

# Twenty-First-Century Historical Archaeology

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**Abstract** The practice of historical archaeology has exploded over the past two decades, and especially since 2000. Methodological advances and new theoretical insights mean that archaeological research requires periodic evaluation, and this overview builds on the work of three earlier assessors of the discipline. Here, I concentrate on four areas of research currently being pursued by historical archaeologists: analytical scale, capitalism, social inequality, and heritage and memory. I conclude that historical archaeologists have made major strides in understanding the modern world and that future research promises to offer diverse perspectives that will deepen our appreciation for how the past influences the present.

**Keywords** Historical archaeology · Scale · Capitalism · Inequality · Heritage and memory

## Introduction

Historical archaeology is growing exponentially to the point where it has become impossible to stay completely current with the vast literature. The increase in graduate-level courses and programs, the greater number of professional jobs outside the academy, and the regularity of historic-site examinations in cultural resource management archaeology have combined to push the field in diverse directions. When I first entered the field in 1971, historical archaeologists could read just about everything its practitioners had to offer, except perhaps the most obscure and unpublished papers and reports. The main sources of information were

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*Historical Archaeology*, the *Conference on Historic Site Archaeology Papers*, and *Post-Medieval Archaeology*. Papers focusing on historical archaeology infrequently appeared in the major archaeological journals, and they were even rarer in anthropological publications. The Conference on Historic Site Archaeology was discontinued in the early 1980s, but since then the *International Journal of Historical Archaeology* was created, as were a number of more regional publications. In addition, editors of the major anthropological and archaeological journals are today more likely than in the past to consider articles that concentrate on topics germane to historical archaeologists.

The dramatic growth in the profession has led to increased specialization as historical archaeologists—now following a path long pursued by their colleagues in other areas of archaeology—find that they must concentrate on one topic or geographic area just to stay apprised of the current trends, innovative directions, and new discoveries. The development of an increasingly narrow focus by individual archaeologists has been both beneficial and detrimental to historical archaeology.

Because of the explosion of information and the need for specialization, any overview or assessment of contemporary historical archaeology is destined to be selective. Given that reality, this overview necessarily exhibits a number of limitations. First, I focus only on terrestrial sites. Maritime archaeologists are conducting serious and important research around the globe and diligently working to convince the public that maritime archaeological sites are as important to the world's cultural heritage as land-based remains (e.g., Adams 2002; Corbin and Rodgers 2008; Flatman and Staniforth 2006; McConkey and McErlean 2007; Richards 2008; Staniforth 2003; Staniforth and Nash 2006; Van Tilburg 2007; Webster 2008; Williams 2007). Given its own inherent complexities and technicalities, a full examination of this important body of information is better left to a specialist in the field. Second, I concern myself with archaeological sites and properties confined to the post-Columbian era; I use “historical archaeology” as shorthand for the more limited definition of the field pertaining to the archaeology after roughly 1492, essentially modern-world archaeology. My use of this more narrow definition—as opposed to the broader definition of historical archaeology as an archaeology that combines excavated and textual sources—is also one of convenience. Under the broader definition, this overview would include current trends in Roman, Greek, Biblical, medieval, and all other archaeologies that rely in some measure on textual sources. These research areas are outside my area of expertise, though the problems archaeologists in those areas face are similar to those confronted by historical archaeologists (e.g., Brewer and Teeter 2007; Foxhall 2000; Pollock and Bernbeck 2005; Tabaczyński 2000). Third, I concern myself principally with archaeological research written by English-speaking archaeologists living in the United States. This limitation unfairly privileges Anglophile archaeology, but the explosion of archaeological research around the world has meant that many reports, papers, and summaries are not widely available outside their countries of origin. Where possible, I move outside this limitation, but this overview does not purport to represent global historical archaeology in any substantive manner.

Given the above limitations, in this essay I explore four directions of historical archaeology since 2000, with the understanding that my knowledge is constrained

by my own specialization, reading, and interests. Even though a full assessment is impossible, a few currents of inquiry can be identified among today's historical archaeologists. I follow the course of other historical archaeologists who have presented similar overviews and explore the field topically rather than focus on theoretical perspectives. Both before and since 2000, historical archaeologists have used numerous theoretical approaches—often quite distinct from one another—to interpret the past. Their approaches are consistent with those being pursued by other archaeologists (see Johnson 1999).

## Past assessments

I chose the year 2000 as a starting point because three scholars have provided thorough overviews of historical archaeology before that year. Reconsiderations of archaeological practice are helpful because archaeology is a discipline that “invites, perhaps requires, constant critical review” (Fairclough 2007, p. 19). Kathleen Deagan's assessment of 1982 was followed in 1994 by Barbara Little's update, and in 2000 Robert Paynter published two essays on the state of historical archaeology. Before examining the avenues of study in the post-2000 era, we may usefully consider the comments and impressions of these scholars to constitute a historical background for historical archaeology in the 21st century.

Deagan (1982) concentrates on two central issues in historical archaeology that emerged out of the 1970s: the identification of the field as either anthropology or history, and the field's definition and subject matter. Both were burning issues at the time, but since then archaeologists have solved them by acknowledging the dual nature of the field as encompassing both broad and narrow definitions. The disagreements that still exist about the field now concern theoretical approaches rather than simple definition.

Deagan identifies the main themes historical archaeologists pursued in the 1970s and early 1980s. These themes, which she terms “orientations,” represent the tensions in the field at the time. The first theme, “historical supplementation,” can be associated with the historicists' perception that historical archaeology provides a mechanism to increase historical knowledge about a site, property, or region and the individuals and social groups who inhabited them. The pedigree for this line of reasoning derived partly from Noël Hume's (1972, pp. 12–13) assertion that anthropologists do not make the best historical archaeologists without considerable training in historical methods and artifacts. His claim, though certainly contentious at the time, had merit, and it clearly expressed what was then perceived as the “historical” approach to historical archaeology. The other perspective was represented by archaeologists interested in the “reconstruction of past lifeways,” a concept that grew directly from the development of processual archaeology. As an “anthropological” rather than “historical” pursuit, the task of cultural reconstruction was linked to ethnography rather than purely to historical reconstruction. Deagan (1982, p. 161) notes correctly for the time that reconstructing the lifeways of disfranchised groups was “quite often closely interrelated with processual concerns,” shorthand for the more anthropologically sensitive approach. In

particular, the use of cross-cultural comparison, one hallmark of cultural anthropology, was useful in connecting life in the Old and New Worlds, which was perceived as an avenue of inquiry into colonialism. The other orientations Deagan identifies are “processual studies,” “archaeological science,” and “cognitive studies.” That James Deetz prominently appears in all three themes as well as in the two preceding themes demonstrates his impact on the field’s early development, particularly as it pertains to cognitive studies.

In her overview of a decade later, Little (1994) begins by assessing the ways in which historical archaeology had advanced since Deagan’s (1982) analysis. Since the publication of Deagan’s assessment, one of the major developments in anthropology that affected historical archaeology was the publication of Wolf’s *Europe and the People without History* (Wolf 1982), published the same year as Deagan’s overview. Wolf did not use archaeological research in the book, but as Little (1994, p. 5) notes, his widely read and generally well-received book immediately inserted into historical archaeology a number of new concerns: “the modern world system, capitalism, history, and the variable political uses of ‘history.’” Little also adroitly addresses the nuances of how historical archaeologists began to accept the challenges of applying textual sources of information to archaeological analysis since 1982, including attempting to grasp the meaning of gaps in the record. As a further demonstration of the maturation of the field in the 1982–1994 period, Little conjoins Deagan’s three orientations of everyday life, cognition, and cultural process under the heading “historical ethnography.” This is a sensible union because it represents the growing acceptance that historical archaeology was neither history nor anthropology, but a mixture of both. Archaeologists also began to see the mix as multiscalar because analyses could be conducted on many levels ranging from the household to the global system. Realizing, then, that historical archaeologists had rejected the fallacy of the history/anthropology debate, Little (1994, pp. 13–14) explores the question of whether historical archaeology should be processual or postprocessual in orientation. She observes that as of the early 1990s many historical archaeologists were being drawn to postprocessual subjects like meaning and symbolism. She also notes a continuing methodological conundrum in historical archaeology over the application of textual sources of information. She states that “there is little agreement [in historical archaeology] over how method is to be improved or applied to broader questions” and adds that “the questions themselves are not altogether obvious” (Little 1994, p. 15).

Little (1994, pp. 16–23) also examines an issue that was then growing in importance: how historical archaeologists should examine capitalism. This was a knotty problem in the early 1990s and, as explained below, it remains so today. For Little, the main currents of capitalist analysis in archaeology include the use of cross-cultural information, the analysis of production, consumption, and industrialism, and the role of power and ideology in forming, directing, and accepting or rejecting capitalism. Related issues—whether the study of capitalism is necessarily Eurocentric, whether the dominant ideology thesis holds merit, how power is used in everyday settings, and whether an emphasis on capitalism ignores non-European history—are still in contention today.

