Community Activism and African American Archaeology: Excavations at the Maynard-Burgess House, Annapolis.

By

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I would like to begin by reading the opening paragraphs from Black Marylanders: A History for Children, a text which is part of the Maryland Black History Series, published by the Maryland Commission on Afro-American History and Culture.

> The past is cloaked with shadows. And deep in the darkness are a dark people. We cannot see their faces, and we hardly know their names. It is hard to penetrate the shadows of three centuries.
>
> But if we try, we can hear their shouts and their whispers, their cries and their laughter. We can see the places where they walked. We can sense their pride, and we can feel the chains that held it in. And, if we try, very hard, we can even feel their dreams... [move inside us] (Cole n.d.:1).

Paul Mullins, Myself, Mark Leone, and other colleagues associated with "Archaeology in Annapolis" have spent a large part of the past four years trying to "penetrate the shadows of three centuries."

Since 1988, Paul Mullins, and I have been involved with Archaeology in Annapolis. Many of you are familiar with the project, but for those who are not I will briefly say that Archaeology in Annapolis is an eleven-year collaborative research endeavor between the University of Maryland at College Park and the Historic Annapolis Foundation, a nationally renowned preservation organization. During the eleven years of the project's existence archaeological excavations have been conducted on over thirty sites within the historic district of the city of Annapolis, at least five or six of which could be considered to be major excavations. The rationale for the project is to explore the rise and impact of capitalism throughout the three centuries of the city's existence. To fulfill our research goals project members decided several years ago that it was necessary to directly address the African American experience in Annapolis. A result of the first years of our work in Annapolis was that we knew a considerable amount about the emergence of merchant capitalism in the colonial Chesapeake (Leone 1988), the class crises which contributed to the Georgian Order (Shackel 1987), and the contemporary institutions which present Annapolitan history (Potter 1986, 1991). What we did not know or understand was the African American experience. As the historic texts about the city readily indicate this was a major shortcoming on our part.

What historic documents do indicate is that as slaves and in freedom, African Ameri have been a significant part of the development of Maryland since the states settling in 1630s. Maryland was a slave-holding state and Annapolis was a significant port-of entry enslaved Africans coming to the U.S. (Brugger 1988) However, Maryland's status was uni in that the state had by far the largest population of free blacks prior to the Civil War of slave-holding states. In Annapolis free blacks accounted for at least 25% of the total population of the city from at least 1820 on (Ives 1979).

Just as significant, however, in illustrating our shortcomings was the reaction contemporary Annapolis to our work. Today one third of contemporary Annapolis's populati is black. But when we looked at the visitors to our sites and the other historic venues in city, virtually no African-American visitors were among our constituents.

In 1989 Archaeology in Annapolis began an African American archaeology project rethink and expand upon both ours and others interpretations of the city's pasts. What we ha tried to do in Annapolis over the last four years is to develop a context for dialogue betwe ourselves and black Annapolitans. This dialogue sees people of color as a constituency archaeology, rather than a passive audience, or alienated opponents. Through such a dialogu we hope that the African American community will compel us to interpret differer archaeological narratives, and, hopefully, they will be able to use archaeological knowledge ends which are meaningful to them. The hope is to make archaeological sites, material culture archaeologists, and visitors elements with which white and black Annapolitans can critically evaluate and discuss contradictions in interpretations of the past and the impact of thos interpretations in the present.

What I would like to do today is to address what we have accomplished towards thes ideals. First, I would like to discuss some of the significant archaeological findings from ou work and, second, the multifaceted relationship that has been developed with the present-day

African American community and the importance of that relationship to archaeologists and to African-Americans.

