Revelations, Roots and Reactions—Archaeology and the African Diaspora

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I am a Historical Archaeologist. My recent interests lie largely in the cultural interactions that have taken place in the era of the Atlantic Slave Trade that transferred large numbers of Africans from their countries into bondage in the Americas. Our research involves looking at the material culture, dug up by the archaeologists that can supplement documentary sources. Historical Archaeology has been particularly successful in providing a voice for those people who are left out, or who are inadequately represented, in the documentary record. It is an aphorism of American history that white, Protestant, elite Anglo-Saxon males wrote American history for the benefit of other white, Protestant, elite Anglo-Saxon males. What is true for North America is even truer for the Caribbean and Africa where documentary sources are sparser. Left out of the picture are women and minorities, but particularly left out are Africans who were savagely transplanted. If they are represented at all they are written about as commodities of trade, a production cost, or as background actors. Historical archaeology is now beginning to empower the invisible and give a voice and a presence to deprived peoples. Though enormous strides have been taken in African history informing us about the states that existed within West Africa during this period, many of which participated in the trade, we know far too little about the actors in this trade. What has 20 years of archaeological research on both sides of the Atlantic revealed about the impact of the slave trade on West Africa and about the nature of both free and enslaved African communities in the New World? UCLA faculty and doctoral scholars in Anthropology, Geography, History, and from the Interdepartmental Archaeology Program have been particularly active in this research.

Less than 25 years ago, African-American archaeology did not appear either in anthropology syllabi or even as lectures within courses on the later archaeology of the Americas. The focus was

either on Native Americans or on the Spanish and English settlers of the post Columbus contact era. Even in the Caribbean, where people of African descent comprise more than 95% of the population of places like Jamaica, what little archaeology had been done had been mainly undertaken on Arawak and other early Amerindian sites. Where historical sites had been investigated as in Jamaica it was the original Spanish capital of New Seville as well as such memorable English sites as Port Royal, submerged in the devastating 1692 earthquake. In 1981, I personally questioned Prime Minister Seaga of Jamaica about this situation, when UCLA was initiating research on slave villages within plantation sites. His reply to my pleas for Jamaican Government help with Afro-Jamaican archaeology was that slaves had nothing so that there was nothing to find. Tourists, he contended, were more interested in the tangible remains of the Spanish and the English such as their stone churches, sugar mills and plantation homes. Fortunately, the Institute of Jamaica was more enlightened at that time and participated with UCLA in two training schools on slave villages on plantation sites. The African Diasporan dimension of archaeology had been basically ignored until the early 1980's. My paper on "Towards an Archaeology of the Black Diaspora" in Santo Domingo in 1981 (Posnansky 1983) was the first attempt to apply a knowledge of West African archaeology for an understanding of slave sites in the Caribbean. Archaeology at that time was not on the syllabi of the Caribbean student. African history was only just getting a toehold some 20 years after first being taught in Africa and later in North America. A significant achievement of the Diasporan approach came with the appointment of Dr. Kofi Agorsah, a Ghanaian archaeologist trained at both the University of Ghana and at UCLA, to initiate the teaching of archaeology at the University of the West Indies in Kingston, Jamaica in 1988. This paper will largely be confined to West Africa and the Caribbean where scholars from UCLA have worked in the past 20 years.

What has historical archaeology achieved in Africa with regard to the African side of the famous Triangular Trade? We know a great deal from the documentary record, well summarized by Philip Curtin (1969) and many later scholars, that provides us with statistics of numbers of people transported, of where they were shipped from and by whom. From Angola and the Congo, which provided the greatest number of slaves, we have very little information. For the past 40 years the area was shut off, first by Portuguese dictatorship and later

was in the grips of brutal wars, that now fortunately show realistic signs of abating.

