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# Archaeology under the Blinding Light of Race

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Michael L. Blakey

Racism is defined as a modern system of inequity emergent in Atlantic slavery in which “Whiteness” is born and embedded. This essay describes its transformation. The operation of racist Whiteness in current archaeology and related anthropological practices is demonstrated in the denigration and exclusion of Black voices and the denial of racism and its diverse appropriations afforded the White authorial voice. The story of New York’s African Burial Ground offers a case in point.

## Conception and Birth of White Supremacy

The American school of polygeny fully establishes the biologically determined, ranked definition of human groups (i.e., race) to justify societal inequity (therefore becoming racism) as North American slavery (Nott and Gliddon, after Morton [1854], responded to by Douglass [1950 (1854)], elucidated by Gould [1996 (1981)] and Smedley and Smedley [2012]). Such qualitative origins always succeed cumulative events in a fertile context. In science and society, the events that led to racism bridge Christian religious and European Enlightenment ideologies. Before Samuel Morton’s polygenesis, Blumenbach classified an Adamic “Caucasian” race bracketed on each side by increasingly degenerated other races (Blumenbach 1781; Keel 2018). His teacher Carl Linnaeus’s *Systema naturae* (1758 [1735]) established four races as ostensibly unranked taxa. In fact, Eurocentric descriptions by his former students in the colonial world (Spencer 1997) were merely inscribed on nature as convenient Eurocentric rationale for colonizing and enslaving unreasonable inferiors. Inequality was similarly implied by Blumenbach’s notion that “Caucasians” stood as standard humanity, even of beauty (Painter 2010:43–91). Just as humeral theory tied Linnaeus to earlier Roman ideas, special creation tied them both to Christianity. Indeed, a contorted Christian moralization of slavery as charity had marked the fifteenth-century Portuguese beginnings of the Western European rise to a world civilization on the backs of enslaved Africans (Inikori 2002, 2020). Thus, to dry the royal court’s “tears” for what it was doing to those who “too are of the generation of the sons of Adam” (Zurara 1444 in Jennings [2010:17]). At the birth of the intolerant Inquisition that shed the religious tolerance of Moorish al Andalus, a Christian spiritual, aesthetic use of “Whiteness” associated the “europenses” (see Lewis [2008] for this nascent ninth-century recognition of a Europe) with Christian goodness (as they began Christendom). Such “Whiteness” substituted for the Christian election (the chosen people) lost when, in their reinvigorated anti-Semitism,

they severed Judeo-Christian identity at its hyphen (Jennings 2010).

But these cultural elements would not comprise racism (they are ethnocentric) until biology replaces a faltering Christian moralization of American slavery (see Jea 1998 [1811]; Koo 2007) with a secular ideology of nature during the Enlightenment and following the first use of “White” as a legal identity (vs. “Christian”) forbidding intermarriage in 1691 Virginia at the origin of “racial slavery” (Epperson 1999b; Smedley and Smedley 2012:115–116). Christian justifications for chattel slavery (the savage had no soul or if so it needed saving) met their ultimate demise upon the rack of their own contradictions (Jea 1998 [1811]; Jefferson 1785:162–163; Koo 2007) with the conversion of African Americans after the end of the Anglophone transatlantic trade (1807–1808). The ideological effect (ancillary to those of rebellions and economic forces) is exemplified by the expansion of Northern abolitionism (Blight 2018; Kendi 2016:79–248) with more effective use of the two best-selling contemporary books, the Holy Bible and *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (Stowe 1852), leading to Civil War.

Mainstream (White) American anthropology (Northern or Southern) legitimized slavery and gave it moral cover. Blacks uniquely used ethnology to contest natural inequality extolled by polygenists and continued to be the most definite advocates of the equality of all humans (Douglass 1950 [1854]; Du Bois 1897; Firmin 2000 [1885]; Patterson 2013). US physical anthropology, founded at the Smithsonian, was definitively eugenicist (Hrdlicka 1918), patriarchal, and White supremacist (Hrdlicka 1925, 1927) in the first half of the twentieth century (Blakey 1996). Franz Boas critiqued race during Jim Crow (Stocking 1968), but he and his successors were mainly concerned about the acculturation versus racialization of marginalized Southern and Eastern Europeans in the United States (see Baker 1998; Blakey 1996; Boas 1911; Montague 1951; Willis 1969). Indeed, Whites’ postwar objections to Nazism were mainly focused on the newly racialized denigration of marginal Whites (Cesaire 2000 [1955]) prior to the demonstrated effectiveness

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of anticolonial and civil rights movements led by peoples of color. According to Painter (2010:359–374), these non-Western Europeans benefited from the Third Enlargement of American Whiteness after the Irish.

By 1968–1980 there would be won a “second Reconstruction” (my revision of Bell [1987]; Marable [2007]) of governmental programs (including affirmative action) to rectify continuing consequences of prolonged White privilege. It would be curtailed after a dozen years (like the first Reconstruction) by a mythology that White privilege had suddenly ceased (the “level playing field”) enabling the fallacious logic that efforts to end White discrimination and privilege (whose notice was delegitimized as “playing the race card”) constituted racism (“reverse racism”) (see Haney-Lopez 2010). Now, falsely anchored in the new imprimatur of anti-racism, all racial discourse (including race-based correctives) was stymied by Whites (and their intellectual allies like economist William Julius Wilson [Kendi 2016:427–428]). They returned to Blumenbach’s handle as the sole exemplars of normal, individual people, racially unmarked (in their own imaginary), American, universal, objective, unhyphenated “Caucasians” (see Frankenberg 1994; Mukhopadhyay 2008) irrelevant to structural racism. Thus, a new White supremacy rose against the presumed ethnically and racially marked, subjective, hyphenated (African-American, Native-American, Mexican-American, etc.), abnormal other, of questionable rational endowments (Herrnstein and Murray 1994) and national entitlement. Most Whites (including the Republican Party) insisted, metaphorically, on continuing an identity as entitled *occupiers*—distinguishable from, rather than part of, national “diversity”—protecting *their* structurally ill-gotten “ranches” with propagandistic ideology, police force, and military at “the wall.” American archaeology was created in this White society. The following anthropology of anthropology shows how archaeology joins the unmarked White voice to muffle critical Black voices and impose pseudopublic engagement to preserve an ethical guise over adamant White authority to marginalize the other and elevate themselves.

### Social Origins of African American Archaeology and Africana Studies in the United States

Apart from Herbert Aptheker on the left (1937) and an apologetic Southern historiography to damn the Reconstruction and defend Jim Crow on the right (see discussion by Foner [2014]), Whites rarely read or wrote African American history before World War II. African Americans accelerated the production of their own historiography during World War I (Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, e.g.). In the wake of the Second World War rise of antifascism, the US civil rights movement, and international colonial independence movements, broader literatures on peoples of color, White supremacy, and colonialism emerged (Marable 2000). A market for that literature would grow, and African American studies departments accompanied the desegregation of formerly all-White institutions of higher learning, beginning in the late 1960s. Ar-

chaeologist Leland Ferguson attributes the rise of African American archaeology to this societal moment (Ferguson 2012).

