



Dirt in the Wounds: Confronting Hard Histories through Public Community Archaeology in Boston

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Abstract The majority of Boston’s residents are minorities. These minority residents confront the ongoing effects of racism, including the “hard histories” of enslavement, the civil-rights movement, and community displacement. Some white Bostonians are unaware of these hard histories or see them as an unnecessary and uncomfortable politicizing of the past, while others are aware, but not personally impacted. Public community cultural-resource management archaeological surveys by Boston’s City Archaeology Program seek to confront these hard histories through recent surveys in Boston’s Chinatown, the Boston Latin School site, and the Malcolm X-Ella Little-Collins House. The hard and often entangled histories encountered at these sites challenge public perceptions of archaeology by seeking extensive public engagement through community archaeology. This article explores the economic and social issues created by the hard histories at these sites through the reflections of individuals both personally

and professionally connected to these community archaeological surveys.

Keywords Urban archaeology · Community archaeology · Boston · Slavery · Civil rights · Public archaeology

Introduction

Like all cities in the world colonized by Europeans, Boston, Massachusetts’s white male-supremacist legacy continues to have impacts experienced by its residents today (LaRoche and Blakey 1997; Silliman 2005; Little 2009; Wood 2014).

The City of Boston Archaeology was founded in 1983 as a direct result of the large-scale cultural-resource management (CRM) archaeological surveys ahead of the city’s Central Artery/Tunnel project or “Big Dig,” a conversion of a raised highway into a tunnel system. The construction of the Central Artery highway marked the start of a decades-long period of urban renewal of the 1940s–1960s that continued a tradition of government-sponsored identification of immigrant communities as “ghettos,” the demolition of historical spaces and sites, and the community displacement of large areas of Boston, including existing Jewish, Black, and immigrant neighborhoods (Elia et al. 1989; Tsipis 2000; Blessett 2020).

While the City of Boston Archaeology Program has always focused on education, public engagement,

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and the curation of archaeological collections, it has pivoted in the past decade toward social-justice anti-racist archaeology through excavations at sites associated with Boston's underrepresented past as a means to celebrate a more inclusive Boston history.

The term "hard history" means different things to different people (Rose 2016). As it is used here, it refers to the events that reflect ongoing issues of racism, enslavement, sexism, the civil-rights movement, community displacement, and other related issues. These are hard for the individuals and communities—often minority communities—who are actively experiencing the ongoing social, emotional, political, physical, environmental, and economic impacts of these events. They are also "hard" for individuals and communities who may not have directly experienced these events as a result of an oppressive system, but are now challenged by the uncomfortable, challenging, emotional, and often embarrassing reckoning that occurs when dominant cultures face the consequences of their past and sometimes ongoing actions.

As a government service that functions as a hybrid of a community archaeology team and a CRM firm, the City of Boston Archaeology Program has conducted multiple projects where proposed work and modifications to historical properties have threatened archaeological resources. These CRM-style excavations, conducted by a team of community members and professional archaeologists, often encounter Boston's hard histories at archaeological sites. Three of the sites are the subjects of this article: 6 Hudson Street Chinatown, the Boston Latin School, and the Malcolm X-Ella Collins House (Fig. 1). In the case of these projects, these hard histories were confronted in full view of the public and press.

Joseph Bagley, director of archaeology and city archaeologist of Boston, served as the principal investigator on all three of these projects. The coauthors represent members of both the archaeology team working on the projects and the communities impacted by the projects. Using the principles of community-based archaeology (Atalay 2012), the coauthors have provided individual commentary and reflections on these sites without thematic constraint and in their own voices. As such, the style, tone, and perspectives in the sections below change with each coauthor.

Jocelyn Lee is an archaeologist and doctoral candidate at Stanford University, specializing in the

Chinese diaspora, race, geographic information systems, and community archaeology. Lee participated in the community engagement work of the 6 Hudson Street Project both before and after the Chinatown dig. Jessica Dello Russo is a classical archaeologist with a doctorate from the Vatican's Institute for Archaeology in Rome. She is a Boston Latin School alumna, lifelong Boston resident, and participant on the Boston Latin School Project and other City of Boston Archaeology Program digs. Rodnell Collins is the president of the Malcolm X-Ella L. Little Collins Family Foundation, Inc.; the Collins family still owns the Malcolm X-Ella Collins House. Collins is Malcolm X's nephew and the son of Ella Little-Collins, who bought the home and invited her brother, Malcolm, to live there. Rodnell Collins grew up in the house and was directly involved in all aspects of the archaeological survey at his home, including excavation, washing, cataloging, analysis, and interpretation.

The coauthors of this article stand at the intersection of the community and archaeology of these three places. Lee and Dello Russo contributed written components ("Transformation of Place" and "Tradition Bound," respectively). Rodnell Collins preferred an oral interview, included here as a shorter series of approved detailed notes.

Six Hudson Street, Chinatown

Project Background

While giving a public presentation on Boston archaeology in 2017, Bagley responded: "Chinatown," when asked where he would like to do a project someday. Tunney Lee, a prominent Chinatown historian and emeritus professor of urban planning at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, was in the audience that day and invited Bagley to lunch in Chinatown and on a personal tour of the neighborhood. During the tour, Lee pointed out 6 Hudson Street, a vacant parcel owned by his cousin, prominent Chinatown resident Wilson Lee, who was considering developing it in the coming years. The parcel was ideal for public archaeology: it was vacant, unpaved, and relatively easy for locals and visitors to find and watch the archaeological survey due to the site's proximity to a well-used state park and in the immediate vicinity of Boston's Chinatown gateway arch (Fig. 2).

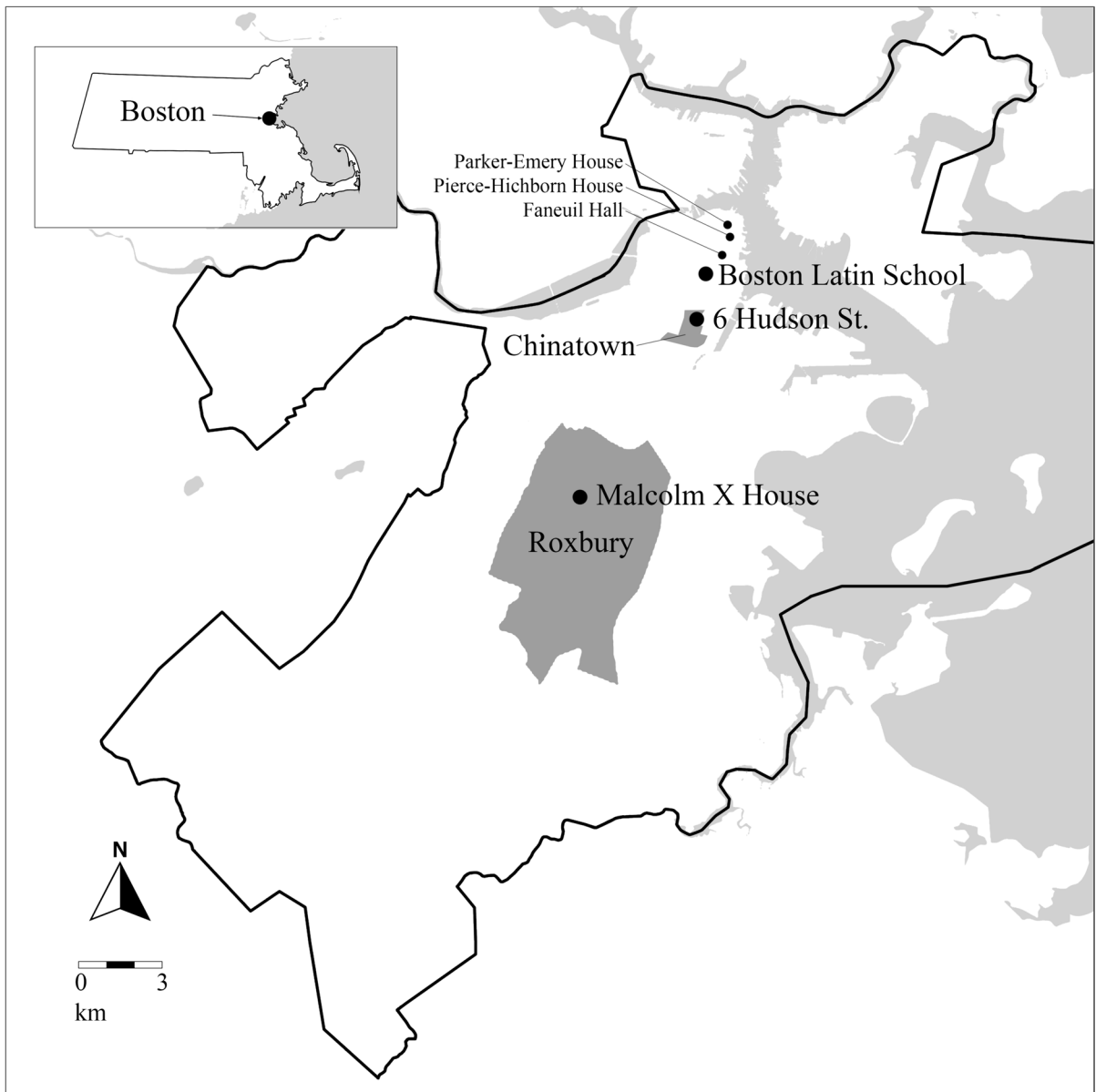


Fig. 1 Map of Boston showing the locations of archaeological sites mentioned in this article. (Map by Joseph Bagley, 2024.)

