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Lonely Islands: Culture, Community, and Poverty in Archaeological Perspective

ABSTRACT

The study of poverty in historical archaeology has not yet developed a productive engagement with the complex political economy of impoverishment. A primary concern with culture and representation has instead supported the production of often essentialized subjects who ultimately mirror the problematic foundations of the "culture of poverty" thesis. This paper critiques the processes of constructing impoverished subjects and considers the notion of a "poverty of culture" as a relational position for analysis. Working in close collaboration with members of an impoverished African American community in Setauket, New York, alternative readings of poverty, culture, heritage, and archaeology are discussed. These alternatives serve as the foundations of a community-driven project informed by indigenous meanings and interests in the archaeological past in order to challenge the marginalization of this part of the broader local community.

Introduction

> One hundred years later, the Negro still is not free. One hundred years later, the life of the Negro is still sadly crippled by the manacles of segregation and the chains of discrimination. One hundred years later, the Negro lives on a lonely island of poverty in the midst of a vast ocean of material prosperity. One hundred years later, the Negro is still languished in the corners of American society and finds himself an exile in his own land.
> — Martin Luther King, Jr.

These powerful words from Martin Luther King's famous 1963 "I have a dream" speech critique the historical connections between race and poverty that positioned African Americans, even 100 years after emancipation, at the margins of American society. King depicts a landscape of African American poverty located not at the edge of America but within its core, as a series of scattered and lonely islands surrounded by a white world of prosperity. King invokes here the predominantly black urban centers, rural backwaters, and small towns that suffer in isolation and local oppression. He also establishes that the strategy of segregation was one of a simultaneous inclusion and exclusion such that black communities remained dependent on their white neighbors but were ignored in mainstream characterizations of the larger community. This particular burden of racism, poverty, and exploitation, of being contained and ignored, describes the legacies of slavery and legal segregation in the United States and underwrites a dominant African American standpoint today (Shelby 2005). The question now is, How can this complex conceptualization of the African American past—one that is not really in the past since it survives in the way black social action remains overdetermined and constrained by race and marginality (Trouillot 1995; Blight 2006)—inform new historical research? Is there a way, moreover, for historians, archaeologists, and descendents to be not only aware of America's distinct brand of racial injustice, but to be informed by indigenous critiques that have long worked to challenge and overcome oppressive social and political structures that reject and ignore African America? In the spirit of antiracist activism, is there not a way to regard the segregation and isolation of black communities as, in part, an artifact of a powerful representation and, thus, to tell more contextualized and integrated stories that position black communities as agents within the neighborhoods, regions, and networks to which they contributed and that fostered their social consciousness? The specific problem in this article is how to put these simultaneous legacies of marginality and resistance to work in the discovery and proliferation of African American archaeologies that can make sense of *and* usefully address local cultural heritage and community impoverishment as integrated processes themselves.

My focus is on explicating the relationship between poverty and cultural heritage in the way archaeological sites and the communities connected to them in Setauket, New York, should be imagined. This investigation sheds assumptions and stereotypes of black history to examine better the diversity of social strategies and struggles that African Americans in Setauket have faced

and incorporate now into who and what they think their community is. This effort requires a review of several key ideas on the connections between poverty and a diverse cultural heritage that have played out locally and beyond, and a discussion about how archaeology fits into this dialogue. The result is the identification of several issues and agendas that integrate poverty and impoverished people within local history through the alternative perspectives presented by archaeology. The major source of information in this paper is derived from a collaboration between the Center for Public Archaeology at Hofstra University and the Higher Ground Inter-Cultural and Heritage Association, Inc., an African American community-based preservation organization in Setauket, New York.

This paper critiques standard approaches to public interest in the archaeological past, which often dehistoricize communities and the processes of collaboration. I call for examining how collaborating communities and the historical political economies that structure community heritage are operationalized on the ground. In modern world archaeology (Orser 1996, this volume), an essential starting point is to look at how poverty and wealth mutually construct persons and places in the modern landscapes that make up a project. Notably, archaeological sites traditionally come to be known and evaluated through distinct mechanisms of power and authority related to local class structures. Who in a locality knows about archaeology and what purposes archaeology can serve are highly flexible, and archaeology does not and need not remain the same in different peoples' hands (Leone 2005; Matthews 2008; Pyburn 2008). Archaeologists also need to consider how communities have formed and changed through local historical dynamics of poverty and wealth. Modern economic standings do not always mirror those in the past, though legacies of impoverishment frequently impact how communities come to be structured today. These interrogations of the past and present contexts of wealth and poverty aim to know better how archaeologists and communities find common ground and understanding, and conversely reveal how collaborations can also obscure and exclude dynamic aspects of community history hidden behind presumably static notions of identity such as race and class. Community collaborations in archaeology demand a solid understanding of the

history of poverty and wealth that gave rise to communities with which we can work today. Different historical conditions would have produced different community dynamics now and, thus, changed with whom we would be able to work and do research. More direct to archaeology, it is not uncommon for modern minority communities to desire new ways to conceptualize themselves that draw from different evidence and speak to different goals than those found in traditional histories. Aspects of archaeology can develop such alternatives, but we should know more about why these alternatives are in demand.

