

Archaeologies of African American Life in the Upper Mid-Atlantic**Michael J. Gall and Richard F. Veit (editors)****Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 2017****288 pages, 41 figures, 4 tables****\$69.95 (hardcover)****ISBN 13: 9780817319656****DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.14713/njs.v4i2.137>**

Variable and intergrading strategies of survival through resistance, integration, and negotiation have been the focus of considerable scholarship in the archaeology and social history of marginalized communities. This book builds on and furthers this scholarship by addressing African American communities in the upper Mid-Atlantic region of eastern North America from the late seventeenth through mid-twentieth centuries. Editors Michael J. Gall and Richard F. Veit introduce the volume with a chapter defining the issues and the geographic and temporal framework.

The book helps fill a gap in our understanding of what the editors call a “borderland” zone in the geography of race and slavery, betwixt and between the plantation south and abolitionist New England. This rural Mid-Atlantic region was the locus of competing ideologies represented by such stakeholders as the Quakers and the Abolition movement centered in Philadelphia and the American Colonization Society, whose mission was to relocate former slaves to Africa. Prior to emancipation, slaves of diverse origins and backgrounds were sent to the Mid-Atlantic. Origins included the British West Indies, southeastern United States, and West Africa. Following the introductory chapter, the book is organized into four parts: (I) Slavery and Material Culture, (II) Housing, Community, and Labor, (III) Death and Memorialization, and (IV) Reflections.

Part I, Slavery and Material Culture, offers three case studies. William B. Liebeknecht observed that very little archaeological evidence for African slave quarters has been documented in Delaware, “despite decades of archaeological surveys” in the state (p. 21). This study, however,

argued that a site initially identified as one of white farmers was, in fact, worked by African slaves. Although this argument seems a tenuous one, Liebeknecht's chapter provides useful guidance for what to expect in sites with slave occupations.

Keri J. Sansevere synthesized the available information for colonoware use in the Mid-Atlantic and Northeast. As a class, colonoware consists of "low-fired, hand-constructed coarse earthenware pottery that often mimics European vessel forms" and is generally associated with marginalized communities of Native Americans, African Americans, and poor Euro-Americans (p. 37). Sansevere suggested that colonoware was both locally manufactured by Native Americans and brought to the region by Haitian refugees or African Americans from the south. She concluded that the use of colonoware reflected overlapping domains of meaning, including identity markers, economic necessity, and sentimental family heirlooms.

Ross Thomas Rava and Christopher N. Matthews reported on their excavations at the Rock Hall manor estate located on Long Island in Lawrence, New York. Linking historical documents, West African ritual activities, and archaeological finds, Rava and Matthews offered tantalizing suggestions for caching of religious items and organization of the presumed slave quarters of the estate in the form of a West African cosmogram.

Part II of the book, entitled "Housing, Community, and Labor," consists of five chapters. Michael J. Gall, Glenn R. Modica, and Tabitha C. Hilliard addressed survival strategies of a free late eighteenth/early nineteenth-century African American family in Dover, Kent County, Delaware. Combining a solid corpus of archaeological data with thorough archival and historical research, Gall et al. provide a nuanced and convincing narrative of free African American survival strategies in the antebellum years of the Mid-Atlantic. They documented a process of fluid

ethnogenesis as the family “navigated and negotiated” the worlds of paternalistic Quakerism and Christian and West African belief systems.

Continuing the study of antebellum survival strategies of free African Americans, James A. Delle investigated an early to mid-nineteenth century tenant farm in Christiana, Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. Following a controlled surface collection and the excavation of 25 shovel tests and 66 1-x-1-m units, Delle identified the foundation of Parker’s house. Domestic deposits, including utilitarian and refined earthenwares, revealed a family of self-emancipated African Americans striving “to live ordinary lives” during turbulent times in the borderland (p. 100).