When I first went to Ghana in 1967 I had intended to work on the European trading stations, forts and castles and the towns which had grown up in the lee of those forts (Posnansky 1969). There are more than 50 such trade sites built from 1482, many of which survived into the 20th century fairly intact, used as rest houses, administrative offices, police stations and jails. Many, but certainly not all, had been intimately involved in the slave trade. At that time the climate of opinion at African universities was discouraging for fieldwork at European trading posts even though they were associated with a mass transfer of Africans to the Americas. It was felt that a professor of archaeology should concentrate on African sites in the interior. The reasoning behind this argument was that so little was then known about early African state formation and urban origins that to spread the effort to cover the coast would diminish the scholastic returns. It proved, however, impossible to work for long in Ghana on second millennium sites without being aware that Africa was closely tied into world global economic systems. In medieval times West Africa was tied into a larger trading network to the north (Posnansky 1972) through imports from the middle Niger valley, the area of the great Western Sudanic states like Mali, and later from the coast through expanding European maritime trade. It was abundantly clear that after A.D.1500, sites, in southern Ghana at least, could not be considered separately from those on the coast. In 1970 we surveyed coastal sites and in 1973 conducted the first, and so far the only, excavation on a slave dungeon in West Africa at the Ghanaian fort of Cape Coast Castle (Simmonds 1976). There we found little other than a few beads, chicken bones, and a small number of potsherds, about the limited material culture of the Africans doomed for shipment to the Americas. In 1975 we conducted a brief excavation on the one trading post built away from the coast in 1654, Fort Ruychaver (Posnansky and van Dantzig 1976), as far as we can tell completely unassociated with a trade in slaves. From the late 1980's, starting with work at Elmina by Christopher DeCorse, now at Syracuse University, the emphasis has been placed on investigating the degree of acculturation of African townsfolk by looking at their diet, general lifestyle, and at the nature and scale of trade (DeCorse 2001). DeCorse was fortunate that the town, which in the 18th century may have had a population of up to 15,000, larger than contemporary New York or Philadelphia, was de-

stroyed by the British in 1873 and the site never reoccupied. It was thus somewhat of a time capsule. He demonstrated that the African townspeople enjoyed foreign luxuries such as glass stemware, bottled drinks and imported ceramics but nevertheless maintained an African lifestyle with burials beneath the floors of their homes. Grindstones, coalpots that are still used for cooking, local earthen wares and faunal remains reflected African food-ways. There was a propensity for recycling. Gold dust was used rather than coinage in commerce and the discovery of brass gold weights at Elmina has done much to substantiate their dating originally proposed by Timothy Garrard (Garrard 1980). Spatial relationships, with a compacted urban plan indicated by extremely narrow alleys, were very African. There were household shrines and presumably traditional social and religious practice as indicated by ivory stamps used for body decoration. Among the imports there was material from different parts of Europe, Africa and Asia testifying to the global nature of the trade links. But make no mistake; this was an African town. The townsfolk had taken what they wanted from contact with the Europeans. By the 18th century the fort was dominated by the slave trade. The town, however, was a separate political entity, a prosperous African trading community existing in a symbiotic relationship with the Europeans and owing much of its prosperity to the trade in Africans brought down from the interior.

In contrast to the Gold Coast with its many towns and forts, the Slave Coast from Togo to western Nigeria had only one major point of departure, Ouidah, a little like an Ellis Island in reverse. Its era of importance was from the late 17th century until the middle of the19th century. The largest number of Africans from any point on the African coast, the product of wars waged by such interior states as Dahomey and Oyo (Law 1991), were funneled through barracoons on its beach to await the boats of the European traders. These beach barracoons were initially controlled by small English, French and Portuguese forts in the town. Before the rise of Dahomey, Allada, 100 km from the coast, and Hweda near the coast, with its capital at Savi, some 7km north of Ouidah had been the principal polities. In 1727 Dahomey moved down to the coast sacking both states. It was Savi with its well documented destruction date of 1727 and an absence of subsequent occupation, that drew Ken Kelly of UCLA, and now of the University of South Carolina, to its investigation (Kelly 2001). Impressive in size, more than 2km across with huge ditches, up to 8

meters deep, demarcating its royal quarters, its former buildings were indicated by mounds of collapsed mud walls. Kelly tackled the largest suite in which, in fashion of Fon type palaces, the inner rooms had floors at higher elevations than the outer.[1] Excavation revealed long narrow rooms, similar to those in later palaces with very thick coursed mud walls and in places floors tiled with Dutch brick. In several locations a thick layer of burnt organic material and charred beams indicated the nature of the roofs at the time of the sacking of the capital. Beneath this burnt layer were many finds left in haste by the fleeing inhabitants, including in one room numerous imported onion shaped wine bottles and kitchen gear. Other items included brassware and parts of firearms. Unlike Elmina, imports were largely the prerogative of the king and his court. The model described by Kelly for this early contact situation is one in which the African king had contacts with the Europeans to enhance his status. He added to that status by keeping the European merchants in special commissaries, as depicted on contemporary European drawings, within his own palace enclosure. These commissaries were inferior in size and construction to the palace. Thousands of imported bricks had been head-loaded from the coast and made the chief's palace even more memorable. The few muskets and cannon were probably designed as much for ceremonial display as for defense. Missing from the imports were the glass stemware, brass bric a brac and abundant imported ceramics of the Elmina townsfolk. There was very little real acculturation and no town grew up similar to those on the Gold Coast. This was probably a model repeated elsewhere on the coast in which the Europeans had to deal through the local potentate.