The need for novel critical perspectives in community archaeology responds to a call from many archaeologists to make the results of community-based research useful. This question of relevance, a concern voiced by contributors to many recent volumes in "public," "collaborative," and "ethnographic" archaeology (Shackel and Chambers 2004; Little and Shackel 2007; Silverman and Ruggles 2007; Castañeda and Matthews 2008; Colwell-Chanthaphonh and Ferguson 2008; Sabloff 2008; Matthews 2009; Mortenson and Hollowell 2009; Nassaney and Levine 2009) includes an interest in developing a better grasp of how we construct subjects in archaeological study. The goal in this paper is to make local relationships between poverty and wealth more visible and the impact of modern political economic structures on "the poor" better understood. This approach, however, returns to those about whom I am actually writing. Following an antiracist agenda, it is imperative to do more than associate minorities with poverty. Rather, the emphasis is on how the struggles of being impoverished cultivate a distinct desire for recognition and inclusion within the larger community, as well as an understanding of the struggles and sacrifice that working to gain recognition has historically *and* materially involved. So, while the minority African American community in Setauket is at the center of this article, I am clearly also writing about the larger community, which has benefited from a particular history of exclusion and segregation. The point is that in writing about poverty the opportunity to integrate minority and mainstream worlds becomes apparent. At stake in this approach, however, is "culture" and the political contradictions of "having a culture" (Handler 1985) that being a minority group within a larger community dictates. So, in

the following, I closely read key aspects of the Setauket African American community's history in reference to conversations with a leading voice from the community about what an archaeology of his community's poverty should be. In particular, the discussion describes the effort to explain how archaeology can be useful to what is perceived as a poverty of culture in his community. Ultimately, the goal is to contextualize an archaeological approach to poverty in the critical terms outlined by community members and their own historical conceptualizations of their place. A detailed discussion of the project in Setauket follows a consideration of key critiques of modern poverty research that situate my approach to poverty, culture, and heritage in Setauket in more explicit terms.

Poverty, Culture, and Difference
in African America

Recent critiques of global-poverty research point to a tendency to consider the qualities and measures that constitute "poor" people and communities rather than the way "the poor" are structured and defined by the conditions and causes of poverty. Who the poor are, rather than how people become impoverished, overwhelms the literature. A useful view, relevant to this article, is the critique of a post–civil rights movement perspective on race in the United States, a perspective that blurs issues of class and culture in a problematic way. The post–civil rights movement stance denies contemporary connections between race and poverty in favor of a celebration of the presumed achievement of racial equality in America since the 1960s. The idea is that African Americans, as a group, are no longer poor, and they enjoy a rich and distinct cultural heritage, once, but no longer, suppressed by racism. Highlighting some problematic dynamics of this perspective, Kevin Kruse (2008:26) observes:

> [T]his understanding of the civil rights movement as a struggle against racism alone has been so widely accepted because it flatters our sense of ourselves. It assures us in soothing tones that all the movement's concerns have been addressed, all the problems solved, all the wrongs righted. The American landscape is no longer scarred by the physical markers of racial segregation, such as separate drinking fountains or crudely divided public spaces. The most obvious and egregious examples of racial subjugation have been

likewise written out of our public laws and national consciousness. In the final reckoning the civil rights movement has been simplified in American memory to little more than a morality tale. The martyrs of the movement died for the nation's original sin of racism; as a result, our sin has been washed away.

A post–civil rights standpoint forefronts visible signs of racial equality on the American landscape, such as unmarked water fountains and a growing black middle class, to argue for cultivating a new approach to social action beyond the consideration of race. Critics argue, however, that the post–civil rights agenda protects the standpoint of formerly overt racist perspectives by eliding discussion of poverty and class, which are more difficult to identify than color and culture in the public sphere.

Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (2003) has introduced the concept of "racism without racists" and a "color blind ideology" to describe the action of whites privileged enough to be unaware of their racial advantages (Wise 2004; Hartigan 2005; Ford 2008). Bonilla-Silva explains that a color-blind ideology is believed to be just because it allows individuals to institute nonracist practices that are defined in large part by their distance from the past, where racism was believed to be an artifact of an ignorance that defined previous eras. The claim is that, with modern thinking, all Americans, regardless of color, now have equal access to the benefits of the market and the state. Some post–civil rights activists, in fact, argue that any consideration of race is unjust. Separating the present from a history of racism, however, ignores how slavery and segregation, which disempowered all people of color, restricted economic and cultural opportunities only to those most representative of the presumed American norm, and that the material legacies of racism remain palpable factors in contemporary inequalities (Katznelson 2005; Lipsitz 2006). Critics of the post–civil rights stance highlight that group advantage continues to define the American landscape, as historically derived patterns of wealth and poverty remain sharply cut along racial lines. The civil rights struggle is ongoing and in some ways is more difficult and important than ever (Hall 2005).

