March 2011 Newsletter

The Archaeology of Race and African American Resistance

By Christopher Matthews*****

Preface to "The Archaeology of Race and African American Resistance" for the *African Diaspora Archaeology Newsletter*.

I want to thank Chris Fennell and Christopher Barton for including a chapter from my new book on *The Archaeology of American Capitalism* published last fall by the University Press of Florida in this issue of the ADAN newsletter. My book is about how archaeology documents the materializations of capitalism in the making of modern America. I consider a range of examples from the New England fur trade to the creation of the modern city to western gold rush and mining communities. I structured the book to illustrate and explain how capitalism was both instituted and resisted in various instances that give great texture of American life past and present.

The chapter reproduced here is my favorite since it exemplifies how I worked to weave together cultural, historical, and political economic factors to produce an archaeological interpretation that highlights both agency and critique. My argument is that capitalism is based on a particular worldview that supports the agency of actors engaged in society as individuals; thus individual agency is a key to participation and to the reproduction of the capitalist system. However, individual agency comes at a price. While many pay this price in labor, debt, and sacrifice, others, usually those most marginal to the mainstream and thus least able to afford the costs of participation, developed alternatives that I consider as critiques. These critiques pointed out the shortcomings and flaws of the system capitalism created, but as I show in the book, most of these critiques failed to generate substantial change as they were adopted by people too heavily invested in that system to see beyond it. My chapter on African Diaspora communities tells a different story by showing how the material culture of African Americans exhibits astute and critical readings of racism and the foundations of capitalism that helped to dehumanize them as slaves and, thus, commodities. Being so marginalized, in other words, African Americans felt and saw what capitalism most expects from its participants and thus were in a unique position to develop a critical standpoint against it.

I also emphasize the importance of considering *multivalency* in the interpretation of African Diaspora materials. The fact that objects can produce and sustain multiple meanings allowed African Americans to develop autonomous though partly hidden cultural systems informed but not controlled by the white capitalists who surrounded them. Similarly, I highlight the value of considering *assemblages* so that we are able to consider how artifacts were ordered and related in particular ways that allow us to see the African American cultural critique of capitalism. Finally, I emphasize the *social value of religious expression*. As religion is based in a community of believers I describe how the material expressions of ritual action and religious belief, from marking colonoware bowls to experiencing conversion in African American Christianity, informs us about how communities critical of racism and capitalism were reproduced through time. Ultimately, I argue that an archaeology of capitalism provides vital insights into the origins and meanings of African American culture from which America as a whole still has so much to learn.

Note

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The Archaeology
of American Capitalism

Christopher N. Matthews

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Foreword by Michael S. Nassaney

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The Archaeology of Race
and African American Resistance

> This past, this endless struggle to achieve and reveal and confirm
> human identity, human authority, yet contains, for all its horror,
> something very beautiful.
>
> James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time*

Perhaps the most powerful examples of exclusion in American history are
the multitude of ways that the dominant society has defined membership
by race (DuBois 1994, Orser 2007). Despite the historic variability of the
category (for example, see Roediger 1991, 2005, Ignatiev 1995, Jacobsen
1998, 2006, Guglielmo 2003), racially defined nonwhites have been con-
sistently shifted to the margins of American society, no matter their ori-
gin. Native Americans, African Americans, Hispanic Americans, Asian
Americans, and the wide array of "provisional" or "probationary" whites
(Jacobsen 1998), such as Irish, Eastern European, and Southern European
Americans, have faced similar, unjust challenges in their attempts to par-
ticipate in civic society and obtain its promised material well-being and
opportunity (Orser 2007, Voss 2008). However, because of a history of
race-based slavery, the case of African Americans stands out. Without
diminishing past and ongoing struggles of other minorities in the United
States, the qualities of slavery demand that African American history and
archaeology be considered a distinct topic in a book on capitalism. The
basis of this distinction is the fact that in the modern enslavement of peo-
ple of African descent, the exploitation and commoditization that defines
capitalist labor relations was taken to an extreme. Modern enslavement
was not the result of retribution or capture (Patterson 1982, Davis 1966,
2006), but was instead a radical debasement by which the humanity of the

enslaved person was disregarded in assessing their capacity to labor and the manner in which their work could be translated into the production of value for its true owner—the master—in the market. The root of this system was racism, or the belief that because of inherent and inheritable attributes, some persons are naturally superior to others. Racism has enabled segregation, violence, and a willful disregard for many segments of the American population—especially African Americans—since its founding. In modern slavery, the principal variant of this belief established that people of African descent were savage, heathen, and incapable of surviving in, let alone producing, civilization. They were therefore best served by a system that restricted their freedom and put them in the service of civilized whites.