The 1966 National Historic Preservation Act fostered by an environmentalist movement will mitigate the destruction of cultural resources (archaeological sites) requiring contractual work for federally funded development projects. African American archaeology will partly result from the random identification of sites in the path of highways and building construction that would become the bread and butter of American archaeologists. Let it be clear that American archaeologists were almost exclusively White people who studied native “prehistory” and a growing number of historic sites (Blakey 1983, 1990; Schuyler 1971).

As these researchers began to study African American sites, they rarely attended African American studies programs at their universities. The situation reminds me of Zora Neale Hurston’s quip about Boas’s expectations of her anthropological training, saying she was unclear how “Pawnee” would assist her in the study of Blacks in Alabama (Mikell 1999). These departments and Black colleges where one could achieve a sophisticated understanding of the history and culture of the African diaspora were the segregated domain and desegregated intellectual and affective choices of Black students. The New Archaeology in which Whites were trained in the United States between the 1960s and 1970s, like a continuing objectifying physical anthropology, was deeply naturalistic in its theoretical orientation (Blakey 2001). Yet, as historical archaeology of the European colonial and industrial periods grew, humanistic training became more appropriate for North American archaeologists. But rarely would African American historians and anthropologists be read by those involved in the archaeological construction of the African American past. Many archaeologists simply borrowed the Boasian emphasis on acculturation (see Singleton and Bograd [1995] for review), superficially constructing Blacks as exotic primitives or Westernized recipients, deaf to their historical articulations. As late as 1989, Black scholars Theresa Singleton and Ronald Bailey held “Digging the Afro-American Past,” a conference in Oxford, Mississippi, to introduce archaeologists and African American studies to one another. Archaeological interests have begun to broaden at long last (Battle-Baptist 2011; OgunDIRAN and Falola 2007; Singleton 2009).

Other theorists, often neo-Marxian but not the Black Marxists (who emphasized racism), were employed. Here, again, it is the authoritative White voice and vantage these White archaeologists sought for their historically thin analysis of the African American and slavery’s past. Archaeological “critical theory” (Leone, Potter, and Shackel 1987) is too much of a parlor game, I think, similar to Harrison’s critique of post-modernism as an elite White man’s toy (Harrison 1991). As Marxesque theory, it claimed science could be apolitical and neutral as the opposite of ideology, narrowly defined as religion. Unlike Marxism itself in this way, it might fall under Hurston’s term “bourgeoisification” for transforming the authentic into something more politically palatable (Mikell 1999).

Highly theoretical and devoid of the historiography of African Americans they intended to study, it may have been intellectually engaging among themselves but was of little note among disinterested Black intellectuals and the Black public. This was comfortable neoliberalism. Public archaeology stood aloft public participation in historical construction other than as occasional informants and supporters (e.g., McKee and Thomas's "conversations," resembling marketing in intent [1998]).

Initially, Douglass, Firmin, Du Bois, Woodson, Leo Hansberry, Hurston, and Cobb and later African and diasporic intellectuals (Diop, Fanon, Césaire, Eric Williams, Willis, Drake, and Johnnetta Cole, as examples) constructed a critical epistemology of racism, accumulation, and power (often incorporating Marxist and womanist critiques) that challenged historical and anthropological "objectivity" (as neutrality). Their activist scholarship "vindicated" the race (Drake 1980) with an accurate social history beyond that derived from Whites, who they knew preferred to talk and listen to themselves. After all, Blacks knew Whites' worldview, having always served in their most public and intimate parlors (Gwaltney 1980:1–27, e.g.). African diasporic intellectuals recognized human responsibility (not nature's) both for historical interpretations and the material organization of society, while adhering to the authority of evidence and experience. They innovated activist scholarship as they invented the nurture argument against the earliest anthropological biodeterminism (Douglass 1950 [1854]).

Whites, on the other hand, had little knowledge of their own deep subjectivity (of the existence of other truths across Du Boisian veils) because they rarely read and listened to others. The "other's" voice was either silenced (as Frederick Douglass described the sanctioning of the enslaver's criticism in his 1845 autobiography [2001 (1845)]) or delegitimized as lacking the authority of the objective and universal truth that Whites exclusively arrogated to themselves (see Blight [2018] on abolitionists) against the inconvenient and uncomfortable vantages ("biased" voices) of others.

Antenor Firmin's advanced 526-page tome *The Equality of the Human Races* (666 pages in the original 1885 *De l'égalité des Races Humaines* [2000 (1885)]) was simply ignored by the Gobinist Anthropological Society of Paris who could not have understood him to be a human being (Fluehr-Lobban 2000). Cobb (1981) recognized Black science contributors had been considered "nonpersons." Despite high honors and 1,100 publications on both sides of "the veil," he, uncited by Whites for his core work on the biological effects of Jim Crow racial segregation, joined them (Rankin-Hill and Blakey 1994). Instead, polygenic and eugenical fantasies were embraced by most Whites, and not by Blacks.

Anthropology departments spread rapidly at twentieth-century White universities. The postwar years offered Boasian primitivism as the fix for the previous exclusion of people of color entirely from curricula. In 1969 a Black graduate of Columbia and perhaps the best-informed anthropologist on Franz Boas (Sanday 1999), William Willis, explained and objected

to this problem. The Boasian cultural environmental antithesis that coexisted with Jim Crow was itself a form of cultural reductionism that defined anthropology as the study of the primitive experiments of people of color, not the urban industrial and anticolonial struggle in which most were increasingly engaged (Willis 1969). It is the selective exclusion of Whites and non-White modernity, despite the epistemic value cultural reductionism might have had in bringing into print an objectified but heretofore unexamined humanity, that made the Boasian project racist (see Anderson's [2019], King's [2019], and Thomas's [2019] critiques of Boasian liberal racism). They failed to turn a critical lens on the oppressive cultural institutions of Whiteness. Nor did Boasians incorporate or credit non-White anthropologists' viewpoints and interests in their canonical conversations.<sup>1</sup> More in disinterest than defense, Black colleges (HBCUs) have chosen to hire the occasional anthropologist without self-governing anthropology departments within their walls.

## Senility

The world of White Americans post-1970s, pivoting on the Bakke anti-affirmative action case (Takagi 1994), is the peculiar crucible of a continuing deafness and numbness. The finding that races do not exist in nature (Livingstone 1962) was twisted to the idea that anti-racism was simply the denial of races rather than opposing discrimination. Rather than turning the attention of social policy or anthropology toward the problem and correctives of racial inequity (as Mullings [2005] recommended), White Americans imaginatively maintained their sense of merited entitlement by increasingly denying racism existed at all (Blakey 1994). Racism, then conveniently defined as uncivil or uncomfortable language (including reference to racism itself) was nominally swept under the rug (DiAngelo's "White fragility" [2011, 2018]). The false notion that American opportunity existed on a "level playing field"

