Historical Archaeology, Identity Formation, and the Interpretation of Ethnicity

Edited by
Maria Franklin and Garrett Fesler

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Historical Archaeology, Identity Formation, and the Interpretation of Ethnicity

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Maria Franklin and Garrett Fesler

With
Foreword by Robert L. Schuyler
and Comments by Fraser D. Neiman

Colonial Williamsburg Research Publications
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This volume was the result of a session on ethnicity held at the 1996 Society for Historical Archaeology conference in Cincinnati. The original panel included Margot Winer, Minette Church, and Jeff Watts-Roy. We thank these individuals for their participation in the session, and for helping to provide the basic foundation from which this volume grew. Fraser Neiman and Robert L. Schuyler served as discussants on the panel, and we deeply appreciate their initial feedback on all of the papers, and on their willingness to contribute to this volume. It is to the authors—Carl Steen, Audrey Horning, Barbara Heath, Susan Kern, Patricia Samford and John Metz—that we are most grateful. Thank you all for staying committed to this project, for your patience, and for coming through as strongly as you did.
Since 1980 historical archaeology has expanded its subject matter by moving beyond basic culture history to emphasize a number of central research topics. These themes are not limited to the field of historical archaeology and archaeologists, both prehistoric and historical, are merely following the lead of current scholarship, especially the work of historians and some cultural anthropologists. Topics covered, or potential future additions, include ethnicity, class, gender, age cohorts, race, occupations, and a series of categories (such as nationality, religion and political groupings) that may or may not be subsumed under these more generalized types.

One of the first research subjects selected by historical archaeologists was ethnicity, and it continues to occupy the center of topical research, although the study of class, a related subject, is growing in popularity. This set of papers by six younger scholars all approach ethnicity as both a significant factor in human culture history and a difficult problem for archaeologists. Is ethnicity a surface phenomenon, fully active on a conscious level of behavior, purposely manipulated in a fluid environment of power and class—a suit of cultural clothing worn and changed at will and only having meaning relative to other groups otherwise dressed? Or, is ethnicity a deeply rooted, stable phenomenon grounded in enculturation and history—a manifestation of the bedrock of culture itself?

Which end of this spectrum of definitions a researcher selects will have a major impact on how one approaches the topic from fieldwork to synthesis and interpretation, as well as how successful archaeology is in recognizing material manifestations of ethnicity.

Six case studies are offered in this monograph. They range across the formation of “creole” society in colonial Virginia, Native Americans interacting with Anglo-American power centers, the ability or lack of ability of enslaved Africans to preserve or de novo generate their own cultural identity, or more specifically, to maintain their most basic beliefs, to a discussion of ethnic variation internal to Euro-American culture, a theme that has been relatively neglected. This range of essays takes the reader on a quite varied and fascinating exploration, but one unified by the same cultural region in North America. Virginia and South Carolina have both been well explored by both historians and archaeologists. Metz, Kern, Horning, Heath, Samford and Steen are all to be congratulated for an insightful if tentative set of essays.

*Historical Archaeology, Identity Formation, and the Interpretation of Ethnicity*, because of its authors and two organizers-editors, is a solid contribution to the growing literature on the ability of historical archaeologists to explore one of the most basic human categorizations to appear since the rise of complex societies.

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**Foreword**

Robert L. Schuyler, University of Pennsylvania

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The Exploration of Ethnicity and the Historical Archaeological Record
Garrett Fesler and Maria Franklin

Part 1: Introduction

Several years ago while visiting a friend excavating a sugar plantation in the mountains of Jamaica, a middle-aged man approached me at a rural taxi stand. “Who you?” he asked rather threateningly. I was not sure exactly what he wanted to know, so I told him I was an American from the United States. “No, who you?” he said again. I explained I lived in the state of California. “No, no, who you?” he implored while stepping toward me and brandishing his machete. Since I was wearing a Los Angeles Dodgers baseball cap, with some alarm I gestured to it and told him I was from Los Angeles. The man laughed, turned to the twenty or so people gathered around us, and said, “See, this bloody ras don’t know who he is!” Indeed, the joke was on me. Yet, although the man took the opportunity to ridicule an outsider and in doing so, to advance his reputation within his community, in essence, we as historical archaeologists ask that same simple question of the people who formed the archaeological sites we excavate, “Who you?” And all too often, no simple answer materializes and we end up feeling as lost and confused as I did with the man at the taxi stand.