Six Hudson Street stands witness to almost 150 years of history, beginning with local Massachusetts residents in 1841. Throughout the first half of the 19th century, Massachusetts-born residents occupied the building, while immigrants and first-generation Americans dominated the second half of the century (Bagley 2019; Bagley and Lee 2019). With the appearance of Syrian immigrants in tax records by 1899 (FamilySearch 1899), both the lot and the larger

surrounding neighborhood centered around Hudson Street turned into “Little Syria.” By the 1920s Chinatown had begun to expand west into Hudson Street. In 1929 Ruby Foo bought 6 Hudson Street and turned it into a restaurant called “Ruby Foo’s Den.” This restaurant successfully catered to a non-Chinese and celebrity clientele and became the most famous restaurant for non-Chinese customers in the 1930s. Foo opened new restaurants in New York, Miami,



Fig. 2 View of the China Trade Gate entrance to Boston's Chinatown (left), Mary Soo Hoo Park with building-sized vent from the Big Dig-related highway tunnel (center), and the 6 Hudson Street site location (right, indicated by a white arrow). (Photo by Joseph Bagley, 2019.)

Washington, and Providence, and mentored dozens of aspiring chefs in Boston (To and Chinese Historical Society of New England 2008). According to the 1930 census record at 6 Hudson Street, eight additional men resided in the rental units above the first-floor restaurant (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1930). These men ranged from 23 to 47 years old, six out of eight worked in a restaurant as a waiter or dishwasher, one was a Chinese-goods importer, and another was a hotel helper. Throughout World War II Ruby Foo's Den remained a legendary meeting place for theatrical and sports figures. The restaurateur died of a heart attack on 16 March 1950 (Bagley 2019; Bagley and Lee 2019). Throughout the late 19th and early 20th centuries, 6 Hudson Street was an important place for many.

The justification for the public CRM dig at 6 Hudson Street was its pending development and the possibility that it could reveal new information about multiple underrepresented Boston histories, including Syrian and Chinese immigrants and women-owned businesses. This was the first archaeological survey in Boston's Chinatown. Coincidentally, the granddaughter of the previous owner, Ruby Foo, had just published a children's book on food and culture, titled *Ruby Foo and the Traveling Kitchen* (Foo 2018), and had reached out to the Chinese Historical Society of New England. The timing of the publication and outreach by the author Tiffany Foo helped build the momentum for reconstructing the story of



Fig. 3 Cover slide of public presentation made to Chinatown community organizations by coauthors Joseph Bagley and Jocelyn Lee, including translations by Lee. *Background* images include a historical photo of Syrian immigrants smoking a hookah and making lace on a Hudson Street stoop in 1909 and a postcard showing the interior of Ruby Foo's Den ca. 1940 (Boston Public Library 1909, [1940]).

6 Hudson Street. Though the publicity and support of the local Chinatown residents for the 6 Hudson Street excavation were incredibly positive and hopeful for the archaeologists, when the excavation finished, 6 Hudson Street temporarily regained its interstitial-place status for residents and non-place status for the public.

Jocelyn Lee, who at the time was a University of Massachusetts Boston historical archaeology master's candidate, joined the early project team as an archaeologist of the Chinese diaspora, as Bagley had no prior experience in Chinese-diaspora archaeology. After collaborating with Chinese Historical Society of New England, Lee translated Bagley's prepared presentation into Mandarin Chinese (Fig. 3), and Lee and Bagley attended multiple community meetings throughout the months prior to the dig to discuss the history of 6 Hudson Street, share the proposed plan for archaeology, exchange contact information with neighborhood members, and recruit volunteers for the dig. These efforts were supported by coverage in the *Sampan* newspaper, a bilingual Chinatown newspaper that published news on the forthcoming dig in traditional Chinese (Wong 2019).

The dig began in July 2019. After excavating multiple trenches and test pits totaling 19.5 m² (Figs. 4, 5, 6), the dig ceased abruptly in early August after reaching the water table at just 198 cm below the current surface. Within the largest and deepest of the two

Fig. 4 Map of the 6 Hudson Street project area showing Trench 1, at the rear foundation of 6 Hudson Street, and the larger Trenches 2 and 3 at the rear of the back yard, in addition to shovel test pits. (Map by Joseph Bagley, 2019.)

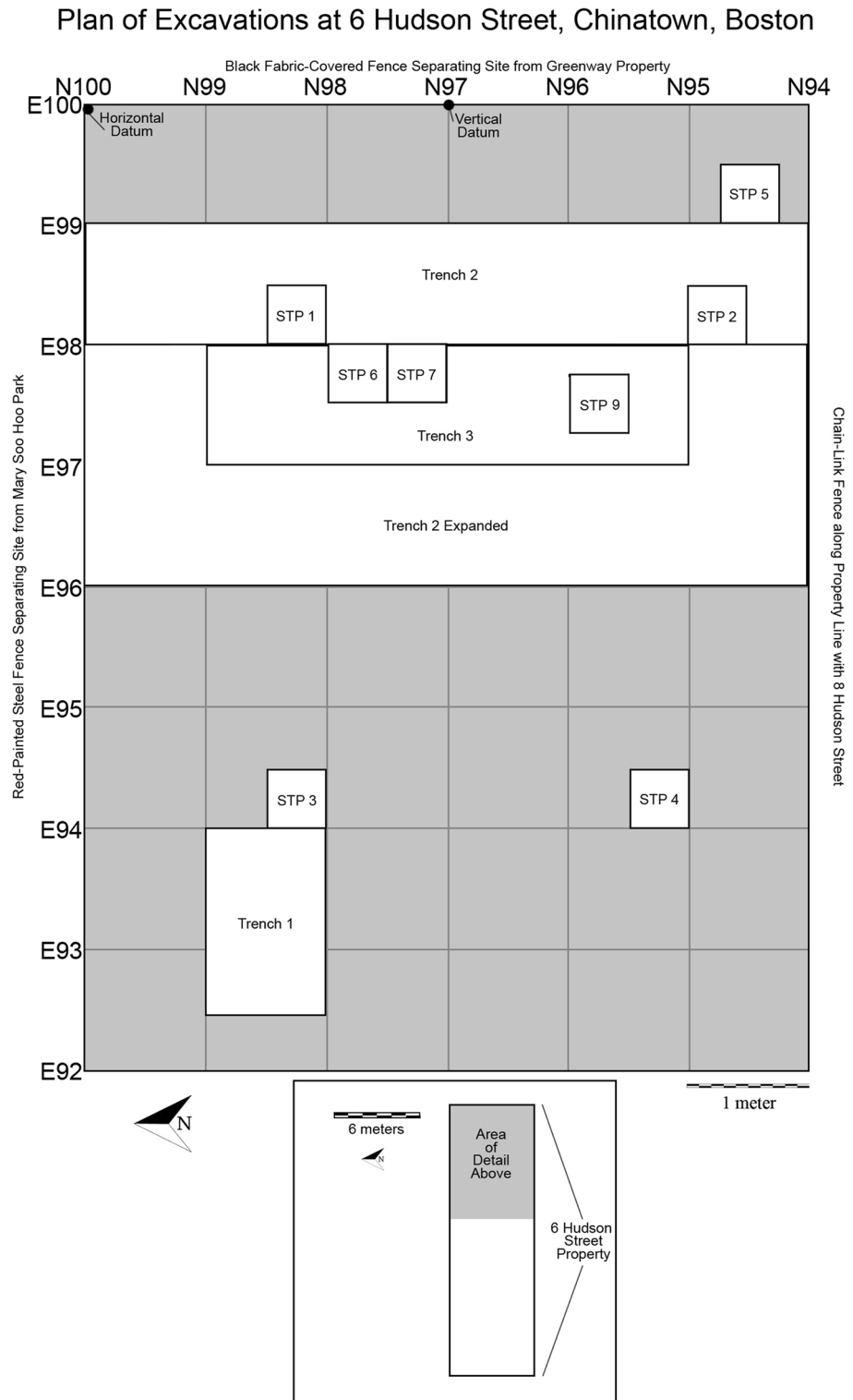




Fig. 5 View west across Trench 1 showing the extensive backdirt pile from the site trenches and nearby Chinatown businesses along Hudson Street in 2019. The individual row buildings seen in the background would have been nearly identical to the building located inside the project area. (Photo by Joseph Bagley, 2019.)

trenches, the team encountered an unexpected addition on the rear of the building that included a full basement, within which the team, unknowingly, had been excavating for the entire project. Though the project did not find intact late 19th- or early/mid-20th-century artifact deposits, a sizable sample of 1970s and 1980s artifacts totaling 1,699 items was recovered in the demolition fill (Bagley and Lee 2019), all of which were photographed and can be seen online (City of Boston Archaeology Program 2021).

Fig. 6 View east at the 3 × 6 m excavation Trench 2 with smaller 1 × 4 m Trench 3 within it at the completion of the project. Note the seepage of ground-water at the bottom of the unit, located at 205 cm below surface. (Photo by Joseph Bagley, 2019.)



Though the City of Boston Archaeology Program has a policy of backfilling all excavations, the 6 Hudson Street hole was not filled for nearly a year. As Jocelyn Lee presents in the commentary that follows, the open pit created a grave concern for Chinatown residents and exacerbated deep tensions and challenges among Chinatown residents, the city, and public perception of the neighborhood. The open pit and its highly visible location at the transition space at the edge of Chinatown amplified a community's sense of abandonment and racist judgment by outsiders looking in. This was made significantly worse by the looming social, political, and racial impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on Chinatown.