1. Collaborative Black and White non-Boasian social anthropologists joined sociologists at the University of Chicago (see Harrison and Nonini 1992) to critique institutional racism in Myrdal's *American Dilemma* (1944), while Herskovits, Boas's student, contributed African survivals (1941). Gene Weltfish (1902–1980), who was an exceptional Boasian critic of racism and class (Benedict and Weltfish 1946), was denied tenure by Boasians at Columbia as a progressive and a woman. Boasians used the few African American students they accepted for access to data to be incorporated into their White conversation about the other (Drake 1980; Willis 1969), and Zora Neale Hurston like other Black Columbia graduates (Vera Greene, William Willis, and John Gwaltney) accommodated only strategically as they turned their lenses on Black America, inclusive of effects of White racism (Harrison and Harrison 1999; Harrison, Johnson-Somon, and Williams 2018). With few exceptions, such as the White authors of *Decolonizing Anthropology* (Harrison 1991), Kevin Yelvington (2006), Schmidt and Patterson (1996), and Robert Paynter (1990), Blacks' works continue to be tokenized or ignored in the intellectually gated White community of American anthropologists (Beliso-de Jesús and Pierre 2019).

would mislead to notions of a “post-racial” America in the wake of a unique Black presidency in the twenty-first century, immediately contradicted by continuing White backlash. Throughout this period Blackness was stigmatized, indeed vilified, by a criminal justice system that incarcerated and disfranchised millions of African Americans while making them a source of racial animus and profit (Haney-Lopez 2010). White backlash against an equalizing affirmative action (with aspersions specific to Blacks but shedding from White women) hid racism openly beneath the notion that it violated individual merit and benefited the undeserving. Yet, the sustained momentum of Whites’ material advantages already built on the backs of Blacks who created national wealth with no wages, or low wages, and inheritance accruing instead to Whites’ family economies (see Hall 2020) and exclusive access to property and power (Sacks [1994] shows this by comparisons to the effect of re-Whitening Jews) makes the idea of White individual merit relative to non-Whites fraudulent. Affirmative action becomes “reverse racism” in the fictitious absence of White supremacy that, in fact, continues to greatly bias job opportunity (Pager, Webster, and Bonikowski 2009; Turner, Fix, and Struyk 1991). At the turn of the twenty-first century a Race Initiative led by the first Black American Anthropological Association president, Yolanda Moses, created traveling exhibitions (*Race: Are We So Different?*) and a website (<https://www.understandingrace.org>) to place an anthropological discussion of “race” (though truly of racism) back on the table.

Yet White bias in anthropology’s canon, hiring, and teaching remains extensive in the United States (see Commission on Race and Racism in Anthropology 2010; Deborah Thomas 2018). When subaltern anthropologists speak, many White anthropologists apparently cover their ears. A recent publication advocating that anthropologists turn their ears in service to the public (Borofsky 2019) fails to cite any African diasporic anthropologists (rarely anyone of color) who long heralded that goal (see Jones 1970; Allen and Jobson 2016; Harrison and Harrison 1999; Harrison, Johnson-Somon, and Williams 2018), omitting even the flagship article of the second Black president of the American Anthropological Association who argued for such public engagement citing that legacy (Mullings 2015; see also Beliso-de Jesús and Pierre [2019] on such deafness as the “mundane” White supremacy of anthropology). A 2019 Society for American Archaeology presidential plenary on ethics lamented archaeologists’ superficial public engagements while completely ignoring the successful alternative model used by Blacks at New York’s African Burial Ground. Are our ideas only for Blacks to consider and perform?

New York City’s African Burial Ground Project (1992–2009) and its aftermath showed that some White archaeologists and bioarchaeologists continued to believe in the dehistoricized natural objectification of Africans in America, past and present, as they pursued appropriation of archaeological resources. Their expressed entitlement continues at other sites, even as they espouse “public archaeology” or “civic engagement” in an ostensibly ethical or democratic vein. These White archaeologists demonstrate race-evasive complicity with White privi-

lege, equivocating still, avoiding acknowledgment and redress of White racism, blinded to their own deep subjectivity and deaf to critiques of those who are not of their own White likeness and presumed neutral voice.

### African American and Native Origins of Archaeological Public Engagement

African diasporic archaeologists and biological anthropologists broke the Enlightenment mold at the African Burial Ground to innovate publicly engaged archaeology in the activist and interdisciplinary vein begun by Equiano (1794) and explicitly framed by Douglass (1950 [1854]) to confront slavery’s justifications with fact. At the end of the 1960s, Black anthropologist Delmos Jones advocates “native anthropology” in this tradition of activist scholarship (1970). Our approach was also influenced by ethical discussions of indigenous leaders at the First World Archaeological Congress in 1986 (Blakey 1986, 1987b; Ucko 1987) and its 1989 Inter-Congress (organized by Larry Zimmerman) that produced the Vermillion Accord, and also discussions with cultural anthropologists proposing “publicly engaged anthropology” in the field (Blakey et al. 1994).

Lesley Rankin-Hill and I, working at the Smithsonian in 1984–1986, joined John Milner Associates in the museum’s first mass reburial (Rankin-Hill 2016). African American remains from Philadelphia’s nineteenth-century First African Baptist Church cemetery (Rankin-Hill 1997) were taken to Eden Cemetery when our research was completed, while some Smithsonian anthropologists resisted native reburial and viewed ours as a dangerous precedent. Moved by World Archaeological Congress conversations, I tried an approach to making paleopathology useful under the assumption that “descendant communities” had the right to determine the disposition of their dead (Blakey [1989] before the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act [NAGPRA]) by offering to follow their questions. The Pawnee for whom I worked under the Native American Rights Fund simply wished biological data to confirm or deny the accuracy of assessments of antagonistic Smithsonian anthropologists associated with named individuals. At that time only skeletons identifiable by name could be legally claimed for the purposes of reburial. I did so with requested ritual. The crucible of New York allowed the idea of bioarchaeology in service to culturally affiliated groups or “descendant communities” (an empowering term I found to be consistent with language in the National Historic Preservation Act, first entering our research design and popular usage in New York) to be refined and implemented for the first time in 1992–1994 (La Roche and Blakey 1997). The site’s press coverage from discovery in 1991 until the opening of the visitor center in 2009 remains unparalleled in American archaeology, and its presence in anthropological literature has been robust.<sup>2</sup> Thus its subsequent

2. This includes multiple textbooks in multiple languages (e.g., Haviland et al. 2005; Johnson 1999; Thomas 2005), our discussions of engagement in scholarly books and journals (e.g., Blakey 1998a, 2001, 2008, 2010, 2014; Blakey and Rankin-Hill 2016; La Roche and Blakey

appropriation, distortion, and dismissal become evident as responses of White colleagues to that which they see and not as an accidental oversight.

New York City's African Burial Ground was faced with a challenge immediately following NAGPRA that left African American sacred sites vulnerable to objectifying bioarchaeologists looking for remains of non-Whites upon which to work. African Americans—knowing that place as their monument—were determined to dignify it as they did themselves, and they transformed the site from a national secret to a national monument. Whites who could empathize joined them. Others “sympathized” and/or obstructed.

### The African Burial Ground and the Struggle for Human Rights

The foundational language of memorial begins the story of *Homo sapiens*, as archaics marked a protracted symbolic presence. Burials adorned with items of care for ancestors is the first archaeologically observed symbolic behavior, as specific as food sharing, technology, and language. Burials are also material evidence of the origin of cosmology, perhaps of all religion and perhaps of none in particular. Is this the wisdom for which Linnaeus meant the term *sapiens*, or might *Homo reminiscens* (the memorializer) be more specific to our ultimate evolved distinction? As with anything of such great value as to communicate “human dignity” among all people and shared by no other species, mortuary behavior also serves to communicate deeply cutting insult, as Homer's legend *The Iliad* would have it. No such far-flung examples are necessary to describe the human feelings and societal commitment to memorializing “loved ones” and “heroes” on the great landscape of material signifiers in the language of memorial, long-standing and desecrated at great risk.