Paynter's (2000a, b) two essays on the state of research in historical archaeology at the beginning of the 21st century continue the themes addressed by Little and anticipated by Deagan. His careful assessments indicate the growing sophistication of thought and practice in the field. In writing about the archaeology of capitalism, for instance, Paynter (2000a, pp. 8–9) notes the post-1990s awareness among archaeologists that the rise of the capitalist project must be constructed both locally and on a world stage. Also, by mentioning Wolf's (1982) impact on historical archaeology, Paynter acknowledges that the old analytical standbys of assimilation and acculturation are no longer sophisticated enough for 21st-century archaeology. He also observes that the use of the term "the contact period," the typical focus of assimilation and acculturation studies, tends to reify and solidify sociohistorical moments of interaction that are composed of multiple strands of previously unrelated cultural-historical processes. Paynter further notes the greater sophistication in the ways historical archaeologists were then thinking about meaning and action as related to spatial ideology. He correctly observes that one of the areas of greatest reconceptualization in historical archaeology relates to landscape studies. By 2000, historical archaeologists generally no longer viewed landscapes as static backdrops for human action but rather as places created and imbued with diverse meanings, disparate ideologies, and variant perspectives.

In his second essay, Paynter digs deeper into the development of historical archaeology by concentrating on the post-Columbian history of North America. He identifies the central topics of historical archaeology as including power relations in state-level social organizations and the analysis of class, race, and gender. He observes that historical archaeologists must find ways to study such complexities in real-world case studies. And, as he correctly notes, much of this research necessarily will be multicultural and multiscalar (Paynter 2000b, pp. 199–200). That different historical archaeologists have been able to investigate the intersection of race, class, and gender using different paradigms—extending from narratives to hypothesis testing—merely demonstrates the breadth of research in historical archaeology and the growing realization among archaeologists that the past can be interpreted in different ways.

Many of Paynter's observations, as well as those of Deagan and Little, are prescient about the development of historical archaeology in the post-2000 era, and I return to them as necessary in the following comments. Each scholar profoundly understood the field and clearly grasped its then-current directions. I wish to take the essence of their assessments, fully understanding their historical context, and use them in conjunction with my own understanding of historical archaeology to explore four areas of current research in the field. Of course, these are not the only topics being investigated by today's historical archaeologists, and none of them are being explored using only one theoretical perspective. Quite the contrary; each of these topics, vast in their spatial, temporal, and cultural dimensions, can be approached from many perspectives and viewed through diverse lenses. In fact, theoretical breadth is what gives the contemporary practice of historical archaeology its interpretive power, historical insight, and relevance.

Enough historical archaeologists are now practicing around the world that it is unrealistic that only one way of seeing the past holds sway or in fact could hold

sway. Although it is true that most historical archaeologists currently agree on the “basic methodology” of the field (Hall 1996, p. 35), considerably less agreement rightly exists about which interpretation best fits historical reality, and perhaps whether *any* interpretation can be expected to reflect it. This diversity is a healthy sign for the field because it properly expresses its vitality and potential for intellectual growth and, at the same time, stresses the commitments of its practitioners to stay current with intellectual trends being developed outside the discipline.

Each of the four areas of research that I identify, when considered alone or in combination, constitutes some of the most pressing research issues in historical archaeology. Each also represents an area of research that historical archaeologists are likely to pursue in the immediate future. None of them can be easily addressed or facily interpreted. These four areas are analytical scale, capitalism, vectors of inequality, and heritage and memory. Each topic intersects the others in numerous ways and no one of them stands independent of the others. My separation of them is purely heuristic because each contains crosscutting elements that link them together. In what follows, readers will surely notice the ways in which the themes pursued by individual archaeologists provide different perspectives and insights. An inherent strength of historical archaeology—the presence of multiple lines of evidence—means that analyses can be multifaceted, multidimensional, and highly contextualized. In explaining each of the four areas, however, I tend to cite only works completed since 2000, understanding that the archaeologists’ methods, approaches, and interpretations did not come about independently but were the cumulative result of years of research by earlier archaeologists. In many cases, individual archaeologists have concentrated on one subject but have experimented with different perspectives in the course of their careers.

### Scale in historical archaeology

Issues of scale in historical archaeology have been embedded in the field since its inception, and considerations of scale will always be pertinent in archaeological thinking. When Schuyler (1970) and Deetz (1977) defined historical archaeology as a field whose practitioners were interested in the spread of Europeans throughout the world beginning in the 15th century, they opened the door to the development of global historical archaeology (Orser 1994, 1996). For these archaeologists, the linkage between “the local” and “the global” is a subject of profound interest, but a central question remains: “How does a historical archaeology of the modern world hold in the same frame attention to the ‘small things forgotten’ of everyday life and particular individuals and the global system of distribution characteristic of modernity?” (Hall and Silliman 2006, p. 8). Put another way, how can archaeologists be interested in the globalized world and yet excavate individual sites? Using the common white clay smoking pipe as an example, Hall and Silliman note that while these ubiquitous archaeological finds may have been manufactured in Amsterdam in the 17th century, archaeologists discover them throughout the world in New York, Brazil, South Africa, Southeast Asia, and everywhere else that

Dutch traders plied their wares. This similarity of finds across widely diverse environments is difficult to ignore, and so a major task facing historical archaeology today is “not to shift focus on an exclusively larger scale, but to grasp the relationship between the small-scale” and the “wider processes of transformation, and the colonial experience” (Johnson 2006, p. 318).

Observations such as these clearly indicate that the issue of scale remains at the heart of much archaeological analysis and that it presents a challenge worth confronting. As in many cases, archaeologists can take their lead from scholars in related fields because the linkage between the local and the global has long been a topic of considerable interest throughout the social sciences and humanities. Archaeologists, too, have formulated research designs that look beyond their sites’ limits and into the wider world. Some degree of extra-site interest has existed in archaeology since the development of settlement archaeology. Settlement archaeology as a specialization is now 50 years old, but even earlier archaeologists working at remote sites had essentially crossed the threshold of their sites’ boundaries when they began to wonder about the wider world in which their sites’ residents lived. And when they made the semantic shift from “settlement studies” to “landscape studies” they had resolutely moved into the realm of multiscale analysis. Even so, “there has yet to be a full appreciation of the inherent possibilities of scale in historical archaeology (Hall and Silliman 2006, p. 8).

Historical archaeologists have attacked the problem of scale from two directions, the local and the global. At times it may appear that the two groups of analysts work at cross purposes, but their independent research has the same goal: to understand the relationships between small and large scales of social interaction using material culture (ranging from small artifacts to historical records to landscape features) as the primary source of information. A clear problem, however, involves inventing ways to integrate the approaches.

One way to envision the problems archaeologists face when thinking about the local-global nexus is to envision the scale of archaeological research as a continuum that extends from the household to the various interlinked, intra- and transcontinental networks of interaction. The archaeological focus on households as a minimal analytical unit has appeared desirable because much research in historical archaeology is conducted at a discrete place that typically can be defined as a household (e.g., Barile and Brandon 2004; Beaudry 2002; King 2006). Even world-systems theorists see the household as a primary unit of analysis (Wallerstein 2004, pp. 37–38).

The focus on households in archaeological research, besides having a practical element, has important connections to anthropology and history. These links demonstrate the inherent multidisciplinary nature of historical archaeology and stress the importance of the small unit of analysis. Households constitute a basic unit of daily life because they provide an environment that encompasses just about every feature of the socialization process (Birdwell-Pheasant and Lawrence-Zúñiga 1999). In Americanist archaeology, the pedigree for household archaeology derives from Mesoamerican studies and the historic preservation movement (King 2006, pp. 295–296), perhaps most visibly expressed by the archaeologically informed physical reconstructions at places like Colonial Williamsburg (e.g., Epperson

1990; Noël Hume 1969). As noted below, however, the household as the central unit of analysis is not universal in historical archaeology because it cannot address sociohistorical situations where communities were the referential unit of residence.

The anthropological foundation of most historical archaeology is solid and well understood, but much of the rationale for the analysis of small units derives most recently from the similarities between archaeology and microhistory (Brooks et al. 2008). Both household archaeologists and microhistorians study small social groups (and sometimes individuals), investigate narrow spaces and short periods of time, use sources that may be extremely particularistic, and defy the artificial boundaries established by separate academic disciplines (Orser 2007b, pp. 28–29).

Carlo Ginzburg, one of the central figures in the development of microhistory, recognized its connection with archaeology: “Since historians are unable to converse with the peasants of the sixteenth century (and, in any case, there is no guarantee that they would understand them), they must depend almost entirely on written sources (and possibly archaeological evidence)” (Ginzburg 1992, pp. xv, 58). Other microhistorians have echoed Ginzburg’s point by noting that microhistorians operate like archaeologists because they share an interest in the “trifles” of everyday life (Egmond and Mason 1997, p. 2; Niccoli 1991, p. 93). Both microhistorians and household archaeologists share concerns for family structure, network relations, popular folk and religious beliefs, and other features of quotidian life. Thus household archaeology is similar to bottom-up history (Ginzburg and Poni 1991, p. 7; Levi 2001), “grassroots history” (Hobsbawm 1985), and “the history of the common people” (*Alltagsgeschichte*) (Lüdtke 1995).