Transformation of Place: Commentary by Jocelyn Lee

“Place” is defined by all the lived dimensions that include social-identity formation, economic, and environmental dimensions, or meaning making (Flexner 2014). In contrast, “non-places” are places, such as grocery stores, hotels, streets, and airports, where the space is the production of the nonmeaning (Augé 1995; Moran 2005). Meanwhile, an “interstitial place” is a “locus of activity, which, while initially marginal or radical, enters the mainstream of social life,” while “liminal spaces” are inherently in between and have the ability to “drift into interstitial margins,” which are driven by power (Graves-Brown 2011:58). The location of the archaeology at 6 Hudson Street marks the transition of a seemingly inconspicuous lot of an interstitial place to briefly a place,

and then back to an interstitial place for the Chinatown residents and a non-place for the public.

Chinatowns are similar to other spatially “bounded” areas in a city that are often misrepresented as “ethnic enclaves” due to the high density of certain groups of identity within a semi-defined space. These spaces tend to have the additional burden of negative-stereotype designations or implications due to the insularity label that is put on them. Therefore, although Chinatowns are commonly viewed as tourist destinations, historically these are spaces seen as unclean, filled with opium dens and crime, and insular from other communities. Negative stereotypes of Chinatowns across the United States continued to be reflected in 2020, when Asian Americans became the target of many racial hate crimes as a result of COVID-19 (Jeung et al. 2021). Racial stereotypes of Chinese Americans are thus expanded beyond the racialized bodies themselves, but also manifested in the spaces they occupy. Even now, despite decades of literature from a variety of scholars, including those in Asian American studies, Chinese American history, Chinese-diaspora archaeology, ethnic studies, and religious studies (Voss 2008; Fong 2013), Chinatowns are still perpetuated by negative perspectives that are the result of decades of systemic racism. However, Chinatowns are dynamic, and authors such as Lui (2004) emphasize the amount of interaction and everyday movement that takes place in New York’s Chinese and non-Chinese populations. Racialization thus also plays a role in the discussion of the different types of places.

Located at the heart of downtown Boston, Chinatown, and 6 Hudson Street specifically, is within walking distance to some of the wealthiest parts of Boston, such as the financial district, the Back Bay, or Beacon Hill. The empty lot stands directly adjacent to Mary Soo Hoo Park and the China Trade Gate, both of which can be defined as places with embedded meanings, as they are easily spaces with which people regularly interact and create memories. Hundreds, if not thousands, of people walk past this area daily, demonstrating how the lot simply exists in the background of Chinatown’s landscape, or as a non-place. Memories of this empty lot may still be held by a small percentage of the population in Chinatown, including the current owner, who once lived in the former building, but most passersby had ignored its presence until summer 2019. On 9 January 1989, an Inspectional Services

Department permit was approved to “take down and fill to grade” the lot at 6 Hudson Street, Boston (Bagley 2019; Bagley and Lee 2019). The property remained undeveloped, likely due to nearby tunneling and the ongoing efforts of some Chinatown families to buy up properties in Chinatown and hold off gentrification and development, despite high property values and immediate adjacency to downtown Boston (Ellis and Liang 2020). For example, there are dozens of one- and two-story buildings still standing in the neighborhood, in an area otherwise dominated by large hospital, office, and commercial structures. According to census data compiled by the Boston Planning and Development Agency (2024), in 2020 Boston Chinatown had a population of 6,211 people.

Rather than solidifying the significance of 6 Hudson Street, post-archaeological excavation saw the beginning of a nearly yearlong battle among the Boston Parks and Recreation Department, the property owner, and the city archaeologist, Joseph Bagley. While Bagley fought hard to get the excavation unit backfilled, complications arose between the other two parties. Between August 2019 and winter 2020, the excavation unit effectively became a pit that further perpetuated the racialization of Chinese Americans and Chinatown. The excavation unit was left open due to “complications” that were never specified, giving the public, including the nearby houseless and drug-addict population, opportunities to use the open unit as a trash pit. Prior to excavations at 6 Hudson Street, the empty lot was already regularly trashed. With a literal hole in the lot and various excavated structural debris all around, the problem was only exacerbated. The materiality of the lot became defined by needles, beer bottles and cans, and other miscellaneous trash that contributed to the negative perception of 6 Hudson Street.

The turn of the 2020 new year marked the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic that was first diagnosed in China. Since then, anti-Asian sentiments saw a steep rise, which made Chinatown residents weary of Bagley, the larger archaeological project, and the city for keeping the pit open. Residents believed that the unfilled pit encouraged more rats, garbage, and needles, giving people an excuse to not visit Chinatown and blame Chinese people for the “Kung-flu” pandemic. What was unknown to Chinatown residents was that a member of their community, the property owner of 6 Hudson Street, had specifically

requested that the excavation hole remain open on the last day of the project, as he wished to develop the property soon and excavations for a new basement were imminent. Also, when initial complaints began to reach local elected representatives in late 2019, while the City of Boston Archaeology Program was actively excavating in a different neighborhood, the Boston Parks and Recreation Department offered to backfill the hole. Their crews did not come to the site for several months, and were further delayed when crews arrived with excavation machines in early 2020 and the gate access to the property was too narrow to allow for access to the site, requiring the entire fence to be removed. Then, COVID-19 began, and city crews were unavailable due to shutdowns and social-distancing restrictions.

As private property, the lot, ultimately, was out of government jurisdiction. However, since the hole was created by the city's archaeologists with a highly publicized association with Bagley, then the only full-time permanent staff of the City of Boston Archaeology Program, Chinatown residents believed that he had the ultimate responsibility in backfilling, was responsible for abandoning it, and personally at fault for the negative impacts on the community.

By July 2020, the excavation unit was finally filled by Boston Parks, and Chinatown residents moved on. The empty lot returned to its status as an empty lot, as the houseless and drug-addict populations continue to use it as a social spot alongside Chinatown residents playing games and exercising in Mary Soo Hoo Park. For Boston Chinatown residents, the 6 Hudson Street excavation had represented a glimmer of hope for change and combating racist narratives. During the community meetings prior to excavations, community members were optimistic and highly supportive of the excavation, believing in archaeology's ability for social activism and as one of many ongoing processes to preserve local Chinese American history. To them, 6 Hudson Street may have been an interstitial place embedded with social memory that was left at the wayside, whereas the public saw the lot as a non-place. The archaeology at 6 Hudson Street brought public attention to this space and the story of the displacement of the Chinatown community, and it briefly gave it a place status embedded with a positive meaning. By the end of the project, despite the lack of older intact deposits, the survey was experienced by the team as a significant community archaeology success story.

This meaning for both the public and Chinatown residents quickly took a bleak turn immediately after the excavation. Chinatown residents saw the abandonment as perpetuation of stereotypes and racialization. While the lot may still be a place with embedded meaning, the meaning was now a negative and represented the struggle for change. In the eye of the public, as told through personal communications with staff of the local city-council representative via texts and phone calls during the early stay-at-home portion of the pandemic in 2020, the 6 Hudson Street excavation was no longer an excavation, but just another empty space that blends into the background of Chinatown, or a non-place. Systematic racialization of Chinese immigrants that is imprinted into the landscape of all conceptions of any Chinatown creates certain perceptions of these spaces that need to be challenged. For 6 Hudson Street, archaeology has played a role in the transformation of place for Chinatown residents and the public.

Boston Latin School

Project Background

The lessee of Boston's city-owned Old City Hall property approached the Boston Landmarks Commission in late 2014 with a proposed walkway-resurfacing project in the paved, front open space of the historic 1862 Old City Hall building downtown. Because the front yard of the building was the historical location of multiple previous structures, including the 1635 Boston Free School (later known as Boston Latin School), the 1637/1701 schoolmaster's house, and an 1810 barrister's hall, Bagley flagged the project for archaeological mitigation by the City of Boston Archaeology Program ahead of the proposed work (Figs. 7, 8).

In the spring of 2015, a team of volunteers, including archaeologists and members of the public, excavated four, 50 cm wide, linear test trenches across the paved front yard of the project site (Fig. 9). The archaeologists documented 2 m of stratified historical deposits, a potentially significant foundation component and chimney fall of the 1637 schoolmaster's house, and over 8,000 artifacts spanning the 17th through 20th centuries (Bagley, von Jena et al. 2018).

Today, Boston Latin School ranks annually as one of the top public high schools in the United States. In

Fig. 7 Detail of a 1743 map of Boston showing the relative locations of King’s Chapel, Boston Latin School, and the schoolmaster’s house along School Street. The map was updated to 1743 from an earlier map by John Bonner (Bonner [1723–1733]; Price 1743). (Map annotated by Joseph Bagley, 2018.)



the early 18th century, the primary function of public schooling was the education of young white males in Greek and Latin (hence the term “Latin School”) so that they would qualify for entrance exams for Harvard, where upon graduation they would leave for careers in business, legal, political, or religious leadership. Boston Latin students, their enslaved accompaniment, and the schoolmaster must have all been considered male to be qualified to be present in their associated roles on the school property (student, enslaved servant, or schoolmaster). Rev. Nathaniel Williams became the first Latin School graduate to become schoolmaster in 1698, moving into the adjacent schoolmaster’s house with his wife Anne Bradstreet Williams; their two daughters, Mary and Anne; and two enslaved people: a “man named Richard” and a “woman named Hagar” (Suffolk County Probate Records 1738).

