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"Poor White" Recollections and Artifact Reuse in Barbados: Considerations for Archaeologies of Poverty

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Abstract Archaeologists regularly confront the material realities of economic inequality. This article contributes to a growing body of literature on the archaeology of poverty but challenges archaeologists to consider how such approaches are politically weighted and directly come to bear on how communities experience economic hardship in the present. Additionally, through a case study of a "poor white" tenantry in Barbados, this article suggests that material culture from sites associated with people of limited economic means necessitates alternative interpretive methods that combine archaeological, historical, and oral sources.

Keywords Poverty · Caribbean · Oral tradition · Whiteness · Artifact reuse

Introduction

How can archaeologists demonstrate the tangible realities of economic inequality without branding the groups and individuals they study with the social stigmas associated with impoverishment? This is a crucial question, pertinent for all studies of economically marginalized individuals and groups but particularly in cases when descendant communities are involved. Given the rise in archaeological literature dedicated to the analysis of poverty and impoverishment (see Mayne and Murray 2001; Rimmer et al. 2011; Spencer-Wood and Matthews 2011a), the political implications of these terms are increasingly important to such archaeological endeavors. While such terms may adequately and accurately describe the realities of economic inequality and the lived experiences of coping with limited economic means, they simultaneously

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inscribe groups and individuals with an identity oftentimes marked with scorn and derision.

In Barbados, the pejoratives "Redleg" and "poor white" refer to a marginalized segment of the island's population that is largely composed of the descendants of seventeenth-century European indentured servants and small farmers (Sheppard 1977). Primarily residing in the rural areas along the island's east coast, they were indelibly marked by their economic circumstances and continue to be identified in relation to their anomalous racial and class position in an island society that was, for roughly two centuries, defined by a sugar and slave system (Lambert 2005; Watson 2000). Following emancipation, the "poor white problem" was further exacerbated by a flooded job market, leaving elites to ponder what was to be done with a poor and white underclass (Beckles 1988; Watson 2000). Interestingly, however, the "white" identity of this Barbadian demographic was regularly reaffirmed. Historical data from Barbados vividly detail the discourse of "poor white" idleness as debates swelled concerning whether the "poor whites" were deserving of poor relief (Marshall 2003). Despite frequent and explicit indictments of laziness and destitution by island visitors and elites, the everyday lives of the "poor whites" and their socioeconomic circumstances remained poorly understood. Additionally, there remains a lack of consideration of how "poor white" Barbadians understood their own circumstances in the past and present.

Through a comparison of a discourse of destitution and archaeological and ethnographic findings from a "poor white" tenantry known as Below Cliff, evidence suggests that economic hardships are experienced and understood in a myriad of ways that can be viewed materially, often standing in stark contrast to imposed assumptions about poverty (Taylor 2013). Despite archaeological research on poverty being largely concerned with urban slums (see Giles and Jones 2011; Rimmer et al. 2011), the rural landscape similarly offers a means through which to confront the material manifestations of economic inequality and community strategies for subsistence and survival (see Barnes 2011a, b). In confronting the realities of economic hardship materially, interpretations of the specific artifacts demand alternative strategies that go beyond functional categories of intended use. In the tenantry of Below Cliff, residents displayed ingenuity and thrift in reusing particular material goods. In most cases, reuse strategies were uncovered through the collection of oral traditions and demonstrate the limitations of traditional interpretations of material culture according to intended functionality. These oral traditions further demonstrate how diverse community members recall and understand their own experiences with limited economic means.

Archaeologies of Poverty

In a neoliberal politico-economic climate in which the half-century-long war on poverty established by former US President Lyndon Johnson can be more aptly referred to as war on the poor, those of limited economic means are castigated as idle, inherently lazy, and deserving of their often dire circumstances (Gans 1995; Katz 2013). While such phenomena have been heavily scrutinized in the American context, such sentiments are certainly not the invention of post-war America and are manifest in the spread of capitalism and its associated ideologies on a global scale. In many cases, groups

condemned as the "undeserving poor" in the past and present also exhibit additional traits of the Other; those of African descent and migrant populations are oftentimes derided as being to blame for their own economic hardships. Significantly, white populations are, and have been, susceptible to similar condemnation, sometimes calling into question their white or unmarked racial status (Hartigan 2005; Orser 2004, 2007, 2011b; Wray 2006). It is no coincidence, therefore, that such groups have been the focus of archaeological analyses of the "inarticulate" (Ascher 1974, p. 10). Through the use of archaeological methods, it is possible to confront political assumptions and sentiments that are imposed upon individuals' lived realities.

Archaeologists regularly encounter the material manifestations of economic inequality. Unequal access to goods, amenities, and power are visible in everyday items as well as in developing and dilapidated landscapes. Careful attention to the processes that led to the establishment of "poor white" tenantries on the same landscape as villages for the enslaved certainly entails an engagement with the forces and relations that engender inequality, specifically those between planters/overseers/elites and non-elite laborers (enslaved and free) in an agrarian capitalist system. In this sense, I agree with Mark Leone's (2010, p. 52) summation of the tenets of a Marxist archaeology, namely:

> that capitalist society is based on unequal power. Unequal wealth knows no limits, and neither does poverty. This leads to divisions within society, called classes, and their relations are often and inevitably antagonistic. These antagonisms are distinguished by racism, sexism, and other ideologies of inferiority and superiority, whose results are called subordination and domination (emphasis in original).

These classes, however, are not necessarily coherent and frictions exist in how individuals of similar class backgrounds experience their world. In other words, antagonisms between classes can obfuscate differences and schisms within classes, including among those marked as subordinates. The construction, reconstruction, and negotiation of difference among non-elites necessitates an engagement with how such individuals simultaneously coped with poverty and interacted with one another, their material possessions, and environment.