While this racist ideology is seriously flawed and has been challenged since its inception, antiblack racism still has firm roots in contemporary society (Jordan 1968, Fields 1990, Frederickson 1987, Holt 2000, Ford 2008, Wise 2008). It has been the goal of many archaeologists studying the African diaspora in the United States to develop a counter-hegemonic account that challenges and disarms racist assumptions about the history and culture of people of African descent (Singleton 1995, LaRoche and Blakey 1997, Wilkie 2000, Franklin 2001, Franklin and McKee 2004, Mack and Blakey 2004, Orser 2007, Mullins 2008). This work has recorded a wide array of practices that captive Africans and their descendents developed to assert their humanity and resist both enslavement and the sustained inequalities that came with emancipation. My goal here is to contextualize some of these findings within the capitalist constructions of labor and personhood. I show how African diaspora archaeology presents evidence critiquing both white supremacy and, especially, the capitalist system that provided theoretical and practical knowledge for establishing racism as a matter of fact in modern life.

I primarily consider evidence of race as an ideological hegemony, drawing from Barnett and Silverman (1979), who show that dominant cultures order social life by explaining how and why experience may be separated into distinct phenomenal categories.[1] Racism stands out among such categories for its especially cogent assertion that persons may be ordered by unalterable, inherited biological characteristics that establish America's social statuses. Accordingly, critical scholarship seeks to identify how the categories of race and racism organize social action by producing and

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1   The following discussion is adapted from Matthews, Leone, and Jordan 2002

reproducing the dominant cultural hegemony (Gramsci 1971, Roseberry 1989, Fields 1990). In this sense, domination is not only informed by and responsive to cultural categorizations of an elite, it is also an inherent aspect of most tools to which the nonelite have access. The result, therefore, is often that resistance produces only a very limited effect, and often no substantial structural change. In contrast, successful strategies of resistance are those that acknowledge the dominant order, but are informed by and respond to a critical, alternative, cultural sensibility. Successful resistance is based on understanding the deeply situated powers that organize and categorize social life and the production of meaning, then seizing opportunities to craft alternatives that emerge through ruptures or interstices of the dominant system.

Notably, archaeology is one of the best methods available for recovering these strategies. For one, material culture, unlike dominant linguistic and related discursive modes, has the unique ability to contain and sustain necessary ambiguities (Gundaker 1998, Howson 1990, Mullins 1999, Voss 2008). Things, that is, can take on a variety of meanings, sometimes meanings that are themselves contradictory except in that they reflect applications to objects made by groups from different, if not opposing, sectors of society (Leone 2005). Howson (1990), as well as Perry and Paynter (1999), emphasize the multivalence of material culture, meaning that the same object may hold very different meanings in, for example, European or captive African hands. Second, archaeology has the opportunity to look at and contextualize expressions of resistance found at the level of assemblages. Successful resistance is not to be found in the simple objects that people make and use. Rather, it is found in the way objects are ordered and related, reflecting the adherence by oppressed people to a system altogether different from, if not also critical of, the dominant majority. African diaspora archaeology is flush with evidence that captive Africans and African Americans developed and embraced such alternatives. I discuss a few examples in the following.

The Complexities of Colonoware

Discovered and identified as early as the 1930s, the remains of low-fired, handmade pots crafted from local clays are a common find at American archaeological sites, especially plantation slave quarter sites associated with captive Africans who lived in the Chesapeake and Southern colonies. While these pots were originally thought to be made by Native Americans who produced them for trade, Leland Ferguson argues that

the vessels were produced and used by captive Africans themselves (1980, 1992, 1999). Ferguson proposed renaming these vessels from colono-Indian ware (Noel-Hume 1962), to simply colonoware, so that pots made by both African and Native American hands could be considered a product of these groups' engagement with colonization. Since Ferguson's identification of the African American origins of many of these pots, a trait that he rightly argues should have been obvious all along, archaeologists have turned up tens of thousands of colonoware sherds from plantation sites dating to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Patterns in these findings show that vessels produced by captive Africans describe a powerful history of making a life and community under the conditions of forced migration, enslavement, and racial violence. This is especially evident when colonoware vessels are contextualized in the race-making dynamics of colonial America.

James Deetz shows that the archaeological record of late-seventeenth-century Virginia plantations is marked by an increase in locally made colonoware vessels and a reduction in the average number of rooms per house (1994). The smaller houses are said to reflect a resolution of social tensions between masters and their white indentured servants, achieved through the construction of separate houses for them, which reduced overall house size (also see Epperson 1999, 2001). However, this argument overlooks another important component of late-seventeenth-century colonial society in the Chesapeake. Outlined by Morgan (1975) and Jordan (1979), the period after 1660 saw the rise to prominence of the first generation of native-born, property owning white men. Rather than accumulating capital through servitude, as did many of their fathers, these men inherited it. So, even as the demands of white indentured labor challenged the consolidation of an elite hegemony, a new generation of masters were in a position to subvert the challenge through the replacement of white labor with more expensive enslaved Africans. This pattern was widely accepted, resulting in a rapid growth in the population of people of African descent in the Chesapeake between 1680 and 1720 (Kulikoff 1986). This strategy not only resolved a crisis in labor, but also redefined the social order by creating a foundational distinction defined simultaneously by race *and* class. The greater number of colonoware vessels during this period is therefore evidence of such a transformation, since within the new slave-based system of production, colonoware vessels identify the emergence of a racially framed social distinction that segregated blacks and whites both