Given dominant cultural norms of masculine practices in this context, this setting was expected to produce a masculine-leaning artifact assemblage. However, at the schoolmaster’s house the presence of the two Annes, Mary, and Hagar, all of whom, as much as we can tell, identified as women, were highly visible in the archaeological record through artifacts that

have been historically documented as associated with women, specifically sewing pins.

A total of 308 18th-century, copper-alloy straight pins and pin fragments was found during the excavations, all but 3 from the lower deposits of a 4 × 0.5 m test trench, at a density of 74 pins/m² (ppsm). This was a stark number of pins when compared to other, larger contemporary site excavations in Boston, including Faneuil Hall (0.88 ppsm), the Parker-Emery House (11.4 ppsm), and the Pierce-Hichborn House sites (0.55 ppsm).

That same test trench included 5.5 cowrie shells (Fig. 10) from the same deposits as the pins, indicating an association between the domestic presence of sewing activities and activities related to the use of the cowries, suggesting that similar activities—such as domestic labor—produced the two artifact deposits. In Boston, money cowries are relatively rare and their study relatively new (Heath 2020). Though their appearance on archaeological sites suggests transatlantic trade, gaming, packaging, and complex monetary functions more than direct indications of the presence of enslaved African identity and cultural practices (Heath 2016, 2020), in Boston they are often found backless and frequently with holes

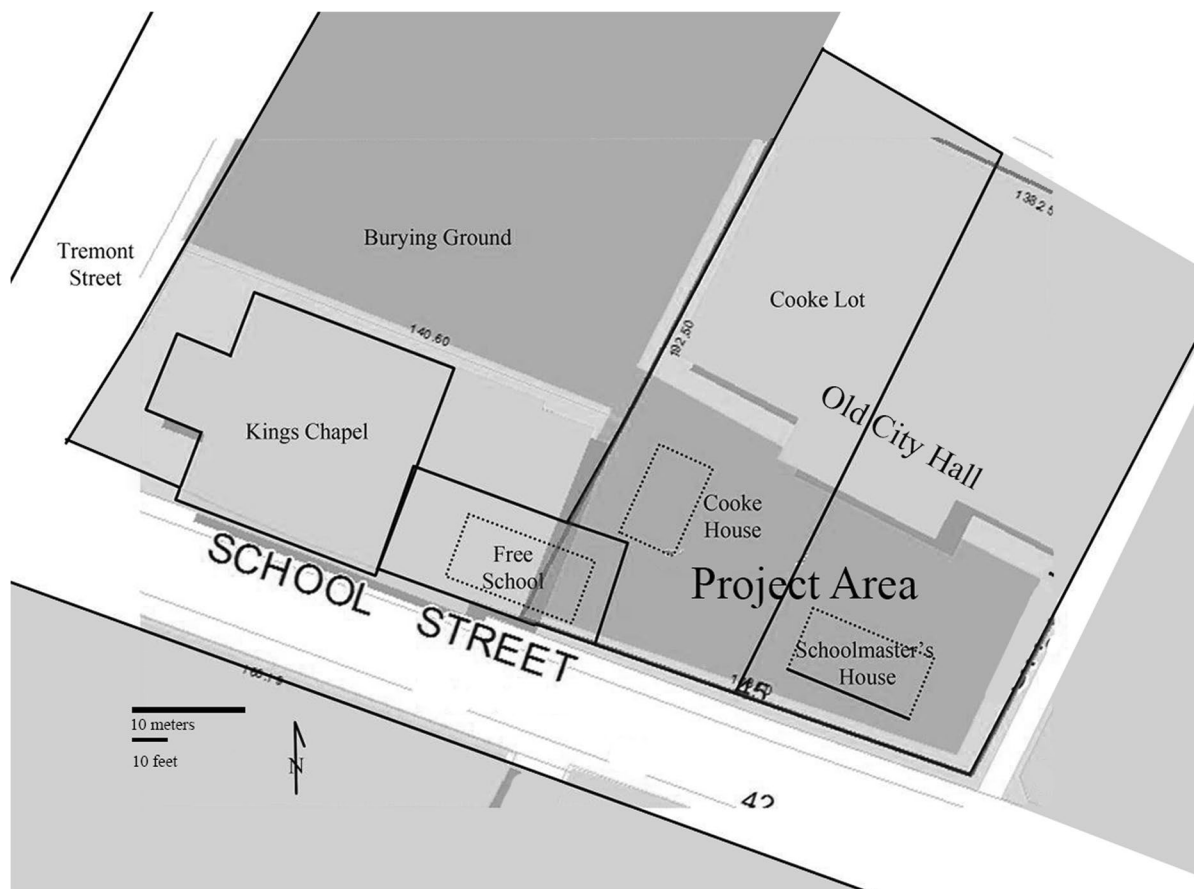


Fig. 8 Map showing the approximate locations of historical property lines and structures within the project area in front of Old City Hall based on detailed descriptions of building sizes in county deeds. (Map by Joseph Bagley, 2018.)

pierced through them, suggesting they were worn as adornment. Additionally, all the sites where money cowries have been recovered in Boston also have the documented presence of enslaved people. Given that enslaved people were a small minority of Boston residents (approximately 6% of the total population in 1754 [Massachusetts Archives 1754–1755]) and cowries are rare on 18th-century Boston sites, there appears to be an association between cowries and the presence of enslaved people on 18th-century sites in Boston.

Analysis of the pins and cowries at the site suggests that the extensive sewing taking place within the household was either performed by elite, well-educated women as a luxury practice afforded by the presence of enslaved people performing other household duties, or the sewing was performed by their enslaved servants, likely Hagar. It is also possible

that the extreme number of sewing pins suggests that Anne performed a parallel service to her husband for elite white girls in the community by teaching sewing and possibly other private lessons, such as reading and writing, still allowed for by the presence of enslaved people providing domestic services (Bagley, von Jena et al. 2018).

Due to the 2 m of later protecting fill, habitation, and demolition deposits on top of the schoolmaster's house deposits within the front of the Old City Hall property, the proposed work would not impact these significant deposits, nor would it prevent future access to these deposits, so the work was permitted without further archaeological survey, and the schoolmaster's house site remains in relatively good condition underground.

Just feet from Boston's Freedom Trail, this project remains one of the most visited and visible projects



Fig. 9 Volunteers and visitors at the Boston Latin School dig from the front steps of Old City Hall in 2015. Coauthor Jessica Dello Russo is visible kneeling to the left of the test trench in a dark coat. The schoolmaster's house was later found in a trench located beyond this trench. (Photo by Joseph Bagley, 2015.)



Fig. 10 A *Monetaria moneta* cowrie from Trench 4 at the Boston Latin School soon after it was found. (Photo by Kathleen von Jena, 2015.)

conducted by the City of Boston Archaeology Program. Field volunteers included members of the general public and local archaeologists. Jessica Dello Russo is a classical archaeologist based in Boston who participated in the fieldwork at the Boston Latin

School site as both a professional and as an alumna of the school. In her commentary that follows, Dello Russo explores the sometimes conflicting narratives of commemorative landscapes, celebrated historical figures, and archaeological data, as the Boston Latin School confronts a racist past.

Tradition Bound: Jessica Dello Russo Commentary

The conversation sometimes began with the classic ice breaker: “Digging for dinosaurs?” To be fair, it was almost always said in jest. This is because many of the visitors to the archaeological dig site below the bluestone pavement in front of Old City Hall in Boston lived or worked in the city. They already knew something about what was up—more to the point, what was just then turning up in the test trenches. And I knew that they knew because far more often the opening line was something along the lines of: “Let me know if you find my uncle, he was crushed under a stack of Latin grammars,” or “Did you find the pencil I lost when I was 16?” I am not making these up, and could give as well as I got, depending on the spectator’s level of interest and some instinctive sense of speaking to a member of one’s own tribe of old-school Bostonians, of the sort born and bred in the city—and, in many cases, like me, products of its schools (Fig. 11).

Old school, indeed. This was the oldest school of its kind in British North America, and one of the most vibrant institutional carryovers from Boston’s colonial era into the life of the modern city and predecessor to the Boston Latin School of today. This was the community that had sanctioned the principle of publicly funded education in the first years of the colony’s existence with the founding of the Free Grammar (Latin) School. It is easily forgotten how the concept of publicly subsidized education stood out among societies of the age. Rather, it is Boston Latin School’s enduring reputation as a place for the city’s best and brightest academically that turned the archaeological dig in the summer of 2015 into something very consequential for Boston and indeed the American nation. As Boston’s then-mayor Martin J. Walsh noted in the press release, the dig had all the potential to “unveil an important part of Boston’s history and a piece of the Freedom Trail” (City of Boston 2015).

In case an out-of-town visitor to Boston had missed the news and its connection to the address at



Fig. 11 Boston Latin School student volunteers holding a women’s copper clothing fastener during the dig at the former location of their school. (Photo by Joseph Bagley, 2015.)

which we were now digging (on School Street, no less), it was easy to catch up onsite by a landscape of commemorative markers, plaques, and statues. The most recent memorial, “City Carpet,” is a splash of color in the form of a “carpet mosaic” on the concrete sidewalk along Boston’s Freedom Trail. Created in a regional folk-art style by artist Lilli Ann Killeen Rosenberg in 1983, the sidewalk memorial illustrates boys and girls engaged in lessons and at play. The largest, shiniest words in bronze at top are “Latin School,” with a medallion of the school logo—the Lupa, or She-Wolf—symbolizing the idea of the alma mater (Latin, again), in plain terms, the school as “a prolific mother of good and great men,” as the Latin

School on this site was described, in the oldest literary magazine in the United States, the *North American Review* (1848:250), which could count among its founding members several graduates of the school.