The "poor white" experience of economic hardship was shared by enslaved and free Afro-Barbadians, albeit under different circumstances. While these rigid racial boundaries were by no means impermeable (see Jones 2007; Stoler 2002), such differences come to the fore in the historical record as elites debated how to govern, manage, assist, or condemn diverse underclass populations. Additionally, members of the "poor white" community in the past and present experience class antagonisms and their own economic circumstances in a multitude of ways, thus drawing an important distinction between "individual descendants of historical communities [and] a descendant community" (McGuire 2008, p. 212). Multiple, and sometimes conflicting, narratives arise between individuals within these communities, engendering schisms in how economic inequality is interpreted and remembered (Jones and Russell 2012b, p. 280, McDavid 2011). Conflicts and competition may arise due to social stigmas associated with poverty. As discussed below, members of the present-day "poor white" community offer conflicting opinions on their own economic circumstances. It is with such

sentiments in mind that scholars must carefully consider the use of the terms poverty and impoverishment.

The castigation of the poor is inherently tied to class antagonisms and has informed recent approaches to archaeological studies of impoverishment and homelessness (Kiddey and Schofield 2011; Mayne and Murray 2001; Rimmer et al. 2011; Spencer-Wood and Matthews 2011a; Zimmerman et al. 2010; Zimmerman and Welch 2011). A long-standing engagement with analyses of class and economic inequality has led to an explicit archaeological approach to poverty. As Spencer-Wood and Matthews (2011b, p. 1), argue, "Poverty is a way of positioning some at a disadvantage that simultaneously enriches the few, impoverishes others, and marks the poor with symbols of marginality, failure, and Otherness. Poverty, therefore, is a struggle for resources and reputation" (emphasis in original). Like Wurst and Fitts (1999), Spencer-Wood and Matthews acknowledge that an engagement with poverty entails a relational definition of class (see also Mrozowski 2006, pp. 12–13; Taylor 2013, p. 13). For the purposes of this case study, "poor white" economic realities may have been similar to the circumstances of free and enslaved Afro-Barbadians, but they experienced the plantation landscape in markedly different ways given their racial identity. Defined as free and white plantation residents, the "Redlegs" were marked by their impoverishment and socially condemned due to their perceived idleness.

When confronting economic hardship, the material record is often scant, presenting unique methodological and theoretical challenges. One specific challenge is a qualitative and quantitative lack of the things that constitute archaeological assemblages, forcing archaeologists to confront physical absences. In engaging with the recent turn in the social sciences towards materiality, Severin Fowles (2010, p. 25) argues that "thing theory's major blind spot is, quite literally, that which is unseen—or, rather, that which is absent but nevertheless experienced as a presence precisely because its absence is marked or emphatic." Fowles considers material as well as conceptual absence from Neolithic figurines to the absence of the state or civilization in Lewis Henry Morgan's early analyses of culture. Therefore, while not explicitly engaging with poverty or material inequality, Fowles raises significant questions about how we confront archaeological absences in impoverished contexts. A relative absence of material culture needs to be placed in dialogue with broader class relations and structures that made manifest and perpetuate the realities of poverty. Poverty may be constituted by a relative quantitative absence of things, but its affects and realities are always present.

This theoretical consideration has practical implications for more subtly interpreting the material record of those experiencing economic hardship. As Erin Taylor (2013, p. 4) succinctly notes, in rather bald terms, "the relationships that poor people have with their possessions are not just about deprivation." Rather, as Spencer-Wood and Matthews (2011b, p. 6) point out, "Since it can be expected that poor people would carefully curate their few possessions, any differences among archaeological sites of the poor probably have meaning, even in a small sample." Therefore, in interpreting the archaeological record of the "poor whites" one must carefully consider the choices made on the part of consumers, the options available to them (no matter how limited they may have been), and how material culture was utilized. The latter is particularly significant given that in such contexts items can, and often are, reused for purposes other than their original intended function. Artifact reuse infuses material culture with new and

alternative meaning, casting doubt on claims that "dominant groups create and control the meanings and uses of material culture" (Shackel 2000, p. 234). For instance, through an analysis of modified ceramics that had fallen out of popularity in an impoverished district of urban New Orleans, D. Ryan Gray (2011, p. 68) has argued that in addition to evidence of thrift on the part of impoverished residents, the reuse or modification of items is also "part of an active attempt to remain independent and self-sufficient." These considerations, specifically those associated with material reuse, apply to materials excavated from the "poor white" tenantry discussed below and demonstrate the importance of illustrating how the analysis of materials associated with limited economic means necessitates nuanced, subtle, and alternative methods of interpreting material culture.

Below Cliff, along with other "poor white" tenantries and villages around Barbados, is and has been viewed as a marginal space inhabited by a socially isolated demographic. A reorientation of how the archaeological landscape is viewed and interpreted reveals that such marginal zones can be spaces of significant social interaction and the persistence of a way of life in spite of a harsh environment and impoverished conditions. Such a reorientation allows for considerations of class on a plantation landscape in which race-based inequality has been the focus of scholarly study (the two are, of course, not mutually exclusive; see Delle 1998, 2014; Mills 2010, pp. 72–100; Orser 1990). As Christopher Matthews (2011, p. 45) argues, such an archaeological approach looks "at the process of impoverishment within the overarching social system of meaning that both defines 'the poor' and connects impoverished people to others in their communities through ongoing political economic relations." By focusing on this seemingly peripheral space, it is possible to archaeologically engage with economic limitations, both the processes and structures that engender inequality, and how community members relate to one another and their circumstances.

The archaeological approach proposed here takes seriously the realities of poverty experienced by Below Cliff residents without reifying the social stigmas imposed on the economically disadvantaged by island and visiting elites. Archaeological materials speak to the physical dimensions of everyday life on the plantation landscape but also speak to deeper and localized understandings of how laborers understood their class and racial identities, understandings that did not necessarily mesh with dominant ideologies concerning impoverishment. In bringing to light the ingenuity on the part of individuals and groups struggling with limited economic means, Charles Orser (2011a, p. 538) warns that "In the effort to illustrate the virtues of the human spirit and humanity's incredible ability to adapt, we must not lose sight of the reasons for poverty in the first place." As such, contextualizing the historical processes that give rise to inequality is a necessary step in understanding its realities. Furthermore, in contextualizing the "poor white" experience in Barbados, the complicated links between poverty and race emerge (Orser 2011a, p. 537).

