The Anthropology in American Historical Archaeology

Since its infancy, American historical archaeology has maintained a relationship, albeit often a tenuous one, with its anthropological parentage. Given both the history of the field and its practitioners’ often-tortured efforts to define their intentions, goals, and perspectives, it is not surprising, perhaps, that many anthropologists may not recognize the important contributions historical archaeology can make to the anthropological project. A multifaceted and wide-ranging examination of the post-Columbian world gives historical archaeology a special ability to investigate modern history and to provide insights into the historical circumstances of today’s world. [historical archaeology, post-Columbian archaeology, history of American archaeology]

The development of prehistoric archaeology as an anthropological pursuit has been detailed in several important histories of the discipline, and its place within anthropology is no longer seriously debated (e.g., Patterson 1995; Stiebing 1993; Trigger 1989; Willey and Sabloff 1974). In the United States, many researchers associated with the Bureau of American Ethnology had pressed the cause of archaeology beginning in the last decades of the nineteenth century.

As an explicit, although widely debated, historical perspective began to dominate anthropological practice in the early twentieth century (Voget 1975:322–323), individual anthropologists engaged in considerable and protracted discussions on the proper use of history in anthropology (Harris 1968:275–277). The exact role of archaeology in this debate was not always clear, at least partly because anthropologically trained archaeologists themselves had yet to explicate the historical nature of their own pursuits. What they did understand, however, was that when they and their fellow anthropologists used the term archaeology, they were referring to prehistory. Thus, for example, when Kroeber (1948:4, 631) defined archaeology as “the science of what is old,” he voiced the commonly held perception that the subject matter of archaeology is literally prehistory, “history before written documents.” Within this intellectual framework, anthropologists could imagine using archaeology to project the human story into the most inaccessible corridors of time by providing material documentation for the ancient human condition. Even with this understanding firmly pronounced, anthropologists using prehistoric, archaeological information often felt compelled to defend its usage to their fellow social scientists (e.g., Wissler 1927:888–890). Historical archaeology did not require similar justification because it did not exist during the formative years of American anthropology. In fact, historical archaeology in the United States was not a fully recognized member of the archaeological family until the late 1960s. Even at this time, however, the precise relationship between historical archaeology and anthropology was still somewhat unclear.

A Brief History of Historical Archaeology

Historical archaeology has a somewhat ambiguous place within the history of American archaeology (see Paynter 2000a, 2000b), and for most of its formative years, archaeologists—even those practicing historical archaeology—were unsure of precisely where their field fit, not only within anthropology but even within archaeology itself. As archaeologists initially trained as prehistorians sought to define the anthropological mission of historical archaeology—and to justify the field’s existence even to their archaeological colleagues—many of them felt like little more than “a junior varsity” (Little 1994:30), who were often openly ridiculed for their interest in “the unrespectable in American archaeology” (Fontana 1968) and for using some referred to as “an expensive way of finding out what we know already” (Bradley 1987:293).

The problems faced by America’s earliest historical archaeologists were twofold. In the first place, historical archaeology bore structural similarities to some Old World archaeology in its use of textual information and in the investigation of sites associated with men and women from literate cultures. Even at its inception, then, historical archaeology shared the core of a research methodology with other, well-established archaeologists who routinely combined archaeological and “nonarchaeological” materials...
When aligned with an Old World archaeology focused on literate “civilizations,” even if remotely, the important theoretical debates within historical archaeology would necessarily revolve around how much historical research was necessary, required, or even tolerable for field studies and whether a greater reliance on texts over artifacts meant that the archaeologist was actually performing as a historian (e.g., Finley 1971). Anthropology’s precise role in all this was unclear, and the question of whether historical archaeology was history or anthropology would bedevil historical archaeology for years and cause many historical archaeologists trained as anthropologists—and personally committed to the discipline—to question their relationship to prehistoric archaeology (Deagan 1988; Orser 1996:10–11). The resultant “crisis of identity” (Cleland and Fitting 1968; Walker 1970), and questions over the role of “history” in their research, meant that many historical archaeologists no longer felt totally secure in their self-identification as anthropologists. For example, pioneering historical archaeologist John Cotter (1967:15) could not decide whether to refer to a fellow historical archaeologist as an “anthropologist-turned historical sites archaeologist or [as a] historian-Americanist-turned archaeologist.” One problem, of course, was that Old World archaeology focused on “civilization”—arguably historical archaeology’s closest intellectual cousin—had never been conceived as an anthropological pursuit, even though one branch of it, classical archaeology, had played a prominent role in the earliest years of American archaeology (Dyson 1989:127–128) as well as archaeology elsewhere (e.g., Furnari 1997). In accordance with the confusion that accompanied Cotter’s disciplinary terminology, what American archaeologists today know as “historical archaeology”—the archaeology of the post-Columbian era—was then known by several other names, including historic site archaeology (Harrington 1952, 1994), historic archaeology (Harrington 1952; Setzler 1943; Walker 1967), colonial archaeology (Setzler 1943), and historic sites archaeology (Fontana 1965; Mattes 1960; also see Pilling 1967).

