st Century Racial Dynamics

Kelley Deetz

This piece is dedicated to Malcolm X who would have been 90 years old today.

"I believe that there will ultimately be a clash between the oppressed and those who do the oppressing. I believe that there will be a clash between those who want freedom, justice and equality for everyone and those who want to continue the system of exploitation. I believe that there will be that kind of clash but I don't think it will be based on the color of the skin." –Malcolm X

I think America is *starting* to wake up. Alarms of racial violence and unjust verdicts have saturated the social media. These things are not new, but they have finally become news and worthy of note. The social fabric of this nation is twisting and tearing in new ways, but in similar directions. As a scholar and professor of Black history I am maddened by the chaos. This moment provokes rigorous analysis. My mind is rapidly tracing moments, mentally referencing scholarship and chronicles that weave into this everlasting narrative. This is all too familiar, while being completely unlike anything in the past. The familiar is the consistent abuse of Black bodies and spirits by white authority figures, and the routine excusing of such acts. It is the ebb and flow of cognitive dissonance and civil unrest, manifested in protests, marches, chants, radical iconography, semiotics, kinesics, rhetoric, and a series of high-profile incidents that keep gaining international attention. America is catching fire, *again*. This fire is not new--it never went out. This is the same fire that burned in the souls of enslaved African folk throughout the Diaspora, inspired resistance, revolts, and revolutions. This same fire was in Sojourner Truth, Nat Turner, Denmark Vessey, Frederick Douglass, and Harriet Tubman, and helped them fight against slavery, and in Ida B. Wells-Barnett who battled exhaustively against Lynchings, and in the countless organizers who shut down Jim Crow. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X had this same fire, but chose to direct it in different ways for the same cause. This fire is burning and powerful and ever so familiar. The fight for civil rights began when that first captive African was put on a ship to sail to a land where he would become systematically, legally, and institutionally oppressed for centuries.

Resistance is inseparable from oppression, and protests are undoubtedly chaotic. However, this particular moment is more opaque than ever, and trying to simplify the dynamics can be challenging. Racism fed into laws, and laws dictated civil rights. It was transparent and targetable. The successes of the modern Civil Rights Movement are clearly seen in the legal sphere, as the government established equality through legislation. However, laws only enforce boundaries, they don't change ideologies. The CRM did little to eradicate racism. The racist white students who spit on, beat, and screamed at black students as they integrated public schools went on to have children and undoubtedly passed on legacies of hate. These legacies are hundreds of years old, and continue to inform ignorance as we've seen recently in multitudes of cases.

Television played a pivotal role in the modern Civil Rights Movement as it allowed the non-violent tactics to play on the moral sensibilities of mainstream America. The 21st century has more sophisticated media sharing, without the control that the 20th century ensured. Grassroots movements are at our fingertips as we hashtag and tweet ourselves into mass momentum. Videos capture manifestations of our racist nation as they record the brutal unjust murders of Oscar Grant, Eric Garner, and Walter Scott. There is no mistaking the current state of chaos in this nation. One second on twitter and you know: this historic fire is raging.

America was never post-racial, and the mythical idea that was is quickly unraveling. We are in a state of moral and cultural turmoil and nothing is clear except that we live in a highly racialized and racist country that is struggling to measure its pulse. The modern Civil Rights Movement gave way to the popularization of Liberal cultural norms. Political correctness became the standard. No longer was it acceptable to say racist words, tell racists jokes, or more recently, even refer to race. The Liberal-born move to become a "color-blind" society fed off good intentions, but failed miserably as it inadvertently promoted a more sophisticated form of racism in our nation. Color-blindness is a privilege of whiteness, and one that carries little to no residence or respect in communities of color. If you can truly not see color you're disrespecting the rich cultures around you and choosing to ignore the dignity and pride that historically oppressed groups have sewn despite centuries of abuse.

Ironically, “color-blindness” epitomizes the height of white patriarchal demands; something that Liberals often demonize.

The #Blacklivesmatter campaign is impressively strong. With the current state of racism in this nation, we must approach the challenges with new tactics. We need to think critically about our demands. The left has shown us that “eracism” bumper stickers didn’t erase anything, and forcing a lexicon onto a complicated and deeply historical social problem only masked the beast. How do we slay this “beast” within the confines of our constitution? How can we support free speech and then punish that very freedom? We must believe in equality and justice for all. Neither of those are given. We are a nation who is highly stratified according to class, race, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, and religion. No law can fix this-- behaviors and beliefs fix this.

America’s dirty secret keeps rearing its head because it’s never fully been acknowledged nor has it been properly addressed through education. This is an era where states like Arizona, are actively omitting ethnic studies curriculums, while college police tackle black professors as if they were enforcing the 1850 Fugitive Slave Act. Police aren’t held accountable because latent racism cannot be tested by the means they employ.

The recent police murder of Baltimore citizen Mr. Freddie Gray made this fire explode in ways that forced justice to come to the table. Protestors began employing terms with deep roots in the rhetoric of race and revolt; #blackspring compares the U.S. strife to that of the #Arabspring, an association that surely terrifies conservative Americans. They took on #baltimoreuprising to signify the slave uprisings that generations of blacks participated in and that led to the liberation of Haiti. The replacement of the word “riot” with “revolt” is of a similar vein. These words have historical currency and evoke the memories of the ancestors, and the long legacy of struggle in the African Diaspora.

The city of Baltimore yields an incredibly complex stage to discuss race, power, police, and justice. Americans like binaries and simplicities. *This is not simple.* Six police officers- three white, three African American, were charged for Mr. Gray’s murder. Intersections of power, race, place, and class worked in twisted ways. It is this intricacy compiled with generations of

institutionalized racism, oppression, and poverty that make Baltimore such a complicated place for teasing out simple narratives for public consumption. Baltimore, in so many ways is Oakland, Detroit, Chicago, etc. It is the essence of the disease that is racism in the 21st century. Race in 2015 is highly complex and deeply rooted in the fabric of our nation. Whose responsibility is it to teach Americans to think critically? How do we move forward when so few folks refuse to look back? What does Baltimore say about the legacies of slavery and Jim Crow?

To be continued . . .

Some recent pieces on Malcolm X and #Blacklivesmatter:

What Would Malcom X Think? (by his daughter Ilyasah Shabazz)

http://www.nytimes.com/2015/02/21/opinion/ilyasah-shabazz-what-would-malcolm-x-think.html?_r=0

Do Black Lives Matter: Rectifying Malcolm X with Post-Racial America:

<http://genius.com/Edward-ongweso-jr-do-black-lives-matter-rectifying-malcolm-x-with-post-racial-america-annotated>

How Malcolm X's Teachings are Being Revived 50 Years After His Assassination:

<http://thinkprogress.org/justice/2015/02/21/3625590/malcolm-x-taught-me/>