Using deeds, maps, census records, standing architecture, and historical documents, Janet L. Sheridan conducted a landscape analysis of a nineteenth-century free African American community called Marshalltown, located in Mannington Township, Salem County, New Jersey. The c. 1830s founding community members sought marginal land “on poor soil next to a tidal flat,” a survival strategy “turning isolation into protection” (p. 101). In the case of Marshalltown, that history of exclusion, oppression, and empowerment has been formally recognized in a 166-acre historic district listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

A compliance-driven cultural resources project documented a free African American tenancy in St. George’s Hundred, New Castle County, Delaware. Jason P. Shellenhamer and John Bedell conducted archival and archaeological investigations to trace the history of occupations in the context of white oppression and surveillance and the construction of African American community identities through the nineteenth century, before and after the Civil War. Again, we learn that African American presence was “sparingly documented in tax rolls or other records” (p. 116) but through careful investigations a history is brought to light regarding socioeconomic negotiations and the establishment and maintenance of social networks.

Christopher Barton addressed food ways during the lean years of World War I, the Great Depression, and World War II among an African American community in Timbuctoo, Westhampton Township, Burlington County, New Jersey. Barton's team excavated within the footprint of a house ruin that was used as a community trash disposal area from the 1920s through 1940s. In addition to undecorated ceramics and canned food containers, home canning jars were recovered suggesting to Barton a "community-based mechanism ... used to ... overcome daily obstacles" of limited access to food (p. 133). He related these findings to the wider national consciousness linked to conservation during the era of the World Wars.

Part III of the book, "Death and Memorialization," consists of three chapters. Veit and Mark Nonestied built on their previous collaborations addressing New Jersey cemeteries to investigate antebellum African American gravemarkers in the northern part of the state. Gravemarkers contain information about the deceased ranging "from the practical to the personal," potentially shedding light on social status, race, or ethnicity (145–146). African Americans are not represented in the gravestone record prior to 1804, suggesting that with the Act for the Gradual Abolition of Slavery attitude changes may have resulted in "growing emphasis on the individual," including African Americans.

Meagan M. Ratini investigated the community associated with the Mount Gilead African American Methodist Episcopal Church located in Buckingham, Pennsylvania. In studying details of the nineteenth-century gravestone markers, she suggested that meanings may be reflected by "earlier practices found across the southern United States" (p. 167).

David Orr investigated the African Union Church Cemetery and its associated landscape in Polktown, New Castle County, Delaware as a form of microhistory to gain insight into "national events like the Civil War ... and their impacts at the local and individual level" (p. 171). Five of

the gravestones marked the graves of United States Colored Troops. In conducting what he called “narrative archaeology,” Orr offered an evocative account of African American enlistee James H. Elbert’s “odyssey” as a Union soldier during the Civil War.

Part IV, “Reflections,” closes the book with two review chapters expanding on themes addressed in the previous chapters. Christopher C. Fennell reviewed concepts of race and ethnicity; strategies followed to maintain connections with African lifeways and belief systems; strategies of resistance and the geography of escape routes; and the meanings that can be construed from selected classes of artifacts.

Lu Ann De Cunzo provided a thoughtful final chapter, linking the various themes in the book to a larger discussion of African American experiences in the greater Delaware Valley. She observed that the geographic frame for the book, the borderland, “accommodated spaces of dwelling and of crossing, of stasis and of movement, of surveillance and of invisibility, of bone-breaking labor and of faith, of kidnapping and of safeguarding emancipation” (p. 199). De Cunzo’s review addressed a number of cross-cutting topics: origins, enslavement, and emancipation; labor; home and family life; community; and church and spirituality. She concludes with the important observation that struggle and resistance were not limited to African Americans: “Native American, European American, and African American histories are deeply entangled ... especially ... in the upper Middle Atlantic, the greater Delaware Valley borderland, and its vicinity, a diverse, contested, and ambiguous place in the past and the present” (p. 212).

As attested by reading any issue of a newspaper today, we are confronted with often frequently fraught deeply entangled histories at local, regional, national, and global scales. *Archaeologies of African American Life in the Upper Mid-Atlantic* is one contribution to this story of entanglement.

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