The larger point of this critique is that it is within the realms of language and thinking as much as in behavior and action that a color-blind approach supports abuses resulting from simplistic

and hopeful notions that disconnect race and poverty. Inadequate conceptions of the meanings of privilege, poverty, and wealth disable attempts to address the legacies of difference, both discursive and material, that allow the mainstream to regard some as "the Other," including "African Americans" and "the poor," and not to see that white privilege is predicated on the assumptions and positions that allow these constructions to be put into play.

One area in which this problem has been frequently addressed has been in the prominent debate on the relationship between poverty and culture. The "culture of poverty" concept, coined by Oscar Lewis (1966) and popularized by Daniel Moynihan (1965), suggests "the poor," especially poor African Americans, were entrenched in a degraded value system produced by social disorganization stemming from their impoverishment. Lewis and Moynihan cite "defective" social patterns caused by poverty that promote a sense of marginality, helplessness, and a lack of belonging inherited by subsequent generations. Poverty thus creates its own norms and expectations, interpreted here as a "culture" of poverty. The culture of poverty is thus often regarded as a deviant social pathology in need of external treatment. Problems identified include a tendency of "the poor" to live in single-parent households, to gravitate towards parental authoritarianism, to devalue the innocence of childhood, to display an aversion to delayed gratification, and to take no interest in education. Addressing these issues as social and personal defects, culture-of-poverty advocates argue that changing impoverished values will change "poor" people and eventually eliminate poverty.

Strong critiques of the culture-of-poverty approach reject the construction of impoverished people as cultural deviants, citing ample evidence that poverty results from structural inequality and the lack of opportunity, rather than learned behavior. Principal among these critical studies are those led by sociologist William Julius Wilson (1987, 1996). Nevertheless, while Wilson soundly rejects the concepts of the culture of poverty and the idea of a black social pathology, his "underclass thesis" is an equally problematic framework. Wilson considers poverty and the social disorganization of impoverished African Americans as a factor of isolation and unemployment due to systemic factors, most especially

structural racism. Wilson situates the poor as the "black underclass" segment left behind in urban centers in the wake of the social and economic advancement and exodus of others. He cites evidence of the post-1970s suburbanization of the African American middle class and the removal of many of the African American urban community's leading institutions, which had supported the community's natural leaders. Lacking leaders and stable networks of support, social disorganization emerged in the urban centers, evidenced by welfare dependence, unwed mothers, gang violence, and drug abuse. Functioning as the basis of new organizational systems, these forces worked against "natural" community development to enforce poverty's reproduction.

Wilson finds a role for culture in explaining poverty such that the dominant American norms of the two-parent family, regular employment, and community engagement are debased by "ghetto-specific" adaptive strategies that meet needs created by the forces that impoverish specific neighborhoods. Unlike the culture-of-poverty approach, in which the parameters of the culture in question are impoverished communities as discrete entities, Wilson's approach describes the action of individuals located in specific contexts. So, while Moynihan's poor, who inherit a cultural system, would most likely still struggle if their conditions improved, Wilson's "poor" would more than likely find prosperity.

Alternatively, it is also possible to see both of these approaches situated along a problematic continuum of individual victimhood. In the culture-of-poverty approach the victim is a generic member of an impoverished community, while in the underclass thesis it is the members themselves who are impoverished and together create a "poor" community. In neither instance is the community, in what by contrast becomes a radical collective sense, considered. I mean here the idea of communities, rather than individuals, as victims and agents in the making of wealth and poverty.

Considering the community as the body affected by the dynamics of wealth and poverty, recent anthropological research argues that that for both Moynihan and Wilson "the poor [exist] as noncitizens" (Goode and Maskovsky 2001:14). The problem is the reification of "the poor" as a culture, class, or similarly definable group that may be conceptualized, separated, and

contained. In a critical view of the representation of impoverishment through statistics and other "measures," anthropologist Maia Green (2006) suggests this containment, in fact, describes latent middle-class interests more so than factors describing those struggling in poverty. Green observes that poverty is "ultimately politically determined ... that the institutional structures for perceiving poverty become politicized contexts where poverty can be claimed not so much as a problem for [impoverished people], but as an asset by others who stand to gain from the inputs associated with the development relationship" (Green 2006:1,121). She speaks specifically of middle-class professionals who are direct beneficiaries of "contracts, large scale resource transfers, opportunities for employment, travel, study tours," etc. (Green 2006:1,125n18). In other words, the ones most invested in the construction and measurement of the poor, that is, middle-class professionals, are those whose livelihood centers on transforming "knowledge [about the poor] that it is applicable to the rich." The fallout, according to Green, is that "with poverty as a subject, the poor, who by definition lack the resources and entitlements to reframe the terms of engagement, become objects of study" rather than persons or collectives capable of understanding and addressing their own conditions (Green 2006:1,113).

