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

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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.