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Archaeology of the Floorboards: An Analysis of the Condition of the Captive Black Woman at Livingston Manor, Clermont, Montgomery Place, and the Germantown Parsonage

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Archaeology of the Floorboards:
An Analysis of the Condition of the Captive Black Woman at Livingston Manor, Clermont,
Montgomery Place, and the Germantown Parsonage

Senior Project Submitted to
The Division of Social Studies
of Bard College

by
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Annandale-on-Hudson, New York

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Introduction

My adult peers and mentors flinch at the mention of slavery in the Union. It is not that we do not all collectively understand the fundamental facts about American slavery: The Transatlantic Slave Trade itself began in the 15th century. The American slave trade began in 1610's, predominantly transplanting African and Black captives to North America and the Caribbean Americas to work as forced laborers. The historic economic development of this nation was built on the backs of this captive labor. Difficult to digest sometimes and still straightforwardly understood. For those in my life, the more accurate struggle appears to be a deeply aesthetic and personal one.

“Obviously the Civil War was predominantly about ending slavery in the South. I hate it when people play dumb.”

“White people still benefit from slavery even hundreds of years later, even in New York.”

“I wish I had learned more about slavery in my hometown when I was younger, but I'm from [New England] and there just isn't any Black history to study in the area.”

“...it's like we're living in the Antebellum South, white men keep getting worse and worse the more time we give them.”

Half truths from well-intentioned people I've spoken to in an academic setting; the image most people have of U.S. slavery is that of a plantation in Mississippi with hundreds of Black captives fighting for their lives and planning their escape. Contemporary movies such as *Django Unchained*, *Twelve Years a Slave*, and *Antebellum*, have planted an appropriately uncomfortable

and violent idea of slavery into the minds of contemporary Americans. However these themes alone also simplify the narrative of slavery in the U.S. The idea is that the institution of slavery was contained in the backwards southern colonies where Black captives' communities were beaten down forcefully, always looking towards the freedom that lay above the Mason Dixon line.

Without deeper social context these themes allow for the infantilization of the slave narrative. An idea that a captive person's identity was consumed by their captivity. That, even though a captive person's life somehow revolved exclusively around their captivity, they could not do anything to change their situation. This is impossibly false. It also allows for patterns of oversimplified history, wherein the modern world was created by select people in power and very little attention is given to those people whose lives overlap with that power, such as their wives or servants. As young learners we begin to empathize with the figures in history who are treated as whole and complete people with depth of character. People whose lives have records protected generationally and even cross-culturally. This type of care is not systematically in place for the historically enslaved in the U.S., and more specifically to my thesis, it is not in place for Black captive women.

Even more nuanced is an understanding of the role women played during developmental time in colonial and revolutionary United States history. Deborah Gray White's (1999) exploration of Black womanhood and slavery in *Ar'n't I A Woman*, proposes the idea that "...perceptions of racial difference were founded on the different ways [colonial white America] constructed black and white women" (9), and so if the perpetuation of a white supremacist patriarchy relied on the subjugation of women, womanhood as a definable subject relied on the

juxtaposition of Black and white women. I often find this link between race and capitalism to be missing in academic discussions of social facts: values and systems existing outside of the individual which exert control over all people existing in society. This missing link is replaced with speculation about dissemination of power in patriarchal societies and how [white] men's influence affected the rest of the [white] man's world.

We assume academically and socially that the modern world was shaped by men, for men are now in control. Because of the scale of white patriarchal supremacist values and global connectivity, even modern academics struggle in handling a social lens larger than that of victimization by the patriarchy. However, society is more than just a sum of its parts. During the period to be analyzed in this paper; from the period in U.S. history before Independence in 1776, through the abolition of slavery in 1827; society was more than women and people of color acting as the instruments of white colonial U.S. politicians. It was and still is, entirely reliant on the relationships between every actor, and seldom discussed is the unprecedented significance of the relationship between white women and Black women.

Womanhood is depicted as a powerful tool in a modern social armory. Seduction, pregnancy, vulnerability, motherhood, and ruthlessness are themes found in stories of modern powerful women; "Behind every strong man..." This idea of powerful women working behind the scenes--the true orchestrators--invalidates the actual power they wield in relationships completely isolated from the ones they have with men. It also ironically allows for the vindication of the functionally powerless woman whose only source of freedom is behind the scenes. In this paper and time context, when I speak on power, power for the white woman is the ability to enslave, to own property, and to participate in slave-trade. Possibly also to manage a

household, and to be responsible for a business. Power for the black woman is autonomy of thought and personal culture, memory, and individual action and community without relationship to her captors. I will explore how both of these women exercised functional autonomy, in conversation with each other and through their own relationships isolated from one another.

In this thesis I will analyze the relationship between the overly-sexualized Black captive woman and the labor she was forced to perform. The commodification of the female body and what delineated 'female,' and how these stereotypes combined to create the image of the care-taking and asexual 'mammy.' The critically important nexus of these conversations is the experience of childbirth and motherhood for Black women in the colonial and antebellum U.S. Exactly because white and Black womanhood rely on each other for definition, I will also be exploring the experiences of the white women who would have created relationships with these Black captive women mentioned in my writing. I am focusing specifically on the Livingston family of Columbia County at the time of Alida (1655-1726) and Robert Livingston Sr. (1654-1728); the period during the Revolutionary War when Margret Beekman managed Clermont, a manor on the land her father-in-law inherited from his father Robert Livingston. I will also be exploring Janet Livingston, daughter of Margret Beekman, and the house, property, and business she owned at what is now Bard college's Montgomery Place campus. I will also include narratives from Sojourner Truth, who was born captive in Kingston, New York in 1797. I have also determined the names of captive people kept by the Livingston family and Janet Montgomery Livingston, and so wielding the few names I was privileged to recover and collect, I, whenever possible, name captive people to deviate from a nameless chattel narrative. Similarly

I consistently name the captors such as Alida, Margret, Janet, and their husbands, so that their actions in the slave trade are not allowed to exist separately from their socio-political legacies.

The complicated relationship between Black and white women not only defines racial relationships on a larger societal scale, but defines modern American womanhood. White womanhood and “mistress-dom” exist exactly because Black women were captive; “Black and white womanhood were interdependent” (Gray White 1999, 12, 15). This was not only a passive relationship designed by men to ensure their generational patriarchy. White American women were not passive actors in the development of the U.S. slave-trade and more specifically were not ignorant to the realities of slavery on their own properties. Although, “Slave-owning women rarely talked about their economic investments in slavery, and they wrote about them even less. Their silence did not reflect their aversion to slavery or human trafficking” (Jones-Rogers 2020, 27). The idea that social convention subdued women in all aspects of life in colonial and revolutionary-era U.S. history similarly affects captive communities and Black women. The victimizing lack of autonomy in this stereotypical rhetoric allows for misunderstandings and generalizations about the way captive women saw themselves and therefore defined their existence.

This train of thought introduced me to a series of essays written by Black feminist authors. Over the summer I was introduced to bell hooks and Patricia Collins. I found a copy of Stephanie Jones-Rodger’s (2020) book titled *They Were Her Property*, detailing the undocumented relationships between Black captives and white women in the antebellum south, Quickly once I returned to campus I began reading Maria Franklin, a prominent Black female archaeologist, and from here I discovered the term Black feminist archaeology; a small--a

tiny--faction of archaeologists and archaeological thought that has infinitely expanded my understanding of the Black captive women in this thesis, and the white women, and their personal intricates, who relate to their lives.

It is incorrect to assume that Black feminist archaeological opinions pertain only to the study of Black women. Black women cannot act as subjects in a vacuum the same way the white supremacist patriarchy is able. As noted by Maria Franklin (2001) in an article I have found to contain the first use of the phrase 'Black Feminist Archaeology', she writes, "One might argue that the absence of a Black feminist perspective in historical archaeology is directly related to the absence of Black feminist historical archaeologists. This explanation does not suffice, as it suggests that the issues raised by a Black feminist critique could, or should, only be important to Black feminists" (116). In this declaration there contains an acknowledgement of what has been a constant complication to my studies. This 'complication' is the assumption by others that Black feminist thought exists only to represent the historical record of Black women.

The history of Black women is seen either as Black history, which realistically is not considered fundamental to understanding U.S. history, or it is considered women's history which is also, realistically, not considered fundamental to understanding African and Black American history. Because of this, Black women's history and theory has had to work doubly as hard to relate the experiences of Black women to the larger historical canon. In doing so, I have found Black feminist thought accounts for far more than just the unwritten history of the Black or African woman in the U.S.. In one of my favorite readings for this project, *A Black Feminist Archaeology*, Whitney Battle-Baptiste (2016) details the unique position Black feminist thought is placed in in its ability to view the world; "Black Feminist Archaeology is a method that

centers the intersectionality of race, gender, and class into a larger discussion of archaeological approaches to interpreting the past” (69-70). Black feminist archaeology represents an intersectional interpretation of history. I even briefly resented the term for its suggestion that Black female academics were the only ones rescuing contemporary history from its paternalistic views of marginalized history. However, it represents more than that.

A Black feminist archaeology does what no other theories can; it keeps Black women as a focal point. As if ‘Black women’ were a thesis, all theory, archaeology, and historical interpretation extending from a study of history pertaining to Black women, return to the original thesis. This feels like an obvious and unnecessary specification, but it is important to clarify this explicitly; the mindset of a Black feminist archaeology and the considerations taken in its intersectionality can be applied on a more universal scale to studies of all marginalized peoples. However, when it is removed from the focus of Black women, captive, free, and contemporary, it simply becomes intersectional academia. This is almost directly contradictory to the point I suggested previously, that: the idea of Black feminist thought existing only to represent the experience of Black women being an erroneous assumption. In clarification, what I consider to be erroneous is not the Black female experience being a focal point, but is instead the removal of a Black female experience from the context of its historical interpretation. Black feminist archaeological theory centers around the location in, and history of a time, that Black women simply existed, and focuses on the intricate and invaluable perspective Black women possess. This perspective is born from the unique type of oppression experienced by Black women and the specific type of social mobility this allows them. Separation from a focus on this perspective is to remove the study from Black feminist archaeology completely. Because of this, Black

feminist theory is obviously especially poignant in understanding roles only women can fulfill: pregnancy, childbirth, breastfeeding and the experience of systematic sexual terrorism.

By living in the Hudson Valley, I have coincidentally found myself at the nexus of gendered colonial misconceptions and a Northern 'union' society, in which I have recently been able to use my knowledge and study to realistically deconstruct. My goal is to begin to uncover the truth about the role of slavery in New York and the truth that my peers have difficulty grasping, which is the constant reality that I am faced with in my study of the archaeology of the area. Situated in Tivoli and a student at Bard College, I am bordered by the historical property of the Livingston family and Clermont Manor to the north, and Montgomery Place immediately to the south of my campus. Both manors at times had dozens of captive employed on the properties for their labor. Without slavery, not even the property now known as Blithewood would have been cleared out of the forest and built upon. The economy of the Hudson Valley, and of the Bard area specifically, was wholly reliant on development through captive labor. Seldom discussed in my research on the topic of slavery in the colony of New York, is how specifically this area became so organized--in a time and area stricken by tense and aggressive ethnic relationships--as a means to boost its economic growth, and to this end I propose the answer is found in the organization of the domestic. What is considered the realm of women.

The loudest pushback I received in response to this paper was what purpose it served to academia. I struggled for many months with the idea of analyzing the autonomy of captive women in any way, shape, or form in relationship to white women. As a black woman living in the Hudson Valley, this project is a deeply personal one, and so my first priority is always to the lived experience of my subject as detailed and accurately as I am able to contextualize. In this

essay I will explore the role of women in the development of the economy of slavery in the Hudson Valley, both enslaved and slave-owning. I do this not only because their stories are invaluable and missing from the history of this area but also I emphasize their significance separately from the role of mainstream history and to highlight the value of their perspectives outside of academia but as common decency for people of the past.

"The Archeology of the Floorboards" is pulled from my childhood being surrounded by women and the domestic sphere. A few weeks before the end of last semester I cut my foot on a piece of glass on the floor while sweeping. I cleaned often and had never broken any glassware and so while I sat on my living room floor bandaging my foot I thought about who, renting the house before me, might have left a broken cup under my radiator. Growing up, the domestic community I was a part of sustained itself through this kind of storytelling. These women in my life kept the family records and in their free time became masters of genealogy. My great-aunt made it her hobby to reconstruct our family tree. Women in my neighborhood would create historical communities based on the archeological findings on their farms or from the stories their parents would tell them about the area. I personally never felt particularly close to those rural white women-run communities, although I still observed them.

My dedication to archaeology comes from the very ideas in this thesis. I chose not to pursue ethnographic study in college because of the responsibility I feel to material culture. The art, and objects left behind by those who were not granted written records, are the stories these people tell about themselves. After bandaging my foot that evening I fingered through the spaces between my hardwood floorboards. I pulled out sewing needles. I pulled the cushions off of my sofa and dug through the troughs under the backboard. I found hair ties, cigarettes, and candy

wrappers. In Part I of this thesis I explore the similarities shared by white and Black motherhood as well as the expectations of Black women's reproduction which was exploitative and violent by nature. In Part II, I analyze Black communal spaces, with a specific focus on spiritual practices of the area, in relationship to the sustenance of Black community by Black matriarchies. In Part III of this thesis I explore the relationship between Black womanhood and labor, and how intrinsically connected the definition of 'Black' is to the expectation of labor. The Black woman exists at the nexus of racism and patriarchy, and so an analysis of her position in captive or free society is not complete without the historical context of social attitudes towards gender roles and race relations. And so I also provide historical and archaeological context for the white families that the Black female subjects of this thesis would interact with, specifically their white female captors.

Making an archaeological senior project this year has been particularly difficult, but I believe it is crucially important that this project is an archaeological one. In spring 2020, second semester last year, the covid-19 pandemic effectively shut down every active field site I would have had the opportunity to work on, including the Germantown Maple Avenue Parsonage. Over the summer and the course of the first semester I struggled to narrow down my research topic; I could not find an archaeological outlet. However in this project I am drawing from the archaeology of others; archaeological surveys made before construction, past senior projects, and previously active field sites of New York and in the general northeast; to inform my research of this area and the families I will be focusing on. Most important to me, I will be drawing on my own personal finds, and that of my classmate's, on our season studying the hearth of the

parsonage in Germantown, where there is distinct evidence of Black and African captive culture in the form of artifacts and carvings into the structure of the hearth itself.

The role of archaeology to interpret the past and inform history. More specifically, archaeology enables us to inspect objects from the past in their own context. The moment an artifact comes out of the ground it newly informs history and is simultaneously informed by the mind of the person who has found it. To me, archaeology is a practice in meditation; a knowledge of history and some tools does not make an archaeologist. It requires a mindful and ego-free approach to any material and the flexibility to immediately deconstruct a narrative you may have been building around an object or collection. The same aforementioned responsibility I feel towards material culture extends not only to knowing those whose stories remained unwritten, but also to better understand the world around me especially in racial and religious relationships. My goal is to have the ability to enter archaeology and history with fewer and fewer assumptions every time, and the first step for me is to better understand the area that has fostered me in my academic development over the past four years.

It is not advertised as such, but Hudson Valley is one of the most historically significant areas in the U.S., and its significance is due in large part to the people whose stories are not considered contextually important to history. These omissions on the behalf of Black and white women critically undermine the social relationships that build this country and cripple our understanding of basic social relationships. Taking a note from published author and Professor, Dr. Battle-Baptist, I use the word captor instead of the word slave or enslaved, so that the identity of the individuals in this essay are not reduced commodities whose lives revolved around their captivity. The word captor also indicates the very active role slave-holders occupied in their

participation with the slave-trade and in the lives of captive people. In this essay I capitalize the word Black in reference to Black Americans to acknowledge the culture that was borne from the communities and generations of captivity. I do not capitalize white for the same reason; whiteness is not a culture, it is capital.

Slavery in New York

Why is it so rare to find a mention of slavery in histories that are not written intentionally for Black Americans? Historical homes and landmarks sprinkled down the East Coast seldom mention captive peoples in their placards, panels, and gift shops. Why is it so difficult to, instead of writing slave histories, to keep slavery in mind when writing history? I propose it is because if the U.S. suddenly adopted an attitude of mindfulness through any facet of education, we would suddenly be inundated with all of the affects of slavery that persist to this day.

Delegating my examples only to New York City for the sake of concisness, there are numerous accounts of the direct participation of slavery in the development and success of modern U.S. companies. The international investment firm Lehman Brothers began as a family enterprise of cotton factors¹; “Three brothers named Lehman were cotton brokers in Montgomery, Alabama, before they moved to New York [City] and helped to establish the New York Cotton Exchange.” Lehman Brothers was at one point the fourth-largest and most successful investment bank in the U.S.

J.P. Morgan² is another popular modern investment bank, however this business started in the mid 19th century when “Junius Morgan, father of J. Pierpont Morgan, arranged for his son to study the cotton trade in the South as the future industrialist and banker was beginning his business career” (Farrow, Lang, Frank 2006, 39). The first American millionaire, John Jacob Astor, “made his fortune in furs and the China trade.” In his success as an American merchant he

¹ Cotton factors, also known as cotton brokers, were the individuals who worked as middlemen for cotton farmers and plantations, and the cotton market which would be shipped domestically and internationally. There was a lucrative business to be found in representing cotton farms and plantations to prospective merchants.

² Now more recognizably known as, J.P. Morgan Chase & Co.

also was heavily involved in the southern cotton trading industry domestically and internationally (Farrow, Lang, Frank 2006, 40).

The most common mention--and often only an implication--pertaining to the involvement of American slavery in history is in details about crops and material goods. The cotton economy mentioned in the examples above is specifically in reference to economic relationships in the southern United States. And so why, with mentions of cotton being so ubiquitous with early American economies, is the institution of slavery so rarely mentioned explicitly? This is not only a question pointed at the southern plantations of the U.S.; the words ‘plantation’ and ‘cotton’ carry heavy implications of slavery and the slave-trade, and to the average American invoke images of race-based oppression in the rural south. This question is more appropriately pointed at the northern United States. Without cotton-imagery and plantation-style narratives, as well as the addition of the connotation the north carries as being a collection of ‘free-states,’ what room is left for a seemingly-contradictory history of slavery? Objectively speaking, plenty. There is plenty of room for an understanding of slavery in the north.

New York state was the second-to-last northern state and original member of the thirteen colonies, to abolish slavery.^{3 4} In 1799, New York legislature passed the Manumission Act of 1799 stating,

“Be it enacted by the people in the state of New York represented in senate and assembly that any child born of a slave within this state after the fourth day of

³ All thirteen colonies declared statehood in 1776 simultaneously along with declaring independence from the British. In this essay I will use the word colony to refer to New York for dates prior to 1776, and the word state for the same reason for the dates 1776 and onwards.

⁴ The final northern state being New Jersey, which did not officially end slavery until the passage of the Thirteenth Amendment in 1865. Prior to this, and similar to New York State, there were multiple partial manumission-acts passed at the state level, none of which fully abolished the institution of slavery in the state.

July next, shall be deemed..to be born free. Provided nevertheless that such child shall be the servant of the legal proprietor of his or her mother, until such servant if a male shall arrive at the age of twenty eight years, and if a female at the age of twenty five years."⁵

This act freed children born to captive mothers born after the year 1799. However, the act also kept the children in the service of their mother's legal captor until adolescence and offered no state-standard reparation system to be put in place after their freedom. The colony of New York--first New Netherlands⁶--is unique to the history of slavery in the north exactly *because* slavery was so crucial to the development of New York. For this reason it was not possible for the economy of the state to completely abolish slavery in 1799. In comparison, Vermont was the first state to abolish slavery in totality in the year 1777.