Thusfar we have conducted excavations on four different properties within Annapolis which were known to have been occupied by African Americans. What is especially important about these sites is the range of experiences that they represent. Chronologically they range from the late 18th century on up to the present. They represent individuals who were enslaved and who were free and, they represent some differences in economic well-being within Annapolis. The four sites that have been excavated are as follows:

The first site that we conducted excavations on was the Gott's court site, a site which has already been discussed at some length in the previous paper. Besides the 18th and early 19th century contexts that have just been discussed the property had an early 20th century context which consisted of a series of 25 early 20th-century wooden frame houses which were owned by whites but were exclusively occupied by African American renters. Due to time, monetary and logistical constraints, we were only able to conduct three weeks of excavation on the several acre piece of property (Warner 1992a).

The second site was the Franklin Street site. The Franklin Street site was located just a block away from Gott's Court and is adjacent to the Banneker-Douglass museum. The Franklin street property was the location of a series of single family dwellings. The property was a mixture of owners and renters and was predominantly occupied by African Americans from at least the 1870s until the 1960s, when the neighborhood was destroyed for the construction of a parking lot.

The third site was the St. Mary's site. Although the property is more widely known for its white owner, namely Charles Carroll, a signer of the declaration of Independence, excavations below the foundation of the existing structure during the summer and fall of 1991 revealed a previously unknown African American component to the property. I will discuss

this site in some more detail later on but the excavations strongly suggest that a east wing basement of the property was the location of a late 18th-century slav

Finally, the most recently excavated site is the Maynard-Burgess site. ' single family household located at 163 Duke of Gloucester street. It was continuo by free African Americans from 1848 until the early 1980s. An important excavation of the Maynard-Burgess property is that through the generosity of t the property, Port of Annapolis, Inc., we were able to test the entire property excavate almost 50% of it. This is in contrast to the excavations on Gott's Court St. were we were able to investigate less than 1% of the total area of the properi

In the interest of time I will limit my discussion of the archaeological ma sites, St. Mary's and the Maynard-Burgess sites, though I will be happy to ansv concerning any of the four at the break.

Although archaeologists had excavated on the grounds of the Carroll p 1986, the 1991 excavations were the first time archaeologists had been abl excavations inside the existing structure. During the excavations in the east Carroll mansion one of the project's many volunteers found several objects which somewhat puzzling. The volunteer recovered a large cache of objects which wer small area in a corner of the room. This cache of objects included twelve clear qu a clear glass bead, a polished black stone and a large ceramic bowl fragment witl symbol as part of the design on its base. Later in the excavations archaeologists similar assemblages of crystals, polished black stones, bone disks, and pierced c other rooms in the mansion, all of which dated to the late 18th century.

Based on the work of former project archaeologist George Logan with sev of west African cultures it now appears that the caches of goods in each of the were illustrative of west African religious practices. According to Logan's wor several distinct parallels between the material culture assemblages such as the or

in the Carroll mansion with other sites known to have been occupied by slaves, such as Manassas and Monticello, as well as with some contemporary west African tribes. For example, families of particular tribes located in what is known today as Sierra Leone frequently have placed various transparent objects, such as glass above or below their doorways. The significance of the location is that the objects represent the continuing presence and protection of their ancestors. Much like the Sierra Leone example, the crystals in the Carroll house were buried between two entryways in the east wing of the property.

Logan has also demonstrated several other very clear symbolic parallels between other objects recovered from the Carroll house caches and either other sites in the United States which were occupied by slaves or with contemporary examples of west African cultures. In the interests of time I will not go into all of these. Overall, however, Logan's work is an extremely persuasive argument that Charles Carroll's slaves "were attempting to establish their own enduring cultural presence" within the Carroll house through those symbolically potent objects (Logan 1992).

So, through archaeology we have learned two things about the Carroll property: First we have identified specific symbolic and religious practices of enslaved African Americans in Annapolis. Second, and more fundamentally, the importance of this find is that the basement of the Carroll Mansion is the only place that has been definitively identified as a slave quarter or residence in the entire historic district of Annapolis.