These are details to take in rapidly, because the sidewalks of School Street are narrow and heavily trafficked by pedestrians. The finer print below the title of Rosenberg’s work gives more background on the school, with the date of its foundation (1635), its earliest building design, and a few names of eminent male alumni who were leaders of major political and intellectual movements of the 18th and 19th centuries. As a not-so-exceptional alumna, my favorite part of the text is a quote of one of these luminaries, Benjamin Franklin: “Experience keeps a dear school but fools will learn in no other,” because the inside joke among Bostonians is that Franklin had been, in fact, “Latin School’s most famous dropout.” Still, like Franklin and others who had studied at the school, I was able to understand the concluding phrases in Latin: “*Labor omnia vincit*” and “*Omnibus opportunitas*” (“work conquers all” and “opportunity is everything”). Many of us had even been taught the original source of these words—the *Georgics* of the Latin poet Vergil, although not that the expression had become the fighting words of the U.S. labor movement in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Like a lot of Greco-Roman influences on American nation building, there was a backstory to the integration of “dead” languages and remote cultures into the fabric of modern society.

The point about legacy building through Greco-Roman cultural practices was more explicit in other Latin School markers nearby (Latin quotes aplenty). On either side of the walkway up to the entrance to Old City Hall stand bronze statues, larger than life-size. The one on the north representing Franklin is the work of another Boston Latin School alumnus, Richard Saltonstall Greenough, and has the distinction of being the first public portrait statue erected in Boston, in 1856. Inside the Old City Hall foyer (open to the public, the rest of the building is not) are wall paintings that, like Rosenberg’s “City Carpet,” are a visual celebration of American education, with children at play in the foreground above a painted plaque (flanked by portraits of Franklin and Hancock) relating the history of the school’s founding once more, with the added note that in 1645 the town “stipulated that Indians were to be taught gratis.” It takes a bit

of digging among textual sources to be satisfied that this was not simply a pro forma declaration: of the few Native Americans who did attend Boston Latin in this era, Benjamin Larnell, a member of the Nipmuc tribe, was an accomplished scholar of Greek, Latin, and Hebrew (Ireland 2013).

Like Rosenberg's sidewalk illustration in the pavement outside, the wall paintings in the foyer created by Joshua Winer, Campari Knoepffler, and Olga Voronina in 1993 emphasize free play in a school yard, in this case with a nod to another very famous wall painting of the early 16th century, Raphael's *School of Athens*, to invoke Boston as the "Athens of America" and national leader in democracy and education. On either side of the inner door frame the same artists have listed the names of 38 mayors of Boston who served in the building between 1863 and 1969. Until 2021 this succession was exclusively male and white, with the only major shift being in the officeholders' European origins, from being largely Anglo-Saxon to exclusively Irish, with one of the memorable examples of the latter type being another Boston Latin School alumnus, John F. Fitzgerald, JFK's maternal grandfather.

I have walked you through this terrain and commemorative landscape because these are but some of the public monuments set up at conspicuous points in the immediate vicinity of the Boston Latin School excavations. They help to explain the initial public and media interest in the archaeological dig and why it became immediately associated with the ideas of learning, student success, and commonwealth that the Boston Latin School legacy has perpetuated to this day, especially thanks to the influence of its alumni in powerful circles of American politics, economy, and culture. Even if the vast majority of visitors to the dig site had not actually attended the school, they were familiar with the basic facts of its history or could easily learn them onsite from the landscape. To be perfectly honest, in all my years as a student at Boston Latin, I do not think I picked up more information about the school than a typical tourist would have, aside from what was proclaimed on additional monuments within the school itself and the one locked classroom in the current building that preserves its appearance from a century ago, ca. 1920: bolted desks, inkwells, real slate backboards, and the like. Some of the teachers I had still remembered when the school was all male (until 1972), and

my older relatives bemoan the loss of military drills, ceremonial address of teachers as "Master," and disappearance of some curricular matter fixed firmly in their minds as "classic."

For all the jokes about lost pencils and the bones of bad schoolboys, the artifacts emerging from the deepest levels of the trenches did in fact give honest testimony to daily life in Boston, especially during the 18th century. More importantly, they differed from the narratives presented in the commemorative landscape. The artifacts centered upon a domestic space, not the schoolhouse, providing rare insight into a female and domestic presence not reflected in the institutional legacy of the school or the monuments. The 2015 dig had helped to clarify that there was much more history on the site than the collective creators of the memorial landscape selected to hand down to future generations.

The domestic artifacts and architectural elements revealed the Williams family and the complex identities of their patriarch, Rev. Dr. Nathaniel Williams III. In colonial-era domestic Boston (and long afterward), families of means could afford to pay for the education of girls in private group or home lessons, but no amount of string pulling could break free of social norms and get female students into Boston's Latin Schools (two in existence in Boston until the late 18th century). The home remained their glory, and signs of a female presence were abundant in data from the dig. My son, age eight at the time of the excavation, spotted a metal pin in the dirt, one of many hundreds that would emerge. He very much enjoyed the "buried treasure" idea of the find, which was employed in sewing. Other articles of dress were brought to light, as well as more personal objects of quality, such as silk-and-bone fans, grooming tools, and molded clay pipes, together with generic household goods in metal, glass, ceramic, and stone—even some tools for writing, possibly connected with learning activities at the school—okay, so maybe the team did end up finding a few "lost pencils."

In Trench 4, closest to the modern curbside, a more distinctive type of object appeared, a cowrie. This would ultimately be one of five-and-a-half examples of a type of mollusk shell not native to New England ocean waters. They could only have arrived in Boston by sea from someplace much warmer in the Indian or Pacific oceans, and in Boston are sometimes associated with the presence of Africans in 18th-century

domestic spaces (Heath 2020). Research into the occupants of the schoolmaster's house between 1645 and 1809 turned up the names of two people of African descent, Richard and Hagar, who were enslaved and brought to Boston at the start of the 18th century as the property of the future schoolmaster, Rev. Dr. Nathaniel Williams III.

Richard and Hagar had arrived together in Boston with the Williams family around 1700, when Williams left his Christian missionary work in Barbados and returned to his place of birth. Since Hagar is the name of the woman servant in the Bible who gave birth to the patriarch Abraham's son, Ishmael, it may be that she had been baptized by Williams on the island and given this name as a reminder of her servile status in English colonial society. As in the case of Onesimus, enslaved by the Mather household, it is not unusual to find biblical names assigned to chattel personnel by their Puritan masters, in all probability not only to mark their eternal freedom as Christians before God in heaven, but also to reinforce their bondage as a sign of divine providence (Ross 2021). The probate for Williams's will after his death in 1738 does not provide a last name for Richard and Hagar. Perhaps they were laid to rest in the burial plot of the Williams family in the Granary Burial Ground, like some of the enslaved individuals in the house of Williams's pupil, John Hancock, Boston Latin School class of 1745. Or it could be that they were interred with other people of African descent in designated areas within the town's burying grounds, for the most part in unmarked graves.

While Richard and Hagar disappear from the record, the man who had held them in human bondage for life, Rev. Dr. Nathaniel Williams III, is rescued from near-total obscurity by his connections to mainstream Boston society. With family ties to many Massachusetts Colony leaders, it is not surprising that Williams was the first schoolmaster of the Latin School to have been educated there before continuing on the regional *cursus honorum* to Harvard College for his bachelor's and master's degrees in theology. Son of a prominent deacon of the Third Church of Boston (Old South Meeting House), Williams continued to deliver sermons to the congregation while serving as a schoolmaster. He even took his community service a step further by training to be a physician. In this role, in 1721 he promoted, along with Dr. Zabdiel Boylston, the practice of inoculation against

smallpox. Boston was on the forefront of the practice of vaccination, not only because of the presence of medical professionals mostly trained in Great Britain and Germany, but also because one of its most influential Puritan ministers, Rev. Cotton Mather of Boston's Second Church in the North End, had publicly come out in support of the procedure, which he is believed to have learned about from an enslaved member of his own household from West Africa. On his part, it is possible Dr. Williams had become aware of the practice of vaccination from his experiences in the West Indies and the presence of Africans in his own household on School Street. The "folk knowledge" he and other Boston doctors applied in the face of much opposition and even threats to their physical safety continues to save lives.

These other activities are not to make it appear that Williams neglected his educator's role. The position of schoolmaster was inseparable from one's duty as a Christian and public citizen (the eulogy for Williams notes that, despite his professional obligations, they did not "take off his Heart from the Ministerial Work" [Prince 1738:27]). The town selectmen had the responsibility of reviewing the schools and making sure they were in order, with proper materials for instruction. Distinguished for his study of classical languages, Williams produced a new Latin grammar based on the notes of his own teacher and former Latin schoolmaster Ezekiel Cheever (1724), to whom he credited the work. The publication of his Latin grammar helped spread this sophisticated type of learning to other parts of the colonies, where public schooling took root. For this, and other "extensively serviceable" activity, Williams was eulogized as a model citizen in the *Boston Weekly News-Letter* upon his death in 1738, "so his Death is esteemed as a public Loss" (Windsor 1883:540).