The "Poor White Problem"

Historically, Hilary Beckles (1988) has presented the "poor white problem" as a political question faced by Barbadian authorities in the decades surrounding emancipation in 1834. An estimated population of between 8000 and 12,000 "poor whites"

(Sheppard 1977, pp. 34, 43) had for centuries struggled with poverty in the English colony and had shown little to no signs of social mobility despite paternalistic efforts on the part of planters and administrators (see Lambert 2005; Sheppard 1977, pp. 79–101). The "poor whites" or "Redlegs," as they are pejoratively referred to, are largely the descendants of seventeenth-century European indentured servants who were eventually replaced on the plantation landscape by captive Africans during and after the sugar revolution beginning in the 1640s (see Beckles 1989; Sheppard 1977). Barbadian and colonial elites grappled with the conceptual and practical paradox of a sizable "poor white" population in a rigidly bounded racial society. If we then consider the master narrative of white plantocratic rule and black impoverishment and oppression, the historical "poor white problem" is also a contemporary theoretical and conceptual one. In other words, aside from the historical question of how "poor whites" fared in plantation societies, the implications of this narrative are more broadly situated in discussions of the intimate relationship between race and class in Atlantic world economies (see for instance Robinson 1983). This is not to say that class outweighs race or vice versa but, rather, that in contexts in which the two are inextricably linked, it is necessary to discern the recursive relationship between the two.

The need for the economic qualifier of "poor" in the pejorative "poor white" reaffirms the significance of anticolonial discourse as well as scholarship that has explicitly illustrated the "white over black" realities of Atlantic world history (see Fanon 2004; Jordan 1968; Mills 1997; Wolf 1982). In his philosophical explication of the inherently racist ideologies and epistemologies that define the modern condition, which he terms the Racial Contract, political philosopher Charles Mills (1997, p. 30) has argued that "though there were local variations in the Racial Contract, depending on circumstances and the particular mode of exploitation…it remains the case that the white tribe, as the global representative of civilization and modernity, is generally on top of the social pyramid." In an attempt to cement the status of the Racial Contract as a political, social, economic, ideological, and philosophical rule, Mills privileges the broader implications of the Contract while minimizing the "local variations." It is, however, at the sites of these local variations that we are able to observe the successes and failures of the tenets of the Racial Contract and begin to unpack how and why they succeeded or failed. In Barbados, these successes and failures rested on the "poor white problem" as the plantocracy struggled to consider the reality of "poor white" colonial subjects.

Observers from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries strategically incorporated the "poor whites" into their accounts of Barbadian society. These accounts served to marginalize the "poor whites" as both exceptional and isolated in a plantation society that was coming to grips with the inevitability of emancipation. In 1832, two years prior to emancipation (or the start of the apprenticeship period which lasted until 1838), Edward Eliot (1833, pp. 225–226), in a lecture at the Bridgetown Cathedral would comment on the current state of the "poor whites." Arguing that most of the carpenters, masons, tailors, smiths, and shoemakers were free people of color, he noted that this was "at a time when a large white population are in the lowest state of poverty and wretchedness." The problem of "poor white" poverty was exacerbated by full emancipation in 1838 with a flood of free Afro-Barbadian laborers on the market. With historical roots in the period of slavery, Hilary Beckles (1988, p. 1) has argued that "By the end of slavery in 1838 a heterogeneous white working class had fully developed,

and society was characterized by an element of 'black over white' at its lowest levels." Additionally, without the threat of slave rebellion the island's militia was soon disbanded. "This in effect meant that those whites who occupied rent-free land on the plantations in return for services rendered in the militia, suddenly became squatters, with no legal claim to the land they occupied" (Watson 2000, p. 134).

Visitors to the island were particularly critical of the observed poverty under which the "poor whites" suffered. In the late 1820s, shortly before emancipation, Frederick William Naylor Bayley (1833, p. 62)., the son of a military officer, would visit Barbados and comment on the "poor whites" he came across in Bridgetown, the island's urban center:

> Of all the classes of people who inhabit Bridgetown, the poor whites are the lowest, and the most degraded: residing in the meanest hovels, they pay no attention either to neatness in their dwellings or cleanliness in their persons; and they subsist too often, to their shame be it spoken, on the kindness and charity of slaves. I have never seen a more sallow, dirty, ill looking, and unhappy race; the men lazy, the women disgusting, and the children neglected: all without any notion of principle, morality, or religion; forming a melancholy picture of living misery, and a strong contract with the general appearance of happiness depicted on the countenances of the free black, and colored people, of the same class.

This account, among others (see Coleridge 1826, pp. 272–274; Dickson 1789, pp. 37, 41, 57; Pinckard 1806, p. 132), paints a harrowing picture that came to define the "Redlegs" in a race-based society that was typically dependent on white superiority, power, and control. This phenomenon bears striking similarities to the discourses produced about "white trash" in the American South during the same period when Bayley's account was published (see Hartigan 2005). By this time the direct relationship between impoverishment and physical health, appearance, degeneration, etiquette, nourishment, and hygiene were being observed and acknowledged on both sides of the Atlantic (for a case study of such effects from the American South see Novak 2008). On visiting Ireland, this led Frederick Douglass (2008[1854], p. 38) to comment in relation to the physical appearance and wellbeing of an individual that a man "may carve out his circumstances, but his circumstances will carve him out as well." Despite the similarities in this developing discourse, the "poor white" situation was unique in the Caribbean given their proportionally high population on a densely populated island.

By the start of the twentieth century the condition of the majority of the "poor whites" had improved little despite efforts for reform through poor relief and education (see Reilly 2014; Sheppard 1977, pp. 79–101). These conditions, however, were not unique to the "poor whites." Widespread poverty and growing unemployment swept across the island as global sugar prices declined and England looked to other Caribbean territories (such as Cuba) and to the beet sugar producing regions of Eastern Europe to purchase sugar (for labor conflicts during this period see Carter 2012). This led to a tremendous outflow of Barbadians to Panama to work as laborers building the canal (estimates reach as high as 45,000 laborers; for more on Barbadians in Panama and the economic effects of return migration see Richardson 1985). Additionally, health issues such as malnutrition and hookworm plagued the "poor white" population. A 1917

Rockefeller Foundation study revealed that 65 % of the "poor whites" suffered from hookworm compared to 36 % of the Afro-Barbadian population (Watson 2000, p. 134). Official efforts to promote emigration in the mid-to-late-nineteenth century and migration to Panama in the late-nineteenth-early-twentieth centuries were factors in the decline of the total white population which dropped from 16,207 in 1861 to 12,063 in 1911; it is estimated that the "poor whites" made up as much as three quarters of the white population (Sheppard 1977, p. 70).