In addition to expanding our understanding of slavery, the Maynard-Burgess property has provided an opportunity to explore African Americans in freedom. As I mentioned earlier, the property was a single family household which was continuously occupied by African Americans from approximately 1848 until the early 1980s. The excavations on the property are particularly notable for the very large faunal assemblage that was recovered. Of particular interest are the approximately 6400 animal bones that were recovered from three areas on the property. The areas to be discussed are: A large "root cellar" located in the main portion of the

house which contained large bottle and bone assemblages, that totaled approximately 85 bottles and 1200 bones. The original date of construction of the cellar is unknown, but it was filled in over a very short period of time in the late 1880s or early 1890s. The second feature was a probable barrel privy located in the corner of the backyard which was filled in the early 20th century. The feature contained a wide variety of materials including construction refuse, ceramics, glass and bones. Again glasswares and bones were the largest categories of materials recovered. 42 glass vessels were identified and 1100 bones.

The third set of data comes from an area below the floorboards of the still-standing 1870s addition to the original 1848 house. Over 3200 bones were recovered from contexts tentatively dated to the 1850s and 1860s (Mullins and Warner, n.d.). The materials recovered from this area represent the earliest significant archaeological assemblage on that site. I am currently analyzing the faunal remains as part of my graduate work at the University of Virginia. Paul Mullins has undertaken the glass and ceramic analysis as part of his Ph.D. research at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst.

To date approximately a quarter of the faunal assemblage has been analyzed and already the data has suggested several intriguing possibilities for further research. Not surprisingly, the entire assemblage is predominantly represented by domesticated species such as cow and pig which had been commercially butchered, points which argue for extensive participation in a commercial market economy. However, this partial analysis does not just illustrate a process of assimilation by African Americans into the market economy of the city, rather I believe the faunal assemblages highlight the symbolic importance of food for the negotiation and definition of distinct identities by African Americans. Most people do not often think about the symbolism of food until they are confronted with obvious differences. Think for example of attending a baseball game and not having the option of buying a hot dog and a beer, or thanksgiving without a turkey or when you are served a new food for the first

time which was the case when I was served hogs head cheese during a tour of the Mississippi delta in 1989.

People regularly use food as part of the process of negotiating individual and group identities (cf. Camp 1989). I believe such an argument can be made for African Americans in Annapolis. During a time when major constraints were placed on the actions of African Americans choices in food consumption were an avenue through which people of color could separate themselves from white society.

My dissertation research on this subject is still in its preliminary stages. However, through a comparison of the Maynard-Burgess assemblage to other urban African American occupied sites within the region I hope to eventually demonstrate the point that the consumption behavior of African Americans regarding foodways may have been a mechanism by which they could establish distinct identities. In particular I am focusing my work on two aspects of this consumption behavior: First, the degree to which blacks may have circumvented traditional commercial markets and second, when they participated in those markets the specific choices that they made. To illustrate the possibilities of these two areas of inquiry I would like to present two brief examples.

The first is a contrast of parts of the earliest assemblage recovered from the Maynard-Burgess site with the faunal remains from the Main Street site also located in Annapolis. Like the Maynard-Burgess property, the Main St. site was a single family dwelling. The property was continuously occupied by white Annapolitans from the early 18th century until the 20th century. The materials used for comparison in this paper were recovered from a privy dating to the late 19th century, a period when the property was occupied by a physician and his household. The Main Street site was excavated by Archaeology in Annapolis during the winter of 1985-86 and the summer of 1986 under the direction of Dr. Paul Shackel (Shackel 1986).

On both properties the two largest classes of materials were mammal and bird remains, a fact which in itself is not particularly revealing. However, the percentage of fish recovered

from the Maynard Burgess site comprised 24% of the entire assemblage, while fish account for only 7% of the Main street assemblage. An initial hypothesis is that the occupants of the Maynard Burgess site were circumventing a white dominated market by exploiting local marine resources (Warner 1992b). In other words by acquiring fish outside the marketplace, African Americans could avoid the interpersonal relationships with white merchants which reinforced their inferior status in 19th century Annapolis society.