Archaeological research is now being undertaken on the Kingdom of Dahomey that sacked Savi in 1727. Using GPS, oral traditions and surface survey Cameron Monroe, of the UCLA Department of Anthropology, has delineated the distribution of old sites and particularly of royal capitals. Each ruler had a series of palace sites that spread along a plateau ridge on the trade route to the coast. What is outstanding is the sheer extent of these sites from 10-30 hectares in size. They proclaim the greatness of rulers who at their height of power and influence were responsible for some fabulous art, wonderful crafts and managed a very profitable trade in slaves with the coast through their outlet port of Ouidah. Wealth from the slave trade brought with it absolute power and a complex regional organization. Decline only came with the European embargo on the

slave trade and the eventual intrusion of French commercial, evangelical and political interests after the middle of the 19th century. Analysis of the material culture obtained from test excavations will inform us about the nature and control of European imports.

In its splendor the Kingdom of Dahomey was no different from such contemporary states as Asante in Ghana or Benin in Nigeria. All of them had large slave populations, perhaps up to 30% of their total population (Patterson 1982: 355), often working on agricultural plantations to provide provisions for the court and armies. To assess the negative impact of the slave trade it is necessary to look at the areas between these great states where societies were poorly organized and which were beset by destructive attentions from many quarters (Manning 1982). Their sites certainly do not command the same attention from the archaeologists.[2] Displaced populations have few material goods, they do not have the comfort of long established village communities or spectacular architecture and when one does find an abandoned site it is difficult to know the cause for its abandonment. What we do know is that in the 18th century, at the height of the slave trade, many communities fled to inaccessible locations. In Sierra Leone (DeCorse 1980), Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana, Togo (De Brunner 1969-70) and Benin hilltop sites have been found with stone defensive walls and hollows ground into the rocks for grinding grain. At Denou in Togo in 1985 we found a chamber carved into the hillside, covered with large stone slabs and hidden from view by terrace walls (Posnansky and Kuevi 1986). Presumably endangered villagers hid themselves and small animals in such places at times of stress. Similar bolt-holes and obscure places of safety litter the countryside and await discovery.

Some 12-15 million Africans were shipped to the New World with 43% of them going to the Caribbean and the Guianas (Curtin 1969). The first slaves arrived in 1501, less than 10 years after Columbus. By 1503 some had already escaped to form the basis of the maroon societies. Little direct archaeological work has been undertaken on early Spanish slave communities. For the first 100 years their numbers were relatively few. Once the northern European powers of England, France and Holland began to take economic and political control from the Spanish, sugar plantations developed very rapidly. They began in St. Kitts where British archaeologists in 2000[3] located the first English settlements of 1625, and later Barbados, Jamaica and in such Lesser Antillean islands as Saint Eustatius, Montserrat and

Grenada. In 1695 the western half of the island of Hispaniola was taken over by the French as St. Domingue, which by the 1780's had nearly half a million Africans and had become the most productive sugar economy.