While American historical archaeologists could find some measure of methodological affinity between themselves and many Old World archaeologists, they had no recourse to sites that could be promoted as “meaningful” in the same way as Pompeii, Herculaneum, or Nineveh. Put another way, historical archaeologists realized, perhaps subconsciously, that to bring their field the notice it deserved, they would need a “heroic age” that would mimic that of other “high civilization” archaeologies (Stiebing 1993:23). Like these other “historical” archaeologists, American archaeologists could use the heroic age to build the intellectual foundation of their field and to create its rationale.

Where would historical archaeologists find this heroic age in the United States? Though one could easily argue that the most heroic men and women of the past had been the hundreds of thousands of laborers who had struggled to build the nation, America’s archaeologists, as members of an intellectual elite, were drawn to the homes and properties of the nation’s historic, almost mythic, elites (Orser and Fagan 1995:25–29).

Happily for American historical archaeologists, the United States government interceded with the passage of the Historic Sites Act of 1935. The framers of this act explicitly linked “historic and archaeological sites” and “historic or prehistoric sites” and mandated the examination of “sites, buildings, and objects” that could be deemed to “possess exceptional value as commemorating or illustrating the history of the United States” (King et al. 1977:202). Historic sites were thus legislatively correlated with prehistoric sites, and each place was given equal legal weight. As a result, the act not only provided employment for pioneering U.S. historical archaeologists, it also created a way for them to construct a “heroic age” around famous sites in American history. Though much of the research initially conducted under the 1935 act was purely architectural in design and scope (Harrington 1994:6), it nonetheless provided a significant entry point for historical archaeology into American archaeology.

At the same time that the federal government was involved in promoting sites and properties judged to be significant within American history, capitalist entrepreneurs were also employing their own brand of historical archaeology, what Harrington (1952:341) has referred to as “restoration archaeology.” In Dearborn, Michigan, Henry Ford used a primitive historical archaeology to aid in constructing his Greenfield Village, an idyllic town meant to portray an America his automobiles were helping to destroy (Upton 1979), and in Williamsburg, Virginia, John D. Rockefeller Jr. was helping to fund excavations that would guide the reconstruction and renovation of one of America’s premier colonial towns (Yetter 1988). These elites used historical archaeology to create memories of the nation—and
themselves—that would last as long as the sites themselves (Patterson 1995:59–60; Schuyler 1976; also see Shackel 2000).

The historical archaeologists of this time generally made no attempt to promote an anthropological connection to this primarily architectural work, even though Harrington (1955), the excavator of Jamestown, had a paper published in *American Anthropologist*. Harrington proposed in the essay that historical archaeology’s greatest contribution was to the study of History, and that the future relationship of historical archaeology to anthropology, and even to social science in general, was debatable. Looking back on his career more than twenty years later, he did not believe the situation had improved much, and he reiterated his opinion that little progress had been made in formulating an anthropological historical archaeology (Harrington 1994:14).

The confusion and controversy expressed during historical archaeology’s earliest years indicated that America’s historical archaeologists had major problems when it came to relating to their fellow anthropologists, even though most of them had been trained as prehistorians (see South 1994). Without being encumbered by the onus of textual “history,” America’s prehistorians discovered that they could find their anthropological niche in the codification of large-scale classification schemes and the concomitant construction of large-scale regional chronologies (Lyman et al. 1997; McKern 1939; Willey and Phillips 1958). Just as Engels (1972:72) had realized that Morgan’s research could help to reconstruct the “prehistoric basis of our written history,” so, too, did prehistorians discover their anthropological relevance. The problem was that a full-scale commitment to the creation of prehistoric cultural chronologies within the anthropological sphere left no relevance for historical archaeology. As archaeology was being cast at the midpoint of the twentieth century, the purview of the prehistorian was literally construed as the study of prehistory, the time before the presence of written language. With time demarcated in this manner, historians would study “history.” The historical archaeologists who investigated sites and properties covered under the auspices of the Historic Sites Act of 1935 were thus actually performing as historians. Historical archaeologists digging into archival collections uncovered written records that had the same intellectual weight as the artifacts they discovered from beneath the earth. When the history of twentieth-century American archaeology was divided into two broad categories—the descriptive-historic period and the comparative-historic period (Willey 1968:40–53)—historical archaeology simply had no anthropological role.