Some seventeen years ago Robert Schuyler compiled and edited fourteen essays in a volume entitled Archaeological Perspectives on Ethnicity in America: Afro-American and Asian American Culture History (1980). As its title suggests, the book introduced a variety of historical archaeological treatments of the topic of ethnicity, exclusively focused on African- and Asian-American sites. The book, like this compilation, was in part a product of its time. It was published while Iran held 52 Americans hostage, while Nelson Mandela was just another forgotten prisoner in an entrenched South African system of violent apartheid, and while Dublin, not Beirut or Sarajevo, was the world’s most notorious ethnic battleground. Almost twenty years later, ethnicity remains at the forefront of the social, political, economic, and religious agenda around the globe, although the sites of its turbulence continue to change. Dozens of clashes motivated by ethnic issues occur everyday, resulting in ethnic convergence at its most deadly. It would be comforting to think that the distance between “ethnic cleansing” in Bosnia in the 1990s and the expressions of ethnic identity on an eighteenth-century Virginia plantation or in the hollows of Depression-era Appalachia are hardly comparable. Yet the germ of conflict in both locales, separated as they are by time and circumstance, is distinctly ethnic.

The word ethnicity, and its attendant terms ethnic group and ethnic identity, are relatively new idioms still in semantic flux. The term ethnicity emerged in the mid-twentieth century, but the exact origin is unknown (see Sollors 1996, footnote 2). The word only first appeared in English dictionaries in 1972 (Glazer and Moynihan 1975:1), while the term ethnic group and the adjective ethnic first surfaced in the latter nineteenth century and early decades of the twentieth century (Sollors 1996, footnote 2). The root of ethnicity, ethnic, is derived from the Greek word ethnos or ethnikos which at different times translated to “heathen” or “pagan,” and later as “nation” or “people,” and in more general terms as “others” (Banks 1996:5; Eriksen
In the United States during the Second World War, “ethnics” was used “as a polite term referring to Jews, Italians, Irish and other people considered inferior to the dominant group of largely British decent” (Eriksen 1993:4). For social scientists since mid-century, the term has evolved into a referent for groups of people who consider themselves or are labeled by outsiders as culturally distinctive, sometimes conflated with other terms such as “race” or “minority” (Eriksen 1993).

Today there exists as many working definitions of ethnicity as there are groups who claim to possess a distinctive ethnicity (see, for example, Banks 1996:4-5). More than one hundred ethnic groups can be found in the Harvard Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups compiled in 1980, and since then more surely have surfaced (Thernstrom et al. 1980). The term ethnicity has become so malleable and vague, some claim the expression to be virtually drained of its utility (Banks 1996:10). Yet, still the word and its multiple meanings persist, and have become part of the anthropological and archaeological language.

The debate which has dominated the anthropological discourse on ethnicity for several decades is between two schools of thought, primordialism and instrumentalism. Primordialists tend to acknowledge the core of ethnic attachment to be ineffable, emotional sentiments or psychological bonds between people centered on blood ties (Hutchinson and Smith 1996:8). Instrumentalists counter with a social constructivist view of ethnicity that places ethnic origin as a manifestation solely of culture, which is malleable and interchangeable depending upon common needs and often the sociopolitical setting (Hutchinson and Smith 1996:9). Dyed-in-the-wool primordialists can be criticized for biological deterministic leanings, while hard-core instrumentalists tend to disavow the very real emotional dimensions of ethnicity (see Jones 1997:68-72, 76-79). Somewhere between the two extremes of primordialism and instrumentalism resides a broad-based approach to ethnicity which simultaneously acknowledges both cultural and seemingly unexplainable psychological ethnic ties which bind groups of people together (see Keyes 1976). Most recently, elements of practice theory have been utilized to suggest that “the construction of ethnicity is grounded in the shared subliminal dispositions of social agents which shape, and are shaped by, objective commonalities of practice” (Jones 1997:128).

In this volume we hesitate to become mired in adding another carefully crafted definition of ethnicity that toes the line between the primordial and instrumental camps. Instead, we encourage historical archaeologists to seek their own working definitions, an approach taken by each of the authors in this volume. The multifaceted nature of the issue which is apparent in the six essays here, hopefully illustrates the merit of embracing the paradoxical nature of ethnicity as a means for broadening the inquiry into the issue. Rather than mourn the fact that “the relationship between artifacts and ethnicity or culture is ambiguous and evanescent” (Upton 1996:5), we celebrate the challenge that the complexities of ethnicity and material culture pose.

