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Land Rich and Cash Poor: The Materiality of Poverty in Appalachia

ABSTRACT

This article considers the materiality of poverty in the Blue Ridge Mountains of Virginia between 1865 and 1920. It problematizes the stereotypes of Appalachia as poor and white, and examines the dialectics in which groups that have power in a social system influence the allocation of different types of resources, such as land. With an emphasis on the landscape, I consider the intersections of poverty, race, and class in the material lives of African American landowners and tenants by comparing material remains as well as access and control of resources.

Introduction

Archaeology, with its emphasis on materiality and time, has the potential to offer insights into the power relations that create economic polarization over time. In Appalachia, a region stereotyped as poverty-stricken, backward, and timeless, archaeology provides a set of tools to locate narratives of how local and national economic changes impacted individual lives. Taft Hughes, born in 1909, grew up in the Blue Ridge Mountains of Virginia. His parents were tenant farmers who rented land from an African American landowner. Hughes remembers:

> My mother made my shirts. She would get striped cotton for the winter and thinner stuff for the summers. We didn't have much for shoes. We had one pair of shoes, and they had to last you a year or better. (Benavitch 1992)

The family lived in a log house on a narrow flood plain along Brown Mountain Creek. They grew tobacco, corn, and wheat, and maintained a garden lot. Hughes recalls that most things, like the grinding of the flour, were attained in toil, since "[t]here was no money" (Benavitch 1992). By many standards, the Hughes family was poor, but archaeology provides a more nuanced understanding of the historical and social makings of poverty in Appalachia.

The archaeology of poverty is rooted in the archaeology of "the inarticulate," a term coined by Robert Ascher (1974) to refer to the men and women "who did not write or who were not written about" in the chronicles of the past. An interest in the inarticulate has become prominent in historical archaeology, and archaeologists have increasingly conducted research on groups that can be considered to have been neglected and poor (Deagan 1982; Singleton 1985; Horning 2000a; Mayne and Murray 2001). The archaeology of "the inarticulate" was developed to locate the people—enslaved laborers, women, and the poor—often obscured in the research of plantations and forts. Yet an archaeological emphasis of poverty has the potential to reify stereotypes of poor people, when in reality the study of poverty *should* emphasize the historical, social, and political conditions that impact the everyday lives of people who had little. In the social sciences, poverty studies have blamed the poor or recreated the stereotypes of poverty—backward, timeless, deserving and undeserving, lacking material goods, and economically deprived. For example, the "culture of poverty" thesis (Lewis 1966) connects behavior with the persistence of poverty. The poor were seen to be enmeshed in an intergenerational quagmire of dysfunctional values and behaviors. This view of poverty resulted in a "social work" solution, which aimed to change poor peoples' values and behaviors rather than address the social, economic, and political causes of poverty (Goode and Maskovsky 2001:10). Archaeologists are in a unique position to move beyond the discussion of "the isolated behaviors of poor people" to the "making of poverty" and poor peoples' response to it (Goode and Maskovsky 2001:3).

Despite these concerns, poverty has been of increasing interest in archaeology. The study of poverty can be seen in research at Black Lucy's Garden (Bullen and Bullen 1945; Baker 1980), Deetz's (1996) work at Parting Ways, and Shephard's (1987) study on the status of freed blacks in Alexandria. In addition, excavations of

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poorhouses (Bell 1993; Garman and Russo 1999), almshouses (Baugher and Spencer-Wood 2001; Spencer-Wood 2009), and orphanages (Feister 2009) are increasingly providing opportunities for archaeologists to study poverty.

The poor are heterogeneous populations, defined in historical and geographical specificity, and both within and across various axes of difference. Poverty has existed since medieval times (and before). Within modernity, poverty is a political, economic, and ideological effect of capitalist processes and state activity; it is a function of power (Goode and Maskovsky 2001:3). In other words, capitalism creates a structural space for poverty and turns its back on those who are poor and blames them for their structural positions, which capitalism creates and maintains. Poverty's connection to power, capitalist processes, and state activity make it an ideal focus for historical archaeology, since it utilizes a number of tools vital for understanding poverty. For instance, the landscape provides a way to examine the power relations that emerge through spatial arrangements. An examination of excavated artifacts can reveal details about the consumption of tangible goods and services. Since the artifacts that are excavated were once commodities produced as part of a capitalist exchange system, material culture is particularly relevant (Orser 2004:281). Yet a lack of material culture alone does not equate with poverty. Other variables, such as access to material goods and services, and allocation of resources, particularly land, need to be considered. Here I use these variables to consider the intersections of poverty, race, and class in the material lives of African Americans in Appalachia at the turn of the 20th century.