America’s historical archaeologists, however, were deeply concerned about their inability to capture a place within anthropology, their disciplinary training ground. For example, Charles Fairbanks (1994:204–205), who had studied with Redfield and Radcliffe-Brown, was especially committed to building an anthropologically based historical archaeology. As proof, Fairbanks constructed a conscientious anthropological foundation under both plantation archaeology and the archaeology of colonial Spanish America in the Southeast (Fairbanks 1983, 1984). Fairbanks’ early plantation research, for instance, situated him squarely in the middle of the anthropological debate between Frazier (1964) and Herskovits (1958) over the persistence of African cultural characteristics in the New World. Fairbanks made a lasting case for the tenacity of culture—even in the face of the barbarity of the Middle Passage—in his search for material “Africanisms” at antebellum plantation sites (Orser 1994:34–35). Since Fairbanks’ initial research on the nature of violently transplanted African cultures in the Americas, historical archaeologists have moved the examination of slavery and African American culture steadily into such firmly anthropological topics as acculturation (e.g., Wheaton and Garrow 1985), creolization (e.g., Dawdy 2000; Ferguson 1992), race (e.g., Mullins 1999; Orser 1998), the social use of space (e.g., Delle 1998, 2000), and magic and religion (e.g., Leone and Fry 1999; Orser 1994; Wilkie 1997).

**The Further Anthropologization of Historical Archaeology**

While diverse anthropologists argued for a greater union of anthropology and history—and thereby implicitly made a case for the anthropological relevance of historical archaeology (e.g., Evans-Pritchard 1962; Mead 1951)—it was actually the development of the New Archaeology in the 1960s that gave historical archaeology its firmest anthropological standing. Binford (1968, 1972) formulated processual archaeology partly by grounding it in Taylor’s (1948:41) idea that anthropological research could be temporally unbounded, and that it could include “18th century England, Blackfoot Indians, or an industrial community in Indiana”—all, by the way, legitimate subjects for historical archaeology. Within the emergent Taylor/Binford framework, the parameters of the history/prehistory divide became irrelevant as culture process took precedence over temporal affiliation. Binford’s open-minded perspective was undoubtedly both theoretical and personal because he had obtained direct experience with historical archaeology as a graduate student at Fort Michilimackinac, Michigan (Maxwell and Binford 1961; also see Binford 1977). Binford’s “revolutionary” efforts to create a nonmimetic archaeology were eagerly adopted in historical archaeology, largely because the apparent temporal restrictions had been removed from the practice of anthropological archaeology. The historical archaeologist’s role as historian could be downplayed in favor of a newly justifiable role as anthropologist. Once again, however, the United States government had a timely role to play in forcing the practical acceptance of historical archaeology. With the implementation
of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 and 36 CFR Part 60 in 1976, government officials agreed that sites and properties over fifty years old were eligible to be listed on the National Register of Historic Places (Hardesty and Little 2000:43–44; King et al. 1977:223). As of 1976, then, historical archaeologists—examining sites occupied as recently as 1926—found their research mandated by federal legislation designed to defend, protect, and investigate historic-period archaeological sites that could be judged to be “significant” within the legislative guidelines.

Even before the federal mandate, however, some historical archaeologists had actively promoted the use of overt anthropological perspectives in the field. For example, James Deetz (1965, 1968a) was an early advocate of anthropological historical archaeology through his pioneering research on Arikara residence rules. Though some consider this work to fall within the often-murky purview of “protohistory” (e.g., Willey 1968:52), Deetz (1968b, 1988, 1996) became one of America’s premier historical archaeologists and a persistent proponent of an overt anthropological historical archaeology. Stanley South (1977), another influential proponent of anthropological historical archaeology, worked toward the construction of an explicitly scientific historical archaeology rooted in an unambiguous cultural evolutionism (South 1955). South leaned heavily on the works of White and Malinowski in creating his eclectic brand of nomothetic historical archaeology (Orser 1989:28–33), and his approach forever demonstrated the close connections between historical archaeology and anthropology.

