# A North American Perspective on Race and Class in Historical Archaeology

Jamie C. Brandon

## Introduction

When Hurricane Katrina struck the Gulf Coast in August of 2005, it became one of the most costly and deadly storms in American history. It also, although briefly, highlighted the often muted importance of inequality in our society and started a discussion about race and class in the American mainstream media. An analysis of damage data shows that the storm's impact was disproportionately borne by the region's African American communities, by people who rented their homes, and by the poor and unemployed (Logan, 2006). "It takes a hurricane," wrote senior editor and *Newsweek* columnist Jonathan Alter:

> It takes a catastrophe like Katrina to strip away the old evasions, hypocrisies and not-so-benign neglect. It takes the sight of the United States with a big black eye—visible around the world—to help the rest of us begin to see again. For the moment, at least, Americans are ready to fix their restless gaze on enduring problems of poverty, race and class that have escaped their attention (Alter, 2005:42).

In academia, however, race and class have become two of the largest, and arguably two of the most important, categories of analysis used by every discipline in the social sciences and humanities. As a part of the so-called "triplet" of race, class, and gender, these categories are seen as attributes of individual and group identity as well as concepts that are central to modernity, with its unequal access to power. This linkage of racial and class-based classifications with the modern world, however, is not meant to imply that inequality did not occur in premodern times (Gosden, 2006; Orser, 2004:5), but that the structure and content of the modern ideas of race and class are qualitatively different and inextricably tied to Western capitalist ideology (Geremek, 1997:109; Hartigan, 2005:33–42; Smedley, 1999:18–20).

From the nineteenth century to the present, scholars have been arguing the relative importance of these analytical registers. Some researchers have claimed a privileged position for race by pointing out that class barriers can be transcended while racial barriers cannot (e.g., Smedley, 1999:221), and recently anthropologists such as Faye Harrison (1998) and Kamala Visweswarn (1998) have asserted that race and racism needs to be the central focus of our discipline. Many other researchers, largely working within the Marxist tradition, have argued that race falsely divides the working class or, even further, that white working-class subjectivity was predicated on racism (e.g., Roediger, 1991:13). In contrast, a few scholars have claimed that the old, modern ideas of "race" and "class" are no longer useful in a postmodern world (e.g., Gilroy, 2000; Pakulski and Waters, 1996).

Recently, however, even many Marxist theoreticians are beginning to explore the ways that the relationship between race and class has been undertheorized—refusing to reduce race to class and vice versa (Williams, 1995:301). At the same time there have been calls for anthropologists and archaeologists to begin to examine the intersections of several social phenomena, rather than fixating on the primacy of one (e.g., DiLeonardo, 1998:22; Franklin, 2001; see also Brandon, 2004a). This approach allows us to understand the subtle, yet important interplay between these phenomena. For instance, racial identities varied significantly over time, between

**J.C. Brandon** e-mail: jbrando@uark.edu

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classes, and across regions, but by the nineteenth century, *race* was a central feature of American *class* identity on both sides of the color line (Mullins, 1999a:22; Roediger, 1991).

Over the last decade, several scholars have argued that historical archaeology is in a unique position to shed light on the nature of these categories (e.g., Deetz, 1996; Jones, 1997:27; McGuire, 1982:161; Orser, 2001:1; Wurst and Fitts, 1999). In fact, it has been suggested that we may bear more *responsibility* for their investigation because of our focus on the modern world and our interest in voices that are unrepresented in the historical record (Orser, 2004:8).

Of course, attempting to synthesize archaeological approaches to class *or* race in a chapter-length treatment is a substantial undertaking—much less attempting an overview of our discipline's approaches to both class *and* race. Fortunately, several recent works have provided us with solid, detailed examinations of race (Orser, 1999, 2001, 2004) and class (Wurst, 2006; Wurst and Fitts, 1999) as historical archaeologists have employed these concepts. In light of these works, and the many others that have taken race and/or class as their subject matter, I intend to provide a discussion of how these two analytical registers *relate to each other,* primarily focusing on work that has been conducted in North America. That is, I intend to appraise how historical archaeologists have attempted to parse race *and* class in their work and the implications of the methods that they have employed in their investigations.