On the most basic level, household archaeology focuses on the individual domestic house, and although household archaeology is perhaps most easily identified with North America (King 2006, p. 295), archaeologists are working at this scale throughout the world, including in Latin America (e.g., Rocchietti 2008), England, Scotland, and Ireland (e.g., Giles and Giles 2007; Orser 2006b), Spain (e.g., Christie et al. 2007), Australia (e.g., Allison 2003), and everywhere archaeologists excavate domestic structures.

It is important when discussing the household level of analysis to note that some historical archaeologists are beginning to work at the subhousehold level, taking microhistory at its smallest unit of analysis (e.g., Beaudry 2006; Loren and Beaudry 2006; White 2005). Following Deetz (1977), the goal is to “build thick processual understandings that transport the reader into the rich context of some previous place” (Paynter 2005, p. 404). The basic idea of this level of analysis is rooted in the concept that even the small and seemingly insignificant things we have around us help manipulate, define, and signal who we are. This scale of research appears inherently interesting to historical archaeologists because it provides in-depth insights into the contextualization of material culture in living social organizations. It remains to be seen, however, whether this level of analysis will be misapplied by some analysts and simply develop into a new particularism (Wylie 1999, p. 26).

The household constitutes a small and reasonable scale of archaeological research, but considerably more difficulty is introduced when archaeologists attempt to broaden the scale to include several households. Community studies also have a long tradition in historical archaeology, with much of the research being conducted



in urban neighborhoods (e.g., Mrozowski 2006; Mullins 2008a; Mullins and Warner 2008; Murray and Crook 2005; Yamin 2001). Equally significant are neighborhood-type studies conducted in seemingly non-neighborhood groups of households like extractive work camps (e.g., Lawrence 2000; Pickands 2000; Saitta 2007; Van Bueren 2002, 2008) and state-run institutions (e.g., Baugher and Spencer-Wood 2001; Casella 2007; Karskens 2003; Spencer-Wood and Baugher 2001). A main feature of these studies rests on the idea that the people in the neighborhood or community interacted on a daily basis and that the networks of relations they created—material, economic, religious, and otherwise—formed the various social units in operation there. Much of the theoretical foundation of such research is rooted in the archaeology of social inequality, which I explore in more detail below.

Community studies are relatively easy to conceptualize, particularly when the archaeological focus is the urban neighborhood. We can expect that individuals in the various households interacted in regular ways with their neighbors. This idea allows powerful insights into past daily life, particularly in situations where the community was tightly knit (e.g., Greenwood and Slawson 2008).

Historical archaeologists face serious conceptual and practical issues when attempting to move beyond the community and the city and into the wider world. In some ways, archaeology is best suited to small-scale analysis and tightly focused interpretations of individual artifacts and discrete places. Without question, however, the development of global studies is extremely important to furthering the sophistication of the discipline's methods and theories. The difficulty faced in attempting to link individual sites with the wider worlds around them does not mean that the effort is unworthy of serious consideration.

The idea behind attempting to link individual and mostly post-Columbian archaeological sites derives mainly from the well-known writings of Wallerstein (1974, 1980) and Braudel (1972). Archaeologists have made use of Braudel's dissection of historical time into his "various planes": geographical time, social time, and individual time. This "time perspectivism" (Harding 2005), which is equally a space perspectivism—or what has been termed the "socio-spatial dialectic" (Soja 1980)—attracts archaeologists because it appears to offer the opportunity to link individual archaeological sites and their inhabitants with a broader scale of human activity. Both archaeologists (e.g., Funari et al. 1999; Schmidt 2006; Schmidt and Walz 2007a, b) and nonarchaeologists (Frank 1998; Goody 2006) have attacked the apparent Eurocentric focus of the Wallerstein thesis, but historians recently have begun to demonstrate that a global focus can be constructed that includes the geographical space of a culturally diverse Europe but does not adopt a European perspective (e.g., Brook 2008; Crossley 2008; Dirlik 1999; Hart 2008; Linebaugh and Rediker 2000; Marks 2002).

The concept of a modern-world archaeology (Orser 2004a) was created specifically to designate an archaeology of the post-Columbian world that seeks ways to link individual sites with the world at large as a way of understanding why the world is as it is. That a number of historical archaeologists continue to explore world-systems theory and other ways of perceiving the world beyond the limits of the site demonstrates that there is much here that demands further contemplation and analysis (e.g., Carroll 2000; Crowell 1997; Groover 2003, 2008; Hall 2000;

Kardulias 1999; Orser 2002). A central question is whether archaeologists can invent ways to conceptualize extra-site interactions and connections in innovative ways that move beyond simply noting that similar artifacts occur in diverse places in the world, the basis of Deetz's (1991) largely undeveloped "international comparative approach." The creation of global political, economic, and cultural networks in history mandates that one of the archaeologists' goals is to find ways to link the "small" with the "big" in ways that have interpretive power and provide new insights about the past (Beaudry 2005, pp. 305–306), a theme that is perfectly consistent with global historical archaeology (Orser 2007b). Continued research on scale and particularly multiscalar forms of analysis attests to the significance of this subject in historical archaeology.

### **The historical archaeology of the capitalist project**

The archaeology of capitalism, or perhaps more accurately "the capitalist project" (to suggest that more than economics is involved), emerged as a serious topic in historical archaeology in the 1980s, largely through the expression of Marxist political economy (Matthews et al. 2002; McGuire 2006). The development of this focus, however, has been controversial, even into the 21st century. For some analysts, the historical archaeology of capitalism tends to pull the focus unfairly toward the Euro-American world and away from all those cultures that were not involved in the capitalist project. Admittedly, the history of humanity was noncapitalist much longer than capitalist, but this fact should not negate the significance of the global impacts of capitalist practice on the world's people. For others, capitalism constitutes a metanarrative and is thus suspect. In general, historical archaeologists who both investigate the local impacts of capitalism and seek to find archaeological methods for examining capitalist globalization fully acknowledge that capitalism was indeed a metanarrative and one that continues to exert itself in today's world.

In the past, historical archaeologists interested in investigating the capitalist project often worked around the margins of the system, interrogating whether and how archaeology might contribute to knowledge about capitalism. As this archaeology has matured, archaeologists are now providing more nuanced and deeply contextualized studies (McGuire and Wurst 2002). Given the diverse perspectives that can be used to interrogate the capitalist project, we should not be surprised that the studies take various forms, only some of which can be mentioned here.

In Great Britain and Ireland, as well as elsewhere (e.g., Smith and Gazin-Schwartz 2008), archaeologists have approached the capitalist project from the direction of landscape transformation using the language of improvement. Much of this research has been inspired by Johnson (1996). In Scotland, Dalglish (2003) has examined the parish of Kilfinan on the peninsula of Kintyre in the southern highlands. His focus is on the ways in which 18th- and 19th-century capitalism impacted daily life by privileging individualism over older notions of kinship and community. Capitalist-inspired, improving landowners transformed their landscapes by enclosing their fields and reallocating their resources. Improvement of this sort

was a distinct “civilizing” project because it profoundly altered routine life. Dalglish demonstrates that improvement undermined traditional values and practices and reoriented the landscape to commerce. In her study in England, Tarlow (2007) provides an equally thorough exploration of the ideas underpinning the theory of improvement and investigates the ways in which these theories linked improvement in both rural and urban environments with the lives of individuals. She notes that urban improvement was implemented using the same precepts enacted in the countryside. Clean streets and peaceful parks were merely perceived as the urban equivalent of drained bogs and neatly planted fields. In many ways, the consciously designed urban landscapes mirrored the transformations of the large landed estates throughout Britain (e.g., Everson 2007; Finch 2007) and in the British-administered colonial islands (e.g., Hicks 2007).

In Ireland, archaeologists also have investigated the capitalist project through the lens of improvement. For example, at Whiddy Island, County Cork (Breen 2007), and Rathlin Island, County Antrim (Forsythe 2007), understanding the principles of improvement guided the archaeologists’ interpretations. At Whiddy Island, Breen documents how the concept of enclosure reached the far southwest of Ireland in the 18th and 19th centuries from England, which had experienced the process two centuries earlier. The old Gaelic system of power relations was replaced with capitalist relations. Forsythe observes the same process far to the north on Rathlin Island, where “landscape reform” caused a reorganization of both administrative and agricultural boundaries. He documents how once-communal island life was transformed by the enactment of capitalist relations in a way that mirrored the development of individualism elsewhere. Faced with the radical alteration of their traditional customs, islanders were forced to adopt a range of responses that included mixtures of collaboration, acquiescence, and resistance. In my own research in Ireland, I examine the ways that an Anglo-Irish ascendancy family used designs of improvement to transform an estate landscape (Orser 2005, 2006a, 2007a). I use archaeological information from a 17th- and 18th-century estate to interpret how improvement concepts like the Cult of the Ruin helped explain changes in the landscape.