Africans of the diaspora would not be denied their humanity, despite every desecrating attempt to do so, which was in the very definition of chattel slavery and their resistance to it. At New York's eighteenth-century African Burial Ground the careful burial of the dead is obvious evidence of Africans' continued belief in their own humanity against European objections. They usually interred in shrouds and coffins (as were being used among the Asante and others) in common and unique burial positions (nullification), with artifacts as offerings of reciprocity despite their utter impoverishment. The memorial evidence of their successful autonomous agency is abundant (Medford 2009; Perry, Howson, and Bianco 2009).

On the other hand, kiln wasters and other furniture of the Croleus and Remy potteries were found strewn among the graves, showing that the new social class of “Whites” imag-

ined they could deny African humanity. An African and poor White Doctors Riot of 1788 was preceded by a letter from free Blacks threatening “doctors of physic” should they continue to loot graves for anatomical cadavers at night (Medford 2009).

Dutch New Yorkers would build houses on the African Burial Ground in the 1790s. When uncovered by archaeologists serving human curiosity (*H. sapiens*) ahead of the federal government's construction of a 34-story office building on the site in 1991, the immediate and powerful outcry of *H. reminiscens* halted desecration. But by that time, a team of White archaeologists (Historic Conservation and Interpretation) and forensic anthropologists (Metropolitan Forensic Anthropology Team, Lehman College, CUNY), unqualified for the excavation and analysis of the African Burial Ground, had removed nearly all potential surface artifacts by backhoe. Their objectifying focus on race assessments and their devaluing prioritization of the European story they could tell from the pottery trash revealed ignorance of the humanity and culture of those whose burials were the cemetery's primary purpose. Where was empathy with descendants? Faye Harrison (2008) has posited that one has an epistemological advantage if one “loves” the studied people, often distinguishing African diasporic and “ex-centric” anthropologies from a White mainstream. Black activists insisted on an empathetic and competent project, if any. Our new Black-led project's laboratories passed Congressional sole source criteria as superior, as did all our PhD directors' résumés. The former White principal investigator had a high school diploma.

Our project took the position of discarding the biological concept of race. Biological evidence was drafted to identify peoples and places in order to characterize their histories and cultures. Old genetics methodologies of dental and cranial morphometrics and new methodologies of mitochondrial DNA and dental chemistry (identifying regional birthplaces by the chemical signatures of the geologic environments in which people were nurtured), together with artifactual data, pointed to peoples and places whose fragmentary American chronicle was usually reported as one would property. Genetics clearly trumped nothing, as we often found it misleading when held against the most credible humanistic data (Mack and Blakey 2004). But together these different lines of evidence allowed a biocultural conversation about the complex human histories of captured people buried in colonial New York City, by which we addressed the question of origins, transformation, physical quality of life, and resistance with which we were charged by our ethical client, the African American descendant community (Blakey and Rankin-Hill 2009 [2004]; Medford 2009; Perry, Howson, and Bianco 2009).

As an example, the *linea aspera*, a long muscle attachment in the back of the thigh bone (femur), like all muscle attachments grows in living bone to accommodate its work stresses. My racializing colleagues might simply compare average sizes of such biological indicators in men and women to show reduced sexual dimorphism in Blacks as a confirming characteristic of race. Our difference was to examine change in the frequency of hypertrophy (enlargement) and enthesopathy (enlargement

1997; Mack and Blakey 2004; Perry and Blakey 1997), and our hard copy and online volumes (Blakey and Rankin-Hill 2009; Medford 2009; and Perry, Howson, and Bianco 2009). Our exceptional visibility nonetheless requires what legal scholar Derrick Bell (1992:140, 145) terms “special pleading” by Black witnesses (or under-cited Black scholars). I argue our metatheoretical contribution to archaeology, being obvious, is discredited by racism.

with ossification of connective tissue) demonstrative of strain on the linea aspera (a group of muscle attachments on the posterior femur). Changing frequencies over successive temporal phases (from the late seventeenth century, or “early,” to end of the eighteenth century, or “late”) show excessive work, more in men than women, yet women’s labor appears to have closed on that of men over the course of the eighteenth century (fig. 1). We incorporated this finding (Blakey, Lasisi, and Bittner 2019) in a story of African resistance when many more men than women populated the colony, followed by a shift to the disproportionate importation of women and children in the European attempt at social control within a changing, more domestic but not less arduous, arrangement of labor in the Northeast, increasingly placed on the backs and thighs of women (Blakey 2014; Blakey and Rankin-Hill 2016; Blakey et al. 2009 [2004]; Wilczak et al. 2009; also see Barrett and Blakey [2011] on stress throughout their life cycles). Biocul-

tural anthropology recognizes the body as plastic (Goodman and Leatherman 1998), influenced by its “circumstances” (as Douglass [1950 (1854)] said, “a man is worked upon by what he works upon”) and part of the history we, ourselves make (according to Antenor Firmin [2000 (1885)]).

European American archaeologist Terrence Epperson understood the difference we insisted on by disregarding natural and objectified race (Epperson 1999a). He also understood (Epperson 2004) that we were surrounded by White archaeologists and city and national preservation bureaucracies that sought to contain us at every turn. We had long departed from a political arena in which MFAT thought it would have the contract for analysis of the site, long from its attempt to have me and my expert team work under them, now long from their inclusion at all. We prevailed over city (debates among the Professional Archaeologists of New York City, the City University of New York, and the New York Landmarks