In the last 20 years excavations have been undertaken at slave villages on large plantations in which Africans routinely outnumbered their European masters by some 20 to 1 (Farnsworth 2001). At Drax Hall in Jamaica Douglas Armstrong, now of Syracuse University, excavated several slave houses in the early 1980's (Armstrong 1990). These were simple structures not unlike worker's cabins on contemporary plantations, with small rooms for sleeping, occasionally with a single room with wood flooring. We can help reconstruct former lifestyles and architecture by using contemporary drawings and mid 19th century photographs. Most activities, including cooking and eating took place in the 'yard' outside. Armstrong discovered that the slaves retained African foodways, eating communally from locally made earthen bowls rather than from imported plates common at the Great House. They supplemented the rather poor rations of corn, salted cod fish and pickled pigs' feet reported in the plantation records, by growing a variety of foods in their small holdings. They added protein nutrient by collecting seafood around the coast and trapping the few small creatures and birds native to the island using their knowledge of traps and snares brought with them from West Africa. The bone finds indicated that more than 40% of their meat derived from hunting and trapping. They adapted the English tools but adapted them to their particular use, preferring short handled hoes to long handled tools and the slashing blades that they were used to in Africa for the bill hooks of the English. Their descendants on the island continued to make pots in a West African fashion and a few surviving folk potters still use Akan words from Ghana for their simple potting tools (Ebanks 1995). Armstrong went on to dig a further plantation village at New Seville and there he made an interesting discovery. Before the devastating hurricane of 1760, the slave houses were placed in rows and were spatially arranged according to the prevailing slave code so that doors were all visible from the overseer's house and windows were limited. After 1760, when the village was rebuilt the houses were arranged in a more West African circular mode (Armstrong 1992). This indicates a certain stability in slave life in which slaves had a vested interest in where they lived, using their limited freedom to produce a small agricultural surplus for

trade from their own small parcels of land. The slaves had joined the market economy using currency to buy minor trinkets at the weekly Sunday market.

In several instances, notably from Newton's Plantation on Barbados, we get information from human remains. At Newton's Plantation where more than a 100 slave burials have been excavated (Handler and Lange 1979) the orientation is always with the head towards Africa. The head on its side facing west in the case of females, east in the case of males so that that they can be awakened by the rising sun to go to their fields, the normal pattern for West African burials. Though we are dealing with a deprived population, many were buried with grave goods such as beads, smoking pipes, bracelets and buttons indicating a fervent belief in an afterlife. One of the burials was evidently that of an *obeah* man, a person possessed of strong leadership, healing and religious powers as the body was accompanied with cowrie shells, a necklace of dog teeth, glass beads, fish vertebrae, a knife and a pipe (Handler 1997). At a Montserrat plantation (Pulsipher and Goodwin 2001:196-9) a woman in her 60's was buried clothed in a dress with white glass buttons and brass hooks in a decorated coffin with a decorated headstone. She bore no signs of malnutrition, and was most likely an *obeah* woman. Many bodies in slave cemeteries show signs of early arthritis, malnutrition is indicated by hyperplasia lines on teeth (Corruccini *et alia*1982) and evident lead poisoning which was a concomitant of rum processing in the Caribbean (Handler *et alia* 1986).

Turning briefly to North America, the destination for only 4.5% of the slaves shipped from Africa, an increasing amount of archaeology has been undertaken at plantation sites from Virginia to Louisiana.[4] In the early 17th century Africans lived on small plantations around the Chesapeake together with indentured white servants and only after the commercialization of tobacco in the 1640's do we witness a clear housing segregation in the archaeological record. On many of these plantations Africans made their own pottery. At first not recognized as African and termed "Colono" ware it has now become somewhat of a marker for places where large numbers of Africans lived. In South Carolina Colono ware comprises more than 50% of the ceramics found on many estates. The practice continued until the late 18th century by which time cheap English imports of glazed pottery dominated the market. Africans also made clay tobacco pipes adorned with West African abstract designs (Emerson

1994). In South Carolina, Professor Leland Ferguson, from the University of South Carolina, found many pot sherds which had etched cruciform decorations on them similar to cosmograms in West Africa (Ferguson 1992). Many were found on pots evidently broken and thrown into rivers, perhaps as gifts on death to a water deity. Such cosmograms in Africa help to identify the cycles of life and still occur on Congo funeral effigies (Thompson 1983). Most of the colono ware is in the form of bowls that normally comprise more than 40% of the ceramic assemblage in contrast to the 70–85% of flatware or plates found on the sites of European settlers (Otto 1985). This clearly indicates a difference in eating habits, with Africans eating stews and Europeans eating cuts of meat and vegetables in a drier fashion. As in the Caribbean, slaves supplemented their meager rations by hunting and trapping such small creatures as raccoons, possum, various reptiles and birds. In slave houses in Georgia lead shot balls and gun flints have been found indicating this was a tolerated practice (Fairbanks 1984). There was also a lot of recycling going on with buttons used as amulets and broken European pipes converted for use with reed stems. Religious practice is very African with the occasional cowrie shells, blue beads, forked sticks and even in one case a carved clenched fist provided as grave goods (Orser 1994). The salvage excavation of the extensive New York Black burial ground highlighted the importance of a knowledge of African burial practice which enabled coffin designs, indicated from ornamental studs, to be recognized as the Akan adinkra symbol *sankofa* that entreats the observer to be mindful of the past (Harrington 1993). In spatial analysis, the layout of rooms and the arrangements of compounds, we also glimpse African origins particularly in the shotgun houses of the American south east with rooms opening up to others on a longitudinal axis, a plan still existent in Nigeria. At a South Carolina estate the discovery of lineal cup marks in the ground are clearly identifiable as the West African board game of *oware* where the game is more normally played on wooden boards or in temporary holes scooped out of the hard compacted ground.