The use of food to establish distinct African American identities was not simply achieved through avoidance of the marketplace, however, as the archaeological record suggests, blacks did participate in the commercial economy of the city. For example, the majority of the mammalian faunal remains from the Maynard Burgess site are from domesticated species and they exhibit evidence of being commercially butchered. Yet even within the limited options available in the marketplace African Americans may have been able to make choices which separated them from white Annapolis. In other words, with commercialization and standardization of the market, the primary avenue for choice was not so much what species of animal to eat but instead what part of the animal to eat.

A preliminary analysis of the pig remains, for instance, suggests that the Maynard household selected some particular cuts of meat more frequently than others. The cut that seems to have been most frequently selected is a cut which is commonly known as a blade roast which comes from the scapula of the pig (Skelley 1985:34-38). The preference for this particular cut of meat does not seem to be apparent at the Main Street property, nor do I believe that it's presence on the Maynard-Burgess site can be attributed solely to economic constraints. As contemporary ethnographic literature on foodways suggests it is common for particular parts of an animal to be relished by one group and not another and that these preferences are made with little regard for economic circumstances (Raspa 1985). As my analysis continues I am certain that other specific consumption preferences will be identified at the individual cut level.

To conclude, although I want to re-emphasize the tentativeness of these hypotheses it does appear that foodways were an important symbolic component of African American life. So although, the 19th century was a period when there were immense social constraints on African Americans which restricted their activities, both in public and private domains, foodways was clearly a way in which African Americans could negotiate a separate identity for themselves.

Now, I would like to move this discussion beyond an exclusively archaeological realm. As a project, we are thankful to Al Lukenbach and Esther Doyle-Read, for inviting us to participate in this conference on archaeology in Anne Arundel county. Obviously, an important part of our project is to report on and discuss our findings as well as hear critiques of our work. That is inevitably part of the professional process. An equally important part of this process however, is to make our archaeological endeavors relevant to people today. To that end, our initiative in african american archaeology has strived to make our research relevant not just to our fellow archaeologists but also to the contemporary African American community of annapolis. To accomplish this the first move when we began this initiative was to contact the Banneker-Douglass Museum located here in Annapolis.

Before we began any excavations on this initiative, project archaeologists sat down with Barbara Jackson-Nash and Steven Newsome, two of the leaders of the Banneker-Douglas Museum, and home of the State of Maryland's Commission on African-American History and Culture to discuss what we were hoping to do in Annapolis. Despite some initial skepticism on their part about our intentions, project archaeologists came away from those first meetings in 1988 with three questions which helped to frame our work. The first was quite simply "Do African Americans have and archaeological past in Annapolis?" The second question was: "We know about slavery, and its devastation, what about freedom, where are the african American success stories?" and finally "Is there anything left from Africa?" (Leone et. al., n.d.) As my

previous discussion of some of our archaeological finds indicates we have clearly begun to provide some answers to those questions, but it really was just a beginning.

Over the years, we have found that the skepticism of Jackson-nash and Newsome is a common initial response to our project. Many of the high school students who visited the excavations on the Maynard Burgess site were quite willing to comment that they found it unacceptable to hear about African American history from white male graduate students. It was an obvious contradiction to them to see a white person attempt to explain and interpret what they saw as <u>their</u> history.

With the assistance of the Banneker-Douglass Museum staff project archaeologists wanted to begin to address this sense of alienation. One of our first extended forays into attempting to establish a sustained dialogue was our participation in the Kunta Kinte festival in 1990. During the festival we conducted archaeological site tours of the Franklin St. site and requested visitors to fill out written evaluations of the tour and our project. During that weekend we collected over 350 written evaluations of the tours and the project itself (MHC Project Evaluation Summary, Grant #032-L). As many of you know written evaluations frequently have been a part of our public programs but this was the first time that we had attempted this on a site which had been occupied by African Americans.