Figure 7.1. Vessel on right is a Virginia-made colonoware copy in the style of the delft English-made vessel on the left (courtesy of the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, image # 1959-DW-0703-8).

physically and—as the labor force was enslaved and marked by race— categorically as well (Epperson 1990, 1999, 2001).

The racist culture that subsequently emerged illustrates a reconsolidation of the dominant cultural order in response to a rupture in the system brought about by a tremor of unrest in the labor force. Nevertheless, this was only the first of a series of ruptures relevant to the emergence of African America. A subsequent development may be identified in the vessel forms of Virginia's colonoware pots. Africans in Virginia were subjected to white domination longer and under different conditions than in other Southern colonies, and Virginia's colonoware vessels were often made in forms resembling those from Europe (see Figure 7.1). The presence or absence of these "copy" vessels is usually attributed to the level of interaction among whites, blacks, and Native Americans (for example, see Ferguson 1992, Deetz 1994, Mouer et al. 1999). The story goes that the greater the number of "copy" vessels, the more intensive and long-term the "contact" between people of different racial and ethnic backgrounds was. This thinking, however, reduces the dynamic complexities of colonialism to a problematic factor of the relative acquaintance of consumers with producer populations. The production of colonoware vessels may in fact have been part of a contentious and ongoing cultural process of domination and resistance. Rather than simply reproducing familiar forms, Africans in Virginia were likely attempting to assert a position *within* mainstream society and to challenge the racial foundations of slavery that produced their supposed exclusion. It was certainly clear to enslaved Africans that Europeans were a different sort of people, based both on their constructed

superior status and their different cultural habits. For captive Africans to try to be more like their masters—an assertion powerfully embodied by the production and use of similar vessel styles, styles that were indeed different from those that African-born persons would have known—may have been a way to acquire some of the substance and practice of what Europeans were and thereby close the gap that both differentiated and subordinated Africans in colonial American society. From the dominant perspective, however, this practice identified yet another rupture within the system and produced new reactions that further removed blacks from the white-dominated society, such as the invention of the segregated slave quarter and other institutional racist practices that further alienated captive people from the products of their labor and the society in which they lived.

Autonomy Through Critique: A Culture of Resistance in African American Religion

A dominant thread in African diaspora archaeology asserts that the archaeological record is valuable for the unique information it provides about the persistence, resilience, and syncretic survival of African cultural practices in the African American diaspora. The implication is that by maintaining African culture and belief, captive people and their descendents established an autonomous position that supported their communities and secured their identities despite the dehumanization, oppression, and violence of enslavement and racism. Autonomy may in fact have been the ultimate goal for Maroons and other American self-emancipated and free black communities (see Deetz 1996, Leone et al. 2005, LaRoche 2004, Geismar 1982, Weik 2004, 2007), but the survival of African beliefs is not sufficient evidence to establish that autonomy was either realized or even a desired end for the many held captive or confined to living in similarly white-dominated contexts like towns and cities. In fact, it is far more reasonable in these integrated settings that cultural critique, or the active negotiation and rejection of racist oppression, would have been a more successful resistance strategy. Considering material evidence of African American religious expressions in these settings, I believe archaeologists have defined many activities, artifacts, and features of African American historical material culture that assert a powerful critique of the underlying principles of the dominant order, an order that relied on capital-

ist theorizations of materiality, labor, and personhood to establish white supremacy in the face of a diverse social world.

The first part of this argument draws from compelling studies that establish that black and white colonial communities overlapped and interacted more than they diverged (for example, see Sobel 1987). In material culture studies, this understanding is pronounced by Dell Upton (1988, 1990), who shows that early Virginia landscapes bear the marks of and intersections between both white and black community structures. Upton opposes these landscapes as articulated and informal constructions of space. The white gentry, backed by the resources and authority of the colonial state, created a far-reaching landscape in which their "houses, churches, courthouses, and other public structures, as well as the roads and ways which linked them, were conceived as an articulated spatial network" (Upton, 1990: 72). It seemed as if, over the whole of space, whites established a consistent order that marked their dominion. Nevertheless, within this network, certain spaces were occupied and controlled by enslaved Africans, and accordingly reflected their agency. Near to and inside their houses, around plantation service buildings, and in the fields, woods, and waterways, numerous spaces were under African control. Whites rarely ventured into these spaces, other than to visit the quarters and barns in order to reassert their authority through expressions of oppression and violence, including whippings and rape. Especially in the interstitial spaces between plantations, captive people found the resources to undermine the control of the articulated white landscape. Albert Raboteau records, for example, that African Americans often had "a private praying ground, located in thickets, woods, bushes, or at a particular tree" where they could go to engage the spirits (Raboteau 1995: 154, also see Gundaker 1998, Edwards 1998). Exploring the material remains of activities that occurred in these African spaces allows us to understand how the enslaved constructed a sense of belonging in their own communities, and especially the ways in which these communities developed around conceptualizations that criticized the racist foundations of the larger plantation dominion.