Much earlier, during the 17th century, the then-Dutch settlement of New Amsterdam had long been employing the labor of captive Africans in similar roles to as are seen in later iterations of African and Black American slavery.

“Labor shortages were endemic in the New Netherlands, and the Dutch had imported enslaved workers from the earliest days of their North American colonies. The critical role of African labor in the Dutch colony received graphic demonstration in the prominent place given to Africans in mid-seventeenth-century personifications of the Nieu Amsterdam colony...The African laborers supported the local economy as agricultural workers and skilled artisans, while enslaved African and African American domestics served both as

⁵New York State Archives, New York (State). *An Act for the Gradual Abolition of Slavery*. Dept. of State. Bureau of Miscellaneous Records. Enrolled acts of the State Legislature. Series 13036-78, Laws of 1799, Chapter 62.

⁶ Also sometimes ‘New Amsterdam.’ The British conquered the Dutch colony of New Amsterdam in 1664 and it was thereafter known as New York.

aids in labor and conspicuous indicators of status for their owner” (Bankoff, 2005; 295).

Few families during the 17th century and turn of the 18th century could afford to purchase a captive laborer, but the newly named colony of New York was home to a disproportionate number of wealthy and politically involved families. The Schuylers, Beekmans, and Van Benthuyzen, to name just a few. Although there were few New York families as influential as the Livingston’s of Columbia County. This family amassed such wealth during the late 17th century that the name Livingston would share a similar connotation to one of the family names or corporations mentioned above, mirroring the associations of wealth and success in business that come with the name J.P. Morgan to a contemporary audience.

Livingston Manor & Clermont | Alida and Margaret

In 1673 Robert Livingston, later known as Robert “The Elder,” came to the United States as a prospective merchant. He was nineteen years old. Having grown up in Rotterdam, a port city in the Netherlands, Robert was accustomed to an economically diverse metropolitan and was not interested in returning to his ancestral home in rural Scotland. Instead he immigrated to Massachusetts in 1673, and later to New York, in search of wealth (Kierner 1992). The colony of New York had then-recently, in the year 1664, been conquered by the British after being colonized by the Dutch. Robert Livingston was bilingual from a childhood spent in the Netherlands, and used his fluency in both Dutch and English to gain favor in the colony’s politics. He would find his wealth while strategically working alongside the governor of New

York, then appointed by the British Crown. In 1678 he married Alida Schuyler, recently widowed, and daughter of the influential Schuyler family. Alida would later become an invaluable member of the Livingston business model for her ability to organize and manage the Livingston property.

Because of his marriage to Alida, Robert suddenly had intimate connections with the most powerful families in New York, paired with his years creating business relationships as a government official in Albany. Alida Schuyler Livingston, previously Alida Schuyler Van Rensselaer, granted Robert access to an, albeit tense, relationship with the Van Rensselaer family, from whom a later 2,600 acre portion of his property would come. In 1686, with the assistance of the then-governor of New York Thomas Dongan, Robert and Alida applied for a tract of land between the Hudson and the Massachusetts border. The 160,000 acre land grant was signed over to the Livingstons by the British crown and had quickly secured Livingston's future and influence over the development of New York state. So why then, in all my research, are there so few records of the captive people Robert Livingston Sr. and Alida, or their children, held? This is the responsibility of archaeology.

Using historical records and the extensive collection of letters written between Robert and Alida Livingston, it is very quickly determined that Alida Livingston was responsible for the management of the entire Livingston estate. Robert spent most of his time in mercantilism, which kept him away from home. Prior to British colonial rule, women in New Netherland,

“...had an independent status in the eyes of the law. They could own real estate, could sue and be sued, could own and operate businesses and engage in trade without male permission or co-sponsorship. Many women of New Netherland

engaged in economic activity on their own. Their status changed after the British conquest, but the change was gradual” (Beimer 1982, 183).

This meant that Alida had watched her mother Margaret⁷ manage the vast Scuyler property, their tenant farmers, captive laborers, a respectful relationship with Native American peoples, and all ten of her children, for her entire life throughout the relative liberty of Dutch colonial rule. Alida herself had nine pregnancies, and seven children who survived to adulthood. At the same time, her husband quickly began to amass the largest fortune in the Hudson Valley which required tenants--for rent--as well as captive labor, all on a much larger scale than she had grown up with. On a communal note, Alida’s close relationship with her mother was well-documented and surely influenced much of the way she worked at home and raised her children.

The cultural values surrounding the continuation of the institution of slavery changed quickly throughout the two centuries that legal slavery was vital to the economic development of New York. In this regard, the Hudson Valley acts as a unique time capsule of northern colonial attitudes towards slavery; the prominence of the Livingston family, and their family members’ constant participation in politics, lead to the preservation and translation of records of their daily lives. This includes the unique position of this wealthy family to hold dozens of captive people in an area where the average lower or middle-class captor held only one or two.

Robert Livingston The Elder made a fortune in trade and mercantilism and, “As early as 1690, he had begun investing in ships, purchasing a half-interest in the *Margriet*, a vessel that journeyed to Madagascar, Barbados, and Virginia to trade in slaves, sugar, and tobacco” (Kierner

⁷ Also spelled Margarethe; this alternate spelling will be found in quotes I use later in my writing.

1992, 39). A generation later, Robert's eldest son and heir to the Livingston manor, Philip (1686-1749), also sustained the family's wealth through trade. Most notably, a significantly heavier involvement in the Transatlantic Slave Trade than any average New York merchant; "Philip was one of the most successful merchants [in New York]. He...was the third leading importer, bringing some 219 blacks from the Indies to New York. In the 1740s New York merchants greatly increased their trade with Africa. The Livingstons participated in this trade. Philip invested in four Africa-bound slavers" (Singer 1984, 59). It was due to Philip's participation and success in the slave-trade of the West Indies that he became involved in the African slave trade (Kierner 1992, 71), which was a unique position for any New York slaving merchant. In the 1730s,

“...and 1740s, [Philip] was one of New York's leading importers of slave labor from the sugar islands, and also one of few New Yorkers who imported slaves directly from Africa...In 1738 Philip bought a one-third share in a voyage to Guinea, where two hundred slaves were purchased and consigned to his son Peter...and his partner in Jamaica...New York's direct trade with Africa grew significantly after 1748, and the Livingstons continued to be among the colony's leading Africa traders” (Kierner 1992, 71-2).

The well-kept records of the Livingstons, and their wealth and merits, until this point extend also to Robert the Elder's second surviving son, Robert Livingston (1688-1775), who was known later as Robert of Clermont, and his family lineage at the Clermont property.

In a role similarly significant to Alida Schuler Livingston, a woman named Margaret Beekman, managed the Clermont property in the constant absence of her husband. Margaret Beekman Livingston (1724-1800) was the wife of Robert R. Livingston (1718-1775)--later

known as 'The Judge'--the grandson of Alida and Robert. Judge Robert R. Livingston's father, Robert of Clermont, built the manor house Clermont in 1740 on the 13,000 acres given to him as the second-oldest son, upon his father's death in 1728. Margaret Beekman Livingston and her husband Judge Robert R. Livingston lived primarily at Clermont, the home her father-in-law built, until their deaths. Judge Livingston died in 1775, and shortly thereafter, in the conflict of the United States Revolution, British troops burned down Clermont in retaliation for the Livingston family's support of American patriots during the war. Margaret Beekman, at this time a widow, managed to gather her family and the domestic workers, including captive people, and sail across the Hudson River to the safety of Kingston while her home burned to the ground. For a few weeks the group sheltered in Connecticut with Margaret's relatives, and ultimately returned to Clermont. Over the course of the next few years, under Margaret's direct supervision, Clermont house was rebuilt and stands to this day. Margaret Beekman Livingston occupied a similarly important position to Alida Schyuler Livingston who had lived two generations before her own. And as a woman, Margaret and the captive women who worked for her, were faced with the restructuring of women's communities that was only beginning to develop in rural New York a generation prior, much different from the relative freedom awarded to women by Dutch social standards.

In my research the word community is emphasized again and again in explorations of women's history. This introduces a tenet of Black feminist archaeology: the power in spheres of community. This also supports my introductory explanation of the reasoning behind my use of Black feminist archaeology in this thesis, not only in the study of captive Black women, but also

the relationships they had with the white women in their lives. This is where the aforementioned notion of community can be truly introduced.

Firstly, it is important to note that, “Low population density and dispersed settlement isolated many black residents from one another, and slaves in rural regions lacked those social and cultural supports available in urban centers” (Groth 2017, 1). On a large estate such as Livingston Manor, there would have been a unique community of Black captive people living relatively closely to each other. Alida and Robert would have “adopted” the use of captive labor “early on” (Mohler 2011, 32) in their development of the Livingston estate; “In addition to directing the manor’s store, gristmill, sawmill and agricultural production, Alida sustained responsibility for oversight of the manor’s slave laborers...historian Roberta Singer notes that the family owned at least forty-four slaves prior to Robert’s death in 1728” (Singer 1987 as referenced in Mohler 2011, 32). Alida kept the estate and its tenants organized, detailing her everyday activities in letters to her husband. With Robert spending so much time away, she would also be responsible for the business dealings at the Livingston property in including maintaining a relationship with the Native American tribes,⁸ as well as managing the sale and purchase of captive Africans and Blacks; “Though male heads of households typically oversaw the purchase of slaves, Robert’s absence from the manor for business and political purpose left Alida...[to] not only [manage]--but also [sell]--slaves on her husband’s behalf” (Mohler 2011,

⁸ In his letters Robert Livingston referred to the Natives Americans as “savages” (Mohler 2011; Biemer 1982) and looked unfavorably upon the local Native Tribes. Alida on the other hand had watched her father, Phillip Schuyler develop important political relationships of relative respect with Native Tribes that his land was connected to. The Schuylers were famously amicable in their Native relationships especially in the political center of Albany on Iroquois land. Albany had been near the center of Mohican lands until they were pushed eastward by the Mohawks, who were positioned west of Fort Hunter [at Schoharie Creek] by tradition and British force. Because of this it may have been fortunate that Alida spent so much of her time at home in lieu of Robert; her management of the Livingston estate would have included maintaining a respectful relationship with the Natives in the area.

36). In one such letter dated 1711, Alida "...complained to Robert, 'it is too much for me to oversee so many Negros'" (Mohler 2011, 32; Biemer 1982). By using details from the records of Alida's life we are able to determine the significant captive population on the Livingston lands.

Bettie and Christyn, Joe, Deigo, Jan, Tom, Isabelle, and Jupiter are the names of eight captive people recorded to have work at some point for the Livingston family under the direction of Alida Livingston (Kierner 1992; Biemer 1982; Mohler 2011) during her life at Livingston manor between 1670 and her death in 1729. Bettie and Christyn are mentioned once in a letter from Robert home, on the 13th of May 1717, making note of a few supplies he had included in a shipment from New York city home, to repair their shoes; "Alida's responsibilities included the medical care, clothing, and housing of the manor's slaves" (Biemer 1982; Mohler 2011, 33), and so Alida would have previously written to Robert in the city, to send her back supplies to care for the female captives. No other records including their names exist. A captive man named Joe is referenced twice, once in a letter from Alida to Robert on the 3rd of May, 1717, where she detailed to Robert that he had fallen ill (Mohler 2011, 33). In a letter written by Robert on the 13th of June 1722 he remarks on the grain Joe had recently ground (Mohler 2011, 33-4). This information means that Joe was a skilled worker, employed at the manor's gristmill and responsible for at least a portion of the flour that would sustain the manor, its residents, and its workers. Isabelle and Jupiter are names listed only in Robert Livingston's will of 1728, as they are the names of two captive youth, a young girl and boy. Isabelle was given to Margaret, the oldest Livingston daughter, and Jupiter was given to Gilbert, the Livingston's fourth son (Kierner 1992, 63).

Deigo is a name also mentioned multiple times in the letters between Alida and Robert that I have been able to find. Deigo is the only captive man who is said to have, “possessed a higher level of trust than the majority of the family’s slaves and traveled back and forth between Livingston Manor and New York City in accordance with the couple’s needs” (Mohler 2011, 34). In his will, Robert Livingston gave Deigo to his daughter Joanna (Kierner 1992, 63). Tom and Jan are mentioned briefly a handful of times as captive laborers with no specific relation to each other. Both Tom and Jan are noted in Alida’s letters, as performing labor outdoors equal to each other. In a letter dated August 13th, 1717, Alida hints at the type of work Tom would have been responsible for, writing, “Tom Nochs has written Pieter Meese for his wheat, our Tom told me, but I kept the letter back for a while until he brings the wheat from Klaverack here” (Biemer 1982, 203). The first Tom is specified with his last name and implied to be a white man. She refers to the second Tom as “our Tom,” and accompanying similar information about specific type of grain-related labor he performs--as is reported in an undated letter; “I cannot make the oven and I need our people for building and Tom has to go to the farmers.” (Biemer 1982, 195)--I do assume that Tom is a reference to a documented captive man working at that same time for the Livingstons.

The information in both of these instances indicate that Tom, like Joe, worked at the grist mill and handled wheat, grains, and flour. In the aforementioned letter on page 195 (Biemer 1982), Alida notes that the ovens had not been working and so Tom needed to take the manor’s bread supplies to the neighbors' ovens. Bread would have been an incredibly important staple at the Livingston manor as both a Dutch home in the Hudson Valley and as a manor with a grist mill and many people to feed. The bread would have been heavy and dark, and cheap to

make--all important to Alida Livingston, for whom those qualities were important in simplifying her already long list of responsibilities.

Jan is the final name I was able to find in reference to captive workers, especially female, on the Livingston manor during the time of Robert and Alida Livingston. Jan is mentioned twice in Linda Biemer's (1982) translation of Alida's letter to Robert, the first time in an undated letter written, "Bring a cartload of sand because Jan cannot work with the pewter without sand." (195). Pewter is a cheap and easily malleable metal alloy that can be heated and poured into a sand cast for things like utensils and simple dishware. A captive woman working in a metal craft position signifies the type of labor Alida Livingston asked of the captives on her property and those positions were not necessarily divided by gender. Joe and Tom may have only worked the gristmill because of the physical strength required for that position. Not because the mill was work designated to men.

The second mention of Jan points to an interesting labor dichotomy on the Livingston manor. On Sep 19, 1711 Alida wrote, "I have hired a brewer but I had to hire a Palatine with him because Jan the nigger is not here yet" (Biemer 1982, 199); Alida and Robert would have been employing the labor of the then-recent German-immigrant Palatine⁹ workers at the beginning of the 18th century as well as captives and handfuls of other European renters on the manor. Many of Alida's tenant farmers were Palatines and from the tone of several letters, the Livingstons looked down on these German immigrants and preferred Black or African labor. This could be for

⁹ The Palatines were a group of German-immigrants who settled in an area known as East Camp after months of "deplorable" traveling conditions (Otterness 2016, 78). East Camp was located on the Livingston property and in return for allowing and feeding the Palatine settlers, the Livingstons received payment from the British Crown, who had promised the Palatines land in New York in exchange for their labor making naval stores for the British military (For more information see Otterness 2016, 89, "They Will Not Listen to Tar-Making : The Hudson Valley, 1710-1712).

multiple reasons: Alida possibly would have had to pay the Palatines for their labor and this would have not been preferable to free captive labor. Or maybe the negative stigma that surrounded the Palatines culturally would have made her speak poorly of their communities and of their work. Either way I believe that the sheer amount of responsibility thrust upon Alida during the time most of her children were moving into adulthood, and while her responsibilities were already so multifaceted, would have been an incredible source of stress.

“Besides the beer and bread provided by Livingston, each family was to receive beef or pork three times a week, and fish, cheese, flour, or peas the other four days. 11 The Board of Trade had instructed Hunter to provision the settlers at a rate of six pence a day for all people age ten and over and four pence a day for children under age ten” (Otterness 2016, 91).

In one of many references to the Palatine presence on her property, Alida wrote, “There is a lot of disorder here. If they had only waited until the 300 men had gone, but now they say that they cannot let their women and children die” (Beimer 1982; 196). This short passage is about an incoming flow of Palatine families suffering due to a lack of supplies and support from the English in the new colony. Alida is constantly reported to be overwhelmed with the needs of so many people and so there are many possible reasons for her to speak poorly of the new immigrants sustaining life from her property and resources. It is entirely possible that no accurate connection can be drawn between the Palatine workers and the Black captives on the Livingston property, but it should be noted that Alida outwardly felt little sympathy towards the demanding work imposed on her laborers or their plights, as pointed out in her complaints of the Palatines and specifically in a letter written on May 21st, 1714 in which she explains to Robert an incident with her son Gilbert beating a captive man to death as punishment; “[Alida] expressed little

mercy for the slave who had, in her mind, simply died to ‘vex his owner’” (Mohler 2011, 36). This is a particularly cold sentiment from Alida, who regards her loved ones in writing with much affection.

Records of slavery at Clermont are less readily available, but do exist. Historian Roberta Singer (1984) notes that tenant farmers were a huge asset to both the Livingston manor and Clermont, and that at least one quarter of all of Clermont's tenants under Robert R. Livingston and his son Judge Livingston’s generation owned a Black captive and relied on their labor to parse out their daily responsibilities. It is recorded at Clermont between 1750 and 1775, “Petrus Shuts sent his Negro to pick up a quart of rum...Jacob Petrie asked his Negro to get a pound of ground ginger...Samuel Halenbeck sent his [Negro] man out to get an empty hogshead...Casparus Kool needed two pounds of nails and sent his slave to get them” (Singer 1984, 63). The Livingstons of Clermont themselves also owned captives. However, like the 17th and 18th century Livingston Manor, there are few, if any, archaeological records of their lives. Instead, I rely on the archaeological excavations of a similar manor house ninety-four miles south of Bard, the Van Cortlandt Plantation, for extrapolated research.

Today, almost identically to Clermont, the Van Cortlandt Plantation house is one of New York’s historic homes and is open to the public for tours. The property on which the house sits is open from sunrise to sunset and over 1000 acres. At the same time as Margaret and Judge Livingston presided over Clermont, Frederick Van Cortlandt and his children presided over the Van Cortlandt estate, “Frederick’s will of 1749 records twelve slaves...” (Bankoff & Winter 2005, 296), as well as a few of their names. Levillie, a boatman, Piero, a miller, and Caesar is a captive Native man. Hester, wife of Piero, and Kate, wife of Caesar. Hester and Piero are

recorded as having a son named Pieter. There are also six young girls and boys in the will, Mary, a young girl also named Hester, Hannah--left to Fredericks's daughter Anne--a young girl named Saro--left to Frederick's daughter Eve--and two young boys, Claus and Little Frankie, left to Frederick's sons Augustus and Frederick respectively (Bankoff & Winter 2005; Van Cortlandt House Museum 2021).

The Van Cortlandt family was similarly unique to Clermont and the Livingston estate in their ownership of captive people, and the management of their property reflected the Livingston's economic position in the Hudson Valley. In the 17th century, during Robert The Elder's generation, Jacob Van Cortlandt was considered one of the wealthiest men in the colony of New York. His son Frederick basked in similar wealth, comparable to Judge Livingston of Clermont. The archaeological record of slavery the Van Cortlandt estate is slim, but records in patters of refuse prove to be the most valuable insight into the lives of the named captives who lived there.