Archaeologists working in Antarctica, the last continent to be explored, also have examined local expressions of capitalism (Zarankin and Senatore 2005, 2007). Typical histories of the continent tend to focus on famous explorers and scientific expeditions, but Zarankin and Senatore found a related topic: how Antarctica was drawn into the global, capitalist project. Investigating a series of sites on Byers Peninsula, they examined the organization of labor and housing at sealing camps. Antarctica was a continent devoid of indigenous human habitation, so capitalism was entirely free to develop in any way its agents saw fit. They could establish the rules and attempt to transform the harsh environment purely with economic motives in mind. This research on Antarctica neatly bridges the past and the present because nonexploitation pacts in force today constrain multinational corporations from extracting oil and minerals from the continent in a manner consistent with past practice.

Archaeologists working in the United States have continued the trend noted by Little (1994) and have investigated the capitalist project at numerous places using

myriad theoretical perspectives. For example, Groover (2003, 2005) combines a world-systems paradigm with ideas from the *Annales* school to investigate the ways in which people in southern Appalachia in the 1790–1920 period were enmeshed in capitalism. Americans tend to accept that the Appalachians were isolated and that its people were backward and clannish. Focusing specifically on the Gibbs family in Knox County, Tennessee, Groover conducts a thorough household analysis in a multiscalar fashion. He uses a variety of sources to examine consumerism, standard of living, foodways, and ceramic use. What emerges from Groover's studies is that the Gibbs family negotiated through the capitalist world in complex, dynamic, and even contradictory ways as they simultaneously maintained the cultural conservatism generally characteristic of their region.

Annapolis, Maryland, has been a focal point of research on the archaeology of American capitalism because of the dual influence of the multiyear archaeology program conducted there, which has led to a wealth of well-excavated information supplemented with an immense body of textual documentation, and Leone's (e.g., 1999) leadership in the archaeological examination of the capitalist project. In his study, Matthews (2002) investigates the ways that various groups have symbolically reinvented Annapolis in a manner that is concordant with the creation of America as a capitalist nation. The urbanization of nearby Baltimore, as Maryland's capitalist powerhouse, was an integral part of the business revolution that began to transform the United States around 1790. The revolution in business, which included new practices involving credit and finance, was accompanied by the rise of impersonal relations. Annapolis witnessed this transformation but was not a true participant. To help illustrate the various transformations experienced in Annapolis, Matthews identifies six chronological "moments of danger," a concept he takes from Benjamin (2006, p. 391): class formation, revolution, marginalization, the creation of the United States Naval Academy, the failure of industry, and commodification. The first process—class formation—began with the earliest founding of the city in the 17th century, and the final process—commodification—began when elite residents consciously conceived Annapolis as "The Ancient City," a dedicated representational space built around a mythic image of the past that would help protect the homes of the wealthy and attract tourists wishing to sleep where George Washington slept. Each of these processes has an intersecting rhythm that is constantly being reconceived in the process of creating the cultural history of the city, a history that is intricately linked with capitalism.

Leone (2005) also uses archaeology to investigate the capitalist project at Annapolis, but through a slightly different lens than Matthews. He explores the capitalist project through the lens of ideology, whose goal is to mask social reality. This research continues and expands his earlier, pathbreaking analyses of the role that ideology plays in creating and maintaining capitalist social relations (e.g., Leone 1984, 1987). Divisions in society are hidden behind ideological propositions that maintain that society's structure is natural and even ordained by God. Leone's goal is to critique the application of ideology in Annapolis, both naturalizing ideology—which proposes that the social order is natural—and masking ideology—which hides social reality behind a concept of individualism, whose foundational idea maintains that all people have equal opportunities. Beginning with the ideology

of individualism that was and still is the core of the American Dream, Leone traverses an archaeological landscape replete with signs that real men and women living every day in Annapolis struggled to create their own sense of liberty. Nowhere is this search for freedom more apparent, says Leone, than among Annapolis's African American community. He employs ideas from Habermas and Althusser to investigate the historical context of African America as it existed in Annapolis. One of his most perceptive analyses focuses on the discovery and meaning of spirit bundles. Spirit bundles appear as caches of artifacts found together in the soil—buttons, pins, broken plates, and other objects—that African Americans used both to protect themselves from evil forces and to distinguish themselves from their owners. Rather than viewing these bundles as simple proof of the retention of African customs in America—a common conclusion of historical archaeologists in past years—Leone situates the bundles firmly within the struggle for liberty. His analysis ultimately focuses on the ways in which men and women in capitalist societies wrestle with the realities of that economic system: “The promise of and quest for freedom masked the inescapable reality of capitalism’s base and essence” (Leone 2005, p. 247). As people become absorbed in the system, they find various ways to accept it or to struggle against it, and it is this on-going contestation that Leone addresses so adroitly.

Garman (2005) investigates the role of American liberal capitalism in structuring the nation’s penal institutions. By examining the landscapes of confinement in Rhode Island, he gains important insights into the ways in which state-mandated repositories sought to shape the lives of people on the fringe of society. Reformers consciously designed state institutions as sites of personal improvement, an idea consistent with the overall theme of “improvement” noted above. Archaeologists like Garman show, however, that even in such restrictive, structured environments inmates were still able to engage in resistance and personal expression (also see Casella 2007). As a result, penal institutions provide an important arena in which to examine the parameters of free will and restricted agency.

One of the most encouraging signs in the archaeology of the capitalist project derives from the realization that not only can archaeology be *about* capitalism, but that it is also enmeshed *within* it (e.g., Hamilakis and Duke 2007). Without question, the development of archaeology is closely linked with the capitalist project. My view that capitalism represents one of the “haunts” of historical archaeology (Orser 1996, pp. 71–81) was intended to support Handsman’s (1985, p. 2) earlier comment that “historical archaeology has always been about capitalism.” Then as now, the goal should not be to ignore capitalism or to regard it merely as a historical accident (thereby naturalizing it), but to investigate it in both its historic and contemporary manifestations, as many of the archaeologists cited above have done. Of all the archaeologies that can be practiced, historical archaeology is arguably the one that can most easily tack back and forth between past and present within the capitalist moment. The reasoning underpinning this perspective is that “understanding anything in our everyday experience requires that we know something about how it arose and developed and how it fits into the larger context or system of which it is a part” (Ollman 2003, p. 13).

Archaeologists have traditionally tended to stay on the sidelines of controversial political issues (Patterson 1995, pp. 138–139), perhaps using as a defense that they perceive contemporary controversies to lie outside their areas of expertise. The creation of the World Archaeological Congress in 1986—founded specifically to counter apartheid in South Africa and to promote indigenous rights, including those surrounding the ownership of history—helped terminate the notion that archaeology was only about the past. The idea of praxis, as taken from Marx, provides the mechanism for putting archaeological knowledge to use in today's world (McGuire et al. 2005). The goals of praxis are threefold: to know the world, to critique the world, and to take action in the world (McGuire and Navarrete 2005, p. 310). Gathering knowledge, which includes archaeological research, also can involve demystifying the past and unmasking it in order to help create a more just world (Hamilakis 2003; Walker and Saitta 2002; Wood 2002).

An illuminative effort that has overtly linked past and present through the lens of the capitalist project is the Ludlow, Colorado, research (Ludlow Collective 2001; McGuire 2008, pp. 188–221; McGuire and Reckner 2003; Saitta 2007). Ludlow was a tent colony built and inhabited by coal miners striking against the Colorado Fuel and Iron Company. On April 20, 1914, 25 men, women, and children were attacked by agents of the company. The strikers eventually lost the strike, but the outcry about the assault was so great that it accelerated the cause of better working and living conditions for miners. The site of the tent city is today owned by the United Mine Workers of America, whose former members led the strike and whose present members consider the site sacred ground. These realities, coupled with the construction of a monument at the site in 1918—and its contemporary vandalism, undoubtedly as an expression of anti-union sentiment and a misunderstanding of socialism—overtly stress that the archaeology at the Ludlow camp could never have been solely about the past. Given that collective bargaining has been under attack in the United States since the 1980s, the archaeology at Ludlow is an exercise to which working-class union members can relate. Knowing the struggles in their own lives, they can appreciate past struggles in concrete, personal terms. The materials excavated by the members of the Ludlow project provide tangible links to the past that demand attention.

Somewhat similar projects, and particularly courageous ones, focus on repression and resistance in contemporary Latin America (Funari and Zarankin 2006). Archaeologists conduct these studies at sites of torture and mass murder sanctioned and directed by their various nations' dictators. Excavations of mass graves, analysis of graffiti inside torture cells, and studies of the architecture of detention under military dictators erase the line between past and present. In such cases, the cause of the capitalist project is often hidden behind the mask of terror, but it is this concealed character that gives the archaeology its immediacy and its profound significance in unmasking injustice (also see Connor and Scott 2001; Schablitsky 2006).