## Roots of Class and Racial Analysis in Historical Archaeology

The archaeologies of race and class have their beginnings at a similar point in time in North America—the late 1960s. It is not that archaeology had not previously been conducted on sites that were of interest due to the race or class of the occupants (e.g., Bullen and Bullen, 1945), but these categories were not the *analytical focus* of the archaeologists who were conducting the excavations. This changed in the 1960s, when "the civil rights movement, the war in Vietnam, and other factors combined to cause archaeologists, and most social scientists, to reevaluate the social relevance of their fields" (Orser, 1988a:10). These factors caused many archaeologists to become dissatisfied with the seemingly atheoretical products of pre-1960s archaeology and the newer approaches that "emphasized ecological factors and cultural adaptation at the expense of social dialectics and conflict" (Matthews et al., 2002:110).

Robert Ascher, Charles Fairbanks, and James Deetz (Ascher, 1974; Ascher and Fairbanks, 1971; Deetz, 1977; Fairbanks, 1974) provided some of the earliest examples of scholarship that approached sites with what Singleton (1999:1) has called a "moral mission: to tell the story of Americans—poor, powerless and 'inarticulate'—who had been forgotten in the written record."

Despite this newfound dedication to a more social archaeology, race and class have remained what Wurst (1999:7) has referred to as "ghost concepts" in the field of historical archaeology until relatively recently. Serious archaeological investigations into race only date to the 1990s, and class remains an underutilized analytical register—even by archaeologists focusing on capitalism and inequality (Orser, 2004:81; Wurst, 2006). Both concepts have often been subsumed under a host of topical archaeologies that, although fruitful in other ways, served to decenter these registers while focusing on broader phenomena—plantation archaeology, archaeologies of inequality, dominance and resistance, ideology, the archaeology of capitalism, and the archaeology of the African Diaspora.

Below we will briefly examine the history of the archaeological approaches to race and class. Although this discussion is presented chronologically, the reader should keep in mind that I am not proposing a progressive evolution of theoretical deployment (i.e., many early theoretical models are still used in some contexts by researchers today). Additionally, I must point out that my own work deals with the American South and the archaeology of African American life in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Thus, although I have attempted to broaden my discussions to include larger theoretical debates, I feel that a bias toward my own "comfort zone" is clearly evident.

### *A Note on Terminology: Race, Class, and Ethnicity*

The late 1970s and early 1980s provide us with the earliest works in historical archaeology that specifically

use race, ethnicity, and class as analytical registers. One of the first major published works to address the intersection of race and class was *Archaeological Perspectives on Ethnicity in America: Afro-American and Asian American Culture History* (Schuyler, 1980). This volume consisted of 14 essays that provided a variety of historical treatments that focused discursively on ethnicity, although many essays reveal the complex relationship between race and class on African American and Asian American sites.

There is a considerable amount of confusion regarding terminology in analyses based on race, ethnicity, and class. In these pioneering works, "ethnicity" and related terms (such as ethnic group and ethnic identity) were often used as a suitable substitution for "race" (Singleton, 1999:2; Smedley, 1999:31). This substitution was not uncommon throughout the social sciences and is rooted in attempts to emphasize that race was a social construction as opposed to the earlier, widely held biological orientation of the term (Omi and Winant, 1994:14–15; Smedley, 1999:30–35).

Although the shift to ethnicity-based theory is admirable from an anti-essentialist standpoint, by the end of the twentieth century researchers became increasingly aware that "ethnicity" was problematic when dealing with racial minorities—the victims of *racism*. Ethnicity-based approaches not only stressed the fluidity and flexibility of identity, but also stressed assimilation or acculturation as a logical response to the dilemma of racism (Omi and Winant, 1994:17). In reality, however, racial classifications are *seemingly* rigid and permanent despite the fact that racial identities themselves show an extraordinary amount of historical variance (Smedley, 1999:33). Thus, racially defined minorities were categorically different from ethnically defined minorities in that they have little choice as to their racialization. Some researchers, however, continue to use ethnicity to describe racialized subjects, especially when they want to stress agency in relation to identity formation (e.g., Baumann, 2004; Fesler and Franklin, 1999; Wilkie, 2000). With a few notable exceptions (e.g., Otto, 1980), the term "race" was not widely deployed as an analytical construct by archaeologists until relatively recently.