Like today, ethnicity possessed differing meanings for different people in the past. Each historic archaeological site offers the opportunity to explore the varying ways in which people created, altered, and used ethnicity for themselves and sometimes in contrast to others. Thus, the question to be asked while excavating historic archaeological sites is not how past peoples fit into our rigid contemporary definitions of ethnicity, but rather how people in the past constructed ethnic identities and how the identities worked and for what reasons (e.g. McGuire 1982). The re-
results of such investigations may prove that other social dimensions dominated, or that ethnic identity was enmeshed in complex ways with other forms of identity such as gender or class (Jones 1997:85; McGuire 1983). By questioning the formation, maintenance, and use of ethnic identities, historical archaeologists can at least avoid some of the more damaging trappings of a monolithic, positivistic, and static version of ethnicity that has tended to dominate the historical archaeological treatments of the topic (Upton 1996), including some of the essays in Schuyler’s volume.

Schuyler and his colleagues posed a key question in 1980 that still resonates today: “Is ethnicity . . . recognizable in the archaeological record?” (viii). In the intervening years, a more relevant question has emerged. Rather than framing the issues of ethnicity and ethnic groups as an issue of visibility in the archaeological record, we suggest that a more fruitful path is studying the concept of ethnicity and ethnic affiliation as a tool used by various individuals and groups to facilitate practical ends. Instead of searching for the static patterns and correlates of so-called ethnic identity, we must recognize that ethnicity and ethnic identity served as a dynamic agent of social and cultural negotiation. All peoples and the objects through which they manipulate daily life are imbued with ethnic overtones, whether it be in the meals they consume, the clothing they wear, or the spaces they inhabit.

Some 25 years after writing his celebrated introduction to Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference, Fredrik Barth, the anthropologist largely responsible for placing ethnicity at the forefront of the discipline, encouraged researchers to “attend to the experiences through which [ethnic identity] is formed, it is not enough, as one thought with a simpler concept of culture, to make a homogenizing inventory of its manifestations.” (Barth 1994:14). Given Barth’s encouragement, perhaps the more robust question at hand is: Can the findings of historical archaeologists contribute to a fuller understanding of the social uses of ethnic identity? By framing our focus on the processes of ethnic group formation, maintenance, and dissolution, rather than the end products of ethnic display, we believe historical archaeological contributions to the issue are greatly empowered.

Several recent scholars suggest that historical archaeologists are uniquely poised to investigate ethnicity (e.g. Deetz 1995; Jones 1997:27; McGuire 1982:161; Staski 1990:121-122). Thus far, however, “the existence of historical references to specific ethnic groups has resulted in the perpetuation of the ‘ethnic labeling’ of sites and objects” rather than more in-depth revelations of ethnic uses and abuses (Jones 1997:27). Although we might wish it to be so, simple, one-to-one correlations of ethnic identity do not exist (Jones 1997:140). Jim Deetz recently characterized the search for individual “ethnic” objects as “something of a red herring” (1995:9). Indeed, many have been distracted from the real work of ethnic understanding, entranced by the luster of mere baubles. Instead, Deetz encourages archaeological practitioners to ask how “ethnic groups manage their ethnicity in the face of adversity” and to consider each culture as an integrated whole rather than piecemeal (1995:10).

Unfortunately, the historical archaeological literature on ethnicity tends to be top heavy with assessments of items such as blue beads, cowrie shells, opium pipes, distinctively butchered animal bones, dietary products, quantities of buttons and the like with the inference that these constitute ethnic markers for some groups (e.g. Etter 1980; Kelso 1984:201-202; Klingelhofer 1987; McKee 1987; Pearce 1993; Stine et al. 1996). These objects certainly meant something to
the people using and creating them, and may relate in some way to discrete groups of ethnically related individuals. Yet, like most archaeologists, we steadfastly reject the "artifact=ethnicity" premise, not because many transplanted Africans, Chinese, Italians, Germans, Mexicans, Irish, etc. did not retain distinctive identities and practices related to their perceived ethnic affiliation, but because the nature of archaeological evidence of ethnicity is necessarily complex, situational, historically contingent, and culture-driven (Verdery 1994). Given this, we suggest that finding so-called "ethnic markers" at a site is not the termination of inquiry, but rather initiates the creation of questions which focus on the meaning, construction, and expression of ethnic identity for a variety of specific peoples in various settings.