Boston Latin School and Harvard College graduate, minister, schoolmaster, doctor, and slave owner—which one of these characterizing terms was left out of virtually all accounts of Williams's life until 2015? The last, of course, and Bagley and his colleagues have picked up on this omission to single out the way the history of colonial Boston has been perpetuated in ways that address only partially the impact of the colony's institutions on residents' lives. More to the point, it confirmed a trend of digging in colonial sites in different parts of Boston, namely the presence of enslaved people in the households

of eminent Bostonians. The information had been quietly shelved by previous generations of historians in favor of a narrative that fast forwards to the time when the Massachusetts constitution essentially abolished human enslavement in 1780 by affirming that “all men are born free and equal,” thus providing the grounds for the judicial review and declaration of enslavement as unconstitutional in the eyes of the state. The Freedom Trail bisects the Black Heritage Trail at the site where this decision was made, but does not extend to the John Adams Courthouse close by, where the ruling to desegregate Boston’s public schools was reached in 1855. Bagley’s excavation has already inspired discussion about making the heavily trafficked Freedom Trail more inclusive of Boston lives beyond those mentioned in Williams’s family tree and social circles (Spencer-Wood 2021).

As a Boston Latin School graduate of a more recent vintage, I can do Williams proud by identifying (and declining) the Latin verb *trahere*, which somehow evolved from the original meaning of “surrender” to the English term “tradition”: something to hand down, to safeguard, usually as an inheritance (yes, the word “traitor” also stems from the same Latin word). This concept is deeply ingrained in the school’s perceived value as a public institution. But it also implies a selectivity of perspective, of participation. Boston Latin School alumni like to call attention to the virtues of their selection to attend the school by means of a competitive examination, which they say rewards hard work and diligence. But, when they chant: “*Sumus primi*” (essentially, “we are number one”), who are they leaving behind? Who are the number twos, and so on? The revelations of the past few years about racial harassment and discrimination at Boston Latin School are really gut-wrenching, because they call for a radical reassessment of the role that tradition plays in the life of the school (WBUR Newsroom 2016; Bailey 2021).

The City of Boston Archaeology Program’s initiative to reconstruct what Bagley has called “hard histories” and “underrepresented histories” is a key activity in the process of uniting Bostonians around the need to make hard and historical choices in school assignment to truly end segregation by affluence and race, even if the present system is largely de facto and does not appear in any legal code as exclusionary, as it has been in the past for both women and most nonwhites. The archaeological evidence by process

of discovery and interpretation has the potential to reach a wider audience and drive home the point that it might be better to be “*sumus unum*” instead of “*sumus primi*,” not first, but together as one, as in the words of current Boston Latin School student Selina Tang: “[T]ogether, we are stronger when we unearth the full history which we are heirs to as members of the BLS community” (Tang 2022).

Malcolm X-Ella Collins House

Project Background

In 2014 Rodnell Collins approached the Boston Landmarks Commission with a proposal to repair the foundations of his family home, the landmark-designated Malcolm X-Ella Collins House at 72 Dale Street in the neighborhood of Roxbury. Bagley flagged the project for archaeological mitigation to document the small yard for potential 19th- and 20th-century archaeological deposits relating to Malcolm X el-Hajj Malik el-Shabazz (Malcolm X), his sister Ella Little-Collins, or the previous owners and occupants of the building.

In 2015, with the assistance of Collins, staff and volunteers of the Fiske Center for Archaeological Research at the University of Massachusetts Boston, and local volunteers, the City of Boston Archaeology Program conducted a Phase 1 survey of the property, which included a series of 19 shovel test pits across the yard and 3, 1 × 2 m units positioned perpendicular to the house foundation, recovering a surprising 18,207 artifacts spanning the early 18th century through the present day (Fig. 12).

The project received international press, resulting in overall support of the project with some exceptions. Some expressed bemusement over the 20th-century past being excavated at an archaeological dig. Still others voiced vociferous opposition to the dig in online article comment sections accusing the archaeological team of celebrating racism, even terrorism, by spotlighting the history and presence of Malcolm X and his family of Black Nation of Islam converts.

For portions of the background research, the project team over-relied on the house’s landmark study report, which stated that the land was a small part of an undeveloped farm prior to the mid-19th century. The archaeological deposits proved otherwise. Based



Fig. 12 Excavations at the Malcolm X-Ella Collins House (far left) in 2016, including children and teachers from Boston Public Schools, Native monitors, and volunteer excavators. Coauthor Rodnell P. Collins is visible in the rear, speaking to a video journalist. (Photo by Joseph Bagley, 2015.)

on a large deposit of 18th-century artifacts in a buried land surface, the presence of a wealthy occupant of the land is indicated. These included large, customized, Chinese-export porcelain vessels, wig curlers, large punch pots, and refined goods from a midden deposit (Fig. 13). Extensive additional deed research and property-line reconstruction done after the dig demonstrated that a prior landowner was a wealthy Boston merchant, Abijah Seaver. Seaver had a large rural mansion estate approximately 200 ft. from the later Malcolm X-Ella Collins House site. Though a considerable distance from the house, it appeared that the civil-rights leader's home was built upon an extensive 18th-century sheet midden.

Later deposits on the site included a mid-19th-century trash deposit associated with the house's early Irish and English immigrant residents and an extensive surface deposit associated with the occupation of Ella Little-Collins and her family, including her brother, Malcolm (X), and her son, Rodnell Collins, who initiated the field project with his renovation plans (Fig. 14).

Ella was born in Georgia in 1912 to Earl Lee Little and his first wife, Daisy Mason. Malcolm Little, later Malcolm X, was born in Nebraska in 1925 and was one of seven children born to Earl and his second wife, Louisa.

After Earl Little's lynching in 1931, Louisa was institutionalized, and the State of Michigan moved



Fig. 13 A sample of the 18th-century artifacts recovered from the lowest strata of the Malcolm X-Ella Collins House site, likely associated with Abijah Seaver, including a manganese mottled mug base (top), a Westerwald stoneware mug sherd (left), and a Chinese porcelain flatware body sherd (right). (Photo by Joseph Bagley, 2015.)



Fig. 14 An intact and playable vinyl LP record recovered from near the rear entrance to the Malcolm X-Ella Collins House. An inscribed serial number (MH 9905) indicates it is a 1959 release of *Folk Songs of America* from the Golden Record Library (Album 5). (Photo by Joseph Bagley, 2015.)

her children into foster care (R. Collins and Bailey 1998:17). Ella, now working at her mother's store in the Roxbury neighborhood of Boston, had first met Malcolm the year prior to Earl's death. Ella had left an impression on Malcolm: "I think the major impact of Ella's arrival, at least upon me, was that she was the first really proud Black woman I had ever seen in my life. She was plainly proud of her very dark skin. This was unheard of among Negroes in those days, especially in Lansing" (X and Haley 1965:34).

In 1939, while living in the Ingham County Juvenile Home in Mason, Michigan, Malcolm visited Ella at her future-landmark home in Boston, where she lived with her second husband, Frank Johnson, and two sisters, Sas and Gracie. Malcolm would continue to live with Ella the following summer, and in 1941 requested that Ella petition for his legal custody (R. Collins and Bailey 1998; Bagley, Glyman et al. 2018).

Ella, now separated from Frank, was able to pay off an overdue loan to secure ownership of 72 Dale Street in 1941, which would become the new home of Ella's extended family, her new husband, Kenneth Collins, and their son, Rodnell Collins. The home is still owned by the family today (R. Collins and Bailey 1998; Bagley, Glyman et al. 2018).

The majority of the mid-20th-century artifacts recovered from the site were brought to the home by Ella Little-Collins as household goods. Ella was the most visible individual in the archaeological record (Bagley, Glyman et al. 2018). Malcolm spent his time in Boston in multiple locations—home, work (including as a parking attendant in Chinatown), and play—but always considered 72 Dale Street his home (R. Collins and Bailey 1998), and he is listed as living in the home in town directories every year between 1954 and 1962 (Bagley, Glyman et al. 2018).

Ella demanded respect for herself and her family, and was an early leader in Boston's civil-rights and social-justice movements. When falsely accused of theft, she fought the charges, becoming the first Black person to win a case against the Boston Police Department (R. Collins and Bailey 1998:58). When Rodnell was assigned an essay on George Washington, Ella encouraged him to submit two essays, one on the former president and the second, more subversive essay, on George Washington Carver (R. Collins and Bailey 1998). When the latter essay was ignored and the former given a poor grade, Ella confronted the Boston Public Schools system, accusing it of

failing to teach Black history (R. Collins and Bailey 1998). One school-board member, Louise Day Hicks, famous for her antibusing stance, declared that Black history did not belong at Boston Public Schools. Her statement resulted in a physical altercation with Ella (R. Collins and Bailey 1998). Coincidentally, this event occurred in a former home of the Boston Latin School across the street from the original school site and site of the 2015 survey.

In 1946, 20-year-old Malcolm was sentenced to prison for larceny, and Ella began writing to him in prison, encouraging him to better himself while incarcerated. She also helped get Malcolm transferred to a different prison, where he could attend college-level lectures, read, and learn debating skills. While incarcerated, Malcolm learned of the work of the Nation of Islam through letters from his Michigan siblings. After his release in 1952, he traveled to Detroit, where he met the Honorable Elijah Muhammad, converted to the Nation of Islam, and was given the name "Malcolm X," the "X" given to converts to replace last names given to them by their ancestors' enslavers (Boston Landmarks Commission 1998).