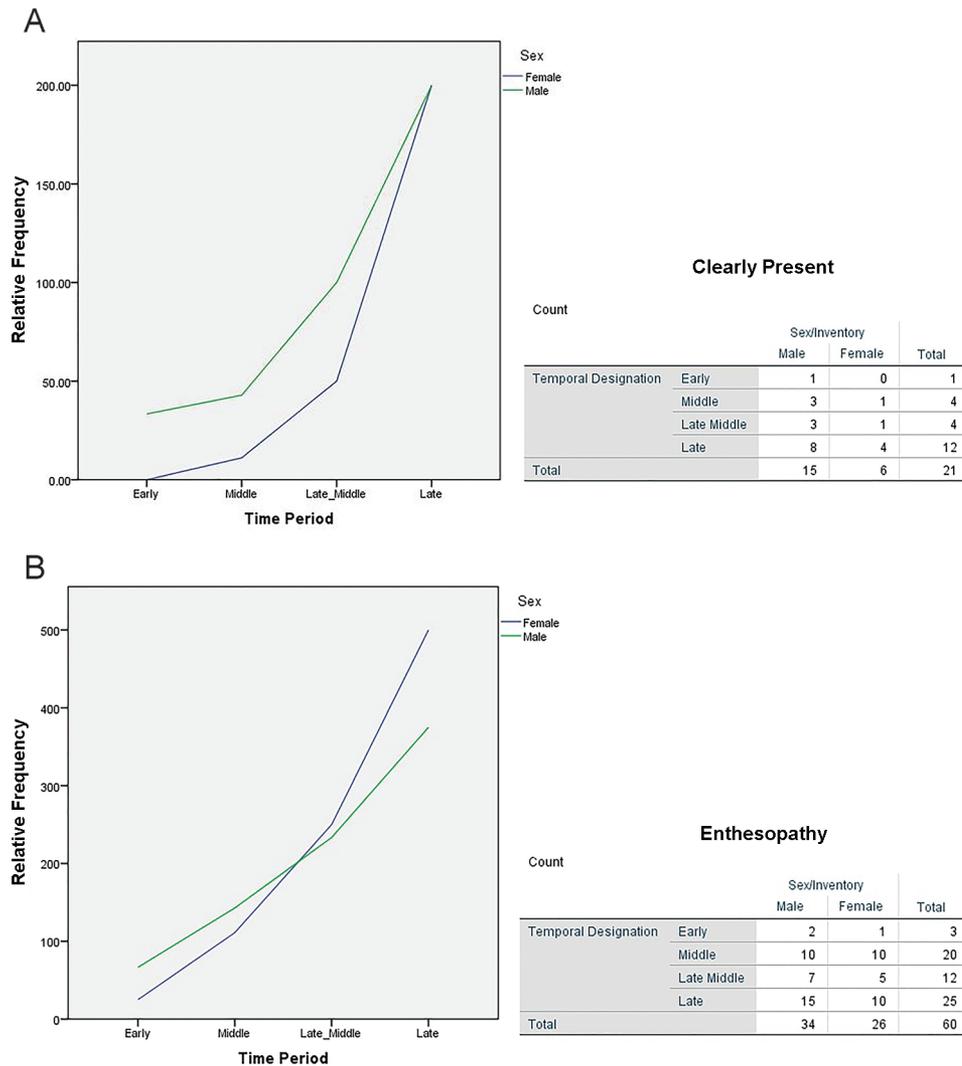


Figure 1. Line graphs showing late seventeenth- to late eighteenth-century change in frequency of individuals with “clearly present” enthesopathic (A) and hypertrophic (B) linea aspera relative to (as a percentage of) those with nonhypertrophic, observable, femora among men and women 15 years of age and older in New York’s African Burial Ground (from Blakey, Lasisi, and Bittner [2019], replacing previous data in Blakey [2014] and Blakey and Rankin-Hill [2016]).

Preservation Commission) and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation archaeologists who grabbed for the project claiming, in response to the 1993 draft research design, it to be “American history” *rather than* African American history (in which New York’s anthropologists had invested little since Robert Schuyler’s departure). They thus claimed “community” rights, or that we should have referred to the project’s significance as “multiculturalism” rather than as a problem for African diasporic activist scholarship to correct (in which vein it proceeded), as though somehow that represented reverse racism. The Black community saw this clearly as an assertion of White entitlement over their stewardship, rejecting it. The project ignored the suggestion of “reverse racism” that presumed there were no academic and bureaucratic White racism that our scholarship deliberately opposed to correct continuing Eurocentric distortions of the past. No reverse discriminatory effect was shown (see Cook [1993]; Harrington [1993]; Katz [2006] on public debate).

For the first few years our technical work proceeded efficiently as a large (nearly \$6 million) multidisciplinary project. As complex as were the technical requirements alone—full recordation of 419 human remains, first to be conducted under the new standards (Buikstra and Ubelaker 1994), and interdisciplinary work at eight labs and institutions—portions of the work already under contract were under control. The rest was not. We would have to completely remove the Harpers Ferry National Park Service (NPS) from its management of the first interpretive (visiting) center competition. Input (a list of goals for interpretation) from an expert panel of African American scholars and the formal descendant community goals reported by the Federal Advisory (Steering) Committee were discussed at meetings with NPS’s White representatives for more than a year. But both components were completely ignored and omitted from the boilerplate requests for qualifications (RFQ) that the NPS advertised to solicit proposals from bidders for the interpretive center design and build project. They would have had no guidance as to what Blacks (or scholarly experts) wanted the center to interpret. And that was the second time the NPS had ignored us as though we (the PhD experts as Blacks) had no credibility. The expert panel made the General Services Administration (GSA) withdraw the RFQ and sent the NPS home, to be replaced by a Black architect, Peggy King Jorde, who was highly effective in bringing in bids for the visitor center and monument until overwhelmed by GSA’s rude halt to all our efforts (except for our Office of Public Education and Interpretation) in 1999. We battled the GSA in public as they worked to end our funding before the completion of the project’s publicly approved plan (Howard University and John Milner Associates 1993). Only when work resumed after a four-year standoff between GSA and community and scientific activism would the NPS be able to return with a more collegial and professional staff to restart bidding and to administer the US National Monument and Visitor Center.

Denied our final report, the GSA could not comply with their legal requirements. Found without justification, the GSA

was joined after the four-year “rope-a-dope” hiatus (when we continued working and exposing the GSA in public) by the other agencies who brought them back to the table to provide us with much of the funding and data access that had been agreed to in the first instance. We did not receive funding for further DNA studies that had been promised when found “feasible” by an amino acid study, however.

The Army Corps of Engineers Center of Expertise for Archaeological Curation and Collections Management was recruited by the GSA to inventory our collections and restart management of the site when GSA’s token Black placeholders hired in the hiatus failed to bring sufficient public confusion about the source of conflict to end the project. The Army Corps’ management was contemporaneous with spates of rumor in the archaeological community about our mismanagement of samples, even their destruction. We were vulnerable, I believe, to stereotypical racist doubt. At one meeting we shared our belief that the Army Corps’ explicit desire to bar us even from access to these samples was meant “to distribute them among their friends” with all the professional reciprocity entailed in the control of samples they could no longer obtain without community permission, and Native people were not giving it. They only showed a discrepancy of three skeletal fragments in our more than 1,000 samples at varied labs (more than the “adequate” tracking they reported when pressed). We were able to secure access to all our samples for continued study (Jones 2015; Wedel 2006) and curated them at the Cobb Laboratory at Howard designated for stewardship by the community. Funds for an authorless volume summarizing our reported data were, however, expropriated to Statistical Research, Inc. (2009) of Tucson, Arizona, without the principal investigator’s permission or the involvement of project researchers. Importantly, we would negotiate adequate funds for final analysis and preparation of our 2,500-page academic volumes as final reports—not everything, but the professional preparation of the most sophisticated bioarchaeological reports ever produced would have to be enough.