There is a similar amount of confusion surrounding the meaning of class in archaeological studies. There have been two major approaches to defining class among archaeologists—class has been seen as an "objective entity, thing, or structural location" and as a social relationship (Wurst, 1999:7, 2006:191). Those stressing the objective notion of class have tended to see "classes as a descriptive attribute of individuals" or "the aggregate of individuals who share a particular descriptive quality." As we will see below, this notion of class has played an important role in archaeological studies that use artifacts as identity markers or that employ consumer-behavior models. The second notion of class, the relational view, focuses on issues of power, struggle, conflict, and contradictions in social relationships (Wurst, 2006:197; see also McGuire and Wurst, 2002). This view has played an important role among archaeologists focusing on inequality and capitalism.

## Problems Isolating Class, Ethnicity, or Race in Archaeological Analysis

The first generation of archaeologists struggling with the topics of race and class had an extraordinarily difficult time in their attempts to separate these concepts. Drawing on the well-established traditions of prehistoric archaeology, historical archaeologists attempted to focus on how "status differences" might be reflected in archaeological remains and their patterns. John Solomon Otto's work at Cannon's Point Plantation (Otto, 1975, 1980, 1984) should be applauded as the first to attempt to engage race as an imposed, culturally constructed condition (see discussion in Orser, 1998:662) and as the first to introduce class into the archaeological study of racially defined minorities (Singleton, 1999:3). Otto's analysis has been critiqued for both its focus (Orser, 1988b) and its methods (Miller, 1991). Interestingly, although Otto's work was ahead of its time in the way it attempted to deal with race and class, it also foreshadowed the problems that were symptomatic of other works engaging the connections between these two analytical registers. Otto, like many other pioneers in the field of plantation archaeology (e.g., Baker, 1980; Geismar, 1980, 1982; also see discussion in Singleton and Souza, this volume) focused on patterns in ceramics and faunal assemblages in order to discern "status differences." Although he used the classic "caste model" in

describing the conditions of enslaved African Americans in the American South, his analysis divided assemblages into three groups: slave, overseer, and planter (see Orser [1988b:738] for a critique of the caste concept as used in plantation archaeology). This tripartite division demonstrated the difficulties in separating class from race, and the resulting conclusions revealed a gradational view of "living conditions" as seen through material culture. In effect, the planter class had the most material wealth, followed by the overseer and, finally, the slaves. Otto parsed these statuses into a "racial/legal status" that distinguished between members of the free, white caste (planters and overseers) and enslaved African Americans and a "social or occupational status" that emphasized class differences in a gradational way (i.e., planters with the most access to material wealth and slaves with the least). Otto, however, constantly struggled to understand which social dimension was being expressed by the material record (Otto, 1984:160–175). This struggle is also taken up by Lange and Handler (1985:16) who state that in their work on British Caribbean plantations that "relative social/economic status or rank can be defined archaeologically, but that at the present time legal or imposed status cannot." Furthermore, they conclude that the class (or at least economic status) is more discernable than race:

> the clear implication is that archaeological patterns resulting from slave behavior are not sufficiently well defined to be used independently [from economic status]. Excavations in such settings have indicated a confusion of patterns in which there is overlap between planter, white overseer, black slave overseers, free white, free black, and Amerindian archaeological patterns (Lange and Handler, 1985:16).

A similar, but more ambiguous result can be seen in Vernon Baker's reanalysis of cultural material excavated from the household of Lucy Foster, a freed black woman who lived in Andover, Massachusetts, during the mid-nineteenth century. Baker, like Lange and Handler, was forced to make conclusions about what was being reflected in the assemblage of poor blacks:

> Two features make Black Lucy's Garden distinctive: 1) the site was occupied by an Afro-American, and 2) this individual was poor. Similarly, Parting Ways was occupied by needy Blacks. The issue, then, is that the patterns visible in the archaeological record may be reflecting poverty and not the presence of Afro-Americans (Baker, 1980:35).

Baker's above mention of "Parting Ways" refers to the James Deetz's early work at the Parting Ways site, the home of a black Revolutionary War veteran and his kin in Plymouth, Massachusetts. Parting Ways was excavated the same year as Charles Fairbanks's work at Kingsley Plantation in Florida, but Deetz was taking a different theoretical approach to the past than Fairbanks, Otto, and others working within the "status differences" tradition. Although Deetz (1977:154) does counter the African American stereotype of "simple folk living in abject poverty," the thrust of his analyses of early colonial America focused on large-scale structural changes in American culture throughout the colonial period. The major structural differences for Deetz are temporal, thus he downplays internal divisions such as class. Although Deetz's (1977) influential *In Small Things Forgotten* addressed race directly (primarily through the Parting Ways site), his approach did not parse class differences in a clear way. Furthermore, his structural treatment of the Parting Ways site seemed completely separate and parallel to his analysis of "white" American culture—all white-related sites are interpreted through change (i.e., the shift from medieval to Georgian mindset), whereas the material record of Parting Ways is interpreted through continuity (i.e., Africanisms and creolized African American patterns). Thus, while Otto and Baker struggled to separate class from race in their material analysis, Deetz used the material culture at the Parting Ways site to construct a fundamentally different narrative.