In the first of two barn structures on the northeastern area of the manor home's central estate (Fig.1), was found two "...subterranean stone structures, each approximately 1.75 m square and approximately 3m deep" (Bankoff & Winter 2005). The field volunteers during this excavation posited these structures' role as root cellars using the records of previous research done at Washington Irving Mansion. When these posited root cellars were no longer needed by the Van Cortlandt family, they were filled with refuse and covered in dirt to be grown over and forgotten. A common practice of filling unnecessary underground storage space. The refuse contained "...ceramic dinner wares of various types, chamber pots, crocks, and unguent containers, medicine and drinking substance bottles, glass syringes, the decayed remains of a

number of pairs of high-heeled shoes, white clay smoking pipes, cutlery, tooth brushes, and an upper plate from a set of vulcanite/porcelain false teeth” (Bankoff & Winter 2005, 310-11).

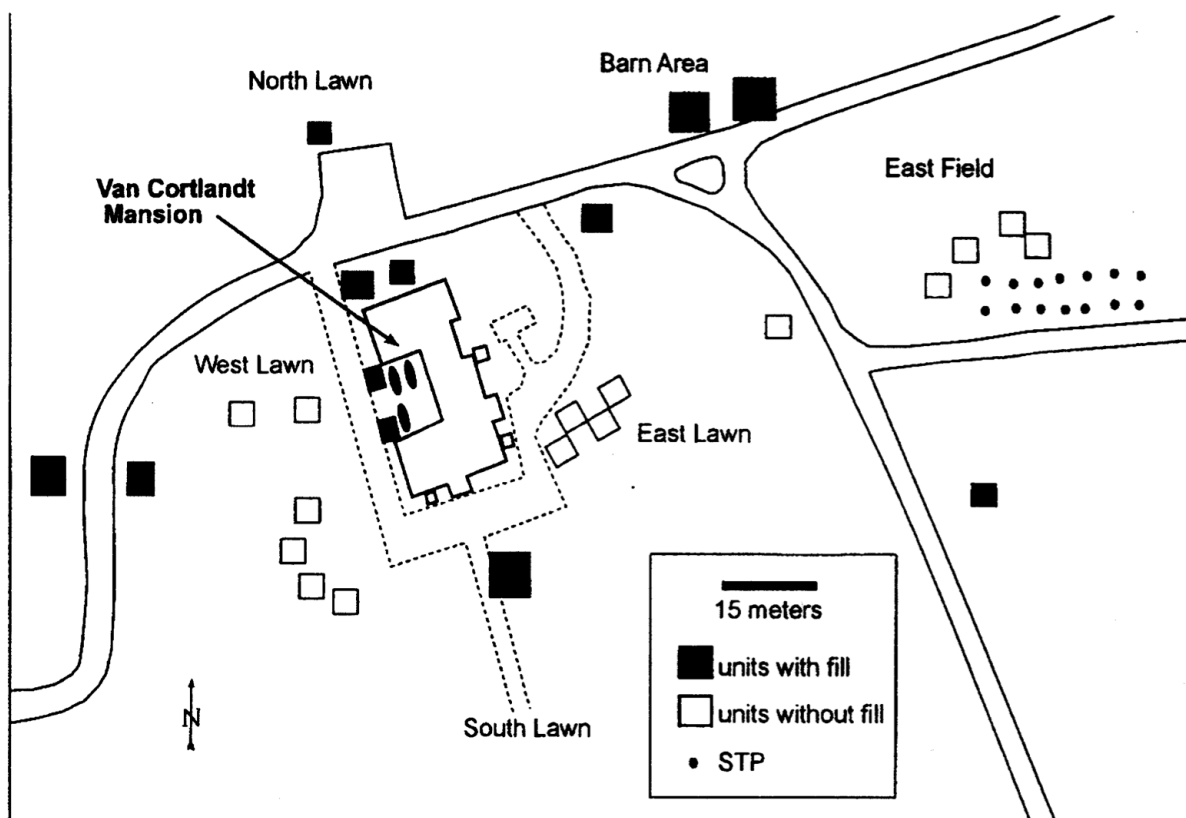


Figure 1: Illustration of buildings central to the Van Cortlandt house(Bankoff & Winter 2005).

The containers, medicine and drinking substance bottles, glass syringes, the decayed remains of a number of pairs of high-heeled shoes, white clay smoking pipes, cutlery, tooth brushes, and an upper plate from a set of vulcanite/porcelain false teeth" (Bankoff & Winter 2005, 310-11). The artifacts in this feature are generally dated as a late 19th century fill. However, one pottery sherd, a “creamware lid” is dated to the late 18th century, and “...it is also the case that the most conspicuous subset among the ceramics in the pits consists of imported Chinese and English

transfer-printed blue willow wares dating to the first third of the nineteenth century, many of which show extensive surface scratchings suggesting similarly extensive use” (2005, 311). The age and wear patterns on these artifacts indicates an archaeological record of slavery where slavery remains otherwise invisible; “These scratched and two-generation-old plates and serving pieces, cleared out of the house and dumped as part of the property transfer, may have been the back room remnants of the family's no-longer-finest diner wares, suitable for a servants table, in other words, but not for a master's” (2005, 315). It is suggested then, that the Van Cortlandt family passed down their old fashioned pottery and dinnerware to their captive servants, instead of spending money on cheap dinnerware for their captives. This was common practice.

The archaeological record of slavery in the north is not incredibly dense. Especially in comparison to the archaeological remnants of slavery in the southern U.S.. This is partly because, “Slavery as a phenomenon is not particularly likely to produce clear manifestations of the sort that would tend to be recovered through archaeological excavations. After all, slaves are constrained from setting their own life agendas” (2005, 306), indeed of the archaeological excavations I have attended in the Hudson Valley, the most detectable traces of captive peoples are intentionally hidden or located in refuse deposits. A comogram in Germantown NY, is marked on the hearth frame structure which remains intact from the late 18th century.

In an archaeological excavation at Clermont a group of New York State archaeologists were hired to perform dig tests in an area with proposed construction. The report itself is titled, “Archaeological Testing At Clermont State Historic Park, Town Of Clermont, Columbia County, For A Proposed Telephone-Electrical Line” (Feister 1981). The group found nothing preventing

the construction of the telephone pole, but did uncover the remains of an old carriage path in the form of varying gravel types, large flat stones, and orange-colored sand.

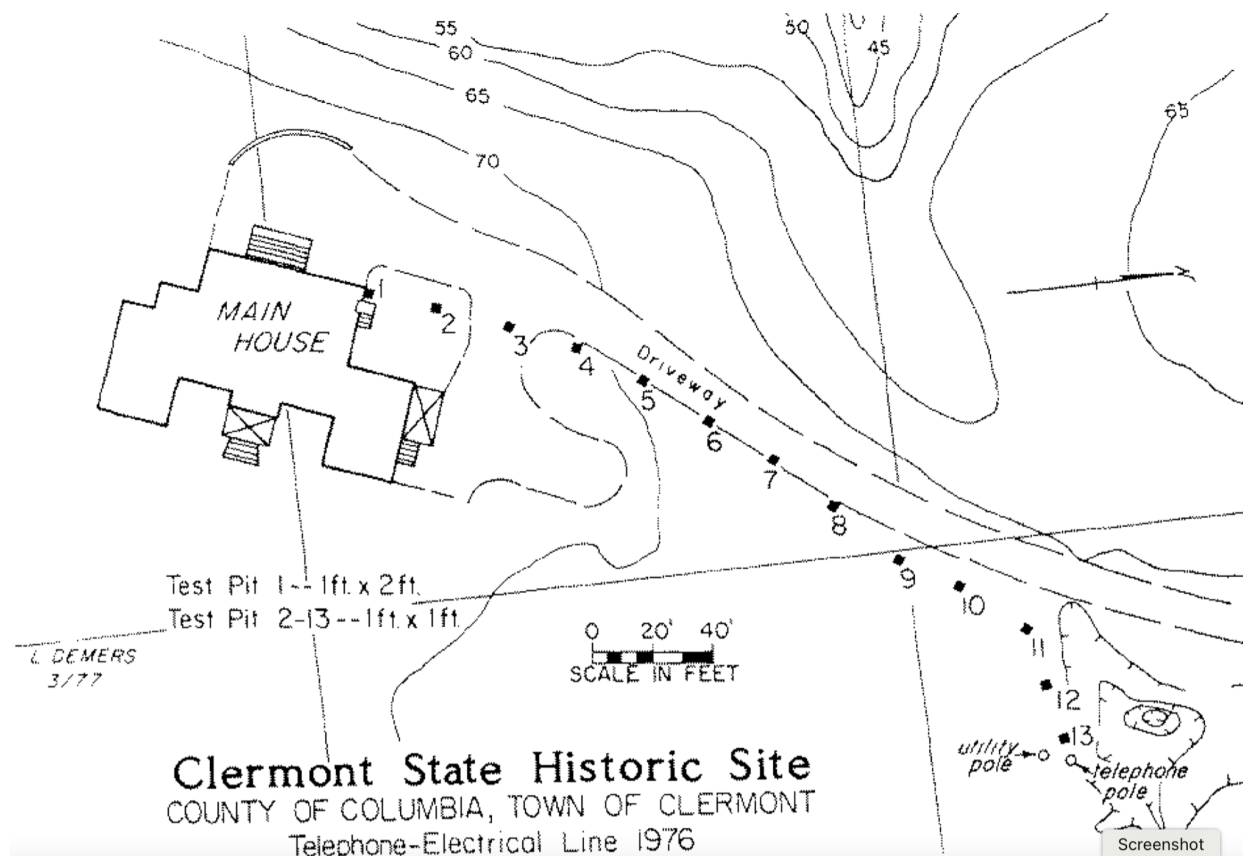


Figure 2: The map of Clermont house in relation to the proposed telephone pole, and thirteen archaeological test pits (Feister 1981).

The test pits numbered #2, #3, #6, #7, #11, #12 all contained partial remains of these different constructions of paths dating from the orange sand and gravel used commonly in paved carriage paths during the 18th century (Feister 1981, 41). Although in test pit #8 a number of ceramic artifacts were found. It was not until the fourth layer, Stratum IV, that the ceramics and other artifacts which “...represented food and drink activities...” were found (1981, 42). The artifacts found are as follows:

“...some mammal bone remains; two plain delft sherds; two lead glazed buff earthenware sherds, one with part of a dark brown dot under the clear lead glaze; a sherd from a vessel with pierced open basketwork design, but burned (in 1777?) so that further identification is not possible; six undecorated sherds of creamware; one tiny piece of white saltglazed stoneware; and three porcelain fragments, two hand-decorated in blue and white.”

There were also artifacts relating to architecture found in Stratum IV and are listed as follows,

“...four hand wrought nails, twelve red brick fragments, lime mortar, and one piece of plaster. A small hand forged iron buckle was also discovered and was probably part of a harness, perhaps from a bridle. A final artifact in Stratum IV was a 1 in. long brass straight pin with a wire-wound head (1981, 42).

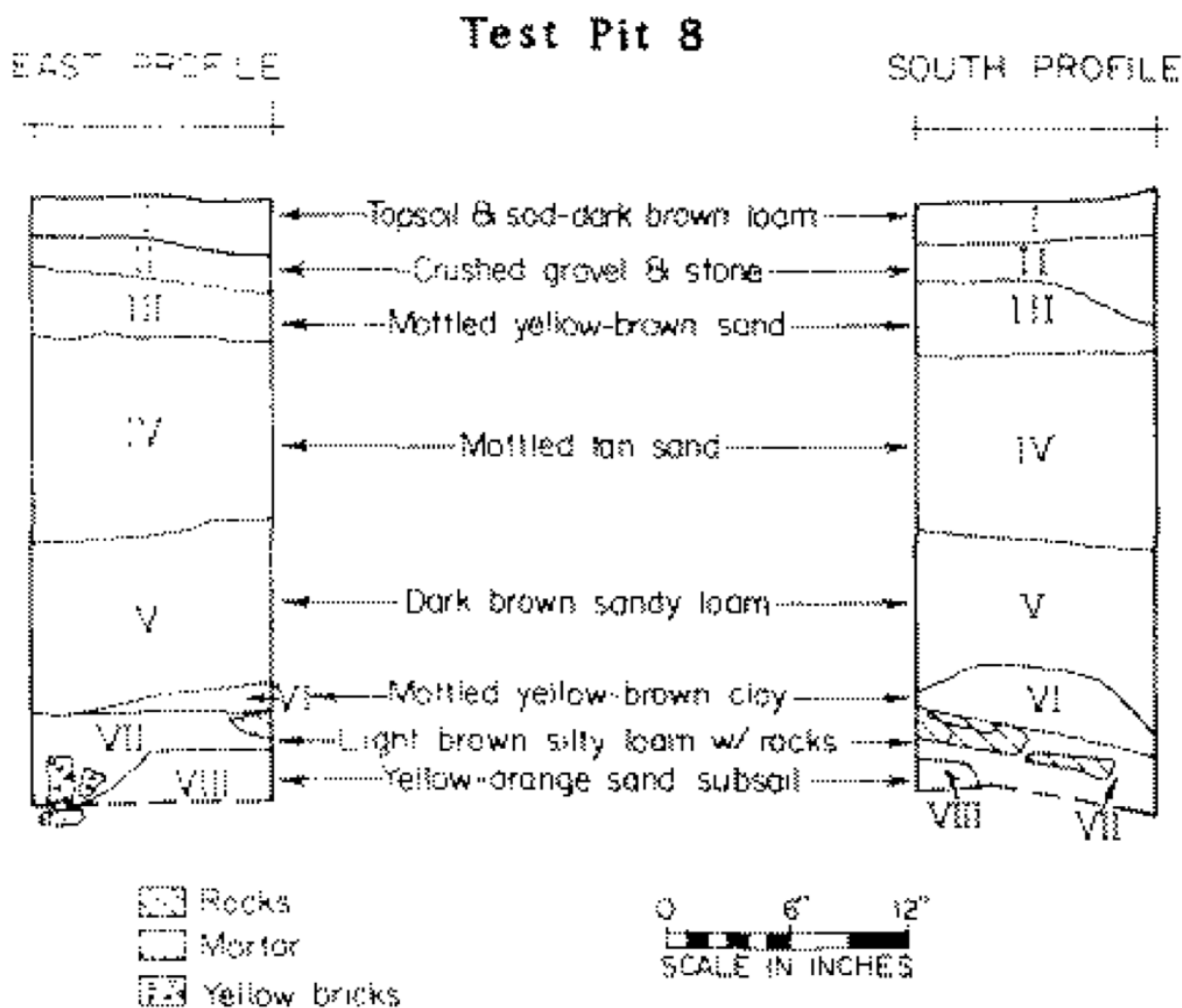


Figure 3: Illustration of the stratigraphic measurements and soils types of test pit #8 (The map of Clermont house in relation to the proposed telephone pole, and thirteen archaeological test pits (Feister 1981).

These artifacts found in Stratum IV dated to the mid-18th century to the early 19th century at the latest. The artifacts in Stratum IV and below¹⁰ puzzled the archaeologists; there were no mid-to late 19th century ceramics found when Clermont was known to be heavily in-use during those times (1981, 44).¹¹ The conclusion reached was that the lack of older artifacts, and the artifacts that were discovered together from the 18th century, indicated that this is an area that is part of a refuse deposit. And that the lack of artifacts from the mid-18th century indicate this specific refuse deposit was closed at the turn of the 19th century and a new refuse pile started elsewhere on the property (1981, 40). The surveyors also hypothesized that refuse in this area so close to the main house, as well as existence of artifacts pertaining to building and architecture, points to this location being in or around an late-18th century outbuilding. An outbuilding being a small tool shed, or animal house; Although more likely a storage shed, due to its close proximity to the main house.

While I am unable to determine from these artifacts a distinctive mark left by captive people the same way the archaeology of the Van Cortlandt barn refuse pile is able, with this information I do start to ask questions about the relationship women had with waste. During the mid-to-late 18th century, during Margaret Beekman's lifetime, who would have been responsible for waste management? Maybe the pile was communal like a modern-day trashcan and so

¹⁰ Stratum V contained items dating from the 18th century: "...two beef bone fragments, a single piece of dark green bottle glass, and two red brick fragments." Stratum VI contained "...12 pieces of burned limestone...together with an oyster shell and a 5 in. long beef bone...2 pieces of Dutch yellow brick...plus other artifacts dating from the 17th or early 18th century..." (Feister 1981, 42) which indicates a Dutch home on this property prior to the construction of Clermont. This would have been on Livingston-owned land still.

¹¹ Important to note: as I was finalizing my research for this thesis I found out about the existence of an archaeological report published by Anne Wentworth, on artifacts found during a test excavation of a planned HVAC installation a few yards in front of the Clermont house. This record analyzes Margaret Beekman's theorized consumer choices by examining ceramics found in the test pit, most likely a refuse pile. I could not locate the document title.

throughout the days and weeks items like broken ceramics, or bent nails would be tossed into the pile from the main house. Maybe this pile was created during a season of cleaning, and all old or unusable items were thrown out together in a large sweeping order. Who would have taken out the trash? Captive men or women? Most importantly I question, what was considered unusable?

This question acknowledges the practice of passing down one's out-of-use dishware to captive servants. And so, in helping to create refuse piles what values would captive people have prescribed to the trash from their captors' homes in relation to those same items now located in their own homes? The relationship between women and trash is particularly interesting to me; Black women were charged with the maintenance of their communities often as the most permanent fixtures in those communities, and so what would be categorized as trash to these matriarchs who not only were able to enter Black spaces but were also required to enter white ones?

The Van Cortlandt property most closely resembles Clermont in the comparable records I have been able to access. Possession of a dozen captive people is a significant number in colonial New York; similarly in the 1790 census, Margaret Beekman, at this time a widow, owned fifteen captives. Margaret and her husband Judge Livingston worked together more closely than Alida and Robert the Elder, who were separated by distance for work, but the realm of the domestic--including managing it--traditionally belonged to women and wives. The historical record is fortunate enough to have Alida Livingston's meticulously articulate letters, though we are not similarly fortunate enough to have such detailed accounts from Margaret's management of her household.

Of the few historical records kept by Margaret, of the goings-ons of her home, including few written records of accounts of the captive people who were kept on her property, Singer (1984) and A.J. Williams-Meyers (2002), recall an incident involving a captive man named Ben, who had been separated from his daughter through her sale to a neighboring manor. Ben murdered his captor Johannes Dykeman, a tenant farmer at Clermont, who was responsible for the sale, and then disappeared from Clermont's written record (Singer 1984, 56; Williams-Meyers 2002, 17). One of the only translated or surviving records in Margaret Beekman's own words is her 1796 will, which preceded her 1800 death by four years. In this document she writes,

“...and in consideration of the faithful service of my slaves I direct my executors to manumit those among them above the age of thirty years who may desire it. And whereas Robin, Scipio, Mariah, and Nan are now too far advanced in life and unable to support themselves by their labour, my will is that it be their option to chuse with whom of my children they prefer to live” (Margaret Beekman, quoted in Singer 1984, 65).