The Commodification of the Mountains at the Turn of the 20th Century

The capital investment in the railroad and basic industries in the last decades of the 19th century lifted expansion to a crescendo and transformed much of Appalachia from a rural agricultural economy to one in which major subregions became dependent on industry (Lewis 2004:59). National institutions—corporations, labor unions, state and federal governments, media, the military, cultural institutions, and the apparatus of tourism—brought Appalachia's economic and cultural resources into the embrace of supraregional systems (Whitaker 2002; Williams 2002). The state and national governments and mining and timber companies owned by speculators based in major eastern cities and abroad began to control more and more resources in the region. This multistaged process included not only the labor struggles to which many historians have been drawn (Banks 1995; Scott 1995; Pudup 2002), but also the origins of the Tennessee Valley Authority (McDonald and Muldowny 1982; Walker 1998), of Appalachia's national parks and forests (Sarvis 1993; Bolgiano 1998; Horning 2000a, 2000b), and various other federal programs active in the region (Barker 2002; Williams 2002). This was also an era of town building, in which a gulf opened between Appalachian towns and cities and their hinterlands (Williams 2002).

Industrialization affected farm families in a number of ways. For instance, in Lynchburg, Virginia, as the city grew and more manufacturing plants were built above the city's intake on the James River, the dumping of industrial waste eventually caused the James to become unfit for use domestically (Wingfield 1974:3). Mountain farmland was increasingly coveted by the city of Lynchburg as the city planned to develop a new water supply. In addition, the Weeks Act, legislation passed to create the National Forest Reservation Commission, which was charged with the purchase of land on the headwaters of navigable streams and the building of Appalachian forests, was passed in 1911; also, the recently formed U.S. Forest Service started looking towards Appalachian farmland to build national forests and protect watersheds (Graves 1911:8).

Meanwhile, farm families such as the Richesons were plowing, planting, and harvesting the mountain land. In 1895, Moses Richeson, a mixed-race former enslaved laborer, owned over 354 ac. of land along Brown Mountain Creek in Amherst County, Virginia (Figure 1). Amherst County is situated along the north bank of the James River and straddles a dividing line between the Appalachian Plateau and the Blue Ridge Mountains in Virginia. Brown Mountain Creek flows between Long and Brown mountains into the Pedlar River, which flows into the James River (Figure 2). The mountain terrain consists of flat ridge tops, steeply sloping ridge sides, and narrow, steep-sided hollows containing intermittent streams and terraces (Tolley 1995). This