Before leaving the archaeology of capitalism, I make one final observation. The attempt by some archaeologists to deny the global significance of the capitalist project (e.g., Lucas 2006, p. 39; Schmidt and Walz 2007b, p. 132) may be well meaning in intent. It is true that the examination of capitalism initially draws attention away from the construction of alternative histories, particularly as they

pertain to indigenous peoples untouched by capitalism. The archaeology of capitalism also unfairly appears to place the central focus on Europeans. Some studies indeed have been presented in this manner largely because it is impossible to delink capitalism from the various European nation-states. The archaeology of capitalism, however, does not seek to deny the significance of alternative and indigenous histories—after all, the history unearthed by the Ludlow Collective is an alternative history in the true sense of the word—but only desires to keep capitalism within the sights of archaeological analysis. Ways of doing so without resorting to a narrow European perspective exist (e.g., Prashad 2007) and are entirely possible for historical archaeology.

### **Vectors of inequality**

The attempt to discern the social identities of past peoples using physical remains has been a central feature of archaeological practice for many years, with archaeologists pursuing various temporal and topical interests. Historical archaeologists, generally aided in their efforts to interpret identity by the presence of textual sources of information, were quick to embrace contextual analyses of society (Wilkie 2005, p. 343). In the earliest days of anthropological historical archaeology, practitioners tended to take documents at face value and searched for ways that archaeological collections might suggest the “status” of the people who owned and used the artifacts found during excavation. The facile association between artifacts and past identity was reinforced with a perspective that maintained that social differentiation in hierarchical societies—as measured by gender, class, ethnicity, and race—were fixed positions that people occupied.

More recently, the historical archaeologists’ analytical frameworks have become more sophisticated and contextually nuanced. Most archaeologists today neither read written sources of information uncritically nor accept a one-to-one correlation between past identity and artifact association. Contemporary historical archaeologists tend to envision identity as situationally mutable and as an area of social life that is contested and open to interpretation. Archaeologists have begun to apply the concept of “overdetermination” to promote the view that the creation of social identities is a multidimensional, interconnected, and on-going process of being (Voss 2008b, p. 5). For this reason, the goal of (re)constructing past identities has become decidedly more complex since 2000. Today’s historical archaeologists are more likely to speak in terms of vectors of social inequality than to focus on fixed notions of status. The hierarchical societies that historical archaeologists investigate necessarily contain a multifaceted complex of vectors of inequality, none of which can be separated except artificially. It remains true, however, that as a practical matter, archaeologists tend to focus on only one vector of inequality as a way to investigate past social differentiation. This separation is usually accompanied with the understanding that the extraction of one vector from the complex network is an artifact of analysis rather than a representation of historical reality.

Given the importance of social inequality in historical archaeology—as both a historical subject and a factor in today’s world—it is understandable that researchers

have provided numerous, often quite diverse analyses. For the sake of brevity, I focus somewhat on the Overseas Chinese in the United States because archaeological studies of sites associated with them are representative in method and approach to studies of other social groups, however distinct in their sociohistorical contexts. I do not explore the role of religion and symbolism in helping create group identity, though important studies have been completed (e.g., Fennell 2003, 2007). My focus is on what has been termed “historical archaeology’s great triumvirate of gender, race, and class” (Saitta 2007, p. 5).

Archaeologists increasingly understand identities as produced through the negotiation of power relations in distinct sociohistorical settings rather than as fixed identities (Voss and Allen 2008). The ways in which the identities are expressed—materially, socially, visually, and ideologically—depend on the spatio-temporal environment. As noted above, the analysis of temporal and spatial variables necessarily includes a consideration of analytical scale.

In her careful examination of “social collectivity and community agency,” Voss (2008a) explicitly confronts several topics central to contemporary archaeology, most prominent among them is the relationship between identity and scale of analysis. Voss postulates that in Overseas Chinese settlements, the household is not an analytically viable research unit. She argues that archaeologists who begin their analysis at the household level are privileging “normative, middle-class European American practices related to the family unit, property ownership and refuse disposal” (Voss 2008a, p. 37). As she notes, the significance of this observation extends far beyond the investigation of historic Chinese life in America because the preservation laws of the United States are biased toward the household level of analysis. Households are units that preservationists can identify as tightly dated, spatially discrete entities. As a result, much archaeology accomplished within a cultural resource management environment has a household focus.

Chinese immigrants to the United States adopted associational units of identity for which the household as unit of analysis is inappropriate. The social collectivities Voss identifies—business consortiums and district associations—move the analysis beyond the individual household level. The implication of this historic reality is that archaeologists must ask new questions about the links between material culture and identity. How do archaeologists reorient their understandings of consumer practices when the frame of reference is not the household? How should archaeologists model the materiality of social relations when the focus is on communities rather than individuals? The second question has profound significance for both practical and theoretical reasons. In terms of archaeological practice, separating some communal deposits into households can represent a considerable challenge and reduce the ability of archaeologists to relate a collection of artifacts to a specific household. This problem is especially acute in urban contexts (Mrozowski 2006, pp. 37–39). On a more theoretical level, the focus on households, and the people who lived in them, reaches to the heart of the question of how archaeologists envision and use the concepts of agency and individuality without falling prey to neoliberal thinking (Patterson 2005). Here, I specifically mean privileging, if even only tacitly, individuality as the “right and proper” expression of American life or envisioning the movement from communal life to nuclear family as an inevitable cultural



evolution. This issue is also one that has implications for the investigation of capitalism, and similar questions central to historical archaeology have been asked in other contexts (e.g., Saitta 2007).

Studies of the immigrant Chinese, as well as those of other cultures who left their homelands for the promise of better living conditions, raise the issue of identity in transnational settings. In her examination of Chinese identity formation on a plantation in Hawai'i, for example, Kraus-Friedberg (2008) charts the creation of a local identity that developed from the forced ethnic segregation of the estate's laborers. She argues that the creation of a local identity allowed ethnic solidarity (in relation to outsiders) as it simultaneously worked to maintain a hierarchical structure within each ethnic group. Conceptualizing identity as also transnational creates an appreciation that ethnic groups can create identities that are both local and transnational at the same time. This is an important social aspect of the immigrant experience that is also apparent in the case of non-Chinese groups (e.g., Orser 2007c). Maintaining a strong cultural identity that extends to the homeland requires that the identity "must be strong enough to resist erasure through the normalizing processes of forgetting, assimilating, and distancing" (Clifford 1997, p. 255).

One of the most positive outcomes of the nuanced thinking about Overseas Chinese identity is the willingness to confront directly issues of oppression, discrimination, and racism. Compared to other scholars, historical archaeologists generally have been slow to take up considerations of race, preferring instead to explore the arguably less-contentious subject of ethnicity (Orser 1998, pp. 661–662). The willingness of organizations such as the World Archaeological Congress to confront such issues, however, has helped spur many historical archaeologists to investigate institutional racism and the process of racialization. A growing number of archaeologists now accept that a consideration of racialization cannot be eliminated from the examination of American life, past or present.

Recent research clearly substantiates that Overseas Chinese social groups established their identities in an environment that was not only hostile, but where bigotry and discrimination against them were legally sanctioned (Baxter 2008; Orser 2007d, pp. 139–159). Baxter (2008), for example, documents that one rationale for the creation of Chinatowns was as a defense against nativist racism. The residents of one Chinatown in San Jose, California, when faced with bigotry and discrimination adopted numerous offensive strategies consciously designed to counteract racist behavior. One strategy involved constructing their own fire hydrant system as a defense against the arson they had already experienced. Their pump-and-well system provided a source of water in case of fire, but more profoundly, it made a concrete statement about the hesitancy of the city's non-Chinese fire companies to respond to conflagrations in their communities. In my own research using archaeological and historical information from Stockton, California, I demonstrate the use of traditional medicines by Chinese laundry workers as a form of resistance to the institutional racism they faced from outside the Chinese immigrant community (Orser 2007d, pp. 171–175).

Research on Overseas Chinese identity is illustrative because of the archaeologists' turn toward the conceptualization of agency. Rather than perceiving Chinese

individuals and social groups as mere automatons imbued with the characteristics of their culture and acting in accordance with prescribed rules of behavior, historical archaeologists now tend to see Chinese individuals and groups as having situationally relevant degrees of personal freedom. Mullins (2008c, p. 155) has observed this important trend in thinking: “The picture of Chinese immigrants as thoughtful agents carefully managing tradition in the face of American life perhaps demonstrates a sea change in thinking.” The adoption of agency as a concept has moved historical archaeology far beyond any sort of mechanical association between artifacts and identity and has created a space for the development of alternative histories (e.g., Paterson 2008; Paynter 2002).