Archaeologists working closely with scholars in other disciplines are revealing many African legacies in the Americas. An excellent example of this is in the rice industry of South Carolina where both archaeologists and geographers have amply demonstrated that Senegambian slaves brought their technology of rice cultivation using an intricate system of sluices with gates for growing swamp rice

(Carney 2000). Both the tradition of pounding the rice in pestles and mortars and winnowing in baskets woven in West African fashion are African derived, as probably is the use of dug out canoes on the waterways. Charcoal-making on which so much of early American iron working was based owes in part a similar debt to African skills.

At Fort Mosé, just north of St. Augustine in Florida, a free African American town flourished from 1738 until Florida was handed over to the British in 1763. Made up largely of run-away slaves from the Carolinas, this community with its earthenware pots, and its amulets, similar to those further north, provided soldiers who fought for the Spanish. The Fort Mosé people evidently entered into mutually advantageous relations with the local Indian populations whose ceramics they used (Deagan and Landers 1999). Everywhere indications of resistance to slavery are showing up even in unlikely spots as in the root cellars beneath the slave cabins in the previously seemingly model slave community at President Jefferson's Monticello (Kelso 1986). Hidden there were such objects as chicken bones from poultry taken for an occasional meal or sacrifice, locks and keys removed to make access to store rooms possible or items of African religious significance and personal value. More than 100 root cellars have been found on eastern plantations containing material which slaves did not want their masters to find including writing slates and in all likelihood food they required to hoard if they wanted to move temporarily or permanently off the estate.

Archaeology on free African maroon communities is perhaps the most exciting research presently being undertaken (Agorsah 1994). Though, as to be expected, very few finds come from sites of materially deprived populations. What they do provide us with is a knowledge that such communities did persist throughout the period of slavery. They kept alive their African knowledge, their communities were probably more numerous than historians previously believed based purely on documentary evidence. It is probable that many communities were ephemeral, persisting for relatively short periods before oppressive searchers discovered their whereabouts and captured or dispersed the inhabitants. The challenge for archaeologists is to retrieve this information. Up to now we have had to rely on biased documentary references or on the oral traditions of the surviving maroons in the Caribbean, Brazil and the Guianas but new prospection techniques hold out exciting possibilities for locating many lost sites. In May 2002 a team from East Africa is visiting

Arizona to look at new techniques in which soil samples can reveal past agricultural practices in order to discover more about the presence of former cultivators on terraced sites in Kenya,Tanzania and Zimbabwe[5]. Similar methods can be employed to test possible maroon sites. Satellite imagery is revealing vegetation changes that hold the promise of identifying abandoned settlement sites in heavily vegetated areas that cannot be picked out by archaeologists walking the landscape.