One of the most frequent responses on the evaluations was that people said that they would like to see the results of the excavations placed on display. As a result of this request and as part of our efforts to continue building our relationship with the African American community we went to work with the Banneker-Douglass Museum staff and produced an exhibit in the Museum in the spring of 1991.

When the museum exhibit was mounted in the Banneker-Douglass Museum in early 1991 it marked the first time in Annapolis that there had been an archaeological exhibit of material culture known to have been used by African Americans. After several months at the Banneker-Douglass museum, the exhibit was moved to the Shiplap house in Annapolis. This past summer

the exhibit traveled to the museum at Jefferson-Patterson park and I have just learned that at least a few of the artifacts from that collection are to go on display in city hall later this year. All told, well over 12,000 people have seen that exhibit thusfar (MHC Project Evaluation Summary, Grant #729-M).

At the same time another aspect of our initiative which has proved to be a very valuable contribution to both the archaeological excavation and the museum exhibits is oral histories. To date, Hannah Kaiser, a graduate of the Master's program at Maryland, and currently pursuing her Ph.D. at the City University of New York, has conducted approximately 15 interviews with African American Annapolitans, many of whom used to live on Gott's Court or Franklin St. The interviews have been a very rich source of information on the historic circumstances of African Americans in Annapolis. They have also been able to provide a very consistent critique of all aspects of Archaeology in Annapolis' actions. Many times we have been praised for our continuing actions, but we have also been sharply criticized. When some of Kaiser's interviewees visited the exhibit when it was at the shiplap house, they laughed at quotations about making chicken feet soup, and they nodded in recognition at the accounts of the toys children were playing with but they complained strongly about our accounts which referred to Gott's court as a tenement, as well as when a story was presented about African-Americans stealing food from the Naval academy. Despite that criticism, though, the oral histories have proved to be the venue which most readily attracts African American participants in our project.

However, after all that we have done as a project the question remains what have our efforts accomplished over the past four years? Certainly, we have gained a great deal of archaeological information about the histories of the city. Our work has also been a useful part of the historical preservation movement in the city. The restoration of the Carroll Mansion is proceeding with a recognition of the contributions of not only Charles Carroll but also of enslaved African Americans. Additionally, the city of Annapolis recently designated the

Maynard-Burgess property a historic landmark. Certainly the historical research by Jane McWilliams (1991a, 1991b) has been central understanding this property, but the Archaeological investigations of that property have certainly enriched her initial analysis, as well as directly refuting alternative hypotheses of an 18th-century origin for that property.

Over-riding all of this, however, is a recognition that in order to successfully use archaeology to present interpretations of African American pasts which are useful to and viable for both the black and white communities of this city sustained interaction is necessary between archaeologists and African Americans. Our belief is that the fundamental way to undertake this archaeology is to be guided by people of color who can pose the most useful questions about the contradictions in the past and the present. The African American community empowers us as archaeologists by thoughtfully critiquing our interpretations of their pasts and compelling us to see their impression throughout the city and region. Perhaps in some way we can help to empower our African American constituents by promoting a new space for their voices. This can only happen when archaeologists talk to African Americans in a critical and sustained manner; archaeologists can't expect to overcome 350 years of racism in a single field season or on a particular project that was undertaken in a "black" neighborhood.

We have tried to use the dialogue that we have built with the African American community to transform our archaeological project. Eventually, we hope to transform the perceptions of Annapolis, namely, we want to recognize that Annapolis was a product of the labors of both black and white people. Sometimes each group was at odds with each other, sometimes they were in cooperation, but at least the efforts of all parties is recognized. As one of the evaluations of our archaeological exhibit at the Banneker-Douglass Museum said: "so few blacks realize through their constant struggle they have a rich background that needs to be remembered and kept in mind. To that I would add few whites are aware of that history also. Hopefully, our project can continue to contribute to critical thought about the complex

relationships between black and white Annapolitans, both in the past, and in the modern-day world.

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