The current archaeological depiction of African American religious expression has cited artifacts representative of a presumably African-derived spiritualism, in which forces assumed to be static by the dominant white ideology were instead taken to be quite active. Here I refer to
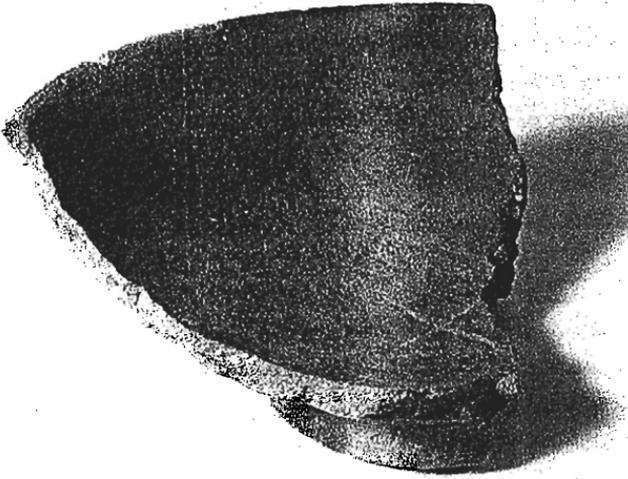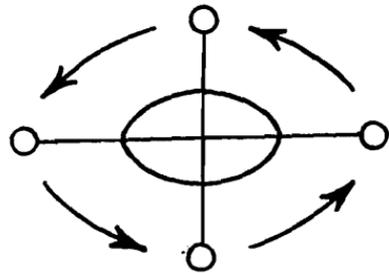
Figure 7.2. Incised colonoware bowl alongside a stylized image of the Bakongo cosmogram. The marked vessel is a representation of the cosmogram used in an African-derived boundary-crossing ritual (photograph by Leland Ferguson; drawing by Ross Rava after Thompson 1983: 109).

interpretations of 'X' marks on colonoware vessels and architecture, root cellars/subfloor pits, beads, crystals, coins, nails, animal bones, crab claws, turtle shells, mirrors, marine shells (especially cowries), rings, gaming pieces, charms (such as *figas*), as well as carefully selected and reworked glass, stone, and ceramic sherds (for example, see Blakey and Rankin-Hill 2004, Brown and Cooper 1990, Brown 1994, 2001, Chan 2007, Coplin and Matthews 2007, Emerson 1999, Fenell 2007, Ferguson 1992, 1999, Jones 2000, Leone 2005, Leone and Fry 1999, Leone et al. 2005, Logan et al. 1992, McKee 1992, Orser 1994, 1998, Perry et al. 2006, Russell 1997, Samford 2007, Singleton 1995, Stine et al. 1996, Wilkie 1995, 1997, 2000, Woodruff et al. 2007, Yentsch 1992, Young 1997).

Taken as a whole, these many examples comment on a general process of transcending boundaries in both material and ideological senses (Franklin and McKee 2004). For example, Ferguson suggests that incised

'X' marks on colonoware vessels reproduce a Bakongo cosmogram (1992, 1999) (see Figure 7.2). Many of the marked vessels were found by divers in rivers adjacent to large plantations, suggesting that their use involved ritually pushing these vessels across the boundary between land and water, which in Bakongo belief is interpreted as moving from the material world of the living to the spiritual world of the ancestors. Stine et al. similarly show that blue beads are commonly associated with African American sites (1996). They suggest that the color blue, which represented the sky and thus heaven, was used by African Americans in different media, such as house paint and decorative beads, to ward off ghosts and malevolent spirits. Yet another example comes from caches of materials unearthed in spaces formerly occupied by captive African people, which often included crystals and other reflective stones, glass, and ceramics, pierced coins, discs, and buttons, bent pins and nails, beads, doll parts, and other materials (see Figure 7.3) (see discussions in Brown 2001, Leone 2005). These caches are interpreted as spirit bundles, or *minkisi,* that were placed in the ground or in enclosed spaces, especially near such spiritually charged liminal areas as hearths, doors, stairs, pipes, and northeast corners. *Minkisi* were placed to protect the living from powerful spirits that may have been directed by others to cause harm. Mark Leone argues that *minkisi* were also used "to keep dangerous, burdensome, people away and in their place. It was not passive; it was aggressively about wishes to kill, drive crazy, and cause sickness and harm" (2005: 231). He concludes that *minkisi* were a form of symbolic violence reflecting an effort by captive people to control the actions of their masters, if not do them outright harm.