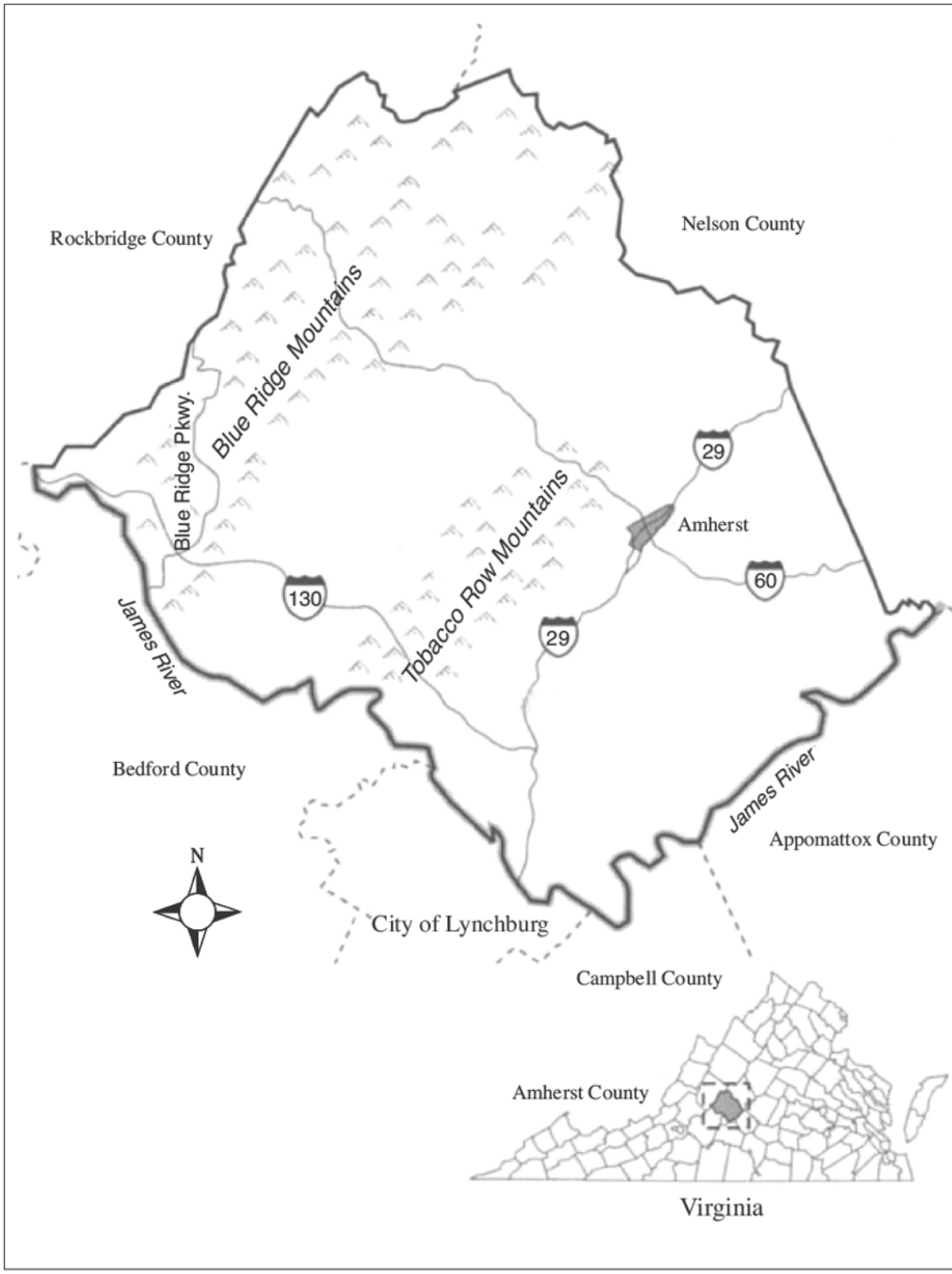

FIGURE 1. Map of Amherst County, Virginia, adapted from Cook (2000:81).

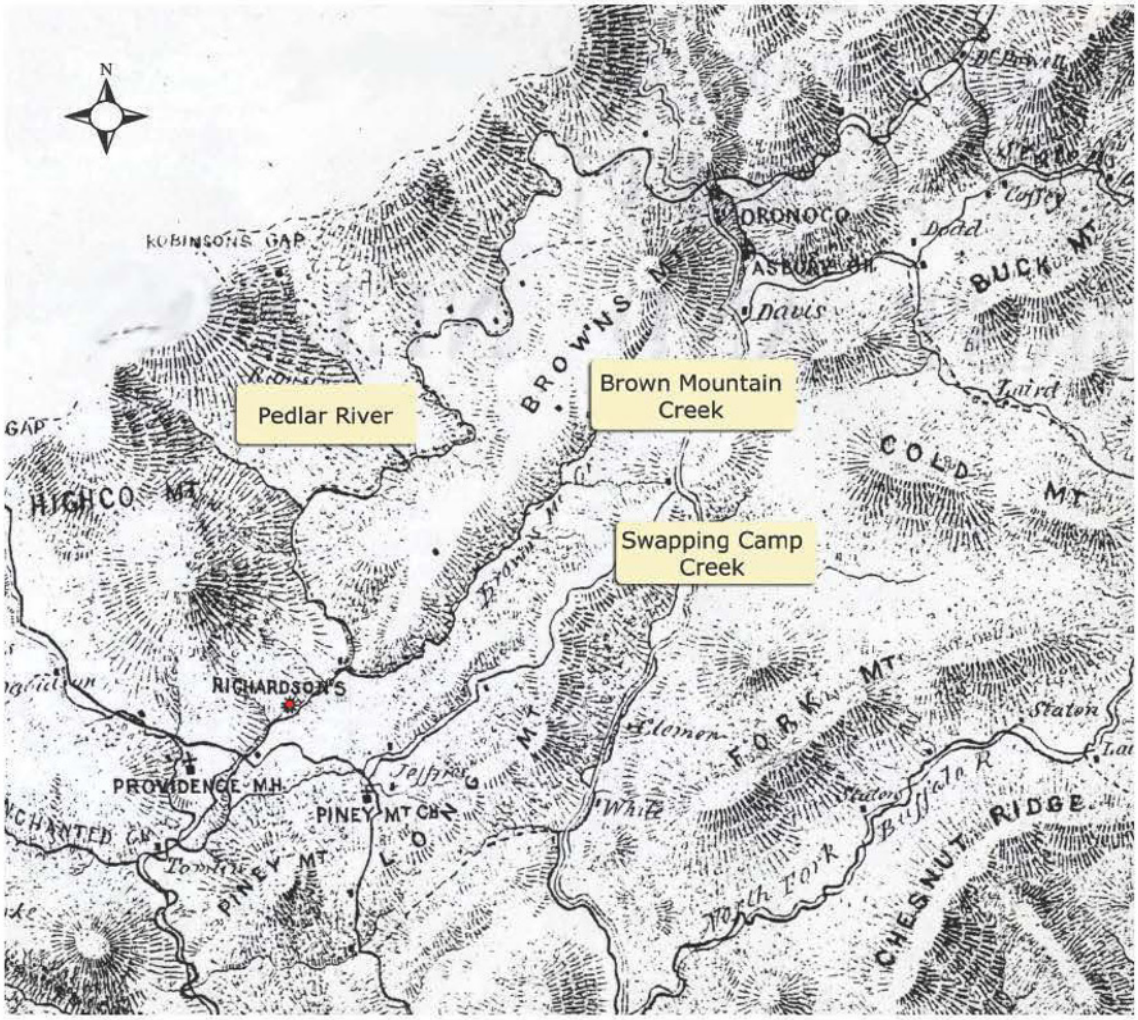

FIGURE 2. Map showing the location of the Richeson Plantation, adapted from Gilmer (1864).

mountain land was first settled in 1780. With its mountain setting and its social history, the small community can be seen as a microcosm of Appalachia and, therefore, provides insight into the ways poverty was created and experienced in the region.