In addition to encouraging archaeologists to seek the visibility of ethnicity in the archaeological record, Robert Schuyler in 1980 recognized the connection of ethnicity and issues of political domination and power, suggesting, "Ethnicity has little meaning until complex structures arose based on political domination" (viii). Indeed, issues of ethnic identity in more recent archaeologies "are often overtly political in nature" (Jones 1997:10) and issues of nationalism are intimately tied to structures of ethnic identity (see Barth 1994; McGuire 1982; Shennan 1989; Verdery 1994; Williams 1989). Thus, as Brackette Williams stated recently, "'ethnicity' is . . . a matter of power differentials between two or more groups in contact producing one or more additional groups, which then confront the originators" (1992:609; see also Jones 1997). Moreover, Adrian Praetzellis et al. remind us that in most contexts ethnicity only emerges in contrast to a dominant cultural tradition that functions as a lens through which we can see emulation or rejection, ethnic and otherwise (1988:193).

Throughout the literature on ethnicity, both archaeological and anthropological, the issue of what Fredrik Barth (1994) calls "social dichotomization" or "difference" is paramount. Essentially Barth recognizes that ethnicity is a method of organizing cultural differences so as to create the criteria for which to include or exclude members Barth (1969). In our zeal to recognize and understand ethnic difference, however, Katerine Verdery warns us of the dangers of accepting difference uncritically. Verdery worries that the potential uses and abuses of the heterogenization of society marks a movement toward a "new essentialism" which threatens to diminish multiculturalism. The possible misuses of concepts of ethnic difference are symptoms of the restructuring of world capitalism as it attempts to cope with recent crises and threats to its hegemony (Verdery 1994:51-55). Thus the concept of ethnic difference, whether it be at issue on a college application form, in a repatriation dispute, or a fundamental element of social organization on an eighteenth-century plantation, cannot be divorced from the larger social milieu in which historical archaeologists presently function.

We recognize that the theoretical discussion of ethnicity may well be an exercise in rhetoric unless it can be translated into practical definitions for archaeological use. Therefore, like the case studies compiled by Robert Schuyler almost twenty years ago, we hope the studies herein provide a set of blueprints from which to assist historical archaeologists as they continue to wrestle with the intertwined issues of identity in the past and the many meanings and uses of ethnicity.

**Part II: Six Authors, Six New Insights**

The papers presented in this volume underscore historical archaeology’s sustaining in-
terest in ethnicity and culture. Moreover, they exemplify the move by a growing number of archaeologists towards more thoughtful and critical analyses of what are now more fully appreciated and recognized as inherently complex processes of identity construction. This holds true for the six authors herein, even though they variously differ on points ranging from their working definitions of “ethnicity,” to their interpretations of how and why individuals and groups set themselves apart from others. The following discussion summarizes the diverse perspectives brought to bear on the question of how people in the past devised meaningful ways to negotiate both their sense of individuality, or “self,” and their collective sense of belonging to a group.

To start, on a fundamental level the authors all seem to agree that ethnicity is socially constructed, from both within and without the group. Further, they all variously recognize—although they differentially emphasize—that culture and tradition, place of origin, common ancestry and history (whether real or imagined), and diverse physical attributes all combine to forge one’s ethnic identity. Horning, Metz, and to a lesser extent, Steen, move beyond this basic definition in considering the role of power in the creation of ethnic groups. As Horning posits, “ethnic groups, by definition, only exist because of their relationships with other groups.”

These relationships are often fraught with tension as people with divergent interests coalesce into different factions and compete for what ultimately boils down to dominance or self-determination. For example, Metz asserts in his study of English colonists that their move towards embracing a distinct, Anglo-Virginian ethnicity was largely due to their attempts to vie for control over their limited resources. Similarly, Steen acknowledges that the need to preserve the institution of slavery, and hence maintain control over Africans and blacks, made ethnic group formation pertinent to white colonists. Having each stated their case on what they mean by “ethnicity,” the six authors then move in different directions, guided by varying research questions.

Metz’s article deals with a crucial period in American history, when the system of indentured servitude shifts in centrality, giving way to the rise and establishment of the African slave trade. Metz focuses on the population most responsible for changing the nature of the Chesapeake labor force: Virginia’s native-born, or “creole,” landholders and political leaders. He contends that it is their unwillingness to be completely dependent on England for finished goods, among other things, that impels them to invest in local trades and manufactured goods. His main body of evidence is the archaeology of brick-making technology.