Livingston Manor and Clermont are an anomaly in the Mid-Hudson Valley; they were both large enough estates to support dozens of captive individuals. In this way, the estates acted like an urban center because of their centrality to Columbia county and the larger Hudson Valley. This means that Black captive relationships to each other and to their captors are more similar to these same relationships in the plantation-south than they are related to the more common single household, rural slave-holding families in the rest of New York. These small families who could afford to purchase captive labor would normally have no more than two or three captive laborers, and would live as tenant farmers on larger estates such as the Livingston property, or in small

rural neighborhoods such as Redhook, Germantown, or Rhinebeck. The unique position of the Black captive women who worked closely with Alida at the Livingston Manor and Margaret at Clermont, means that the first and most prominent aspect of community in a colonial woman's life, childbirth, could serve as an active relationship between white and Black women, or could exist separately from each other and may simply present opposing dynamics in culture.

Midwives

Women's communities surrounding childbearing and birth are the most obvious instance of community. For Black and white women alike prior to the 18th century, female midwives were the most common people to assist a woman in birth.

“Midwives, or older women, dominated the birthing rooms of white and black women and practiced a variety of techniques – some rooted in superstition, but most based on herbal knowledge or an understanding of how massage and position could reduce maternal and infant injury...Midwives, then, proved adequate to tend to a woman's needs until time to birth the child, or to see her through the entire process...” (Hamilton 2015, 15-16, 17).

Midwifing is a term used to describe the role women occupied in assisting others through childbirth and so it stands to be clarified that midwives have existed for all of human history, in every recorded corner of the Earth. Women caring for each other during pregnancy, childbirth, and childrearing is a universally recorded tenant of human culture (Owens 2017). For women

during the mid 17th century, Alida Schuyler Livingston's lifetime,¹² midwives remained standard medical practitioners. Especially in rural areas such as the Hudson Valley, midwives would potentially travel miles through various types of terrain and weather conditions to reach their patients. In these rural captive communities, Black midwives acted in the same roles, "Slave women felt personally cared about and validated by midwives who took the time to listen to and soothe their fears...midwives stayed by the woman's side through the duration of labor, assisting in a variety of ways such as performing housework and caring for older children" (Hamilton 2015, 18). During her pregnancy, white women, slave-holding or not, were typically expected to continue their daily responsibilities such as, "...maintain[ing] her home, attend[ing] church, and mother[ing] existing children..." while pregnant (Hamilton 2015, 14). In the case of white captors, these duties may have been simplified and supplemented by a certain degree of wealth and or the domestic assistance of captive women, thereby lightening the load. However, the expectation of the completion of that labor still remained.

It is now that I begin to imagine Alida Livingston during one of her multiple pregnancies, fussy with all the work that needed to still be completed. Alida liked to keep notoriously busy and moving--possibly the result of the magnitude of the responsibilities she had managing the Livingston property--although she would periodically fall ill and remained weak for periods of her life. She began having children at the age of twenty-four, her first child being John Livingston, who died before both of his parents at the age of forty in 1720. Alida had her second

¹² Here, I am measuring periods of time by the lifespan of the white slave-holders because their deaths denoted significant change in the lives of the captive people held by them. Written into the will of captors, including the Livingstons, is who the captive people should belong to and subsequently where they will be moved.

child two years later at the age of twenty-six, her oldest daughter Margaret who was named after Alida's own mother. She gave birth to nine children in total.

The pressures in what was still largely a Dutch society, for any woman all came down to her ability to be a mother, "Colonial society judged women, regardless of their economic status or entrepreneurial abilities, largely by their success--or failures--as mothers" (Mohler 2011, 130). Would Alida Livingston have felt a specific, self-conscious type of pain when mourning the deaths of her children? With so much pressure put on her to prioritize her children, Alida managed still to act as organizer in letters to Robert into their children's adulthood; "Alida, consumed with business affairs and the management of the family's home, also maintained responsibility for the educational and moral upbringing of her children" (2011, 133). She monitored the behavior of her sons Phillip and Robert who had both in turn, moved to New York in the pursuit of legal education. Alida continued to give birth into her early forties and so during her many pregnancies she was not only expected to maintain her family business and tend to young children. She was also the primary organizer for her grown children and was tasked with educating them in matters of business for the family responsibilities that would later fall to them. A contemporary audience may envision a mother only giving birth for a short period of time in her life, this is not the case in the colonial U.S..

The expectations that existed for white women in pregnancy surely also extended to Black women. This means that Black pregnant women were expected to complete their usual labor during pregnancies as well. Either pregnant captive women labored without change to their schedule until they were physically unable to do otherwise, or in rare instances, were given a

lighter workload by their captors. In any scenario, she would have or relied more heavily on other women in her community if there existed a community for her,

“[captive] pregnancy increased a woman’s likelihood of interacting with, and receiving support from, other women.” And if, “...reassigned to lighter labor, the woman often performed her...tasks in the company of others with similar assignments – typically older, pregnant, or nursing women...Women, both slave and free, typically cared for one another during pregnancy and particularly with the onset of labor” (Hamilton 2015, 15).

In the case of the Livingston estate, the implied captive community would have most likely created female networks just like this. I now imagine Alida Livingston as a businesswoman and estate-planner making note of a Black captive woman’s pregnancy and either excusing her from some of her responsibilities or keeping a continuous eye on the expecting mother, without lightening her labor loads. There are no surviving records of a specific instance of captive-punishment that may have occurred on the Livingston property at the hands of Alida or Robert but, “...the couple’s high demands may have contributed to the escape of two unnamed manor slaves in 1711” (Mohler 2011, 35). There is no more information on the details on this event other than the two captive people were reported to have reached Canada and secured their freedom. The implications of difficult work demands at the Livingston property by Alida Livingston, on whom the responsibility of labor manager lied solely, translates directly to the expectations of continued labor for pregnant women, specifically Black captive women.

A captive woman would have had minimal contact with her captor in regards to her pregnancy; “...enslaved women took it upon themselves to create social networks where child birthing and rearing and other tasks were performed communally. This helped to ensure some

stability within the slave quarter where the breaking up of families loomed as an ever-present threat” (Franklin 2001, 113-14). Pregnancy was one of multiple vehicles Black captive women used to reaffirm their own communities, separate from the influence of their white captors. I now imagine what realities would have existed for a captive Black mother on the Livingston property, during Alida’s generation. Possibly the captive woman Jan who worked on the Livingston property while she was an adult. She may have spent her life on Livingston manor with the frequency she is mentioned and the periods of time that exist in between, and at some point had a child. With the only mention of her work being working with sand and pewter (Biemer 1982, 195)--and from my suggestion that one of her responsibilities was casting molten pewter in sand molds--it can be assumed that her work would have been dangerous and grueling, and may not have relented through her pregnancy. Would there have been a community for her in the roughly forty-three other captive people living under Alida’s control at the turn of the 18th century and would she at some point have been attended to by a midwife?

For Black women, captive and free, childbirth and the role of the midwife acted as a gateway into an exclusively Black¹³ space Whitney Battle-Baptiste coined, “The Wilderness” (2016, 89). The Wilderness is, “The untamed space that was often used as a place of retrieval, to regroup, escape, hide, worship, hunt, gather medicinal herbs or travel” (2016, 90). As this quote suggests, the liminality of The Wilderness extends to multiple aspects of captive life, especially in areas of the rural U.S.. In the context of medicine, The Wilderness represents Black women’s control over their own bodies and the bodies that were similar to their own, in appearance and in treatment. “...Laurie Wilkie describes the intimate knowledge of midwives pre- and post-

¹³ In a more general context, non-white.

emancipation, and the use of powerful herbs such as “Pennyroyal, ergot, tansy, cotton, and rue, abortifacients that had been used for centuries” (Wilkie 2003, 150, as referenced in Battle-Baptiste 2016, 90). Black midwives were able to perpetuate the values of their own communities and cultures in the specific moments of tending to pregnant women because of the invisibility performing this role granted them. Not only were cultural norms at the heart of this cycle, but most importantly knowledge was. The knowledge captive women had about their bodies is a window into how captive women viewed themselves. It is a rare opportunity in written history to understand Black women through the context of Black womanhood. This is why narratives of childbearing are so significant to an understanding of the lives of Black captive women in the U.S. and abroad. Adversely the existence of this liminal space also signifies the great danger posed to Black captive female communities when access to the space was attempted to be removed from their lives with the introduction of gynecology.

Gynecology

My earlier comparisons of white and Black women’s pregnancies was not entirely fair; The value of Black and white pregnancies were not the same. This was not only true because of the value placed on white vs. Black women in society, but also because of the difference in outcomes of both pregnancies. Black women were used as tools to perpetuate the cycle of slavery through childbirth; “Much has been made of the slaveholders’ definition of the Black family as a matrilineal biological structure. Birth records on many plantations omitted the names of the fathers, listing only the children’s mothers...state legislatures adopted the principle of

partus sequitur ventrem—the child follows the condition of the mother” (Davis 1981, 22-3). And Black captive women’s pregnancies, consensual or otherwise, were a means to an end for the white supremacist patriarchy. The development of American gynecology proves this.

American gynecology was born from slavery. As the commodification of Black women’s bodies began to turn a profit in the form of free labor, white doctors very suddenly took interest in maintaining the efficiency of Black women’s reproductive systems.

“...the [captive] mother’s real value was in her reproductive health and her labor, which helps explain why reproductive medicine was so important during this era. White men with a stake in upholding slavery relied heavily on medical language and practices to treat and punish black women. (Hence, slave owners and medical men upheld the practice of doing what they believed best medically to maintain a reproductively sound female slave labor force that was capable of breeding)” (Owens 2017, 44).

By the beginning of the 19th century, gynecology started developing into a standard practice, in both Black and white childbirth (Owens 2017); as Black and white womanhood were and still are, interdependent. The development of gynecology also actively attempted to remove the function of midwife from the process of pregnancy and childbirth, which further acknowledges white male gynecologists’ thinly veiled motives. Male gynecologists, also just known as doctors in most records and academic writings, developed medicine based off of the practices the midwifing--in all its many forms--had been using for generations. In one account by O.W. Green, a Black man, he,

“...recalled how his grandmother, a slave nurse, passed along her medical and pharmaceutical knowledge to her family members...Although it was Green’s

grandmother who was giving medical care to patients, her white owner, who was also a doctor, took possession of her knowledge and touted it as his medical ‘secret’ and inflicted corporal punishment on the woman to force her alligience to him...Yet she defied her master in the privacy of her community and divulged her body of medical and herbal knowledge to her grandson” (Owens 2017, 50).

Imagine the women who suffered at the hands of opportunistic men. Black women’s communities specifically suffered the most; the space white people would not have previously even been interested in accessing, The Wilderness, had suddenly turned a profit. I now see the laboring woman Jan, or perhaps her daughter in the next generation, be considered ‘valuable’ enough to be tended to by a white doctor and what type of negligence a body like hers would have received in the name of ‘science.’

In all likelihood, the captive woman Jan, who was an adult during Alida Livingston’s organization of the Livingston manor, would not have received medical care from a white male doctor; as Alida Livingston herself was aided by a Dutch midwife in her delivery of her ninth and final child in 1698 (Mohler 2011, 131). As for the medical treatment received by the family’s captive workers, in the same aforementioned letter written by Alida in 1717, she not only detailed to Robert that the miller Joe had fallen ill, but also the course of treatment he had received from her. She, “gave him a vomit drink and made him bleed and then sweat.” (Mohler 2011, 33). Joe’s recovery “...was essential to the running of the family’s gristmill...” (33) so it is important to note that even a captive man so valuable to the family did not receive outsourced medical treatment from a white doctor. The captive women giving birth on this property would

most likely not have been seen by doctors either. The potential for the existence of gynecological intervention for captive women on the Livingston property changes however, as time continues.

Childbirth, Black or white, is not well-documented at the Livingston manor during the lifetime of Alida Livingston. I rely on supplementary research from the records of similar homes during this time period to infer what childbearing looked like during Alida's life. Neither is it well-documented at the time of the next prominent Livingston wife Margaret Beekman Livingston (1724-1800). However, the standard practices of the time of Margaret Beekman very much changed the possibilities for what life would have looked like for women and specifically how medicine would have developed to treat them.

By Margaret Beekman Livingston's death in 1800, as close as New York City, gynecology had become a well-known path in the study of medicine. The medical treatment of captive people on Clermont during Margaret Beekman's time is relatively well documented; Roberta Singer (1984) even claims, "...the Third Lord and his Clermont cousins took pains to provide their slaves with the best of medical care" (65). She elaborates further in writing, "[They] engaged the services of Dr. William Wilson, who settled on Clermont sometime before 1785. His records show that he was kept busy bleeding, medicating, and operating on slaves and family members alike" (65). Dr. Wilson could easily be pictured on-call for the pregnant women in the area, white and captive, who were slowly weaned off of a reliance on midwives.

The U.S. by this point, was completely economically dependant on the institution of slavery and subsequent continuation of this institution through captive women's childbearing. In

one detailed account written in 1809 by Dr. John Archer,¹⁴ he detailed a peculiar story of two separate captive women's childbirths. Both accounts are of women with whom the doctor attended, who had no concernable vaginal opening (Archer, 1812). In the first account, a story from in 1783, Archer writes, "...when I came, and enquired of the midwife the situation of the fetus, she said she could not tell...I immediately examined, and...found that the labia interna were firmly united, so as to close the vagina..." (319). As for the second account he writes, "When I came, the midwife told me nearly as stated in the first case, and on examination I found her statement correct, but perceived the adhesion was not so firm and hard as the foregoing case...I separated the labia without the use of a knife by only forcible pressure (320). From these two experiences Archer suggests that this a common infliction for the female children born to captive women, as the title of this letter is, *Facts Illustrating a Disease Peculiar to the Female Children of Negro Slaves*. The infliction, by his suggestion, is caused by the necessary negligence of captive women's children so that those women may complete their daily labor. Captive mother's labor was normally, similarly to pregnant-labor, expected to be completed with little change to schedule; While many mothers were forced to leave their infants lying on the ground near the area where they worked, some refused to leave them unattended and tried to work at the normal pace with their babies on their backs" (Davis 1981, 16-7). On this topic Archer speculates,

"It is customary for negroes, who work out, that is, the field negro woman, to take their children with them...When the infant is able to sit up...she sets it down on some old cloth or petticoat at the end of the corn row, where it sits until she hoes two rows, during which time it wets itself, &c. and sits thereon until the mother has hoed a row out an another back again. This being constantly repeated...the

¹⁴ This account was in the form of a letter addressed to his colleague Dr Mitchell in Hartford county, Maryland.

slime becomes so acrid that the labia interna and contiguous parts become inflamed, and being kept constantly in contact, they unite from frequent inflammations, are rendered thick and callous (320-1).

The doctor suggests the female children of slaves develop an almost completely closed vaginal opening, not even large enough to be penetrated and inseminated. The possibility for these two pregnancies baffled Dr. Archer who then determined this was not a medical anomaly but proof of an undiagnosed condition particular to captive women, not due to their race but to their social position.

This account from northern Maryland may have been more than slightly removed from life in rural New York state, but it is strongly representative of the knowledge that white doctors possessed and shared with each other. The infantilization of midwives in these narratives similarly exists to uphold the fragility of the institution of gynecology. The aggression that comes from gatekeeping the possession of knowledge of women's bodies is rooted in the colonial instinct to control these bodies. For Black captive women this meant the control of the production of the next cycle of workers and breeders. For white women, it meant, more broadly, their continued submission and subsequent upholding of the white supremacist patriarchy. This control ensured the validity of white male doctors over female midwives of all races, who possessed centuries of generational knowledge of women's bodies and what ways they were best treated.

In urban areas where access to a doctor would have been more common at this point in the late 18th century, it is recorded, "Doctors advocated...that their care provided the best outcome and midwives should summon for them at first sign of trouble" (Hamilton 2015, 17).

The societal trust of midwives and their work found in primary accounts, regardless of the outcome of the child or mother, is lost with the introduction of male doctors. While the standard practice of midwives was to assist in delivery and the mother's recovery, "...doctors paid little heed to the anxieties of laboring mothers and rarely addressed them" (Hamilton 2015, 18). When a captive woman's delivery was deemed valuable enough for a doctor to attend, many of these men had no intention to disguise the way they viewed Black women's bodies. Insightfully, Hamilton (2015) writes about this exact phenomena in saying, "doctors paid little heed to the anxieties of laboring mothers and rarely addressed them. ...when faced with a period of waiting doctors preferred to do so within the white family's home" (18), if faced with spending a prolonged period of time within the Black community.

There are countless instances of documentation of the ways male doctors viewed and profited from Black women's bodies and reproductive systems through Western medicine and gynecological practice. One specific story stuck with me through my research and that is the story of a group of four doctors performing experimental ovarian surgeries on an unnamed captive Black woman. They suspected this woman had an ovarian tumor; there was a hard growth in the woman's abdomen. Without use of anesthesia the four men restrained the woman and removed her ovary, noting "...the enslaved patient lost 'her self command, screamed and struggled violently--rendering it no easy task to control her..." (Owens 2017, 46-7). After the procedure the ovary was put up for "pedagogical" use by medical students (47). One of the four doctors present also later, "...lamented that he had not saved the enslaved woman's reproductive parts for preservation and study. For early gynecologists like Harris, even postmortem, a bondwoman's 'real' value was still measured by her reproductive organs." (47).

To American doctors, not only gynecologists, Black captive women were convenient tools.

“Despite the general belief that black people, especially women, were inferior, the bodies of women fascinated, as well as repulsed, white southern doctors...doctors discussed the dirty appearance of black female bodies...and examined so-called black practices such as eating clay or dirt...The reports and articles of these doctors continued to promote a general belief that blackness was unclean and caused disorderliness and that black bodies were vectors of disease” (Owens 2017, 46, 53-54).

The systems that were put in place to delineate white from Black womanhood, thereby epitomizing one and making the other untouchable, also separated the people in power from their untouchable class for long enough that they forgot what had created the separation in the first place and began to fear the distance. The “fascination” surrounding Black women’s bodies is somewhat ironic; this mix of fear and curiosity would prove fatal for millions of captive women whose bodies were able to be used as experiments on ‘women’ exactly because it would not have been proper to experiment like this on a white woman's body. The nature of these gynecological experiments relied on the fact that Black women were biologically identical to white women. This irony was of course covered through the use of the physical-stereotype of masculinizing Black women’s bodies to uphold the definition of femininity. Ironies aside, these, like all systemically oppressive practices were possible because of their ability to replicate; oppression is cyclical and so not only were reproduction and childbirth tools used by captors to ensure the cycle of captivity continued, children were another vehicle used to perpetuate captive communities. This was used by both captive people and their captors and so, “Enslaved women therefore played a major role in social reproduction, where boys and girls learned cultural

practices, survival strategies and to negotiate their gendered and racialized identities” (Franklin 2001, 114). Children would learn cultural values from the systems put in place by their mothers and more generally the female captive adults in their communities.

Sexual Terrorism

Black women in particular were so valuable to their captor of course because of their ability to conceive children. This thesis has discussed the medical repercussions of white captors’ obsession with systematizing Black women’s reproductive health for this purpose, but in 1808, the colonial U.S., *The Act Prohibiting the Importation of Slaves*, was passed and it did exactly that. This 1808 federal declaration made U.S. participation in the Transatlantic Slave Trade illegal.¹⁵ Black captive women’s reproduction suddenly became all the more valuable after the enactment of this act that even as the push for manumission grew in the U.S. during the 19th century, violence against Black women’s bodies was consistently maintained and excuses made for it. Violence against Black women’s bodies was not just reserved for thinly veiled medical experimentation. A combination of factors allowed for the social acceptance of sexual acts of violence forced upon Black women, free or captive.