The mountain land owned by Moses Richeson was previously part of a plantation held by Jesse Richeson. Jesse Richeson consolidated a number of early land grants and amassed much of the fertile, productive land along the Pedlar River and its tributary branch, Brown Mountain Creek (Tolley 1995; Barnes 2008). In 1850, Jesse Richeson, by no means poor, owned over 2,000 ac. of land and 39 slaves. Jesse Richeson owned a gristmill, which allowed him to blend tobacco and wheat cultivation, livestock raising, and the manufacture of agricultural commodities (Barnes 2008:95). In Appalachia, prior to the Civil War, land provided the economic basis for the structuring of polarized local economies in which landowners and slaveholders, like Jesse Richeson, amassed a majority of the acreage while more than half the white households remained landless (Dunaway 2003:139).

After the Civil War, the economic prosperity that some landowners had experienced changed with the need for new forms of labor. The Civil War disrupted the structure of mountain life, as it did that of American history generally.

Emancipation, disruption of the established social and economic structure, three successive years of crop failure, as well as a depression during the 1870s affected the livelihoods of people in Amherst County (Stuckert 1987:145, 1993; Schweninger 1997:47). The building of the Norfolk and Western Railroad in 1880 triggered a great land boom and the growth of cities, such as Buena Vista and Lynchburg, and integrated Amherst County into larger markets.

Although their land was often broken up and rented to tenant farmers or sold, members of the planter class who controlled the land generally maintained their positions of power and privilege (Stuckert 1987; Schweninger 1997). Many planters expected the former slaves to remain on their plantations as sharecroppers, and former enslaved laborers with a limited number of options had to make decisions about what to do and where to go. The demography and social structure of Amherst County was transformed as former enslaved laborers sought new social and economic opportunities. At the same time, racial tensions increased significantly among lower-class whites who perceived more clearly than ever the impact of large-scale competition for low-status jobs, as both poor whites and blacks were dependent upon the landowning class for their livelihoods as sharecroppers and tenants.

Archaeology along Brown Mountain Creek

Archaeology can show how particular events are given material form (Appadurai 1996:181; Hall 2000:3) and provide ways to determine the meanings that are attached to objects and places through daily practice (Wilkie 2000:15). Yet along Brown Mountain Creek, the archaeology was not comprehensive on its own; therefore, a diversity of methods and sources were utilized. I began research at Brown Mountain Creek with archival and genealogical research combined with community workshops and informal interviews to encourage the involvement of community members in aspects of the archaeological investigations. I used oral histories, such as the one compiled by Dave Benavitch (1992) based upon interviews with Taft Hughes, who grew up along Brown Mountain Creek, to provide site-specific information and local insight to test via archaeological and historical research. I conducted a phase-one shovel test-pit (STP) survey throughout the mountain hollow, locating six sites. In total, 78 STPs were excavated, and maps (Figures 3 and 4) were produced to demonstrate the relationship between positive and negative STPs, the landforms and the foundations, retaining walls, fence lines, roadbeds, and other observable traces on the landscape (Barnes and Robbins 2006). At three of the six sites, I conducted a metal-detector survey (with the help of members of a local metal-detector club) and systematic excavations.

Excavations were conducted inside the houses and within the yards of each site, yielding a limited number of diagnostic artifacts (approximately 1,400 total, with less than a third diagnostic). The metal-detector survey following the stone wall near each house resulted in a total of 325 artifacts, including metal artifacts such as nails, horseshoes, plow parts, and a wagon step as well as other discarded objects such as ceramics and glass. Although vessel numbers, whether of plates, teacups, wine bottles, or clay pipes, are more meaningful measures for analyzing how objects were used before they were lost or discarded (Miller 1986; Sussman 2000; Lawrence 2006), a minimum vessel count (MNV) for ceramics and glass was difficult because of the limited amounts of ceramics and bottle glass recovered. I calculated the mean beginning and ending dates for when each deposit was formed. In addition, artifacts were grouped into functional categories: foodways, household, personal (which included clothing and beads), arms, architecture (which consisted mainly of nails, the majority of the artifacts recovered), activities, and agriculture in order to determine the patterns of men and women living within a cultural tradition (Table 1). In developing functional categories, I attempted to avoid a rigid functional classification that assumes that artifacts were only used for one purpose and that this was the purpose for which the item was originally manufactured (Lawrence 2006:365).

The diversity of sources at play in this study is its strength, and it is through the integration of these data that the archaeology of poverty can be constructed. Alison Wylie (1989) argues that archaeological interpretations gain strength by moving back and forth between multiple lines of evidence, a process that she calls “tacking.” With various methods and sources, I build upon Wylie’s concept of “tacking” to integrate different types of data. This “tacking” of data provides