Metz posits that while England’s main interest lay in Virginia’s tobacco economy, Virginia creoles understood that tobacco monoculture was not necessarily in their best interest. Colonists re-envisioned their political and economic goals, and a growing number of native-born English subjects viewed themselves as a different sort from their English-born counterparts. Influenced by Randall McGuire’s work, Metz interprets this growing division, manifest in an alternative social identity (i.e. “creoles”), as evidence of ethnogenesis brought about by group conflict. Through a careful synthesis of archaeological data on Chesapeake brick production, Metz demonstrates that this form of local manufacture is but one example of the attempt by Anglo-Virginians to move towards self-sufficiency, thus challenging England’s dominance. It further attests to their growing resolve to plant themselves permanently in Virginia by building more permanent shelters than were previously common.
Like Metz, Horning takes into account how power relations were key in forging certain aspects of Appalachian identity and group formation. She adds a fascinating dimension to her study by considering how not only emic but etic constructions of ethnicity were variously accepted by hollow residents as, in Fesler’s words, “dynamic agents of social and cultural negotiation.” Horning effectively argues that the imposition of negative, “hillbilly” stereotypes to “hollow folk” from the Blue Ridge Mountains was clearly motivated by deceitful politics aimed at removing longtime residents from their land. Horning strikes a blow to these persistent stereotypes, demonstrating with architectural and archaeological evidence that Appalachian families maintained vibrant and diverse communities that did, in fact, have knowledge of the outside world. Importantly, Horning’s study serves as a prime example of how ethnic identity is situational. Citing oral testimonies, Horning shows how certain members of this group ably adopted the stereotypical, characteristics of “backwoods” ethnicity to their advantage in dealing with outsiders. As she observes: “Clearly, the creation of ethnicities can be a fluid and rapid process, readily able to traverse the boundaries of the emic and the etic.”

A recurring theme in this volume is the caveat against using material culture as “ethnic markers.” It is a message oft-cited, but less often are we given alternative, constructive ways to interpret artifacts that are indeed associated with ethnic groups. Kern does just this, in a similar fashion to Horning, by showing that just as identities are fluid and relational, so are the meanings and values we attach to objects that play a significant role in shaping identities and social relations.

Kern chooses as her focal point an assemblage of Native American artifacts that many historical archaeologists encounter, but are typically hesitant to attempt an explanation for when they are recovered from “non-Indian” sites, such as Shadwell plantation. In contrast, Kern seizes the opportunity to investigate what she perceives as potential evidence for interactions between diverse ethnic groups within the Virginia frontier. Creating a narrative from historical sources, Kern helps us to visualize a series of encounters between enslaved blacks, whites, and Indians. In doing so, she demonstrates the role that material culture played at different scales. On one hand, objects were visible in the social and political arena, as different ethnic groups worked to position themselves via status. On a smaller scale, material goods exchanging hands between individuals may have been central in forging personal relations, as Kern suggests may have been the case with Indians enjoying the hospitality of enslaved blacks at Shadwell.

Kern presents us with multi-layered interpretations of ethnic and social identities in motion, shifting to accommodate different circumstances. She does archaeology a great service in underscoring just how complex and fluid these meetings between different individuals and groups may have been, and therefore, how difficult it must be to discern the meanings of material goods associated with these exchanges.