Historical archaeologists generally have accepted that giving voice to the voiceless is one of their field’s major strengths. The dilemma, however, concerns how much agency to model, which again returns to the role of capitalism in contemporary archaeological research (McGuire and Wurst 2002). The danger, as Mullins (2008c, p. 155) notes, is that in imbuing past groups with agency archaeologists run the risk of “ignoring the structural conditions” that may shape the forms and amount of agency possible. In other words, the acceptance of total free agency in a particular sociohistorical setting may erase the limits that racism and bigotry place on freedom of movement and expression. Regarding race specifically, the understanding of agency must be constrained—in each historical moment—by the structures within which the social groups operate. This is a central concept for fully understanding the process of racialization because it foregrounds the importance of Bourdieu’s concept of habitus, a widely used but generally poorly understood concept in archaeological research (Orser 2004b, pp. 129–133; 2007d, pp. 57–59). Though Bourdieu’s notion of habitus is complex, we can think of it as historically created and structured individual and collective action rooted in the concept of what is possible within the class hierarchy. During the socialization process people learn what is possible given their social positions and they act accordingly, even though the habitus does not govern all human action and expression. Clearly, social collectivities have some measure of freedom, but as the case of Ludlow, Colorado, clearly demonstrates, social group agency can be quickly eliminated by an oppressive power structure willing to use intimidation and violence (Saitta 2007).

Adopting more complex relational and situational understandings of social practice and structural power has permitted archaeologists to move the examination of race into the study of whiteness (e.g., Bell 2005; Paynter 2001). This is an important area of research that undoubtedly will continue to grow over the next decade, though it will likely remain contentious (e.g., Anagnostou 2009).

The postmodern turn in historical archaeology that has made it desirable to think in terms of individualism and agency has had significant implications for the study of social class (Wurst 2006, pp. 193–194). As archaeologists have moved toward a perspective that privileges choice and free participation, they have found it difficult to problematize class, and in fact have tended to perceive it—as well as ethnicity, race, and gender—as personally exhibited traits rather than as sets of social relations (e.g., Wilkie and Bartoy 2000).

Archaeologists have been less willing to explore issues of class and gender at Overseas Chinese sites, preferring to concentrate on ethnic characterizations and most recently race. In general, class appears to be a vector of inequality that archaeologists associate with European and American societies rather than immigrant communities. With time this association will hopefully disappear as archaeologists come to accept that issues of class were closely entwined with all the other vectors of social inequality.

The archaeology of class has generally been subsumed within the analysis of capitalism. The development of a Marxist-inspired archaeology that was pursued by V. Gordon Childe in the early 20th century came to the forefront of much archaeological thinking in the 1980s (see Orser and Patterson 2004). An observer unfamiliar with historical archaeology but knowledgeable about post-Columbian Western history might suppose that historical archaeologists would have been quick to provide class analyses given the creation of class hierarchies in the West. Such has not been the case, and Paynter (1988, p. 409) could observe in the late 1980s that with some exceptions historical archaeologists had failed to “make detailed use of class models of capitalism,” an observation that may still be accurate, though less so. A closer association of historical archaeology with class analysis is occurring (Wurst and Fitts 1999), though perhaps not as rapidly as some might wish.

In his full-length analysis, Mrozowski (2006) investigates the nature of class relations in 18th-century Newport, Rhode Island, and 19th-century Lowell, Massachusetts. He correctly notes that most historical archaeologists now perceive class as a mutable vector of inequality that was constant in overall structure but varied situationally. In other words, though the structure of the capitalist project was fairly rigid, some measure of flexibility was possible within it. Newport was developed as a late 17th-century port city within the British Empire, whereas Lowell was a 19th-century industrial city intended to serve as a model for American enterprise. Each city was different in myriad ways, but both were capitalist manifestations within which class relations were invented, reinvented, and expressed. The nature of the evidence allows Mrozowski to pursue analyses at the individual and household scales (for a similar analysis in another context, see Mrozowski et al. 2007, pp. 143–153). This kind of multiscale investigation demonstrates the power of historical archaeology to provide insights into the nature of class relations as they were actually created among individual members of discrete classes. The nature of class relations, being based as they are on the unequal acquisition and maintenance of resources and power, substantiates that the classes in both cities lived in spaces that were variously contested. In Lowell, for instance, factory owners had the power to control the worker’s spaces, but they nonetheless could not eliminate acts of resistance. Class identities were constantly being negotiated in this charged environment even as the agents of the capitalist project struggled to instill a structure over them (Mrozowski 2006, pp. 137–138; also see Mrozowski 2005).

At first glance, industrial environments appear to constitute an ideal arena to illustrate the importance of an archaeology of class relations. Class consciousness, identity formation, and social negotiation seem especially apparent in these sociohistorical situations because of the presence of owners and workers. Even in

these environments, however, it is possible for archaeologists to deflect the importance of class by instead writing about status, socioeconomic status, or even worker resistance as cultural (i.e., ethnic) rather than class oriented (Wurst 1999). One approach has been to adopt the “neutralized” approach of interpretive archaeology (e.g., Taksa 2005), and another is to deny the importance of class relations all together (e.g., Palmer 2005). The presence of these counterthreads indicates the variation that is possible within historical archaeology and illustrates the reluctance of some scholars to engage in class analysis. Yet to be investigated is whether this reticence relates to personal preference, an urge to focus on “anthropological” concepts (like culture and ethnicity) rather than “sociological” concepts (like class), or a desire to avoid investigating social relations that remain fractious in today’s world.

Archaeologists face numerous pitfalls when encountering a complex web of social relations where class should play a major role in structuring inequality but where other variables seem more important. In her examination of a deep-mining operation in South Africa, Behrens (2005, p. 64) notes how the various groups of workers—from different European ethnic communities—were segregated into discrete villages, and observes that such separations have appeared at other mining camps that archaeologists have studied. Her observation is important because it demonstrates, among other things, the power of owners to structure the landscapes of workers. Importantly, the plan behind this spatial separation was to eliminate any class solidarity that may have developed among the workers despite their diverse ethnic heritages. Their division into ethnic enclaves in fact created national consciousness and unity and resulted in ethnically based conflicts. Such research amply illustrates the power structure imbued in the class relations of capitalism.

Not surprisingly, numerous historical archaeologists have brought new insights to the study of gender relations since 2000. The nature of the information means that the investigation can be focused on a specific individual, such as Little’s (2007, pp. 99–101) narrative about Anne Catharine Green, or White’s (2005, 2008) studies on the role of personal adornment in constructing identity (also see Middleton 2007). Though both archaeologists take a different tack—Little links her investigation to power and capitalism more than White, and White relies more than does Little on an interpretive approach that stresses social performance—both archaeologists understand that gender, like other vectors of social inequality, are constructs that are embedded within the sociohistorical context of the times.

One of the points that White (2008) effectively makes is that historical archaeologists have traditionally perceived many of the objects of personal adornment as mere “small finds.” Authors of archaeological site reports and monographs have typically given these objects short shrift compared to ceramic objects. Such lack of attention has been a significant failure of historical archaeological practice but one that is now being corrected. For example, Hull (2006) uses such seemingly insignificant finds as five glass beads excavated from an evicted tenant farmer’s home in the Irish Midlands to illustrate how Irish women used their lace-tatting skills as an integral part of the household economy. She argues that the maintenance of the household economy was more than simply subsistence-related because the tenants on that specific property were engaged in a

protracted rent strike. As a result, the continuation of the family's well-being was an overt act of resistance masked as subsistence. In another example, some archaeologists are rethinking the small artifacts left by war in an effort to understand the inherent role of material culture in all human life (e.g., Saunders 2002).

Archaeologists have been interested in domesticity for many years, and typically this has meant a concomitant interest in women's roles. Recently, however, historical archaeologists have begun to investigate masculinity. For example, working in the Australian bush, Lawrence (2003) has observed that the facile association between women and domesticity reduces the presence of different versions of masculinity. As she notes, the discovery of refined teawares and delicate glasswares may lead one to conclude that women on the site attempted to construct domestic lives in the bush rather than to consider that men may have been engaged in a form of masculine domesticity unrelated to women's roles (Lawrence 2003, p. 220). Similarly, Williams (2008) has investigated masculinity in an Overseas Chinese community in California. This research significantly advances the archaeological consideration of gender because it allows masculinity to be problematized equally to femininity. This more nuanced perspective also eliminates the essentialist understanding that women = femininity/private and men = masculinity/public.

Numerous archaeologists' efforts to engender archaeology also have resulted in considerations of sexuality, a topic that was rarely broached before 2000 (Voss 2006, pp. 121–122). Considerations of sexual politics, which sometimes includes same-sex liaisons (e.g., Casella 2000), has helped to transform historical archaeology into a mature field of inquiry.

## Heritage and memory in historical archaeology

Historical archaeology has always been about heritage, especially in the United States where the development of historical archaeology was intimately associated with the physical reconstruction of sites deemed important in American history. In recent years, however, historical archaeologists have joined other archaeologists in realizing that heritage is a social construction that is often used to promote national ideologies, factional perspectives, and even pernicious world views. The role of memory—literally what gets remembered and why—in constructing and sustaining heritage also has come to the fore in much archaeological thinking throughout the world (e.g., Stritch 2006).