We completed our extensive reports in 2004 (Blakey, Rankin-Hill, and Medford) and 2006 (Perry, Howson, and Bianco), followed by the same authors’ academic volumes in 2009 (available online at the African Burial Ground National Monument website). These described by critical interdisciplinary interpretation the African past in early New York and Atlantic world context rather than being a study of race estimation and pottery trash. An enormous two-day reburial ceremony was conducted in 2003, and the site became a US national monument in 2007 (not the plaque on the wall GSA had first insisted on) with a now popular visitor center,<sup>3</sup> all of

3. A historian’s publication timed for the opening of the visitor center (and presented by the *New York Times*, Sewell Chan, January 26, 2010) suggested our subjectivity, insisting that “creolization” defied authentic African roots of African American identity and that our heart-shaped artifact could not have been the Akan symbol *sankofa* because no colonial collection had included it until the twentieth century. We (with

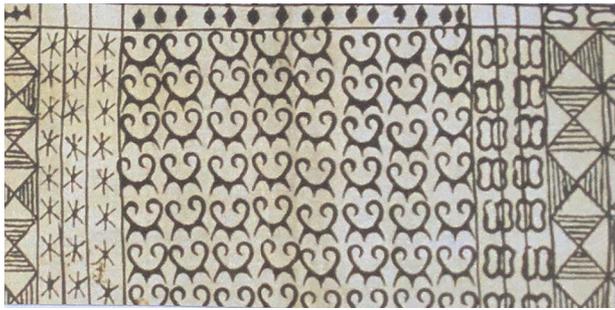


Figure 2. Geometricized *sankofa* (retrieve the past to inform the present and future) stamped on panel of Adinkra cloth, before 1825, Ashanti region. Rijksmuseum Volkenkunde (National Museum of Ethnology) collection (object number RV-360-1700), Leiden (verified by Dr. Kweku Ofori-Ansa).

which include data from our research (figs. 2, 3). African Americans were for the first time interested in their own national archaeology, although tours of ancient Egypt had long been favored by African Americans departing from Washington and New York City.

In this abbreviated story one will find evidence of White objectification of the African American past and living present, instrumental stereotyping, deafness and entitlement, and adamant control and containment constituting avarice and blindness to the evidence of Black humanity and competence.

The African Burial Ground Project also shows the existence of anti-racist Whites who joined in our research and gave other kinds of support. These were White people capable of following those who do not look like themselves, which is uniquely exceptional for Whites. It is customary, on the other hand, for Blacks to be inclusive, as demonstrated by their racially integrated civil rights movement or housing patterns (Jaynes and Williams 1989:55–113, 140–148; Smelser, Wilson, and Mitchell 2001). Despite the false twisting of late-twentieth-century anti-racist racism to rumor the project as “reverse racism,” the African Burial Ground Project of approximately 200 PhDs, MAs, students, and technicians remains the most ethnically and racially diverse anthropological project of any kind in the United States. In addition to its Black leadership, there was White participation at every level, along with Latinos, Native Americans, Asian Americans, and continental and diasporic Africans throughout our laboratories—and the ratio of women to men was almost exactly 1 : 1 as associate and laboratory directors, recruited by me.<sup>4</sup>

Jessica Bittner) found he completely omitted its multiple stamping on a pre-1825 cloth (Seeman 2010:113). Still, the absence of European evidence would not have constituted evidence of absence (see fig. 3).

4. Today, an aspersive self-published book, *Sankofa?*, is proffered to mischaracterize me and the project. The book’s author, David Zimmerman (2013), asserts that I operated as a messianic leader, do not understand science, and am not a skeletal biologist at all despite my impeccable credentials (consider Blakey and Armelagos [1985], Blakey et al. [1994], and my pedigree in Blakey [1998b]). The book claims our re-

W. E. B. Du Bois said African American “honesty, knowledge and efficiency” were more feared by the White South than their opposites, as they ended the first Reconstruction (Du Bois 1915:218). In a racially integrated society, everyone will appear in every status, including Black intellectuals’ leadership.

### An Ethical Epistemic

The African Burial Ground Project lent science to the restoration of the memory of those who were memorialized. In my view as director of that project, the most important product of that campaign, now nearly three decades old, is the expanding international commitment to the right of descendant communities to determine the disposition of the dead and their participation as clients (though more often as less empowered stakeholders and partners) in the formulation of research questions and interpretations of many kinds of historic sites. The watershed of public engagement and the plural democratization of science was successfully demonstrated in New York City. By operating consistently with principles of informed consent, the African Burial Ground Project, 1992–2009, was the first ethical bioarchaeological project in which scientific methods and human rights were made complementary. We followed, however, the similarly descendant-driven human rights forensics of Clyde Snow, who began community-engaged identification of the “disappeared” in Argentina by establishing the Equipo Argentino de Antropología Forense in 1984 in a similar spirit of service to a particular people’s interests.

Our original definition of descendant community bears stating. Like a culturally affiliated group used for NAGPRA, it is a descendant community whose social history preserves it with continuing common relationships with the broader society and shared meanings among its members. This is consistent with the definition of an ethnic group. Some, though not all, members of a descendant community are plausibly consanguineal relatives of the ancestral population. American slavery deliberately tore connections of genetic relations, and this should not be the high bar of plausible descendancy, although it also opens up broadened possibilities for undocumented consanguines. It is, nonetheless, the social group that

search, instead, depended entirely on a single White woman’s work (Blakey et al. [2009 (2004)] describes our collective analysis under my direction) and that I was sexist because I ended her employment for persistently trying to infringe on others’ laboratory work, believing only she was competent. He claimed I was fired from the project, while authorship of our volumes proves I remained its principal investigator until completion. My White students are occasionally confronted with *Sankofa?* by some White colleagues who should know better, attempting to dissuade their collaboration, through a swarming, entitled resentment of our success and disavowal of the racism we opposed. *Sankofa?* and its use is a study in racist disentanglement of Blacks, casting the blinding light of stereotype over fact, stubbornly performing common White perceptions of unmerited affirmative action (see “racist power relations routine” in Blakey [1997]).



Figure 3. 2007 opening of the African Burial Ground US National Monument, 290 Broadway, New York. Photo courtesy of Autumn Rain, IHB.

recognizes ancestry like cultural affiliation under NAGPRA. Importantly, the descendant community is defined by those asserting stewardship because they *care* about the disposition of ancestors in question, thus making them vulnerable to harm by anthropological treatment. They therefore are subject to and empowered by professional ethics (an ethical client) with rights to some version of informed consent over the disposition of their ancestral remains and arguably even over the interpretation of their histories (see American Anthropological Association professional ethics and the World Archaeological Congress’s Vermillion Accord). The approach that holds these responsible for deciding whether research may be conducted or not holds these clients’ moral authority above that of the business client who pays for research. “Clientage” requires archaeologists to listen and follow descendants’ expressed interests. The standards of professional conduct (evidential fact must be adhered to), ethical obligations to descendant communities, and contracted business agreements must be reconciled in this *clientage model* of public engagement (fig. 4).

Projects since the 1990s watershed of NAGPRA and the New York African Burial Ground represent an ongoing struggle for such ethical practice against the objectifying tendencies of a dominant, but increasingly contested, naive positivism. We prevailed in New York over the embodiment of White privilege and capitalism by anthropologists, bureaucracies, and developers claiming the authority of unobservable neutrality. So this pursuit of an ethical anthropology facilitates the plural democratization of knowledge (Blakey et al. [1994] white pa-

per) enabling particular ethically justified descendant communities’ struggles for human rights to memorial and memory against a hegemonic majority (see also Guinier [1994] against majority-takes-all democracy).

Unapologetically Black women’s archaeology has come along this route, advocating descendant community clientage (Franklin 1997), theorizing womanist knowledge, and centering family “home places” archaeologically (Battle-Baptist 2011), and advancing Du Boisian and emic perspectives (Turner 2017), while acknowledging our project.