## Patterns, Consumer Choice, and Ethnic/Class Markers

Otto was, however, well aware that there was "an imperfect association between status and material rewards" (Otto, 1980:4, 159). This is not necessarily the case with many of the countless researchers that followed Otto's lead into the first "boom" in plantation archaeology (e.g., Adams and Boling, 1989; Adams and Smith, 1985; Armstrong, 1985; Joseph, 1989; Klingelhofer, 1987; Lewis, 1985; Orser, 1988a, 1988b; Orser and Nekola, 1985; Wheaton and Garrow, 1985).

Throughout the 1980s, historical archaeologists began to develop two major approaches to examining race and class. The first approach attempted to find and interpret ethnic or class markers and the second focused on identifying the boundaries between groups (Griggs, 1999:88; Wurst and Fitts, 1999:2). The "ethnic marker" studies often fixated on particular classes of material culture that may be considered diagnostic of particular classes or racialized subjects. Artifacts such as colonoware, blue beads, high percentages of pipes, shortened pipe stems, opium paraphernalia, patent medicine bottles, ginger jars, cowrie shells, and particular types of food remains were often used to indicate the race, ethnicity, or class of households and groups (Griggs, 1999:87). The second approach, influenced by both Stanley South's (1977) pattern analysis and Fedrick Barth's (1969) notion of boundary maintenance, followed Otto's methods and concentrated on comparing patterns between disparate classes (usually read as socioeconomic status) or racial groups (Wurst and Fitts, 1999:2). These comparative studies grew into methods that stressed patterns of material consumption—consumer-choice studies (e.g., Adams and Smith, 1985; papers in Spencer-Wood [1987a]). These studies focused on explaining "why goods of differing quality or price were selected for acquisition and archaeological deposition by different cultural subgroups in a market economy" (Spencer-Wood, 1987b:9).

Both of these approaches can be seen in the papers contributed to the seminal book *The Archaeology of Slavery and Plantation Life* (1985) edited by Theresa Singleton. In this early, influential work, many of the chapters (in particular the ones dealing with settlement patterns) seem to focus implicitly or explicitly on patterns relating to class or the more general term "status" (e.g., Adams and Smith, 1985; Lewis, 1985; Orser and Nekola, 1985). Alternatively, other papers deal nominally with racial or ethnic identity as they are primarily concerned with Africanisms and the process of acculturation (e.g., Jones, 1985; Wheaton and Garrow, 1985).

In the worst cases, concentrating on diagnostic markers objectified race and class and led many researchers to focus on either assimilation or cultural survival in an overly simplistic way. Although there may be a statistically significant correlation (Stine et al., 1996), not *every* African American household will yield blue beads and not *every* household yielding blue beads is African American. Likewise, pattern studies and later consumerism studies often reduced consumption to a series of market transactions, where only the cost of the goods was deemed socially important (Mullins, 1999a:18), thereby bolstering the importance of class over race (Orser, 1987:125). Both approaches tended to look at housing, food remains, and ceramics to "determine the former site inhabitants' access to material wealth and labor" and then, "in turn, determine the racial, ethnic and social status of former site inhabitants" (Otto, 1984:158).

Thankfully, the historical record often makes it unnecessary to establish the demography of a household using material culture—a fact not lost on early scholars (Lange and Handler, 1985:15; Otto, 1984:159). What later researchers would find is that the presence of these artifacts in *particular* racial or class *contexts* would provide an important starting point for a more nuanced investigation of identity and agency in the archaeological record (Perry and Paynter, 1999:301; see below for further discussion).

I believe that Orser (2004:17) has correctly correlated problems analyzing race (and, by extension, class) with problems inherent in the underlying definition of culture employed by these various researchers. Although entirely within the mainstream of the archaeology of the period, countless researchers—including Deetz with his structural approaches and Otto with his pattern analysis—used a reified, objectified notion of culture. Orser's critique of the employment of a reified concept of "race" is mirrored by LouAnn Wurst and Robert Fitts's discussion of class as an analytical register (Wurst, 2006; Wurst and Fitts, 1999). Class has been seen as an objective, descriptive attribute of individuals; a static, unchanging classification of reified persons and social roles (Wurst, 2006:191; Wurst and Fitts, 1999:2).