Heritage and memory are interlinked because places—discrete locations on the ground—are imbued with social meaning. The remembrances, diverse and changeable over time, are embedded in the collective memory and materially impressed upon the landscape (Holtorf and Williams 2006; Johnson 2007, p. 148). That many of the most venerated places are those relating to elite members of society, or indeed built by them, merely highlights the role of class identity in the creation of heritage. The growing remembrance of once-ignored groups, both in the landscape and in the collective memory, illustrates the important role of

multicultural education and awareness that has occurred in many places around the world since the late 1960s.

Harpers Ferry, West Virginia, has been a particularly rich site for illustrating several ways in which heritage has been used to structure memory and create tradition. As Shackel (2000, 2001, 2003; Moyer and Shackel 2008; Shackel and Palus 2006) has shown in depth, historical memory at Harpers Ferry was built exclusively around the events of the American Civil War. Other histories, including those of African Americans and members of the working class, were ignored (also see Little 2007, pp. 116–121). The history originally presented by the US National Park Service at the site offered a skewed view of the past by exclusively concentrating on the great men of history. In striving to provide a more inclusive history of the city, Shackel constructs a series of countermemories. His history is thus one of plurality and inclusion, one that reaches across racial and class lines to construct working-class and African American histories. His studies foreground the idea that to understand the construction of heritage, archaeologists also must comprehend the sociohistorical context of the times in which the heritage plan was designed and implemented. At Harpers Ferry specifically, ignoring African American history coincides with America's era of Jim Crow separatism in the same way that a failure to commemorate the rise of Harpers Ferry as an industrial town can be linked with efforts to discourage the creation of labor unions and workers' collectives.

One example from Harpers Ferry that is especially illustrative involves the Heyward Sheperd Memorial (Moyer and Shackel 2008, pp. 153–157; Shackel 2003, pp. 81–112). The importance of this case study serves as a metaphor for much heritage presentation, because, for one reason, it clearly demonstrates the association between monuments and the sociohistorical moments of their creation and erection.

Heyward Shepherd, a free African American killed during John Brown's famous raid on Harpers Ferry, had remained aloof from Brown and his efforts to incite a slave rebellion. In the late 19th century, white supremacists and Southern apologists, seizing on Shepherd as the symbol of the "faithful Negro," commissioned an inscribed granite monument dedicated to his memory. Many African Americans quickly condemned the monument as racist when it was unveiled in 1931. When, in the 1950s, the National Park Service acquired the land on which the monument sat, it decided to turn it around to conceal the proslavery language. The monument was removed in the 1970s when the adjacent buildings underwent renovation, and in 1981, the Park Service put the monument back on display. When the park superintendent learned that the monument might be vandalized, he had workmen encase it in a plywood box. The NAACP continued to label the monument offensive, but pro-Confederacy commemorative groups viewed the monument as a legitimate historical marker. In 1995, the National Park Service decided to remove the plywood box and to install a small placard near the monument to provide an alternative perspective on the monument and the significance of John Brown's raid. As Shackel (2003, p. 111) notes, the monument, and the emotions it evoked, reflect the attitudes of the various periods of its history. The decision to erect the Shepherd monument in the 1920s coincided with the rise of the NAACP and the resurgence of

the KKK. The confusion over how to treat the monument in the late 20th century mirrored the uncertainties of the era, just as the placement of the placard can be perceived as an artifact of the postmodern view that many perspectives are possible. We must remember, however, that the monument and the placard are neither neutral nor harmless.

In the United States, the founding fathers are held in utmost esteem to the point that they are often imbued with near-mythic attributes. In her consideration of the examination of one of these figures—Benjamin Franklin (and properties associated with him)—Jeppson (2006, p. 25) adopts the term “civil religion” to describe the degree of veneration bestowed on such historical figures. In promoting civil religion, the state constantly works to maintain faith in the social order and its ideals—in this case, the democracy of the United States—through the conduct of civil rituals enacted at venerated sites and properties. The Franklin House in Philadelphia—another one is located in Trafalgar Square, London—is the second most visited historic site at the Independence National Historic Park after the Liberty Bell. During the course of the tercentenary-era assessment of Franklin Court in 2003–2005, Jeppson had occasion to study the archaeology projects that had been undertaken at the site in the 1950s and 1960s. In unraveling the narrative of the excavations, she discovered stories related to African Americans, low-wage laborers, Native Americans, and issues about gender equality and sexual orientation. All of these additional subplots of the Franklin’s Court story were buried underneath the veneration of Franklin. That Jeppson was initially conflicted about mentioning these alternative histories aptly demonstrates the pressures that archaeologists can feel—even if they are internal—over how best to present minority histories. As part of her reconsideration, Jeppson understood that the main goal of the power brokers in the Franklin commission was to maintain the civil religion that had been built around Franklin and the other founding fathers.

Given the high profile of the founding fathers and the ways in which the state’s institutions have worked to venerate them, it is not surprising that many citizens understand the value of studying and protecting sites overtly tied to the dominant ideology. It may be more difficult to appreciate the value of site protection and veneration when the memories associated with them are painful. The most vocal opponents might even judge veneration as unpatriotic and, in the United States, as un-American. The vandalism of the Ludlow monument noted above serves as a stark example. Cooper (2005) addresses this very issue in his study of 18th- and 19th-century Manchester, England. He observes that Manchester, as the archetypal industrial city, was a place many people today associate with pollution and abject poverty. The concept of “the slum” has become fixed in the public’s collective memory as a place to be avoided and forgotten, and so they deem the buildings in such areas as unworthy of preservation. In short, historic Manchester was not the sort of place that today’s city leaders wished to promote as the image of the city. Members of the local government, who perceived the buildings as examples of an unfortunate period of history, opposed the work of the preservationists who valued the buildings for their historic characteristics. In the public’s mind, the sites were associated with the “social ills” of the past; the sooner forgotten, the better. Preservationists and others view such places as worthy of thoughtful study and even

protection. Controversies over the preservation of certain historical places, such as “slums,” demonstrate how heritage and memory are forever linked.

The nature of historical archaeology as an examination of the recent past means that its practitioners frequently locate artifacts that have been created specifically to mold public memory. For example, writing about the Jamestown Tercentennial Exposition held in Norfolk, Virginia, in 1907, Margolin (2008) illustrates numerous ceramic objects and other items that companies had manufactured specifically to commemorate the founding of America’s premier English settlement. Objects like miniature bricks impressed with the words “Made of Jamestown Soil” and transfer-printed plates depicting scenes of the exposition—along with insets showing John Smith and Powhatan (wearing English clothing)—were intended to be taken home and cherished. Racist figurines were also for sale as commemorative keepsakes. That producers in both the United States and Great Britain made the commemorative objects highlights an international aspect to the creation of memory. The objects also poignantly illustrate the social positions of both African Americans and Native Americans in early 20th-century America and show how a certain segment of the population perceived such peoples. The Jamestown exposition was a failure from the standpoint of tourism, but the continued presence of the objects created for it demonstrates the permanency of material culture and the profound significance of examining it as a window into heritage and memory.

Research thus demonstrates how the concepts of heritage and memory are entwined with the perspectives, ideals, and worldviews of members of diverse living communities. In fact, the collaboration between archaeologists and members of descendant communities has been one of the most positive developments of the archaeological examination of heritage and memory.

The archaeological investigation of the African Burial Ground in New York City has been one of the most visible, most important, and coincidentally most contested collaborations in recent American archaeological history (Perry et al. 2006). Despite the obstacles, the research team was able to build a collaborative program that included political and religious leaders, community activists, and numerous other scholars. Through this innovative effort, they provided a “dramatic case for the development of the theory and practice of inclusion and engagement” (LaRoche and Blakey 1997, p. 99). This project significantly advanced historical knowledge about the nature of African American life in a major city as it equally served to demonstrate the promise and value of truly collaborative research.

Throughout the world, archaeologists are now engaging and collaborating with indigenous peoples to gain new insights into the links between present and past. Such collaborations are having the important implication of encouraging archaeologists to reexamine their previously accepted concepts and perceptions (e.g., Matthews 2007; Mullins 2008b; Silliman 2005) and to apply the new sensitivity to explicit case studies (e.g., Jordan 2008; Paterson 2008). The exploration of nuanced theoretical concepts is pushing 21st-century historical archaeology in new and important directions. Moreover, the new directions have the potential to demonstrate the important role that archaeological knowledge can play in refining our understanding of our collective historical pasts.