Piercing boundaries was thought to allow communication between separate worlds and extended the control of living people into the spirit realm of the ancestors. The most common interpretation of these efforts argues that these are examples of the unique development of African American culture during slavery as a creolized, African-derived society (Mintz and Price 1992, Gundaker 1998). Seeking to regain the control over their lives denied them by slavery, so such an argument goes, captive people embraced their heritage of African spirituality. To date, however, there has been too little emphasis on the American context, for most scholars have described these practices as continuations and permutations of African traditions (Holloway 1990). Reconnecting these practices to the African American destabilization of institutional racism is vital.
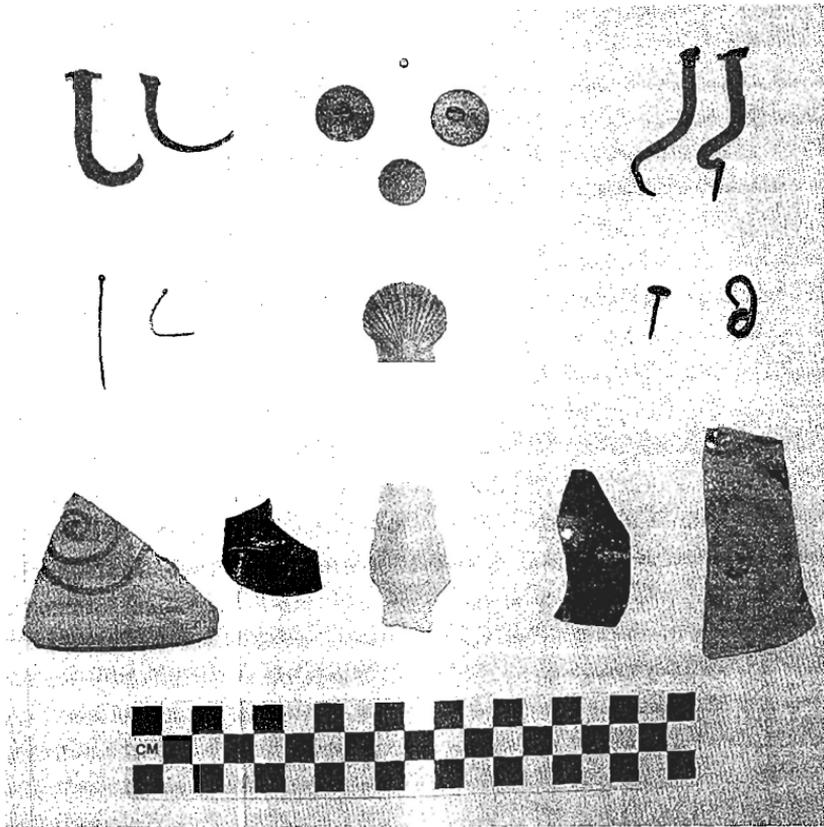
Figure 7.3. Artifacts constituting a *minkisi* bundle recovered from a cache found under the floor at the top of the basement staircase at the Latting's Hundred site in Huntington, New York (courtesy of Reginald Metcalf, photograph by Jenna Coplin).

The boundaries crossed were constructed in an African American belief system that spiritually animated physical features of the environment such as land and water. On the one hand, then, these practices describe a distinct cultural order, one that whites commonly asserted was filled with superstition and fear (Wilkie 1995: 140). However, these same physical features also acted, albeit in different and often unrecognized ways, to organize and determine the dominant white cultural order. Land, water, color, coins, stones, nails, shells, and bowls functioned as mute commodities in capitalist culture. Their purpose was found in use and the exchange value they held in the market. Any other enhanced meanings or

enchantments were—through a cultural separation of the material from the spiritual—rejected, condensed, or lost. The meanings applied to these objects by African Americans, however, provide evidence that more than their utilitarian or exchange values were at play and, in their association with symbolic and spiritual power, that these meanings disturbed the dominant discourse and, by extension, arguably challenged the hegemony of the capitalist order.

The same signification process applies even more substantially to captive Africans themselves, who, being enslaved, were commodified human beings. Captive people faced a powerful contradiction between their existence as persons and members of communities and their existence as commodities or objects that were comparable and severable from all others. This contradiction was obviously felt every day inasmuch as captive people were aware that at any time they might be sold, sundering their ties with home, family, friends, and familiar settings and communities.