With this simplistic understanding of class and race, disparate peoples with disparate cultures could be identified by ethnic/racial/class markers or patterns, and their degrees of difference or assimilation could be tracked by changes in material culture and pattern recognition. However, the very notion of disparate cultural wholes obscured real differences, contradictions, and conflicts within and between racial and class subjectivities (Matthews et al., 2002:111).

Many historical archaeologists, however, were about to make a shift that would begin to address the contested, political, and nuanced nature of class and racial identities as well as the role archaeology plays in their interpretation.

## A Multitude of Voices: Critical, Political, Mutualistic, Marxist, and Vindicationist Archaeologies of Race and Class

During the late 1980s and early 1990s there was a significant shift in how researchers were approaching race and class in the archaeological record. This shift can be linked with the growing, broader dissatisfaction with the processual approaches of the 1970s, which were accused of

> uncritical acceptance of positivism, stress on functionalism and environmental adaptation, disdain for emphasis on social relations or cognition or ideology, lack of concern for the present social production of knowledge, overemphasis on stability rather than conflict, reduction of social change to effects of external factors, and belief in quantification as the goal of archaeology (Shackel and Little, 1992:5).

Other factors, such as the political consequences following the "rediscovery" of the African Burial Ground in New York in 1991 (LaRoche and Blakey, 1997:85), contributed to feeling that archaeology needed to be more critically aware and politically engaged.

Like all postprocessual archaeologies, there was no one approach promulgated by historical archaeologists attempting to deal with issues of race and class. Various archaeologists attempted to provide a theoretical framework with which to understand the past. These included various critical archaeologies drawing on the works of the Frankfurt School (e.g., Leone, 1995; Leone et al., 1987; Little, 1994; Shackel and Little, 1992), archaeologies of mutualism derived from the work of Michael Carrithers (Orser, 1996), vindicationist archaeologies drawing on anti-essentialist works and critical race theory (e.g., Epperson, 2004; LaRoche and Blakey, 1997; Mack and Blakey, 2004; Perry, 1999), archaeologies drawing on practice theory and the work of Pierre Bourdieu (e.g., Stewart-Abernathy, 2004; Wilkie, 2000), and archaeologies drawing on a combination of a variety of these and other theories—including explicitly postmodern theorists (e.g., Hall, 2000).

Despite much disagreement, the hallmarks of most archaeologies of race and class that follow this shift are an emphasis on reflexivity, the use of some brand of critical theory, and the symbolic interpretation of landscapes or of individual pieces of material culture.

### *Power to the People: Reflexivity and Descendant Community Involvement*

Although there are several important early articulations of the shift (i.e., Leone, 1984; Leone et al., 1987), this discussion on the intersection of race and class might best be served by beginning with a series of critiques of plantation archaeology. Particularly important are Jean Howson's (1990) and Parker Potter's (1991) critiques—papers which can be viewed as landmarks in the transformation in how archaeologist dealt with topics such as class and race.

By the late 1980s, archaeologists using the framework provided by pioneers such as John Solomon Otto had drifted toward an approach that decentered race in favor of legal and economic status. While Otto attempted to disentangle race and class in his analysis, researchers such as Adams and Boling (1989) claimed that although "clearly linked to race," nineteenth-century slavery in America was "much more arbitrary than commonly believed" and that status for the enslaved "was largely a legal condition, rather than one of race or skin color" (Adams and Boling, 1989:69). Potter took issue with the lack of political awareness of researchers working with racially charged materials and suggested that the focus on "quality of life," which was tacitly linked to class, was a "dangerous trap" (Potter, 1991:97). For instance, Adams and Boling state

> Indeed, on such plantations slaves may be better understood within the context of being peasants or serfs, regarding their economic status. Their legal status was still as chattel slave, of course, but their economic freedoms were much greater than most people realize (Adams and Boling, 1989:94).