Throughout the twentieth century, the "poor white" population continued to decrease. As agricultural production diminished, emigration continued to be a factor in population decrease. Additionally, many rural "poor whites" made their way to Bridgetown with hopes of social mobility. Despite social unrest due to mass unemployment which climaxed in riots in 1937 (Browne 2012), many "poor whites" were able to take advantage of employer preference for light-skinned employees and were able to procure jobs as clerks, bank and office workers, cashiers, dock workers, and skilled laborers in the city (Sheppard 1977, pp. 109-110). Given the diminishing numbers of those defined as "Redlegs," by the 1960s and 70s it was observed that they could only be found in two discrete areas—the urban context of Bridgetown and in the rural community of Newcastle or Churchview in the parish of St. John, the area of investigation for this case study (Keagy 1975, p. 20). Historical and semi-ethnographic works of the 1950s–70s attribute the dwindling of the "poor white" population to limited social mobility and outward migration but are torn on the issue of miscegenation (Davis 1978; Keagy 1972; Price 1957; Rosenburg 1962).

Poor Relief and Planter Paternalism

From the earliest years of settlement elites, planters, and authorities made attempts to assuage the condition of those considered to be the "deserving poor" through "outright gifts (donations) and capital gifts (endowments) to extend poor relief schemes, to establish educational institutions, to educate select groups of the deserving poor, and to keep churches in good repair" (Marshall 2003, p. 167). Based on a long-standing tradition of poor relief in England, policies and strategies would transform in colonial contexts to suit the needs of the local population (Newman 2013; Slack 1995; for Australia, see Barker and Lamb 2009; for Jamaica, see Roper 2012; for Barbados, see Marshall 2003). In Barbados, religious duty certainly played a major role in compelling (and even forcing) residents to provide relief for the island's poor, evidenced in the parish vestry's responsibility in collecting and allocating poor relief funds from parish residents. This relief, however, was only extended to those identified as "white" and "Non-whites, whether slave or free, were deliberately excluded from participation" (Marshall 2003, p. 167). Therefore, the parish vestry minutes housed at the Barbados Department of Archives (BDA) are a rich resource from which to garner elite attitudes toward "poor whites," elite attempts to improve their conditions, and the successes and failures of these attempts.

June 25, 1655 marks the earliest reference to parish money being collected via taxes to support poor relief in the parish of St. John (where the tenantry of Below Cliff is located). The entry reads that "one pound of suggar p acre be leavyed this yeare for the repairing of the Church and the mantainance of the poore in the pish [sic.]" (BDA D

279, 1649-82, p. 6). There is no indication of how this money was to be allocated or to whom. It is not until over a decade later in January of 1667 that specific reference is made to a recipient of poor relief: "Ordered from the day above said that Dennis Fallin for his future relief be allowed him eighty pounds of suggar per month" (BDA D 279, 1649–82, p. 17). The surname Fallin suggests that this individual may have been from Ireland or was of Irish descent, but no further information is provided as to why he was receiving relief. It likely stands to reason, however, that only those deemed deserving through an inability to work (illness, injury, or otherwise) would be assisted. Additionally, it is debatable as to whether assistance was actually granted to those deemed deserving of relief given that a 1675 entry notes that "severall persons are refractory in the payment of the said Leavey" (BDA D 279, 1649–82, p. 31).

The parish vestry minutes are not available for the parish of St. John for the eighteenth century until 1792 by which time the documentation of the poor relief was much more thorough and descriptive. By this time the vestry minutes provide detailed lists of the names of those who were receiving quarterly pensions and the amounts they received. Parish vestrymen were aware of the mixed results that their poor relief efforts were having on the "poor white" population. It is difficult to gauge how relief efforts were reformed on an island scale, but vestry minutes from the parish of St. Philip (directly south of St. John) offer some insight into how the vestry attempted to reform the pension system. An 1808 report was delivered to the vestry based on a study carried out by a vestry-appointed commission that investigated each individual case of poor relief to determine the legitimacy of the claim. In half of the cases, the commission concluded that the recipients of quarterly pensions were not deserving of the sums they were receiving. While they deemed some unable to work due to disease, illness, old age, or injury, many were determined to be capable of some form of industry. Additionally, they determined that many women were having children in order to receive parish support. As they argued, "those who receive payment on account of Children, the Pension we consider acts to the discouragement of Industry by taking away the greatest of all Stimulus to exertion, the desire to support our Offspring and rather excites heedless and inconsiderate Poor, to contract Marriage and acquire Families, when they have neither established the means, nor possess the Industry to support them" (BDA D 273, 1794–1835, Feb. 9, 1808). Instead, children were to receive clothing. In all, of the 64 individual pension cases, 32 (exactly half) were either severed from the poor relief system or received some form of decrease in the funds or services they received.

Of particular significance is the commission's assessment that poor relief was discouraging recipients from working or contributing to local industry. A similar assumption was expressed in an anonymously authored letter found in the Barbados Council Minutes of 1847. During that year the vestry of St. Joseph, the parish directly north of St. John, requested additional funds for poor relief following a severe drought that had hit the "Redlegs" particularly hard. The author, arguing against the allotment of extra funds, was highly critical of the poor relief system, which in the post-emancipation era was still reserved for "poor whites" in an attempt to bolster their position against that of the recently freed Afro-Barbadians. He argued that such relief was the cause of "Redleg" idleness and lack of industriousness: "The very means adopted to raise them [the "poor whites"] above their fellows [Afro-Barbadians] has been the very means to work out their destruction and sink them to the very abyss of

misery and woe, they are nurtured in the lap of prejudice and distinction, and thereby despise the means of earning themselves an honest livelihood" (BDA Barbados Council Minutes, 1847). Investigations into the poor relief system are telling of elite perceptions of the "poor whites" and of poverty in general. In essence, "Redleg" poverty was a self-fulfilling prophecy as well as a tautology; the "Redlegs" were lazy and in need of relief, which discouraged them from working and encouraged the cycle of idleness and poverty.