Challenging a growing pattern of commodification, or the stripping of any meaning from objects beyond their exchange value in American culture, the practice of animating persons and objects with spiritual power formed a community of believers who together stood against the premise of their enslavement. In these practices, captive people asserted their personhood, and they animated and re-signified the spaces and objects that lay at the root of the capitalist construction of reality. If a property is embodied by sprits, then it is not solely a real estate investment; if a bowl can carry the wishes of the living to the spirits of the dead, then it is not merely a product for the market; if a nail can be bent to reflect the order of the cosmos, then it is not simply a tool for fastening boards; if a person can construct reality, then he or she is not just a laboring body. Such significations certainly did not stop capitalism, but they did establish for African diaspora communities—those most debased by capitalism's social construction of reality—that the system of their oppression rested on arbitrary and challengeable categorizations.

Crossing boundaries by venturing into forests and waterways and animating supposedly static objects like earth, plants, water, and the sky ultimately accomplished two things. It established that the difference resulting from racism could be the creation of both black and white agency, in the sense that it was the creativity of Africans in America who found ways to practice sustainable alternatives to dominant sensibilities. Having failed

in any attempt to be like their masters, I argue that Africans in America sought to be increasingly *unlike* them, and therefore they challenged the claims to commonality and the universality of humanity that served as a key foundation to the white domination of a racist and capitalist society. If Africans were categorically different and incomparable *on their own terms*, then white supremacist arguments about their inferiority were invalidated. Second, these activities, as they challenged the separations of the white cultural order, critiqued and undermined the forces which established and relied on those separations. Turning everyday commodities into fetishes that could protect as well as do harm at the very least destabilized assumptions that otherwise made racism and the capitalist exploitation of labor seem natural and inevitable.

Conversion and the Archaeology of African American Christianity

An examination of African American religion is not complete without a consideration of Christianity, the faith that the vast majority of the African diaspora population in the United States came to embrace and continues to practice. Historical archaeologists have spent very little effort thus far researching the history and culture of African American Christianity. With no exceptions that I know of, descriptions of artifacts with Christian associations are accepted either as products of assimilated Christian converts or as evidence of syncretic Afro-Christian practices that deployed Christian artifacts in African-based contexts. An example of the former is found in Orser's consideration of an African American man buried in New Orleans around 1800, who was found with a rosary and two silver Christian medallions (1994: 38). This individual also had modified teeth: "purposefully notched first mandibular incisors." The dental modification is interpreted as evidence that the person was African-born, while the rosary is interpreted to mean that "he had accepted Christianity." Lacking in this assessment is a contextual appreciation for the malleability of Catholicism in African American contexts. Various African American religions across the hemisphere, such as Santería, Candomblé, and vodou—a religion known to be practiced in New Orleans—employ Christian symbolism to express belief. For example, in vodou, African spirits and gods were disguised as Catholic saints, allowing believers to appear Christian while preserving the African traditions of the orisha (Anderson 2005). There is no way to know for sure whether the man with the rosary practiced

Christianity, vodou, or even something else. But it is important not to simply interpret the recovery of Christian objects as a sign of Christian assimilation.

Still, when done hastily, the interpretation of Christian artifacts as syncretic is also problematic. Wilkie, for example, suggests that finding "a nativity scene porcelain figure head, a brass rosary medal, and a brass Christ's head medal" in the late-nineteenth-century assemblage of Silvia Freeman, an African American servant at Oakley Plantation in Louisiana, is "not surprising when one considers the similarities between these medals and traditional African charms" (1995: 142). This pattern of explaining findings in the United States in relation to Africa is obviously tempting for archaeologists (see Ferguson 1992, Emerson 1999, Leone 2005, as well as my own discussion above), and it is often supported by compelling evidence. However, we need also to be careful not to do a historical disservice to those who may very well have embraced Christianity fully, even to the extent of debasing African practices. We need not see, in other words, that African American conversion to Christianity is evidence of a negative process of assimilation or acculturation. Why is it that African Americans must maintain their African heritage in order to be recognized as resisting slavery and racism? Might not their conversion to the religion of their masters, especially given its tenets of forgiveness, salvation, redemption, and equality before Christ, be a powerful critique of those who oppressed, condemned, and despised Africans because of their supposedly unredeemable state?

One such voice that is now under archaeological investigation is the captive African Jupiter Hammon (Coplin and Matthews 2007). Hammon, born in 1711 and owned by the Lloyd family on Long Island, New York, lived in a manner atypical for a slave. Despite being enslaved, he was educated, learned to read and write, and managed at least some of his own business affairs as well as some of those of the Lloyd family (Ransom 1970, O'Neale 1993). Hammon was also one of the first captive Africans to be published (see Figure 7.4). His known writings consist of four poems and three works of prose that speak to other captive Africans and clearly and openly challenge the injustices of slavery. It is likely that these texts were widely known in the region, as Hammon is thought to have been a preacher and had his work published in Long Island, New York City, and Hartford, Connecticut. Hammon's writings are devoutly Christian. It is

A N

Evening THOUGHT.