In her innovative work on the enslaved community of Poplar Forest, Heath deals with an essential aspect of identity formation and maintenance: its outward display in the form of dress and adornment. Her article is a departure from most previous research on the emergence of African-American identity in that she begins with the premise that there did not yet exist a sense of African-American ethnicity during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Heath points out that during these early years, “African-American society” was in fact a heterogeneous mix of blacks and Africans that did not necessarily view themselves as
a group. Her focus is therefore on the events
preceding the transformation to a more de-
finite African-American ethnic group,
when a myriad of African-born peoples,
along with an American-born population of
numerous racial categories, actively sought
to forge individualized identities.
By taking this route, Heath does not con-
fine her analysis to “ethnicity” or “culture.”
Her study of the relationship between iden-
tity and adornment on a personal level pulls
in other factors that crosscut cultural values
such as occupation, gender, and enslave-
ment. This is perhaps the greatest strength
of her interpretation, in that the individuals
of her study are not reduced to one-dimen-
sional characters, devoid of multiple subject
positions. Although Heath questions
whether archaeological analysis can be used
to address questions regarding identity and
the role of adornment within enslaved com-
munities, she nonetheless effectively demon-
strates its potential to do so.
Samford’s provocative article on the use
of some subfloor pits as ancestor shrines will
undoubtedly encourage a number of us to
more closely scrutinize the contents of Ches-
apeake “root cellars.” Like Heath, Samford’s
methodology includes the careful con-
textualization of all aspects of her case
study. She begins with a historical and de-
mographic discussion of the West African
groups who were most likely to be present
in the Tidewater during the eighteenth cen-
tury, and who might have been likely to use
pits as ritual spaces. Notably, Samford cen-
ters her attention on the Igbo, Ibibio, and
Yoruba peoples. This is a refreshing depar-
ture from other work on early African-Ameri-
can spirituality which has tended to rely
heavily on drawing analogies from Kongo-
related beliefs.
Samford’s persuasive argument that cer-
tain root cellars may indeed have served as
ancestral shrines is strengthened by her cau-
tious choice of examples. The two root cel-
lars in question both contained artifacts that
Samford argues were left in primary context.
Moreover, her rigorous analysis of patterns
pertaining to placement, artifact association,
and symbolism serves as a prime example of
contextual archaeology. In the end, Samford
successfully manages to take two of the most
popular subjects of study in African-Ameri-
can archaeology, i.e. spirituality and root cel-
lars, and adds a fascinating dimension to the
discussion.
Steen is also to be applauded in bringing
an air of originality to the interpretation of
another well-known topic in historical ar-
chaeology: colonoware pottery. Like the other
authors in this volume, Steen recognizes a
strong association between material culture
and ethnicity. Yet Steen’s objective is to dem-
onstrate that establishing specific ties be-
tween ethnic groups and archaeological evi-
dence (i.e. defining ethnic markers) is not
only difficult at best, but self-defeating and
reductionist at worse.
Steen uses the examples of colonoware
and clay-walled house remains to argue that
the accepted wisdom that these objects are
solely the products of enslaved South Caro-
linians is too simplistic. By combining both
regional and site-specific demographic, his-
torical, and archaeological data, Steen ex-
plains that other ethnic groups could each
potentially have also contributed to their pro-
duction. His research underscores the fact
that the social and cultural boundaries we as
archaeologists so fervently draw around dif-
ferent groups often get drawn around their
material culture as well, and this does not
generally reflect past realities. People of very
different backgrounds and circumstances ex-
changed ideas, transforming themselves and
others in the process. As Steen posits, they
created a variety of “creole” cultures. Thus,
no single, over-arching interpretation could
possibly fit every scenario where clay-walled
houses or colonowares were used. Consistent with this thesis, Steen pursues more site-specific explanations. He summarizes his finding as follows: “...the Lowcountry creation of colonoware is not something that is pan-African or even pan-African American. It is a local phenomenon...created and used within particular social and cultural circumstances.”

Steen’s research exemplifies the value of comparative, multi-scalar research, and will hopefully encourage others to “think locally” rather than attempt blanket explanations which tie specific ethnic or racial groups to the creation and use of specific objects.

**Concluding Remarks**

It will come as no surprise that the theoretical insights and interpretive schemes presented in this volume move in different directions. What binds these articles into a coherent, unified volume, however, are the authors’ concerted efforts to discard the die-hard “ethnic marker” exercises, and to engage in more rigorous and sophisticated analyses of the relationship between identity and material culture. Importantly, these authors privilege the archaeological record, and demonstrate that the potential for constructing viable and engaging interpretations based on the physical evidence is great.

Ethnicity remains an important topic in historical archaeology despite the recent, and legitimate, critique that it has tragically managed to displace race and racism from much academic discourse. Historical archaeology is no exception, and since Robert L. Schuyler’s important, edited volume “Archaeological Perspectives on Ethnicity in America” appeared in 1980, ethnicity has remained a central subject in our discipline while race is not and never has been. Perhaps this is because it is seemingly easier to connect “ethnicity” (often interpreted as including “culture” or “tradition”) to the archaeological record than “race.” Whatever the reason, the study of ethnicity and that of race can, and should, co-exist in our study of the American past, for groups and individuals consciously identified themselves and others both along what we today refer to as racial and ethnic lines.

In ending, the authors in this volume have confirmed that researching ethnicity is indeed still a worthwhile endeavor for archaeologists. More importantly, they have demonstrated that as our understanding of the complexity of the individuals we study grows along with our recognition that the material record is far more complicated than we may have realized, this leads not necessarily to utter confusion, but to fuller visions of experiences once lived.

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