As European laborers began to make their exit from the plantation as laborers in the seventeenth century, those left jobless and landless quickly developed a reputation (whether warranted or not) as being idle and detached from local industry. This reputation would continue throughout the period of slavery and well into the post-emancipation period. Entries concerning poor relief in the parish vestry minutes are representative of the ambivalent stance elites took on the matter of how to (or not to) provide assistance for impoverished parish residents. The parish vestry displayed a continued commitment to providing pensions for those deemed deserving (Marshall 2003). Ultimately, the record indicates that elites were unhappy with the poor relief system, explicitly voicing their opinions that relief encouraged idle lifestyles and perpetuated the cycle of "Redleg" poverty. Comfortable with the adage that the "poor whites" were impoverished because of their own laziness, little is documented concerning how individuals and communities supported themselves or made their livings.

Material Manifestations of Economic Hardship and Artifact Reuse

Archaeological research undertaken in the Below Cliff community builds on a strong tradition of historical archaeology on the southeastern Caribbean island. Since the foundational study of the Newton plantation burial ground by Handler and Lange (1978), archaeological research has expanded to encompass studies of other plantation landscapes (Armstrong and Reilly 2014; Bergman and Smith 2014; Loftfield 2001), urban spaces (Finneran 2013; Smith and Watson 2009), the local ceramic industry (Farmer 2011b; Finch 2013; Stoner 2000), heritage management (Farmer 2011a), enslaved and free Afro-Barbadian culture (Handler 1997; Handler and Bergman 2009; Smith 2008), and even the site of George Washington's brief residence on the island (Agbe-Davies 2009), to name a few examples. The case study presented here, however, marks the first archaeological investigation of the "poor whites."

Archaeological research undertaken at the former tenantry of Below Cliff mediates historical silences concerning how "poor whites" lived their daily lives and coped with their economic circumstances. Material evidence associated with imported ceramics confirms that the tenantry was inhabited in the mid-eighteenth century, but historical evidence from deed transfers suggests that the area was used as "leased land" as early as the 1650s (BDA RB3/3, f. 11). As the name suggests, Below Cliff was composed of small parcels of land located under Hackleton's Cliff, a large geological feature which spans much of the island's east coast (Fig. 1). The land on top of the cliff is relatively flat with fertile soil and has been home to intensive sugar cultivation since the early years of the sugar revolution in the 1640s. In stark contrast, the parcels below the cliff were situated on steep and unaccommodating land, and were largely out of sight of

planters and overseers who were concerned with the daily functioning of the sugar estate. Similarly, the village for the enslaved was located atop the cliff. With limited engagement in the sugar economy as plantation laborers or militiamen, the "poor whites" of Below Cliff were largely left to their own devices and developed intimate networks and strategies for surviving on a harsh landscape in dire economic circumstances.

Excavations were undertaken at three specific households in the tenantry, which was formally abandoned in the early 1960s and quickly overtaken by dense vegetation. The very recent period of abandonment was crucial in determining the nature of excavations. Former tenantry residents now reside in neighboring communities and provided detailed information about life in what they now referred to as "the woods." Excavations came to be focused on one household in particular, the childhood home of one of the neighboring community members who regularly navigates the dense forest to collect coconuts in the area surrounding his former residence. His insights, along with those of other community members, proved invaluable in reproducing the former landscape as well as in interpreting materials uncovered.

In total, limited surface collections, 21 shovel test pits (STPs), one partially excavated well/trash pit, and 27 excavated units, 1m^2, produced 3590 artifacts. Given the scale of excavations and the long period during which these house sites were inhabited, the quality and quantity of artifacts reflect the limited economic means that constrained purchasing or consumption power. While the tenantry was certainly peripheral in relation to the functioning of the plantation, the densely populated nature of Barbados would have made it unlikely for "poor whites" to be severely geographically restricted in terms of access to mass-produced goods (for market access within scission communities see Sayers et al. 2007, p. 83; Sayers 2014). Rather, the assemblage was more likely affected by economic access. Despite the

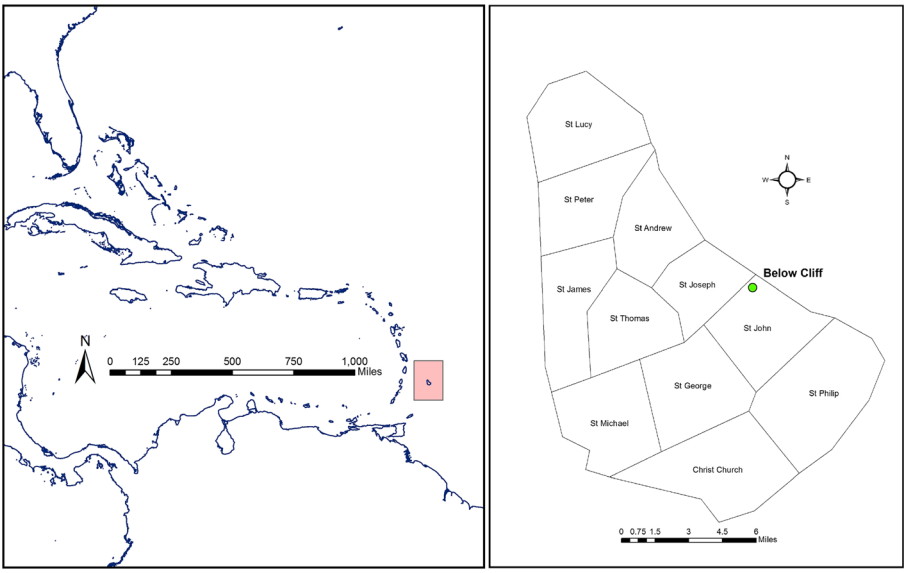

Fig. 1 The Caribbean islands and Barbados with parish boundaries and the location of Below Cliff along the island's east coast. Map by author

relative lack of material goods, however, those materials that are present reflect how limited means affected residents' access to goods, their consumption choices, how materials were used, how they were repurposed, and how they entered the archaeological record. While all artifact groups and types have the potential to speak to themes of economic inequality, the use and reuse of glass bottles, tin cans, and buttons are discussed here as they best exemplify active choices made by Below Cliff residents in combatting particular economic circumstances.