SALVATION BY *CHRIST*,

WITH

PENETENTIAL CRIES:

Compofed by Jupiter Hammon, a Negro belonging to Mr Lloyd, of Queen's-
Village, on Long-Ifland, the 25th of December, 1760.

SALVATION comes by Jefus Chrift alone,
   The only Son of God ;
Redemption now to every one,
   That love his holy Word.
Dear Jefus we would fly to Thee,
   And leave off every Sin,
Thy tender Mercy well agree ;
   Salvation from our King.
Salvation comes now from the Lord,
   Our victorious King ;
His holy Name be well ador'd,
   Salvation furely bring.
Dear Jefus give thy Spirit now,
   Thy Grace to every Nation,
That han't the Lord to whom we bow,
   The Author of Salvation.
Dear Jefus unto Thee we cry,
   Give us thy Preparation ;
Turn not away thy tender Eye ;
   We feek thy true Salvation.
Salvation comes from God we know,
   The true and only One ;
It's well agreed and certain true,
   He gave his only Son.
Lord hear our penetential Cry :
   Salvation from above ;
It is the Lord that doth fupply,
   With his Redeeming Love.
Dear Jefus by thy precious Blood,
   The World Redemption have :
Salvation comes now from the Lord,
   He being thy captive Slave.
Dear Jefus let the Nations cry,
   And all the People fay,
Salvation comes from Chrift on high,
   Hafte on Tribunal Day.
We cry as Sinners to the Lord,
   Salvation to obtain ;
It is firmly fixt his holy Word,
   Ye fhall not cry in vain.
Dear Jefus unto Thee we cry,
   And make our Lamentation :
O let our Prayers afcend on high ;
   We felt thy Salvation.

Lord turn our dark benighted Souls ;
   Give us a true Motion,
And let the Hearts of all the World,
   Make Chrift their Salvation.
Ten Thoufand Angels cry to Thee,
   Yea louder than the Ocean.
Thou art the Lord, we plainly fee ;
   Thou art the true Salvation.
Now is the Day, excepted Time ;
   The Day of Salvation ;
Increafe your Faith, do not repine :
   Awake ye every Nation.
Lord unto whom now fhall we go,
   Or feek a fafe Abode ;
Thou haft the Word Salvation too
   The only Son of God.
Ho ! every one that hunger hath,
   Or pineth after me,
Salvation be thy leading Staff,
   To fet the Sinner free.
Dear Jefus unto Thee we fly ;
   Depart, depart from Sin,
Salvation doth at length fupply,
   The Glory of our King.
Come ye Bleffed of the Lord,
   Salvation gently given ;
O turn your Hearts, accept the Word,
   Your Souls are fit for Heaven.
Dear Jefus we now turn to Thee,
   Salvation to obtain ;
Our Hearts and Souls do meet again,
   To magnify thy Name.
Come holy Spirit, Heavenly Dove,
   The Object of our Care ;
Salvation doth increafe our Love ;
   Our Hearts hath felt thy fear.
Now Glory be to God on High,
   Salvation high and low ;
And thus the Soul on Chrift rely,
   To Heaven furely go.
Come Bleffed Jefus, Heavenly Dove,
   Accept Repentance here ;
Salvation give, with tender Love ;
   Let us with Angels fhare.

F I N I S.

Figure 7.4. *An evening thought: Salvation By Christ, with penitential cries*, a poem by
Jupiter Hammon, December 25, 1760, original broadside printing (courtesy of the New
York Historical Society Broadsides SY1760 no. 2).

generally accepted that he was influenced by the messages of Great Awakening preachers who came to Long Island during his young adulthood in the 1730s and 1740s. These Evangelicals spoke about conversion in shining terms, and they promised essentially all that one can imagine captive people longed for: salvation, redemption, forgiveness, and the validation of a personal faith that did not require an intermediary such as a priest, pope, or master for believers to receive the gifts of God.

Hammon's writings consistently refer to conversion as a route to freedom. Becoming "new creatures," being born again, and being saved are regularly referenced, and he makes note that with conversion captive people, "black as we are, despised as we be" (in Ransom 1970: 99), are presented with an opportunity to undo the system of their oppression. As he wrote in "An Evening's Improvement," "if we are slaves, it is by the permission of God; if we are free, it must be by the power of the Most High God," and also, citing John 8:36 in *A Winter Piece,* "if the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed." In these and many other passages he counsels his enslaved "brethren" that they may replace their unjust master's authority and its "daily physical, psychological, and emotional attacks against one's dignity as a person" with the redeeming authority and love of Jesus Christ (Raboteau 1995: 157). This strategy clearly undermines the master's authority by employing the very Christian hierarchy and belief system that masters supposedly adhered to and often perverted to justify the enslavement of African people.