Most archaeological attention has been focused on the maroons of Jamaica who survived in the rough terrain of the Blue Mountains. Under a woman warrior chief called Nanny they forced the attacking British to a treaty in 1742 that secured their rights for another 50 years. Archaeologists have found evidence, summarized in Agorsah (1994), of their battles, their smoking pipes and occasional adornments. In the undulating and rugged limestone hills of the west of the island, known as the Cockpit country, communities still exist that keep alive not only their language with its Akan words derived from their Ghanaian homeland but also their musical traditions and farming practices based on yam cultivation. The same Ghanaian archaeologist, Kofi Agorsah, who worked in Jamaica has now turned his attention to Surinam where maroons survived in the tropical forests and swamps fighting for their existence against the Dutch. The survivors have kept alive a very vigorous African culture and Ghanaian scholars were amazed at their memory of Africa. It is this memory that has been so important for continuities from Africa. It was St. Domingue maroons who spearheaded the 1791 slave rebellion that helped lead to the free Republic of Haiti in 1804. The most vigorous maroon societies existed in north-eastern Brazil where an African kingdom existed for nearly a century with at one time a dozen fortified villagers, with the largest housing some 5000 inhabitants (Orser 1996: 41-55). The kingdom was only destroyed by the Portuguese in 1694 and was locally known as Angola Janga or new Angola and to the outside world as Palmares. Though archaeologists have undertaken little work there, African style ceramics, pipes and arrowheads have been found similar to those from other maroon locations in the Caribbean. These Brazilean sites have a particular plan with rivers guarding their flanks and palisaded earthworks protecting their fronts so that they have an armadillo-like plan. Archaeologists and ethnographers are working both on the surviving crafts of maroons and demonstrating their relationships with past and present West African

societies. Professor Candice Goucher, who researched past and present iron working in Togo and Ghana as a student at UCLA, is now working in Barbados, Jamaica and most recently on an African blacksmith shop at Fort George in Trinidad and clearly demonstrating technological continuities (Goucher 1999).

Underwater archaeology has perhaps been the most overlooked aspect of archaeology when it comes to Diasporan issues. Underwater archaeology had had a bad reputation in the profession because of the suspicion that too many divers were more interested in salvaging treasure than solving historical problems. Within the past 20 years several slaving ships have been discovered. What is obvious is that custom-made ships with internal decks and 'sardine' like packaging of slaves were not the norm. Most slave ships were general cargo vessels with extra bulkheads, chaining devices and additional side arms for the crew provided on an ad hoc basis to meet the exigencies of the trade. The excavation of such wrecks has led to intensive studies on the sailing schedules, cargo and personnel manifests and histories of such ships that would otherwise not have been attempted. The Danish ship Fredensborg sank off the Norwegian coast in 1768 on its return from a triangular journey which had taken it from Copenhagen to the Gold Coast then to St. Croix and back (Svalensen 1989). The journey had lasted 18 months and cost the lives of 12 of the 40 crew members and delivered a cargo of 238 slaves with 24 dead en route. Ivory tusks were salvaged from the wreck as well as dye-woods and mahogany collected in the West Indies. Without the historical records it would not have been identifiable as a slave ship. Other ships were similarly lost in rough northern seas. One ship that was easily identifiable as a slaver from the salvaged shackles was the Henrietta Marie that sank around 1699 off the Florida Keys (Moore 1987). It still contained pewter vessels and beads it had failed to sell in West Africa as well as ivory tusks. One of the most interesting of all the slave vessels was the Whydah that sank off Cape Cod in 1717 after having been captured by the pirate Black Bellamy. Of interest there was the presence in its cargo of worn out and crushed gold jewelry made in the Akan world of Ghana and the Cote d'Ivoire that was being traded as bullion (Ehrlich 1991). The gold beads match 1692 drawings while the year of the ship's foundering dates a style that has continued unbroken until the present and enhances art historical studies on the Akan civilization clearly indicating such jewelry was older than the creation of the Asante state in

the early 18th century. What still awaits to be found is a fully laden boat sailing from West Africa to the New World.

I want to conclude by looking at some of the reactions to a quarter of a century's archaeological research. Firstly, historians are now aware of the contributions that archaeologists can make in recreating the cultural transformations that occurred with the displacements of populations across the Atlantic (figure 1). Work on house sites, burials, eating practices, crafts, games and decorative motifs are revealing not only the tenacity of African populations that underwent an indescribable trauma, but also their rich coping mechanisms in creating a new and vibrant African-American culture. Secondly, it is evident that we cannot look at either the western coast of Africa or the eastern coast of the Americas separately. They are parts of an interactive Atlantic World. Work in the Caribbean has been particularly intensive (Farnsworth 2001) and has spread from the original centers for research like Jamaica to include the Bahamas and many of the smaller Antillean islands. Thirdly, American archaeologists have at last fully realized, particularly since the seminal 1989 NEH-sponsored conference on *Digging the Afro-American Past* in Oxford, Mississippi, that African American archaeology is a legitimate academic field of study. It is embraced by several universities and is a vital part of American Historical Archaeology. Research has expanded exponentially and researchers are kept in touch with the *African-American Archaeology* newsletter launched in 1990. Unfortunately research and teaching is still too localized or all too often depends on the academic interest of a single scholar. Eyes have been opened up to what is African. American scholars have realized that it is just as important to understand the cultural roots of Africans if they want to understand the archaeology of Americas as it is to know something of England if they want to appreciate the culture of the earliest English settlers. It is important that many more North American archaeologists follow the lead of scholars like Theresa Singleton and Leland Ferguson in both visiting and working on West African and North American sites. Fourthly, there is now an awareness that in looking at the African American past we should not be fixated on the Africans who were enslaved. It is just as essential that we look equally at two other essential strands that are much harder to untangle, namely the maroons and the few free Africans, particularly in towns, who had less impact on the documentary record. Later this year a major monograph is being published on the East End community of St. Johns in