An alternative approach is to look at the process of impoverishment within the overarching social system of meaning that both defines "the poor" and connects impoverished people to others in their communities through ongoing political economic relations. Poverty, in this light, is the specific outcome of specific historical social relations that can be defined and addressed. This is the goal of the approach being developed here. Following Green, archaeologists need to consider why the middle class labors to study poverty to understand better how even the construction of poverty is a class-based group dynamic. Certainly, some middle-class interest in poverty is driven by a fear of impoverishment endemic to the class. This fear is intensified by dominant middle-class constructions of impoverishment, which increasingly drive perceptions of the poor as victims of their own bad decisions and moral failings, a foundation of the color-blind ideology. Self-reliance, however, as well as notions of both upward and downward mobility are best

described as middle-class values, which also exhibit a tendency to depoliticize poverty and deny that class relations privilege the position that middle-class people hold in society. Thus, as the construction of poverty by middle-class research professionals proceeds, ongoing collective actions by both the wealthy and the poor in the making and retaining of wealth and privilege in given social contexts remain invisible. In order to make poverty visible we should alternatively follow the lead of anthropologists Judith Goode and Jeff Maskovsky (2001:17), who conclude "that poverty is a direct outgrowth of uneven capitalist development; that the meanings, practices, and identities of those who are impoverished vary across geography, history, and multiple axes of difference; and that poor people engage in a number of collective and individual strategies that are designed not only to survive the conditions of poverty but to change them."

From this anthropological perspective of poverty as a class dynamic based in collective action, two approaches may be developed for researching poverty in historical archaeology. These embrace a construction of poverty as a simultaneously discursive and political economic process in which class relations and identities are informed by specific notions of who is poor and the local causes of impoverishment. First, how impoverishment emerged needs to be examined by considering what historical material factors developed to marginalize some sectors of a particular community. Here slavery, racism, and other exploitative practices connected to labor and property relations need to be considered. Second, archaeologists need to look at how impoverishment also developed local labels for "the poor," so that within communities certain qualities came to be regarded as inherent in those pushed to the margins. This is where race and ethnicity become materialized in social practice and class struggles. Connecting these approaches, archaeologists may then embark on an investigation of how the poor not only struggled to improve their conditions but also resisted being associated with and representative of poverty in their larger communities (Mullins 1999, this volume). In defining the origins of poverty, archaeology is an especially apt method, for the materialities of wealth and poverty constitute a vital part of the relations and ideas that structured the separation of people along class lines. Impoverishment may be read in

both landscapes and artifacts that reflect lack of resource access as well as the effort to escape the labels of poverty. Moreover, the materiality of archaeology provides a ready means for illustrating and explaining, in public and community settings, how poverty emerged in varied contexts. Here, especially, I think archaeologists gain a great deal by broadening the interpretive lenses to be informed by communities whose current poverty reflects a struggle with the legacies of local political economic exploitation that continues to constrain their ability to act on their own behalf. In the following, therefore, I illustrate an ongoing effort to bring this "internal" community perspective on impoverishment to light as a way of establishing a foundation for archaeological fieldwork and public engagement with African American impoverishment in Setauket, New York.

A Poverty of Culture

My approach in this community-archaeology case study considers historical patterns of uneven development in the history of Setauket, New York, on Long Island (Figure 1). I underline interconnections between the isolation of people and communities in both wealth and poverty, and the making of key social attributes of the landscape, specifically a racialized exclusion within local private-property relations. I show

that local social relationships have been reified in the same way that "the poor" have been by most researchers, despite significant historical dynamics that continue to challenge racial monoliths in the present day.