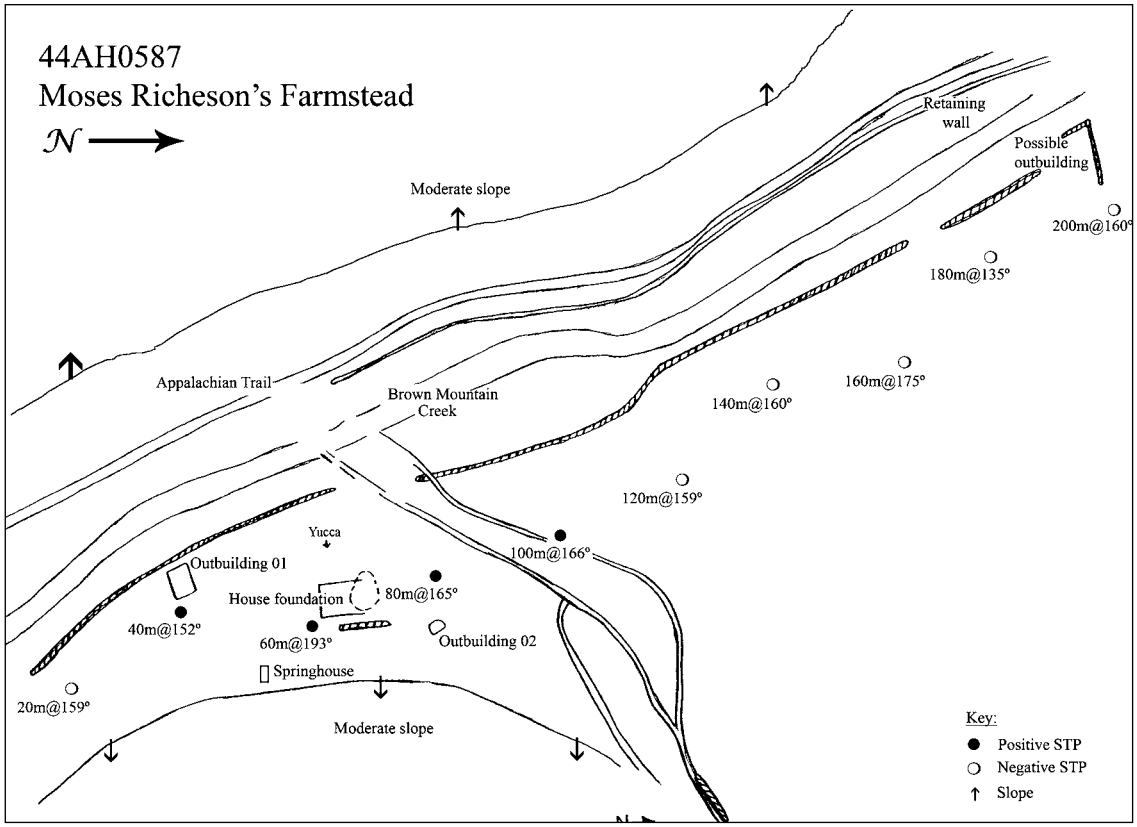

FIGURE 3. Map of Moses Richeson's farmstead. (Map by author, 2007.)

an opportunity to play to the differences in resolution inherent in the materials. By examining oral history, U.S. Census records, maps, deeds, wills, material culture, and the material traces on the landscape while "tacking back and forth," I was able to tease out the role of land and labor in the ways people worked toward security, self-efficiency, and self-improvement in the Appalachian mountains.

Land and Labor: Security, Self-Efficiency, and Self-Improvement in the Blue Ridge

Moses, born into slavery around 1828, was mixed race. Jesse Richeson, the plantation owner, was his father, and his mother was an enslaved laborer. Moses Richeson worked as a miller on Jesse Richeson's plantation. After emancipation in 1865, Moses Richeson may have continued as the miller or profited from the Appalachian timber boom, hauling timber by wagon to Buena Vista or to Lynchburg (Philip Davis 2008, pers. comm.). Regardless of his occupation, by June of 1868 Moses Richeson had earned enough money to purchase 220 ac. of land along Brown Mountain Creek (Table 2).

Land ownership was an important form of social, political, and economic stability for former enslaved laborers. The Richeson family could make decisions about allocation of time and energy toward domestic and agricultural labor. Domestic labor, or work inside the home, was geared toward production for subsistence and family life, and agricultural labor, or the work outside the home, was directed toward the production of commodities for exchange. The mountain land owned by Moses Richeson provided sustenance, security, as well as a productive resource (Geisler 1995:27). The Richeson family grew tobacco, wheat, and corn, and kept a garden to supplement the family's diet. The land helped the Richesons diversify their survival