In 1954 Malcolm X traveled back to Boston to establish a temple in Roxbury. During this time, 72 Dale Street became Malcolm's meeting place in addition to his home. Ella converted and became a significant player in the Nation of Islam. In 1959 Ella's relationship with the temple deteriorated, and Malcolm expelled Ella from the Nation of Islam. Malcolm would later separate from the nation in early 1964. In 1965, Malcolm was assassinated while speaking in Harlem. After the death of her brother, Ella never returned to 72 Dale Street. Ella passed away in August 1996 and the property passed to Rodnell.

In the 1970s the house was vandalized by a nearby construction crew, resulting in the surface scatter of artifacts from Ella's home at the property (Bagley, Glyman et al. 2018). In 1998 the house was designated a Boston landmark and was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in February 2021.

In 2021 Bagley sat down with Rodnell Collins to reflect on the dig for this article. The conversation topics varied widely, but the resounding theme of the conversation was social justice through education: the importance of education to Malcolm X's goals, the continuation of these goals through the restoration of the Malcolm X-Ella Collins House and the work of the Malcolm X-Ella L. Little Collins Family

Foundation (“the foundation”), and the role of education in Black history within the Black and white communities in Boston.

The following are edited excerpts from a 70-minute interview with Rodnell Collins about the dig at his house, Malcolm X, and the Roxbury neighborhood’s history. Text in italics is a “detailed notes” transcription of a portion of the full interview, approved by Rodnell Collins, removing irrelevant content, editing for clarity, and reorganizing responses in the interview. The full unedited audio version of the interview is archived at the City of Boston Archaeology Program, Boston (R. Collins 2017). This section ends with additional text from a 15 September 2021 e-mail conversation following the first draft of this manuscript. All commentary and clarifications by coauthors who are not Rodnell Collins are in brackets.

Interview with Rodnell Collins

Bagley began the interview with a series of questions about Collins’s expectations on the dig before it began, what he expected the outcomes to be, and how the dig may have contributed to the recent listing of the property on the National Register of Historic Places. Collins’s responses emphasize the role of education in the dig, his uncle’s and mother’s legacies, and the foundation’s goals.

Collins: I learned so much. I’m reading. Reading is learning. One of the things I learned about is this idea of social anthropology, how it can be used, how it can help understanding of the past, present, and the future, for young people to get involved, now. It’s a good method of communication. I see the usefulness of it, similar to what Arjun and Dayorsha [Rodnell’s son and daughter] are doing: science is looking back at sites, and that has evolved in the science industry with education, social, and climate impacts. So I see this [social anthropology in science] is a necessity, in going forward, and I want us [the foundation] to be a part of it. I’m learning—and my family. Arjun, in particular, and Dayorsha, she’s an educator, and it motivated her, seeing the children on the site that have come out to Malcolm X House, how enthused they are; it has motivated her more

in her work. Same with Arjun. Individuals ask me: “Why are they doing archaeology? What does that do for Malcolm X and history?” I tell them you should take a look at archaeology and get involved in science, and maybe you would understand. Because, look at what we discovered, the artifacts that were there, the Civil War guys you found, Donn and Dorr [Frederick W. Dorr and John Donn, previous owners of the house in the mid-19th century found during the research phase of the project (Bagley, Glyman et al. 2018)].

We’re all learning, we’re all benefiting from it. My neighbors volunteer more with Malcolm X Park [a park named after Malcolm located two lots down the street from the house/dig]. I’m getting more people, more cousins involved, people want to be involved with the education component.

Joe, you’ve sent me back to school. You can get stale, so this is new food for me. From the beginning, the city came to my mother, and my mom left it to me. “The decision is yours, you’re the only child, it’s up to you.” And I’ve made mistakes! I was selling that house and I got family calling me: “Don’t you dare!” My wife said: “You have children, what are you doing?” Talking to my children, they said: “Dad, no you can’t, you mustn’t.”

My son, Arjun, I may have misspoke and said “18,000 artifacts,” and he said, “No, dad, I think Joe found 50,000.”

Bagley: It was definitely in the tens of thousands [it was 18,207 artifacts], there’s a lot.

Collins: If that’s the case, there’s a lot more research to be done.

Malcolm’s father’s people grew up on this land, Joe, 2030 will be 200+ years that people on his father’s land are still on that land, actually, in that area [Georgia] they go back to the British and Native Americans. They’re still there. So I see that history and I know what that meant to Uncle Malcolm’s mom, his father, and, going back, because I see that now. And it all has to do—and at every point, there’s education, there’s learning, there’s progress.

Bagley: Were you surprised by how loud the voice of your mom [Ella Little-Collins] came through the artifacts in the ground?

Collins: *Yes, that really took me back. She would have said: “Oh, well, I’m glad you did something right.” You know how mothers are. I know she would have been pleased because she didn’t go back to that house, the house was ransacked. After Aunt Sarah and Uncle Malcolm passed away in 1961, mom just didn’t want—there was too many family members about. It was enough for her to sit with me in the car, and I’d drive by, and she’d say: “Don’t stop.” She just would not set one foot, even on the sidewalk. She’d send someone else. “Just come back and give me a report.” Anything that you found—and there were material things that were precious, but that was nothing. Did you see the interview with my mom on YouTube? [E. Collins 1969]. That’s my mother. That will answer all of your questions.*

Bagley: *How do you expect your mom would have reacted to the dig?*

Collins: *If it was informative. Yes, anything that is informative and educational, my mom always looked at to be, well, in her own words, instructive. Do. Do! Do something, like what you’re [Bagley] doing—constructive that educates, informs, enlightens. Move forward, be constructive, not destructive. Her words: “Pick up your bed and walk.” Move, walk forward, move, build. You’re doing something, Joe, that hasn’t happened in the city of Boston. I can’t believe what you’re doing, what I’m hearing. Look at the waterfront, what you found [Seaport District shipwreck discovery in 2015] that has changed that whole dynamic of the area.*

Bagley: *How do you think your uncle [Malcolm X] would react to the dig?*

Collins: *Same as my mother. If you’re learning, as long as you have the African American, Native American, and Euro-American history, because I was reading something from his speech he gave at Oxford [3 December 1964, Rodnell was 19 at the time], one of the things he said, just what you’re doing, if you take a look at the history, because my uncle was an advocate for Native American history even in the Nation of Islam, they don’t talk about that, when Americans look at where America is and as we as Black Americans stand in for justice and liberty, we’re lighting the path, he says you’ll find*

more Euro-Americans joining the fight than us, African Americans. He says there’s cancer in America. It’s not about the color of skin, it’s about money, power, and control. He understood that. So, going forward, it’s not going to be this foolishness, the color of your skin, divide and conquer, divide and conquer. That’s why he loves young people. So this, for him, yeah, 90-something years old, he’d be ready: “Let’s go do it!”

Bagley: *We got a lot of press. We got a lot of harsh comments.*

Collins: *Of course! I’d be surprised if we didn’t!*

The conversation moved through multiple topics, including the evolution of the Roxbury neighborhood. The discussion coalesced around the audience of the dig and the parallels of that audience to recent exhibits on Nubian art at the Museum of Fine Arts Boston (MFABoston 2020) and the African American Civil War Museum in Washington, D.C. Collins comments on his role as an observer at these events, these exhibits, and Malcolm X’s speeches that he attended as a young person, as well as the education of the members of the Black community about their own history.

Collins [commenting on people observing Black history exhibits and becoming aware of Black history and accomplishments]: *Education. I’m standing around listening to European Americans and they were like: “What?!” From that exhibit [Nubian art at the Museum of Fine Arts Boston], and the [African American Civil War] Museum, seeing the Smithsonian [National Museum of African American History and Culture], when that opened up, and to hear whites go into that museum and this one here, it’s like what Uncle Malcom said: “European Americans, when they see, basically they drink the Kool-Aid, too.”*

The conversation transitioned to the role of public speaking in the education of Black and white audience members. Rodnell shared his role at his uncle’s speeches, with direct parallels to his role as a participant observer during the archaeology of his home.

Collins: *That’s what my Uncle Malcolm loved, the young people. Black colleges weren’t, the historically Black colleges, weren’t inviting Uncle Malcolm. I seen that. I know that. It was these*

Ivy League colleges and others that were inviting Uncle Malcolm, first. Okay? The most sought-after speaker in the history of America Malcolm X was. When President Nixon saw that, so I heard, when he was, you know, senator or congress, he didn't like—how did that happen? What?

But people seeing that at Harvard, Yale, Brown, seeing the audience, maybe a hundred white men, a few white women, and maybe one Black student from somewhere. And the response—I saw that. Because Uncle Malcolm would allow me. My mother would say: “Go with your uncle, hang out.” So I was allowed to go out with him and hang out with him. My duty was to be a little Black child, hanging around, come to see what's going on. And I'd sit and listen, and my uncle would ask me: “Rodnell, what did you hear? What were people saying?” and I'd tell him, we'd have a whole discussion about that. I used to do that in New York when he was speaking, and I'd look up, and he'd see me walking in the crowd, and I'd be standing next to people, listening, and I'd go back to report to him. I'd go WAY in the back. “What is everybody saying?” and that was the input, and I enjoyed it because I could go to Uncle Malcolm, a little boy. I used to think he was my brother! I didn't know [Malcolm was his uncle] for a long time. I liked the idea, my mother encouraged it. So to see what people were saying. It was interesting, the impact. Whether you hated Malcolm or loved him. Maybe can't STAND him as a person, but we have a job to do, and we both like doing this job. And we want to get the job done, so you work together to get the job done.