This approach derives from conversations with Robert Lewis, who leads the Higher Ground Inter-Cultural and Heritage Association, Inc., and helped to create the Bethel Christian Avenue, Laurel Hill (BCALH) Historic District in Setauket, New York, in 2005 (Figure 2). The historic district is the focus of the current archaeological project. The BCALH Historic District, a half-mile-long stretch of Christian Avenue, is home to members of an historic African American and Afro–Native American community that has lived in this location for multiple generations and in the Setauket area since at least the 18th century, if not from before European colonial settlement. Many in the historic community were enslaved laborers, and the founders of the current community most likely coalesced as a group after their emancipation from slavery in the local area. The purpose of creating the historic district was to preserve the remaining segments of the community fabric of houses and families, which are under the threat of gentrification and removal. In fact, the majority of properties in the historic district are not historic in the traditional sense. Many houses have been removed and replaced
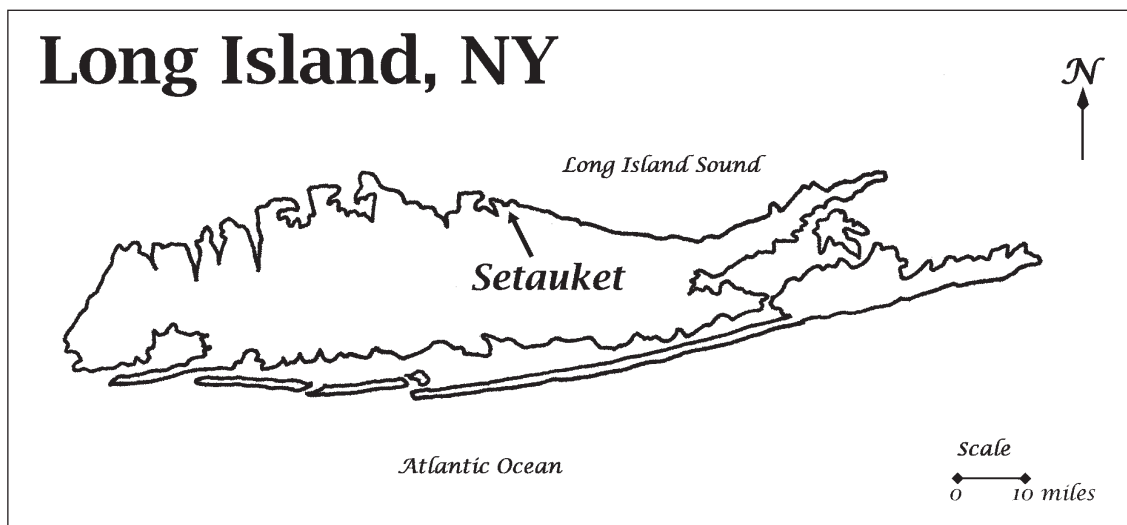

FIGURE 1. Map of Long Island, New York, showing the location of Setauket. (Map by Ross T. Rava, 2011.)

with modernized suburban homes. Mr. Lewis's house fits this description, though it stands on the lot where he grew up. Nevertheless, the district includes the 1908 Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church, home to a congregation dating to the early 1800s, and Laurel Hill Cemetery, resting place for several generations of the area's African American families (Figure 2).

I have been fortunate to participate in a handful of conversations with Mr. Lewis since we first met in 2007. He established early on that he is interested in working together because of the possibility of enhancing the district's recognition through a public archaeology program. He very much wants to use my presence, as an archaeologist, a college professor, and a locally visible public scholar to the community's advantage. In preparing the way to undertake projects together in the district, he and I have learned a great deal from each other about the neighborhood, as well as about local issues of race and culture. The material discussed here comes from conversations

we had between 2007 and 2009 on the subject of poverty in light of some proposed sites to be studied and excavated in upcoming years. African American and Afro–Native American residents in the BCALH Historic District are economically marginal. The historic crisis in the neighborhood stems from recent fast-rising property taxes that have forced the otherwise economically stable heirs of the historic properties to sell their family homes and leave the community. It was the destruction of one of these older community homes by a nonindigenous new owner that prompted Mr. Lewis to initiate the historic designation effort.

To introduce the neighborhood, Mr. Lewis gave me a walking tour of the district. Notably, the road that provides access to many of the indigenous community's homes is not recognized as a street on most maps. Homes along this street were mostly built by the owners in the last century and have been renovated and enlarged in an accretionary fashion. Mr. Lewis remarked that one can see the history of the families in the way the houses developed. He also showed me the small structure built and lived in by his "uncle" Ernest Hart (Figure 3). This small house is 6 by 9 ft., with one room and an attic storage loft. It appeared to me at first as a simple toolshed and, in fact, it may very well have been interpreted as one without input from indigenous members of the community who knew Mr. Hart and remembered how the house was set up (Figure 3).

The Ernest Hart House stands behind the street-front house of Lucy Hart Keyes, Hart's sister, a home now for sale by her nonresident adult grandchildren. It appears Ernest Hart was a transient and likely spent some of his adult life under the care of his sister. Mr. Lewis and other community members remember the house when it was Mr. Hart's home. They explained how it was arranged with a cot and pointed out the bar where he used to hang clothes. The structure still contains a variety of materials, including some large white tin bowls and a gray-bodied stoneware beer stein. Ripe for analysis, these remains attest to Ernest Hart's occupation as well as the abandonment of the house after his death around 1965. This site, along with at least two others along Christian Avenue, will be the focus of archaeological excavation and analysis that will explore the material life of the Christian Avenue community since the 1870s.