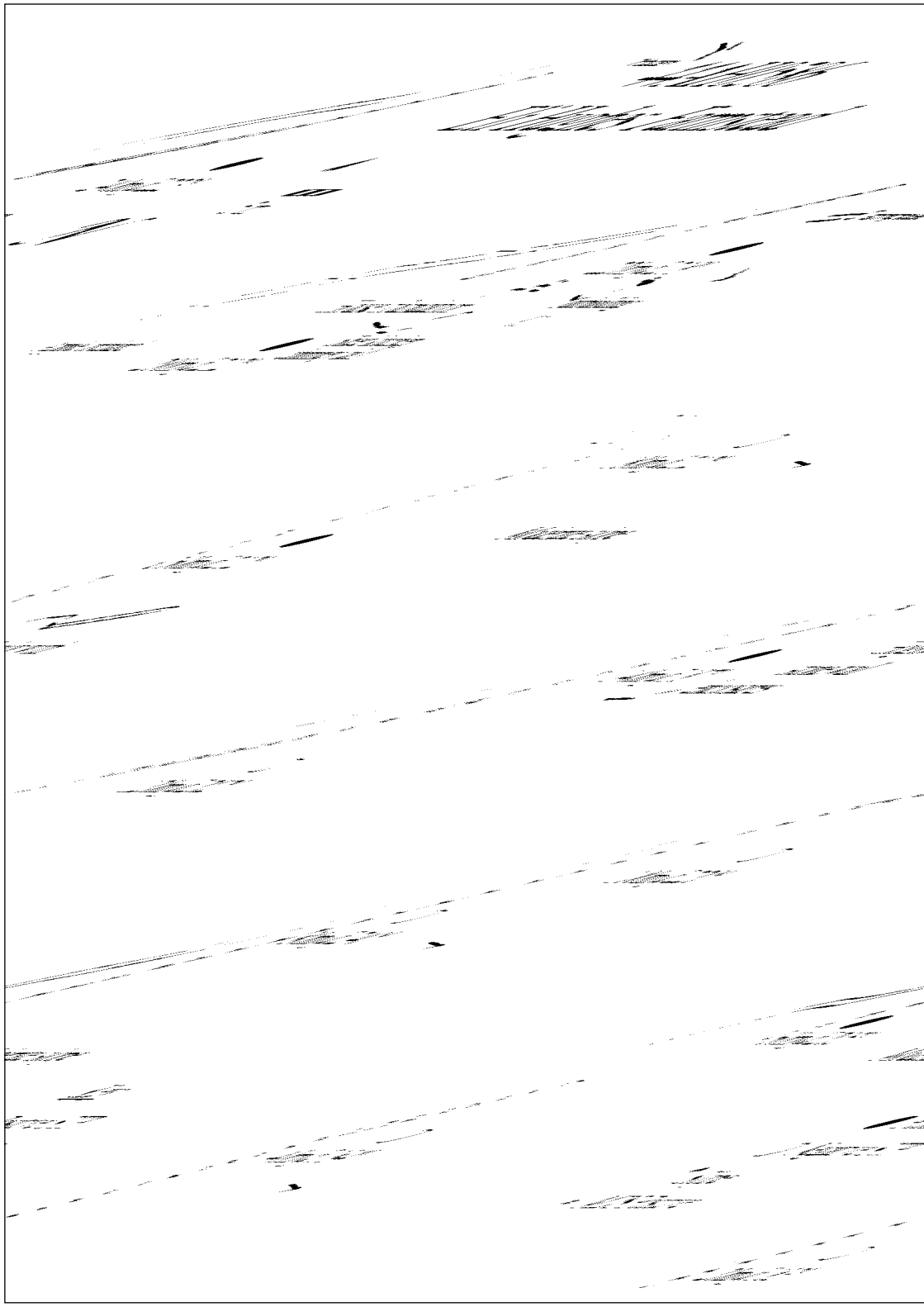

FIGURE 4. Map of the Hughes farmstead. (Map by author, 2007.)

TABLE 1
PERCENTAGES OF ARTIFACTS RECOVERED FROM THE MOSES RICHESON AND ELI HUGHES FARMSTEADS DIVIDED BY FUNCTIONAL GROUP

	Artifact Patterns							
	Personal (%)	Foodways (%)	Household (%)	Arms (%)	Architectural (%)	Activities (%)	Pipes (%)	Other (%)
Hughes Farmstead	7.55	23.92	3.53	1.12	48.95	5.29	0.00	9.63
Richeson Farmstead	1.96	13.76	3.78	0.45	71.40	4.84	0.00	3.78

TABLE 2
MOSES RICHESON'S LAND ACQUISITIONS

Purchased from	Date	Acreage and Location	Amount Paid	Source
Henry E. Smith	1868	220 ac., including Staton Lot No. 3, purchased 1863	$300	Amherst County Land Records 1868:232
Edgar N. and Ellen Staton	1870	Partial interest in the Dower lot	$18	Amherst County Land Records 1870:98
Edward and Isabelle Davis	1872	20 ac., Staton Lot No. 8	$20	Amherst County Land Records 1872:97
Marshall and Caroline Staton	1872	50 ac., Staton Estate Lot No. 2	$375	Amherst County Land Records 1872:163
William M. and Nancy Staton	1878	64 ac., Staton Estate Lot No. 5	$275	Amherst County Land Records 1878:101
		Total: 354 ac.	*$988*	

strategies through local land-based economics, as a place to hunt wild game and gather wood as a major energy source. Land also provided security as a source of real property or an asset that could be a principal source of credit. Since Richeson owned the land he was able to rent parcels to tenant farmers. The tenant farmers provided labor and Richeson controlled the means of production. By 1893, Richeson and his sons were listed in the Chataigne business directory as principal farmers in Amherst County (Chataigne 1893). Yet an examination of the material culture as well as access to resources at Richeson's farmstead and their tenant property provides contradictory notions of economic well-being and challenges the stereotypes of Appalachian poverty.