Humans are specific, individual, gendered, and grouped. Denial of culturally constructed group identity is simply to

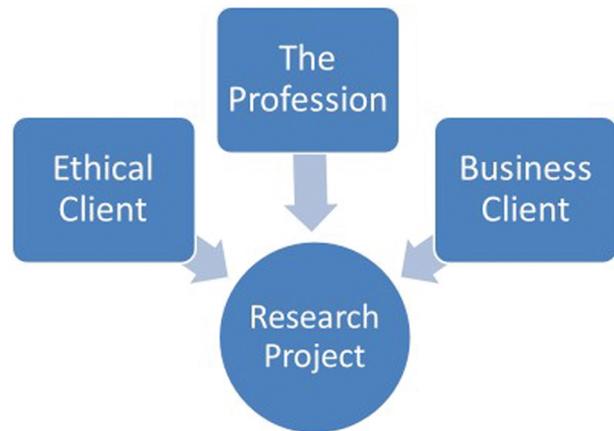


Figure 4. African Burial Ground clientage model of public engagement.

deny historical group vantages, rights, and responsibilities by reducing them to the presumably cultureless thoughts of individuals. Thus, broadening public sharing of science procedures by acknowledging situated group and individual perspectives seeks transparency and fairness in the application of science. Frederick Douglass made a similar critique of the earliest anthropologists whose “neutral” craniometry supported slavery, imploring scholars instead to make the other moral choice—to stand “for us” because “the neutral scholar is an ignoble man” (Douglass 1950 [1854]).<sup>5</sup>

Progressively, James Madison’s Montpelier estate humanizes its now more honest exhibition of slavery (*A Mere Matter of Colour*) with descendant participation. Montpelier and the National Trust for Historic Preservation created a summit in 2018 that published high standards for public engagement with empowered descendants. After more than a decade of struggle, Richmond, Virginia’s, African Burial Ground has been largely restored from the former parking lot atop it; the human remains that had filled Richmond’s East Marshall Street Well as a nineteenth-century hiding place for Black bodies robed for dissection at the Medical College of Virginia has come under descendant community control (as a surrogate for family) and memorialization—they were returned from the Smithsonian’s anthropology department in 2019. A Black

5. While I believe academic freedom is important, it is often used in precisely this way. For example, academic freedom became a rallying cry of American archaeologists (formally by the Society for American Archaeology) opposed to the 1986 first World Archaeological Congress’s imposition of the African National Congress ban, excluding South African and Namibian scholars. In so doing, many American archaeologists chose also to walk away from serious repatriation dialogue with indigenous peoples while the congress attracted remarkable Third World support (Ucko 1987). Professional ethics concern humane *responsibilities*, not our *freedoms*, and the use of academic freedom as a scholar’s ethical choice corrupts the meaning of ethics. Similarly, claims of neutrality abdicate responsibility for personal decisions and interpretations, just as Douglass said. But does not neutrality define science? Science is materially defined as knowledge that relies on systematically collected, observed, recorded, and analyzed evidence (I call this objectivity no. 1). But neutrality (objectivity no. 2), which is often confounded with objectivity no. 1 (Lewis et al.’s [2011] mistake) is actually an *unobservable* science ideal. We cannot materially ascertain a permanent truth throughout all time and space (however large these may be). Objectivity no. 2—neutrality—is a belief rather than an empirical fact. Regular material observations of science itself demonstrate that science abounds with subjective biases and results based on false assumptions that are not self-correcting (Bernal 1987; Blakey 1987a; Gould 1996 [1981]; Keel 2018; Khun 1970 [1962]; and others). Subjectivity is most apparent in *interpretations* of material evidence (intraspecific head size reflects intelligence) without which proximate descriptive evidence (centimeters of cranial width) is meaningless. This paradox of objectivities no. 1 and no. 2 requires practitioners to take responsibility for our subjectivities rather than defaulting to denial. Public engagement is one means of taking open, ethical responsibility for the subjective choices of research questions we pursue while maintaining skeptical adherence to the plausible stories the material evidence (objectivity no. 1) tell regarding our and others’ research questions.

church in Bethesda, Maryland, has made tortuously slow headway against county bureaucracy, developers, and their evasive contract archaeologists to save Moses Cemetery from a second desecration—they have led sizable multiethnic rallies regularly over the past three years. In addition to these others, my Institute for Historical Biology has begun work with the National Park Service on the interpretation of Angela, one of the first African Americans in Jamestown (United States) in 1619, as an engagement of the African American public for whom this is an origin story.

The National Museum of African American History and Culture and the Université Cheikh Anta Diop in Dakar, Senegal, have adopted our model of public engagement for its Slave Wrecks Project; Archaeology of the Valongo Slave Wharf in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, is led by advocates of similar engagement (Lima 2020), while the proper appointment of human remains of the nearby Cemeterio dos Pretos Novos is contested between culture center advocates for community control at the site and anthropologists who have possession of the remains (Barrett 2014).

Alternatively, University of Bristol’s excavation and analysis of 325 remains at St. Helena showed facile disregard for the involvement of descendants of Liberated Africans (Callaway 2016)<sup>6</sup> and distributed skeletal samples for genetics and chemical sourcing studies whose methodologies were innovated by us (see below). In the wake of African American and indigenous people’s calls for ethical practice, many White archaeologists and site interpreters continue to insist on exploitative authority while adjusting only their moral tone. A variety of false engagements, a feigning tokenism, persists in calling itself either public or civic engagement but is no more than the old public archaeology that uses descendants for information about questions only the archaeologist him- or herself poses, and for marketing that archaeology to the public.

American bioarchaeology has steadily dwindled as its nearly exclusively European American participants face the requirement of asking permission of other culturally affiliated or descendant communities in order to conduct research. Yet, quietly, non-NAGPRA-protected archaeological remains like those of African Americans and state-recognized Indians are being mined between the cracks of the law in places like Maryland and Virginia (where new federal recognition and law may put an end to it) for collections at the National Museum of Natural History.

In fact, there at the Smithsonian lies the most prominent example of scientific obstruction to those human rights, contemporary with the African Burial Ground Project. The racialization of Kennewick Man/The Ancient One has somehow convinced members of the public that an ancient, generalized north Asian-looking skull cannot be ancestral to derived Northwest Coast Native Americans (Owsley and Jantz 2014). The skeleton’s racialization as Caucasoid or Eurasian nominally

6. *A Story of Bones*, Dominic De Vere and Joseph Curran, codirectors, Peggy King Jorde, impact producer, in production (with an October 22, 2019, viewing in New York), New York: GoodPitch Productions.

cleaved its relationship from descendants in the interest of the careers of forensic-oriented bioarchaeologists who would thus circumvent NAGPRA to possess it while constructing Whites among the first Native Americans in doing so. Imposing race as a qualitative morphological distinction of identity, the continuous quantitative changes of evolutionary biology that bridge American ancestry across the Bering Straits were conveniently sidestepped. Smithsonian anthropologists stood in court to play the “race card” against modern science while titillating the White nationalist imagination. Finally, after decades of court cases that allowed repeated taking of data by biological anthropologists, Danish geneticists confirmed what the Umatilla always knew, as should we all, that The Ancient One who died in their home was their ancestor (Rasmussen et al. 2015). They now have use of NAGPRA after more than a quarter century of racist impediments. And the research questions? I do not see how The Ancient Ones’ fallacious Whitening stems from a better research question than its evolution or memorialization.