FIGURE 2. Signpost for Bethel Christian Avenue, Laurel Hill Historic District. (Photo by author, 2009.)

FIGURE 3. The Ernest Hart House. (Photo by author, 2009.)

I highlight the Ernest Hart House here because its small size epitomized to me the struggles of poverty this community has faced over the past hundred-or-so years. Would Mr. Hart have built something larger if he had had the means? Is this house evidence of a particular struggle with poverty? Yet, when I asked Robert Lewis about poverty, the question posed as something like, what do you think of poverty as a research agenda for the archaeology we are thinking of doing here? he responded in a surprising way. He said it is not poverty that matters on Christian Avenue but culture, and that they do not have any, or least not enough, and that if they are poor it is that they are poor in culture. In a certain way Mr. Lewis is referencing and criticizing the culture-of-poverty argument, a history of which I know he is aware, even as he flips it around to propose instead the idea of a "poverty of culture." He elaborated that his goal in creating the BCALH

Historic District and in speaking with me about doing archaeology in the neighborhood was to address a problem with serious effects: members of his community were increasingly disconnected from their past, and because of this they too easily abandoned their homes on Christian Avenue. He is after the community's roots, which he intends to put to work.

As we continued our conversations, he agreed this process was rampant in the region, since on Long Island private-property interests trump almost all other valuations of the land. His community's history was one, among many others, being erased before our very eyes. He explained, however, that he is looking for the *substance* of culture in the form of objects, traditions, people, and relationships that cannot be so easily denied, let alone erased, by interest in private property. He sees archaeology, in part, as a way to recover items that might allow him to skirt the region's

economic structures in the effort to save the Christian Avenue community. What he wants from archaeology is assistance in the production of a culture that will stand up to the encroachment of outsiders, despite the marginality and poverty of the current community.

This effort, however, is not as simple as identifying sites, excavating their remains, and constructing interpretive conclusions about the community's resilience in the face of power. A part of the cultural discourse in which Lewis is involved is internal to the community. Another member of the community, Theodore Green, who died in 2006, initiated a separate though similar effort at cultural revival along very different lines. Green compiled an extensive genealogy that details the community's descent from the Setalcott tribe, the designation applied to the Native American people who resided in the area at the time of colonial settlement (Mead 2005[sec. 14LI]:9.). Green and others adopted Indian names, his own was Chief Blue Medicine, and constructed a story of Setalcott participation in local history. This includes a story of Setalcott participation in the Underground Railroad in which members sheltered runaways and crafted coded quilts. Not just an uplifting (though tenuously documented) history, this story establishes the Setalcott as historical peers of their better-known, wealthy, and respected 19th-century abolitionist Quaker neighbors who have a dominant role in local history. The Underground Railroad story also created a role for a Setalcott woman in a local play entitled: *Running Scared, Running Free*, which bolsters the local standing of descendant Setalcott, as it is now performed for local school children each year.

In another conversation, I asked Mr. Lewis about the community's Setalcott heritage. While he acknowledges it, his feelings are best described as frustration. He elects to be identified as "Afro-American." While I do not know the nature of the relationship between Green and Lewis, I do know Mr. Lewis feels Green's work was counterproductive to the preservation of the community. The implication, as I first interpreted it, was that the effort to turn the community towards being Native American was a turn away from being African American, a process that debased the community's existing "culture," since there are many still living who have only ever known themselves as "Afro-American," including

some who were actively involved in the African American civil rights movement. Becoming Native American seemed to deny this history and, for Mr. Lewis, I surmised, only further distanced living people in the community from their past.

Lewis has a very different take on the problem of culture in the community. Addressing a perceived poverty of culture, Lewis suggests that Mr. Green found in being Setalcott Indian a "culture" to claim in order to fill the gap. As a recent *New York Times* article described it, the Setalcott were supposedly "Hidden in Plain View" (Mead 2005). The suggestion being that people otherwise categorized as African American and impoverished in multiple ways were in actuality Native Americans in disguise. This presentation delivered a discursive transformation of identity that instantly changed who they were. Adopting Indian names and developing new traditions, members of the community were able to move from a cultural poverty to being flush with Setalcott "culture" with no effort beyond a genealogical reconstruction. Sensing a certain futility in this easy discursive transformation, Mr. Lewis has since worked to remind his community that despite their mixed ancestry they have a history from the last 100 years that should not be forgotten. For Mr. Lewis, the fact that they have been otherwise hidden in plain sight and their century-long struggle to remain a community despite being publicly unacknowledged is only further complicated by the adoption of an Indian identity. From our conversations, I glean that Mr. Lewis thinks becoming Setalcott will do little to help because it shifts the cause of their struggle from a history of material racist exclusion to one of an historically debased but "revitalizable" identity. Using the terms established above, it moves the struggle from one of class relations to culture. If they had only stayed Native American, some might very well say, they would not be in their impoverished situation. Mr. Lewis disagrees.