For the early years of U.S. history during the era of slavery, the rape of a Black woman was not illegal (Pokorak 2006, 8, 26). In her essay titled “Feminist Perspectives on Rape,” Rebecca Whisnant uses the term “black women’s unrapeability” (Whisnant 2017), to describe

¹⁵ Domestic slave trade inside the continental U.S. and between the Americas remained legal until complete manumission in 1865.

the freedom the white colonial class had in handling Black women's bodies, and the northern colonial U.S. was not exempt from the sexual horrors detailed in the lives of southern antebellum captive women. One such account,

“...demonstrates that the judicial system prized the woman's pregnancy and unborn child rather than the teen mother who had been raped for five years by her late owner, Robert Newsome. Celia murdered Newsome, who had repeatedly raped her since she was fourteen years old. She had borne two of Newsome's children and was pregnant at the time of his death. The local court found her guilty and sentenced Celia to death. They delayed her executions, however, until she could give birth to her baby” (Owens 2017, 43).

In this case and in a larger sense, the value in Black women's bodies was obviously in her ability to reproduce.

Acts of sexual terrorism were excused in society not only because of their economic means to an end--the free reproduction of captive labor--but also because of the tenets of womanhood prescribed to Black women. A portion of Black women's “unrapeability” was due in part to the nature of her womanhood. White womanhood, as delicate and accomplished, hinged on Black women's forced labor and commodified achievements, through personal success, childbirth, medical and other generational knowledge, community, and art. Davis argues, “If Black women had achieved a sense of their own strength and a strong urge to resist, then violent sexual assaults—so the slaveholders might have reasoned—would remind the women of their essential and inalterable femaleness. In the male supremacist vision of the period, this meant passivity, acquiescence and weakness” (Davis 1981 41). This was a “reminder” that could only be enacted on Black bodies, even though the “male supremacist vision” of subservient femininity

was a tenant of all womanhood. Race defines gender and so the actions taken towards Black bodies were examples of actions that could not be taken toward white ones.

Why is it that the weapon of sexual violence is used most commonly on women's bodies? Why is it that, "In confronting the black woman as adversary in a sexual contest, the master would be subjecting her to the most elemental form of terrorism distinctively suited for the female: rape" (Davis 1972, 96)? Rape is a tool of war, and this implication of rape during the time period of the Hudson Valley is not limited only to the Black community; "...racist ideologies about rape are also prominent in the history of colonialism and genocide against Native Americans. Ideas about Native men as savage rapists, Native women as downtrodden and raped squaws, and white men as heroic saviors of both white and Native women were essential to the "colonial imagination" that explained and justified the taking of Native lands" (Whisnant 2017). There were many 'others' in European-colonial New York, all of whom needed to fit into the gender binary and roles that were assigned in it. As for Black women, rape was a multifaceted attempt to subdue.

The rape of Black women specifically targeted the Black community through the lense of forced control over her body, "Rape is a common, indeed arguably universal, form of abuse in war" (Whisnant 2017). This control over a black woman's body and reproduction is meant to eradicate her culture. The culture that exists inside of herself and also the culture that would exist in her children. Today, "Rape by combatants during armed conflict is now explicitly recognized as an international war crime and, in some settings, as genocide or a crime against humanity" (Wood 2018, 2), and so even without this modern context, the severity of the implications of these terrorist acts of sexual violence cannot be understated, especially in this setting of formal

academic writing. I hope to highlight this crucial significance by exploring the implications of sexual violence in the instance of the Hudson Valley.

In 1997, the Murphy family of Baltimore met with the Rabb extended family for a Livingston-descendant family reunion at the Clermont Historic site. However, the Murphy family is Black. Madeline Murphy, who was then seventy-five, had heard stories from her aunt about her great-grandmother Celia who was supposedly the illegitimate daughter of Philip Henry Livingston (1769-1831), great-grandson of Robert Livingston Sr (1654-1728). Philip Henry Livingston belonged to the branch of the Livingston family descended from Robert Sr.'s eldest son Philip (1686-1749), all of whom inhabited the largest parcel of Livingston property bequeathed to them by Robert Sr.. The Livingstons who lived at Clermont were descended from The Judge Robert Livingston (1688-1775), The Elder's second son. The captive woman named Celia, as well as her mother Barbara Williams, who had a sexual relationship with Philip (1769-1749), were also captives belonging to Philip. By her own account Madeline posits, "It was likely the sins of the forefathers that caused so much embarrassment for the Livingstons that they long ago wiped the family slate clean of any mention of Barbara Williams and her bastard daughter" (Glanton 1997). This erasure also makes obvious the fact that Christina was entirely excluded from her father's will and all Livingston records and so "...Murphy and Rabb do not believe the relationship between Williams and Livingston was a loving one" (Glanton 1997).

The captive woman Barbara Williams originally labored on a sugar plantation in Jamaica. It was there she and Philip met, and it was from there Philip took her to New York to serve presumably as both laborer and concubine on the Livingston property. Black captive women had no functional control over the whims of their captors, legally or otherwise and so stories like this

one are common. This lack of control also existed within Black communities, when white captors gained access to Black-community; “Slaves were frequently forced into undesired sexual liaisons with each other...based on the whims or the breeding plans of their owners...” (Whisnant, 2017). Black captive men and women were often sexually manipulated for the benefit of their captor’s. Through the rape of Black women and the ‘assigning’ of Black men to Black women, captors were violently attacking the possibility for the Black community to autonomously create the boundaries for their own community within the confines of a larger captive community, such as the Livingston or Clermont properties where the captive community would have been isolated from a larger Black community due to its rural location and expansive property.

As stated in the tactics of “breeding” captors employed on their captives, attacks on Black bodies and Black sexuality were not limited only to Black women’s bodies, although sexual domination by the white captive class hinged on the abuse of Black women. And of course, because Black womanhood defines white womanhood, the sanctity of white sexuality relies on the violation of Black sexuality. And so comes into play, “...the two-pronged criminal law response to Black sexuality: nonrecognition of the crime of rape for Black women victims and severe punishments, including death, for unregulated Black male interactions with White women” (Pokorak 2006, 8). Through this, white womanhood gains another boundary dependent on the simultaneous criminalization and blind eye turned towards Black bodies.

Spirituality

If left alone, the “lack of control” Black captive women had in their lives, mentioned in the previous chapter, will fester into an erasure of Black women’s autonomy. I previously mentioned the existence of a space Whitney Battle-Baptiste coined “the Wilderness” (2016, 89); I use this space to explore the relationship captive women would have with medicine and with their own bodies. Black women’s legal autonomy during the 18th and 19th century were nonexistent, but to ignore the knowledge circulated in Black and African communities is to infantilize those communities. In this liminal space of Wilderness, are examples of the formation of community, removed from the context of their captor’s culture of capture.

In particular, Black women were central to the formation of captive communities due to motherhood being such a significant power in creating the cycle of both community and also, to the white population, physically continuing the cycle of slavery. Because of the acute differences in the reproduction of Black and white communities, practices of motherhood in Black captive communities became stereotyped and led to further ‘othering’ of Black women. For example,

“Eugene Genovese suggests that the reputation the slave woman had for beating her children might have resulted from her attempts to teach them to obey quickly that they might later avoid death at a white man’s hand...No precedent for harsh parental discipline existed in [West] African society, where mothers traditionally indulge their younger offspring” (Wallace 2015, 314)

Because the institution of slavery relied so heavily on Black women’s physical reproduction, Black communities relied on Black women to reproduce culture and pass it down to younger generations, due to the threat of separation of the Black family for their captor’s economic gains.

“Black women viewed themselves as the cultural bearers of West African beliefs [about motherhood]...” (Owens 2017, 46), and so this cycle was not only rooted in motherhood but intrinsically in the reproduction of actions and knowledge in the liminal space of The Wilderness. A major and completely untouched aspect of these Black women’s lives in this thesis is another facet of what I consider to exist in The Wilderness, which is religion and spirituality.

Black women’s cultural identities were weaponized in a cycle meant to withhold their autonomy. Religion, in colonial and antebellum-era Black women’s lives alike, existed despite the influence of the majority white captive population they would interact with, “...when persons who exercised a dominant religion in one region are removed from that context...They will only be able to continue the exercise of their beliefs through individualized, instrumental expressions in private settings” (Fennell 2003, 10); as a matter of fact, spirituality and religion safely separated the Black community from the white community and created a space where religiosity was quintessentially Black--even when the dominant majority religion Christianity was being practiced. In New York, Black women could have ethnic roots in many West or Central African cultures, or a combination of multiple. Of note are the Yoruba and Igbo identities identified on much of the East Coast. However, due to my archaeological research at the Maple Avenue Parsonage in Germantown NY, I am able to speculate a smaller Igbo or Yoruba influence, and instead the much more noticeable presence of Bakongo identities in Black captive and free people in this area in the Mid-Hudson Valley. The distinctions between these religions also does not mean that they could not be combined in practice.

To a Yoruba or Igbo woman in the colonial U.S., “The model of West African womanhood that took effect in the Americas [was] associated with the blood of mothers, a highly fetishized, indeed potent substance that accounts for the ‘secret’ of women—that which gives them the ability to conceive and give birth” (Apter 2013, 73). In these West African cultures, womanhood and femininity were not necessarily interdependent in the same way we in the U.S. place their division. Instead, womanhood was a divine occupancy of the physical body and awareness for the systems that defined the separation of man and woman. Motherhood was one of these separations for womanhood and was considered spiritually charged through the act of creating life. Motherhood was similarly significant to the West African conception of womanhood as emphasized in Dutch womanhood in the Hudson Valley during the lifetimes of Alida and Margaret Livingston’s generations. However, the divinity of childbirth to these Dutch was not a similar celebration of the workings of the physical body. This is especially true when considering the development of medicine in the 19th century, “Because doctors believed in the inferiority of women and the double inferiority of black women, they considered natural biological conditions such as menstruation pathological” (Owens 2017, 46), and so the religious celebration of women’s blood in menstruation and in childbirth as representational for the possibility of life, would have obviously been staunchly opposed by white culture.

Igbo in Utopia

In chapter six of Patricia Samford’s (2007) exploration of subfloor pits in African and Black captive communal living quarters in Tidewater Virginia, *Subfloor Pits*, she identifies and

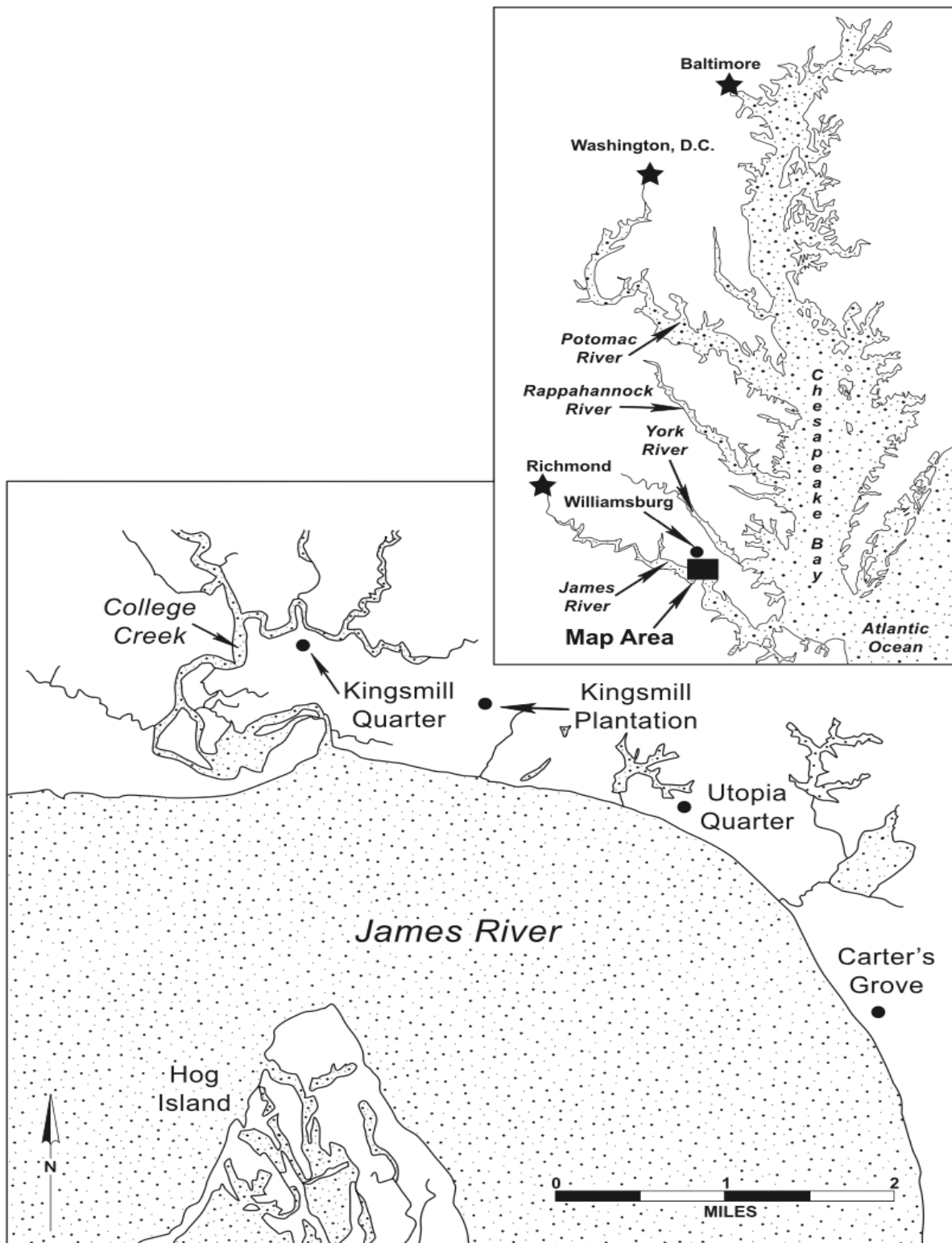


Figure 4: Map of Tidewater Virginia area and the placement of the Utopia quarters in relationship to the Kingsmill Plantation house (Samford 2007).

analyzes captive living quarters at what was previously known as Bray Plantation. Also known as the Kingsmill Plantation. These living quarters are named “Utopia” and are illustrated by Samford in Figure 4, 5, and 6. At this Virginia plantation, there were four iterations of the U-shaped Utopia Quarters spanning from roughly 1670 to 1775. The U-shape being, “...a plan reminiscent of West African house compounds” (2007, 43). The four Utopia quarters are dated:

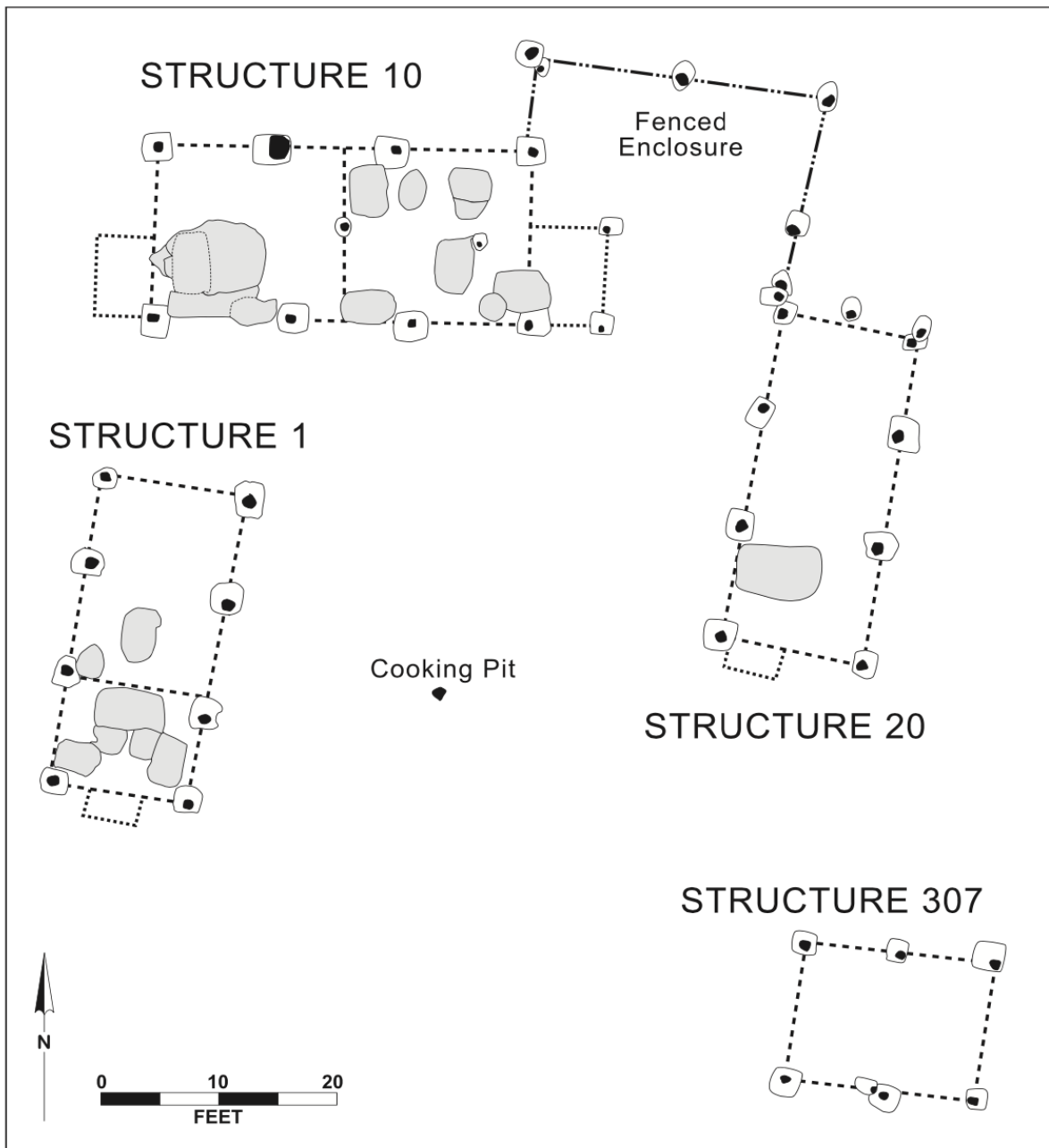


Figure 5: Illustration of Utopia II, the second-generation of the Utopia slave-quarters (Samford 2007).

Utopia I (1670-1700), Utopia II (1700-1730), Utopia III (1730-1750), Utopia IV (1750-1775).

Each new quarter was built roughly 30 feet behind the last once the structures became too worn to continue use as homes.

In this text, Samford uses her archaeological analysis to write narratives about her theorized archaeological subject. Chapter six opens with narrative prose detailing a moment in the afternoon in the life of the captive woman named Debb--the woman who had become the central matriarchal force in her community (Samford 2007). The woman Debb, whose name was listed on a slave-registry of the property in 1720 and lived in Structure 10 at Utopia II, (Samford 2007), was decidedly ethnically West African. Figure 6 (Samford 2007), illustrates the layout of the northernmost structure in the Utopia quarters, appropriately dubbed "Debb's Quarters" (2007, 123).