South’s formulation was immensely important to the maturation of historical archaeology because he made a strong case for the inclusion of the field into mainstream anthropological archaeology. To make the transition watertight, however, South proposed that, except for its “data base,” historical archaeology was “not a different kind of archaeology from any other” (1977:2). In other words, historical archaeologists were simply archaeologists who studied the relatively recent, as opposed to the ancient, past. His position harkened back to Taylor’s view that “the archaeologist, as archaeologist, is really nothing but a technic-in” (1948:43). But, where Taylor (1948:44) had proposed that archaeology was neither history nor anthropology—but an autonomous discipline in its own right—South (1977:12) situated historical archaeology firmly within anthropology and effectively removed it from any real association with classical archaeology. Without question, his unmistakable insistence on the creation of an anthropologically informed historical archaeology was designed to counter the voices of other prominent historical archaeologists who not only denied anthropology any role in the field whatsoever (e.g., Noël Hume 1972:12–13; Walker 1967) but also openly ridiculed the nomothetic goals of the New Archaeology (Walker 1974). These anti anthropology historical archaeologists took English jurist F. W. Maitland’s advice seriously that “an archaeology that is not history is somewhat less than nothing” (Hazeltine et al. 1936:242). Significantly, the most vocal opponents to an anthropological historical archaeology had been trained in Great Britain, where “archaeology, whether prehistoric or not, has always been regarded as an aspect of history” (Walker 1967:29). Even today, an anthropologically rooted historical archaeology has been slow to develop in Europe, even though the situation is in the process of changing (see, e.g., Frazer 1999; Orser 2000).

Is Historical Archaeology Unique?

From our vantage point at the beginning of the twenty-first century, we can say without qualification that historical archaeology is now a recognized and generally accepted kind of anthropological archaeology. We thus may well imagine that historical archaeologists have exhausted the early epistemological crises that swirled around the meanings of history and the role of archaeology in terms of these many meanings. We may also suppose that the precise relationship between historical and prehistoric archaeology is no longer contested and that a consensus of place exists among most anthropologically trained archaeologists. After all, historical archaeology—in one form or another—has been conducted in the United States since the initial decades of the twentieth century. Based on this history, we would be justified in supposing that the most basic controversies of the field have all been resolved and that historical archaeologists have moved on to more substantive theoretical matters. The controversies of today are indeed more complexly formulated than in the past, but it continues to be somewhat true that the emergence of historical archaeology “as a legitimate subfield in the consciousness of most American archaeologists is relatively recent” (Deagan 1982:151). The often-contentious nature of historical archaeology has not entirely disappeared, and a clear-cut agreement as to the mission and goals of the field is still somewhat elusive. In fact, the controversies of the late 1960s (see South 1968) are still with us, resurfacing in a new guise as recently as the mid-1990s.

In 1994, Mark Leone and Parker Potter (1994) provided a synopsis of an advanced seminar they had organized the previous year at the School of American Research (see Leone and Potter 1999). The central theme of the seminar was based on a growing realization among many historical archaeologists that they were uniquely positioned to investigate the material and cultural manifestations of historical capitalism as it had been expressed around the world since the early 1500s (Leone and Potter 1999; also see Johnson 1996; Leone 1995a; Little 1994; Orser 1987, 1988a, 1988b, 1996; Paynter 1988, 2000a, 2000b). One point of both the symposium and Leone and Potter’s short report was to promote the idea that the study of capitalism can serve to unite historical archaeologists in the common
purpose of understanding the intricacies of the capitalist project, while at the same time providing a commonality for the investigation of the dimensions of capitalist resistance at localities across the globe, topics that have serious anthropological relevance (e.g., Bodley 1990; Friedman 1994; Patterson 1999; Robbins 1999). Leone and Potter sought to define a role for today’s historical archaeology within the critique of globalization and modernization.

Leone and Potter’s statement, and the growing realization among some historical archaeologists that their field was unique within archaeology, was not truly new, as similar sentiments had been expressed, albeit in different ways, during the debates of the formative years (e.g., South 1968). Nonetheless, their summary reopened and reinvigorated the discussion over the perspectives and goals of historical archaeology and demonstrated that the most basic, definitional issues of the field had never been satisfactorily resolved (Becker 1995; Hackbarth 1995; Leone 1995b; Moore 1995a, 1995b; Wesler 1996).