For him, the problem is actually more complicated and threatening. Explaining himself in the following extract of an email message, he shows how to read racial identity in the community as a part of private-property relations, and how to read past this basis to recognize a different sort value useful in the present struggle. In particular, Mr. Lewis likes archaeology because it is "unconventional" in the way it uses different

methods and materials to invoke questions about both what and how we can learn about the local past. In his own words:

> I like to see people engaged in critical thinking they have derived from themselves rather than from classroom instruction. ... I am inclined to believe that Afro-Americans have yet to discover themselves. How archaeology or reaching back into history can facilitate that discovery is very important to me. So, the kind of training that would seem to me to be more beneficial to Afro-American youth would set a stage with *unconventional* items or methods that will inspire those youths to ask the question "Who am I – What am I?" I feel that in the Afro-American population this has not yet happened on a mass scale, but I believe it has happened with a handful of people.
>
> What I am saying, is that to a grade school or high school student, certainly what they do not know is also unconventional, but they cannot comprehend unconventional because they do not have foreknowledge of the subject. However, that to me is the concept to be explored. Simply because it is unconventional, opportunities for exciting discoveries exist. I think somebody has to say to a growing mind: "This, (or that), is unconventional," and then compare it to what is standard.
>
> I think as much as there is an obvious demand upon a growing mind to 'learn,' there is an equally big demand to '*unlearn*,' but I am of the opinion that the demand to unlearn gets drowned out as we unknowingly, (and almost irreversibly), structure our lives to prepare for the realities of our living circumstances. ...
>
> I think of such a discovery as being in terms of obtaining an awareness about the unknown, unrevealed gifts or exceptional qualities that an individual may bear; things that could be immensely beneficial to the world – a gradient or exponent above what is practical (Robert Lewis 2008, elec. comm.).

Theodore Green would agree with Mr. Lewis on how "culture" is necessary, since it provides direction, purpose, and value to lives overly burdened by the practical "realities of [their] living circumstances." Still, Mr. Lewis clearly feels that the route to "culture" pursued by Green's adoption of a Setalcott identity is actually quite conventional, since being Native American does not require one to unlearn. Here Lewis references an established tradition of African American critical thought first voiced by Frederick Douglass and W. E. B. DuBois, detailed by Carter Woodson in *The Mis-Education of the Negro* in 1933, promoted in the radicalism of Malcolm X and later critical race theorists (Delgado and Stefanic 2001), depicted by John Singleton in the 1995 film *Higher Learning*, and now serving as

a base for most postcolonial scholarship (Spivak et al. 1996; Shelby 2005). As the purpose is both to know more about a community as well as to understand and thus combat the racial and other exclusionary forces that have kept this information from already being known, this critique aims less at persons or class practices than at the knowledge process through which persons, communities, and class groups are established in civil society. The underlying thought is that this knowledge comes only through a radical social and personal transformation such that one's identity is strikingly destabilized. While lofty and hard to demand in full, promoting an imagination of substantial change is one way to reveal and potentially undo the influence of oppressive dominant ideologies (Leone 2005).

Lewis also demonstrates that it is possible to recognize the community as both agent and victim. When the community is driven by need, those advising the young focus on practicalities: "to put bread on the table, pay the bills" (Robert Lewis 2008, elec. comm.). This requires that they ignore their cultural lives, since culture cannot pay the bills. At the same time, Lewis suggests, they are also debasing themselves, for they are turning away from the "things that could be immensely beneficial to the world," not because of their culture but because of the *discovery* of their culture, aspects that were there all along but hidden by conventional reasoning. It is only the unconventional personal work of unlearning (which both Mr. Lewis and I have discussed as a form of excavation) that transforms a person, and this work cannot be accomplished simply by shifting identities or by obtaining new goods in the market. Unlearning is not only difficult, however, it is among the most expensive pursuits, available only to the privileged few with time to reflect on their communities and the structures of their knowledge. It is not an opportunity readily available to "the poor," nor, however, is it very often taken up by those in the middle class complicit in the creation of their neighbors' poverty. The difficulty lies in the problematic constructions that separate communities such that they cannot see their shared interests and integrated lives.

The Poverty of Discovery

A view on middle-class complicity in Setauket is easily found in the dominant local histories

that paint the origins of the Christian Avenue community in tragic terms. A segment of this community originally lived to the north on a peninsula known now as Old Field Village. Old Field was incorporated in 1927 soon after the area was settled by a small and extremely wealthy community of white estate owners with connections to New York City. The creation of Old Field is tied to Christian Avenue since a community of Afro-Indian residents who had lived in what became Old Field were forcibly resettled to make way for the construction of new estate properties. The story includes the removal of their houses from Old Field to Christian Avenue, which erased the community's occupation from the Old Field landscape, so that they could be easily and perhaps "charitably" settled with their own kind. As Mr. Lewis described it, once there they formed a convenient "colored labor pool" for their wealthy new neighbors (Toy 2005).