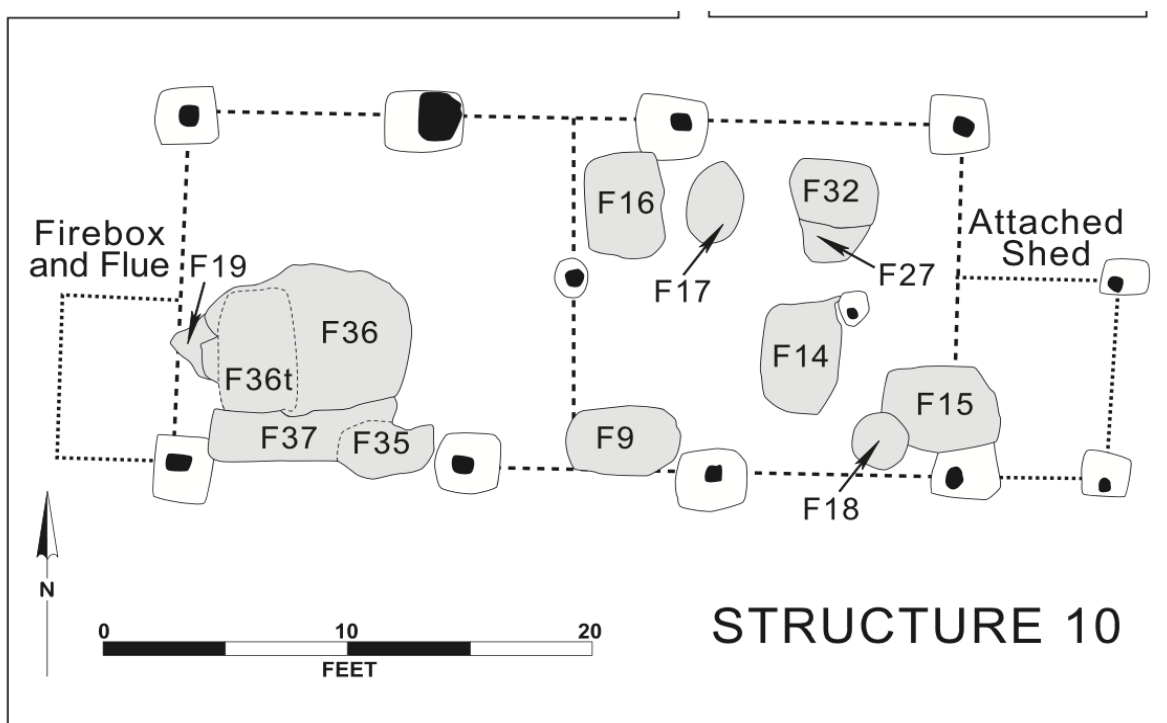


Figure 6: Illustration of Structure 10, the northernmost structure in the Utopia Quarters (Samford 2007).

Each of the features labeled in Figure 5 and 6 are subfloor pits, used to store seasonal clothing, and most importantly food. These pits were lined with grasses or wood and were covered in long planks to preserve as much usable living space as possible in the already-small structures. The produce stored in these pits would not freeze in the winter, nor spoil in the warm spring weather and were kept temperate indoors and underground. These pits would extend at most a few feet into the ground. The materials found in Feature 36 specifically point to the presence of West African Igbo culture in Debb's home; this feature was a hearth-front subfloor storage pit and was determined to have stored large amounts of sweet potatoes; hearth-front subfloor pits were designed specifically for food storage (2007, 121). The pollen tests run on the soil collected in Feature 36, determined the seasonal storage of sweet potatoes and by cross referencing traditional Igbo foodways as well as patterns of the trade routes of captive people in Virginia, Samford determined the presence of sweet potatoes as a reinforcement of a predominant Igbo ethnic community.

The captive woman Debb, was born in West Africa. In Virginia where she was held, it would be her responsibility to pass on her knowledge to the children and other captives in her community. Debb was not the only native West African captive at the Utopia site for any of its iterations, but as matriarch of her community this responsibility fell predominantly to her. These beliefs would include the preparation of traditional foods such as *foofoo*, made of sweet potatoes. In West Africa, the crop used for this meal would be the African yam, but in Virginia, Debb and her community may have found the sweet potato to be a perfect textural substitute. These beliefs would also be spiritual. As mentioned previously, motherhood was a focal tenet of womahood in Igbo communities and so practices of childbirth and childrearing were of course a dominant

responsibility for women such as Debb in the reproduction of communal culture. Owens (2017) comments on the reproduction of motherhood in captive communities, writing, “Enslaved women, who were descended from West and Central African ethnic groups, continued to incorporate the cultural practices that their foremothers had taught them about motherhood. (These lessons ranged from how to suckle their children to how to wrap them in swaddling cloth while the mothers farmed plots of land)” (45). The presence of captive children on this site pointed to the very likely occurrence of captive childbirth at Utopia. It can be posited that some children on this plantation may have been purchased separately from their mothers based on the practices of the trading of captive peoples in colonial Virginia. And so a central and constant matriarchal figure may have been vital to the captive communities’ assimilation of non-local captive children.

The emphasis placed on womanhood, and subsequently motherhood, at the Utopia site as key to replicating community and culture combined with the identification of the markers of Igbo culture, drive this analysis finally into the realm of female spirituality. In another brief archaeological narrative, Samford details a prayer made by a captive woman named Ebo--an Igbo name--for the return of her husband, who has been sold to another plantation. In this narrative, Ebo has finally collected the necessary items for her prayer to the Goddess Idemili over the course of a few months.

“[Ebo] carefully maneuvered the cork from the mouth of the brandy bottle on the floor beside her. It had taken months to save the money needed to purchase this brandy...She brought the bottle to her lips, carefully took in a mouthful and held it there a moment before leaning over and spitting the brandy into the rectangular hole she had cut through the earthen floor of the cabin...in addition to the

seven shells representing water and Idemili, the female deity of water, she had arranged the bones of cows—sacred to the Igbo people of her homeland—and the white clay tobacco pipes representing an offering to Idemili. She took another mouth of brandy, leaned over, and spit into the hole again. This action she would repeat for six more nights...After the seven days, she would carefully fill the hole, sealing the shell, pipes, and bones so that no one could disturb these sacred items” (Samford 2007, 149-150).

Ebo is making this prayer quietly, in the same room as her sleeping children, emphasizing the struggle to obtain all the necessary objects as directly related to the vital importance her family plays in her life.

In this narrative, Samford identifies the artifacts detailed in this chapter as evidence for the use of subfloor pits as shrines. In Structure 10 which represents Debb’s Quarters, there was one feature identified as a possible shrine. In Feature 9 of Figure 6, there was found in the northeast corner of the feature, an iron “agricultural hoe.” In the southeast corner, a wine bottle which contained fragments of “bone and eggshell,” which were “interpreted as food offerings.” The relative center of the feature contained, “A paving brick, a waterworn black cobblestone, a kaolin pipestem, and a raccoon mandible.” This subfloor pit was identified as the others were; a layer of dark brown sandy loam differentiated the fill in the pit from its walls and floor, which were a light-colored clay (Samford 2007, 157-8).

The shrine from Ebo’s story is located in Utopia III in Structure 50. Structure 50 is the easternmost structure on the Utopia III site, abutting the fence line of the community. The pit known as Ebo’s Shrine is located in Feature 44 in the southeasternmost corner of the building. This means that the pit may have been private, and while it would have been difficult to see the

shrine clearly while performing prayer, the shrine itself seemed to have only been used once and then covered for safety. In the feature were found: "...seven complete fossil scallop shells, three large cow bones, two kaolin tobacco pipebowls, and a pipestem" (Samford 2007, 158). What is most easily identified in this collection of items in the pattern of the color white.

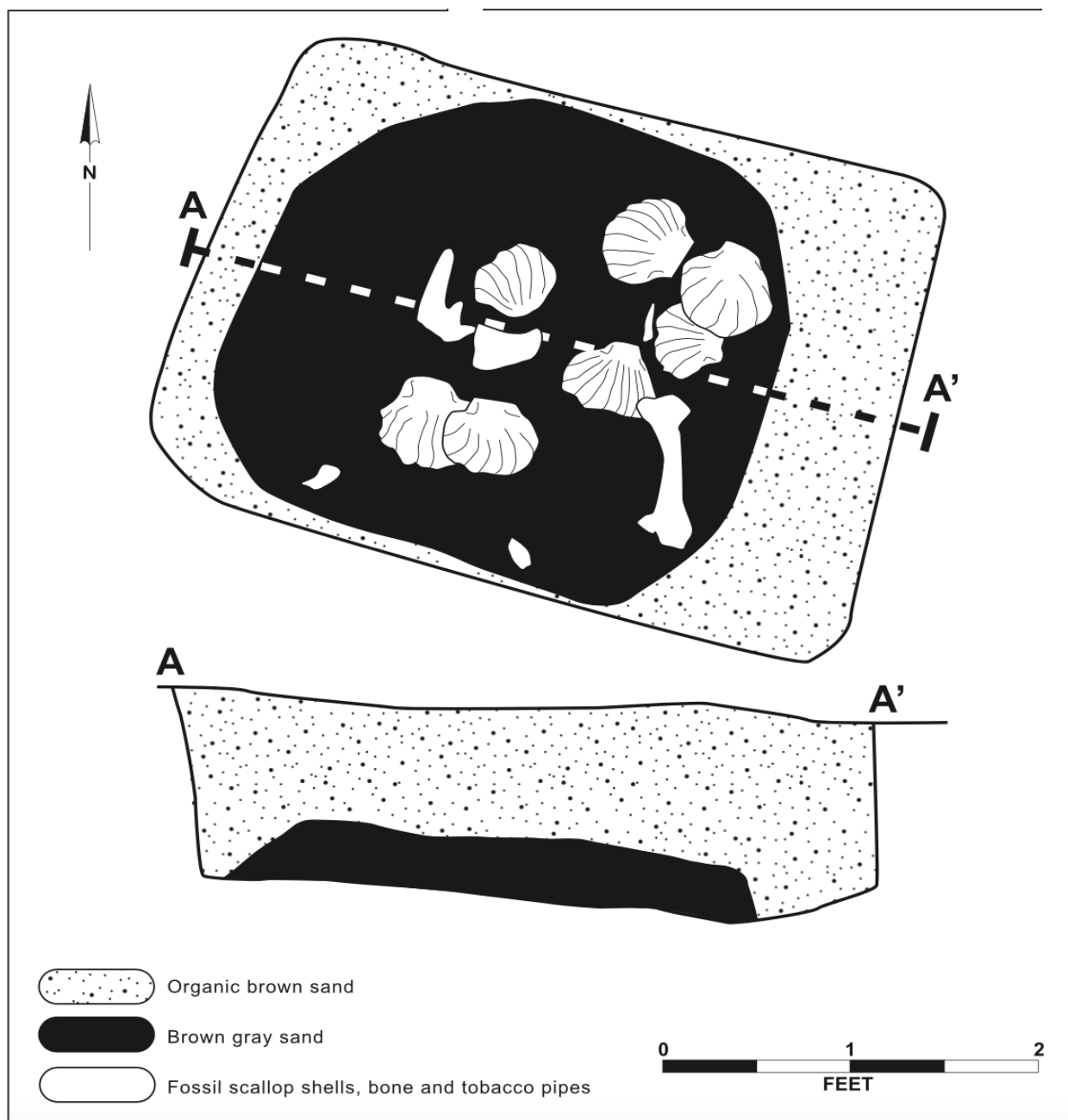


Figure 7: Illustration of Feature 44, and the organization of its artifacts (Samford 2007).

In Igbo spiritual beliefs, the color white was representational of the afterlife or land of the dead (Samford 2007; Apter 2013). As theorized by Samford, the woman making this prayer combined white objects with objects emphasizing a relationship with water and so it is suggested that the objects collected in this feature were meant to be received by a deity of water. The goddess Idemili is one such example of a popular divine figure.

In pre-colonial Igbo culture, “Barred from property ownership and with political rights largely subordinated to those of men, women nonetheless, through their control of the subsistence economy, trade, and the domestic sphere, wielded considerable power (Amadiume 1987, 27, as referenced in Krishnan 2020, 3). The Igbo did not form large empires, instead living in small village communities with central familial power structures, “...with village leadership falling to the head of the senior lineage, with all lineage heads participating in making village decisions (Cookey 1980, as referenced in Samford 2007, 33). Women played an active role in the political structures of their communities; “...precolonial Igboland operated under a dual-sex political system, authority was dispersed among a variety of men’s and women’s organizations, with women forming powerful organized groups that settled marriage disputes, imposed fines on defaulting lineage members, and took charge of death rituals (Amadiume 1987, as referenced in Samford 2007, 33). The active and inclusive role women played in their communities is complementary to the development and inclusion of the female divine.

In Igbo communities, “Women’s roles presented a duality structured around fertility and women’s simultaneous existence as daughters and wives” (Krishnan 2020, 3). This dichotomy is seen similarly in U.S. colonial attitudes surrounding womanhood and the value the women might

bring as bargaining chips in the race to colonize the new colonies. Back in Igboland, similar patterns to those found in the defining features of American womanhood appear around the value of the association of womanhood and motherhood; “More so than anything else, it was through her children that a woman might gain influence within her marital community...the ability of female characters to give birth is seen as emblematic of womanhood, where sterility and lack of children become a marker of subhumanization” (Krishnan 2020, 3). This is similar to Dutch tenets of womanhood and more generally, western European values. While the two values had no pre-colonial developmental relationship to one another, their introduction in the colonial U.S. was complimentary. This meant that at least one West African tenet of womanhood stood relatively unchallenged, and so this thesis’s emphasis on motherhood becomes more clear. The role of childbirth to those women who were capable solidified their position as women and as participating in an action that was divinely feminine.

The shrine in Feature 44, Figure 7, contained objects which pointed to veneration of the water goddess Idemili, a deity with whom only women could communicate. The artifacts found in the features were also determined to be on a raised mound of the pits original earth, and so this mound further points to association with Idemili, for “Idemili, the daughter of the Almighty God, came to earth in a pillar of water that rose from a sacred lake...” (Samford 2007, 34). As studied in archaeology of Igboland, shrines to Idemili “...were often simple and relatively plain, consisting of a stream, or a mound of earth, a stone, or an earthen bowl with seven pieces of chalk” (Achebe 1987, 94–95 as referenced in Samford 2007). Being a water deity, the captive woman contacting her may have chosen this goddess exactly because of Utopia’s proximity to

the James River; “Shrines to Idemili are located near water, and the Utopia shrine was placed in the structure corner closest to the James River, which was visible from the building” (2007, 161).

It would make sense for a predominantly Igbo community to employ subfloor pits not only as convenient and scientifically-sound storage, but also as homes for family ancestral shrines and temporary ritual shrines, “As in most of West Africa, spirituality permeates every aspect of Igbo life, making it impossible to separate spiritual beliefs, social organization, and political authority” (Samford 2007, 35), and so the continuation of culture that fell onto the shoulders of the matriarchs included the continuation of spiritual beliefs. The shrine identified in Feature 44, combines multiple aspects of Igbo spiritual culture and, “While it was not possible for the enslaved to re-create exact Igbo spiritual configurations in Virginia, this shrine shows sophisticated spiritual knowledge in use” (2007, 161), which indicates a combination of meaningful matriarchal-driven community relationships sustaining a knowledge of the Igbo homeland as well as possible direct personal ties to Igboland.

The 1808 ban of imported captive people emphasized the distance growing between captive communities and their personal memories of Africa, and those spiritual beliefs which would have come directly from it. The communities became increasingly reliant on each other for the bond of community instead of a shared identity from separate past. These new bonds, more distant from personal relations with West and Central Africa marked the creation of a Black culture, which was often an amalgamation of spiritual practices of ethnic Africa and the adaptations made to traditional practices using the resources that were available to them in the U.S., like the substitution of yams with sweet potatoes in the story of Debb’s Quarters.

Bakongo in Germantown

The women referenced in Patricia Samford's (2007) study were most likely born in West Africa; the majority of captive people on coastal Virginia plantations during, and prior to, the beginning of the 18th century, came directly from West and Central-Africa. At the Bray or Kingsmill Plantation, "During [Utopia] Periods II and III, the property was owned by the Bray family, and most of the enslaved had been acquired from West Africa, forming a multicultural mix on the quarter. During the final period IV (ca. 1750–1775), the property was in the hands of the Burwell family, and by that time most of the enslaved residing there had been born in Virginia" (Samford 2007, 42). This means that Debb and Ebo would have most likely lived in a community rich with their own Igbo cultural practices. However, matriarchs who came generations afterward would have been charged with maintaining and teaching completely new ethnic values, which would be a combination of the values and practices previous generations had brought over from Africa, that captive peoples brought from their generational homes in the Carribean, and the practices introduced by captive people from different locations in the continental U.S..

In order to survive, Black captive culture in New York would have potentially been a combination of the cultural and spiritual practices of multiple different captive communities across the Americas. Tenets of Igbo spirituality are among the most commonly archaeologically identified along the U.S. East Coast in captive communities, and the domestic transportation of captive people north would have transported these beliefs as well. However in this area of the

Mid-Hudson Valley, West African Igbo spirituality combined with the West Central African Bakongo spiritual beliefs, and more specifically, the Bakongo cosmogram.

Bakongo spirituality originated in West Africa, in the area of the Kongo, “Though slightly out-numbered by captives from West Africa, Central Africans (especially the Kogno) are

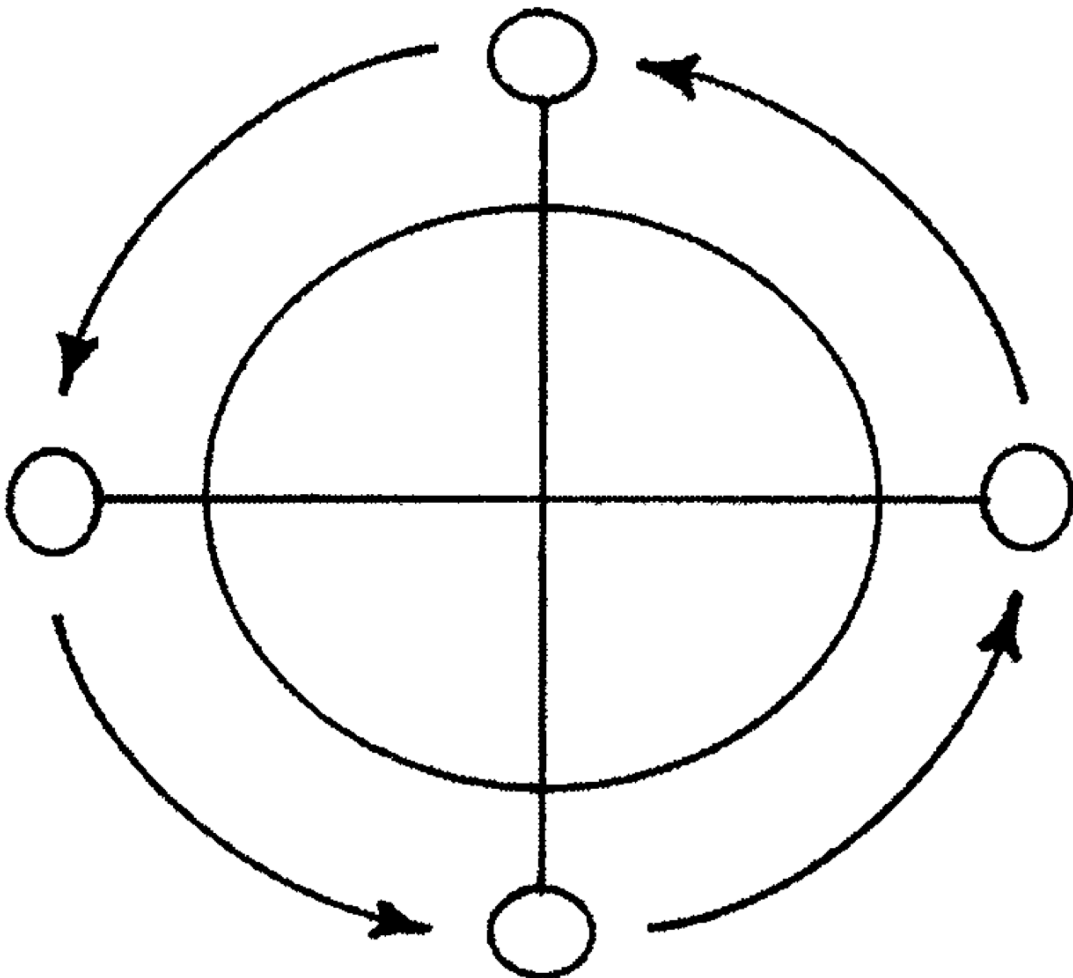


Figure 8: the Bakongo *dikenga*, with arrows indicating direction of movement (Fennell 2003).

now considered to have ‘had the largest homogeneous culture among the imported Africans and the strongest impact on the development of African American culture’” (Holloway 1990, as

referenced in McCurnin 2010, 45). The core symbol of the Bakongo belief system surrounded the significance of the Bakongo cosmogram, illustrated in Figure 8 below.