The opinions that Leone and Potter evoked about the “proper” study of historical archaeology were decidedly more sophisticated than those of the 1960s. The point of contention was not the disciplinary heritage and academic placement of historical archaeology (as either “anthropological” or “historical”—historical archaeologists now readily accepted the fuzzy boundary between the two disciplines) but whether historical archaeologists were correct to express the uniqueness of their field as the study of the material manifestations of capitalism. Historical archaeologists who were opposed to the idea generally argued that foregrounding this primarily economic system created artificial boundaries that were both disciplinarily and temporally based. In other words, a focus on capitalism would tend to separate historical archaeologists both from prehistory (creating an artificial temporal disjunction) and from prehistorians (creating an artificial disciplinary demarcation) (e.g., Funari et al. 1999; Lightfoot 1995; Wesler 1998). Prehistorians will discern that this debate is structurally analogous to the question of whether world systems theory should be restricted to post-A.D. 1500 history (Wallerstein 1974, 1979, 1980) or whether the characteristics of world systems can be identified far earlier (Frank 1993; Frank and Gills 1993). Prehistorians have argued both positions at length and have not been able to derive any sort of final resolution (e.g., Algaze 1993; Blanton and Feinman 1984; Blanton et al. 1992; Champion 1989; Chase-Dunn and Hall 1991; Edens 1992; Hall and Chase-Dunn 1983, 1994; King and Freer 1995; Kohl 1987; Pailles and Whitecotton 1979; Peregrine 1995; Peregrine and Feinman 1996; Rowlands et al. 1987; Sanderson 1995; Schortman and Urban 1987, 1992; Upham 1986). No easy solution similarly exists for the question of whether historical archaeology is about capitalism, or whether, like all archaeology, it is simply situated within an everyday, capitalist system.

Some Current Faces of Historical Archaeology

The dispute over capitalism illustrates that historical archaeology is still not a conceptually unified field of inquiry. The more than thirty years that American historical archaeologists have been searching for a coherent perspective suggests that the field never will be completely settled. Few historical archaeologists would demand any sort of theoretical conformity—as this would seriously stifle intellectual growth—but many may find it disconcerting that the purpose of their field of inquiry is still contested. Others, however, may find the diversity stimulating and thought-provoking. As the situation currently stands at the beginning of the twenty-first century, it seems that historical archaeologists conceptualize their field in several ways. The most prevalent of these perspectives include: historical archaeology as a critique of modern history, including capitalism, capitalist expressions, and resistance; historical archaeology as a trans-temporal study of broad cultural trends and processes; and historical archaeology as a generally particularistic (some would say “historical”) study of specific places. In every case, today’s most accomplished historical archaeology loudly proclaims its anthropological heritage.

Archaeologists who tend to see historical archaeology as a critical pursuit generally believe that it can have a distinct impact on our understanding of the historical roots of today’s world, including capitalism. This understanding is linked to a critically informed anthropology that seeks to be active and engaged in the problems of today’s world (Harrison 1997; Hymes 1974). While some archaeologists may simply choose to characterize this research as “political,” and thereby summarily dismiss it (e.g., Washburn 1987), historical archaeology constructed in this manner seeks to make the past relevant to the present. The target audience is not only other scholars but also descendant communities and nonarchaeologists (e.g., McDavid and Babson 1997; Potter 1994). This kind of historical archaeology—variously termed “modern-world archaeology” (Orser 1999:280–282) and “critical archaeology” (Leone et al. 1987)—shares with many anthropologists an interest in modernization and dependency, globalization, mass consumerism, colonialism, and cultural survival and resistance.

Historical archaeologists who tend to reject the perspective of a critical historical archaeology, but yet who readily accept the premise of anthropological historical archaeology, often seek to use archaeology to document the trans-temporal features and characteristics of complex societies. Using a mostly comparative framework to investigate such topics as urbanism (Mrozowski 1988) and the extent and nature of large-scale trading networks prior to A.D. 1500
(Funari 1999), these historical archaeologists tend to give precedence to cross-cultural similarities between complex societies and downplay the temporal differences between them. In many cases, these archaeological studies of broad cultural trends over vast periods of time share with critical archaeology an overt interest in dominated and intentionally ignored peoples who have had their history appropriated by others (e.g., Mangut 1998; Parker Pearson et al. 1999).