On the New York African Burial Ground Project, we found the quality of the research questions (and the quantity of support for answering them) depended on community clientage. Our questions remain important to public conversations and commercial development (quasi-scientific direct to consumer ancestry services were first inspired by descendant community research questions [Nelson 2016]). Geneticists had never asked, What were the cultural and historical origins of African Americans? before the African Burial Ground Project asked descendants. And this spurred our early application of ancient DNA to historical populations (Jackson et al. 2009 [2004]) as well as our innovation of chemical sourcing of the places of birth (siting identity in nurture) for individual skeletons (Goodman et al. 2009 [2004]; Howard University and John Milner Associates 1993; Jones 2015).

The process of engagement was itself a product, as African Americans activated cultural and political networks (see Nelson 2016) and realized forums for expressing their views about a desecrating racism around them and the history they wanted told to their grandchildren. Similarly, pan-Indian and pan-indigenous networks were forged in the years of struggle leading up to NAGPRA.

### Engagement or Equivocation?

On the fragile edge of White archaeological progress, some archaeologists trained in its critical theoretical vein (Little and Shackel 2007) advocated “civic engagement” as public engagement, now dedicated to “[Participation] in the civic renewal movement. The goals of this . . . movement include community building, the creation of social capital, and active citizen engagement in community and civic life” (Little 2007:1). The idea is to use archaeology as a forum to encourage people to embrace civic responsibility as inclusive, multicultural society. After citing social theorists, they say the “African Burial Ground project in New York City provides a dramatic case study of civic engagement” (Little 2007:12). Descendant

community pressures are described that “changed the project completely and forced the continuing, public engagement aspects of the project, from research design through reinvention through memorialization and ongoing public outreach” (Little 2007:13). Yet they omit Black scholars’ empathy, diasporic intellectual influences, and our professional innovations (descendant community, ethical clientage, linguistic derivatives like “enslaved Africans” replacing “slave” in literature, methodological innovations already discussed, and findings) also distinguishing our engagement. The project’s stated significance is misconstrued to an effort to achieve multicultural citizenship by these authors. In fact, both Black scholars’ and the descendant African American community’s rejection of that characterization of their struggle caused the “reverse racism” fuss. They were defending the Black community’s dignity and history from the federal government and White archaeologists who brought racist disrespect by presuming authority over their past despite insultingly inadequate knowledge.

Although Little’s introduction does emphasize the value of “anti-racist” discussion through civic engagement around archaeological sites, White racism is never mentioned. “Anti-Black racism” is mentioned as a common experience of its authors’ case studies, which if reconsidered as White racism would be even more common among them. The introduction defining civic engagement and its case studies is replete with the evasive language of “cultural differences,” “to move beyond a history packaged to be of interest only to related groups” that never broach the specific position of Whites in American racism. In describing the most explicit case of White supremacist laws meant to bar Latinos from White communities in Manassas, Virginia, Little resolves that “such actions are not unique occurrences, nor is the feeling of established residents . . . an isolated sentiment” (10–11). No. Whites are far more exclusive about neighborhoods than others, institutionally implemented (Jaynes and Williams 1989:55–113, 140–148; Smelser, Wilson, and Mitchell 2001).

This fits the contemporary *condensation* (James Thomas 2018) of anti-White supremacist efforts to a discourse on “diversity” inclusive of everything from regional, to political, gendered, religious, neurological, ethnic, and racial groups. Intolerance viewed as an omnidirectional phenomenon (like the unsophisticated reduction of historically constructed White supremacy to primordial xenophobia) serves to nullify the primacy of a robust institutional system of White supremacy. We have reached an era of customary evasion of accountability to substantial redress of White privilege by institutional programs (at many universities like mine) that instead erect unaccountable “diversity regimes” (see James Thomas’s [2018] ethnographic exposé). Like civic engagement, cultural and intellectual diversity is of course a very good thing, but it is not the same thing as overcoming White supremacy. Such civic engagement is to New York’s public engagement what All Lives Matter is to Black Lives Matter. The former is something we already know. The latter needed to be said. One sees at times advocacy of the former as an insistent moralizing

distraction from the point of the latter, which is that the management of White supremacy is particularly destructive to Black people and their history.

“Civic engagement” emerges from an evasive White worldview that denies their unmerited and harmful privilege over others, while reframing a benign anti-racism for moral high ground (like Zurara’s Christian charity) as cover. Archaeologists control the story inasmuch as the other’s voice is swamped by stakeholders, and decisions default to White-controlled bureaucracies. Legitimate White guilt is assuaged by denial of their singular role in institutional racism. The harmed can little afford to be blinded and resist. Activist scholarship serves resistance and uplift.

Finally, the article by Gadsby and Chidester (2007) in that volume uses a close approximation to our original approach (formal extensive meetings with community groups, mutual review and revisions of research designs, implementing that research and making it available to them in public and academic forums). But they made no mention of the African Burial Ground Project where this approach originates in their field. An entire anthology, *Collaboration in Archaeological Practice: Engaging Descendant Communities* by Chip Colwell-Chanthaphonh and T. J. Ferguson (2008), using the operative term “descendant community,” which we first coined for broad public and archaeological use (Howard University and John Milner Associates 1993; LaRoche and Blakey 1997; Blakey 1998a, 2001, and extensive media), does not reference us at all. In fact the project is not referenced by any of its 12 authors. We should assume they invented collaboration, or that Blacks have no intellectual property any White person need respect, left instead to be found in nature by humans. In Cuddy and Leone (2008) we are told:

In 1990, then-associate director of the Banneker-Douglass Museum, Barbara Jackson (Nash), asked Leone: “What’s left from Africa?” (Cuddy 2005). In that question was born “a discursive relationship between past and present peoples and between researchers and community partners” (Wilkie and Bartoy 2000:747). This chapter describes some of the results of that partnership, looking at evidence for past spirituality and racial discourse in African American archaeology. (203–205)

We are told Mark Leone actually engaged in conversation with an African American woman and her family living at the Wye House in Annapolis. He asked her what she wanted to know about her history and received two questions and was given an artifact by her family (Cuddy and Leone 2008:215). Gadsby and Chidester (2007) mentioned the problem of choosing input only from selective community voices, which they realized at the end of their work. Leone does not seem to recognize the problem at all, nor the absence of formal accountability to public decision-making entailed in his use of an occasional personal conversation. Like Leone’s decision that Hoodoo is what Black Marylanders wanted to know about their African history based on a few personal exchanges, civic

engagement may read as farce. This is not, in fact, public engagement at all.

This article shows archaeologists’ denial of the Black authorial voice (of scholars and the public) and accompanies disavowal of White subjectivity and institutional racism.<sup>7</sup> The denial of racism is the new racism that protects White privilege as a wall against discovery. If the history of public engagement can be so whitened, hearing Blacks but not listening, looking at Blacks but not seeing, what truths can they find left alone with broken objects on the ground? Until archaeologists are willing to ask for things that do not belong to them, the current decline in African American and Native bioarchaeology (toward the level of European American bioarchaeology) might be best.

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7. By describing my 2008 article on the project’s African diaspora-informed philosophy as simply “Marxism” (Douglass preceded Marx) and labeling it as an example of a theory of “Pragmatism” that their anthology is keen to promote, Preucel and Mrozowski (2010) instrumentally dismiss Black innovation and redefine it as the theories of White authors, then rename and claim it.

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