Moses Richeson's small house (8 × 5 m) was located on a narrow strip of relatively flat land in between Brown Mountain Creek and Long Mountain. The house was not a temporary structure, rather, it had a stone foundation with unrefined log walls, a log floor, windows, and a porch. Excavations in and surrounding the house resulted in a limited number of diagnostic artifacts. The limited number of material goods recovered could signify an unwillingness or inability to purchase items from local markets. But, on the other hand, personal items, which included clothing items such as buttons, beads, a buttonhook, a toothbrush, and hair pins, have one of the highest artifact frequencies (after architecture), reflecting an interest of the Richesons in showing their status through their personal appearance (Table 1). DeCunzo (2004) notes that African American tenant farmers discarded toothbrushes and items of personal adornment, such as paste jewelry, which displayed status through dress rather than through other consumer items or architecture. For the Richesons, items such as the toothbrush head and the buttonhook indicate that the family purchased items from local markets

and were not isolated or outside the commercial mainstream, as people of Appalachia are often stereotyped.

With Moses Richeson's economic position, it is surprising that he did not renovate the small log house. The construction and size of Richeson's house could indicate an unwillingness or inability to renovate after current fashions. This could indicate that owning land to pass down to future generations was more important than demonstrating wealth through the architecture and material culture of the family home. The members of the Richeson family appear to have worked towards demonstrating their class position through their dress and personal appearance, yet materially minimized their class differences by living in an unrefined log house and purchasing a limited number of items from local merchants. Moses Richeson may have chosen self-sufficiency over full participation in the market economy. Regardless, minimizing class differences as a strategy should not necessarily be seen as evidence that the Richesons lived in poverty (Figure 3).

Eli Hughes was a tenant on Moses Richeson's land. The share-tenancy arrangement differed from sharecropping, the most common labor arrangement in which sharecroppers only had their labor to offer. In many cases, tenancy was not the most progressive option for former enslaved laborers following emancipation. Rather, tenancy was a compromise solution to serious conflicts between landowners and emancipated slaves. The failure of radical land reform, the demise of any hopes for "40 acres and a mule," and a continuing concentration of land ownership in the hands of wealthy whites resulted in a strictly controlled system of production and marketing. Yet tenant farming was an important advance over slavery. In most cases, the diet, education, leisure time, and general standard of living of the emancipated improved, yet in parts of the South, sharecroppers had little hope of economic and social improvement because they were in debt and immobilized.

Eli Hughes and his family lived on a narrow flood plain on the same side of Brown Mountain Creek as Moses Richeson. A ridge of Long Mountain separated the houses from each other. Eli Hughes's house is similar to Moses Richeson's in size and construction—a small, two-story, log house—with a similar number of outbuildings. The Hughes family was self-sufficient and had a certain degree of independence. Eli Hughes raised hogs and horses to sell for a profit, his wife, Lucy, may have taken in laundry to supplement their income, and the family maintained a garden to supplement its diet. The Richesons appropriated one-quarter of the crop produced by the Hughes family, but the Hughes family also controlled its domestic and agricultural labor as well as its leisure (Figure 4).

The limited number of diagnostic artifacts recovered at the Hughes property was similar to that found at the Richeson's. The artifacts recovered at the Hughes farmstead—including silverware, hairpins, a waffle iron, and plow parts—indicate a level of self-sufficiency and the purchase of items from local and regional markets (Table 1). Taft Hughes told Dave Benavitch (1992):

> We would have old catalogs to look at. There was a company named Charles Williams Mail-Order. Bell Hell, Montgomery Ward, and Sears Roebuck. My mother did right much ordering if she could get some money.

Excavations in the shed kitchen resulted in the expected collection of kitchen utensils, mainly spoons and knives, and canning lids, as well as a number of buttons, including an N & W Union Made button ca. 1880, and a Virginia Military Institute cadet button (Figure 5 and Table 3). The buttons suggest that the kitchen may have also functioned as a place to wash laundry (Jordan 2005). Most of the time laundry was done outside, but in the winter women would wash their clothes in the kitchen (Wigginton 1973:265). The Hughes family may have taken in laundry to earn extra money. According to Laurie Wilkie (2003:83): "Laundress positions offered some advantage over working for a single house. A laundress could work for several families at a time, but because she would most typically do her work at her home, she needed to interact with them only when picking up or dropping off clothing."

By taking in laundry, the Hughes family was able to supplement its income as well as broaden its community networks. The ways in which the Hughes family enacted plans and made decisions about how to supplement its income and be self-sufficient can be seen materially in the hog lot, buttons, and canning-jar lids. The material culture from both the Richeson and the Hughes

FIGURE 5. Excavations in the shed kitchen. (Photo by author, 2007.)