Another face of today’s historical archaeology involves the study of particular places for specific purposes, such as for the completion of cultural resource management reports. American historical archaeology is heavily committed to contract research, and as of 1998, only 29 percent of historical archaeologists were engaged in some amount of teaching (DeCorse 2000:14). Based on the survey, it is reasonable to state that most American historical archaeology is conducted in an applied environment. Much of the research completed within the parameters of sponsored research often appears to have little direct relevance to an anthropologically informed archaeology because the researchers are often contractually engaged to demonstrate the historical significance of a building, site, or property within the established federal guidelines, or are simply empowered to conduct surveys of tightly delimited areas. Even with such constraints, however, cultural resource managers often do complete sophisticated examples of anthropological research, using as part of their explanatory frameworks such concepts as urbanization, ethnic boundary maintenance, and social networks (e.g., McIlroy and Praetzelis 1997; Praetzelis et al. 1997; Ziesing 1998).

One of the exciting elements of today’s anthropologically informed historical archaeology is that these three “groups”—those who study capitalism, those interested in trans-temporal processes, and those engaged in applied research—are loose at best. They are neither mutually exclusive nor do they constitute all possible emphases of research in historical archaeology. Other commentators may dispute their very existence, choosing to argue that the field is differently organized or not organized at all. Rather than being troubling, these differences of opinion merely reflect the vitality of the field and the richness of interpretations that are possible within it.

Examples in Historical Archaeology

The diverse character of today’s historical archaeology means that the field is contentious and alive. Historical archaeologists espouse a variety of theoretical viewpoints and conduct research on a huge number of topics, and individual historical archaeologists see themselves as engaged in various segments of the larger anthropological project. Given the breadth of research now being conducted throughout the world, no single volume, no matter how large, could ever hope to portray the true variation within the field. Instead, the best we can hope for is to present an indication of current efforts in historical archaeology without any goal of total inclusivity. The five articles that follow are intended to demonstrate some of the research that is now being conducted by anthropological historical archaeologists in the United States.

In Bonnie McEwan’s article, we confront a familiar theme in historical archaeology. In fact, the examination of colonization and cultural transformation was one of the earliest topics pursued by historical archaeologists, many of whom first found their anthropological relevance in the study of fur trade posts and other frontier sites where men and women from vastly different cultures met and interacted. Whereas much of the investigation in the past would have revolved around the material identification of acculturation and focused on issues of how acculturation could be “measured” in artifact frequencies, McEwan shows us the true complexities of culture contact. Her lens is through religion, one area of research in historical archaeology that is quickly becoming prominent. She argues that intercultural contact incorporates more than just political changes and shows how Spanish missionaries in Florida zealously pressed the cause of Christianity on the indigenous Native Americans, in a process that was repeated throughout the globe. Relying on a solid staple of much archaeological research, McEwan examines mortuary patterns at several mission sites in an effort to gain insights into religious conversion and the interplay of social variables in those conversions. Using one particular strength of modern-day historical archaeology, McEwan links past and present by noting how the Talimali Band of Apalachee are still practicing Roman Catholics, information that aptly demonstrates the power of religious conservatism over time.

Paul Shackel takes a completely different tack than McEwan and examines how history is constructed and how memory is produced. Issues such as these have seldom been overtly explored in American historical archaeology, even though much of the field’s history is associated specifically with the production of memory at sites considered to have historic, national importance. Confronting such complicated issues as the creation of exclusionary history, the role of patriotism in the production of memory, and the application of symbols at historic landscapes and monuments, Shackel illustrates the tacit power historical archaeologists—and in fact all archaeologists—have at their discretion when they construct images of the past. These images become frozen in time when they constitute the basis for physical reconstruction, a topic of special significance for historical archaeology. Shackel’s effort is also instructive because historical archaeologists often find themselves attempting to justify that they are “doing” historical archaeology when they are not excavating. Many archaeologists tend to equate archaeology strictly with excavation, and an individual who is not a “dirt archaeologist” is often not considered to be an archaeologist at all.
Historical archaeologists are sensitive to this criticism because their vast resource base includes so much that is above ground. Most historical archaeologists adopt an extremely liberal view of what constitutes "real" archaeology, and Shackel's study of public memory certainly qualifies.