The reuse of material items is not necessarily a characteristic only associated with those experiencing economic hardship. In her analysis of the relationship between Americans and trash, Susan Strasser (1999) points out that through the turn of the twentieth century material reuse was a common trait among all individuals who sought to reduce waste and maximize item utility. While she emphasizes that the perception of trash is a culturally specific trait, she also points out that the sorting of items into categories of trash and items fit to be reused "is an issue of class: trashmaking both underscores and creates social differences based on economic status" (Strasser 1999, pp. 4–6, 9). Therefore, in distinguishing between items that were haphazardly discarded and those that were reused, there exists an intimate link with limited economic means. Furthermore, those faced with limited consumption power can be more inclined to reuse items that would be otherwise discarded in order to remain "independent and self-sufficient" (Gray 2011, p. 68). As such, in acknowledging the economic circumstances that led residents of Below Cliff to reuse particular materials, we also need to acknowledge their ingenuity while carefully avoiding assumptions about functionality.

In Below Cliff, artifact reuse is best exemplified when glass shards and tin can fragments are complimented by evidence from oral traditions. In total, 769 glass shards/bottles were collected. Significantly, of these 769 shards and whole bottles, 478 (roughly 62 %) were collected from the surface, in shovel test pits, or within the first ten centimeters of unit excavation. Therefore, based on stratigraphy, as well as the machine-made production method on the complete bottles collected, more than half of the glass recovered was from the late-nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Despite few diagnostic shards from contexts below the first few centimeters of excavations, it is still possible to generate some initial interpretations about consumption and, in combination with oral sources, how glass items were reused. The majority of glass came from beer, wine, mineral water, soda, pharmaceutical, and liquor bottles (Fig. 2). Condiment and ointment jars along with mineral water and soda bottles were predominantly found on the surface, some with decals still present. Locally produced mineral water, soda, and beer bottles demonstrate that, once made available, locally produced goods were favored over imports which could be attributed to cost, preference, local pride, or any combination of such factors. Of particular significance was the preponderance of beer, wine, and liquor bottle glass. In total, bottle glass composed roughly 87 % of the entire glass assemblage, the overwhelming majority likely being from alcohol bottles. While the size and undiagnostic nature of many of the shards made it difficult to identity bottle type with any degree of certainty, color and shape, in conjunction with diagnostic shards that were present, suggest that alcohol bottles were the most common vessels represented. Dates associated with manufacturing methods are consistent with those garnered from imported ceramics. Machine-made condiment bottles were collected primarily from twentieth-century deposits. When present, seam lines indicated nineteenth- and twentieth-century mold production techniques.

Fig. 2 Finish and neck of a mineral water bottle (*top-left*), finish and body fragments of twentieth-century machine-made bottles found on the surface (*bottom-left*), *Black and White* Scotch Whiskey bottle (*top-right*), and a tumbler base along with the base of an English beer bottle (*bottom-right*). Photographs by author

The relatively high proportion of alcohol-related bottles necessitates a confrontation with the stereotype of alcoholism that has been leveled against the "Redlegs" for centuries. In general, such stereotypes often went hand-in-hand with idleness. An anonymous author recollected his experiences in Bridgetown prior to 1805 and of the "poor whites" he notes:

> Few of them have been well educated, or bred to any business or profession; or, if they have, they are too proud or indolent to follow it…in no other colony is the same number of unemployed whites to be met with as in Barbados. Many of them differing little in dress and mode of life from their slaves. Some, indeed, cultivate their lands, raise stock, and sell fruits and vegetables, by which they earn a livelihood; but the majority prefer billiards, smoking, and drinking, to any useful employment (Anonymous 1828, p. 27).

While stopping in the mountainous northeastern region of Barbados known as the Scotland District during an island tour in 1837, Thome and Kimball (1838, p. 57) would similarly comment that the "poor whites" "live promiscuously, are drunken, licentious, and poverty-stricken, —a body of the most squalid and miserable human beings." The high quantity of glass from alcohol bottles may seem to support the stereotype of high alcohol consumption among Below Cliff residents. In considering oral sources provided by local residents, however, an alternative interpretation emerges.

A complete Black & White Scotch Whiskey bottle was recovered from the trash pit adjacent to the primary domestic site of excavation (see Fig. 2). The company started production in 1884 and this particular bottle was produced between 1890 and 1910. The presence of this bottle is peculiar given the expense of imported items, particularly a luxury item such as scotch whiskey from the United Kingdom. Despite its 1890–1910 production date, a resident of the former household from which the bottle was recovered remembered the bottle being used as a container for water throughout his childhood. Given its distinct features and the fact that it was found in a trash pit that the former resident himself had filled, there is little reason to doubt the claim that the bottle was used to hold water. It is possible that someone in the Below Cliff community had purchased the bottle for a special occasion. It is also possible that, as a gardener at Clifton Hall, the former resident's father acquired it from a plantation manager or the owner following the emptying of its initial contents. Regardless, in conjunction with oral sources, the archaeological record suggests that items were used for very long periods of time and for purposes outside their original functions. This evidence does not necessarily counter stereotypes of alcohol consumption as residents could have certainly been consuming the original contents of the vessels. The presence of alcohol bottles, however, should not be uncritically equated with alcohol consumption.