This cosmogram is known as a *dikenga*: which is an illustration of the Bakongo flow of life in the universe. The *dikenga* exists at the heart of BaKongo theological icons; the BaKongo cosmogram represents the cycle of one's life and that of the world (Fennell 2003, Gundaker 2011, McCurnin 2010, Lindner 2016a). This symbol consists of two equilateral crossed lines, with circles at the end of both sides, representing the movement of the sun. The northern point on the *dikenga* "...represents the sun at noon...the apex of a person's earthly life and power in that life" (Fennell 2003, 6). The southern point, "...represents the direction of south, and the sun at midnight...and the apex of a person's spiritual power" (2003, 6). The eastern point in the *dikenga* represents a human soul at birth, while the corresponding western point represents death. The time that one spends above the horizontal axis, the *kalunga* (McCurnin 2010), represents time spent in the land of the living, and below is the land of the dead.

In the Bakongo spiritual belief, the land of the living and the afterlife mirror one another, "The upper land of the living is inhabited by people with dark complexions, opposed and mirrored by the lower realm of the land of the dead and spirits, inhabited by souls colored white...The upper land of the living is conceptualized as a mountain range, mirrored at the *Kalunga* boundary by a comparable mountain range in the land of the dead." (Fennell 2003, 7). The *kalunga* boundary is a significant marker in Bakongo beliefs and is most commonly represented by the surface of a body of water, or a mirror. Because of this, both water and mirrors, and other objects with reflective properties, are used in the practice of Bakongo to conjure the essence of *kalunga*. At the Germantown Maple Avenue Parsonage, where I spent a

spring and summer season working, there is a rendering of the *dikenga* etched into the wooden frame of the basement hearth which is captured in Figure 9 and 10.

The Parsonage that stands today in Germantown was built in 1767 for the minister to the Reformed Church of Germantown and his wife, Christina Ten Broeck, “the 1790 census lists four slaves”¹⁶ belonging to the couple and it is possible that this parsonage was built using captive labor. Germantown is located just a few miles north of the Dutchess and Columbia county border, and so was located centrally to the Livingston manor property and the smaller Clermont-Livingston property. Many of the Palatines who populated the area known as East Camp, which in time would develop into the area known as Germantown, would serve as tenant farmers on the Livingston property for generations. This Germantown Parsonage served the Palatine community in the area and seeing how the vast majority of northern captors were not wealthy by any means, and as a matter of fact were considered relatively poor, it is easy to begin to form an image of Germantown including a few captive peoples at the very least.¹⁷ With further research, the 1790 census record which listed four captives in the possession of Ten Broeck and her husband did not name any of the four individuals. However in the beginning of the 19th century, Christina’s sister Mary and her family occupied the Parsonage and listed a captive

¹⁶*Germantown Archaeohistory. Bard Department of Archaeology, 2017.*

<https://www.bard.edu/archaeology/exhibits/germantown/ar>

¹⁷ For more information related to the relationship between Palatines and Black captives, see Otterness 2017, Chapter 7, *A Nation Which is Neither French, Nor English, Nor Indian*. Quote: “Few Europeans questioned slavery’s role in New York society. Although the 1710 immigrants often complained about being treated like slaves in the naval stores camps, once they left the camps they, too, never explicitly challenged the institution of African slavery. Yet neither did they adopt entirely the attitudes of their European neighbors. The [German] Lutheran churches in New York, unlike other New York denominations, accepted Africans, both free and slave, as full members of the church” (148).

woman named Zian, in their household. Zian also gave birth to her unnamed daughter in the Parsonage.



Figure 9: a photo of the hearth in the Germantown Parsonage.



Figure 10: The *dikenga* located on the right-side vertical frame of the hearth in the Germantown Parsonage.

The archaeological work being done at the Parsonage today focuses in the yard around the property and in the basement hearth. One of the most significant discoveries to this thesis is located on the hearth, and not in it: a painted-over etching of a Bakongo *dikenga*. The *dikenga* is

approximately three inches in diameter, located on the right vertical beam of the hearth frame. It cannot be determined exactly what time period this etching was done, but the presence of captive people alone confirms its connection to Bakongo. The second significant archaeological discovery is of the possible *nkisi* found in the three front sections of the floor of the hearth.

An *nkisi*¹⁸ is the name of a Bakongo spirit or the object used to house them. Elaborate Central African *minkisi* could be anthropomorphic figures, men or women, animals, or simply figureless embodiments of spirituality. These “Non-Figurative” (McCurnin 2010, 31) *minkisi* made up the, “vast majority of the protective and healing *minkisi* used by the Kongo people [and were] usually in the form of containers such as sacks, bundles and cooking pots. They were much smaller...than the grand figurative *minkisi*; hence frequently neglected in art history books and museum collections” (2010, 31). Being much smaller, the *nkisi* that are seemingly neglected by collectors, would also have easily been overlooked by captors. Possible examples of this type of *nkisi*, a simple spiritual bundle, were found under the stones of the hearth.

“Underneath the northeastern slab of stone, 15in. wide by 17 in. out from the exterior wall of the hearth, were especially numerous noteworthy objects. In the central western side, between two and five in. below the slab, was a large fragment of quartz crystal...Between 7.5 and 11.5 in. below the slab’s center were two scraps of leather and another quartz crystal” (Lindner 2016a).

Also in the central location was found, “...10 small pieces of white glass, 1 much larger piece of aqua thick curved glass, and a multifaceted blue glass bead...a fish bone, and a piece of mollusk shell” (2016a). In the southern location n, one more quartz crystal was found, “Along the western side and adjacent northern side of the slab, within two in. of its edge under or around [this]

¹⁸ Plural: *minkisi*.

hearthstone...” (2016a). Along with this third crystal were found, “...a shell button, a gunflint, one rusty rectangular nail, two sherds of creamware, one piece of aqua flat glass, one mammal vertebra, and a clump of fish scales” (2016a&b). During the spring dig season of 2019, when myself and my classmates worked excavating the hearth, a stack of oyster shells was found under the southernmost hearthstone at the left side of the hearth.

The collection of artifacts uncovered at the hearth location point to both the possibility of *minkisi* and also to the hearth’s use as a refuse location, wherein the refuse would be intentionally thrown into the hearth fire to be disposed of. Food waste such as fish scales, and unusable domestic items such as broken ceramics or nails, could be identified simply as this refuse. However, the quartz crystals found on site point directly to the Bakongo *kalunga* spiritual boundary; quartz crystals functioned similarly to a mirror in their enactment of the image of the boundary of water’s surface. The stack of oyster shells is also too intentional to be put aside as simple refuse; “Seashells, nut shells, and some types of roots provided metaphors for wombs and containers of lives, souls, and spirits” (Fennell 2010, 13) in Bakongo beliefs. The role of an *nkisi* is to act as a vessel for spiritual power, power which comes from the ancestral spirits inhabiting the land of the dead on the other side of the *kalunga*. The *dikenga* on the hearth’s frame could clue us into the role the objects stored in the hearth served. The quartz crystals and stack of oyster shells may have acted as invitations and homes for the spirits of the ancestors of the person who placed them. In the Kongo, *nkisi* would be used to house more than just familial spirits; a *nkisi* could serve as a protectorate for the entire village. In the colonial and post-colonial U.S., African spiritual practices needed to be performed privately by captive people in the reproduction of their communities. One would invite their ancestors into their physical

lives to protect themselves or a family member from danger. This includes the dangers of childbirth. The hearth itself is located to the left of what was previously a door leading to the upstairs parlor room. Accounting for this structural change serves to paint a picture of the logic behind the placement of the *minkisi* in the hearth.

I now imagine a captive person waiting for the hearthstones to cool after a day of use before maneuvering around the debris of old broken nails and food waste tossed into the fire while it was still burning, to lift up one of the heavy stones. They then place the object that was carefully selected as the most enticing vessel for a protective or guiding family spirit, in the hope that their ancestor will look favorably upon the vessel and enter their life for a time. After the placement of the first *nkisi*, or perhaps before, the captive individual creates the mark of the *dikenga* on the hearth frame, an icon they have replicated countless times in their life. The stairwell next to the hearth which leads upstairs, created the perfect pathway for a spirit to enter into the hearth; this spirit would be coming from the land of the dead under the water, and the closest body of water was only a mile or so away at the banks of the Hudson River. Hopefully the spirit would travel without pause from the river and into the home, unmarred by walls and aided by windows and stairwells.

Maybe this imagined person was the captive woman, Zian, legal property of Christina Ten Broeck's daughter. Zian may have practiced Bakongo spirituality and asked for help from her ancestor's spirits to aid her in childbirth. Maybe this imagined person was one of the four captive people listed in Christina and the minister's 1790 census records. These four individuals most likely aided in the construction of the Parsonage, and so maybe with the completion of the hearth, the group of captive people who would have worked with the hearth as domestic workers

for Chirstina's family, rendered the *dikenga* as a representation of the communal activities that would take place there.



Figure 11: The view of the Catskill Mountains above the Hudson river, from the Parsonage, 2021.

The view from Figure 11 invokes the image of the *dikenga*. The Germantown Parsonage sits on top of a hill overlooking the Hudson and the river itself creates the *kalunga* boundary separating the living from the dead. An even more compelling example of *dikenga* imagery invocation in nature exists in Figure 4, in the map of the Virginia Tidewater. All iterations of the Utopia captive living quarters are built in a U-shape facing the James River. Their placement on the river indicates that the quarters are facing predominantly south in a southwestern direction, and so, when one stepped out of their home in the quarters and into the communal area in the center, they would be met with an unobstructed view of the James River as the sun rose and set, traveling across the sky as if to replicate the path of the sun in the *dikenga*.

The merging of African spirituality did not only exist in the colonial north; practices from across West and Central Africa melted together across the Americas as captive people were sold from location to location, separated and combined anew, forming intrinsically Black amalgamatory cultures. Water played its own significance in Yoruba spiritual beliefs, but in a time when Bakongo was an influential and dominating spiritual belief system across captive

communities in the U.S., one would be hard pressed not to see the view of the James River from Utopia and particularly *dikengen*.

Montgomery Place | Janet Livingston

In this area of the Mid-Hudson Valley, where rurality impeded a large Black community, the reproduction of Black community in Black spaces was invaluable to the preservation of communal practices. These practices that existed in the safety and liminality of The Wilderness, though reproduced in individual-safety, did produce a culture which would not go unseen by their captors. Black culture needed only to be seen by the white captor-class in order for racial stereotypes to be prescribed to Black communal practices. These stereotypes disproportionately affected Black [captive] women who were quickly prescribed labels like the hyper-sexual jezebel and the asexual mammy, two diametrically opposed characters, simultaneously embodied by the Black woman. Many of these stereotypes were assigned by the projection of white values into Black communities and their subsequent and inevitable failure to assimilate into a dominant culture that did not want them to find a cure for their exclusion.

These stereotypes of Black women were assigned to them by white culture and are what outlined white culture's expectations for their labor. For example, in colonial West Africa, "If [a]...woman could not get along with her husband, she was allowed to separate from him. These practices were all acceptable under the code the slaves devised for themselves and necessary to their survival. It is easy to see how slaveowners used them to support their contention that slaves were amoral and socially chaotic" (Wallace 2015, 312), and so examples of the replication of Black community in liminality still were not safe from observations of its execution in the communal sphere. I will now explore the development and repercussions of these stereotypes

through the still untouched topic of slavery in Dutchess County, and more specifically at the Montgomery Place historic site.

Dutchess county was even at one time the fastest growing economy in New York state.

This was due to,

“New York [state]’s Black population doubl[ing] between 1723-1756 and tripl[ing] during the six decades between 1731-1790...making the province the largest slave society north of the Chesapeake...The rate of increase was particularly dramatic in the Hudson Valley, where more than half of [New York]’s slave population lived and worked” (Groth 2017, 5).

This statistic indicates two things: firstly that--as stated previously--the unique proportion of wealthy merchants in the Hudson Valley is due directly to their success and continued involvement in the slave-trade; and secondly, it points out that New York’s captive capital was not in New York city, but in the Hudson Valley which also made the Hudson Valley the captive capital of the all the northern colonies, the Chesapeake, in its entirety, being located south of the Mason Dixon line. What seems like a small and obscure area, Dutchess County specifically, has an intricate history wholly dependant on the institution of slavery and leading the U.S. north in captives per capita at the same time as the colonies were fighting for their freedom from the British.

At this time in the late 17th century, Janet Livingston Montgomery was living at her property Grasmere in Rhinebeck. It was not until 1802 that Janet began to build Montgomery Place, first named Chateau-de-Montgomery. In a collection of transcribed letters from Janet to her youngest brother Edward, titled “Reminiscences” and compiled by John Ross Delefield

(1930), Janet recounts memories from her childhood spent with her grandparents and the series of lovers which lead her to meet her late-husband. In these documents she relates--often comically--her personal opinions of peers and relatives, as well as general family history. In these Reminiscences, she does not mention any daily activity at Montgomery Place.

Janet Livingston was the eldest child of Judge Livingston and Margaret Beekman, and married her husband General Richard Montgomery at the age of thirty. They were married only two years before his death in the Revolutionary War and Janet never remarried, and in her own words, never recovered (Delefield, 1930). Janet Livingston was sixty-two years old when she purchased the 250 acres of property that would become Montgomery Place. For a woman her age to begin a business endeavor so late in life, Janet was met with doubt from her family and peers. However Montgomery Place became a moderately lucrative business with the success of the orchards, plant nurseries, and the mill. I use the word moderately not to undermine Janet's success, but in regards to the economic success of the Livingston's in this thesis thus far, which was of course due to their relationship with captivity and the slave trade. Janet Montgomery was not exempt from this reliance on slavery, for she herself is listed as owning as many as twelve captive people in the 1820 census.

The names, "Harry, John, Joe, George, Jack, Susan, Mary, Margaret, Dina, Louisa, little Mary, little John, little Louisa, and other enslaved individuals are mentioned in Janet's accounts during the years she lived at Montgomery Place."¹⁹ The exact records I was able to locate are, the 1808 bill of sale by Johannes Klum of a captive woman named Susan, to be sold to Janet

¹⁹ Bard College. "Montgomery Place An American Arcadia." An American Arcadia | Montgomery Place, 2011. <http://apps.hudsonvalley.org/american-arcadia/index.html>.

Livingston Montgomery.²⁰ As well as the “1799 Ledger of Children Born Slaves” located at the Rhinebeck Starr Library, which lists two captive children and two mother by name, stating, “On the 27th day of August 1799, there was born of my slave Margaret a male black child named John...On the 2nd day of April 1800, there was born of my slave Jude a female child named Mary.”²¹ One Black man, who was not a captive, was born at Montgomery Place under Janet Livingston in 1802, and his name was Alexander Gilson. Janet Montgomery’s head gardener. Alexander Gilson was not ever a captive in his time at Montgomery Place--where he worked for roughly fifty years--and was a highly praised landscaper as well as horticulturist. Praises continue to be sung of him in the historical record, as he is a pivotal figure in the Black history of Annandale-on-Hudson.

The type of labor expected to be done at Montgomery Place was predominantly this type of agricultural work, of seemingly both free and captive people, as well as Janet’s tenants. And a defining characteristic of captive labor, which is just as misunderstood as captivity in the north, are the labor expectations of Black women. Davis (1981) writes, “...sexual division of [captive] labor does not appear to have been hierarchical: men’s tasks were certainly not superior to and were hardly inferior to the work performed by women. They were both equally necessary. Moreover, from all indications, the division of labor between the sexes was not always so rigorous, for men would sometimes work in the cabin and women might tend the garden and perhaps even join the hunt” (31). By 1820, the twelve captive individuals at Montgomery, adults among them, reasonably could have been expected to tend to gardens and the livestock, as well as maintain the main house, serve guests, and the trusted few would run errands in Redhook or

²⁰ Bard College. “Montgomery Place An American Arcadia.” An American Arcadia | Montgomery Place, 2011.

²¹ “1799 Children Born of Slaves & Masters.” Rhinebeck: NY, 1799.

Rhinebeck (Kelly 1989, 78). And so of course a captive woman would have worked in the home of Janet Livingston, but the hallmark of Janet Livingston's success was not the orderliness of her home, nor her own age-bending physical prowess in an orchid; Janet's Montgomery enterprise relied almost entirely on captive and tenant field labor.

Women's Labor

Labor outside of the domestic realm--while not a perfectly feasible comparison; domestic and field work were not entirely separable for captive laborers--was performed almost equally by both captive men and women. Already we have listed examples of this type of work: the captive woman Jan who worked with pewter under direction by Alida Livingston. The stereotype of Black women as powerful dominators comes from this lack of division.

Black women as a collective were not seen as fragile in the same way that white women were depicted, "[black women] were not, "...too 'feminine' to work in coal mines, in iron foundries or to be lumberjacks and ditchdiggers. When the Santee Canal was constructed in North Carolina, slave women were a full fifty percent of the labor force...Women also worked on the Louisiana levees, and many of the Southern railroads still in use today were constructed, in part, by female slave labor" (Davis 1981, 19, 21). The picture of captive women in their captors home and the Black captive man withering away in the fields, is not an entirely representative depiction. Combined with Black captive communities tending toward the matriarchal, to their white captors Black women appeared particularly capable and socially backwards.

These stereotypes created a paradox: Black women were simultaneously equally as capable of labor as Black men, as well as somehow not equal to men. And by being charged with the preservation of the cycle of the community through physical maintenance and emotional guidance, to the Black community Black women were also a powerful unifying force. Black feminist archaeologist Maria Franklin (2001) on this writes, “By being both Black and female, Black women were twice condemned and subjugated...Thus, while enslaved women were expected to labor as hard as enslaved men, we find in the archaeological record that they still managed to make significant contributions to their households” (113), and thus Black women became the most thoroughly labored members of society, in their own communities and in the larger captor-society.