TABLE 3
BUTTONS RECOVERED FROM THE ELI HUGHES AND MOSES RICHESON FARMSTEADS

Hughes Farmstead	**Count**	**Description**
House	1	White button fragment
	1	Iridescent blue button
	2	White four-hole button
Shed kitchen	1	Blue Ridge button
	1	Bone button
	3	Bone button fragment
	1	Metal button
	3	Metal button fragment
	1	VMI cadet button
	1	N & W Union Made button
	2	White four-hole button
	1	White four-hole button fragment
	1	White four-hole outer-embossed button
Richeson Farmstead		
House	1	White four-hole button
	1	White two-hole button
	1	White outer-embeveled button
	1	White four-hole outer-embossed button

farmsteads reflects similarities in occupational and economic factors that are similar to other frontier studies. For instance, Miller and Hurry (1983) argues that quality of ceramic assemblages does not necessarily correlate to wealth or social status. It was found that a tenant-farming site in Ohio produced a low ceramic index because the family chose to invest in land and more durable tinware rather than ceramics. Here it is important to keep in mind that cash was not the main means of acquiring goods; cash did not become essential for the purchase of the manufactured goods that found their way into the mountain hollows until the 1920s (Lewis 1998:262). Self-sufficiency, especially self-provisioning, served a practical purpose (survival), but was also an avenue for asserting and maintaining a sense of dignity in a broader society hostile to African Americans (Palmer 2011:200).

Both the Richeson and the Hughes families were a part of a larger system of spatialized power shaped by Jim Crow racism and Black Codes that limited their economic and social opportunities. Black Codes were enacted to limit the freedom of former enslaved laborers, determining where African Americans could attend school or church. White families operated all of the stores, mills, and post offices in the area. The Richeson and the Hughes families attended Piney Hill Baptist Church, an African American church. Joseph Richeson, Moses Richeson's son, was a preacher at the church, giving him an important position in the community. The church provided space for internal definition as a place to worship and to socialize with friends and neighbors. Prior to 1919, there were no schools for African American students along Brown Mountain Creek. Since the community lacked the economic and social resources to develop schools, the children who lived along Brown Mountain Creek helped their families with chores around the farm instead of gathering with other children to learn how to read, write, and do math. The allocation of certain resources such as schools, stores, and mills shaped power relations in this rural farming community.

The Richeson and the Hughes families are two examples of the diversity of racial and classed experiences in Amherst County, Virginia. Yet, with the racialization that occurred as white elites and state officials attempted to fortify the color line and distance whites from blacks and European immigrants, and evade the immense class tensions within the U.S., this diversity was replaced with a monolithic black subject (Mullins 1996:538). Ironically, as people of color were being classified as monolithic black subjects, Appalachia was being represented as the region of white poverty. The history of slavery was erased as capitalism blamed poor whites for their poverty. The diversity of racial and class experiences in the region was obscured by the focus on poor white families rather than the economic changes that placed those families in poverty. To recognize that Appalachia was made up of a diversity of raced and classed positions would mean that the historical and structural space of poverty would also have to be examined.

Conclusions: Poverty in Appalachia

J. Russell Smith (1916) wrote that out of what should have been "an agricultural Eden," the residents of southern Appalachia "only made a slum with a high death rate; a scattered slum of log hovels that would come into violent conflict with the sanitary regulations of a hundred municipalities." Smith, who aimed to teach better farming practices, and other authors of such treatises had their own ideas about the more fitting use of the southern mountains and the betterment of its population. These were not idle words but the public-relations imagery that bolstered sweeping programs of resource extraction, missionary activities, and "anti-poverty" efforts of state and federal governments from the late 18th century to the present (Anglin 2002:565).

In Lynchburg, Virginia, plans to build the Lynchburg Reservoir in the Blue Ridge Mountains began in 1904 (*Washington Post* 1903:4). The clearance, or the removal of people from their homes and lands, marked the mountain landscape as farm families sold their land to city and federal governments. The Richeson family finally sold its land in 1917. The Forest Service purchased the land that had made the family a living, given them freedom from slavery, and provided sustenance and a means of production. As the federal and local governments moved in to manage natural resources, the people who had depended on such lands for food and livelihood found their interests disregarded. The clearance of the Appalachian landscape ruptured the sense of belonging, home, identity, and meaning the African American families had built.

Prior to the sale of their land in 1917, by some measures of poverty, such as income, capital assets, quantity and quality of material goods, and access to resources such as education, the Richeson family may have been poor. But for a farming economy land was an important factor of production, social status, and employment. Yet the connection between land and poverty is often overlooked because the connection between land and wealth is somehow more intuitive (Geisler 1995:30). At the start of the 20th century, African Americans relinquished title to all but 4 million of the nearly 17 million acres of land that they had held, and African American poverty and land loss have, by many accounts, a high correlation (Browne 1973; Geisler 1995).

The case study of the Richeson family shows the connections between poverty and land loss. In Appalachia, the Great Depression of the 1930s began in the 1920s when the industrial system that had lured thousands off the farms and thousands of others to the mountains collapsed under the weight of overproduction and increasing competition (Straw 2006:15). When the Richeson family sold its land to the U.S. Forest Service, it was a participant in the political, economic, and ideological effects of capitalist processes and state activity taking place in the region. Archaeological research showed how the history of slavery, emancipation, and African American landownership was erased through the building of a national forest and the popular images of Appalachian poverty with which it is connected. The Richeson family responded to social, political, and economic changes by moving to nearby cities and finding jobs. Today the family descendants remember the lives of the Richeson family as "land rich and cash poor."

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