Notably, the official history of Old Field recognizes the Setalcott Indians as the area's first settlers. In line with the dominant tropes of American colonization and settlement, these basically "prehistoric" people rapidly fade away to be replaced by today's justified legal owners. As the official history concludes: "While Old Field has changed dramatically from its earliest days to the present, the one constant has been a people committed to preserving the beauty and serenity of their beautiful village; contributing in countless way[s] to the betterment of their community and beyond; and extending the welcome hand of friendship to all who visit or decide to make this their permanent home" (Village of Old Field 2008). One might ask about the warm hand extended to the removed Afro–Native Americans: whether a removal from their ancestral peninsula bettered them, and how their removal helped to preserve the beauty and serenity of the village.

One may also ask about learning and unlearning in this history. The official story establishes that the Native American presence in Old Field is officially ended and has been since long before anyone can really remember. For the privileged children of modern Old Field Village, as for most others living in former Indian country throughout the United States, the story is only about a Setalcott Indian prehistory. A tale with manifold consequences in terms of the local respect for Setalcott descendents, this story is a powerful and strategic claim to the land. The tellers of

this story also encourage a process of strategic unlearning, because as this history populates the space of Old Field with the Setalcott in absentia, the people who were then removed and later designated black are entirely distanced from their own *and* the official history. The children in the Setauket area, both black and white, are not told stories about living Setalcott or the local indigenous African Americans. Rather, the Setalcott are gone and the African Americans, at best, are considered fugitives from slavery. So, while Green's effort has helped place a Setalcott person on an Underground Railroad theatrical stage, there is no story yet about the African American agency that helped to preserve the community which now tells this and other stories about the region. Rather, in the local story of the Underground Railroad, the play *Running Free, Running Scared*, the African American is a dependent, helpless, disconnected fugitive or, to put it in Martin Luther King's words, "an exile in his own land." The lesson here is obvious.

Perhaps, however, as with King, there is a critique available for us within this portrayal. African American communities like the one that formed along Christian Avenue in Setauket in the 20th century are in many ways isolated and disconnected. This is Robert Lewis's point, they lack what having a culture gives a reality *in place*. Without it, the community is dispersing as I write. The point, however, is that archaeology *can* address this issue, and, to that end, Mr. Lewis and I have started to build a story about Ernest Hart and the house in which he lived. We emphasize that he was *Uncle* Ernest, a family member, a person who, despite his poverty and transience, had a place because of his kin and community. Second, we are looking more closely at what his life was actually like. Some have characterized him as a hermit or perhaps mentally unstable. Still, he kept his own modest home, leaving it and returning, knowing it was under the watchful care of his sister. I am certain there will be much more to come on his story, but the job now is to undo his fugitive status, as well as that of this community, in order to help build a route for a return from their discursive and increasingly material exile. This will come by choosing to focus on the way archaeology, as it so naturally does, aides in *discovery* and makes a place for collective remembering to drive action in the world today.

Conclusion

While best remembered for King's now-iconic "I have a dream" speech, the 1963 March on Washington was driven by a separate goal of the civil rights movement: racial equality and justice in employment. With overt discrimination in the labor market, African Americans routinely faced almost insurmountable yet legal restrictions on their desire to acquire well-paying, secure jobs and join with other Americans in the prosperity of the mid-20th century. I have sought to capture the spirit of this concern, borrowing from King the deeply critical notion of "lonely islands of poverty" for the title of this paper. King's identification of poor African Americans living on isolated islands symbolizes both the African American struggle to construct a material basis for their liberty, as well as the effort here to critique the segregation of impoverished people as "the poor" through discursive and political economic interests of the middle class. King's choice to situate this existence as "lonely" and "in exile" describes the extra burdens, which can be seen as spatial relations and landscapes, that define the African American struggle for recognition. It is an imperative that we come to understand these struggles and their legacy in the material conditions of modern communities, as well as the stories descendants tell, and the stories they want to know more about from the past. Finally, putting these symbols together, this paper has sought to bring into view the struggle of impoverished people to address their poverty and to allow, in the case of Setauket, for those speaking from a position of exile to be better heard. The Christian Avenue Project is driven by King's goals of making poverty, racism, injustice, and civil rights history not only visible, but better integrated into the story of American communities. Making these connections and overturning past separations lies at the root of this approach. It is notable that King's recognition of the 100th anniversary of emancipation is fast becoming the 150th anniversary in 2013. While it is certain that a great deal has changed since 1963, I am also certain that, with stories of segregation and a contemporary struggle for African American recognition in Setauket, it can be said with some confidence that much more has not.

Acknowledgements

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