Potter argued that Adams and Boling's lack of self-reflection significantly impeded their ability to understand the implications of their work and to anticipate the possible uses of their conclusions (Potter, 1991:94). Following this critique, and others

like it, archaeologists began to talk about race *and* class *and* their historical construction. Additionally, they became increasingly sensitive to the sociopolitical implications of their work—including grappling with ways to include descendant communities as true research partners (e.g., Epperson, 2004; Franklin, 1997:37, 2001; McCarthy, 1996; Patten, 1997; Perry, 1997).

The last decade or so has seen an increasing awareness that control of archaeological resources and knowledge *must* be shared with "descendant groups, other impacted communities and the public at large" (Franklin, 1997:39)—especially given the growing concern that we as archaeologists demonstrate what have been termed the "public benefits of archaeology" (e.g., Little, 2002). This is, of course, doubly true of archaeologies dealing with topics such as class and race, where researchers "must be informed by an awareness of long-standing debates about the politics of the past" among the groups with which they are working (LaRoche and Blakey, 1997:87).

Although the idea of a "descendant community" is often linked with race, recent archaeological research, such as the work done by the Ludlow Collective at the site of the Ludlow Massacre, has demonstrated that descendant communities can play an important role in class-centered archaeologies as well (Ludlow Collective, 2001; McGuire and Reckner, 2005).

Archaeological work at such sites as the New York African Burial Ground and the Ludlow Massacre site demonstrate how important descendant communities can be to our research. Along these lines, some researchers (e.g., Epperson, 2004) have warned that we need to carefully examine our relationships with descendant communities in order to avoid condescension, trivialization, vulgar anti-essentialism or, worse, co-opting descendant community authority by nominally "consulting" with groups without truly changing the power dynamic associated with knowledge production.

## Looking at Material Culture at the Intersection of Class and Race

Aside from reflexivity and descendant community partnering, the 1990s also marked a shift in how archaeologists deal with material culture. Historical archaeologists, particularly those interested in issues such as race and class, began to stress "qualitative interpretation—rather than primarily quantitative explication, with meaning, with active symbolic uses of material culture" (Shackel and Little, 1992:5).

Many have moved toward understanding the mechanisms that frame how we see the past or the current political implications of our work, while others have looked toward their recovered material culture in a more symbolic way. Rather than using the material record as the point of origin for research questions (i.e., looking for ethnic markers or defining ethnic patterns in larger material collections), researchers began with households where the historical facts and conditions of racialization were relatively well understood. From that historical context, researchers then interrogated the material record for insightful contradictions and patterns that might shed light of the individuals' social identities.

Researchers as diverse as Paul Mullins, Adrian and Mary Praetzellis, and Laurie Wilkie have contributed interesting and powerful interpretations of individual classes—or even individual pieces—of material culture that speak to the intersections of race and class. These works take certain cues from the consumerism studies (and perhaps the ethnic marker search) that came before them, but they manage to synthesize the two previous approaches while at the same time framing the meaning of material culture and, in a broader sense, consumption in a way that avoids essentialism and recognizes the complex, nuanced meanings of things and identity. These works see artifacts as being constantly recontextualized by their use in different social situations. Meanings for things cannot be fixed as they are a part of "live information systems" (Praetzellis and Praetzellis, 2001:645). At the same time, these researchers see material culture and consumption as a way to imagine new social possibilities—to portray not only who we are, but also who we wish to be (Mullins, 1999a:29). Thus, they question the notion that everyone who used these pieces of "material culture employed these items to convey the same idea and for the same purposes" (Praetzellis and Praetzellis, 2001:647).

In this vein, Praetzellis and Praetzellis examine the manipulation of meanings behind the English ceramics in the home of Yee Ah Tye, a wealthy Chinese American merchant in California (Praetzellis and Praetzellis, 2001:648–649), Mullins looks at the powerful symbolic meaning behind "bric-a-brac"

and political paraphernalia in postbellum African American households in Maryland and California (Mullins, 1999a:19–39, 1999b, 2001), and Wilkie explores possible interpretations of items such as antiseptic bottles using confederate imagery found at black sharecropper households in Louisiana (Wilkie, 2000:176–180).

The key to this approach is an understanding of the broader social and historical contexts of everyday objects which can be used to help consumers "see themselves as, or opposed to, racial [or class] subjectivities" (Mullins, 1999a:18). These approaches, in this author's opinion, take giant leaps toward interpreting the complex web of identities entangled with issues such as race and class.