Historian Albert Raboteau argues that conversion should be set among the basic characteristics of black religion outlined by W.E.B. DuBois (1995: 152–65). In his chapter "Of the Faith of Our Fathers" in *The Souls of Black Folk,* DuBois identified "the preacher, the sorrow songs, and the 'frenzy' or ecstasy" (Dubois 1994, in Raboteau 1995: 152). None of these aspects of the American black church are possible without conversion. However, conversion is not simply an acceptance of faith or a change of behavior, it is *"metanoia,* a change of heart, a transformation in consciousness" (Raboteau 1995: 152). Conversion, furthermore, is an experience involving visions, exuberance, speaking in tongues, and other afflictions that are interpreted usually as the gift of God.

Two points explain how conversion was an anticapitalist act of resistance. First, the conversion experience is the basis of a community of believers. Church membership often required conversion. Revivals and

"experience meetings" allowed members to share their stories, which are marked by the following common theme: prior to conversion, the convert admits, they were devoted to the kind of earthly temptations with which Satan attempted to lure Christ. Being touched by God, receiving his gift, converts became unified with Christ. Conversion, therefore, is based in a very personal history and, inasmuch as this was a community of believers, a social history as well. It was a history by which the debased experience of slavery and racism could be, in a sense, instantly overcome through engagement with supportive, communal experiences quite at odds with the alienated individualism espoused by capitalist culture. The second point is that the freedom which Hammon and so many others discussed was considered a gift. It was not something that could be purchased or acquired through direct exchange. It came as the result of sacrifice and an understanding of the mutuality of experience, and it came with an expectation of reciprocity that ultimately bound communities together and persons to God. The thematic of the gift works directly against the priority of the commodity in capitalist culture, which is assessed solely by its value in the market, a value that may be abstracted from the social relations and histories that brought the object about and imbued it with meaning. By contrast, gifts are essentially embodiments of these very relationships and histories (Hyde 1983, Matthews 2001).

DuBois recognized this gift and its political implications. He concludes his most famous work, *The Souls of Black Folk*, with a discussion highlighting the three gifts of African Americans to the United States, including the gift of story and song, the gift of sweat and brawn, and the gift of the Spirit. The third is described this way:

> out of the nation's heart we have called all that was best to throttle and subdue all that was worst; fire and blood, prayer and sacrifice, have billowed over this people, and they have found peace only in the altars of the God of Right. Nor has our gift of the Spirit been merely passive. Actively we have woven ourselves with the very warp and woof of this nation,—we fought their battles, shared their sorrow, mingled our blood with theirs, and generation after generation have pleaded with a headstrong, careless people to despise not Justice, Mercy, and Truth, lest the nation be smitten with a curse. (1994: 187)

These gifts, especially that of African American spiritual fortitude in the face of extreme racist violence and oppression, embodied the essence of the United States: "Would America be America without her Negro people?" (DuBois 1994: 187).

How may this understanding of the gift of the Spirit be applied in archaeology? Since I do not know of any archaeological studies of African American Christianity, I turn to Raboteau to provide an example from James Baldwin's novel *Go Tell It on the Mountain* to suggest what we might look for. Told to clean the living room in his Pentecostal family's home, John Grimes, the novel's teenage protagonist, discovers an arrangement of objects on the mirrored mantelpiece which "held, in brave confusion, photographs, greeting cards, flowered mottoes, two silver candlesticks that held no candles, and a green serpent poised to strike" (cited in Raboteau 1995: 158). These materials reveal and contextualize a history. Greeting cards identify friends and events, photographs show the people as they are, and mottoes present the words of belief. It is the candlesticks and the serpent, however, that clarify the image. Candlesticks provide light, while the serpent threatens death, or, more specifically, the denial of "who we are" that only comes from the light of knowing our history and that we have survived it. Raboteau cites a powerful passage from another of Baldwin's works, *The Fire Next Time*, to explain: "people who cannot suffer can never grow up, can never discover who they are. That man who is forced each day to snatch his manhood, his identity, out of the fire of human cruelty that rages to destroy it knows . . . something about himself and human life that no school on earth—and, indeed, no church—can teach. He achieves his own authority, and that is unshakable" (1995: 165). The strict opposition of salvation and the serpent expresses this philosophy in material symbols, leaving no room for ambivalence. The philosophy is based on a strict commitment to the victory and loss that characterized the lives of those who struggled and overcame.

In this perspective, it takes the persistent presence of the danger of the serpent, set in opposition to a community's consciousness of its history, for a marginal population to survive and produce the persons and resources they need to continue. I think archaeologists can find these remains. The candlesticks are already material, and the serpent is depicted here as a statue, but it is also possible that we will find various other types of symbolic artifacts once we carefully analyze African American–produced

assemblages for patterns of opposition that derive from antiracist and anticapitalist theorizations of the African American social world. While this process requires patience and conjecture, it is vital that we undertake it, for "America has much to learn from the experience of her black citizens" (Baldwin, cited in Raboteau 1995: 164), a history that can offer great beauty but which requires archaeological study to be fully recovered.

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