Adrian and Mary Praetzellis take us in yet another direction with their study in California. As proponents of "contextual archaeology"—an innovative approach that incorporates creative storytelling—they view historical archaeology as a humanistic field that has its greatest chance of interpretive success in the ability of archaeologists to "play" with the data. The goal of this approach is to provide an animated, interesting picture of how real men and women once lived in the world. Rather than focusing on whole cultures or even on social groups as homogeneous wholes, they seek to personalize the people they study and in the process strive to understand how these men and women used their material culture for their own, complex ends. Here, Praetzellis and Praetzellis investigate the gentility of Victorian culture. Subjects of the British Empire expressed gentility as normative behavior across the globe, and Praetzellis and Praetzellis individualize the enactment of this behavior at four unique places. In the process they confront an important issue in today's historical archaeology concerning the scale of analysis. Some historical archaeologists prefer large-scale analyses, while others see their greatest abilities to excel, as do Praetzellis and Praetzellis, at a far smaller scale. Still others promote a multiscalar analysis that tacks back and forth between many scales. The verdict is still out among historical archaeologists as to what scale is most appropriate for particular analyses and whether one particular scale is actually best for historical archaeology. One of the strengths of today's diverse historical archaeology is that no one needs to decide on only one scale of inquiry. Praetzellis and Praetzellis forcefully demonstrate this fact in their powerful, personalized interpretation.

In Elizabeth Scott's contribution we encounter a prominent feature of much historical archaeology: the analysis of faunal remains. Focusing on a sugar plantation in Louisiana, Scott investigates the correlation between the cross-cutting social variables of plantation power relations, ethnicity, and class affiliation, and argues, through an analysis of the excavated faunal remains, that the social variables enacted on the plantation worked in complex ways to affect diet. Scott calls into question some of today's stereotypes about the association of certain foods with specific ethnic groups and proposes that broad generalizations cannot be made from her data to all plantations. Historical archaeologists have wondered since the inception of plantation archaeology whether and on what scale plantation comparisons could be made, and many have devised cleaver dichotomies for investigation of the slave regime: antebellum:postbellum, upland:coastal, sugar:cotton, cotton:rice, and Old South:frontier South. Such broad comparisons can be said conceptually to mirror the culture historian's creation of prehistoric, regional cultural chronologies in that they seek to present totalizing structures of interpretation across and within huge regions. Scott argues, on the contrary, that it is even problematic to compare the faunal data from her site to other plantations in the same state. Part of the difficulty is undoubtedly practical in that the data base, though growing larger every year, is still relatively small. Even so, the possible uniqueness of every plantation—including the spatial landscapes, power relations, social structures, and community organizations—is a topic that plantation archaeologists will likely confront in future studies.

The final article, by Amy Young, Michael Tuma, and Cliff Jenkins, finds us on another plantation site, this one in Mississippi. Showing the richness of interpretive possibilities, Young et al. take a different tack than Scott, even though they also use faunal information. They focus on the notion of purposeful risk management by African American slaves, enacted within a social environment that emphasizes family and community. Young et al. illustrate how slaves used hunting strategies as a means of regaining some degree of control within a socially repressive setting in which they were not intended to have control. The issue of slave control has been a contentious issue in historical archaeology, because to downplay the slaves' power to create culture fashions them into mere automatons, whereas to give them substantial power lessens the repulsive, inhuman nature of human bondage. The examination and interpretation of the control slaves had over their own lives, no matter on what level it was achieved, demonstrates just one area in which historical archaeology can have a major impact on anthropological thought. The concept of risk management provides one intriguing avenue of inquiry, to be sure.

In the articles that follow, we see a focus on both large and small issues and five examples of interpretation and analysis. We move around in time and place and obtain insights into various aspects of the American past. Some of the information presented was gathered within a contract archaeology environment, while other information was generated by pure research curiosity. Some of the archaeologists are interested in capitalism, and others are more concerned with investigating the basic issues of the human condition. But throughout, we see the diversity of approach, the vitality of interpretation, and the exciting potential of an anthropologically informed historical archaeology.

**Note**

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1. Even the figure of 29 percent is too high because the respondent category in the survey included "full-time college/university jobs, joint-appointments, adjunct teaching at colleges and universities, and primary and secondary school employees" (DeCorse 2000:14). Of the 804 Society for Historical Archaeology members who responded to the survey, fully 71 percent stated that they had completed a cultural resource management report within the past five years (1993–98).

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