One potential area of improvement in this line of reasoning, however, is a problem of focusing on a few artifacts to the detriment of the whole assemblage. The act of concentrating on symbolically charged artifacts has yielded good results, but it might leave others wondering about the importance of the other 99 percent of the material recovered from excavations. This is not an entirely fair criticism, given the limitations of scholarly publication (I note, for example, that Praetzellis and Praetzellis include such material in their technical reports). To a certain extent, however, I feel that this is part of a remaining backlash against the hyper-quantification (and dehumanization) of the processual archaeologies of the 1970s. If this is the case, perhaps the pendulum has swung too widely. I believe it is entirely possible to do good archaeology using aggregated material culture as long as one is aware of the pitfalls that befell those who worked with patterns and Africanisms in the 1980s and 1990s.

An example of research that combines the nuanced, symbolic consumer interpretations with some degree of quantification to get at the intersections of class, ethnic/racial identity, and gender is Margaret Wood's examination of women, housework, and working-class activism at the site of the Ludlow Massacre and Berwind (Wood, 2002, 2004). In these, Wood examines the use of space and patterns in household refuse (i.e., degree of reliance on canned goods and ceramic evidence for coffee-related socializing) to assess women's roles in organizing across ethnic and racial lines.

## Cultural Analysis: Expanding the Discourse on Race and Class

Although we have improved our ability to look at race and class in the material record, the intersections of the two phenomena can still remain elusive. Archaeological understandings of culture, poverty, and race are "necessarily complex and historically situated" (Orser, 2004:37) and in many of our works the categorical analyses of identity—race, class, and gender—compete as the key to social phenomena.

Recently, cultural anthropologist John Hartigan examined the "enduring contentious debates over the relative priority" of these three critical registers of social identity and proposed a return to a broader cultural analysis as a possible answer. He asserts, quite correctly, that analysts who feature one of these registers often end up

> asserting the centrality or singular importance of, say, race over class, or gender over either race or class. A cultural perspective, in contrast, renders these registers simultaneously active and mutually informing, rather than disputing whether one is more fundamental than the others (Hartigan, 2005:9).

Statements like this are echoed in many strains of African American scholarship and literature. For instance, in Richard Wright's introduction to Drake and Cayton's seminal work *Black Metropolis* he states

> The political left often gyrates and squirms to make the Negro problem fit rigidly into a class-war frame of reference, when *the roots of that problem lie in American culture as a whole*; it tries to anchor the Negro problem to patriotism of global time and space, which robs the problem of its reality and urgency, of its concreteness and tragedy (Wright, 1945:xxix, emphasis added).

Thus, for Wright, the problem of racism does not lie in categories such as class and race, but in the very structures of American culture writ large. In reality, these categorical registers are "a series of interlocking codes by which patterns of inequality are maintained and reproduced in perceptions of similarity and difference" (Hartigan, 2005:9). If we really are to get at these interlocking patterns of inequality, we must hold more than one analytical register in focus at the same time. We must approach race and class from a holistic cultural perspective.

## Culture: Problem or Solution?

I have stated earlier that I believe that Orser has correctly pointed toward the concept of culture as a root of our problems addressing the archaeologies of race and class. Orser points out that most "archaeologists concentrating on the archaeology of slavery during the earliest years of this disciplinary focus used Krober's whole-cultural concept, largely via South and Deetz, as a methodological framework" (Orser, 2004:18). This "whole-culture" consisted of patterned regularity with definite boundaries and was the basis of most of the archaeological approaches covered in the early portion of this chapter—pattern analysis (South, 1977) and the search for "Africanisms" or cultural survivals (Fairbanks, 1974). The unsatisfactory nature of this reified notion of culture is one part of what the 1990s postprocessual shift worked to change. This shift, however, increasingly led archaeologists away from culture and toward categorical analyses of identity and more thematic frames (i.e., plantation archaeology, the archaeology of capitalism, and the archaeology of inequality).

Similar reified and objectified notions of culture have also led a whole generation of cultural anthropologists away from the culture concept (e.g., Abu-Lughod, 1991; papers in Dirks [1998]). The problems connected to "culture," however, like the problems connected with "quantification" in archaeology, need not be absolute. I will have to concur with other researchers—both in cultural anthropology and archaeology—that taking a "cultural perspective" on race and class can afford researchers several advantages, provided that one avoids the problems of past formulations of the concept.