I learned this from my uncle: You have your stage presence, your speaker voice, and then you have your symposium presence, there's different periods of stages in a discussion or a debate, and how you prepare, present, and communicate, and that takes skill.

Collins goes on to discuss learning over time, how people's opinions change through education, drawing comparisons to President Biden's evolved stance on busing and his work for civil rights today, and the changing opinions of Dr. Henry Louis Gates, a good friend of Collins, and what Rodnell states Gates has said in the 1980s vs. now: “Some people drink the wrong Kool-Aid, and they drug it, and it never had

anything to do with the color of your skin, it had to do with conquest and power.” Collins goes on further to discuss the efforts of historically oppressed white people, including the Irish and women, and their support of the freedom fighters of the 1960s civil war.

Regarding the role of archaeology in the story of Malcolm X and conducting archaeology at the house, Collins had the following to say: “Whatever you can do to inform, to educate, I'm all for it. To get a ‘No’ from me, something must have happened—gotten knocked upside the head, because for me to say no to something that is educational would be denying what this is all about—going all the way back.”

Collins: *“Dirt in the Wounds” brought to mind, not just my own experience at the Malcolm X Ella L. Little-Collins House working side by side with your group of all volunteers, but that of my Uncle Malcolm's up close and personal family's horrible and tragic experience. It is what drove him and his sister, Ella, to work with the authors James Baldwin and Alex Haley on the Malcolm X book and movie [the screenplay for the 1992 film began in 1968] prior to and subsequent to that, Alex's Roots film and book.*

Collins then ties the work at the house to the broader issue of Native American history in urban spaces. This topic first arose when flakes from the making of Native stone tools appeared in the yard deposits at the house. Collins reflects on Malcolm's Native ancestors:

Collins: *“History should be no mystery.” This work in the area of urban archaeology and its social consequences on Indigenous people is an endeavor we must and should all learn. Speaking for myself, I am not a scholar, nor do I claim to be one; however, I'm a student of archaeology for more than 40+ years, as was my Uncle Malcolm. He asked his future wife, Dr. Betty Sanders-Shabbazz, to go with him to the natural history museum, the idea being: “This is who I am, if you want to deal with it.” His siblings were not surprised. The general public does not know this about Uncle: his love of nature, the environment, poetry, horses. Often in his speeches and lectures, Malcolm X spoke of the horror and tragedies of the Indigenous people and the trauma that African Americans identify with them.*

Malcolm X's own grandparents, great-grandparents of his father, Earl Sr., were of the Seminole Nation of people of south Georgia and north Florida. His great-grandparents fought alongside these Native people against the European Americans and British colonial forces. The very church they built and prayed in in 1700–1800 is a State of Georgia historical landmark. Many of those family members of Native and African Americans still live on and maintain the land to this very day.

Malcolm X's mother, Louise Hellen Norton-Little's great-grandmother, was of the Indigenous people of India, from the Bay of Bengal—this is very well documented by scholars and that of his family. Malcolm's mother herself was a constant reminder of these horrors and the tyranny. Malcolm X's best childhood friend and brother-in-law, Kenneth J. Collins, his sister Ella's husband and my father, his own grandmother was Lakota. She endured the horrors, the tragedy of Union troops. Kenneth's own mother was a product of such horror.

Malcolm X knew them both up close and personal in Lansing, Michigan, and here in Boston, as did my mother. I only knew my grandmother, Dolores, as a child. She stayed with us on occasion at the 72 Dale Street house. The last I saw of Grandmother, I was six years old. Great-Grandmother and Grandmother are buried here in Massachusetts. There is a Malcolm X quote in the book and movie that “you did not land on Plymouth Rock, Plymouth Rock landed on you.” It's not just passive, it has meaning and substance.

This was Malcolm X's own hard untold history, a hard history of captive African and Asian people, forced enslavement, and displacement.

Will urban archaeology be able to expand on such an educational challenge? I for one believe our own story speaks volumes for why this field of study in science is so invaluable.

Discussion

The urban archaeology of Boston is an entanglement of cultural pasts, current experiences, and complex archaeological deposits that has impacts on communities today.

In Chinatown, an expected shallow yard deposit from the 19th and 20th centuries was instead a deeply buried demolition deposit within a previously unknown rear addition, filled with late 20th-century demolition and household debris. The Chinese community in Chinatown, despite its presence near the geographic center of the town, have remained socially separated and isolated from others in Boston for over a century. The results of this separation were a sense of abandonment and independence, expressed at 6 Hudson Street through the lack of permits on the rear addition to 6 Hudson Street, which resulted in the loss of the potential rear-yard archaeological site and the demolition fill from the eventual loss of the building due to pending collapse of the structure caused by lowering groundwater levels going unchecked by city regulators (Farmer 2004; Ryzewski 2022). The structural racism and forced independence created the combined effect of residents avoiding regulation and regulators avoiding enforcement, resulting in poorly documented modifications to properties and potentially unsafe building conditions. This is especially notable considering that code enforcement can be and was used in Boston and elsewhere for the opposite purpose: to target underserved communities with the goal of displacement.

While the archaeological project was able to help highlight the presence and significance of Boston's historical Chinatown neighborhood and community, it also directly contributed to the neighborhood's sense of abandonment. When the excavation trench in this interstitial site was left open for nearly a year, it resulted in a direct threat to the Chinatown community—not through the presence of the hole itself, but due to its presence at the boundaries of the Chinatown community, where the visibility of the hole would allow for racist onlookers to associate an apparently abandoned trench with stereotypes and assumptions surrounding the ongoing crisis of COVID-19, cleanliness, and Chinese community identity.

At Old City Hall, the male-dominated presence of the Boston Latin School usurped the schoolmaster's house, which remained unrecognized on a property with multiple monuments to the school. The great depth of the deposits on the site was caused by the urban nature of the site's multiple periods of demolition, resulting in thick deposits that rapidly developed the stratigraphy and depth of the archaeological deposit. Though this depth ultimately protected and

still protects these historical deposits, it physically distanced further the underrepresented intersectional presence of enslaved and female Bostonians at the Boston Latin schoolmaster's house. As the Boston Latin School continues to face its racist past and current racial challenges, this archaeological dig emphasized the historical depth of its entanglement in Boston's hard histories.

The recorded history of Malcolm X's house missed the pre-1840s white, wealthy merchant history encountered during the archaeological survey of the property. These early deposits made up a significant and unexpected portion of the contents of the site physically separated by a deep deposit of fill from landscaping and construction of the nearby homes upon which the later 19th- and 20th-century deposits were encountered, sometimes at the surface. The controversy of Malcolm X's teachings and rhetoric led to minor but vocal community push back during the survey, which demonstrated the ongoing relevance and significance of Malcolm X and his family. The analysis of the dig, however, revealed the importance of Ella Little-Collins as the family matriarch, the arbiter of the items in the home, and her impact on the lives of Malcolm X and her son Rodnell Collins, who continues the legacy of the family through the family's foundation, the Malcolm X-Ella L. Little Collins Family Foundation.

The layering, separation, and depth of these deposits reflect the separation some members of the Boston community once enjoyed from the many stories recorded in the city's urban archaeology. But it is this urban archaeology that has revealed, through excavation and community archaeology, that these deposits are not only symbolic, but also a physical representation and outcome of the discrimination that has subjugated, othered, erased, and buried Boston's hard history.

Conclusion

The 6 Hudson Street Chinatown, Boston Latin School, and Malcolm X-Ella Collins House archaeological sites and survey projects in Boston represent the complex stratigraphy, history, and communities in urban Boston. While each site includes different aspects of Boston's hard histories, they represent the intersectional nature of urban histories, whose narratives, timelines, and people overlap and possess complex identities and pasts. Importantly, the spotlight cast upon

these places when they were excavated ended up being one, if not the most significant, of the contributions of the project to the narrative on hard histories, not the results of the dig or artifacts found. The act of archaeology itself exposed friction and inspired change.

Boston prides itself on its progressive identity, well marketed through contemporary politics and centuries-long positive historical commemoration, resulting in ingrained narratives of freedom, independence, resistance, and civil rights. At its core, however, is a past, a history, and an identity where racism, discrimination, enslavement, oppression, and violence are deeply embedded and where the impacts of these "hard histories" continue today. Furthermore, only some of Boston's residents and visitors have the privilege of being able to associate with, celebrate, and find comfort in this progressive identity, exclusively.

The visibility of the three projects described here, as well as others including Native community collaboration outside the scope of this publication, have placed the City of Boston Archaeology Program at the forefront of the City of Boston's diversity and inclusion efforts and as an active contributor to the evolving and increasing complexity of the narratives of Boston's identity.

By visibly focusing the City of Boston Archaeology Program's efforts on projects that center social justice issues, the role of city archaeologist has expanded significantly. In the past few years, the City of Boston Archaeology Program has radically transformed from a relatively isolated municipal oddity to new leadership roles in initiatives ranging from an exhibit at Faneuil Hall on Boston's role in slavery, efforts to expand tribal decision making and management role in public land projects, mitigation of racist public artworks, advocating for Native involvement in decision making on the Boston Harbor Islands, and the creation of a new paid fellowship position to increase Native inclusion and community support with the city.

Urban spaces and, thus, urban archaeology, provide opportunities to explore the complex nature of communities and individuals, but it is these same complexities that make them particularly challenging to excavate, analyze, and interpret. The City of Boston Archaeology Program uses community public archaeology and the willingness of a local political environment to engage in tough conversations about Boston's past and present challenges with racism, sexism, and discrimination.

Declarations

Conflict of Interest Statement The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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