It was by these standards that Black women were further removed from any shared relationship remaining with the standard definition of womanhood; white women became womanhood itself. Another tenet for this separation is the perceived Black woman as dominator or dominatrix. In the colonial and antebellum U.S. alike “...captive Africans were defined by the work they did, which also made work in many ways a key to gender equalization” (Battle Baptiste 2016, 89), and so the lack of clear white supremacist patriarchal gender roles in captive communities lead to a malfunction of the patriarchal system and the need to implement a new one, which ironically also relied on their biologically female ability to bear children.

Sojourner Truth spoke on this dichotomy in her 1851 speech transcribed and titled, “Amn’t I a Woman?” This irony of Black women was not lost on those who lived during the antebellum and post-antebellum U.S. periods, exactly how the irony of fighting for independence from the

British while ourselves being a slave-holding nation, was not lost on American politicians. In her speech, Truth proclaims,

“That man [over there] says that women need to be helped into carriages, and lifted over ditches, and to have the best place everywhere. Nobody ever helps me into carriages, or over mud-puddles, or gives me any best place! And ain't I a woman? Look at me! Look at my arm! I have ploughed and planted, and gathered into barns, and no man could head me! And ain't I a woman? I could work as much and eat as much as a man - when I could get it - and bear the lash as well! And ain't I a woman? I have borne thirteen children, and seen most all sold off to slavery, and when I cried out with my mother's grief, none but Jesus heard me! And ain't I a woman?” (Truth 1851).

Truth was born captive across the river from Montgomery Place in Kingston, Ulster County in the year 1797. She is most well-known as a manumissionist and women's rights activist, which placed her at the center of the existence of this aforementioned impossible Black womanhood. Truth was not known for her passion or wit for many years after her flee from captivity, and even after gaining her freedom after her successful escape she was remarked upon as insane or “crazy” (*The New Jersey Papers*, as referenced in Truth, Titus, Gilbert, and Olive 1875, 205), in most every publication I have located for her political and religious views. Truth believed in the simultaneous emancipation of the Black community and suffrage for both Black men and women, and her sweeping views on human equity further alienated her from the unachievable position of Woman in the eyes of her society. This is to say that even Black women with marginal influence and a platform however large or small, were obviously not free from externally imposed definitions; a Black woman's captivity is not the deciding factor of her definition by white patriarchy; it is her Blackness.

The Black woman as a dominator, or chattel, is, in regards to her Blackness, still has roots in slavery. White captors simultaneously infantilized the captive Black man (Wallace 2015, 104-5), and “hypersexualized” (Davis 1972, 88) the captive Black woman. These roles could also be reversed. But these stereotypes are the driving force behind the loud-mouthed, mindless, Black woman figure, and this role came from the labor captive women were expected to do. In the fields, such as on properties like Montgomery Place, Black women were tasked with the maintenance of the grounds and gardens, as well as Janet Livingston's prized apple orchards. Imagine the captive woman Jude at the beginning of 1800,²² pregnant and not particularly exempt from work; Janet Livingston was not reported to be an overly-kind captor. It would be cold outside still as she was charged with and completed her daily tasks alongside men in the gardens or fields. It would nearly be time for her to give birth. Do you think the idea of her child being born into a world where The Gradual Manumission Act had recently been passed, weighed on her mind? Or perhaps put her mind at ease; her child would be legally free in fewer than thirty years?

The gender-equality of field labor did not detract from the work captive people could perform in the captor-domestic sphere. Important to note is that, “Generally, it is assumed that enslaved workers on northern plantations enjoyed only haphazard sleeping arrangements, which for domestic workers could have included corridors, attic eaves, or the comers of the kitchen or bed chambers...Agricultural workers would have slept in the mills, barns, and field shelters” (Bankoff 2005, 304), and so at Manor homes such as Montgomery Place, and the Van Cortlandt property--for which we have historical blueprints and maps--living quarters were not standard or

²² The woman recorded in the *1799 Ledger of Children Born to Slaves* with the passage, “On the 2nd day of April 1800, there was born of my slave Jude a female child named Mary.”

required dwellings to provide for captive people. Nor is there quantifiable archaeological evidence for their existence at any Livingston property mentioned in this thesis. And so domestic labor for captive women and men in the north, such as housekeeping, kitchen work, and butlery, was ironic considering these communities were not provided with a domestic space of their own by Western standards.

A lack of house and property of course did not mean that captive communities in the north were lacking domestic spaces. As a matter of fact, the domestic labor completed by captive people in their own communities, "...was the only meaningful labor to the slave community as a whole..." (Davis 1972, 88). Arbiters of 'house and home' is what Black captive women served in their communities ever since the replication of slavery relied on physical reproduction; maintenance of the personal-domestic exemplifies the autonomy of Black captive women.

Wet Nursing

Captive labor within the domestic realm was also not separated by gender. However one domestic role that is crucial to identify belongs exclusively to Black women, and that is once again their value as childbearers, specifically their labor as wet nurses. In my writing I emphasize the relationship between motherhood and womanhood so often because of the chattel narrative perpetuated by the captor-class. Black women and men were separated only by their reproductive roles, not by the 'gendered roles' of their labor. The physically strong would work jobs that require strength, regardless of gender. Any able-bodied person or child could be expected to plant and work the fields. Seamsters and other craftspeople were appointed in

regards to talent and without significant regard to gender. Although, one of the few gendered labor roles for captive women was in their ability to mother for economic gain; as previously touched on in this thesis: their ability to produce free labor through children and not yet discussed: the act of wetnursing.

A common thread in the northern and southern U.S. antebellum are expectations of women. This includes expectations for motherhood. The pressure Alida Livingston felt in raising her children was just the beginning of a culture surrounding U.S. motherhood. This included pregnancy, childbirth, child rearing, and of course breastfeeding. The modern complications of breastfeeding are not new inventions of contemporary womanhood, and the healthy development of one's child depended on a mother's ability to provide them food, be it breast milk, porridge, or otherwise.

“[white antebellum] Mothers valued their maternal role and the enjoyment they derived from breastfeeding. Motherhood and its attendant duties were highly prized during the antebellum years and touted as women's "sacred" occupation. Feminine pride was tied up with breastfeeding, and when a woman could not perform this maternal task, she often felt guilty or inadequate. Just as it was assumed that most women could bear children, so was it assumed that most mothers could suckle their babies” (McMillen 1985, 342).

Of course, ideals surrounding white motherhood did not exist in a vacuum;

“...men encouraged their wives to be competent nurturers and praised their ability to feed the newborn... Breastfeeding was a task that most people assumed mothers were well able to perform” (McMillen 1985, 343).

For all women in the antebellum U.S. womanhood was tied up with motherhood, but to white women, motherhood appeared vastly different than for Black women. And so the commodification of Black women's bodies to serve white children became part of a definition of Black motherhood, but not an aspect of this motherhood that in any way made them mothers to white children. Captive wet nurses would be called upon by their mistress captors who were unwell or otherwise unable to breastfeed (McMillen 1985). This of course led to a prioritization of white children over Black children, for, "Wet-nursing is a complex and contingent process that has commonly involved women in unequal power relationships in a variety of different regimes whereby wealthier women use women from lower down the social scale as wet nurses" (West 2017, 38), while simultaneously establishing a network of captive women aiding one another in the sharing of their breast milk (2017, 38) and the formation of community around another tenet of specifically the trials of Black motherhood.

The politics and complications of wet nursing though, are not incredibly well documented for how common they were; "Ultimately, wet-nursing remained, for many, a private experience" (West 2017, 45), removed from the limelight of the historical record. However the not-so-private position of wet nurse, combined with other factors such as a matriarchal domestic captive sphere, and the infantilization of Black men, lead to the creation of the 'mammy.'

Mammy

A less common phrase in the historical record of the north, the term 'mammy' is a contemporarily recognizable example of stereotyping present not only in the southern colonies; "White southerners commonly referred to senior female domestics as 'mammy'" (West 2017, 47)

a caricature of Black women's labor which was not specific to labor performed by captive women in the U.S. south. Even Sojourner Truth, in her tours around the country, was referred to as 'mommy' or 'mammy' (Truth & Gilbert, 1875, 195) or as saintly and larger than life. In the late 19th century, the *Fall River Papers* of Washington, published news of her then-recent address at the Franklin Street church and wrote about her person,

“Everybody, of course, knows of Sojourner Truth...of her growth in wisdom which seemed born in her as an inheritance; of her active benevolence in all directions; of her shrew repartees and wise sayings which will go down as proverbs among the intelligent for coming ages; of her goodness as a nurse to our sick and wounded soldiers when at an advanced age; of her sharp logic and pointed satire and when warmed up on subjects of interest.”

These remarks share common themes with the myth of the invincible Black woman, perpetuated by the mammy stereotype even in their positivity. In Michelle Wallace's (2015) *Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman*, she perfectly paraphrases in writing, “[A Black woman] was believed to be not only emotionally callous but physically invulnerable—stronger than white women and the physical equal of any man of her race. She was stronger than white women in order to justify her performing a kind of labor most white women were now presumed to be incapable of” (310), and to add: Black women needed to be thought of in this way not only to distance them from white womanhood and preserve its definition, but also so that the patriarchy did not feel guilt in treating her in such an ‘ungentlemanly’ way.

The mammy figure was an inherently asexual one. A mammy was a reliable and loyal mother figure. However, because this character is a creation of the captor-class, she also achieved value by separating herself from the activities of captive communities; “The mammy is

a hated figure in black history and perhaps with good reason. Legend has it that she often controlled the household, its white members as well, that she was sometimes overly loyal to her master and guarded his wealth and position with great vigor” (Wallace 2015, 103). The mammy surly exists maternally and asexually because of the negativity associated with the stereotype of the sexually promiscuous jezebel, forever trapped in the loop of giving birth to her captor’s children. These two women, both meant to exist as lessons in morality, were always simultaneously embodied by the Black woman who could escape one or the other as easily as she could escape her own skin, “...the special situation of the female slave remained unpenetrated. The ceaseless arguments about her ‘sexual promiscuity’ or her ‘matriarchal’ proclivities obscured, much more than they illuminated, the condition of Black women during slavery” (Davis 1981, 8). To the society in which she lived, the Black captive woman is defined by expectation of her labor.

This is true of Alida, Margaret, and Janet Livingston, as well as the Ten Broecks and Van Cortlandts who are not even 1% of the captors in the Mid-Hudson Valley. At Montgomery Place, Janet Livingston was childless and advanced in age and would not have employed a wet nurse on her property, but she is unique to this thesis in this regard, and through Montgomery Place’s legacy of slavery, highlights what labor captive women would still be expected to perform outside of the capability of their ability to nurse a child. At Montgomery Place, Black women could still be expected to have children and to maintain the home and property, for Janet’s property was her income.²³ Janet, like her great-grandmother Alida Schuyler Livingston, spoke fondly of her family members in writing, but by her records did not treat her captives or her

²³ Bard College. “Montgomery Place An American Arcadia.” An American Arcadia | Montgomery Place, 2011.

tenant workers overly sweetly. In her *Reminiscences on family* she begins with kind words for her paternal grandmother, Margaret Howarden.

“She was a melancholy but a sensible woman: the first thing that strikes my memory was her tears; often she lulled me to sleep on her bosom...With this tender parent I lived until my twelfth year, when her sudden death changed my destiny...My excessive grief for her loss made me think hardly of every restraint that was properly imposed upon me; but it is not of myself, if it only of this loved parent whose every word and every story was implanted in my breast, that I would speak” (Livingston & Delafield 1930, 50-1).

In this collection Janet continues to delve into her family history through the lens of a woman, and women’s relationships, with so much wit that I have read this collection over and over and laugh still to myself every time. Janet Livingston was a competent business woman and a talented writer--and enjoyed doing so--and so her lack of a compassionate written record in regards to her captive laborers is telling. Here I specifically mean that Janet Livingston left no indication of manumission for her captive people before her death or in her will. This stood out to me in the historic record because of the instructions of manumission left by her mother Margaret Beekman, in her will. Janet Livingston died in 1827, the year of New York’s complete manumission. Freedom in the year 1827 was not a surprise; the fight for manumission had started generations prior. And so her will’s intentional omission in reference to the captive people on her property is a poignant one.

By this point in U.S. history it had been nearly two-hundred years since the first captive people were brought to New York by the Dutch. U.S. gender roles were solidly developed and the dichotomy between Black and white women had long since become intrinsic. I ask myself,

what was life like at Montgomery Place for a captive Black woman? What did it feel like working alongside or running errands for Janet Livingston's free, Black, male, head gardener? Even without the threat of wet nursing looming over women's heads, there must still have been pressure to have children. What did community spaces feel like? Maybe groups of captive people would have been welcome to sleep in the barns at night, and maybe if we looked close enough we would find marks from these captive communities there? Maybe marks of Yoruba, Igbo, or Kongo identities that tied a fluctuating group of people together around a central comforting idea. Black women were at the heart of this centrality by nature of the system of slavery, and those affects and occupation of those social roles did not stop with their freedom.

Conclusion

Black feminist archaeology fully acknowledges the unique oppression and erasure of Black women. The oppression of the Black female body is not just a debilitating combination of racism and sexism; it is the nexus of both of those systems meeting at an all new destination. The oppression of Black women was a, “...simultaneous manifestation of racism and sexism, not extreme forms of one or the other” (Gray White 1999, 11) and so because of this unique ‘othering’ Black women were not only disallowed from larger communal spaces, but were forced to create their own in Black community. Black feminist theorist Patricia Collins (2000), refers to the evolution occurring in these spaces as Black womens’ “collective wisdom” (24). The exploitation and assault of the Black woman’s body is possible because of “the process of calling blackness into being and causing it to become inextricable from brute labor...” (Morgan 2004, 12), which means not only were Black and white womanhood defined by one another, but a Black woman’s labor was defined by her womanhood and vice versa. Free or captive, historical, or contemporary.

Black feminist archaeology also, maybe redundantly so, uses archaeology as the ultimate history-informing tool. There is a certain romance in the studies of a historian, whose job it is to collect moments, items, and memories and compile them to be read by an audience who is not necessarily made up of historians. In his book titled *In Small Things Forgotten*, James Deetz (1996) uses his own archaeological field work as well as constructed archaeological narratives to explore life in the early U.S.. He reflects on the American past and modern historical portrayals of that past in writing,

“We mistakenly think of Americans in the seventeenth century as ourselves but somehow simpler, ‘quaint’ perhaps...neatly arranged houses often furnished with matching artifacts that are not typical of the tim...homes that seem to have been inhabited by people who subsisted largely on the herbs growing in the adjacent garden and who dipped enough candles to light a small town. Such a [mindset] ignores the cluttered conditions of early houses amply documented in the inventories and the different way of ordering the physical world, as we have observed, and places an undue emphasis on a world flooded with candlelight” (435-6).

There is a fascination in the contemporary U.S. with the orderliness of the American past; maybe it's because of how comparably little history exists of the U.S.? I think it is more accurately, a carryover from our romanticization of colonial England and the relationship the U.S. shared with Europe. In the U.S. this romanticization includes only passive acknowledgment of its historical oppression. The Native peoples ‘died.’ Slaves were ‘freed.’ Women ‘suffered.’ It is in these passive verbs that an idealized version of history is able to occupy the American mind. The contemporary U.S. is similarly guilty of romanticizing the world wars, fetishizing the Orient, and mysticizing Native American culture, among other self-serving and willful misinterpretations. Candle “flooded” museum displays and historical reenactments “...tell us far more about the minds of [their] contemporary creators than [they] does about the thoughts and concerns of the people whose life [they are] meant to represent” (Deetz 1996, 437). And without pause, the same can be said for understanding the position of Black women in captivity.

I believe this is partially due to the vague definition of whiteness. W.E.B DuBois defines whiteness as “...a mechanism designed to keep power and wealth in the hands of white elites” (DuBoise ad referenced in Gorsline 2015, 293), and so this means that whiteness is subjective in

a way that Blackness is not. If the Black skin color is what is “inextricable from a position of labor,” then whiteness is defined as its opposite. Whiteness is simultaneously a skin tone and a relaxed social position. This is what allowed for the racialization of Irish and Italian immigrants in the domestic U.S. during the first half of the 20th century. In other words, “...American whiteness is based on the idea that white people are free not because of the enslavement of others but because, as whites, they do not require social support and are thus autonomous” (Gorsline 2015, 257) and so in colonial and antebellum New York, during the lifetimes of Alida, Margaret, and Janet Livingston, autonomous action in white communities--of all varying economic classes--was inseparable from the capability of the ownership of Black captive individuals who were inherently subjects of labor. Even for free Blacks who themselves owned captives, such as Charity Folks, a Black Annapolis woman who was so loved by the family who freed her that they left her a small yearly inheritance to support herself in the late 18th century (Milward 2013). Charity would go on to become one of the wealthiest Black landowners in Annapolis and herself owned a captive person. Even in these unfortunate scenarios, Blacks could not gain access to whiteness as a social standing.

The Black woman’s lack of social mobility does offer a unique type of autonomy. A sort of social invisibility. The invisibility of Black captive women as perpetual pillars of society--just as noticeable as one notices the every brick that keeps their house standing--allows for the ultimate view of society. And so to a collective subconscious, the Black woman is superhuman for somehow enduring the pains of womanhood and surviving the pains of Blackness. She “...gains none of the deference and approbation that accrue from being perceived as weak and submissive, and she gains none of the advantages that come with being a white male. To be so

“free,” in fact, has at times made her appear to be a superwoman, and she has attracted the envy of black males and white females” (Gray White 1999, 47) and thus the Black woman finds no camaraderie in her marginalization. All U.S. gender norms evolved from the placement of Black women in the bottom rungs of society, and so white America’s general disinterest and lack of understanding of social Black womanhood created a simultaneously hyper-visible scapegoat of womanhood as well as an invisible laborer. Black-American women as a social class are enabled a view of the inner workings of their oppressors through service, and are thereby afforded a perspective which is unique to their specific social class. The key to understanding Black women’s oppression is to understand that her position has been designed for no other reason than to exemplify every negative ‘choice’ one could make in society.

For this reason, I claim that archaeology is a meditative practice. Archaeology of the U.S. suffers from the similarities shared between the archaeological subject of the past, and the current social climate in which the contemporary archaeologist lives. Social roles in the contemporary U.S. developed directly from colonial institution rooted in slavery and so economic diversity stagnates in a country so little removed from its captor-past. A contemporary understanding of history affects the mindset of all archaeological study, but in to the subject of U.S. slavery specifically, the American archaeologist must simultaneously be well-informed of historical context and history, and question the social classes of contemporary society.

A Black feminist archaeology calls Black female oppression into practice to theorize about history from the first person. And a first-person perspective of Black captive women, or Black feminist history in general, is incomplete without an understanding of the unique social position of Black women as well as the understanding of how racism functions in the U.S.; Racism is

born when colonialism turns a profit, thereby introducing inherently capitalist values into social systems. Racism is the combination of colonialism and capitalism, and so the figure of the captive Black woman, whose physical body was used as a means of profit and production, is at the root of all social distinctions in the U.S.. Maria Franklin (2001) writes, “Slave women alone experienced sexual exploitation, childbearing and motherhood, and the slaveholders’ sexism, each structuring her work and everyday existence” (113), with this “structuring” calling into practice the subsequent social structure of the country. In the formation of this country, Black and white women are as inextricably linked as the position of ‘Black women’ is to the labor that created the infrastructure of The American Dream, for those white folks and men who would launch off of their backs to achieve it.

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