Among archeological researchers, Orser's (2004:20–21) solution is to look toward creolization (when not misconstrued as a blended whole-culture) in order to solve the problem. I, like Mullins and Paynter (2000), see a strong connection between creolization, ethnogenesis, and culture change, and I believe that Orser's description of creolization is simply how *all* culture works (see Gundaker [2000] for critique of simplified notions of creolization). Matthews, Leone, and Jordan (2002) also take us in this direction through their application of Marxist critique to cultural production. Rather than understanding culture as "an orderly and structured whole," they contend that it is "an amalgamation of discontinuous interests, often in conflict, forged and reproduced as an entity through struggle and domination" (Matthews et al., 2002:110). Thus, cultural analysis, when correctly conceived, can demonstrate how the constructions of race, class, and gender distinctions operate "according to place-specific dynamics that ground and facilitate the concurrent production and reproduction of multiple overlapping and mutually reinforcing identities" (Hartigan, 2005:258).

## The Archaeologies of White Racial Identity and Privilege

Hartigan's call for cultural analysis, however, is embedded in his project examining "white trash" as a liminally white group that cannot be understood solely in terms of class or race (Hartigan, 1997, 1999, 2005). Hartigan's whiteness (and white-skinned privilege) is not monolithic, and thus raises the concern that examining whiteness will re-center the privileged narrative and further undermine the perspective of racialized minorities. As archaeologists begin to examine whiteness, I believe that we can take advantage of cultural analysis, while simultaneously keeping inequalities at the forefront.

Although the first call to archaeologically examine (poor) whiteness can be found in Baker's (1980:36) reanalysis of Lucy Foster's Garden, it was not until relatively recently that archaeologists have begun in earnest to examine whiteness as a racial identity (Epperson 1997, 1999; Orser, 1999:666; Wilkie, 2004:118). Archaeologists are now investigating the different ways that whiteness is culturally embedded and leveraged for privilege in rural Massachusetts (Paynter, 2001), the Arkansas Ozark Mountains (Brandon, 2004b; Brandon and Davidson, 2005), Ireland (Orser, 2004:196–246), and Virginia (Bell, 2005).

In Massachusetts and the Ozarks, researchers have examined how racialized cultural memories of entire regions erase the presence of people of color, while at the same time shoring up the notion

of white purity. In Ireland, Orser has examined conflict in the village of Ballykilcline and connected it to the larger struggle of the Irish to transform themselves into members of the privileged "white race," while Bell has examined the important connection between the creation of whiteness and the development of capitalist economic systems using colonial Chesapeake case studies. These studies should be applauded for following Faye Harrison's (1995:63, 1998) calls to expand the discourse on race from an anthropological viewpoint. On the other hand, we must always be vigilant when examining whiteness (and applying broader cultural analyses) as it could easily lead to decentering the dramatic inequalities highlighted by the categorical registers of race and class. For instance, some of my own work (Brandon, 2004b) examining the historical trope of the "Ozark Hillbilly" could be reinterpreted as deconstructing the idea of white-skin privilege by producing a case of a "white other"—a result I would have never intended.

## Conclusion

Where does this look at the intersections of race and class in historical archaeology leave us? Early attempts looked at race and class in simple objective terms—searching for markers and patterns in the recovered material culture and reifying the very concepts whose history we are attempting to understand. Attempts to isolate race and/or class as *the* important analytical factor were problematic because these two registers are so closely linked. The search for patterns morphed into consumer studies (especially in the case of class) and, in some corners, race became subordinated to class as the explanatory variable.

Frustrations with this trend led to the creation of historical archaeologies of race and class that stressed (1) public outreach and descendant community partnering and (2) a more complex, symbolic version of artifact analysis. These more recent attempts have taken positive steps by looking at material culture in a more nuanced way—starting from known contexts and exploring interpretive possibilities. But these newer works also focus on small numbers of artifacts that may be charged with symbolic value. All too often we do not hear the voices of the other thousands of artifacts recovered from the sites.

I have proposed that an explicitly holistic cultural analysis may be a fruitful alternative to analyzing competing categorical registers (i.e., class and race). If applied in a nonreifying manner, a cultural analysis may reveal the complex linkages between different, but often simultaneously manifested, identities.

Following Hartigan (2005:284), however, I believe that cultural analysis is not an end in itself and that we must keep the dramatic structural inequalities at the forefront of our analysis. Likewise, the explicit examination of whiteness will be an important part of our tool kit as activist researchers, but it can be a dangerous tool—potentially presenting a fragmented whiteness that obscures privilege and access to power.

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