During a trip through "the woods" with another former Below Cliff resident, we spotted several shattered alcohol bottles found resting in crevices under large stones. The former resident relayed that limestone boulders had functioned as dripstones with the alcohol bottles collecting the water that had naturally been purified after passing through the porous limestone. Given the insights of these oral sources it is necessary to assess the strength of the evidence of alcohol consumption and pursue other interpretations about the uses of alcohol bottles. In his study of alcohol-related bottles in Barbadian caves, Frederick Smith (2008) has suggested these spaces were inconspicuous locales in which the enslaved gathered to consume alcohol and plot rebellion. More specifically, he posits that early-nineteenth-century alcohol bottles recovered from Mapps Cave in the parish of St. Philip may have associated with the planning of the rebellion of 1816 (also known as Bussa's Rebellion) that began in the same parish. Smith's interpretation is certainly plausible given that alcohol was readily available on the island and that it was widely consumed by a diverse array of the island population. In considering the reuse of bottles, however, caution should be employed in using production dates as a correlate for social activity since bottles produced in a given year may have been used for several decades after production and for purposes unrelated to alcohol consumption. Furthermore, it is also possible that alcohol bottles were being placed in caves to collect water from dripstones. This reconsideration of the function of alcohol bottles, however, does not deny alcohol consumption. Rather, I suggest that alternative readings based on oral sources can counter historical accounts that used the consumption of alcohol to demonize the "poor white" community.

Of the 769 shards only 39 were identified as glassware/stemware. Vessels represented include at least two tumbler glasses along with a possible decanter, the shards of which comprised nearly 25 % of the glassware shards recovered. Therefore, the shortage of drinking vessels sparked questions regarding the use of relatively common household items such as cups and glasses. Answers came from soliciting information from local residents and excavated metal artifacts. The tropical climate poses

challenges for the recovery of metal artifacts and this proved to be the case during excavations in Below Cliff. Few metal artifacts were collected and those that were recovered were severely corroded, small, and difficult to identity. It was, however, possible to identify small fragments of tin cans based on rim fragments as well as the thickness and shape of the fragments (Fig. 3). Tin can fragments that were recovered from household interiors were of particular interest given that cans that were emptied of their contents and not reused would likely have been quickly discarded in a locale other than the household's interior. Their presence inside the household suggests item reuse, a hypothesis that was confirmed following conversations with local residents.

Collected oral traditions suggest that tin cans were frequently reused as drinking vessels. Unfortunately, there is no direct evidence of smithing in the Below Cliff tenantry and the tin can fragments cannot definitively be associated with drinking vessels. Given the oral sources, however, it is highly likely that such material reuse was taking place. The revelation that tin can fragments were reused items illustrates the significance of collecting oral traditions and speaking with local community members (see DeCorse and Chouin 2003; DeCorse 2013, pp. 12–16; Jones and Russell 2012a). While some archaeologists have expressed skepticism regarding the

Fig. 3 Tin can rim and base fragments uncovered during excavations (*top*). Recreations of tin cans used as drinking vessels displayed at the Springvale Folk Museum, St. Thomas, Barbados (*bottom*). Photographs by author

reliability of oral traditions as well as the potential challenges they pose to archaeological interpretations (Jones and Russell 2012b, pp. 271–272; Mason 2000), they offer valuable alternative perspectives. In this case, as reused items, tin can fragments directly speak to struggles with poverty as well as local ingenuity and innovation in order to subsist.

Discussions with local residents further proved essential in analyzing and interpreting a diverse assortment of buttons recovered during excavations. In all, 96 buttons were recovered from deposits dating from the mid-to-late-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth centuries. Buttons were diverse in terms of material (bone, ceramic, plastic, shell, and metal), size (ranging from 9.4 mm to 20.2 mm in diameter), color, and decoration (Fig. 4). In fact, of the 96 buttons there is not a single matching pair despite the fact that multiple buttons were recovered from single contexts in the interior of the household.

Initially, it was posited that a previous occupant had been a seamstress. The assumption reveals an unconscious gender stereotype that associates buttons with a form of "women's work." When considering the historical record, however, such an assumption has some justification. In 1826, Coleridge (1826, p. 274), a visitor to the island, would disparagingly comment on the idleness and backwardness of the "poor whites," noting that "The women who will work at all, find employment in washing and mending the clothes of the negroes." In an interesting juxtaposition to other contexts of slavery, the heightened presence of "poor white" women facilitated their roles as seamstresses—a mode of employment commonly held by enslaved women elsewhere (see Galle 2004; Heath 1999; Jorden 2005; Wooderson 1930). Such an assessment was warily put forward given that projecting observations from the period of slavery onto material culture associated with the post-emancipation era can be

Fig. 4 Sample of ceramic, bone, plastic, shell, and metal buttons recovered from household excavation units. Photographs by author

troublesome, despite the fact that the cleaning and mending of clothing would certainly have taken place in the home at this time.

The buttons were soon presented to community members including the resident who spent his childhood years in the household. I asked if anyone in his family had been a seamstress due to the high number of buttons that had been collected. He responded in the negative but offered an explanation as to why so many buttons of different varieties had been recovered. Many residents wore button-down shirts whilst working. The wear and tear caused from physical labor frequently caused the loss of buttons or the widening of the holes through which the button fit. According to oral sources local shops sold packages of buttons of various sizes to meet local demand. Accordingly, as shirt holes began to widen due to wear and tear, button size increased in order to securely fasten the shirt closed.

This oral source posits an alternative reading of buttons that focuses more on labor than on adornment, ethnicity, or style. Buttons can certainly serve as a symbolic representation of the consumer's "knowledge of current styles as well as their ability to participate in the market economy" (Galle 2010, p. 25), but we should not overlook their more banal functions and how variation in style, size, and decoration may serve a purpose that is linked to economic limitations. Far from displaying wealth or the most current styles, button consumption in Below Cliff was an economic decision on the part of residents who found it more affordable to buy new, larger buttons than discarding a worn shirt. Just as in contexts of slavery in which buttons can be linked to the labor of enslaved washer-women (Jorden 2005, pp. 225–226), the diverse assemblage of buttons from Below Cliff is representative of labor activities. Contrary to notions of consumption in which consumers display their wealth and fashion sense, buttons can also be harsh reminders of economic hardship.