the Virgin Islands where Douglas Armstrong has worked on a free farming community (Armstrong 2001). Researchers are discovering the importance of studying surviving maroon communities in Columbia, Mexico and of past communities on various Antillean islands. This is clearly a trend that will continue. Fifthly, it is important that we realize the potential of underwater archaeology. That should be self-evident when we consider the numbers of Africans transported and the very high number of ships lost at sea before late 19th century nautical engineering reduced the risks. And finally, we can rejoice in the fact that West Africans are now beginning to look at the Atlantic Slave Trade in a much more serious way. At the Benin meeting of the West African Archaeological Association in 1994 it was agreed that discovering more about the slave trade at the African end should be a research priority. Much more work is being undertaken at coastal sites, many of them paid for by developers as new buildings are erected in towns some of whose inhabitants were either involved in the slave trade or owned slaves.

We can rejoice that the archaeology of the African Diaspora is now beginning to be integrated into archaeological syllabi of the three axes of the Triangular Trade and not before time!

Figure 1: Archaeological contributions to study of African American experience

- Supplements other disciplines
- Indicates North American society and slave society far from monolithic
- Indicates slavery not completely traumatic in that Africans could retain cultural and technological knowledge despite violence of slavery
- Development of a vigorous distinctive African American culture which was hidden because we did not know where and how to look (e.g., Colono ware)
- Demonstrated elements of resistance and empowerment (evidence of root cellars, retentions of own culture in personal decoration, aesthetics
- Demonstrated continuities from Africa in housing (shot gun) and residential spatial relationships; religion (eg.cosmograms on pots); rites of passage; grave furniture (Sankofa coffin decoration in New York) grave goods (cowries, blue beads and tobacco pipes); games like *oware*
- Recycling activities -- reuse of pipes, strike a light stones, pierced coins, beads, etc., used as amulets
- Dietary and butchery techniques – comminuted bone indicating stews, large bowls indicating communal eating. Faunal remains including coastal seafood and birds, rodents and animal varieties trapped to supplement diet and indications of firearm use from certain S.E. American plantation sites
- Contributes vital information on nutrition, health and other biogenetic data
- Preferred agricultural usage – slashing blades (like machetes) v. billhooks, short v. long handled hoes, wooden mortars v. stone grinders

Notes

[1] The royal palace at Porto Novo, now a part of the National Museum of Benin, provides an excellent example which has survived until the present day.

[2] Though research has been undertaken in West Africa on the period under review, very little attention has been paid to the slave trade except at the coastal sites. In a recent survey on the Historical Archaeology of Nigeria (Wesler 1998) slavery does not appear even in the index yet it certainly was a major theme in many parts of southern Nigeria during the early historical period. Several of the papers in DeCorse (2001b) provide a focus on the impact of the trade as witnessed in the archaeological record for various parts of West Africa.

[3] Private information from the excavator, Dr Mark Horton of Bristol University.

[4] For some of the earliest evidence in the Chesapeake region see James Deetz, *Flowerdew Hundred,* (1993); for South Carolina, Leland Ferguson (1992); for Georgia, John Otto (1984); Charles Fairbanks (1982) for Florida and the general S.E.of the US; Laurie Wilkie 2000 for Louisiana; and for surveys of the field in general and a good bibliography, Theresa Singleton (1995, 1999). The earliest significant work had been undertaken by Fairbanks as early as the 1960's which stimulated a great number of scholars (Ascher and Fairbanks 1971).

[5] Personal information from Dr. J.E.G. Sutton.

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