The idea of heritage and its twin, heritage tourism (which includes presentations on television and the internet in addition to actual visitation; see e.g., Missikoff 2006; Slick 2002), is often entwined with concepts of pageantry. Merrington (2003) explores the presentation of heritage as pageant and perceptively observes how dramatic performances can be used to marshal powers of persuasion intended to advance dominant ideologies like national identity and imperial destiny. Nuanced understandings of the role of heritage and the presentation of the results of archaeological research also create space for conceptualizing the ways in which exhibition can contain embedded issues of class, a topic that archaeologists have explored with some success at Annapolis for some time (Potter 1994; also see McGuire 2008, pp. 106–107). By interrogating the reasons behind the creation of specific heritage programs, archaeologists have begun to question why some properties and sites are preserved and interpreted while others are ignored. Inherent in such explorations are notions of ownership and privatization (Ronayne 2008).

One important development that has resulted from the close examination of heritage is the realization that heritage concerns and human rights are tightly linked (Hamilakis 2005; Silverman and Ruggles 2007). Cultural anthropologists have long understood the relationship between capital development and indigenous rights, but the role of archaeology in assuring cultural patrimony has been less examined in historical archaeology until relatively recently. Since 2000, an increasing number of engaged archaeologists have striven to illustrate how powerful nation-states have used colonial and imperial powers to appropriate indigenous history (Mayne 2008, p. 110). One of the most well-known examples concerns the creation of history at Great Zimbabwe (Fontein 2006), but in the United States examples of appropriated Native American history are equally apparent (e.g., Paynter 2002; Zimmerman 2007), as they are elsewhere (e.g., Lydon 2006; Magnoni et al. 2007). Historical archaeologists have often approached the appropriation of history—and thus heritage—from the direction of African American history and have centered their presentations within a context of public archaeology (e.g., Shackel and Chambers 2004). As noted above, many have framed their arguments in terms of collaboration with descendant communities (e.g., Franklin and McKee 2004; Singleton and Orser 2003). Such collaborative efforts have been found to be fruitful when the archaeologists identify and listen to the stakeholders and when the stakeholders understand that the archaeologists usually arrive with the best intentions. A central concern involves the level of involvement archaeologists should have with telling descendant-community history and how politicized they believe archaeology should be or inherently is (e.g., Dawdy 2008; Matthews 2004; McGuire 2008). In most cases, the connection between politics and archaeology cannot be ignored as easily as it may be in purely academic research. This reality has been confirmed in the analysis of Cold War era heritage (1946–1989), a historical epoch that demands attention today (Schofield and Cocroft 2007).

The appropriation of heritage immediately comes to the foreground when looting and the illegal sale of antiquities is considered. Archaeologists have been aware of the illegal sale of artifacts for many years, but a greater—and perhaps more public—awareness of the theft of cultural heritage has developed as a result of recent—and at the time of this writing, on-going—wars in the Middle East (see

Brodie 2006; Emberling 2008; Van Krieken-Pieters 2006). These conflicts have seen the looting and destruction of the antiquities of many ancient civilizations. American modern-world archaeologists have had no role in the discussions about protecting the endangered antiquities in these battle zones, but thoughtful readers will understand that in addition to the ancient remains in the national museums of Iraq and Afghanistan, much is being damaged and even wholly destroyed that is of interest to historical archaeologists (see Baram and Carroll 2000). Field research is obviously not possible or desirable during war, but this should not deter historical archaeologists from future research interests in the region. The destruction of villages and other cultural properties significantly diminishes our capacity to investigate them in the future.

### Looking forward

In this overview I have focused on four areas of research that historical archaeologists have found to be especially fruitful before and increasingly so after 2000. As noted above, these topics are neither the only areas of research being pursued nor would they be universally accepted as key sites of research. Each is an area of inquiry that I believe is among the most relevant to today's historical archaeology, but they are not the only ones of significance. In this section, I briefly present ideas on other topics that historical archaeologists are currently investigating and that will also undergo much more research in the coming years.

As increasing numbers of historical archaeologists have realized the political nature of their research (through various avenues, including heritage commemoration), many have begun to engage with postcolonial theory. Many archaeologists find postcolonial theory intriguing because of its focus on the dispossessed, resistance, and decolonization (e.g., Liebmann and Rizvi 2008). Others view it as perhaps leaning too heavily on literary theories they deem irrelevant to archaeological research. In any case, many of the sociohistorical situations that historical archaeologists examine have experienced colonialism and imperialism, and many places still feel their effects (e.g., Prashad 2007; Smith 1999). As a result, investigations involving both the past and the present are consistent with historical archaeology's commitment to sensitive historical analysis that has relevance to our present sociohistorical moment. Tensions between postcolonial theory and other perspectives such as classic Marxist thinking creates an important intellectual space for the further development of archaeological insights that have broad appeal. The impact of postcolonial theory in historical archaeology will be interesting to monitor over the new few years.

With the development of historical archaeology into a truly global pursuit, practitioners are now excavating sites around the world. Africa is one continent that has recently witnessed a growth in serious historical archaeology. In many ways, research in Africa is synonymous with archaeology (e.g., Barham and Mitchell 2008), but serious, anthropologically rooted research on the past 500 years is a more recent innovation. Since 2000, archaeologists have used their studies in Africa to enhance methodologies in the field involving the use of oral traditions and memory,

and they have challenged historical archaeologists to reconceive their discipline as a method for constructing alternative histories free from the influence of Europe (e.g., Reid and Lane 2004; Schmidt 2006). One of the most positive signs is the move to create an archaeology of the African diaspora that finds ways to actually link the Old and the New Worlds (Ogundiran and Falola 2007). This analysis is especially important because it perceives the diaspora as a transcontinental/transnational process and because it demonstrates clear avenues of comparative inquiry across the wide expanse of the Atlantic.

With the developing interest in the telling of alternative histories and the application of postcolonial theory, it will be interesting to see whether archaeologists develop a concomitant interest in marginal groups such as criminal organizations and gangs. Archaeologists excavating in what have been labeled “slums” have investigated neighborhoods where organized gangs were likely to appear (e.g., Mayne and Murray 2001; Murray 2006), but to my knowledge the archaeology of criminal gangs—as an urban example of alternative family structures—has not been pursued. Research of this sort may appear in various cultural resource management reports of limited distribution, but the dearth of information implies that this area of research has yet to attract the archaeologists’ attention. Some research in this vein will likely appear as increasing numbers of historical archaeologists investigate the material conditions of poverty, including homelessness (e.g., Zimmerman and Welch n.d.). Such research will expand the links between present and past, demonstrate the role of archaeology in examining the history of “social ills,” and cause archaeologists to reflect on all the topics that appear above.

## Conclusion

The four topics I have explored in some detail obviously do not include all interests of historical archaeologists. My perspective is that issues surrounding the selection of analytical scale, the study of capitalism, the analysis of social inequality, and the efforts of heritage managers to mold and control memory as an element of dominant ideology often linked to nationalism, patriotism, and ethnic pride will shape the immediate future of historical archaeology.

Archaeologists have tended to accept the difficulty of examining the expanding nature of the world after about A.D. 1500 and have sought ways to link the social and cultural practices exhibited on the local level with the transcontinental, often global, forces that swirled around them. Archaeologists fully realize now that the amount and degree of cultural contact and change varies situationally and that their analyses must be multiscalar if they wish to obtain a plausible understanding of past life. Attempts to understand the ways in which local inhabitants were situated within global spheres of interaction does not negate those archaeological studies that are intensively focused. On the contrary, local and global studies complement one another in important ways.

By the same token the archaeological examination of capitalism will continue to interest historical archaeologists of different theoretical orientations and interests.

This research can also be multiscale or site specific. The many characteristics of capitalism each deserve intense archaeological analysis. One of the most encouraging developments in this archaeological focus is the willingness on the part of many archaeologists to see the effects of capitalist practice on current-day archaeological research and to understand that archaeology can never be truly divorced from it.

Historical archaeologists have been extremely interested in using material culture to discern the social divisions of past societies for many years. Whereas historical archaeologists once searched for one or two obvious ethnic markers within their artifact collections, today's researchers adopt much more sophisticated viewpoints about social identity and inequality. Much of the research tends to concentrate on gender, class, and race, and historical archaeologists are continuing to develop ways to understand each within the complex sociohistorical environments they study. At the same time, however, they remain fully cognizant of the complicated ways in which all vectors of social inequality are entwined with one another.

The history of historical archaeology is forever tied to heritage presentation. In the past, much of the connection was forged through simple physical reconstruction at notable places or at sites associated with famous persons. Archaeologists have recently looked more intently at the meaning of heritage and the ways in which memory has been created, used, and manipulated at historic properties. This is a rich area of research and one that is destined to receive a considerable amount of future research. In many ways, the close study of heritage neatly links together issues of analytical scale, social inequality, and capitalism.

Much has been left out of this overview because the explosion of historical archaeology around the world now makes it impossible to summarize the field in any complete manner. In writing this overview, I have overlooked much important research by some of the world's most gifted historical archaeologists. Historical archaeology has progressed far since the late 1960s, and the pace of research has been increasing since 2000, with significant theoretical and methodological achievements rapidly occurring. Much has yet to be learned, but the issues and questions now being pursued at the beginning of the 21st century indicate that the future holds great promise for the discipline.

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