Oral Traditions and Embodied Inequalities

Engagement with local and descendant communities has been a mainstay of historical archaeological for a number of years (see Atalay 2012; Little and Shackel 2007; McDavid and Babson 1997; Marshall 2002; Merriman 2004; Shackel and Chambers 2004). As evidenced by the discussion above, the interpretation of archaeological materials from Below Cliff was largely dependent upon insights provided by local community members. As local residents and/or people with familial connections to those being researched, community members may have a vested interest in the research being conducted and the interpretations being generated. Additionally, stakeholders can provide their own interpretations that may differ from that of researchers based on their unique perspectives and experiences; time in Barbados was spent engaging with community members, particularly older residents who remember life in the area when the tenantry was still inhabited. Oral histories were collected for family genealogies in addition to oral traditions about what life was like in the Below Cliff area in generations past.

At this juncture, I return to the question posited at the start of this article to reflect on the present-day economic circumstances experienced by many Below Cliff community residents. At the heart of community-based archaeological research projects that investigate economic inequality is the risk of reducing local residents or descendant

communities to their roles as research informants. In doing so, the realities of economic hardships experienced by many of these individuals become a backdrop for the foregrounded goals of archaeological research. By directly engaging with inequality in the present, archaeologists can speak to the historical processes that produce and perpetuate economic hardship and connect with such individuals as people rather than as sources of data. As François Richard (2011, p. 167) points out,

> as students of global processes and people who research traditionally silenced, oppressed, or disenfranchised communities—subalterns, 'peoples without histories,' 'those of little note'—impoverishment, marginalization, and economic inequalities are frequently imbricated into the edifice of our research, all the more resoundingly when descendants claiming historical or cultural connections to the sites we excavate continue to suffer the structural inequities and broken geographies perpetrated by capitalist development worldwide.

Grasping how local and global economic forces affected the lives of community members proved essential in having meaningful interactions with St. John residents and in comprehending realities faced on a daily basis.

Diverse in terms of the economic activities undertaken by community members, the rural areas surrounding Below Cliff are largely composed of working - class individuals and families. Large-scale sugar production is on the decline in the area so, in addition to limited plantation employment, residents participate in small farming operations, raise fowl, fish, commute to Bridgetown for employment, or undertake odd-jobs around the community. Prolonged field seasons and daily excursions into the woods to conduct fieldwork fostered relationships between myself and community members based on daily encounters with those who were laboring in banana fields, painting houses, husking coconuts, sweeping, or cooking. The exchange of pleasantries or the sharing of fresh coconut water after a hard-day's work facilitated degrees of trust that directly influenced the information which community members shared with me about their lives. Therefore, while the relationship between archaeological researchers and local community members may not necessarily be symmetrical in terms of socioeconomic standing, strong bonds can nonetheless be forged (McGuire and Reckner 2005).

Most residents of the surrounding Below Cliff communities were open about the economic hardships that they and their ancestors had experienced. Such experiences are inscribed, embodied, and affect the ways in which individuals live their daily lives. One resident expressed frustration that he sometimes struggled to pay monthly utility bills despite the small pension he received from the government following a career of laboring for the island's sugar industry. Another local resident, a mechanic on construction machinery, sullenly remarked that it "was a hard life." While analyzing an early tweneith-century photograph of fishermen from St. John, a relative of several of the men pictured directly commented on their impoverished state, gloomily noting their lack of shoes and the quality and material of their shirts (Fig. 5). Acknowledging that some community members had experienced upward mobility in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, many spoke with admiration for those who had "made it over the hill."

Despite stereotypes of "Redleg" destitution and acknowledgements of economic hardships, some residents were determined not to let poverty define their identities or

Fig. 5 Photograph of "Redleg" fishermen taken in 1908 in the parish of St. John. Photograph courtesy of Richard Goddard

daily lives. One former Below Cliff resident nostalgically commented on his childhood, "You know, we didn't have much, but we were happy. I'd move back if I could" (for similarly expressed sentiments and reflections on poverty see Gadsby 2011). Given the attitudes and sentiments of St. John residents and former residents of Below Cliff, it is necessary to negotiate an archaeological analysis that examines the historical processes and material manifestations of poverty while being careful not to allow economic hardship define the lives of community members, past and present. In Barbados, as in most world areas, stigmas against poverty often demoralize individuals that are perceived to be lazy, deserving of their destitute lifestyles, and are often criminalized (Spencer-Wood and Matthews 2011b). Those that have benefitted from socioeconomic mobility may acknowledge their humble ancestry but neoliberal or "bootstrap" ideologies often generate paternalistic attitudes or blame towards the poor.

Conclusion

This discussion has illustrated how particular forms of material culture are linked to economic inequality. As mentioned above, simply labelling the "Redlegs" as poor or destitute ultimately explains little about how they lived their daily lives. It also reflects particular paternalistic attitudes expressed by elites that viewed themselves as gatekeepers to the realm of socioeconomic respectability. Archaeology can reveal the material manifestations of poverty as well as innovation and ingenuity seen through material reuse.

Additionally, oral sources allow for alternative interpretations that would have been overlooked without the insights of community members. Unlike artifacts that have been noticeably manipulated to facilitate reuse such as ceramic gaming pieces, knapped glass, or flint strike-a-lights (see Armstrong 1990, pp. 193–196, 1998; Hayes 2013, pp. 105–111), the determination of artifact reuse discussed here was dependent on oral sources and artifact provenience. The data gathered sheds light on the everyday realities experienced by Below Cliff residents, the choices they made, and the practices employed to cope with a harsh environment and difficult economic circumstances.

Inequality is not restricted to the realm of capitalism, nor is the condemnation of the poor solely a symptom of neoliberalism, but each has intensified such effects. For the Barbadian context discussed here, planters and other island elites and visitors were concerned about the implications of the existence of an impoverished "white" underclass in a race-based plantation society (both before and after emancipation). The resulting discourse revealed tensions in elite attitudes which included paternalism, condemnation, blame, indifference, disgust, and pity. Such sentiments indelibly marked the "Redlegs" as destitute, taking little consideration of the ways in which they navigated their landscape and economic circumstances. Residents of Below Cliff developed materially visible ways of coping with limited economic means but, nonetheless, experienced such realities in multifaceted ways. It is, therefore, incumbent upon archaeologists to illuminate the material vestiges of inequality in the past and their persistence in the present while attending to the social and political ramifications of the effects of poverty and its associated stigmas on people in the present.

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